

In the American Vein: 1945-1975

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BY

Andrew Marzoni

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Siobhan S. Craig, Maria Damon

May 2015



## Acknowledgements

I am foremost grateful to the Department of English and the Graduate School at the University of Minnesota for academic and financial support. Special thanks are due to my committee members: Shevvy Craig, Maria Damon, Paula Rabinowitz, Charlie Sugnet, and Christophe Wall-Romana. I am thankful to my colleagues at the University of Minnesota, and especially those involved in the Theory Reading Group: Joe Hughes, Robb St. Lawrence, Wes Burdine, Mike Rowe, Stephen McCulloch, Hyeryung Hwang, and Valerie Bherer. Poet-friends like Aaron Apps, Carrie Lorig, Mary Chen, and Elisabeth Workman cannot go without mention, nor can Cultural Studies frenemies and members of the Moving Image Studies Interdisciplinary Graduate Group: Brendan McGillicuddy, Andrea Gyenge, Stacy Douglas, and Sara Saljoughi. Other past-and-present graduate students and faculty members at the University of Minnesota such as Rembert Hueser, Verena Mund, Nuruddin Farah, Tony Brown, Katherine Scheil, Laurie Ouellette, Elaine Auyoung, Eric Daigre, Isaac Butler, Dan Hassoun, Annemarie Lawless, Eric Brownell, Ben Utter, Dana Meade Cason, Will Kanyusik, Adam Schrag, and Sara Jo Cohen have all proved influential to the ongoing consolidation of my ideas, as have friends in New York (David Comer Kidd, especially) and New Orleans. Thanks to Alys George, Sue Richardson, Rebecca Housel, and Adrian Switzer for inviting me to present my research at various conferences, and thanks to S.E. Gontarski, Laci Mattison, and Paul Ardoin for accepting it for publication. I appreciate all of the guidance I have received from various editors I have worked with along the way, including Mike Miller, Eric Lorberer, Jeffrey Zuckerman, Kelli Marshall, Gabrielle Malcolm, Madeleine LaRue, Molly Lewis, Angela Walsh, Alison Hugill, and Houman Barekat. I cannot say enough about the enthusiasm and intelligence of all of my students at the University of Minnesota and Rasmussen College. This dissertation would not have been completed without the practical support and assistance of the English Department staff (Mary Barfield, Terri Sutton, Karen Frederickson, Heather McNeff, Rose Hendrickson, Pamela Leszczynski, Samantha Morris, Judith Katz, and Jess Jordan), David Bernstein and the Department of Theatre Arts & Dance, the New Orleans Public Library, Anne Garner and Rebecca Filner at the Harold W. and Alfred A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library, and Nancy Goldman at the Pacific Film Archive at the Berkeley Art Museum. Additional funding was provided by Student Unions and Activities, the Graduate and Professional Student Association, and the Council of Graduate Students at the University of Minnesota, as well as the Modern Language Association. Thanks and love go out to Giff & Shelby, Justine, Zack, Brigitte, and Mike Marzoni, the Schaaps, the Quinlans, the Zeccardis, Dave Mead, and Seth Wellens. I would be amiss to not mention my cats, Monkey and Nietzsche. None of this would have been worth it, perhaps, were it not for Adriane Quinlan.

A version of Chapter 1 previously appeared in *Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism*, eds. Paul Ardoin, S.E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Dedicated to  
Laura Zeccardi  
(1985-2013)

## Abstract

This dissertation shows how twentieth-century advances in media technology have contributed to a surge of formal experimentation in postwar American literature and film. Scholars have identified a pervasive influence of mass media on avant-garde art in the postwar era, as can be readily witnessed in the celebrity-obsession of Frank O'Hara's poems or Andy Warhol's films. But more than providing mere subject matter, the technological instruments of popular culture presented artists with new ways to work, challenging the traditional relationship between the artist and the work of art. Much of twentieth-century literary and critical theory has argued that human perception is endlessly mediated, revealing the concepts of "reality," "the self," and "the author" to be constructs. I demonstrate that this postmodern conception of what it means to be an author—and even, to be human—is a direct result of the ways that electronic media such as radio and television have reframed perception. I consider how postwar American writers and filmmakers contemplated the aesthetic possibilities of newer media by adopting those technologies for their own use, constructing "literary machines"—technological assemblages that subsume the author's body into the creative process.

My project defines "technology" in Marshall McLuhan's sense of "extensions of man" in order to show how postwar, pre-digital American literature and film implicated the human body in their understandings of the literary, the cinematic, and the technological. For example, I treat narcotics as a media technology in their own right, provoking users with new ways to see, hear, and experience time. I trace the various roles that drugs have played in twentieth-century theories of literature, media, and human embodiment as well as American literary and film history. Because drugs are a technology literally consumed by the human body, the texts and films that Henry Miller, Terry Southern, John Cassavetes, and William S. Burroughs produced about and under the influence of drugs suggest that the aesthetic and conceptual problems posed by new media technologies are in fact inherent to human experience.

**Table of Contents**

List of Figures	v
Introduction: In the American Vein	1
Chapter 1: An American Surrealist in Paris, or, Henry Miller Gets Drunk on Water	17
Chapter 2: Media Anxiety and Literature-on-Drugs	60
Chapter 3: Cinema, Cigarettes, Bodies, and Time	108
Chapter 4: Revolution 23	158
Epilogue: Another Country	207
Bibliography	231

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Lynn Carlin as Maria Forst in <i>Faces</i>	139
Figure 2: Gena Rowlands as Jeannie Rapp in <i>Faces</i>	139
Figure 3: Val Avery as Jim McCarthy in <i>Faces</i>	140
Figure 4: Jeannie and Richard Forst (John Marley) in <i>Faces</i>	140
Figure 5: Richard, Jeannie, and Freddie Draper (Fred Draper) in <i>Faces</i>	141
Figure 6: Maria and Chet (Seymour Cassel) in <i>Faces</i>	141
Figure 7: Richard smoking in <i>Faces</i>	142
Figure 8: Maria as Joan of Arc in <i>Faces</i>	151
Figure 9: A strange choreography in <i>Faces</i>	152
Figure 10: Chet as the “Mechanical Man” in <i>Faces</i>	155
Figure 11: Diagram of a mathematical function	206
Figure 12: The lecture hall in <i>Spring Breakers</i>	226
Figure 13: The robbery in <i>Spring Breakers</i>	227

## Introduction

### In the American Vein

*They strike one, above all, as giving no account of themselves in any terms already consecrated by human use; to this inarticulate state they probably form, collectively, the most unprecedented of monuments; abysmal, the mystery of what they think, what they feel, what they want, what they suppose themselves to be saying.*

—Henry James, by means of James Baldwin<sup>1</sup>

I was once hailed outside of a used bookstore in San Diego, California, by a man in a cowboy hat. A friend and I had been wandering up and down Adams Avenue on an otherwise unremarkable Saturday afternoon, picking through record stores, when we came upon Budget Books. The sign on the door read “Closed,” but before we had made it back to the sidewalk, a gruff “Hey!” turned our heads, only to be followed by, “You fuckers like Kerouac?” I was a college student at the time, and my hesitant nod to the question belied a depth of adoration. We followed the man inside and were immediately taken aback by piles of unsorted books, the reek of cigarette smoke, emptied beer cans everywhere. We knew the man was a character even before he showed us an inscription inside of a worn copy of *Big Sur* (1962). The inscription was made out to Marlon—so named, we later found out, because his mother saw it on the marquee of a theatre playing *The Men* (1950) while she was in the back of the taxi, en route to the delivery ward—and

---

<sup>1</sup> See Baldwin, *Another Country* (London: Michael Joseph, 1963) 5. Baldwin borrows this epigraph from James’s “Preface” to Vol. 14 of the *New York Edition* (New York: Scribner’s, 1908), containing *Lady Barbarina*, *The Siege of London*, *An International Episode*, *The Pension Beaurepas*, *A Bundle of Letters*, and *The Point of View*.



signed “Tom.” “I’m the guy who turned Tom Waits on to Jack Kerouac,” he told us. It was plausible enough: Waits had grown up in Chula Vista and gone to Hilltop High School (the father of the manager of the movie theatre I worked at had been Waits’s Spanish teacher there); he was born in 1949, leaving him just a little older than Marlon. There was ample evidence to suggest that Marlon was pulling our chain; still, we suspended disbelief.

A few days later, we came back. Marlon pretended not to remember us at first, but before long, he was bumming our cigarettes and urging us to peruse his “secret stash”: his personal book collection, which he kept behind the cash register. He told us that these books were not for sale; he told us many things. We returned several times. He tried to convince us that one of Charles Bukowski’s columns for the *Los Angeles Free Press* was about his relentless late-night phone calls to the writer toward the end of the 1960s (his girlfriend at the time had found Bukowski’s number in the phone book). He told us about how Hollywood was supposed to have been built in Normal Heights, the San Diego neighborhood where Budget Books was located, but the scouts tasked with relocating the film industry from New York stumbled upon Los Angeles first. He told us that he planned to change the name of Budget Books to Sin Fronteras, an ironic reversal of the now defunct semi-monopoly, Borders. We spent an afternoon drawing Sin Fronteras “coupons” for him, tracing one hundred dollar bills, substituting his face for Benjamin Franklin’s. These he intended to photocopy. He played Odetta records and smoked a lot of weed. At one point, paranoid as hell, he pulled a knife on us, accusing us of stealing. We didn’t return again. In one of our final visits, I noticed that all of the empty beer cans were labeled “non-alcoholic.”

I only ever bought one book from Marlon. I pulled something from his unsorted stacks—a Nabokov or Camus novel, probably—and he turned it down, pulling a volume from his “secret stash”: a first-edition collection of Henry Miller’s short stories, essays, and travel writings. He asked twenty dollars for it. I couldn’t refuse; he had pulled a knife on me, after all. Budget Books closed its doors long ago. As far as I know, it never became *Sin Fronteras*. My leads on Marlon’s whereabouts today remain cold.

In beginning this introduction with an anecdote, it is not my intent to lionize Marlon, to celebrate him as a paradigmatic figure. As a man, he is (or was) not altogether different from other Americans of his generation, crafting his persona out of an agglomeration of things: books, records, movies, cigarettes, and drugs. In retrospect, Marlon strikes me less as a person than a network of media, a character composed of references to other characters, whose behavior can in part be ascribed to the influence of various substances: narcotics, surely, but also his namesake, Marlon Brando, and Bukowski, symbols of the American tough guy which are, themselves, mediated. Of course, though, Marlon’s identity is intertwined with his physicality; he is a human, not merely an idea. Born in an age of television, Hollywood, and rock and roll, Marlon’s humanity is inextricable from the media landscape in which he exists. He is no John Henry, racing a steam drill. Rather, Marlon is both man and machine.

In the chapters that follow, I examine how the inescapable presence of electronic media in postwar American culture has led writers and filmmakers to study, theorize, and experiment with the technologies involved in creating literature and film. I argue that technology, often figured as “other” or in opposition to the humanities, is revealed by postwar American writers and filmmakers to be an integral part of what it means to be

human in the contemporary era. Many scholars situate the formal experimentation of this period in the context of philosophical theories about the relationship between the author as an embodied subject and the text as a product of labor. Such ideas, I argue, are a direct consequence of writers, philosophers, filmmakers, and literary critics engaging with media technologies that alter human perception and interaction: typewriters, tape recorders, handheld cameras, and drugs. Analyzing how American writers and filmmakers have incorporated various media technologies into their working methods, I read key texts and films by Henry Miller, Terry Southern, John Cassavetes, and William S. Burroughs as a prehistory of digital culture spanning from the dawn of television to the invention of the microprocessor. This allows me to historicize the discourse of the current technological moment in these artists' contributions to a philosophy of art for the electronic age, locating the roots of the digital humanities in American media history.

In each of these chapters, there is one idea that I return to, which I find to be a central theme in American literature and film of the postwar era, the electronic age: the refusal of language to produce meaning. This is an idea that is commonly associated with deconstruction, and the work of Jacques Derrida in particular. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida writes, "Writing is that forgetting of the self, that exteriorization, the contrary of the interiorizing memory, of the *Erinnerung* that opens the history of the spirit. It is this that the *Phaedrus* said: writing is at once mnemotechnique and the power of forgetting" (24). It is for this reason, Derrida argues, that "the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work": once written, language becomes foreign to its writer, any meaning that it might have contained is lost in the process of becoming language (24). Derrida develops the concept of "différance"

to describe this property of language which refuses to mean. Rather than producing meaning, language produces both difference and deferral; *différance* is thus “the formation of form” as well as “the being-imprinted of the imprint” (63). The “originary violence of writing,” Derrida writes, is that “language is first . . . writing. ‘Usurpation’ has always already begun” (37). Following Derrida, I approach the language of all media—of film, of human gesture, of recorded sound—as a kind of writing whose very function is to fail to produce meaning, to divorce the writer who has written from the writer who writes. If Derrida’s prose often seems not to make sense, that is less a fault than an inevitable consequence of his writing: in a fundamental way, it’s not supposed to.

Three years before Derrida wrote *Of Grammatology*, Susan Sontag published an essay in the *Evergreen Review* that explores a number of similar ideas. Like *Of Grammatology*, which begins with a chapter titled “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing,” Sontag begins “Against Interpretation” (1964) by referring to the “earliest experience of art” (3). The two texts share a common enemy, which Derrida refers to as “logocentrism,” and Sontag as “hermeneutics.” While Derrida offers grammatology, the “science of writing” which “shows signs of liberation all over the world” as an alternative to logocentrism, which is “nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism” imposed on the world, controlling the concepts of writing and science and the history of metaphysics (*Of Grammatology* 5-6), Sontag concludes her essay with the declaration, “In place of hermeneutics we need an erotics of art” (14). Making criticism the object of her critique as opposed to philosophy (Derrida’s), Sontag argues that “The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art—and by analogy, our own experience—more, rather than less, real to us. The function of

criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even that *it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*” (14). Sontag notes that interpretation is “based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content,” a theory which in fact “violates art” (10). She points to the “flight from interpretation” apparent in abstract expressionism, pop art, modern poetry since symbolism, and “old Hollywood films” by George Cukor, Raoul Walsh, and Howard Hawks, as well as “the best work of the new European directors” such as Ingmar Bergman, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Ermanno Olmi (10-1). Though Sontag does not go as far as Derrida does to argue that art, like all language, in fact contains no meaning, this is the very realization at which the artists she cites seem to have arrived, and the reason why criticism runs so far behind its objects of critique.

Sontag’s Europhilia is most apparent when she turns to “the situation in America” (10). She writes,

Interpretation runs rampant here in those arts with a feeble and negligible avant-garde: fiction and the drama. Most American novelists and playwrights are really either journalists or gentleman sociologists and psychologists. They are writing the literary equivalent of program music. And so rudimentary, uninspired, and stagnant has been the sense of what might be done with *form* in fiction and drama that even when the content isn’t simply information, news, it is still peculiarly visible, handier, more exposed. To the extent that novels and plays (in America), unlike poetry and painting and music, don’t reflect any interesting concern with changes in their form, these arts remain prone to assault by interpretation. (10-1)

While this was, in fact, the case for much American fiction in 1964, a large extent of what I argue in the following chapters concerns the fact that Sontag was writing at the time of a changing tide. And as a critic writing for American periodicals, Sontag played a central role in this cultural shift. In addition to praising the likes of Bergman, Godard, and Antonioni, Sontag was among the first to turn Americans’ attentions to European

philosophers like Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin. This was a world that she knew well: Herbert Marcuse wrote *Eros and Civilization* (1955) while living in Sontag's house. To a large extent, the development of a legitimate novelistic avant-garde in the U.S. is due to the very Europhilia on display in Sontag's criticism. Three of the writers I discuss at length spent long stretches of their lives as expatriates (Miller in France, Southern in France and Switzerland, Burroughs in Mexico, France, Morocco, and the United Kingdom), the novelties of their literary styles greatly influenced by their European predecessors and contemporaries. As for Cassavetes, Ray Carney notes that as a young actor in the 1950s, Cassavetes "went to the Thalia frequently . . . and was deeply affected by the work of [Luchino] Visconti, [Vittorio] di Sica [*sic*], and [Roberto] Rossellini, which was just making its way to the United States at that point" (60). In effect, the emergence of a uniquely American literary and cinematic avant-garde in the decades immediately following the Second World War—what I refer to as "the American vein"—is not uniquely American at all, but of European extraction.

As I point out in the first chapter, Southern's and Burroughs's generation was not the first wave of American writers to live in and seek inspiration from Europe: the attractions of expat life have been a constant thread in American literary history, dating back to at least Benjamin Franklin, counting Mark Twain, Henry James, and many others amongst its adherents. Miller moved to France in 1929, near the tail end of the Lost Generation's extended stay in Paris, American modernism's most famous vacation. Further, it must be noted that America's love for Europe was not unrequited: largely due to the American military occupation following the end of the war, European culture was awash with American imports: Lucky Strikes and blue jeans, Brando movies, and jazz

played in nightclubs by black musicians and broadcast on the radio from American military bases in Germany. It is not without some irony that young Americans flocked to art houses to see films like Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1960) and *Masculin Féminin* (1966): what they saw was their own pop culture being celebrated by the French, raised to the status of art. My discussion of Southern's "You're Too Hip, Baby" (1963) in Chapter 2 addresses the Americanness of postwar Paris, and in Chapter 4, I follow the American vein as it is captured on tape and brought to Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Carl Weissner, Burroughs's friend and collaborator.<sup>2</sup>

In considering the movement of books and films, writers and filmmakers, between the U.S. and Europe, I want to emphasize that in the period between 1945 and 1975, literature and film became media. In 1964, the same year that Sontag wrote "Against Interpretation," Marshall McLuhan published *Understanding Media*, formally inaugurating the discipline and theory of media studies. In the decades since, the study of literature and film has been greatly benefited by the efforts of scholars to situate these forms within a broader, constantly expanding media landscape. In addition to McLuhan, these scholars include media theorists like Friedrich Kittler (whose work I address at length in Chapters 2 and 4), Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, and Sontag herself, as well as philosophers such as Derrida and Avital Ronell (both of whom make significant appearances in Chapter 2), and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose work has made a great impact on my thinking, and whose ideas I return to frequently, especially in Chapters 1 and 3. In engaging with works of philosophy and theory, it is my intent to bring a theoretical dimension to the media history I construct here, as well as to argue

---

<sup>2</sup> See also James Baldwin's brilliant 1955 essay, "Equal in Paris," in *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 101-16.

that philosophy and theory are necessarily implicated within any media history, and vice versa. “Every theory has its historical a priori,” Kittler argues, arguing that electronic media technologies are among the relevant a prioris of theoretical developments in the twentieth century: “structuralist theory simply spells out what, since the turn of the century, has been coming over the information channels” (*Gramophone* 16).

In twenty-first-century America, the excitement of technological innovation has become banal. Freud’s theories of the unconscious no longer belong to the realm of science, but to literary criticism, where they have been historicized as a symptom of modernism, canonized as a style of reading texts. Typewriters and tape recorders are most commonly found at thrift stores and garage sales, their cultural capital relegated to a cadre of hipster obsoletists donning the habits of a bygone era: fedoras, bicycles, cigarettes, the latter of which can even be found appended with the prefix “e-.” Drugs have lost much of their subversive allure: marijuana is wholly legal in four states, available with a prescription in eighteen, and decriminalized in another four; the best highs are often to be found in hospitals and doctor’s offices, Walgreen’s and mom’s medicine cabinet. McLuhan is known to many only for his cameo in Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall* (1977), more likely screened on Netflix than a film projector—another relic, less likely to be found in an American movie theatre today than a craft cocktail menu or a reclining sofa. The physical presence of an actor as nuanced as Philip Seymour Hoffman—who succumbed an untimely death to a drug overdose, like Judy Garland,



Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, and so many other screen icons before him—need not be mourned, but simply added in post-production.<sup>3</sup>

In the first four chapters, I offer a prehistory of digital culture that concerns American literature and film from the end of the Second World War and the emergence of television to the end of the Vietnam War and the invention of the microprocessor. My readings of Friedrich Kittler, in particular, suggest that military innovation and media history are hopelessly intertwined; while Kittler insists on portraying the relationships among different technologies as an actual war, fetishizing the evolutionary basis of McLuhan's media history to the point of a Michael Bay film, I prefer the euphemisms so favored by American politicians: engagement, conflict, action. Unlike the Vietnam Conflict or Operation Iraqi Freedom, Kittler's war among media produces no casualties: even radio, that comparatively primitive antecedent to television, is enjoying a heyday in 2015 in its remediation as "podcast," with programs like *This American Life* and *Serial* bringing new life to the medium.<sup>4</sup> Despite thousands of declarations of death no less premature than George W. Bush's 2003 "Mission Accomplished" speech, literature and film are not going anywhere, having survived unscathed the adaptation to the electronic age which caused so many twentieth-century American artists so much anxiety.

Of course, "unscathed" does not mean "unchanged." In considering the years 1945 to 1975, I show how media anxiety has led American writers and filmmakers to

---

<sup>3</sup> Though Francis Lawrence denied that he would use computer-generated imagery to reprise Hoffman's role as Plutarch Heavensbee in *The Hunger Games* franchise, it is implied that such a thing would indeed be possible. See Maane Khatchaturian, "'Hunger Games: Mockingjay' Director Didn't Use CGI for Philip Seymour Hoffman Scenes," *Variety* 15 Nov. 2014, Web, 15 Apr. 2015, <http://variety.com/2014/film/news/hunger-games-mockingjay-director-didnt-use-cgi-for-philip-seymour-hoffman-scenes-1201357509/>.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Kittler, see also the works of Paul Virilio.

challenge previous conceptions of author and self, codified conventions of content and form, taking flight from these ideas in the effort of arriving at something “new.” And while their attempts to escape the confines of literature and film were consistently thwarted by the representational limits of language, the impossibility of meaning, they managed to remediate the media of perceived competition, advancing literature and film beyond their modernist periods. As the critical shorthand for this development of the mid-twentieth century itself fades into obsolescence with declarations that postmodernism is “over” and “dead,” proposed additions of a second “post” or the substitution of “empire” for “modernism,” American writers and filmmakers continue to remediate—even if the technologies of their remediation (personal computers, smartphones, social media, the Internet) are not novelties, as they were for their postmodern predecessors, as much as they are commonplace necessities, engineered by a form of capitalism that mandates that no individual be left untechnologized.<sup>5</sup> In 1976, Renata Adler wrote, “The jet, the Xerox, the abortion law, and of course, of course, the tape-recorder—these advances in terms of the reversible and the irreversible are one line, one still fuzzy line, between our set and the last set and the next” (162). In the twenty-first century, to be American one must be linked in: a paradox perhaps no better illustrated by the fact that the twenty percent of Americans without Internet access are likely the very ones most in need of the Affordable

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Alan Kirby’s “The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond,” *Philosophy Now* 58 (2006), Web, 15 Apr. 2015, [https://philosophynow.org/issues/58/The\\_Death\\_of\\_Postmodernism\\_And\\_Beyond](https://philosophynow.org/issues/58/The_Death_of_Postmodernism_And_Beyond), and *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (London: Continuum, 2009); and Bret Easton Ellis, “Notes on Charlie Sheen and the End of Empire,” *The Daily Beast* 15 Mar. 2011, Web, 15 Apr. 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/03/16/bret-easton-ellis-notes-on-charlie-sheen-and-the-end-of-empire.html>.

Care Act, which required all Americans without health insurance to enroll online or face a tax penalty.<sup>6</sup>

For the Miller, Southern, Cassavetes, and Burroughs, media technologies constituted a threat to reality and the self at the same time that they provided the possibility of new realities, new selves. This tension, I argue, is central to the development of an “American vein” in twentieth-century literature and film, an aesthetic as much as it is a mode being—both in the world, and apart from it; oneself and no-self; human and machine. Looking at the present and the future from the perspective of the past, in the epilogue I point out some of the ways that this tension continues in the digital age: first in literature, then in film. In this way, I argue that the transition from the electronic to the digital is not, as many would have it, a rupture. Instead, it should be seen as yet another plot point in the history of American media, which Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors editorially suggest, began not in America, but another country, when in 1507 Alsatian writer Matthias Ringmann and German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller printed one thousand copies of an eight-by-four-and-a-half-foot Ptolemaic map of the world, publishing the word “America” for the first time (Lester 5).

My title is a reference to a book published in 1925 by William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain*. A series of poetic sketches about figures and events in American history from the discovery of the New World by Vikings to Abraham Lincoln, Williams prefaces the book by writing, “In letters, in journals, reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names were constituted. . . .

---

<sup>6</sup> See Caitlin Dewey, “The 60 million Americans who don’t use the Internet, in six charts,” *The Washington Post* 19 Aug. 2013, Web, 15 Apr. 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-switch/wp/2013/08/19/the-60-million-americans-who-dont-use-the-Internet-in-six-charts/>.

it has been my wish to draw from every source one thing, the strange phosphorous of the life, nameless under an old misappellation” (n.p.). These contours, the “strange phosphorous,” make up the “American grain” of Williams’s title. In renaming Williams’s renaming, I seek to substitute for Williams’s sylvan metaphor a fleshier one, referencing the vessels through which blood is circulated as well as the channels through which information, ideas, and media flow. Additionally, the metaphor evokes the intravenous: drugs, intoxication, and the influence of a foreign substance. Indeed, drugs are significant to each of these chapters (and Chapters 2 and 3, in particular), even when they are not addressed head-on or at length. This is not only because of the cultural importance of drugs in postwar America, which cannot be overstated, but because framing drugs as media provides a direct avenue through which to consider the ways that human embodiment and the very concept of the human are implicated in the history and future of media technology. Literature and film intoxicate those who engage with them no less than alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or LSD. Drugs are media, I argue, but so is the human.

In the first chapter, “An American Surrealist in Paris, or Henry Miller Gets Drunk on Water,” I read Miller’s autobiographical novels (and 1949’s *Sexus*, in particular) in light of the experiments in consciousness and language conducted by the European poetic avant-gardes of the early twentieth century: Dada and Surrealism. I argue that Miller follows these European modernists in exploring what it means to be “oneself” in his novels. This results in an innovative and influential style that revolts against conceptions of American literature in the period, setting itself apart from the “Democratic Tradition” of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman with which Miller’s work has frequently

been aligned. Miller adopts the Surrealists' obsession with achieving states of transcendence, hallucination, or nothingness through technologies such as automatic writing, drugs, and psychoanalysis. Through his work, I argue, the pursuit of altered states, a refusal of a stable subjectivity as well as meaning, becomes one of the major preoccupations of postwar American writing.

While a number of scholars have written about the narcotized texts of such writers as Kerouac and Philip K. Dick, Terry Southern's fascination with drugs is a particularly intriguing case study in the influence of altered states on literary production during this period, as Southern's fascination led him to reject literature in favor of another medium: film. In the second chapter, "Media Anxiety and Literature-on-Drugs," I read a number of stories collected in 1967's *Red-Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes* alongside Southern's literary and film criticism, in order to identify a nascent theory of media, concurrently expressed in essays and poems by Ginsberg, which I elaborate further: that literature is stale, divorced from "real" human experience, and in need of the jolt that drugs promise their users. Ultimately, I argue that Southern's attempts to transcend the representational limits of literature are rooted in a media anxiety—the same desire to escape that led Miller to write his self into (and out of) existence.

In the third chapter, "Cinema, Cigarettes, Bodies, and Time," I turn from the medium of literature to the medium of film in order to consider how film language and body language, like literary language, fail to produce meaning. In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1986), Deleuze writes of a school of films in which "the character . . . is reduced to his own bodily attitudes," and the resulting "spectacle" of the actor's body becomes the driving force of the film (192). Such filmmakers, Deleuze argues, seek to rebel

against cinematic tropes by focusing on a more primal medium: the body. Among the filmmakers Deleuze cites as practitioners of this “cinema of bodies” is John Cassavetes. In this chapter, “Cinema, Cigarettes, Bodies, and Time,” I argue that Cassavetes’s efforts—alongside his wife and lifelong collaborator, Gena Rowlands—to foreground the importance of human bodies and their emotions to the cinematic enterprise highlights a much broader, international discourse on “realism” at work in mid-twentieth-century art. Following George Kouvaros and others who have commented on the alcoholic world of Cassavetes’s cinema, I look at the economy of cigarettes in his 1968 film *Faces*. The cigarette, I argue, is a technology that mediates and is mediated by the human body, revealing the body to be bound by the same hermeneutic restrictions of language.

The final chapter, “Revolution 23,” follows the American vein back to Europe, looking at the political potential of literature that is produced and disseminated by electronic means. Here, I read William S. Burroughs’s 1970 essay, “The Electronic Revolution,” alongside the work of Carl Weissner, German editor, translator, and cut-up artist in order to identify a latent theory of literature as a medium of transmission, and not merely of storage. Reading Burroughs’s correspondence with Weissner, I return to the exchange between Europe and the U.S. explored in Chapter 1, this time to discuss the importance of new media technologies such as the mimeograph revolution and audiotape to the production and transmission of literature in the electronic age. I argue that Burroughs’s and Weissner’s experiments with tape recorders do not provide not a new path for literature to follow as much as they expose the ways that literature has always, in a sense, been electronic.

I have titled the epilogue, “Another Country,” after James Baldwin’s 1962 novel of the same name, in order to suggest that the America of the twenty-first century—the digital age, post-electronic—is both fantasy and actuality, reality and virtuality. As Stefanie Dunning argues, Baldwin’s title refers the reader to the author’s

wish for “another country,” another nation, in which our racial and sexual selves are imagined and defined differently or perhaps where they are not defined at all. It is at once a question: another country, illustrating the futility of national crossings, and it is a wistful fantasy: another country, a mythic, imaginary and unattainable place where relationships are not fractured by difference (8).

This, of course, is not meant to imply that the America of today is the America which Baldwin sought—certainly, it is not. Rather, it is a way of concluding with a question, looking forward to the media’s future from the perspective of media’s past. In doing so, I show how the media anxiety of an earlier generation of American writers and filmmakers has been exacerbated by the fractalization of human experience in the digital age even as that anxiety has become mundane, programmed by default into the human sensorium. Looking at Tao Lin’s novel *Richard Yates* (2010) and Harmony Korine’s film *Spring Breakers* (2012), I consider the evolution of American literature and film in the twenty-first century as writers and filmmakers encapsulate the epistolary capabilities of email, text, and instant messaging; adopting an affectless method of narration which evokes the anonymity of the Internet, the haze of prescription pharmaceuticals and reality television.

## Chapter 1

### An American Surrealist in Paris, or, Henry Miller Gets Drunk on Water

*I don't think I'm tangible to myself.  
I mean, I think one thing today and I think another thing tomorrow.  
I change during the course of a day.  
I wake and I'm one person,  
and when I go to sleep I know for certain I'm somebody else.  
I don't know who I am most of the time.  
It doesn't even matter to me.*

—Bob Dylan<sup>1</sup>

The first film to receive an NC-17 rating from the Motion Picture Association of America was Philip Kaufman's *Henry & June* (1990). The film is a loose adaptation of Anaïs Nin's sexual encounters with the American novelist Henry Miller and his second wife, June Mansfield Miller, as recounted in Nin's many volumes of diaries.<sup>2</sup> In the film, after meeting Henry Miller (Fred Ward), the archetype of a rough-around-the-edges American tough guy, the sexual virility of his Brooklyn-boy affect overcompensating for his prematurely bald pate, Nin (Maria de Medeiros) writes, lying in bed next to her husband Hugo (Richard E. Grant), the representative figure of Nin's erotic dissatisfaction, "I have met Henry Miller. He is virile, flamboyant. He is a man life intoxicates. He is like me, but he doesn't know it yet." Nin goes to his apartment to see him; he isn't there. She

---

<sup>1</sup> See David Gates, "Dylan Revisited," *Newsweek* 5 Oct. 1997, Web, 9 May 2013, <http://www.newsweek.com/dylan-revisited-174056>.

<sup>2</sup> The particular volume upon which Kaufman based his screenplay is the clumsily titled *Henry and June: From a Journal of Love: the Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin (1931-1932)*, published in 1986, nine years after Nin's death, six years after Henry's, and seven after June's. June was born in Bukovina, Austria-Hungary in 1901 as Juliet Smerth or Smerdt, a surname derived from the Polish word for death, *śmierć*, as Miller notes often.



snoops around his bedroom, eyeing fragments of unpublished writing, staring intensely at a photograph of June (Uma Thurman)—a character who has not yet been introduced to the viewer. June's face (or more specifically, Thurman's) is presented to the viewer an idea: an idea of pansexual evil, madness, heartbreak. Opening a door to another room in the flat, she interrupts Miller's friend, Richard Osborne (Kevin Spacey), making love to three women simultaneously. If Nin is ready to embark on a journey of sexual excess, as she insists in the film's opening scene, she has come to the right place.

Later, the viewer is transported to a movie theater in Paris, June's doe-eyed face projected on the silver screen. Apparently, she is a film actress. The camera cuts to Nin, entering the theater just as June is bedded down by the Don Juan of the film-within-the-film, their lips locked, both mirror and inspiration to several couples in the audience, less interested in the film than in each other's bodies, a phenomenon Nin seems to take note of as she scans the theater's seats, looking for Henry, the light of the projector reflected on her face. She spies Henry, takes a seat behind him, and smiles. The camera cuts to June onscreen, her string of pearls fallen to the floor in orgasmic delirium. Nin touches Henry on the shoulder. He turns toward her; tears stream down his face. He looks longingly to the camera, which has taken the point-of-view of the film-within-the-film, and rushes out of the theater. Onscreen, June exhales the smoke of a post-coital cigarette; nonplussed, Nin runs after Henry.

What strikes me about this scene is the dissonance between Kaufman's interpretation of Henry Miller—itsself an interpretation of Nin's interpretation of Henry Miller, not to mention actor Fred Ward's interpretation of Henry Miller—and Henry Miller, the protagonist of the novels of Henry Miller, the author. To be clear: the “hero”

of the six novels which constitute the aesthetic core of Miller's oeuvre goes by the name of Henry V. Miller, the "V." short for Valentine, or as June—in the novels, called "Mara," and later, "Mona"—abbreviates it, "Val," a somewhat androgynous nickname which he is called by no other character. Henry Miller's Henry Miller, though he may be "on the point of tears" upon waking up in the morning, faced with the "awareness that the deeper and truer reality belongs to the world of the unconscious" (*Sexus* 369), would never be found sobbing in a theater: Henry Miller's Henry Miller fucks and writes his way both in and out of problems—underemployed as he may be throughout much of his six-volume picaresque, he simply doesn't have time for crying at the movies.

Writing in 1938 Paris of 1920s New York, Miller confesses in *Tropic of Capricorn* (a novel not legally published in America until 1961),

I was ignorant of the fact that there were men then living who went by the outlandish names of Blaise Cendrars, Jacques Vaché, Louis Aragon, Tristan Tzara, René Crevel, Henri de Montherlant, André Breton, Max Ernst, Georges Grosz; ignorant of the fact that on July 14, 1916, at the Saal Waag, in Zurich [better known as the Café Voltaire], the first Dada Manifesto had been proclaimed. (288)

Miller goes on to describe the improbability of himself, "Just a Brooklyn boy communicating with the red-haired albinos of the Zuni region" (290), identifying kindred spirits in the founders of Dada and Surrealism, praising Vaché, Apollinaire, and Émile Bouvier, in particular, along the way. And yet, he emphasizes, he *understands* these artists, mourning the fact that he was born a decade too late, on the wrong continent: "To be generous is to say Yes before the man even opens his mouth. To say Yes you have to be first a surrealist or dadaist, because you have understood what it means to say No. You can even say Yes and No at the same time, provided you do more than is expected of you" (291). He continues: "Ah yes, if I had known then that these birds existed—Cendrars,

Vaché, Grosz, Ernst, Apollinaire—if I had known that then, if I had known that in their own way they were thinking exactly the same things as I was, I think I’d have blown up. Yes, I think I’d have gone off like a bomb. But I was ignorant” (292). With these statements, which constitute one of the novelist’s frequent literary critical tangents, Miller hints at one of the more interesting transatlantic exchanges in twentieth-century literature—one in which he plays a crucial role.

Though all of Miller’s major novels were written prior to 1960, Miller’s name is perhaps most frequently associated with the American counterculture of the 1960s, for which he became a sort of elder statesman. For the Beats, in particular—a literary movement composed of William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac at the center, with writers as diverse as Gregory Corso, Amiri Baraka, and Terry Southern digging the scene from time to time—Miller’s legacy was nothing short of iconic, to the extent that visiting the elderly Miller’s home in Big Sur became the 1960s hipster equivalent of the Hajj.<sup>3</sup> The admiration was mutual: after reading Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums* (1958), Miller wrote to both the book’s publisher, Viking Press, and his friend Lawrence Durrell, praising the book. The following year, he wrote the preface to the paperback edition of Kerouac’s *The Subterraneans* (1958), declaring, “Let the poets speak. They may be ‘beat,’ but they’re not riding the atom-powered Juggernaut. Believe me, there’s nothing clean, nothing healthy, nothing promising about this age of

---

<sup>3</sup> Though, this pilgrimage turned out to be somewhat unachievable: as Kerouac describes it in *Big Sur*, he flaked on his engagement to meet Miller in 1960, getting drunk with his buddies at the Vesuvio in San Francisco instead. Nor was Ginsberg ever to make the trip to see Miller as he had planned: in 1956, “Henry Miller was living in Big Sur. [Corso and I] decided that on our way to Los Angeles, we’d hitchhike to Big Sur and see if we could find Henry Miller. But we couldn’t get a ride out of Carmel and were stuck on the coast highway” (*Spontaneous Mind* 527).

wonders—except the telling. And the Kerouacs will probably have the last word” (qtd. in Charters and Charters 267).

There is, of course, a multitude of reasons for the affinity between Miller—a critically neglected contemporary of the oft-cited giants of American modernism, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner—and this younger generation of American writers. Firstly, Miller’s own wanderlust, sparked largely by his disgust with the Christian-Capitalist morality of the United States (not to mention his lust for his June, whose skirt he was chasing when he first crossed the Atlantic for Paris), led him to spend two decades as an expatriate in Europe, roughly at the same time that Gertrude Stein was hosting the famous gatherings in her salon at 27 rue de Fleurus. It is thus no surprise that the Beats, who spent almost as much time living in Paris, London, Mexico City, and Tangier as they did in the United States (and for Kerouac especially, who firmly established the significance of “the road” in American literature), should filiate themselves to Miller, lifelong pursuer of an insatiable elsewhere. Secondly, to a certain extent, Miller *was* a contemporary of the Beats, given that his important novels were not published in the U.S. until the 1960s, following the United States Customs Service’s ban on the importing of Miller’s debut novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, upon its publication in Paris by Jack Kahane’s Obelisk Press in 1934. Grove Press’s 1961 publication of the novel led to an explosion of obscenity lawsuits, culminating in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1964 overruling of state court findings that *Tropic of Cancer* was obscene, in *Grove Press, Inc. v. Gerstein*. But by the time of the Supreme Court decision in Miller’s favor, two works of the Beat canon had already stood trial for obscenity charges: Ginsberg’s “Howl” (1955), which was found to be of “redeeming social importance” by Judge Clayton W.

Horn of the California State Superior Court (Morgan and Peters 197); and Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, which was "banned in Boston" in 1962, only to be deemed "not obscene" by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 1966, the last significant literary obscenity trial in U.S. history.<sup>4</sup>

In *Sexus* (1949), Miller seems to defend his choice of himself as the hero of a modern novel, or novels, writing,

In the subway, faced with the broken-down night riders of the big city, I fell into a deep introspection, such as comes over the hero in modern novels. Like them, I asked myself useless questions, posed problems that didn't exist, made plans for the future which would never materialize, doubted everything, including my own existence. For the modern hero thought leads nowhere; his brain is a collender [*sic*] in which he washes the soggy vegetables of the mind. (102-3)

Perhaps this is less of a defense of the modern novel than a critique: more than a decade earlier, in *Black Spring* (1936), his most surrealist text, Miller writes, "No harm, I say, can ever be done a great book by taking it with you to the toilet. Only the little books suffer thereby. Only the little books make ass wipers" (49). The examples of such "ass wipers" he mentions include the bulk of what is now considered the American modernist canon: "the *Atlantic Monthly*, or any other monthly . . . Aldous Huxley, Gertrude Stein, Sinclair Lewis, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Dreiser, etc., etc. . . . I hear no bell ringing inside me when I bring these birds to the water closet. I pull the chain and down the sewer they go" (49). For Miller, writing in all-caps this time, "THE TRUE ARTIST IS HE WHO CONQUERS THE ROMANTIC IN HIMSELF" (228), and in arguing that Henry Miller, the author, is such a "true artist," he offers in *Black Spring* the twin thesis statements, "*l'homme que j'étais, je ne le suis plus*" (36), and "*I want to declare that I am*

---

<sup>4</sup> Being "banned in Boston" was a phenomenon so common that the phrase became shorthand for literary censorship in general.

*a traitor to the human race*” (154).<sup>5</sup> It is in sacrificing himself to literature, effectively forging a counterfeit self through language, that Miller takes what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as a “line of flight,” an act influenced by his reading of the post-World War I European avant-gardes as much as the “Democratic tradition” of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, whose looming shadow is so frequently cited by Miller and his critics alike.<sup>6</sup>

Consider the genre of the roman à clef, a genre whose conventions Miller’s novels adhere to closely, if not exactly. In *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* (2009), Sean Latham describes the genre—French for “novel with a key”—as “a reviled and disruptive literary form, thriving as it does on duplicity and an appetite for scandal” (7). The genre has been dismissed by Henry James as little but a “tissue of personalities” (qtd. in Latham 9) and defended by Truman Capote, who claimed in a 1976 interview with *Playboy* that “*all* literature is gossip” (qtd. in Latham 4). Like all romans à clef, there is a “key” to Miller’s novels: Mara/Mona refers to June Miller, Boris to philosopher Michael Fraenkel, Carl to Austrian writer Alfred Perlès, Anastasia to artist-poet (and Mara/Mona/June’s lover) Jean Kronski. And yet, the reader requires no key to uncover the referent of Henry Miller’s Henry Miller—he makes the

---

<sup>5</sup> “*L’homme que j’étais, je ne le suis plus*” translates to English as “the man I was, I am no longer.”

<sup>6</sup> It is reported that *Leaves of Grass* (1855-1892) was the only book Miller packed in his luggage when he embarked for France, where he was to live upon arriving in 1930 until the outbreak of World War II. See Jeanette Winterson, “Renegade: The Male Mystique of Henry Miller,” *New York Times* 26 Jan. 2012, Web, 1 Apr. 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/books/review/renegade-henry-miller-and-the-making-of-tropic-of-cancer-by-frederick-turner-book-review.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/books/review/renegade-henry-miller-and-the-making-of-tropic-of-cancer-by-frederick-turner-book-review.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

connection explicit, while also making it clear that the literary Henry Miller is *not* the “real” Henry Miller.

In *Tropic of Capricorn*, he writes,

I was the evil product of an evil soil. If the self were not imperishable, the ‘I’ I write about would have been destroyed long ago. To some this may seem like an invention, but whatever I imagine to have happened did actually happen, *at least to me*. History may deny it, since I have played no part in the history of my people, but even if everything I say is wrong, is prejudiced, spiteful, malevolent, even if I am a liar and a poisoner, it is nevertheless the truth and it will have to be swallowed. (5)

The point Miller is making here is perhaps not as immediate as one might think. Latham introduces his book with a warning to the reader: “this book commits one of literary criticism’s deadliest sins by treating seemingly fictional works from the early twentieth century as if they contained real facts about real people and events” (3). He goes on to argue that the intentional fallacy, “that sturdy foundation stone of the modern critical enterprise,” is “[f]ar from a natural practice” because it

has to be regularly drummed into literature students. James Joyce is no more Stephen Dedalus, we confidently assure them, than Ernest Hemingway is Jake Barnes or Virginia Woolf is Clarissa Dalloway. That this principle is taught rather than simply intuited, however, suggests that it is *not* a natural way to read, that it is a disciplined intellectual skill rather than some natural aesthetic instinct. (4)

Rather than advocating a return to a pre-Barthes, pre-Foucault conception of the “Author” or a belief in the sovereign subject, Latham here seeks to describe a pre-1970s mode of reading and writing which “contains its own distinctive array of creative energies that spark productively across the gaps between fact and fiction, between ‘a world elsewhere’

and our own” (5).<sup>7</sup> Though Miller’s work was written during the inaugural era of the roman à clef, “a counter-form to the novel that emerged in the 1890s and helped constitute the legal, aesthetic, and ethical challenges we associate with some of the early twentieth century’s most monumental legal productions” (5), Latham fails to address the problem of Miller’s particular brand of roman à clef by remaining bogged down (to quote a prominent academic off the record) in the “shitty language of REPRESENTATION.” The point of Miller novelizing his own life, as opposed to *memoirizing* it, is not to represent Henry Miller, but to present a new Henry Miller, to *produce* a counterfeit self.

In *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari write,

Strange Anglo-American literature: from Thomas Hardy, from D.H. Lawrence to Malcolm Lowry, from Henry Miller to Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, men who know how to leave, to scramble the codes, to cause flows to circulate, to traverse the desert of the body without organs. They overcome a limit, they shatter a wall, the capitalist barrier. And of course they fail to complete the process, they never cease failing to do so. (133)<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-8; and Michel Foucault, “What Is An Author?”

<sup>8</sup> They continue, turning to the problem of literature: “The neurotic impasse again closes—the daddy-mommy of oedipalization, America, the return to the native land—or else the perversion of the exotic territorialities, then drugs, alcohol—or worse still, an old fascist dream. Never has delirium oscillated more between its two poles. But through the impasses and the triangles a schizophrenic flow moves, irresistibly; sperm, river, drainage, inflamed genital mucus, or a stream of words that do not let themselves be coded, a libido that is too fluid, too viscous: a violence against syntax, a concerted destruction of the signifier, non-sense erect as a flow, polyvocality that returns to haunt all relations. How poorly the problem of literature is put, starting from the ideology that it bears, or from the co-optation of it by a social order. People are co-opted, not works, which will always come to awake a sleeping youth, and which never cease extending their flame. As for ideology, it is the most confused notion because it keeps us from seizing the relationship of the literary machine with a field of production, and the moment when the emitted sign breaks through this ‘form of the content’ that was attempting to maintain the sign within the order of the signifier. Yet it has been a long time since Engels demonstrated, already apropos of Balzac, how an author is great because he cannot prevent himself from tracing flows and causing them to circulate, flows that split asunder the catholic and despotic



Here, Deleuze and Guattari commend such Anglophone writers for exploring, as Philip Goodchild puts it, “the nomadic wanderings of desire” (55). Deleuze and Guattari’s typical preferences—the overcoming of a limit, the shattering of a wall, the line of flight, the flow—are very much on display here, and it should come as no surprise that they cite writers of fiction and poetry in the aid of elucidating some of their key concepts. As Anneleen Masschelein points out,

Much like Freud, who repeatedly claimed poets intuited the truths of psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari cast literary authors like Artaud, Beckett, Proust, Kafka, Miller, Burroughs, Lawrence, etc. as the main precursors of their criticism of Freud and the Oedipus complex, alongside dissident psychoanalysts like Wilhelm Reich or the anti-psychiatrists David Cooper and Robert D. Laing. (24)

Indeed, in *What Is Philosophy?* (1991), Deleuze and Guattari insist that such writers (Miller among them) are “half” philosophers but also much more than philosophers. . . . To be sure, they do not produce a synthesis of art and philosophy. They branch out and do not stop branching out” (67). With Claire Parnet, Deleuze argues for “the superiority of Anglo-American literature” (as opposed to French literature, which is “too human, too historical, too concerned with the future and the past” [37]) in the title of an essay published in 1977’s *Dialogues II*, suggesting that Miller and his Anglophone contemporaries are privileged in fulfilling the promise of literature, as Deleuze and Guattari see it: like philosophy, but also more than philosophy.

---

signifier of his work, and that necessarily nourish a revolutionary machine on the horizon. That is what style is, or rather the absence of style—asyntactic, agrammatical: the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow, and to explode—desire. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal, a production and not an expression” (*Anti-Oedipus* 133).

Miller's omnipresence in such discussions is undoubtedly appropriate: in fact, his peculiar style of novel writing often reads more like philosophy than fiction. However, Deleuze, Guattari, and Parnet offer the work of Miller—an American writer, though one who spent much of his career living and writing in France—as a paradigm against which the somehow less modern French literature (with the notable exceptions of Artaud and Proust) is opposed. As a result, they fail to reckon with the fact that Miller's emphasis on the processual, productive and schizophrenic nature of literature in his production of a counterfeit self has as much in common with European modernism as it does with Deleuze's "strange Anglo-American literature," revealing Miller's significance as a direct and generative link between these two literary traditions. Deleuze's tendency to create separate modernist canons, organized into rhizomes, without acknowledging the zones of becoming between them ironically or not reveals the transatlantic, borderless nature of aesthetic and philosophical exchange between various twentieth-century avant-gardes. The case of Henry Miller—and more specifically, the influence of Surrealism and Dada on his work—provides a precise example of writing as production, an idea which is central to the theory of literature developed throughout Deleuze's entire philosophical project, an idea which is distinctly modern: as Marielle Macé writes, "The category of Individual, presenting itself without fixed contours, continually making and unmaking itself, is both boon and burden of modernity" (219).

Before returning to and ultimately critiquing Deleuze's concept of "strange Anglo-American literature," it would be helpful to turn to the writings of Walter Benjamin, whose concepts of shock (*Schock*) and intoxication (*Rausch*) get at the very center of the Surrealist impulse at work in this postwar American avant-garde, and

especially the novels of Henry Miller.<sup>9</sup> Miller's affiliation with Surrealism is as well noted as his influence on postwar American literature.<sup>10</sup> As Ihab Hassan, in one of the seminal texts on Miller's work, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*, writes,

In this century, the immoderate reaction against reason, society, and history, which finally swept into a reaction against all forms, against language itself, carried with it, covertly, the hopes of a saner world. These hopes were sometimes spitefully or flamboyantly expressed, as in Dadaism and Surrealism. Miller responded instinctively to these movements, as he did to the visionary, anarchic strain in America; and his success reflects the wider interest that the antinomian spirit awakens in our century. Miller's Surrealism, however, is of the native kind. (205)

Though Miller professes a closer kinship with Dada than Surrealism (qtd. in Hassan 205), and despite Hassan's eagerness to fit everything into clean binaries, Hassan is smart to align Miller more closely with the later group, mostly because of the Surrealist fascination with psychoanalysis, which plays a huge role in Miller's contributions to the postwar American avant-garde.<sup>11</sup>

### *Profane Illumination*

Benjamin's essay "Surrealism" describes how "the dialectical kernel that later grew into surrealism was originally embedded, was shown by Aragon in 1924—at a time

---

<sup>9</sup> One could make the argument that this "strange Anglo-American" literature is a "minor literature," akin to that of Franz Kafka, Albert Einstein, Fritz Lang, Max Ernst and others in the Central European 1920s. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Miller is "likely to be one of the most important influences on our contemporary writing, but official criticism perseveres in its scandalous and systematic neglect of his work," Kate Millett prophesies in a statement that is perhaps more true in the twenty-first century than when she wrote it in 1970. See Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City: Double Day, 1970) 298.

<sup>11</sup> This is a symptom of Hassan's *very* structuralist criticism, no doubt—the boundaries between these two movements are extremely permeable.

when its development could not yet be foreseen” had already been abandoned by contemporary Surrealists. By 1929, the year before Miller arrives in Europe, “the heroic phase” of Surrealism, Benjamin argues, is already “over” (178). He continues, elaborating on this “heroic phase”:

. . . at the time when it broke out over its founders as an inspiring dream wave, it seemed the most integral, conclusive, absolute of movements. Everything with which it came into contact was integrated. Life only seemed worth living where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as by the steps of multitudinous images flooding back and forth, language only seemed itself where sound and image, image and sound interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called ‘meaning.’ Image and language take precedence. (178-9)

Not only is language brought to “the threshold between waking and sleeping,” it is no longer a slave to meaning, or to the self: “In the world’s structure dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication” (179). Benjamin concedes that there is more to Surrealism than just getting high (“The opium of the people, Lenin called religion, and brought the two things closer together than the Surrealists could have liked” [179]), and that the Surrealist experience—“the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination” (179)—is to be found in “profane illumination,” which narcotics can provide an introduction to, but without complete transcendence.

It is somewhat ironic that Benjamin should write about what is a starkly anti-religious movement in such religious terms, and with such religious passion. Of course, Benjamin could be having a bit of fun here—he often does—but he also rarely appears without a dose of spirituality and mysticism in his writing. As such, in its focus on the

“profane illumination,” this essay sheds some light on Benjamin’s idiosyncratic spirituality as it appears throughout his work. For instance, in one of his most famous essays, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), the argument is rooted in Benjamin’s concept of the “aura,” that thing belonging to a work of art which “withers in the age of mechanical reproduction” (221). Benjamin’s resistance to define “aura” here or elsewhere tends to give the essay (and others) a quasi-religious feel—and rightfully so, as the “aura,” if it can be defined by anything, is defined by its indefinability.<sup>12</sup> It is a *je ne sais quoi* standing in for that part of a work of art which is not re-presentable—mechanically, or otherwise.

While the enigmatic self-reflexivity of the aura may remind the reader of the unnamable Jewish god (especially the reader aware of Benjamin’s tragic death, on the run from the very fascists repudiated in the essay’s much discussed conclusion), the evolution of Benjamin’s deployment of the concept is rather enlightening. A very early use of the concept appears in the first “protocol” of Benjamin’s many experiences taking hashish, an endeavor largely inspired by reading Charles Baudelaire’s *Artificial Paradises* (1860), on December 18, 1927. As Marcus Boon, Avital Ronell, and others have pointed out, Benjamin’s drug protocols are but one instance in a history of literature-on-drugs which predates even William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Ronell writes, taking a cue from Jacques Derrida, “literature, as a modern phenomenon dating from the sixteenth or seventeenth century, [is] contemporaneous with European drug addiction” (“The Rhetoric of Drugs” 78), a historical coincidence which results in “a certain type of ‘Being-on-

---

<sup>12</sup> N.B. the attempts of Benjamin’s friend and scholar Gershom Scholem to reclaim the mostly secular Benjamin as a Jewish thinker. See Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1981).

drugs' that has everything to do with the bad conscience of our era" (3).<sup>13</sup> Listing the effects of this, his first impression of the drug, Benjamin notes, "Boundless goodwill. Falling away of neurotic-obsessive anxiety complexes. The sphere of 'character' opens up. All those present take on hues of the comic. At the same time, one steps oneself in their aura" (*On Hashish* 19). Another protocol provides more description:

Objects thus participate in my depression = annulment of their matter. They become mannequins. Unclothed dress-up dolls, waiting to do my bidding, they stand around in their nakedness, and everything about them teaches a lesson, as with an anatomical model. No, it's like this: they stand there without aura. By virtue of my smile, all things are under glass. (34)

He develops this concept further in the protocol of another experiment with the drug, this time administered by Benjamin's cousin Egon Wissing and his wife Gert, in March 1930. Benjamin writes here against the theosophists, he insists, "whose experience and ignorance [he] found highly repugnant" (58):

First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine. Second, the aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental, with every movement the aura-wreathed object makes. Third, genuine aura can in no sense be thought of as a spruced-up version of the magic rays beloved of spiritualists and described and illustrated in vulgar works of mysticism. On the contrary, the characteristic feature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo [*Umzirkung*], in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case. Perhaps nothing gives such a clear idea of aura as Van Gogh's late paintings, in which one could say that the aura appears to have been painted together with the various objects. (58)

In a number of ways, these protocols exhibit Benjamin as a Surrealist himself, seeking profane illumination not so much in the drugs themselves, as in language: in the protocol just cited, Benjamin points out that "the core of the experiment . . . appeared in Gert's statements and my own recollections" (58), emphasizing that it was through conversation

---

<sup>13</sup> See also Boon, "Walter Benjamin and Drug Literature" in Benjamin, *On Hashish* 1-12; and Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs." The idea of literature-on-drugs is discussed further in the following chapter.

and the writing of the protocols that true insight came to him—the hashish merely provided an introduction.<sup>14</sup> Without even insisting on the “dreamlike” description of objects transforming into mannequins at his bidding, Benjamin’s protocols strike the reader as a record of profane illuminations, thoroughly Surrealist undertakings which result in a “loosening of the self” (“Falling away of neurotic-obsessive anxiety complexes. The sphere of ‘character’ opens up”), and ultimately identify art as the true source of insight: Van Gogh’s late paintings give the clearest idea of aura Benjamin is able to conjure.

And yet, in 1929—a year before Breton makes his own, similar declaration—Benjamin is already arguing that Surrealism is dead, or at least past its prime.<sup>15</sup> Like the narcotic high, the profane illumination fades—as such, intoxication (*Rausch*) appears for Benjamin as the primary objective of the Surrealist project, and it seems better pursued down non-chemical avenues. He cites Breton’s 1928 novel *Nadja*, which Breton referred to as “a book with a banging door” (qtd. in “Surrealism” 180), as illustrative of the characteristics of the profane illumination, foremost in the shock (*Schock*) it incites in its reader:

To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need. Discretion concerning one’s own existence, once an aristocratic virtue, has become more and more an affair of petit-bourgeois parvenus. *Nadja* has achieved the true, creative synthesis between the art novel and the *roman-à-clef*. (180)

Thus, it is not so much the narcotic effect of drugs which leads to profane illumination,

---

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin also experimented with opium and various other opiate derivatives during this period.

<sup>15</sup> Though Surrealism did not “officially” die until 1969, three years after Breton’s death, Dada had called it quits by 1923. See Caws 448.

but rather the moral exhibitionism of the drug user: not only is the druggie viewed with suspicion and contempt by mainstream society, his or her willingness to experiment with other consciousnesses and selves stands in defiance to the rationalism of the modern era. Ultimately, Benjamin and the Surrealists come to the same conclusion that Baudelaire arrived at almost a century earlier: hashish is okay, wine is better, but poetry is the best artificial paradise of them all.

It is interesting to note that Benjamin's praise of Breton's "true, creative synthesis between the art novel and the *roman-à-clef*" brings to mind a statement Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his journal in 1840: "These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies—captivating books, if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his experiences that which is really his experience, and how to record truth truly!" (516). This claim, of course, serves as the epigraph to *Tropic of Cancer*, itself "a creative synthesis between the art novel and the *roman-à-clef*." Though Benjamin acknowledges the revolutionary fervor with which the intoxication of the profane illumination was sought, and that no one knew better what nihilism could result from such experiments than the Surrealists themselves, their true virtue is not in realizing *l'art pour l'art* (which Benjamin points out is rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding), but in their "magical experiments with words . . . the passionate phonetic and graphical transformational games that have run through the whole literature of the avant-garde for the past fifteen years, whether it is called Futurism, Dadaism, or Surrealism" (184). Thus, it is with literature—and language, in particular—that Surrealism pursues its lofty goal: "To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" (189), a task which Benjamin equates to anarchy.



This is the very historical transcendence that Benjamin is after: anarchy in the service of socialist revolution. He writes,

Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*. For the moment, only the Surrealists have understood its present commands. They exchange, to a man, the play of human features for the face of an alarm clock that in each minute rings for sixty seconds. (192)

In addition to providing a defense of Surrealism against claims of political nihilism by its socialist critics, Benjamin proposes a poetic revolution as better than no revolution at all, even though, in its contemporary applications, “Surrealism has come ever closer to the Communist answer. . . . pessimism all along the line. Absolutely” (191). Revolution will not come, Benjamin suggests, until the masses are jolted, shocked: this is why he cites the Surrealist revolution in poetry as a model for political revolution. Class consciousness, it seems, is another reality in the same way that the intoxication of dreams, narcotics, and poetry are—which is why Breton cites the philosophical realism of the Middle Ages (“the belief in a real, separate existence of concepts whether outside or inside things,” Benjamin summarizes [184]) as the basis of poetic experience. In other words, Surrealism provides a stellar example of the revolution in consciousness which Benjamin considers prerequisite to a revolution in politics—though, he is careful not to conflate the two.

In attempting to identify the role of Surrealism (and more broadly, the avant-garde) in revolutionary politics, Benjamin hints at what is perhaps the most profound influence on Surrealism without ever mentioning it directly: psychoanalysis. In fact, to some degree, “Surrealism” seems to argue that what is lacking from the Marxist theory of

revolution is the concept of the unconscious.<sup>16</sup> If the goal of revolution is, as Benjamin argues, the creation of a sphere of bodies, the emergence of a collective, then “the sclerotic liberal-moral-humanistic ideal of freedom,” to which there has been no alternative in Europe since Bakunin, Benjamin argues, must be liquidated (189). In their experiments inhabiting other selves—through drugs, life, and art—the Surrealists have pointedly challenged that “sclerotic liberal-moral-humanistic ideal of freedom” by rejecting the idea of a single, unified, and stable self/subject/individual upon which that concept of freedom is based. Indeed, it is only when the idea of the individual, as problematized by psychoanalysis as it is by Surrealism, is destroyed that the collective will be able to emerge. Though Surrealism proved unable to bring about political revolution on its own, its revolutions in poetry and consciousness (profane illumination) cast the first stone.

### *Spiel und Phantasie*

Though Benjamin chooses to trace the roots of Surrealism back to the *poète maudit* Arthur Rimbaud and focuses on the Surrealists’ revolution in consciousness rather than their supposed political nihilism (as exemplified by Aragon’s declaration, “The thought of all human activity makes me laugh” [qtd. in “Surrealism” 185]), it is important to remember the movement’s political foundations, most evident in the work of Surrealism’s older sister in poetic revolution, Dada. Dada was born, to a great extent as a reaction to the vast devastation of Europe resulting from World War I. As such, Tzara,

---

<sup>16</sup> An argument also made—albeit in drastically different terms—by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, as well as Norman Mailer in his 1957 essay, “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster.” See Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: Putnam’s, 1959).

Hugo Ball, and others posed themselves against all systems: philosophy, psychoanalysis, capitalism, and above all, meaning. “DADA MEANS NOTHING” (qtd. in Caws 301), Tzara declares in 1918, “Freedom: *DADA DADA DADA*, shrieking of contracted colors, intertwining of contraries and of all contradictions, grotesqueries, nonsequiturs: LIFE” (304). And while this belief in nothing certainly qualifies as a sort of nihilism, it is a nihilism in pointed political defiance to those systems of modernity promising progress, but delivering murder, destruction, and horror. As such, Dada is primitivist in both its political and aesthetic objectives: it demands from humanity a radical reboot, a collective starting over from scratch.

By the mid-1920s, though, as Mary Ann Caws writes, “A negative rendering of what was, in origin, a movement of energy and high hopes, Dada had become, said [Robert] Desnos, a kind of chapel. The point was to liberate the human mind from the rational ordering that would tie it down, by means of automatic processes of writing, drawing, and speaking in a hypnotized state” (448). Enter Surrealism. The movement, which began in Paris following the “death” of Dada in 1923, was soon commandeered by Breton, who eventually expelled Artaud, Desnos, and others from the group. Breton, who studied psychiatry and worked in a neurological ward in Nantes during World War I, defines Surrealism in the “First Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924) as “Pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations” (qtd. in Waldberg 75). He goes on to write, “Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of

thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life” (75). If Dada positioned itself against all systems, by the time Surrealism emerged, it seems that psychoanalysis had been pardoned. In their “Declaration of January 27, 1925,” the Surrealists (comprising twenty-six signatures, from Aragon to Roland Tual) still acknowledge the political nature of their movement: “We are determined to make a Revolution” (qtd. in Caws 450). And yet, they continue: “We have joined the word *surrealism* to the word *revolution* solely to show the disinterested, detached, and even entirely desperate character of this revolution” (450). The Surrealists “make no claim to change the *mores* of mankind,” rather, they intend to “show the fragility of thought, and on what shifting foundations, what caverns we have built our trembling houses” (450). Above all, Surrealism is “a means of total liberation of the mind *and of all that resembles it*” (450).

The common ground most obviously shared between Surrealism and psychoanalysis is the significance of dreams. As Linda Williams summarizes it,

. . . the Surrealists were interested in using the dream as a means of access to their own unconscious, considered both as a source for their texts and as a formal model of expression. . . . the dream model appealed to them as a special form of communication without what seemed the rigidities of ordinary language, offering a form of expression in which a given signifier referred not simply to a given signified, but to a multiple chain of often contradictory associations. On the model of this different kind of language, the Surrealists developed their initial experiments in automatic writing and began to produce the various automatic texts, dream accounts, and group experiments, including the trancelike dream-hallucinations of the famous *séances de sommeil*. (33)

In 1970, the novelist Norman Mailer referred to filmmaking as “free psychoanalysis”; in 1925, that was literature—and not because of its potential value as confession or therapy

for the writer, but because of the shifting role of the artist in Surrealism (qtd. in Gelmis 165). Like many other modernist movements, the Surrealists made the author the subject of the work, and not necessarily in the autobiographical sense that Emerson had asked for: rather, in conceiving of literature (and film, Williams points out) as “thought,” the work of an artist becomes a record of his or her unconscious—a representation of that part of the artist which is ultimately unknowable, and which, Freud tells us, it is the goal of psychoanalysis to bring to the surface. “We are always, even in prose,” write Breton and Paul Éluard in 1929, “led and willing to write what we have not sought and what perhaps does not even seek what we sought. Perfection is *laziness*” (qtd. in Caws 472).

In 1907, Sigmund Freud delivered a lecture titled “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” which seeks to identify the relationship between the play (*Spiel*) of children and the phantasies (*Phantasien*) of the creative writer. Freud, a brilliant writer in his own regard, modestly introduces the topic of the lecture by pointing out that, “We laymen have always been intensely curious to know . . . from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable” (436). He goes on, stating, “After all, creative writers themselves like to lessen the distance between their kind and the common run of humanity; they so often assure us that every man is a poet at heart and that the last poet will not perish till the last man does” (437). For Freud, the writer is identical to the child at play in that they both create fantasy worlds which they take very seriously and in which they invest a great deal of emotion while “separating [them] sharply from reality” (437). Importantly, “Language has preserved this relationship between children’s play and poetic creation” (437): Freud

points out the presence of the word *Spiel* (“play”) within the German words for comedy (*Lustspiel*) and tragedy (*Trauerspiel*). As such, Freud insists that both the play of the child and the creation of the poet are strictly opposed to reality—presumably, even the most starkly realist literary composition. Except, in one particularly noteworthy instance, which may be the best summary of Miller’s literary career ever written (unconsciously or not): “As an adult he can look back on the intense seriousness with which he once carried on his games in childhood; and, by equating his ostensibly serious occupations of to-day with his childhood games, he can throw off the too heavy burden imposed on him by life and win the high yield of pleasure afforded by *humour*” (437). Miller—not just a writer, but a notably funny one—is thus unlike most people whom, Freud argues, trade in their childhood games for phantasies, daydreams. “I believe that most people construct phantasies at times in their lives,” Freud seems to understate at first, “This is a fact which has long been overlooked and whose importance has therefore not been sufficiently appreciated” (438).

The child at play is unashamed of his or her (though Freud unconsciously insists on the male pronoun) activities and feels no need to conceal them from others. The child’s play is governed by wishes, Freud argues: primarily, the wish to be grown-up, the wish to be big. The adult, though, knows that she is no longer a child, and ashamed of her phantasies, conceals them from others, even to the point that the daydreamer believes that she is “the only person who invents such phantasies and has no idea that creations of this kind are widespread among other people” (438). Repression: Freud genteelly hints at wishes which cause phantasies “of a kind which it is essential to conceal” (438). Citing Goethe, Freud briefly refers to “a class of human beings upon whom, not a god, indeed,

but a stern goddess—Necessity—has allotted the task of telling what they suffer and what things give them happiness. These are the victims of nervous illness, who are obliged to tell their phantasies, among other things, to the doctor by whom they expect to be cured by mental treatment” (438). The Surrealists, Henry Miller, and as I will discuss in later chapters, the Beats and their contemporaries, explored the relationship between the writer and the mentally ill as much as that between the writer and the child. The “madness” of their writing lies in their refusal to mean, a recognition of the limitations of language that has its origins in Dada.

Freud then goes on to describe these phantasies in some detail. Firstly, like dreams, phantasies fulfill wishes, serving as “a correction of unsatisfying reality” (439). As such, the truly happy person does not have phantasies. Secondly, Freud distinguishes between phantasies motivated by ambitious, or egotistic wishes (predominately experienced by young men) and those motivated by erotic wishes (to which young women are more susceptible, he argues)—though, Freud points out, the two motives are often united, as becomes clear in the work of Henry Miller. Again, like dreams, phantasies are made up of “some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject’s major wishes,” which is then linked “to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled” (439). This link of the present and the past creates a fantasy of the future “which represents a fulfilment [*sic*] of the wish” (439). Just as dreams fulfill wishes so that the dreamer is able to mentally relax enough to fall asleep, phantasies help the daydreamer get on in a society that is unable or unwilling to satisfy his or her deepest urges.

“And now for the creative writer,” Freud states, inching closer to his main point.

He makes an initial distinction:

We must separate writers who, like the authors of epics and tragedies, take over their material readymade, from writers who seem to originate their own material. We will keep to the latter kind, and, for the purposes of our comparison, we will choose not the writers most highly esteemed by the critics, but the less pretentious authors of novels, romances and short stories, who nevertheless have the widest and most eager circle of readers of both sexes. (440)

It seems, then, that Freud is not referring to Shakespeare or Goethe, whom he cites frequently, nor Sophocles, whose Theban plays provide the basis for the Oedipus complex, but rather someone like E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose 1816 story “The Sandman” Freud analyzes in his own 1919 essay, “The Uncanny.”<sup>17</sup> Freud describes the archetypal structure of such an unpretentious story: “each of them has a hero who is the centre of interest, for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to place under the protection of a special Providence” (440-1). What such stories provide for the reader, Freud argues, is a feeling of security (“Nothing can happen to *me!*” he declares, citing Viennese dramatist Ludwig Anzengruber) through which is revealed “His Majesty the Ego the hero alike of every day-dream and of every story” (441). Even more experimental writings which deviate from such an archetypal structure are still linked with the daydream “through an uninterrupted series of transitional cases” (441): the author could distribute parts of his ego amongst a number of different characters, or in the case of the late works of Émile Zola, Freud writes, “the person who is introduced as the hero plays only a very small active part; he sees the actions and sufferings of other people pass before him like a spectator” (441). Regardless

---

<sup>17</sup> Freud’s focus on “less pretentious authors” here proves interesting when Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literature” is considered.



of form or genre, Freud seems to say, it is the “original” writer’s ego which is on display: “A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment [*sic*] in the creative work” (442). And for writers for whom inspiration lies in works already written, too: Freud postulates, “it is extremely probable that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity” (442). In other words, creative writing as sublimation—both personal and cultural.

With that, Freud concedes that he has little more to say about creative writers, unfortunately, except this: while the daydreamer hides his phantasies from others because he is ashamed of them, the creative writer “softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies” (443). This pleasure Freud refers to as “incentive bonus” or “fore-pleasure,” a liberation of psychical tension which makes the enjoyment in reading a work of literature possible. But what if the writer doesn’t soften “the character of his egoistic day dreams,” if he doesn’t alter and disguise his own phantasies? What if the aim of providing fore-pleasure, or any concern for the reader at all, is done away with? What if the realm of the aesthetic, is ignored (but also pursued) through automatic writing, much like Freud’s own description of his recording of the manifest content of dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899)? And what if, as Artaud entitles his 1965 manifesto, all writing is pigshit?<sup>18</sup> It is possible that the aesthetic is by definition post-Oedipal, and the Dadaist

---

<sup>18</sup> See Caws 460-1.

impulse can be read as an attempt to return to a prelapsarian consciousness. Unlike Freud, the Surrealists and Henry Miller are not interested so much in the relationship of the creative writer and the daydream as they are in the relationship between the ego of the creative writer and the ego of his or her creative writing. Throughout his novels, Miller, in particular, seems to be after another ego, another self, other selves: unconscious selves, counterfeit selves in that they are mediated through language, but in many ways more real than the reality governed and described by Freud's "ego." In at least one aspect, Miller and Freud are in agreement: that there is no such thing of a non-counterfeit self. What Miller is after is a literary ego ideal.

*L'homme que j'étais, je ne le suis plus*

The core of Miller's oeuvre is made up of six romans à clef divided into two trilogies, each separated by a decade, a World War, and Miller's return to the U.S. in 1940: the Obelisk trilogy, including *Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, and *Tropic of Capricorn*; and *The Rosy Crucifixion*, which is made up of *Sexus*, *Plexus* (1953), and *Nexus* (1960).<sup>19</sup> These novels, which together can be considered a sort of multivolume

---

<sup>19</sup> Miller was an extremely prolific writer. Prior to his death in 1980, he published over seventy books, among them novels, travel writings, critical essays about art and literature, and extensive correspondence with other writers such as Durrell, Cendrars, and Nin. He got a late start, though: his first novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, was not published until Miller was forty-two years old, when Nin (the sometime lover of both Henry and June) arranged its publication, and borrowed the money for the first printing from her psychoanalyst (and lover), Otto Rank. See Neil Pearson, *Obelisk: A History of Jack Kahane and the Obelisk Press* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007) 439. Miller is well known for a number of other works, and in fact many of his texts exceed the confines of a single work, a single oeuvre, in much the same way that it is difficult to strictly label Miller as an "American writer," his writing as "American literature." This network of texts includes the fascinating correspondence between Miller and Fraenkel which develops Miller's theory of the intellect, *Hamlet* (1939-1941), and the many volumes of

autobiography, focus on three periods of his life treated in a patchwork, starkly achronological, and often repetitive fashion. Miller begins with the first two decades of the twentieth century, focusing on his childhood in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (or, “the Fourteenth Ward,” as he refers to it), the son of conservative working-class German-Catholic stock. The second period begins in the 1920s as Miller, now a young man, rambles around the U.S. (unsuccessfully trying to capitalize on a Florida land boom, picking oranges in Chula Vista, California), finally finding work as the employment manager of the Western Union office in New York, memorialized in his novels as the Cosmodemonic (or sometimes, Cosmococcic) Telegraph Company. The predominant theme of this period is the beginnings of Miller’s ill-fated relationship with Mara a beautiful and eccentric “taxi dancer” (the 1920s burlesque equivalent of a paid escort) with whom Miller engages in an impassioned, volatile affair before finally marrying her in 1928.<sup>20</sup> As Miller’s relationship with Mara is further complicated by the introduction of Anastasia, a bisexual artist who becomes Mara’s lover and Miller’s second roommate, the third period begins: the 1930s in Paris, where Miller attempts to repair his relationship with Mara and finally becomes a writer, once and for all. Indeed, it is this last theme which effectively ties these novels together as a single unity: the *Obelisk* trilogy and *The Rosy Crucifixion* are the chronicle of Miller’s attempt not just to become a writer, but to write—to produce. As Miller describes it in his 1962 “Art of Fiction” interview with *The Paris Review*’s George Wickes,

---

Nin’s diaries, which provide a different, contemporaneous perspective on the years, events and people discussed by Miller himself in his own autobiographical work.

<sup>20</sup> The “real life” analog to Mara is, of course, June, who Miller married following his divorce from his first wife (and mother of his first child) Beatrice Sylvan Wickens, whom he married in 1917. In the novels, Beatrice becomes Maude.

most writing is done away from the typewriter, away from the desk. I'd say it occurs in the quiet, silent moments, while you're walking or shaving or playing a game or whatever, or even talking to someone you're not vitally interested in. You're working, your mind is working, on this problem in the back of your head. So, when you get to the machine it's a mere matter of transfer. (qtd. in Plimpton 172)

Miller's theory of writing, as stated here, employs a strikingly Dadaist metaphor:

language and thought are separate. Despite Miller's cavalier dismissal of the tediousness of the process, these two trilogies indeed serve as a record of this "mere matter of transfer," a process of translation of thought into language.<sup>21</sup>

Because of the associative explosiveness of Miller's style, his resistance to contained or continuous narratives in his novels, one could point to nearly any passage in his work in order to identify his production of a counterfeit Henry Miller, a Surrealist loosening of the self, a literary uncovering of the unconscious self, which is itself no more "authentic" than the conscious self. To elucidate the ways in which Henry Miller, the protagonist of Miller's novels, does not adhere exactly to the Henry Miller of historical fact would be to merely approach his work through the lens of critical biography. Instead, it is more interesting to consider how throughout his novels, Henry Miller becomes, in fact, many different Henry Millers. Take, for instance, two of the more famous episodes in *Sexus* (which stands out as a mature triumph among Miller's novels) not exclusively dedicated to Miller's sexual escapades (of which, there are of course many).<sup>22</sup> Both episodes (to which Deleuze frequently returns) illustrate Henry

---

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps not unlike Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), of which Miller was a great admirer.

<sup>22</sup> Durrell's assessment of *Sexus* was less positive. He wrote to Miller on September 5, 1949, accusing his friend of getting lost "in this shower of lavatory filth which no longer seems tonic and bracing, but just extremititious and sad" (qtd. in Brassã 203).

Miller in the process of becoming yet another Henry Miller. In the first, Miller reconnects with an old friend, Dr. Kronski, a former abortionist with whom he lived in the Bronx some ten years hence:

We had not seen each other for some years. We meet again in New York. Hectic confabulations. He learns that I have had more than a speaking acquaintance with psychoanalysis during my absence abroad. I mention certain figures in that world who are well known to him—from their writings. He’s amazed that I should know them, have been accepted by them—as a friend. He begins to wonder if he hadn’t made a mistake about his old friend Henry Miller. He wants to talk about it, talk and talk and talk. I refuse. That impresses him. He knows that talking is his weakness, his vice. (410)

Miller begins this episode by making several distinctions between different Henry Millers. There is the Henry Miller who knew Kronski in his New York days—particularly, Kronski’s version of “his old friend Henry Miller,” about whom Kronski wonders “if he hadn’t make a mistake.” There is the Henry Miller who has “more than a speaking acquaintance with psychoanalysis”—or so Henry Miller, the narrator, claims. Miller emphasizes Kronski’s amazement at Miller’s *personal* familiarity “with certain figures” in the world of psychoanalysis whom Kronski knows only “from their writings”: Miller is knowledgeable of them not only as psychoanalysts, but as friends. This distinction between writing, or art—a category in which, as it will be come clear, Miller includes psychoanalysis—and life becomes sharper as Miller’s chicanery becomes more explicit: in refusing to “talk” with Kronski, Miller acknowledges that Kronski “knows that talking is his witness, his vice.” Of course, Miller knows that too, and quickly, he turns that knowledge into a kind of “play”—not the play of Freud’s child, but that of an aestheticized performance.

In the episode that follows, Miller manages to convince Kronski that, during his time in Europe, he became a psychoanalyst, under the tutelage of Rank, for whom Kronski had “an unholy respect,” although, Miller admits, he had merely “toyed with the very idea” (411). No longer practicing medicine, but living off of insurance checks sent to him in the wake of an unexplained accident from which he sustained injuries, Kronski employs Miller to analyze some of his former patients to some apparent success, and then asks his friend, “What about analyzing *me*? No, seriously. I know it’s not considered a good risk when you know one another as intimately as we do, but just the same . . .” (412). And so the real con begins. Miller agrees to the request: “perhaps we might even explode that stupid prejudice,” Miller tells him, “After all, Freud had to analyze Rank, didn’t he?” acknowledging to his reader, “This was a lie, because Rank had never been analyzed, even by Father Freud” (412). The arrangements are made: sixty minute sessions will be held, with Kronski paying Miller by the hour—though not without much protestation: Miller cites Freud’s imperative for the analysand to pay for his or her analysis, but not without drawing some explicit parallels between the occupation of the analyst and that of the prostitute (or alternately, the Chinese dry cleaner): “‘You’ve got to give it to me now,’ I insisted, ‘or I refuse to deal with you.’ I enjoyed being firm with him—it was a new role for me also. . . . ‘No tickee, no shirtee’” (413).

The results of the two men’s agreement are nothing short of comic, though not without Miller drawing surprisingly profound conclusions (as he is prone to do even, if not especially, in the most ridiculous of circumstances). Ironically, Miller tells Kronski, “This is a painful procedure, but it’s in your own interest. If you learn how to adapt yourself to the role of a patient you will also learn how to adapt yourself to the role of

analyst. Be critical with yourself, not with me. I am only an instrument” (414). Through disguising himself as a psychoanalyst, Miller effectively becomes one. He narrates:

My exhortation to talk had paralyzed that faculty of speech which was his prime endowment. To begin with there was no longer any adversary before him to demolish. He was being asked to employ his wits against himself. He was to deliver and reveal—in a word, to *create*—and that was something he had never in his life attempted. He was to discover ‘the meaning of meaning’ in a new way, and it was obvious that the thought of it terrified him. (415)

The “meaning of meaning,” of course, is that there is silence: language creates selves, but ultimately fails to mean. Soon, a clear argument emerges: “Indeed, once having decided to play the role I was thoroughly in it and ready for any eventuality. I realized at once that by the mere act of assuming the role of healer one becomes a healer in fact” (415).

Unsurprisingly, Miller’s choice strategy as healer is that of the manipulative antagonist: Miller encourages Kronski, who has a hard time finding something to say, to take a nap during their first session: “In a flash he was wide awake and talking. The idea of paying me to take a nap electrified him. He was spilling over in all directions at once. That wasn’t a bad stratagem, I thought to myself” (416). After the hilarity of the first session, poor Kronski deigns to continue, despite “complaining that his money was giving out” (419), and Miller reveals his endgame: “The problem, however, was to rout him out of his state of dependency, drain him of every penny he owned, and restore the desire to earn a living again” (420). In other words, Miller’s goal as analyst is to essentially crush Kronski’s spirit entirely, to “break down his pride” (420).

Miller’s diagnosis of Kronski’s neurosis inclines him to abandon the role of writer, if only temporarily, in favor of that of the psychoanalyst-philosopher in the narration of the story (as with many such episodes in Miller’s work, the conclusion of Kronski’s

treatment is never reached, ending instead with implied ellipses). Citing Louis-Ferdinand Céline, “Surrealist metempsychology,” and Constantin Brâncuși, Miller returns to his thesis: “the healing art was not at all what people imagined it to be, that it was something very simple, too simple, in fact, for the ordinary mind to grasp . . . *everybody becomes a healer the moment he forgets about himself*” (425). Without the burden of authenticity or singularity, other counterfeits are free to exit. He pushes this further:

Reality is here and now, everywhere, gleaming through every reflection that meets the eye. Prisons and even lunatic asylums are emptied of their inmates when a more vital danger menaces the community. When the enemy approaches, the political exile is recalled to share in the defense of his country. At the last ditch it gets dinned into our thick skulls that we are all part and parcel of the same flesh. When our very lives are threatened we begin to live. (425)

For Miller, to “be sick, to be neurotic, if you like, is to ask for guarantees” (426), whereas the analyst “is like God, in a sense—the God of your own creation. Whether you whine, howl, beg, weep, implore, cajole, pray or curse—he listens. He is just a big ear minus a sympathetic nervous system” (429). Ultimately, Miller takes away from this charade a sense of infinite unknowability: “*Everything lies ahead*” (430). He ends this chapter of *Sexus* arriving at the truth—or *a* truth, as it were: “Imagination is the voice of daring. If there is anything God-like about God it is that. He dared to imagine everything” (431).

In downplaying his own role as artist here, insisting instead on that of the psychoanalyst-philosopher, Miller seems to rearticulate Picasso’s famous maxim: “Art is the lie that reveals the truth.” Miller’s reader is aware that he is being fake, and not just by pretending to be an analyst. In acknowledging that he is only able to help Kronski (though, whether he actually *does* help Kronski is of course up for debate) by becoming other—not Kronski’s friend, but his analyst—he gets at the center of Henry Miller the



protagonist's existentialist crisis: the only way for Henry Miller to heal himself is to *forget* himself, to become other—in this case, to become a writer. Being a writer is necessarily being fake, as language cannot avoid being fake. It is his fakeness that makes his incoherence productive. Because *Sexus*, like most of Miller's novels, is a novel about a writer becoming a writer, in this episode Miller reveals the central theme of his work: that it is only through breaking out of the prison of identity through trickery, manipulation, and deceit that freedom becomes possible.

Later on in *Sexus*, the reader witnesses Miller playing yet another role: not the psychoanalyst this time, but rather the madman. This episode occurs in New York, again, in what can be considered the novel's present day: ten years prior to his run-in with Kronski.<sup>23</sup> It begins with a lover's quarrel between Mara—now—and Miller. Mona leaves, only to be coaxed back by Miller's friend Arthur Raymond, a pianist. Upon returning, Mona implores her soon-to-be-husband: "I want you to fuck me as though you never had before" (556). An extended sex scene ensues, in which Mona, "squirming like an eel" (556) becomes convinced (for the moment) of Miller's love for her and the two drift off to sleep. They wake up late, "hungry as wolves" (559), and take a taxi to a grocery store, where the proprietor sings the praises of his native Italy, putting a bug in Miller's ear: "Your wife is so beautiful... why don't go to Italy? Just a few months. I tell you, you never come back" (560). Thus is introduced one of the major themes of Miller's novels: the urge to escape, and to Europe in particular. Miller and Mona return home, daydreaming in bed of travelling the world: Baghdad, Vienna, Budapest, Sofia, Belgrade,

---

<sup>23</sup> N.B. the consistently loose temporality of Miller's novels.

Constantinople, Timbuktu, Taormina, Jerusalem, Romania, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt.

Almost seamlessly, the hyperbolically specific daydream transitions into a REM cycle:

Somebody is talking to me. We've been having a long conversation. And I'm not in the desert any more but on Sixth Avenue under an elevated station. My friend Ulric is placing his hand on my shoulder and smiling at me reassuringly. He is repeating what he said a moment ago—that I will be happy in Europe. He talks about Mt. Aetna, about grapes, about leisure, idleness, good food, sunshine. He drops a seed in me. (564-5)

The reader's sense of space and time is further disoriented as Miller continues this increasingly surreal interlude: "Sixteen years later on a Sunday morning, accompanied by a native of the Argentine and a French whore from Montmartre, I am strolling leisurely through a cathedral in Naples" (565). Eventually, Miller the narrator emerges from Miller the dreamer's unconscious:

I was like slave who dreams of freedom, whose whole being is saturated with one idea: escape. Nobody could have convinced me that if I were offered the choice between her and my dream of Europe I would choose the latter. It would have seemed utterly fantastic, *then*, to suppose that it would be she herself who would offer me this choice. And perhaps even more fantastic still that the day I would sail for Europe I would have to ask my friend Ulric for ten dollars so as to have something in my pocket on touching my beloved European soil. (568)

As Miller rapidly, chaotically moves between past, present, and future, dreams and waking life, fact and fiction, as it were, it becomes clear that Miller's resistance to chronological or teleological narratives is tied up with his rejection of a stable subjectivity: he is not the man he was, nor is he ever to stop becoming different men. His tendency to refer to himself as a "Mongol" in his novels, speculating on the possibility of his having "Mongolian blood" refers not only to his constant wanderings through space, but through time—and, like the Surrealists, different consciousnesses, which he will soon make explicit. "Writing always combines with something else," Deleuze and Parnet

write,” which is its own becoming. There is no assemblage which functions on a single flux” (44). This flux, both one and multiple, is duration, in the Bergsonian sense: time. In his textual travels through space and time, Miller is a nomad, a producer of nomadic thought.

It is here where we begin to see Miller actively create a counterfeit self, yet another Henry Miller. His dream-premonition makes his love for Mona somehow more real to him, and the next day the two take the train to Hoboken to get married, perhaps “to conceal the fact that I had been married before, perhaps we were a bit ahead of the legal schedule” (569). It turns out to be a humiliating experience: they find two hobos to serve as witnesses and return to New York penniless, feeling thoroughly depressed. Miller calls his friend Ulric, but Ulric’s roommate Ned answers instead. Ned invites them over, and Miller agrees, hoping to eke out a wedding present in the form of a hot meal and something to drink. When they arrive, it turns out that Ned doesn’t have any money (his girlfriend Marcelle does, and she’s on her way) but he’s got plenty of liquor: “He was an artist who had never found his medium. His best medium was drink” (571). Marcelle arrives and the two women decide to go out for groceries to prepare a makeshift wedding feast. Miller takes a few sips of gin and Ned provokes him to a rant, which takes a strange turn when Miller declares, “I want everybody to strip down, not just to the flesh, but to the soul. Sometimes I get so hungry, so rapacious, that I could eat people up. I can’t wait for them to tell me things . . . how they feel . . . what they want . . . and so on. I want to chew them alive . . . find out for myself . . . quick, all at once. Listen . . .” (578). At this point, Miller sees a drawing made by Ulric, an artist, and begins to eat it. Ned snatches it away; Miller replies, “Give me something else then. Give me a coat . . . anything. Here,

give me your hand!” (578). Miller attempts to eat Ned’s hand and Ned accuses him of “going nuts” (578). “You think it’s the gin?” Miller asks: ““All right, I’ll throw the glass away.’ I went to the window and threw it into the courtyard. ‘There! Now give me a glass of water. Bring a *pitcher* of water in. I’ll show you . . . You never saw anybody get drunk on water, eh? Well watch me!’” (578-9).

What follows is an extended monologue in which Miller, portraying an enlightened madman, is interrupted more and more frequently as his ideas and language become more and more surreal, ultimately leading Marcelle to resolve to leave Ned, realizing that he doesn’t love her, thanking Miller: “Thanks, Henry, for giving me a jolt. I guess you weren’t talking such nonsense after all” (588). In the meantime, Miller waxes philosophical on the nature of hunger, desire, intoxication, ecstasy, and insanity. After requesting to eat only the bones of the chicken Marcelle has prepared—”Bones give phosphorous and iodine. Mona always feeds me bones when I’m exalted. You see, when I’m effervescent I give off vital energy. You don’t need bones—you need cosmic juices. You’ve worn your celestial envelope too thin. You’re radiating from the sexual sphere (582)—Marcelle asks for clarification, to which he replies, “Your spiritual hormones are impoverished. You love Apis the Bull instead of Krishna the charioteer. You’ll find your Paradise, but it will be on the lower level. Then the only escape is insanity” (583). Having succeeded in getting drunk on water, literally embodying a new consciousness by means of a placebo, Miller seems to snap out of it:

I paused a moment to get my breath, rather surprised that I hadn’t received a clout. Ned had a gleam in his eye which might have been interpreted as friendly and encouraging—or murderous. I was hoping somebody would start something, throw a bottle, smash things, scream, yell, anything but sit there and take it like stunned owls. I didn’t know why I had picked on Marcelle, she hadn’t done anything to me. I was just using her as a stooge.

Mona should have interrupted me... I sort of counted on her doing that. But no, she was strangely quiet, strangely impartial. (587)

Of course, Miller does not remark on the strangeness of this particular wedding night.

Deleuze makes much of this scene, asking with Guattari, “Could what the drug user or masochist obtains also be obtained in a different fashion in the conditions of the plane, so it would even be possible to use drugs without using drugs, to get soused on pure water, as in Henry Miller’s experimentations?” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 166). In their consideration of the ability of drugs to grant their users immanence, Deleuze and Guattari conclude, like Baudelaire, Breton, and Henri Michaux before them, “Drugs are too unwieldy to grasp the imperceptible and becomings-imperceptible; drug users believed that drugs would grant them the plane, when in fact the plane must distill its own drugs, remaining master of speeds and proximities” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 286).<sup>24</sup> In getting drunk on pure water, Miller “succeed[s] in getting high, but by abstention” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 285). Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of *Sexus* seems to echo Benjamin’s claim of the Surrealists, that “This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication” (“Surrealism” 279). Here, it is through language and life-as-art that Miller is able to achieve intoxication, liberation, madness—the reader witnesses Henry Miller in the process of becoming yet another Henry Miller.

---

<sup>24</sup> Breton, the self-appointed flag-bearer of the Surrealists, was no fan of narcotics, unlike many of his contemporaries. As Anna Balakian notes, “Instances of his personal disapproval of all artificial stimulants can be found in the pages of *Entretriens, 1913-1952, avec André Parinaud* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952) and in other personal accounts of his own and his friends’ experimental activities in the field of the expansion of consciousness. His quarrels with Artaud and Desnos stemmed largely from Breton’s suspicions that pathological and artificial aberration of the psycho-sensory mechanism made certain of the surrealist colleagues unsuitable subjects for surrealist exploration of the human psyche” (96).

*Strange Anglo-American Literature*

Praising the “superiority” of Anglo-American literature, Deleuze and Parnet again cite “the great scene of drunkenness on pure water in Henry Miller” (53). In fact, they use this scene as an example of the concept of “becoming”—as integral to Deleuze’s entire philosophy as it is at work throughout Miller’s novels. They write,

Becoming is loving without alcohol, drugs and madness, becoming-sober for a life which is richer and richer. This is sympathy, assembling. Making one’s bed, the opposite of making a career, being neither simulator of identifications nor the frigid doctor of distances. You will get into your bed as you made it, no one will come to tuck you in. Too many people want to be tucked in by a huge identifying mother, or by the social medical officer of distances. Yes, lunatics, madmen, neurotics, alcoholics, and drug addicts, the infectious ones, let them get out of it as best they can: our very sympathy is that it should be none of our business. Each one of us has to make his own way. But being capable of it is sometimes difficult. (53-4)

Here, Deleuze and Parnet defend Deleuze and Guattari’s privileging of the schizophrenic (and with him or her, the lunatic, the madman or -woman, the neurotic, the alcoholic, the drug addict) as the paradigmatic figure free from the bonds of modern society, bogged down as it is by capitalism and “the daddy-mommy oedipalization” (*Anti-Oedipus* 133) of psychoanalysis in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, especially, insisting that in singing the praises of such fringe characters, “We are trying to extract from love all possession, all identification to become capable of loving. We are trying to extract from madness the life which it contains, while hating the lunatics who constantly kill life, turn it against itself. We are trying to extract from alcohol the life which it contains, without drinking” (53). Here, the outsider—or as they put it, the “traitor”—becomes the model of

liberation, though Deleuze and Guattari are careful not to ignore the realities of the schizophrenic's condition.<sup>25</sup>

Ironically, for an essay devoted to elaborating on the theory of 'strange Anglo-American literature' first introduced in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Parnet fail to recognize the extent to which, as French writers, their fascination with American writers is mirrored by those very same Americans' fascination with French literature. They begin the essay citing Lawrence on leaving—what they call the line of flight, a deterritorialization, claiming that according to Lawrence, the highest aim of literature is “to leave, to escape . . . to cross the horizon, enter into another life . . . It is thus that Melville finds himself in the middle of the Pacific. He has really crossed the line of the horizon” (36). The French, they argue, do not understand this: “The French are too human, too historical, too concerned with the future and the past. They spend their time in in-depth analysis. They do not know how to become, they think in terms of historical past and future” (37).<sup>26</sup> Anglo-American writers, though, “constantly [show] these ruptures, these characters who create their line of flight, who create through a line of flight. Thomas Hardy, Melville, Stevenson, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe, Lawrence, Fitzgerald, Miller, Kerouac. In them everything is departure, becoming, passage, leap, daemon, relationship with the outside. They create a new Earth” (36).

---

<sup>25</sup> In doing so, they seem to take a cue from Ginsberg, who begins “Howl” with, “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, / angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night, / who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz . . .” (*Collected Poems* 134).

<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, it would be difficult to make this case for Rimbaud or Stéphane Mallarmé.

While their analysis of Miller along these lines is certainly correct, their eagerness to essentialize Miller as an American writer leaves them unable to account for the fact that Miller, a self-declared “citizen of the world,” takes his line of flight—both in his writing and his life—towards France, towards the ruins of the European avant-garde.<sup>27</sup> As Miller writes in *Sexus*, it is on the model of Surrealism and Dada that he develops his techniques, not only as a writer, but more generally, as an artist-in-the-world:

I had survived my own destructive school of Dadaism: I had progressed, if that is the word, from scholar to critic to pole-axer. My literary experiments lay in ruins, like the cities of old which were sacked by the vandals. I wanted to build, but the materials were unreliable and the plans had not even become blueprints. If the substance of art is the human soul, then I must confess that with dead souls I could visualize nothing germinating under my hand. (271)

Deleuze and Parnet’s admiration for the becomingness of Miller’s writing—becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-grass, becoming-China—and his success as a “traitor” (“What other reason is there for writing than to be traitor to one’s own reign, traitor to one’s sex, to one’s class, to one’s majority? And to be traitor to writing” [Deleuze and Parnet 44]) does not acknowledge the European roots of these very undertakings. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller quotes the following lines from Tzara’s *Dada Manifesto* of 1918:

I am writing a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I saw certain things, and I am against manifestoes as a matter of principle, as I am also against principles. . . . I write this manifesto to show that one may perform

---

<sup>27</sup> Their discussion, though, of Lawrence and Miller’s inescapable sexism is not without its shortcomings: “Woman is not necessarily the writer, but the minority-becoming of her writing, whether it be man or woman. Virginia Woolf forbade herself ‘to speak like a woman’: she harnessed the woman-becoming of writing all the more for this. Lawrence and Miller are considered to be great sexists: writing, however, drew them into an irresistible woman-becoming. It is only through this becoming, where women have to make as much effort as men, that England has produced so many women novelists” (Deleuze and Parnet 43).



opposed actions together, in a single fresh respiration; I am against action; for continual contradiction, for affirmation also, I am neither for nor against it and I do not explain for I hate good sense. . . . There is a literature which does not reach the voracious mass. The work of creators, sprung from a real necessity on the part of the author, and for himself. Consciousness of a supreme egotism where the stars waste away. . . . Each page must explode, either with the profoundly serious and heavy, the whirlwind, dizziness, the new, the eternal, with the overwhelming hoax, with an enthusiasm for principles or with the mode of typography. On the one hand a staggering fleeing world, affianced to the jinglebells of the infernal gamut, on the other hand: *new beings*. . . ." (288)

The very process of becoming at work in Miller's novels, praised as quintessentially Anglo-American by Deleuze and Parnet, is here in its embryonic form. The opposition as a matter of principle, even to principles (!); the "minority" ("There is a literature which does not reach the voracious mass"); the "supreme egotism" at work in the creation of a literary self (cf. Emerson's call for diaries and autobiographies); the production of "*new beings*," new Henry Millers.<sup>28</sup> By defining "strange Anglo-American literature" in opposition to French literature, Deleuze and Parnet fail to draw attention to the rich exchange between the two literary traditions, an exchange which I will show in later chapters to be dialectical, and without which contemporary readers would not have Henry Miller, nor many of the significant "American" writers (and filmmakers) of the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond.

As "the unique Dadaist in America" (*Tropic of Capricorn* 282), Miller merges the Surrealist impulse to, through writing, uncover the unconscious with the Emersonian call for autobiography, Rimbaud's declaration, "*Je est un autre*" (374). "*L'homme que j'étais, je ne le suis plus*": The counterfeit selves of Miller's novels are caught up in this process of becoming: becoming-literary, becoming-dreamwork, becoming-Henry Miller:

---

<sup>28</sup> The line of flight is, after all, always simultaneously multi-directional.

The artist's game is to move over into reality. It is to see beyond the mere "disaster" which the picture of a lost battlefield renders to the naked eye. For, since the beginning of time the picture which the world has presented to the naked human eye can hardly seem anything but a hideous battle ground of lost causes. It has been so and will be so until man ceases to regard himself as the mere seat of conflict. Until he takes up the task of becoming the "I of his I." (*Sexus* 273)

In becoming the "I of his I," and never ceasing, never finding satiation in one final "I," getting drunk on water, Henry Miller inaugurates a revolution in consciousness which is continued by American writers of the decades following World War II, who seek other consciousnesses, escapes, and lines of flight through experiments with drugs, sexuality, and literary form itself. As will be seen, the consequences this bears on how literature comes to be defined—as one medium among many, steeped in anxiety about its cultural relevance, its status as art, its grounding in language—are as expansive and explosive as Miller's novels, Miller's selves.

## Chapter 2

### Media Anxiety and Literature-on-Drugs

*I thought I could write. And then I smoked a  
big joint and I really thought I could write.*

—Iggy Pop<sup>1</sup>

In an early poem, “Marijuana Notation” (1951), Allen Ginsberg muses on the feeling of being high, writing on drugs:

How sick I am!  
that thought  
always comes to me  
with horror.  
Is it this strange  
for everybody?  
But such fugitive feelings  
have always been  
my métier. (1-8)<sup>2</sup>

Like many American writers of his era, Ginsberg was a known drug user and advocate (he even testified before the United States Senate on behalf of LSD in 1966), and this is only one of Ginsberg’s many poems on and about drugs.<sup>3</sup> Right off the bat, Ginsberg captures the strange mixture of paranoia, solipsism, and existential comfort that accompanies THC intoxication. The drug forces him to realize that he is alone in his

---

<sup>1</sup> See Marc Maron, “Episode 400—Iggy Pop,” *WTF with Marc Maron*, 24 June 2013, Podcast, 15 Jan. 2014, [http://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episodes/episode\\_400\\_-\\_iggy\\_pop](http://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episodes/episode_400_-_iggy_pop).

<sup>2</sup> See *Collected Poems* 74.

<sup>3</sup> Examples abound, but see for instance “Mescaline” and “Lysergic Acid” in 1959’s collection of poems, *Kaddish and Related Poems*, in which Ginsberg mourns the death of his mother, in *Collected Poems* 236-42. See also, “U.S. Senate Statement,” *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995*, ed. Bill Morgan (New York: Perennial, 2000) 67-82.

thoughts. But then, he remembers, he has always been alone, marijuana or no. His mind drifts to literature:

Baudelaire—yet he had  
 great joyful moments  
     staring into space,  
 looking into the  
     middle distance,  
 contemplating his image  
     in Eternity.  
 They were his moments of identity.  
 It is solitude that  
 produces these thoughts. (9-19)

Ginsberg imagines himself as Charles Baudelaire, who used hashish (not to mention alcohol and opium), a hundred years before him, achieving transcendence in the “middle distance, / contemplating his image / in Eternity”—that is, finding transcendence within himself, a thoroughly Buddhist concept, blatantly projected onto the death-obsessed French Symbolist. A good student of Baudelaire, Ginsberg seconds his predecessor, who described drugs as “artificial paradises” in his 1860 book of the same name, identifying marijuana itself as something like a placebo, a means by which to achieve transcendence, but not its true source: “It is solitude that / produces these thoughts.” He ends the poem on a note of mundane calm, echoing Frank O’Hara:

It is December  
 almost, they are singing  
     Christmas carols  
 in front of the department  
 stores down the block on  
     Fourteenth Street. (20-5)

Awakened by the truth that the drug has led him to find within himself, the speaker (Ginsberg) learns another lesson: that he is, in fact, not alone. He is struck by time and space—winter, downtown Manhattan—but the reality is not harsh. Marijuana did not

reveal his being-in-the-world to him: it allowed him to reveal it to himself. The drug is not quite the message, nor the messenger, exactly. It is in the means of transmission: a media technology, marijuana turns the dial to a certain frequency.

Whether by means of storage or transmission, Marshall McLuhan (another guru of the 1960s) tells us: the medium is the message. Like the novel, film, radio, and television, drugs are always fundamentally about themselves, i.e., the medium is necessarily inscribed in the content. This idea is perhaps most readily apparent when one considers drugs as a medium, as the very act of getting high amounts to at least some of the allure that drugs have to offer. Later, of course, McLuhan revised his catchphrase to “the medium is the message” to reflect the ways in which media alter the human sensorium, which in the case of drugs is quite literal.<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida asks us to “consider literature, in a fairly strict sense, distinguishing it, at least in Europe, from poetry and belles lettres, as a modern phenomenon (dating from the sixteenth or seventeenth century). Well then, is it not thus contemporaneous with a certain European drug addiction? In fact, one that was tolerated?” (“The Rhetoric of Drugs” 27).<sup>5</sup> This contemporaneousness is no doubt a result of imperialism, which brought drugs to Europe in droves (opium, hashish, and tobacco, but also coffee, tea, and sugar) and thus art of the nineteenth century would be far lesser without literature-on-drugs: see Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* (1816) and Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium*

---

<sup>4</sup> See McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (Berkeley: Gingko, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> The relationship, in fact, goes back even further. As Marcus Boon points out, “In the very beginnings of the Western literary tradition in Homer’s *Odyssey*, narcotics were described: nepenthes, a pain-relieving drink that Helen gives to Telemachus, and the lotus, an oblivion-inducing plant that seduces some of Odysseus’ sailors” (18-9). Incidentally, Nepenthe is the name of a restaurant in Big Sur, where Henry Miller was a regular in his last decades.

*Eater* (1821), to name just two examples.<sup>6</sup> One could look as easily to twentieth-century literature, from Marcel Proust to Bret Easton Ellis, to confirm that the tendency to write on and about drugs has increased alongside the ascent of writing about writing—that metafictional impulse identified by scholars from Jean Baudrillard to Fredric Jameson as the dominant evolutionary trend of twentieth-century literature.<sup>7</sup>

William S. Burroughs, lifelong heroin addict and dabbler in all intoxicants, renders drugs' self-reflexivity—a characteristic that binds them to representation, and often, literature—in mathematical, if not economic terms, referring to it as “the algebra of need.” In the introduction to *Naked Lunch* (1959), Burroughs writes,

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 his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client. He pays his staff in junk. (xxxvii).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> While *Kubla Khan* is, in fact, poetry, it was written after the historical emergence of literature as a category. As such, I would suggest that in distinguishing poetry and belles lettres from literature, Derrida is noting that these phenomenon, which predate literature, are later subsumed into the “literary” rubric.

<sup>7</sup> See Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994); Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991); and practically all of postmodern theory.

<sup>8</sup> David Lenson explains further, writing, “What one is purchasing when one buys drugs, however, is not an object for long-term ownership or a product consumable for the sustaining of life and the attendant assurance of further consumption. What one is purchasing is the promise of a change in consciousness—and possibly an alternative to Consumerism. Thus, with drug buys the act of purchasing paradoxically defeats the act of purchasing. The drug transaction is a shadow of a conventional transaction, a spurious substitute for a ‘valid’ acquisition. . . . The contention that drugs are escapist may be accurate. And those who profit from consumer culture do not want anyone to escape it” (28).

This economy, Burroughs argues, “yields a basic formula of ‘evil virus’: *The Algebra of Need*” (xxxvii). In *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (1992), Avital Ronell, citing the obscenity trials of *Naked Lunch*, sees a similar structure in Burroughs’s novel:

The slippage from obscenity to the representation of hallucination—in other words, the representation of representation—cannot fail to raise questions about the veilings that both literature and drugs cast. . . . The menace of literature in these cases consists in pointing to what is not there in any ordinary sense of ontological unveiling. The court is not wrong to institute the proximity of hallucination and obscenity as neighboring territorialities, since both put in question the power of literature to veil its insight or to limit its exposure. Literature is most exposed when it stops representing, that is, when it ceases veiling itself with the excess that we commonly call *meaning*. (56-7)

This is to say that the danger of *Naked Lunch*, literature-on-drugs, and drugs themselves, is their insistent refusal to mean, to disguise themselves in a costume of sense. Juridically speaking, drugs and literature stand on equal footing: “the matter of representation continues to be the same,” Ronell concludes, “the court keeps a close watch on creatures of the simulacrum” (57).

Derrida identifies the double, contradictory nature of narcotics formulated by Burroughs more generally, writing of the “pharmakon” (*φάρμακον*), a Greek word meaning sacrament, remedy, poison, talisman, cosmetic, perfume, intoxicant, etc., from which “pharmacology” is derived, and whose ultimate source is “pharmakós” (*φαρμακός*), which refers to ritual human sacrifice, or alternately, the scapegoat herself.

Derrida writes,

The pharmakon will always be understood both as antidote and as poison . . . the drug addict may seek to forget even as he takes on the job of an anamnestic analysis, may at once seek repression and a release from repression (which may well portend that this is not the important boundary, and that it has other, more twisted forms . . . ). To this end the addict uses a “technique,” a technical supplement which he also interprets as being “natural.” (“The Rhetoric of Drugs” 25)

If drugs become a technique or technology of the addict, what is their function? Derrida phrases this question more pointedly, asking, “What do we hold against the drug addict?” (25). He offers a variety of answers, which all amount to pretty much the same thing: (1) the addict, “cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community,” escaping “into a world of simulacrum and fiction”—a charge, Derrida asserts, that “we never, at least never to the same degree, hold against the alcoholic or the smoker”; (2) society “disapprove[s] of his taste for something like hallucinations” (25); (3) of those hallucinations, “we cannot abide the fact that his is a pleasure taken in an experience without truth”; (4) “the drug addict as such produces nothing, nothing true or real,” and is thus “legitimate only in some cases, secretly and inadmissibly, for certain portions of society, and only in as much as he participates, at least indirectly, in the production and consumption of goods” (26). This is the manifestation of “the rhetoric of fantasy that is at the root of any prohibitions of drugs” (that “drugs make us lose any sense of true reality”) (25) in modern, capitalist society, in which

we still suppose there to be some affinity between, on the one hand, the experience of fiction (literary or otherwise, whether from the perspective of the “producer,” the distributor, or the consumer) and, on the other hand, the world of drug use; and if we imagine this affinity even when the poet does not search for any “artificial paradise,” in that case the writer can be acceptable only to the degree that he allows himself to be reincorporated in the institution. He restores the normal order of intelligible production; he produces and his production generates value. Such a justification has its roots in the evaluation of a productivity which is at least interpreted as a source of truth, albeit one that comes through the medium of fiction. (26)

The writer is thus exempt from drug prohibitions if he is able to produce, in which case literature can be seen as an acceptable form of narco-labor—which is to say that drugs



not only share a privileged relationship with literature, broadly defined, but literary production in particular.

Following Derrida, Ronell conceives of addiction as “a certain type of ‘Being-on-drugs’ that has everything to do with the bad conscience of our era” (3). This Being-on-drugs results in a culture of “*narcossism*,” a culture represented and propagated by modern philosophy, psychoanalysis, and even war.<sup>9</sup> But for Ronell, it is with literature that drugs maintain a special, mutually influential relationship:

The horizon of drugs is the same as that of literature: they share the same line, depending on similar technologies and sometimes suffering analogous crackdowns before the law. They shoot up fictions, disjuncting a whole regime of consciousness. (78)

Readers of literature and users of drugs, as Ronell argues through a reading of *Madame Bovary*, are after the same thing: access to an alternate reality, an invitation to a fictional space that can be entered through smoking, snorting, shooting up, freebasing, and swallowing just as it can through the act of reading. Literature’s addictive potential—like crack addiction, “a pure instance of ‘Being-on-drugs’: it is only producing a need for itself” —has resulted in a relationship between the state and the written word as hostile as the contemporary War on Drugs, of which the obscenity trials of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956), and *Naked Lunch* could be seen to be precursors, at the very least (25).

---

<sup>9</sup> For each of these disciplines, Ronell provides a succinct anecdote. On philosophy, she writes, “It is widely alleged in Freiburg that the ‘philosopher’ with whom Jünger drops acid is Martin Heidegger” (33). On psychoanalysis, “I refer in particular to the professional history of Sigmund Freud who, for the sake of some unplumbable purpose, staked his early career entirely on cocaine and on the essays devoted to cocaine” (52). On war, she writes, “it would be difficult to dissociate drugs from a history of modern warfare and genocide” (52).

The relationship between drugs and literature is a relationship between two different mediums. Derrida has shown how drugs are used as a “technique,” or technology, and it should not be difficult to understand how drugs constitute “extensions of man,” which is how McLuhan defines media. McLuhan’s law, “the medium is the message,” demands that the content of a medium be another medium, and most usually the medium which immediately precedes it historically, such that television takes film as its content, film takes the novel as its content, the novel takes speech as its content, and so on—or, as Marcus Boon nicely summarizes it, “when a new technology emerges that changes human sense-perception ratios, one effect is that the old structure of perception becomes the content of the new one” (235). After McLuhan establishes this in the first chapter of *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), he distinguishes between media that are “hot” and those that are “cool.” McLuhan explains that a “hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition,’” citing radio, film, the lecture, and photography as examples, as they each emphasize either sound or sight over all other senses (39).<sup>10</sup> Cool media—such as the telephone, speech, and television—on the other hand, are “low definition” because less information is provided to the senses, leaving more to be filled in by the audience. As a result, cool media require more participation by the audience, whereas hot media are low in participation.

Literature—or more specifically, the book—is a hot medium, according to McLuhan, who argues that the evolution from “hieroglyphic or idiogrammic written characters” to a phonetic alphabet, and then “pushed to a high degree of abstract visual

---

<sup>10</sup> This idea has come under intense critical scrutiny as of late, especially in phenomenological approaches to film and media theory which reject the supposition that film is a primarily optical medium. See, for instance, Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2004).

intensity” resulted in typography, the “hotting-up of the medium of writing to repeatable print intensity”: “paper is a hot medium that serves to unify spaces horizontally, both in political and entertainment empires” (39-40). Though McLuhan doesn’t say so explicitly, drugs are a cool medium. In a 1969 interview with *Playboy*, he likens drugs most closely to television:

The upsurge in drug taking is intimately related to the impact of the electric media. Look at the metaphor for getting high: turning on. One turns on his consciousness through drugs just as he opens up all his senses to a total depth involvement by turning on the TV dial. Drug taking is stimulated by today’s pervasive environment of instant information, with its feedback mechanism of the inner trip. The inner trip is not the sole prerogative of the LSD traveler; it’s the universal experience of TV watchers. LSD is a way of miming the invisible electronic world; it releases a person from acquired verbal and visual habits and reactions, and gives the potential of instant and total involvement, both all-at-onceness and all-at-oneness, which are the basic needs of people translated by electric extensions of their central nervous systems out of the old rational, sequential value system. The attraction to hallucinogenic drugs is a means of achieving empathy with our penetrating electric environment, an environment that in itself is a drugless inner trip. (qtd. in Norden 253-4)

Thus, in literature-on-drugs, we have a conflict between a hot medium (literature) and a cool medium: drugs, which McLuhan argues are “also a means of expressing rejection of the obsolescent mechanical world and values” (254). McLuhan describes the “disruptive impact of a hot technology succeeding a cool one” (41), but writing in the mid-1960s, he sees the opposite trend as more prevalent: “The ‘hard’ sell and the ‘hot’ line become mere comedy in the TV age, and the death of all the salesmen at one stroke of the TV axe has turned the hot American culture into a cool one that is quite unacquainted with itself” (44-5).

Like the succession of the cool by the hot, the inverse also results in rupture:

The hot radio medium used in cool or nonliterate cultures has a violent effect, quite unlike its effect, say in England or America, where radio is

felt as entertainment. A cool or low literacy culture cannot accept hot media like movies or radio as entertainment. They are, at least, as radically upsetting for them as the cool TV medium has proved to be for our high literacy world. (48)

Friedrich Kittler takes McLuhan's idea even further, writing, "Media such as literature or film or phonograph records . . . are all at war" (*Literature* 103). Kittler suggests that the media wars resulting from McLuhan's electronic age (i.e., postmodernity) render all media necessarily self-referential: "Books (since Moses and Mohammed) have been writing writing; films are filming filming," writes Kittler (*Gramophone* 155). He continues: "Where art criticism demands expressionism or self-referentiality, media have always been advertising themselves" (155). Instead of the content of a medium being another medium, the content of a medium is itself, and thus all media become doubled in nature. For instance, "film presents its spectators with their own processes of perception—and with a precision that is otherwise accessible only to experiment and thus neither to consciousness nor language" (161).

Asked by Eric Norden, in *Playboy*, about the relationship between his theory of media and LSD, McLuhan responded dismissively—"I'm flattered to hear my work described as hallucinogenic, but I suspect that some of my academic critics find me a bad trip" (254). But it's not a bad question: McLuhan's arrival on the scene in the 1960s along with the widespread emergence of narcotic literature, a veritable oeuvre of literature-on-drugs, in the postwar U.S. Though nineteenth-century America, like Britain, had its fair share of writers on drugs (Edgar Allen Poe dabbled in opium, while William James and Henry David Thoreau found much philosophical inspiration from their experiments with anesthetics), it was not until after World War I that drug use became a

politically charged “problem” in American culture.<sup>11</sup> As Boon explains, drugs had to become criminal first:

During World War I, the Harrison Laws in the United States, and a variety of similar laws in other nation-states regulating the sale of narcotics, along with cocaine, came into effect. To what degree did literature play a role in the cascade of events that led to these changes? In general, the role was probably minor, one factor in a much larger network of causes: fear of the “criminalit” of the underclasses; the perceived racial threat from outsiders, whether black, Chinese, or Turkish; excessive use by the military, by women, by the medical profession—fueled by overproduction of drugs and disingenuous marketing by pharmaceutical companies; and the reorganization of the boundaries that define private and public life. (60)

The “larger network of causes” Boon refers to here is modernity itself: urbanization, technological advancement, and a world made increasingly global as a result of these phenomena. It should come as no surprise, then, that the locales on the avant-garde of modernization should become the drug centers of the modern era. Boon continues:

When the first set of national laws regulating narcotic use was introduced in World War I, particular locations in the big cities—Montmartre in Paris, Soho in London, and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York—became associated with narcotic use. These were the great racial, sexual, and class melting pots at the centers of modern cities: home to red-light districts, nightclubs, theaters, and cinemas; places of hybridity, mixture, danger. (63)

Still, though, while many European modernists were writing on and about drugs in the interwar years, if American writers were known to indulge in anything intoxicating, it was alcohol, pure and simple. Perhaps the prohibition of alcohol in the U.S. between 1920 and 1933 was enough to lend booze the criminal status that attracted writers to it, and which would later attract writers to other illicit substances following alcohol’s re-legalization. Most of American modernism’s drunkest writers (Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner) lived and wrote in Europe during Prohibition, where

---

<sup>11</sup> See Boon 43, 87-122.

alcohol was of course legal, and where many narcotics were less strictly legislated than they were in the U.S., and thus more readily available.

In a 1978 interview with Burroughs and American writer Terry Southern, *High Times* magazine's Victor Bockris asked the two drug-friendly writers if, to their knowledge, there was "a lot of cocaine in Paris during Hemingway and Fitzgerald's time?" (256).<sup>12</sup> Authoritatively, Burroughs responds, "Man, there was *plenty* of cocaine and heroin. In the late 1920s it was all over the place in Europe, if you knew how to go about getting it. And it was 1/100<sup>th</sup> the price it is now" (256). Yet Southern says, "Hemingway and Fitzgerald never mentioned it. No reference to dope in their entire collective oeuvre, so to speak. They were both heavily into the juice" (256). Regardless of whether, as Bockris asks, "Picasso and Gertrude Stein and Hemingway [were] snorting coke," the Lost Generation did not constitute a milieu of narcotics users to the degree that Burroughs' and Southern's generation—the Beats and their periphery—did (256). This later generation was, in fact, obsessed with drugs.

At some point in the 1990s, Southern wrote an essay on the subject, "Drugs and the Writer," published posthumously (Southern died in 1995). The essay begins,

I think Big Chuck Bukowski (if, indeed, that is his name) is probably right that drink brings good luck to writers. God (certainly) knows it brings warmth and companionship—to an otherwise absurdly forlorn situation. Faulkner always liked to say: "A writer without a bottle of whiskey is like a chicken without a goddamn head." And Hemingway, of course, enjoyed nothing more than eulogizing the "Godly Brothers Gordon" for hours on end. Joyce would "knock back a whopper" at every opportunity. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to name more than five writers of first account who were not drinkers. (206)

---

<sup>12</sup> Burroughs's drug use is well-documented, and Southern notes that "Cocaine is the most enjoyable drug for me, natch, due to its price" ("Epilogue" 257).

As Southern continues, he seems to sideline the subject of his essay, deferring his discussion of drugs proper until his treatise on alcohol is complete:<sup>13</sup>

This is not to suggest that any of these writers were alcoholics. I don't believe that a serious writer is in danger of becoming an alcoholic, because, after a certain point, one would not be working *behind* it, but directly in front of it, at peril of getting wiped out blotto, thereby defeating its purpose—which is, after all, motivational and as a hedge against the desolation of such a lonely endeavor. Good writers have so much (dare one say “beauty and excitement”?) to come back to that they are not likely to go very far afield for any great length of time. It may be that addiction to alcohol exists among writers only as a psychological painkiller for the ‘*manqués*,’ who had set great store by the potential ID value of it. (207)

By the time Southern addresses narcotics directly, he doesn't seem to have much to say:

I think this may be said for other recreational drugs as well—with the notable exception of heroin, the effect of which is to reduce everything to a single glow, where it is no longer a question of doing or becoming—one is. A difficult package for anyone to resist. Almost no one kicks a major junk habit; only super-artists, whose work is even stronger than the drug itself: Burroughs and Miles Davis are rather obvious examples. Mere mortals, however, beware.

Though in the end this essay is little more than a piece of minor ephemera, seemingly seeming as it is, it poses the “problem” (Southern's ambivalence here notwithstanding) of the writer-on-drugs in a number of insightful ways. First, Southern espouses a view of the writer as a man apart, invulnerable to the pull of addiction—a quite romantic vision, reminiscent of Coleridge and De Quincey's refusals to acknowledge their dependence on opium.<sup>14</sup> This vision of the writer becomes even more romantic as Southern fails to distinguish between the writer simply using drugs (or alcohol) and the writer producing

---

<sup>13</sup> About female writers, Southern declares, “there is (almost) nothing worse than a drunken woman writer,” though he acknowledges, “Dot Parker was no stranger to the grape, nor indeed to the double belt by all accounts. But she could handle it . . . and there's every reason to believe she did some of her best work under the steady influence of a certain *Monsieur Courvoisier*, V.S.O.P.” (“Drugs and the Writer” 207).

<sup>14</sup> See Boon 36-7.

literature while intoxicated: he presents the writer as a figure always writing, and thus any use of intoxicants is necessarily incorporated into the writer's process.<sup>15</sup> This becomes especially clear in his description of the "super-artist," who is resistant even to the chemical dependence of heroin (Southern supposes) by virtue of his or her artistry. The relationship between the writer and drugs is presented here as that between a worker and his or her tools: perhaps not equivalent to, but sharing the same status as the pen, the typewriter, paper, and language itself. Drugs, then, become a medium, in McLuhan's sense: a technology, an extension of man.

The relationship between drugs and literature, as media, is a very close one in the postwar years, as can be seen from even a cursory consideration of the period: by most accounts, Jack Kerouac's mythological *On the Road* (1957) was a result of a three week-long fugue involving stimulants (Benedrine inhalers and coffee), marijuana, a typewriter, and a 120-foot scroll of teletype paper; Burroughs's utilization of Brion Gysin's "cut-up" method was inspired by his struggles with heroin addiction; and Philip K. Dick became addicted to amphetamines in an effort both to elevate his mood and to go on days-long writing binges, producing multiple novels a year, mostly for financial reasons.<sup>16</sup> But drugs were not the only medium with which writers of literature found themselves in conversation in the postwar U.S. According to many film theorists, the 1940s ushered in cinema's modernist era, upgrading a medium previously considered a form of popular entertainment to the status of high art, even within mainstream institutions like

---

<sup>15</sup> On writers always writing, cf. Miller's "Art of Fiction" interview, cited in Chapter 1.

<sup>16</sup> See Boon 81, 197, 206.



Hollywood.<sup>17</sup> The 1950s became the golden era of television, and also saw the emergence of rock and roll, a revolution in the global dissemination of popular music. This is not to say that literature was not in competition with other media (though, I will point out, Southern makes this very argument), but rather that in a media environment as complex as this, drugs became for the writer just another part of the grand spectacle. They could be both research and diversion—in either case, an experience, especially for the “man apart,” as Southern portrays the writer, eager to thumb his nose at the status quo.

Among writers-on-drugs of the American mid-century, Southern’s writing betrays a flagrant media anxiety—that is, a pervasive concern about the status, role, and relevance of literature in an increasing electronic, intoxicated, and intoxicating age. Today, Southern is mostly ignored by literary critics, usually only mentioned as a footnote to the Beat Generation, a 1960s scene-maker or the screenwriter of Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) and Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), forever overshadowed by the films’ supposed *auteurs*.<sup>18</sup> Yet, he was also a celebrated journalist and the author of several best-selling novels. Because of Southern’s engagements with media other than literature, strictly defined, his writing gets at the heart of a self-consciousness which continues to loom large over American literature today. Ultimately, Southern used both drugs and cinema to attempt to transcend the representational limits of literature, a medium rooted in language: to exceed the pages of a book, the keys of a typewriter. That he fails to do so

---

<sup>17</sup> See, again, Jameson’s *Postmodernism*, as well as Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> As to his celebrity status, Southern was the only figure to don sunglasses on the cover of the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967).

is not merely because he was not a “super-artist” like Burroughs or Davis. Rather, his failures can be seen as a microcosm of a larger crisis in American literature, eager to transform itself in the wake of new forms.

*Literature and Other Media*

Writing for *The Nation* in 1962, Southern pitted two media against each other: not literature and drugs this time, but literature and film. In the essay, titled “When Film Gets Good . . .,” he writes,

Now, when Film gets good, Book is in trouble. Theoretically, it is not possible for a book to compete, aesthetically, psychologically, or in any other way, with a film. Of sensory perceptions it is well established that the most empathetic are *sight and sound*. It is for this reason that to *see* someone badly hurt, for example, hit by a car, bleeding, crying with pain, is a totally different experience from reading about it in the paper. In short, next to having been the victim oneself, the most meaningful thing would be to have witnessed it firsthand. “Seeing,” as they say, “is believing.” Film, by its very nature, more closely approximates firsthand experience than does print. And there, of course, the advantage only begins. (198)

By “Film gets good,” Southern means “cheap foreign films” such as Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* (1960) and François Truffaut’s *Jules et Jim* (1962), made available to American audiences with the emergence of art house cinemas in the 1950s—a phenomenon Southern ascribed to the delivery of Hollywood films to American living rooms by way of television. Here, Southern privileges cinema’s relationship to empathy over that of literature because the former medium is more visceral, with more direct access to the senses than literature, the latter dependent wholly upon language, and therefore further removed from human perception. This view is somewhat of a cliché, and a simplistic one at that, which much of 1970s film theory, drawing from the work of Jacques Lacan, worked towards rejecting by showing that film operates according to its

own language, and is thus no less “linguistic” than words on a page. But Southern’s primary subject in this essay is not film, but rather literature: in it, he briefly reviews a number of novels, from James Jones’s *The Thin Red Line* to James Baldwin’s *Another Country*, in order to offer a summary survey of the status of literary fiction circa 1962.

Southern continues his take on the “quality-Lit game,” as he refers to it elsewhere, by arguing for the necessity of literature to come to terms with its own relationship with cinema:

What these new developments mean in terms of the novel is something which seems so far to have been ignored in literary criticism and, at least consciously, by authors themselves. It has become evident that it is wasteful, pointless, and in terms of art, inexcusable, to write a novel which could, or in fact should, have been a film. This ought to be a first principle of creative literature and of its critical evaluation; without it the novel, in the present circumstances, has only a secondary function as art. The recent improvement in the quality of fiction is not due to the sudden excellence of films (and to the necessity for the novel to keep ahead of them), but to the fact that with the publication of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*—along with the favorable court decisions about their legality—the publishing field is now wide open, and both publishers and authors have become bolder. (198-9)

The relaxation of censorship laws in the U.S., Southern argues, has improved American fiction by allowing writers to show what they were not previously allowed to, both in terms of content and explicitness of language. And yet, as he has already stated, films are better at *showing* than novels, and so the task of the contemporary writer is not to approach his art more, but rather less like a filmmaker, in the effort of advancing the form: doing with the novel what the filmmaker cannot with the camera. The novels Southern praises as “non-cinematic” include *Another Country*, as well as texts by Miller, Burroughs, Vladimir Nabokov, and Robert Gover:

The publication of the *Tropics*, and the imminent publication of Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*, do a great deal toward raising creative

expression to a new level; and their public acceptance serves to emancipate publishers from chronic fear of whatever is new, or “formless.” Such books are of real value in the scheme of things; because they are still in advance of cinematic methods, they make literature purposeful. The same may be said of *Pale Fire* and *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding*; generally it requires a book which may at least be *suspected* of ‘obscenity’ to make an appreciable splash. (201)

Southern is suddenly mute when it comes to describing what, exactly, makes these novels “formless,” and his repeated insistence on the shock value of supposed “obscenity” only points to a symptom, and not the cause. He praises *Another Country*, writing, “Although of rather ordinary cinematic format, *Another Country*, by virtue of its introspection, its sexual denial, its realistic dialogue, and its unpopular truths, falls outside the current limitations of film” (202), but it is entirely unclear why cinema, as a medium, is incapable of “introspection, its sexual denial, its realistic dialogue, and its unpopular truths,” or whether this is, in fact, the case. Are cinema’s limitations a direct result of their privileged access to the viscera, relegating the realm of the obscene to literature, which is able to confine the unsavory to mere words, and a smaller audience at that? Is the future of literature only a matter of doing that which cultural mores will not yet allow film to do? For all of his insistence that one must not write a novel that should have been a film, Southern is alarmingly vague when it comes to elaborating on what this actually means.

Because of this, it should come as no surprise that Southern shows himself unable to follow his own rules. By the time he wrote “When Film Gets Good . . .,” Southern was one of America’s most promising young writers. Though his debut novel, *Flash and Filigree* (1958), a more or less sophomoric aping of British novelist Henry Green, one of Southern’s heroes, failed to make much of a splash, the controversy surrounding the

publication of *Candy* in 1958 catapulted Southern to literary celebrity. Though it may be difficult to consider *Candy* to be a significant or even “good” novel when read now, in the twenty-first century, Southern’s satirical “adaptation” of Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759), co-authored with poet and junkie Mason Hoffenberg, arrived at a time when the pornographic deserved a certain literary cachet in American writing. When it was first published by Jack Girodias’s Olympia Press in Paris—an imprint which specialized in pulp novels and “dirty books,” paying flat fees to writers using pseudonyms (*Candy* was originally attributed to the fictitious “Maxwell Kenton”), but was also the first to publish Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955)—the novel was subject to the same obscenity prosecution that had waylaid the publication of *Ulysses*, *Howl*, *Naked Lunch*, *Lolita*, and all of Miller’s novels in the U.S. And it benefitted from the same allure that came along with the legal problems which plagued those arguably more literary works. In 1959, Southern published a third novel, *The Magic Christian*, which boosted his fame even more, and by 1962, Stanley Kubrick tagged him to write *Dr. Strangelove*, resulting in a screenwriting career much more financially lucrative than his endeavors in “the quality-Lit game” were ever to be.

Though he continued to write prose, publishing short stories and journalistic pieces in a wide variety of magazines, the majority of Southern’s work in the 1960s was in film: in addition to *Dr. Strangelove* and *Easy Rider*, the films for which he is most famous today (though his contributions to *Easy Rider* were long disputed by Hopper), Southern worked on Hollywood pictures like Tony Richardson’s *The Loved One*, John Fowles’s *The Collector*, and Norman Jewison’s *The Cincinnati Kid*, all of which were released in 1965; characteristically 1960s spoofs like the 1967 James Bond takeoff

*Casino Royale* and Roger Vadim's *Barbarella* (1968); and more art house productions such as Aram Avakian's *The End of the Road* (1969). More often than not, Southern was approached as a script doctor, adding snappy, realistic dialogue to substandard scripts, and his presence in the credits diminished following Joseph McGrath's ill-fraught adaptation of *The Magic Christian*, starring Southern's friend Peter Sellers, in 1969, which by all accounts left a bad taste in Southern's mouth. As his biographers Lee Hill and Nile Southern (his son) attest, Southern's productivity both as a fiction and screenwriter suffered from a predilection towards partying: his use of alcohol and cocaine became especially excessive, he spent far more time hanging out with writers, rock stars, and Hollywood types than he did actually writing, and his constant squandering of the great sums he made writing for the movies left him with an immense amount of back taxes owed to the IRS, who put a lien on all of his income beginning in 1967.<sup>19</sup> His insistence to "beware" of drugs, lest ye be a "super-artist" like Burroughs or Davis, in the 1990s—another text of his, like many, left seemingly unfinished—takes on a melancholy tone when considered from the perspective of his career as a whole.

But even when he managed to produce, Southern still failed to take his own advice. The reader of "When Film Gets Good . . ." should be rather unsurprised by Southern's turn to the medium of film in the 1960s, but is left puzzled when forced to reckon with his penultimate novel, 1970's *Blue Movie*. By the time *Blue Movie* was published, Southern had been working in Hollywood for nearly a decade, and its satire of the movie industry is critical, even biting at times. Although at this point two of

---

<sup>19</sup> See Hill, *A Grand Guy: The Art and Life of Terry Southern* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010); and Nile Southern, *The Candy Men: The Rollicking Life and Times of the Notorious Novel Candy* (New York: Skyhorse, 2012).

Southern's novels had already been adapted into films, and though the uproar surrounding the publication of *Candy* had been first to make Southern a household name, Southern's work in Hollywood is what brought him true fame—the very fame he mocks in *Blue Movie*, another example of the blurred line between cultural criticism and morose self-deprecation underlying Southern's career as a writer.<sup>20</sup> *Blue Movie* attempts to answer a question which comes up periodically throughout cinema history (most recently, in two very different approaches, by Lars von Trier, in *Nymph()* *maniac* [2013], and Sam Taylor-Johnson, in *50 Shades of Grey* [2015]): what would pornography look like if it were given the full Hollywood treatment: big budget, big production, big talent? The novel concerns the efforts of a director, Boris (aka “King B.”), a “*film-maker*—in the tradition of Chaplin, Bergman, Fellini—an artist whose responsibility for his work was total, and his control of it complete,” to make such a film (*Blue Movie* 15). Like Southern himself, “despite his acclaim,” Boris's films had “met interference”: “Movie houses had been closed in Des Moines, in Albuquerque, in Temple, Texas . . . and in the staunch little Catholic town of Chabriolet, France, there was a warrant out for his arrest. ‘Obscene,’ ‘indecent,’ ‘immoral,’ ‘pornographic’ were the charges” (15). As the reader follows Boris, always the gentleman, as he takes full advantage of the privilege his status affords him (with financiers as well as his actresses), it's difficult not to see Boris as a stand-in for Southern, an iconoclastic man apart in an industry of schlock. A man with vision, a man with a mission: the only one capable of truly shocking America, once and for all.

---

<sup>20</sup> Christian Marquand directed the 1968 adaptation of *Candy* (Cinerama, 1968), notable for a star-studded cast which includes Marlon Brando, Ringo Starr, Richard Burton, and a Swede, Ewa Aulin, concupiscently chosen by Marquand to portray Candy Christian, an American archetype.

But *Blue Movie* fails to shock, as Norman Mailer wrote to Southern in 1971.

Southern wrote to Mailer previously, asking him to pen a blurb for *Blue Movie*. Mailer responded in January 1971, apologizing for being too busy (“even a beautiful word from me would mean very little” [n.p.]), but by April, Mailer had read *Blue Movie*, and wrote again to Southern. “Dear Terry,” he writes,

I finally read *Blue Movie* and look forward to when we get together and can talk about it. You are certainly the funniest writer in America, but between us I don't think you took yourself seriously enough. I think you could have had a great novel there and you sloughed it. But that's what I want to talk to you about. Forgive the brevity of this but the alternative is to talk to you about *Blue Movie* for four or five pages. Of course, if the idea of such a conversation bores the shit out of you, I could always . . . lend you two bucks for breakfast. (n.p.)

Mailer was not alone in disliking the novel. David Dempsey, writing for *The New York Times*, ends his review of *Blue Movie* with a zinger: “I found this a tasteless, kinky book, one that should be published in Liechtenstein. Dig? That way we could order it by mail and get the postage stamps” (n.p.). What is significant about Mailer's review is his clear respect for Southern: he faults him not for a lack of talent, but rather, effort. To Mailer, the subject matter of the film is rich, and instead of taking it seriously, Southern “sloughed it.” Though Mailer doesn't say so, perhaps *Blue Movie* would have been better had it not been a novel, but rather, a movie. Perhaps Mailer's feelings on *Blue Movie* were strong enough to invite Southern to breakfast because Mailer had, in fact, been enacting the plot of the novel the same year it was published, writing, directing, and starring in his third film, *Maidstone*.

Mailer is another American writer who turned to the medium of film in the 1960s, but unlike Southern, his contribution was not limited to the screenplay. Though “often dismissed as vulgar and/or irrelevant,” as Sara Jo Cohen notes, Mailer's brief career as a



filmmaker has received some attention as of late, with the Criterion Collection's release of *Maidstone and Other Films* under its Eclipse imprint in 2012 (161). Mailer wrote, directed, and starred in *Wild 90* and *Beyond the Law* in 1968; *Maidstone* wasn't followed up until 1987's *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Mailer's final film, an adaptation of his 1984 novel of the same name. Cohen argues that Mailer's first three films were largely influenced by the work of John Cassavetes (who will be discussed at length in the next chapter), "although Mailer predictably argues that his mastery of what he calls 'existential acting' makes his films better than those of Cassavetes" (161). The theory of "existential acting," Cohen writes, "collapses the cinema and the outside world, documentary and fiction, acting and existentialism, and masculinity and performance," unsurprising "from the man who gave us the genre-bending history as novel/novel as history, the true life novel, and the novel biography" (162). In a 1970 interview with Joseph Gelmis, Mailer admits that though writing was his "first love,"

I'm a professional writer now. I can do a job. And I'm very much like a prizefighter who packs a suitcase and gets on a train or a plane and goes out to fight an opponent in some town. It doesn't matter what the conditions are particularly. I still have reverence for writing. But you can have reverence for something and at the same time not necessarily get much immediate pleasure out of it. I still get pleasure out of writing. But the *act* is not pleasurable. It's hard work. But making a film is a cross between a circus, a military campaign, a nightmare, an orgy, and a high. (161)

For Southern, as he explains it in "When Film Gets Good . . .," a writer's transition from literature to film is a matter of dedication to the material: that a novel *should* be a film if it *can* be a film. But for Mailer, it's about the pleasurable chaos of the process of filmmaking itself. Writing is hard work, but filmmaking is fun—a sentiment, if not expressed by Southern directly, nonetheless evident in his own biography and *Blue*

*Movie*'s account of Hollywood. For both Southern and Mailer, film is literally more sexy than literature—a thesis both *Maidstone* and *Blue Movie*, in variously misguided ways, stray further from proving the more that they try.

In *Maidstone*, Mailer plays Norman T. Kingsley, a famous filmmaker who may or may not be running for president—the sort of macho philosopher-king protagonist that pops up in much of Mailer's work.<sup>21</sup> As the press awaits his announcement of candidacy, Kingsley begins production of his latest film, an adaptation of Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*, the 1967 film in which Catherine Deneuve plays a young housewife who, out of boredom and curiosity, begins to work as a prostitute while her husband is at work. Meanwhile, assassination rumors are abuzz, and Kingsley's brother Raoul (Rip Torn), who manages Kingsley's finances, emerges as the most likely culprit. The film ends notoriously with footage of a real life brawl between Torn and Mailer, in which both actors push Mailer's theory of "existential acting," which Cohen references, to its absolute limit. Attempting to kill Mailer's character, Torn hits Mailer in the head with a hammer as Mailer's wife and children look on in horror. Mailer returns the favor, biting off part of Torn's ear. Torn strangles Mailer and the two men wrestle like schoolboys—the portly, middle-aged Mailer shirtless, wearing cutoff jean shorts—for ten whole minutes as the camera rolls.

The whole thing is pretty absurd. But Mailer's ideas about filmmaking, put to practice in *Maidstone*, can help to explain the media anxiety proliferating Southern's work. For Mailer, filmmaking is all fun and games: a welcome reprieve from the professionalized "hard work" of writing, no longer liberating because of its subsumption

---

<sup>21</sup> See especially Stephen Rojack, the college professor/TV personality/congressman protagonist of Mailer's *An American Dream* (New York: Dial, 1965).

into the capitalist logic of labor. But as they say, it's all fun and games until someone gets hurt. Mailer, quite literally, got hurt—the filmic evidence of this gives some support to Southern's thesis that cinema can engage with its viewers' emotions and psychology more directly than can literature, by means of the senses of sight and sound. Southern develops this thesis further in a 1975 interview titled "On Screenwriting," in which he argues, "when things are right, [screenwriting] is probably the most satisfying creatively of *all* the forms, because it is so much *stronger* than prose" (67). But he also seems far less naïve than he did about show business in 1962, still a novice in Hollywood:

If a writer is sensitive about his work being treated like Moe, Larry, and Curly working over the Sistine Chapel with a crowbar, then he would do well to avoid screenwriting altogether. On the other hand, if he is *irresistibly* drawn to the medium of films, the wise thing, of course, is to become a *filmmaker*. Simply *insist* on being in charge of your material—don't give it up. In the end, they must relent—because without a story, without a script, without the *creative* element . . . there is no film possible. (68)

By 1986, in an interview with *Puritan Magazine*, Southern seems downright bitter about the film industry:

Screenwriting should be avoided except in the *auteur* context, where the writer is also the director. Otherwise, his power, regarding the *protection* of his work—unlike that of the *playwright*—is only the power of *persuasion* . . . and trying to persuade the ordinary director or studio producer in matters involving taste, aesthetics, common sense, and/or even the most obvious commercialism, is like trying to persuade an untrained donkey. I have been fairly fortunate, working with people Like [*sic*; Stanley] Kubrick and Tony Richardson, but those are rare exceptions indeed. About 99.99 percent of the time you are working with studio people—i.e., shoe-clerk, garment-industry morons who should simply be forced to wear earphones *permanently*, and kicked the fuck off the set, and on no account be allowed physically near a script, as they will invariably contaminate it by sheer osmosis. (Server 9)

Southern's shift in attitude toward film and his decision to publish *Blue Movie* as a novel beg the question of whether the direct expression Southern and Mailer sought in film was

mythical, or whether it was actually to be found in literature all along. In “When Film Gets Good . . .,” Southern argues that the novel ought to do what film can’t. But he is somewhat vague about what, in fact, that is, merely managing to cite a few novels which he sees as somehow “formless,” and thus, “non-cinematic.” As a novel about filmmaking, *Blue Movie* is necessarily “cinematic,” and thus it is somewhat perplexing why Southern chose to present it to his audience as a novel, and not as a screenplay, a film. Southern completed a screenplay version of *Blue Movie*, and why the film was never produced is just one of many historical contingencies of Southern’s career: the same question can be asked of his screenplay adaptations of Burroughs’s *Junkie* (1953), Nathanael West’s *A Cool Million* (1934), or Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), all sitting, ungreenlit, in the Terry Southern Archive at the New York Public Library.

Of course, Mailer was able to make a successful return to the “quality-Lit game” following his flirtation with filmmaking, only to write some of the most well received books of his career. For Southern, things were pretty much over both as a screenwriter and a writer of prose following the publication of *Blue Movie*: only a small spattering of film credits and magazine publications appear after 1970; he worked as a staff writer for one season of *Saturday Night Live* in 1988, published a final novel in 1992 (*Texas Summer*), and taught screenwriting at Columbia University until his death in 1995. For Mailer and Southern both, the allure of film was the possibility to express in a way which literature couldn’t: because it is work (Mailer) and because it is too detached from visceral, human experience (Southern), which both amount to basically the same thing. Essentially, Mailer and Southern were both seeking in cinema what Henry Miller found in the novel just two decades before: a liberation from the self, a rejection of sense, a

rejection of work in favor of play That they both, eventually, abandoned the cinema for literary prose suggests that film did not live up to this potential, and perhaps, what they were looking for was not medium specific.

The body of work accounting for film's relationship with literature—or more specifically, the novel—is doubtless more sweeping than the activities of Mailer and Southern in the 1960s. But their attraction to cinema as a medium occurred at an interesting time, when the creative potential of drugs, and not film, were more frequently discussed, promising transcendence, liberation, and access to new perceptions and consciousnesses. Boon writes,

As McLuhan had prophesied, the literary culture that surrounded psychedelics in the 1950s evolved into various nonliterary forms in the 1960s. Psychedelics were associated with the return to the primacy of the oral tradition in poetry, to the figure of the intoxicated bard, Ginsberg, in Indian gear, chanting om at *The First Human Be In*, but also to the silent affirmation of gnosis: direct knowledge of the divine that is beyond language. Words became music: Carroll's Alice was transformed into Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit." As Leary said in the introduction to *High Priest*: "the work of the psychedelic scholar-politicians (described in this history) is over, with love and confidence we turn our work and our planet over to the young and their prophets: The Beatles, The Byrds." Or words became images, as in the hieroglyphic forms of the San Francisco-based underground comic book *Zap Comix* and Rick Griffin's psychedelic posters for the hippie rock and roll mecca, the Fillmore. (264-5)<sup>22</sup>

Boon's emphasis on "primacy," "direct knowledge," and "images" suggests that artists of all kinds in the 1960s were drawn to drugs for the same reasons that Mailer and Southern turned to film. Writers' anxiety about film has been well documented: countless books have been written about the subject since the very invention of film, and they continue to be published to this day. Yet, a similar anxiety about drugs—despite the intimate

---

<sup>22</sup> See also Bob Dylan's turn to film directing, in the thoroughly exhausting *Renaldo and Clara* (Circuit, 1978).

relations between literature and intoxication insistently described by Derrida, Ronell, Lenson, Boon, and others—has not affected scholarship to a remotely comparable extent. Is it possible that Mailer and Southern’s motivations for working in the medium of film were exactly the same as an entire generation’s experimentation with drugs?<sup>23</sup> And is media anxiety making a straw man out of a placebo—pharmakós, a scapegoat—amounting to a fear of absolutely nothing? A closer look at some of Southern’s writing-on-drugs will help us to approach these questions or more directly, and to consider what drugs have *done* to literature in the twentieth century, and what their influence can tell us about the contemporary novel in today’s expansive, constantly evolving media landscape, where cinema seems to pose less of a threat to literature, both referred to as “dead” now, in an era when the Internet and mobile technologies produce most of the media anxiety.

*The Blood of a Wig*

As David Tully puts it, in Southern’s “fiction of the later sixties, gone is the ethereal Hawthorne style that had marked his earlier prose, replaced by a harder, more violent, more naturalistic tone” (97). Tully cites “Southern’s greatest short story,” “The Blood of a Wig,” originally published in Grove Press publisher Barney Rosset’s *Evergreen Review* and collected that same year in *Red-Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes* (1967), as well as his “most ambitious novel” (97), the wildly problematic *Blue Movie*, as evidence. Indeed, as the collection’s title suggests, *Red-Dirt Marijuana* presents a fascination with narcotics more pronounced than in his previous novels and screenplays,

---

<sup>23</sup> Southern, of course, was a rather vocal drug user. Mailer’s drinking habits are well documented and easily YouTube-able; he writes about his use of marijuana quite frankly in *Advertisements for Myself*.

in addition to showcasing a more journalistic prose—a result of his work as a reporter and editor for *Esquire Magazine*, especially, which cast him as one of the pioneers of the kind of first-person reportage perfected by the likes of Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Gore Vidal, Gay Talese, Joan Didion, and Hunter S. Thompson, later referred to as “New Journalism.” The title story and its sequel, “Razor Fight,” concern the introduction of a young white boy in rural Texas (an obvious stand-in for Southern himself, who grew up in Alvarado, just outside of Dallas) to both drugs and African-American culture by his father’s black farmhand, C.K.<sup>24</sup> A number of the stories set in Paris (where Southern lived from 1948 to 1952, and then off and on from 1956 to 1959, when Geneva, Switzerland, served as his home base) such as “Put-down” and “You’re Too Hip, Baby” also treat drug use explicitly.<sup>25</sup> Two stories in particular—the earlier “The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner” and “The Blood of a Wig”—take the relationship between drug use and literary production in particular as their subject.<sup>26</sup>

“The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner” exhibits the same hip and ironic detachment still apparent in “You’re Too Hip, Baby,” published seven years later in 1963, which tells of the ill-fated friendship between Murray, a young white American expat studying literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne, and an African-American couple composed of Buddy, a jazz pianist, and his wife, Jackie.<sup>27</sup> Murray befriends Buddy in the

---

<sup>24</sup> “Red-Dirt Marijuana” originally appeared in *Evergreen Review*, “Razor Fight” in *Nugget Magazine*. They were later expanded to produce *Texas Summer*, which fills in the narrative gap elapsing between the two stories.

<sup>25</sup> “Put-down” was first published in *Evergreen Review*, “You’re Too Hip, Baby” in *Esquire*.

<sup>26</sup> “The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner” first appeared in *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1956.

<sup>27</sup> Murray is another thinly veiled stand-in for Southern himself, who studied at the Faculté des Lettres at the Sorbonne on the G.I. Bill beginning in 1948. The topic of

bathroom of a Paris nightclub over a joint, and then becomes subject to sexual advances first from Buddy's wife and then from Buddy himself. After turning them both down, Murray is asked by Buddy, "Just what is it you want?" to which he replies, "Well, what do you think, man? . . . I dig the *scene*, that's all. I dig the *scene* and the *sounds*" (*Red-Dirt Marijuana* 86). Bemused, Buddy looks down at Murray and speaks not only to him, but to an entire generation of white Americans fetishizing black culture: "You're too hip, baby. That's right. You're a *hippy*. . . . In fact, you're what we might call a kind of professional *nigger lover*. . . . And I'm not putting you down for it, understand, but, uh, like the man said, 'It's just not a scene I make.' . . . I mean *not when I can help it*, Murray, *not when I can help it*" (86). The narrative indicts its protagonist for the disingenuousness of his hipness, ultimately arguing that to smoke marijuana and listen to jazz is *not* to be black, that hipness itself is an empty signifier, endlessly self-reflexive, and that Murray is a poseur.

But Southern's prose is guilty of the same hipness—or as Mailer writes in a blurb for the book's back cover, "a clean, mean, coolly deliberate, and murderous prose." For instance, note the self-congratulatory use of cultural signifiers, and the *noir*-ish slyness, the detached intrigue with which he introduces Jackie's attempted seduction of Murray:

Jackie finished at the mirror, put another record on, and came over to the bed. As she sat down, Murray passed the cigarette to her, and she lay back with it, head slightly raised on a pillow against the wall, listening to *Blue Monk*.

When Murray had rolled several, he put the packet of hash away and stashed the cigarettes in with his Gauloises. Then he leaned back, resting

---

Murray's thesis, "The Influence of Mallarmé on the English Novel Since 1940," and the list of speakers whose lectures Murray attends ("Cocteau, Camus, and Sartre, or Marcel Raymond, author of *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*") come off as cheeky nods to Southern's own influences (*Red-Dirt Marijuana* 75).



his head on Jackie's lap, or rather on what would have been her lap had she been sitting instead of half lying across the bed; she passed the cigarette to Murray. (82)

The story ends with irony layered upon irony: ordering a cup of coffee after Buddy and Jackie's departure from the café, Murray is asked by the waiter how he takes it: "Murray sighed. 'Oui,' he said softly, 'noir'" (87). The elusiveness of the narrative stance is ultimately as detached as Murray, stoned on hash and existentialism, listening to the abstract progressions of bebop in the dark, smoky haze of a Paris club.

"You're Too Hip, Baby" can be seen as a commentary on or at least a return to the same themes as "The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner," which begins with the title character declaring, "I'll have to be a *hipster*." Dr. Ralph Warner is treated no less critically by the narrator than Murray is, though Dr. Warner's stated intent in using drugs is—to use Derrida and David Lenson's term—"productive," and is therefore somewhat more socially acceptable, occurring as it does under the auspices of "science." Unlike Murray, who "devoted himself to less formal pursuits; he knew every Negro jazz musician in every club in Paris" (75) instead of writing his thesis, Dr. Warner is an energetic and well-respected academic in his fifties, an "established author and critic, past conductor of the San Francisco, Boston and Denver symphony orchestras," who, Southern adds, was "one of the most beloved and respected men in the musical history of the country" (*Red-Dirt Marijuana* 45). The story finds Dr. Warner deep in discourse with two of his colleagues, Professor Thomas and George Drew, about his book-in-progress, *From Bach to Bebop*. Now working on the book's final chapter, Dr. Warner finds his colleagues suspicious of his proposed methodology, which has a reputation for being somewhat unorthodox:

Before completing the book's section, "Dixieland and the Blues," Dr. Warner had meticulously sifted through all the written material on the subject, and had listened to some seven hundred graded recordings, many of them several times, taking copious notes the while. Then he had flown down to New Orleans for an intensive week of firsthand research. When he was not actually listening to music, he ferreted about the Quarter, poking into any narrow opening of whatever half-promise, prowling the blue haze of midnight alleys, tapping carefully on every soundless, dawn-lit cellar door, as though each were his own podium. (48)

Dr. Warner spends his nights soaking up the sights and sounds of the Vieux Carré, speaking "to hundreds of people: strangers, drunks, unknown—and most often, untalented—musicians, bystanders, children, blind men who touched their canes to the earth in some possible connection with the music" (48), and most significantly, indulges in the drug most closely corresponding to the epistemology of blues and traditional New Orleans jazz, marijuana:

And he even had the gall and devotion, one time toward early morning in a booth gone blue-gray with the circling tides of smoke, when a sleepy-faced drummer passed him a sweet cigarette the thinness of two matchsticks, to hold it as he might have been expected, take quick deep drags, wink without smiling, and say in a low voice, '*Crazy, man.*'" (49)

Despite the great lengths to which Dr. Warner goes to be accepted into this world, the narrator notes with an eyebrow surely raised, "He never identified himself, but he was usually remembered as 'an old guy who knew a hell of a lot about music,' or again, by such as the drummer, as a 'pretty stuffy cat'" (49).

For the book's final chapter—on bebop, cool jazz—the stakes of Dr. Warner's "field work" are much higher. He announces to his colleagues that he intends to sample heroin, though he promises them, "I won't main-line . . . Just skin-popping. Anyway, on single dosages, cardiac response is negligible. I've looked into it, of course" (49). He explains that the difference between skin-popping ("a muscle or tissue injection") and

mainlining is a matter of “flash,” once again outing himself as an academic, adding, “You see what I mean by language, eh?” (50). Flash, Dr. Warner explains, is “very subjective . . . A sort of will-less euphoria, I suppose. Sensations of security and general well-being. Wish-fulfillment. Self-sufficiency, if you like. Followed, I imagine, by depression, or letdown” (50). His colleagues remain wary of his proposal (“Good Lord!” announces George Drew, “I’ll stick to Scotch myself”), and the narrator gives us a glimpse of Dr. Warner’s writing process: inspired and meticulous, such that it seems as if his arguments unfold in his mind faster than he can write them down (51). The narrator provides us with several passages from his chapter-in-progress, beginning, “Life has always been a struggle”:

It is tedious to say again, that, through modern science and technology, our material horizons have been broadened, our physical burdens lessened. A badly worn phrase, and it is yet another to point up these gains as having not seriously affected the greater struggle . . . the quest for peace of mind and happiness, the search for security. For it is evident today, perhaps as never before, that we have. . . . (51)

Dr. Warner breaks, skips a few lines, and follows a new train of thought: “Let it stand as living testimony to the fiber of our times that a musical idiom characterized by dissonance and atonality, by unpatterned time-change, and impassive distortion of popular themes, has gained wide favor . . .” (51). Another break, and another new idea:

*Be-bop, bop*, or, more currently, (*modern*) *jazz*, has been defined as “variations on a theme which is never wholly stated,” but which theme, it should be added, occurs (concomitant to the execution) in the mind of the performing artist (*and* the good listener) and which, if expressed at any point, would, in the technical sense, harmonize with the improvisation [*sic*] . . . It is significant that the emotional nihilism, or again, the cold, satiric intent which has come to be identified with these interpretations. . . . (51-2)

He moves from “the emotional nihilism . . . the cold, satiric intent which has come to be identified with these interpretations” to the “cynical veneer, as beneath the chimera of strife and bitterness in everyday living, pulses a vital substance. . . .” (52).<sup>28</sup> Southern uses his sharp sense of satire to reinforce the exact extent to which Dr. Warner is a “pretty stuffy cat”: unlike bebop, Dr. Warner’s prose is detached, formulaic, and academic. There is no—or at least, very little—“vital substance” pulsing beneath Dr. Warner’s language, either in his writing, or in conversation with Professors Thomas and Drew, the latter of whom declares an interest in “vocabularies and their physical correlations” (52). On the one hand, Dr. Warner appears to have mastered the bebop vocabulary, which is why his scholarly impulse has driven him further, towards bebop’s (and heroin’s) “physical correlations.”<sup>29</sup> Yet—unlike Murray, who as a hipster is defined by his minstrelsy (to the story’s black characters, at least)—Dr. Warner’s essential character remains unchanged, and the hipster vernacular is unable to penetrate his language, consciousness, and understanding except within scare quotes.

Dr. Warner’s failure to convincingly talk the talk is heightened in the story’s final scene when, following a prospective heroin dealer to an alley behind a jazz club, Dr. Warner tells the young man, “Now don’t jump salty, daddy-o . . . I mean like level with me ’cause I’m straight for loot, dig, and I got eyes, you know what I mean, like I got big eyes to get on and just fall out someplace where the cats are blowin’” (54). The young

---

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Warner later returns to the second passage, the narrator tells us, rewriting it as “Let it stand, a living mirror to the fiber of our times” (*Red-Dirt Marijuana* 52).

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Warner’s adeptness at memorizing jazz argot is evident when the narrator states, “his thoughts were of the order of those of famous actors in the seconds leading up to the big scene: *blood in the chamber . . . matches and spoon . . . you cut it, I’ll cut it, won’t cook up, will cook up, behind the knuckle, blood in the chamber, silence, . . . silence. Be cool*” (*Red-Dirt Marijuana* 53).

man and Dr. Warner have some difficulty communicating, given the ridiculousness of the professor's overblown slang, though they ultimately agree on a meeting place to make the deal. But even then, the experience is not what Dr. Warner bargained for: "Then he began to frame a sentence in his mind's eye: 'As to progressional pattern, the atonal *riff* is invariably—' and he had just succeeded in freezing *riff* in italics when the word and the phrase exploded in a flash of blinding white, as an arm swung out from the darkness and laid a short segment of lead pipe across the back of the Doctor's head" (55). Experiencing a flash, but not the flash he had hoped for, Dr. Warner is subsumed in "a heavy wave of blood-blackness," as two men empty his pockets. "They both wore gloves," the narrator concludes.

In both "The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner" and "You're Too Hip, Baby," Southern provides a critique of his generation's hipster appropriations of African-American culture, illustrating the inherent foolishness, and even danger, in pretending to be someone or something that one is not. In this sense, Southern connects the drug culture of the 1960s with its roots in imperialist Europe. It is in "The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner," though, that the problem is focused more specifically around the question of drugs and media: the reader, like Dr. Warner himself, is forced to ask whether bebop, as an art form, can truly be understood without heroin serving as a sort of key, the only thing able to unlock its secrets. While it is true that the story exposes Dr. Warner's exploits to be fraught, even silly, it is also true that in never trying heroin, he never gains the insight into bebop which he sought, and his study of the subject is left unfinished.<sup>30</sup> One could certainly argue that it is Dr. Warner's very quest to get high which strays him

---

<sup>30</sup> Though, Dr. Warner does experience something perhaps more central to the historical conditions which allowed for bebop to emerge: violence.

so far from his actual goals, but an anti-drug message such as this seems inconsistent with Southern's body of work. Published a year after the death of Charlie Parker, a longtime heroin addict, in 1955, "The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner" is Southern's first fictional exploration of the relationship between drugs and art, and suspicious of that relationship though the story may be, it suggests that it is not Dr. Warner's desire to use heroin that leads him to his demise, but rather the reasons behind that desire, divorced as they are from physical and emotional feeling, instead rooted in a cold, clinical, and relatively dispassionate interest: that of a critic, and not of an artist.

"The Blood of a Wig," published in 1967, more than a decade after "The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner," addresses the relationship between drugs and art more directly, supposing narcotics to be a medium in their own right. Right off the bat, the story shows Southern writing in a different mode than his earlier fictions—in fact, it is unclear in the beginning whether "The Blood of a Wig" is a work of fiction at all, or rather an exercise in gonzo reportage, the sort of New Journalism which he pioneered writing for magazines like *Esquire* in the 1960s. "My most outlandish drug experience," the story begins, "now that I think about it, didn't occur with beat Village or Harlem weirdos, but during a brief run with the ten-to-four Mad Ave crowd" (*Red-Dirt Marijuana* 231). The narrator is presumably Southern himself, though his name is never mentioned, allowing for the possibility that by shedding its appeal to truth, New Journalism immediately becomes a parody of itself. Regardless, Southern's here distinguishes his earlier accounts of run-ins with hipsters, fictionalized in "You're Too Hip, Baby" and "The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner," with his current situation as a participant in what Southern often churlishly referred to as "the quality-Lit game": the

highbrow, “serious” New York publishing world. In this case, the narrator is offered a temporary position as a fiction editor for *Lance*—“The Mag for Men,” a thinly veiled stand-in for *Esquire*, where Southern briefly served as a relief editor in 1962. The narrator accepts the position as a welcome payday, after his friend John Fox assures him, “you won’t have to *do* anything” (231). But the rigors of a nine-to-five (or in his case, a ten-to-four) job don’t come easily to the narrator, who becomes quickly mechanized in his habits—a quite literal reaction to his absorption into a capitalist economy: “It wasn’t true, of course, what he’d said about not having to do anything—I mean, the way he had talked I wouldn’t even have to get out of bed—but after three weeks my routine was fairly smooth: up at ten, wash face, brush teeth, fresh shirt, dex, and make it” (231-2). In terms of the job itself, the narrator develops a similar system for sorting the manuscripts for which he is responsible: “I had this theory about the existence of a *pure, primitive, folk-like* literature—which, if it did exist, could only turn up among the unsolicited mss. Or *weird*, something really *weird*, even insane, might turn up there—whereas I knew the stuff from the agents would be the same old predictably competent tripe” (232).

Though the narrator’s productivity improves as a result of this mechanization (“By the second week, I was able to reject a ms. after reading the opening sentence, and by the third I could often reject on the basis of *title* alone” [232]), his humanity suffers. And this is where the real narrative of the story begins: that of a fraught drug odyssey. “And so it came to pass that on this particular—Monday it was—morning,” Southern writes, using his trademark tongue-in-cheek appropriation of Hawthorne’s and Poe’s narration (despite Tully’s contention that this is a relic of his earlier work), “up promptly at nine-three-oh, wash face, brush teeth, fresh shirt, all as per usual, and reach for the

dex . . . no dex, out of dex. This was especially inopportune because it was somewhat as though an 800-pound bag, of loosely packed sand, began to settle slowly on the head. No panic, just immediate death from fatigue” (234). After trying unsuccessfully to refill his prescription of Dexamyl, an amphetamine, at a pharmacy (the prescribing doctor is unreachable, on vacation in California), the narrator is lucky enough to spy another casual user at the drugstore counter, from whom he bums a couple of pills: “Have a ball,” the benevolent stranger tells him (235).

At this point in the story, Southern’s commentary on the relationship between drugs and “the quality-Lit game” is limited to a scruffy bohemian writer’s attempt to adapt to a schedule mandated by a corporate environment. But as the narrator’s exploits continue, a more specific argument emerges regarding the relationship between drugs and writing, literary production itself. The Dexamyl allows him to be a part of the capitalist structure, disciplining his body in a “productive” way, presenting not only the drug, but the narrator’s corporeality as a medium. But when it comes to creativity, speed proves insufficient, and he must turn to something stronger, something “weirder.” While the demands of “the quality-Lit game”—i.e, capitalism—require that the narrator mediate his body, when it comes to creativity or aesthetics, drugs are not the way: he is deemed too creative by his bosses, his drug use thus unauthorized. Echoing Derrida, Southern comes to argue that drugs are both necessary and only acceptable when their use is in the service of those in power.

The narrator’s dex-appetite temporarily satiated, he arrives late to an editorial meeting, where *Lance*’s editor-in-chief Hacker (whom the narrator playfully refers to as “Old Hack”) presents the narrator and his co-editors with a particularly bizarre



assignment: a satirical takeoff of the suppressed pages of *The Death of a President: November 20-November 25, 1963*, historian William Manchester's 1967 account of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the center of some controversy when Manchester was forced to censor certain passages from the book due to a lawsuit filed by the Kennedy family. Unlike Fox, who admits that he is not sure that such a grave topic could be made, "you know, uh, *funny*," the narrator relishes the assignment, noting that Hacker "knew that I knew that his 'idea' was actually an idea I had gotten from Paul Krassner, editor of *The Realist*, a few evenings earlier, and had mentioned, *en passant* so to speak, at the last prelunch confab" (238-9). Despite his willingness to accept the challenge, the narrator is aware that this one is certainly not a story to be written while sober—or even on speed.

While filling his Dexamyl prescription, called in from California later that day, the narrator once again runs into the stranger who had given him a couple of the pills previously: "I took out the vial of dex and popped a quick one, thinking to do a bit of the old creative Lit later on. Then I shook out four or five and gave them to the young man" (240). His new acquaintance asks him, "You ever in the mood for something besides dexies?" and then, the narrator notes, "he proved to be the most acquisitive pusher, despite his tender years, I have ever encountered" (240). The drug dealer then offers the narrator a virtual cornucopia of narcotics, and at this point, "The Blood of a Wig" truly begins to take on the air of the absurd:

His range was extensive—beginning with New Jersey pot, and ending with something called a "Frisco Speedball," a concoction of heroin and cocaine, with a touch of acid ("gives it a little color"). While we were sitting there, a veritable parade of his far-flung connections commenced, sauntering over, or past the booth, pausing just long enough to inquire if he wanted to score—for sleepers, leapers, creepers . . . acid in cubes, vials, capsules, tablets, powder . . . "hash, baby, it's black as O" . . . mushrooms, mescaline, buttons . . . cosanil, codeine, coke . . . coke in crystals, coke in

powder, coke that looked like karo syrup . . . red birds, yellow jackets, purple hearts . . . “liquid O, it comes straight from Indochina, stamped right on the can” . . . and from time to time the young man (“Trick” he was called) would turn to me and say: “Got eyes?” (240)

Trick’s prized commodity, however, transcends the quality of a traditional narcotic, and it is to this that the narrator finds himself most attracted. The drug dealer refers to it as “the blood of a wig,” “red-split,” “schizo-juice,” reminding the narrator of “a recent article in the *Times*—how they had shot up a bunch of volunteer prisoners (very normal, healthy guys, of course, with the blood of schizophrenia patients—and the effect had been quite pronounced . . . in some cases, manic; in other cases, depressive—about 50/50 as I recalled” (242). After expressing some initial hesitation, the narrator learns that Trick’s source for this drug is “Chin Lee . . . a Chinese symbolist poet, who was presently residing at Bellevue in a straightjacket” (242). Just the sort of thing needed, it would seem, for the narrator “to do a bit of the old creative Lit.”

The two men do some negotiating regarding dosage and price, and then the narrator announces, “The effect of red-split was ‘as advertised, so to speak—in this case, quite gleeful” (244). He elaborates further:

Sense-derangementwise, it was unlike acid in that it was not a question of the “Essential I” having new insights, but of becoming a different person entirely. So that in a way there was nothing very scary about it, just extremely weird, and as it turned out, somewhat mischievous (Chin Lee, incidentally, was not merely a great wig, but also a great wag. (244)

The narrator begins working on his assignment, the “Manchester passages,” at six in the morning, and by ten he “dexed, and made it to the office” (244). The reader is only supplied with a very brief excerpt from the story, which the narrator tells us begins rather innocuously, but really begins “cooking” towards “the end of Chapter six” (244):

. . . wan, and wholly bereft, she steals away from the others, moving trancelike towards the darkened rear-compartment where the casket rests. She enters, and a whispery circle of light shrouds her bowed head as she closes the door behind her and leans against it. Slowly she raises her eyes and takes a solemn step forward. She gasps, and is literally slammed back against the door by the sheer impact of the outrageous horror confronting her: i.e., the hulking Texan silhouette at the casket, its lid half raised, and he hunching bestially, his coarse animal member thrusting into the casket, and indeed into the neck-wound itself. (244)

“*Great God,*” a character in the story exclaims, “how heinous! It must be a case of . . . of . . . *NECK-ROPHILIA!*” bringing the narrator’s story to a close (244). The bland unfunny of this passage notwithstanding, it is clear that the blood of a wig allowed the narrator to write “creatively,” and to write a lot, at that. He was certainly productive, but not in the service of capital. After reading the narrator’s draft, Fox tells him, “Look . . . I’m not a *prude* or anything like that, but this . . . I mean, *this* is the most . . . *grotesque . . . obscene . . .* well, I’d rather not even discuss it. Frankly, I think you’re in real need of psychiatric attention” (245). The narrator denies that he has lost his mind, though he acknowledges that at the moment he was still “steeped in Chink poet cunning,” suggesting to Fox that he might be working for the C.I.A., accusing his friend of being a closeted homosexual, and finally asks, “Well listen . . . what would you say if I told you that it wasn’t actually *me* who did that, but a Chinese poet? Probably a Commie . . . an insane Commie-fag-spade-Chinese poet. Then we could view it objectively, right?” (246). The narrator manages to calm Fox down, and then tells him about the insight he “had gained into Viet Nam, Cassius Clay, Chessman, the Rosenbergs, and all sorts of interesting things” (246). “The Blood of a Wig” ends with the narrator addressing the reader directly, as it were: “He couldn’t believe it. But, of course, no one ever really does—do they?” (246).

To be sure, there are several ways to read the role of drugs in this story. First, one could take the fantastical element—the blood of a wig—seriously, and assume that the narrator was in fact intoxicated with the consciousness of Chin Lee, and that his piece for *Lance* is the direct result of that intoxication. Following this interpretation, the narrator could be read as either superlatively stoned, or in fact possessed by Chin Lee, which would render *The Blood of a Wig* as an odd sort of ghost story. The other ways to read the blood of a wig are as placebo, pharmakós, scapegoat: either, the narrator merely projects the effects of the Dexamyl and prolonged exhaustion onto the blood of a wig, or, because the narrator has shown himself to be “his true self” while sleep deprived and on speed, the effects of the drug can be deemphasized altogether, and the narrator’s writing fugue can be equated to Miller’s getting drunk on water. That is: was the *Lance* piece written “through” the narrator by Chin Lee, or by a narrator rendered temporarily intoxicated or “insane” by drugs, or by a narrator who may or may not be insane himself? In any case, as with Miller, it becomes clear that an authentic self has ceased to be a possibility, and the reader is left not with a narrator, but a multitude of narrators, some of whom may be Southern, some of whom may be Chin Lee.

Writing about another notable writer-on-drugs, Philip K. Dick, Anthony Enns argues that what schizophrenia, drugs, and media technologies all have in common is that they threaten the concept of the self as a stable subjectivity, and primarily by means of their manipulation of time. In his 1965 essay, “Schizophrenia and *The Book of Changes*,” Dick writes that what “distinguishes schizophrenic existence from that which the rest of us like to imagine we enjoy is the element of time. The schizophrenic is having it all *now*, whether he wants it or not; the whole can of film has descended on him, whereas we

watch it progress frame by frame” (qtd. in Enns 76).<sup>31</sup> The compression of time in “The Blood of a Wig” can testify to the narrator’s experience on the blood of a wig as schizophrenic in this sense: he begins writing at six in the morning, and by ten he has completed what appears to be an impossibly long text, most of which is not reproduced within the story itself, as if it—along with the narrator’s consciousness, while writing—has been lost to time. Enns, citing Kittler’s media theory, derives a definition of consciousness underlying Dick’s work through this notion of schizophrenic time:

schizophrenia occurs when the perceptual apparatus fails to process information in real time, and the ability of film to manipulate the speed and direction of time—which Kittler refers to as “time-axis-manipulation” . . . allows schizophrenics to compensate for this deficiency. . . . Dick’s description of schizophrenia reveals the media logic underlying existential psychotherapy, and it once again illustrates consciousness as an interface between a perceptual apparatus and a recording device. (76)

In other words, consciousness is just one media interfaced constantly plugged into other media interfaces: drugs, madness, movies, or television. Enns reports that like the narrator of Southern’s story, “Dick even speculated that the novel *Ubik* [1969] may have been unconsciously ‘written through’ him by the teletype operator in order to explain the nature of these transmissions,” a trope of American literature that can be traced back to Mark Twain and Henry James (84). Writing-on-drugs can thus be seen as what Deleuze and Félix Guattari call an assemblage or rhizome, or what Kittler refers to as a “discourse network”: a linking up of multiple media technologies.<sup>32</sup> In this case: the narrator’s consciousness, the drug itself (the authenticity of which, in the case of the blood of a wig,

---

<sup>31</sup> N.B. the cinematic metaphor here (“frame by frame”), so common in Dick’s writing.

<sup>32</sup> See Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1990); Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

is suspect), and the other means of production—one would assume, within the context of this story, a typewriter.

In writing on a typewriter, all notions of individuality or authenticity of expression are nullified: for in typing, Paul Benzon argues, “human beings and machines do not wholly collaborate, nor does one entity simply dictate to the other” (94). Though it more easily facilitates the production of words, it makes writing less human, challenging what we have up until this point thought literature to be: for Kittler, Benzon continues, “the rise of the typewriter signifies the end of writing and of human subjectivity in general, as well as of literature in particular” (96). With the introduction of a media technology such as the typewriter, writing can no longer be the product of a single “author” (which, of course, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault insisted decades before Kittler), and with drugs, the notion of authorship is troubled even further. The author of the narrator’s piece for *Lance*, as well as “The Blood of a Wig” and all literature, in fact, is unmistakably plural.

“The Blood of a Wig” thus reveals writing-on-drugs as an exercise in media anxiety. Because the story is a thinly veiled account of Southern’s own experiences (like Miller’s novels) it is not too farfetched to conjecture that drugs factored into the production of the story, as well as its subject matter. This possibility allows the story to be read as a sort of autocommentary on Southern’s part. Early in the story, the narrator theorizes of a “*pure, primitive, folk-like literature*” (232), which leads him to develop a system of sorting through manuscripts based first on the title alone, and then the author’s name: “any woman author who used ‘Mrs.’ in her name could be rejected out of hand—*unless* it was used with only one name, like ‘by Mrs. Carter,’ then it might be a weirdie.

And again, any author using a middle initial or a ‘Jr.’ in his name, shoot it right back to him!” (233). Ultimately, the only example of the sort of “weird,” outsider literature the narrator is able to dig up is his own satire of the Manchester book, written via the blood of a wig, by means of Chin Lee, the sort of fringe character the narrator has hoped to appear in his stack of submissions. In a way, the narrator’s theory of a “*pure*” literature brings to mind Gilles Deleuze’s “strange Anglo-American literature,” as discussed in Chapter 1: Southern’s tastes are well documented, and like Deleuze’s, they tend toward *poètes maudits*. As co-editor (with Richard Seaver and Alexander Trocchi) of the 1964 anthology *Writers in Revolt*, Southern sang the praises of Miller, Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Henry Green, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Curzio Malaparte, and Jean Genet in the introduction, “Toward the Ethics of a Golden Age,” while selections from other American writers such as Ginsberg, Burroughs, William Gaddis, and Hubert Selby, Jr. are also included.<sup>33</sup> So, in a sense, “The Blood of a Wig” can be read as a proclamation of literary success: as the narrator succeeds in churning out the very outsider literature after which he has yearned, Southern joins the ranks of those “weirdie” writers he has admired—if not financially or in terms of lasting fame, then aesthetically and stylistically. It is probably not a coincidence that “The Blood of a Wig” is his best short story—maybe the single best piece of writing he ever produced.

The circumstances of that triumph are rather complex, however, layered as they are. On one hand, the narrator’s drug use and achievement of “weirdie” outsider literature in the square, quality-Lit *Lance* environment exemplifies the 1960s anti-authoritarianism also implied in the title of *Writers in Revolt*, as does Southern’s publication of “The

---

<sup>33</sup> Southern was also an outspoken admirer of Poe and O’Hara, as essays collected in *Now Dig This* can attest: see “King Weirdo” (191-4) and “Frank’s Humor” (214-21).

Blood of a Wig” in *Evergreen Review*, a major competitor of *Esquire*, at which the story takes many jabs, disguised as *Lance* though it may be. Perhaps more closely aligned with punk than 1960s counterculture (in this way Southern, like Burroughs, can be seen to be ahead of his time), this model of social consciousness runs through Southern’s work, making it appear cynical at times.<sup>34</sup> Yet, at the very least, it includes rebellion among those things which, in Southern’s view, literature should do. On the other hand, as I have shown, the narrator’s agency in the production—i.e., authorship—of the *Lance* piece, and by extension, Southern’s role as producer of “The Blood of a Wig,” are challenged repeatedly. Given Southern’s advocacy of drug use (despite his mild warning at the end of “Drugs and the Writer,” written decades after “The Blood of a Wig,” and which is far from the severity of a Public Service Announcement), it is thus difficult to see Southern’s relinquishing of authorship as a fault. Rather, it seems to fit snugly into the theory of literature proposed here: to achieve greatness (or weirdness), a writer must be free of his or her circumstances, body, mind, and self. Like the narrator of his story, with drugs and a typewriter, Southern has achieved transcendence. Or so he thinks.

Like the narrator spouting off conspiratorial rants at the end of the story, Southern’s theory of literature lacks consistency, and it is here that the crisis of the self expressed in “The Blood of a Wig” and the media anxiety apparent in *Blue Movie* and his writings on literature and film can be seen to be one and the same. As Souther elaborates it in “When Film Gets Good . . .” and “On Screenwriting,” the tension between writing

---

<sup>34</sup> I would argue that this kind of social commentary can be aligned with what Italo Calvino describes as lightness, especially in Southern’s reportage on the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, “Groovin in Chi,” originally published in *Esquire*. See Calvino, “On Lightness,” *Six Memos for the New Millennium* (New York: Vintage, 1988) 3-29; Southern, “Groovin in Chi,” *Now Dig This* 118-29.



prose and writing for film is that between individual control of artistic creation and the directness of expression afforded by film, by means of access to the primary senses and emotional core of the audience. Though the prose writer is allowed a much greater deal of artistic control than the screenwriter (except in the rare case of the *auteur*), “when things are done right,” Southern writes, screenwriting “is probably the most satisfyingly creatively of *all* the forms, because it is so much *stronger* than prose” (67). In reality, though, it seems that direct expression and artistic control are a false binary. Though *Blue Movie* might have been a much more affecting film than it is a novel, the cunning of Southern’s prose sours when it is adapted to film, despite Southern’s personal contribution to the production. And if it does nothing else, “The Blood of a Wig” dispels the myth of authorial control, showing that no work of literature is less multi-authored than the Southern-penned *Casino Royale*, a Hollywood flop that credits six different directors as, at one point or another, helming the production.<sup>35</sup> The possibilities of transcendence, of direct artistic expression—a romantic notion, shared by many of his contemporaries—that Southern projects onto drugs and film are not to be found within media themselves. This media anxiety, at work in literature-on-drugs and in the contemporary novel’s parlay with cinema, is rooted in the same desire to escape identified by Deleuze in American literature.

Literature is perhaps most exciting when it is trying to become Other, and we have Southern and his contemporaries in part to thank for this “weird” literature of

---

<sup>35</sup> The credited directors include Ken Hughes, John Huston, Joseph McGrath, Robert Parrish, Val Guest, and Richard Talmadge. Roger Ebert once referred to the film as “possibly the most indulgent film ever made.” See Ebert, Rev. of *Casino Royale*, 1 May 1967, *RogerEbert.com*, Web, 10 Apr. 2014, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/casino-royale-1967>.

dissatisfaction. Of course, it was not long until cinema followed suit, and it will be seen that film is not unaffected by the media anxiety on display here. In the next chapter, as I discuss John Cassavetes, cinema is not pitted against another media, per se, but against itself: the codification of its own conventions. In attempting to overcome the artifice of film, I argue, Cassavetes revels in the representational limits of the medium. Like Miller and Southern, he aims to transcend his medium to arrive at immediacy, but in failing to do so, he comes to delight in the refusal of language to convey meaning, the inability of individuals to be indivisible, and the desire of bodies to extend themselves: with alcohol, cigarettes, and other bodies.

### Chapter 3

#### Cinema, Cigarettes, Bodies, and Time

*We also received additional thank you calls for the product. One from John Cassavetes (and wife Gena Rowlands), came with the assurance that he will use the product in his next film—and to tell us that, because of the samples we provided, he switched from Marlboro to Winstons.*

—Warren J. Cowan, of Rogers & Cowan, Inc., Public Relations, to Laurence M. Wassong, of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.<sup>1</sup>

Gena Rowlands quit smoking in 1994. Her husband, John Cassavetes, died five years earlier of liver cirrhosis, one of the twentieth century's most writerly diseases, brought on by decades of hard drinking and heavy smoking, both of which he gave up in 1984 (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 503).<sup>2</sup> When asked by Henri Béhar of *Film Scouts* why she quit, Rowlands demurred: “Don’t ask me why, or I’ll go back” (n.p.). But when asked about the appeal of cigarettes, her signature prop in the eight films she made with her husband (not to mention the dozens of other films in which she appeared), she had the same thing to say as Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich, and Anna Magnani did before her, so Béhar points out: “It makes the gestures very slow, very beautiful. And the smoke softens the contours of your face. It’s very seductive” (n.p.). Though cigarettes are both “a source of visible sensual pleasure and the emblem of women’s erotic life,” as Richard Klein

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter postmarked Oct. 21, 1980, Beverly Hills, CA. See Charles Leary, “Film Performance and the American Vernacular: The Independent Acts of John Cassavetes,” Diss. (New York University, 2007) 152.

<sup>2</sup> Among the American writers who died of liver cirrhosis are O. Henry, Truman Capote, and Jack Kerouac. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, and Dylan Thomas succumbed to other complications of alcoholism; the deaths of James Baldwin, T.S. Eliot, and Raymond Carver were all related to their smoking habits.

writes, the appeal is of course not exclusively feminine (160). Peter Falk, a close friend of Rowlands and her husband who starred in three of Cassavetes's films, is best known for his role as television's Colombo, the "ass-backwards Sherlock Holmes" who "chews up six cigars a day" (Fantle and Johnson 216-7).<sup>3</sup> Ben Gazzara, star of *Husbands* (1970), *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976), and *Opening Night* (1977), told *Cigar Aficianado* that he used to smoke four packs of cigarettes a day, until 1964, when a bronchial whistle and the Surgeon General's report started keeping him up at night (Rothstein n.p.). He might have preferred Cubans in his private life, but it's hard to find him without a cigarette onscreen.

"In novels," Klein writes, "the cigarette is often the surrogate of the self, a visible sign of mind and heart. Smoke is the material substance that most closely resembles thought" (154). It should come as no surprise then, that in film, a medium able to render that material substance visually (and materially, to some extent), "thinking is often represented by having a character light a cigarette" (154). Klein sees Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942) as an exemplary film of the cinema of smoking, and its star, Humphrey Bogart (as Rick Blaine), as an exemplary smoker. In the film, Bogart "smokes all the time" (160), and by virtue of this he is the "thinker" of the film, "playing chess with himself" (in real life, Klein notes, Bogart was "a serious student of the game") (164). Bogart's image is synonymous with smoking: he died of esophageal cancer in 1957, and in the years since, his name has become drug slang for the act of hogging a joint. Klein notes "the indistinction" in *Casablanca* "between the actor behind the role and the role

---

<sup>3</sup> Falk has prominent roles in *Husbands*, *A Woman Under the Influence*, and *Big Trouble*, as well as a cameo (as himself) in *Opening Night*. He also starred, alongside Cassavetes's, in Elaine May's 1976 homage to Cassavetes's films, *Mikey and Nicky*.

assumed by the star” (164)—a phenomenon that muddles things both ways, as Annie LeClerc notes in *Au feu du jour* (1979), writing of “the Humphrey Bogart cigarette”:

How many films would lose their savor, how many characters their intensity if one took from them this cigarette. . . . The cigarette of the cop, the journalist, the bad guy, the cigarette of someone ‘in the know’ [*avertie*], forewarned. It’s the cigarette of the politician, the scientist, the militant, man or woman. It is always the military cigarette, colonial, imperial. It is the phantom of power desired, aspired to, smoked for so long that it ends by assuming form, becoming solid. (qtd. in Klein 165)

Bogart’s cigarette is a gendered cigarette—a phallic symbol appropriate for a character whose given name could as easily be diminutized as “Dick” as it is “Rick,” and who Bogart, Klein notes, plays “as a ‘Prick’” (162). And so is Bogart’s role as the “thinker” of *Casablanca* gendered: he is the tobacco-stained philosopher of a film full of smokers in which not a single woman “is ever seen to actually take a drag” (160).<sup>4</sup> Bogart’s is a rasp of reason, a patriarchal standpoint that affords him moral authority in a world of often dubious morality: the noir San Francisco and Los Angeles, respectively, of Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe. For Klein, cigarettes are the perfect signifier for this masculinist power: the cigarette is a mask “behind which frightened men hide their doubts, their cowardices, their hesitations, and their impotence” in “an aggressive pose . . . that expresses contempt for the fear and weakness of others” (175). It is “a tool for maintaining the calm, unexpressive exterior necessary in the face of threats to one’s integrity”; it is “the disguise of power and a mechanism for giving oneself the power to

---

<sup>4</sup> Klein notes that in “one of the opening scenes of the film, an anonymous woman, sitting next to Sam’s piano in the crowd of Rick’s American Café, can be seen holding a lit, half-smoked cigarette at the end of her fingers. She starts to take a puff, but interrupts the movement of the cigarette to her lips and smiles as if she were suddenly inhibited by a distracting thought or momentarily enchanted by Sam’s tone. In fact, she was probably checked by a sign from the film’s director. The strength of the taboo in 1942 that prevented Hollywood films from showing women smoking allows us to appreciate the little scandal of Henri Lartigue’s *Femmes aux cigarettes*” (160-2).

maintain one's composure" (177). If Klein's analysis holds true, smoking really is a masturbatory act: each butt stubbed out represents another train of thought come and gone, but it's doubtful that Bogart/Rick is thinking about anything other than himself.

"Smoking cigarettes," Klein writes, "is permanently linked to the idea of suspending the passage of ordinary time and instituting some other, more penetrating one, in conditions of luxuriating indifference and resignation toward which a poetic sensibility feels irresistible attraction" (8). So is the cinema, one of many "technologies of modernity," Mary Ann Doane writes, which is "instrumental in producing and corroborating an investment in events, in dividing temporality to elicit eventful and uneventful time" (144). Klein's cigarette "momentarily opens up a gray-blue balloon above the smoker's head, a beautifully designed space for dreaming, an escape from the harsh constraints of necessity and the cruel menace of death" (138). Cigarettes are sublime for Klein "by virtue of their charming power to propose what Kant would call 'a negative pleasure': a darkly beautiful, inevitably painful pleasure that arises from some intimation of eternity" (2). The smoker is thus not simply a thinker, like Bogart, but also a poet: "With a cigarette, the smoker enacts a subtle dance or enters a dialogue that accompanies every gesture and word. . . . The smoker manipulates the cigarette, like the word *I*, to tell stories to herself about herself—or to an other" (8-9).

While Klein dedicates much of his book to tracing the long, intimate relationship between the acts of smoking and writing (his motives for writing the book, he admits, "certainly had their origin in my urgent desire to stop smoking" [ix]), he concedes that in cinema, the sublimity of the cigarette is more clearly pronounced, heightened:

Many authors have understood the uses to which cigarettes are put as instruments of what is frequently called communication. Smoking

cigarettes bodies forth an implicit language of gestures and acts that we have all learned subliminally to translate and that movie directors have used with conscious cunning, with the explicit intention of defining character and advancing plot. Careful viewers have long observed that in the movies, one can not only watch but read cigarettes like subtitles—translating the action on the screen into another language which the camera registers but rarely foregrounds, a part of the thickness of the medium which is almost never brought into focus. It is the sign of everything the camera sees without announcing that it sees it. The cigarette in the scene serves as a subtext, a mute caption or subtitle, sometimes accompanying, sometimes contradicting or diverting the explicit premises of the action or the open meaning of signs. Its appearance in film may be even more complex if one assumes that the cigarette is not merely a prop but a character on the scene, and not merely a character but at times the principal actor. In some films, cigarettes are so prevalent and insistent that they assume a role of their own, even a leading role, with a pose and a personality, even a voice. (9)

No longer a mere technological apparatus, a trigger of the smoker's dopamine receptors: when subsumed by the cinematic apparatus, the cigarette becomes a body in its own right, an actor signifying meaning, emotion, and time. To overlook the role of cigarettes in a film in which they are present (or even, in some cases, absent) is not only to cast them as a minor character, but to disregard an affective economy, a system of signs. Further, the Klein's analysis of the cigarette in film opens an avenue for embodied viewing. As the cinematic image reminds the viewer of the inhalation of sublime smoke, the negative pleasure and relaxation of its movement into the lungs, film is not simply an optical medium, as Marshall McLuhan would have it, but a medium that massages the whole of the physique.

Like many filmmakers of the mid-twentieth century, John Cassavetes presents his viewers with a foggy, tobacco-stained world in which the exchange and consumption of cigarettes is so ubiquitous as to become mundane, were it not for the particular allure of the cigarette on film. Further, Cassavetes's filmography—spanning from his directorial

debut in 1959, with *Shadows*, to his final film, *Big Trouble*, released three years prior to his death in 1989—coincides with the decline of the cigarette’s centrality to American culture, following the Surgeon General’s Report on Smoking and Health in 1964, the anti-smoking television advertisements mandated by the Federal Communications Commission in 1967, and the Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act of 1970, banning all cigarette advertising on radio and television.<sup>5</sup> Thus, as Cassavetes’s regular troupe of actors—Rowlands, Gazzara, Falk, Seymour Cassel, and others—age over the course of his oeuvre, so do their cigarettes.<sup>6</sup> The aesthetic appeal of the cigarette in *Shadows*, a film set in the jazzy and youthful Beat Manhattan of the late 1950s, is less apparent in later films, like *Opening Night* (1977), *Gloria* (1980), or *Love Streams* (1984), in which the characters portrayed by Rowlands cling desperately to their cigarettes, which are now old friends as much as they are bad habits.

But more than providing a mere sign of the times, Cassavetes’s films elevating the role of the cigarette to that of an actor—no longer props or objects, in Cassavetes’s films, cigarettes become bodies in their own right. That such a thing should happen in Cassavetes’s cinema is itself remarkable. His films are simultaneously degraded and praised by critics for the primacy given to the human body: his actors’ ability to use their own bodies to create drama, deemphasizing the functions of dialogue and narrative; his

---

<sup>5</sup> It was not until almost two decades after Cassavetes’s death that the Motion Picture Association of America ruled that “depictions that glamorize smoking or movies that feature pervasive smoking outside of a historic or other mitigating context may receive a higher [MPAA] rating,” following the decision of several studios, including Disney, to eliminate all depictions of smoking from their films. See William Triplett, “Smoking in Movies to Affect Ratings,” *Variety* 10 May 2007, Web, 29 Jan. 2015, <http://variety.com/2007/film/news/smoking-in-movies-to-affect-ratings-1117964655/>.

<sup>6</sup> This “troupe” also included Cassavetes’s parents Nicholas and Katherine, his mother-in-law Lady Rowlands, his brother-in-law David Rowlands, his three children, Val Avery, Fred Draper, and Al Ruban, who produced nearly all of his films.



camera's ability to defamiliarize those bodies to the extent that they become more than just a component of character, but characters themselves. Jonathan Lethem, in an essay cutely titled "Two or Three Things I Dunno about Cassavetes," writes that by studying Cassavetes's films, "life had been revealed to be so much more like a series of actor's exercises than I'd ever understood before" (122).<sup>7</sup> But Cassavetes's lifelong nemesis, Pauline Kael, dismisses 1968's *Faces* (in many ways his "breakthrough" film) in *The New Yorker*, comparing it derisively to "a number of new forms of theatre," deeming it "Dumb . . . crudely conceived, [and] badly performed" (204). She continues, writing,

*Faces* is being taken as a religious experience. It's almost a form of self-flagellation to go to a movie like this—"to see yourself," which, of course, means to see how awful you are. And the hushed seriousness with which people respond (to what is really not much more than the routine sorrows of middle age or a bad office party) seems almost hysterical. (204)

The viewers of Cassavetes's films, Kael concludes, come out of the theatre "chanting the liberal forms of 'Mea culpa'" (204).<sup>8</sup>

Like many French critics, Gilles Deleuze expressed unreserved enthusiasm for the work of Cassavetes. In Deleuze's expansive two-part philosophy of cinema, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), Cassavetes's films are used to illustrate a number of conceptual turning points in cinematic history. In a chapter titled, "Cinema, body and brain, thought," Deleuze writes,

---

<sup>7</sup> Lethem's essay is a reference to Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film, *2 ou 3 chose que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*).

<sup>8</sup> Kael acknowledges that she is "far from being an enthusiast of John Cassavetes' [sic] kind of movie-making" (200), which was common amongst American critics of the time. Despite Kael's "jeering response," Ray Carney notes that Richard Schickel (of *Life*) and Renata Adler (of the *New York Times*) "stood out from the crowd" of "important New York film critics. Adler wrote of *Faces*, "Far away the strongest, bluntest, most important American movie of the year . . . a movie so good that one can hardly believe it" (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 193).

The greatness of Cassavetes's work is to have undone the story, plot, or action, but also space, in order to get to attitudes as to categories which put time into the body, as well as thought into life. When Cassavetes says that characters must not come from a story or plot, but that the story should be secreted by the characters, he sums up the requirement of the cinema of bodies: the character is reduced to his own bodily attitudes, and what ought to result is the gest, that is, a 'spectacle', a theatricalization or dramatization which is valid for all plots. (*Cinema 2* 192)<sup>9</sup>

I will return to this passage later in order to parse what Deleuze might mean when he writes that Cassavetes's films "put time into the body" and "thought into life," but for now, suffice it to say that Deleuze's analysis of Cassavetes's work highlights the filmmakers' emphasis on "bodily attitudes" as the key to his cinematic innovations. He writes of Cassavetes as a "master" of the "cinema of bodies," a school that includes Cassavetes's American contemporaries Paul Morrissey and Andy Warhol, as well as Europeans such as Carmelo Bene, Jacques Rivette, Chantal Akerman, Philippe Garrel, and Godard (192). Deleuze groups these filmmakers according to their relation to what he calls the "direct time-image," a temporalization of the image which "always gives us access to that Proustian dimension where people and things occupy a place in time which is incommensurable with the one they have in space" (39). Filmmakers like Cassavetes, Deleuze writes, refer "in particular to one aspect of the direct time-image," a "series of time according to the before and the after" (207), presenting the viewer with a "daily attitude" which "puts the before and after into the body, time into the body, the body as a revealer of the deadline" (189). "The attitude of the body," he continues, "relates thought

---

<sup>9</sup> Carney provides the exact quotation from which Deleuze's paraphrase likely derives: "The real difference between *Shadows* and any other picture is that *Shadows* emanates from character while in other pictures the characters emanate from the story. I invented, or conceived, the characters of *Shadows* rather than a story-line. The idea of the story fitting the character instead of the character fitting the story is perhaps the main different point about the film" (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 63).

to time as to that outside which is infinitely further than the outside world” (189). While a filmmaker like Bene is concerned with “ceremonial” bodies, the bodies of Cassavetes’s films are “everyday.”<sup>10</sup> George Kouvaros, following Deleuze, suggests that Cassavetes’s “films suggest an understanding of cinema dominated not by stable identities and figures but by an ongoing process of becoming, a process in which bodies, sensations, and cinematic forms are constantly in flux” (203).

It is not only the critics and theorists who point to bodies as the foundation of Cassavetes’s cinema, but also the filmmaker himself. In interviews, Cassavetes was relentless in insisting that if his films are “about” anything, they are about emotions, and not meaning.<sup>11</sup> “Filmmaking,” he tells Ray Carney, “is an investigation of what is in someone’s mind. I believe in the validity of a person’s inner desires. And I think those inner desires, whether they’re ugly or beautiful, are pertinent to each of us and are probably the only things worth a damn” (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 159). As a filmmaker, it is his goal to “put those inner desires on the screen so we can all look and think and feel and marvel at them” (159). For Cassavetes, the medium of cinema is uniquely adept at portraying emotion, and as such, bears a unique responsibility to do so:

There’s something wrong, basically wrong, with our society that doesn’t make room for people’s emotions. It makes room for people’s thoughts.

---

<sup>10</sup> Though, Deleuze argues, filmmakers like Warhol and Morrissey present bodies that are both “ceremonial” and “everyday” (192).

<sup>11</sup> As Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us, emotions are located within the body: “Anger is, after all, a thought; to be angry is to think that the other person is odious and this thought, like all others, cannot—as Descartes has shown—reside in any piece of matter and therefore must belong to the mind. I may very well think in such terms but as soon as I turn back to the real experience of anger, which was the spur to my reflections, I am forced to acknowledge that this anger does not lie beyond my body, directing it from without, but rather that in some inexplicable sense it is bound up with my body.” See Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver Davis (London: Routledge, 2002) 64.

There's a great territory that's been opened up through the communication media and through TV, and through radio, and through newspapers. But there's no longer any room for truthful emotion. (196)

He saw it as his duty to create an emotional space—not only to simply portray emotions in his films, but to elicit an emotional response from his audience. More often than not, that response is uncomfortable: “when you see these emotions wide open, you don't know whether you like it or you don't like it. It's a rather embarrassing experience. . . . It's a really painful experience” (196). This is not to say that Cassavetes saw himself as a melodramatist, manipulating his viewers' emotions (as his son Nick would go on to do, directing films like *The Notebook*, the 2004 adaptation of a Nicholas Sparks novel): he tells Carney that he “hates” both “entertainment” (“I'm not an entertainer” [188]) and “sensitivity” (“Sensitivity is hypocrisy in the self-pitying way” [195]). He refused to see himself as a Hitchcockian puppet master, and resisted the attempts of critics to situate him in the auteur tradition, to characterize him as an American Bergman or Antonioni: “*Faces*,” he says, “is really an anti-intellectual picture; it's against people that *know* and for people that just *feel*” (199). In Cassavetes's view, his films constitute a cinema of the body, and not of the mind—a Cartesian split that Deleuze's analysis attempts to resolve.

Taking Cassavetes at his word, Carney makes much of the often radical ways in which the filmmaker utilized the bodies of his actors, as well as his own, in order to realize his vision of a truly emotional cinema. Through various anecdotes, Carney shows Cassavetes's tendency to create “a state of insecurity in certain actors for certain scenes” (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 331), as in the following story, which comes from the set of *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974):

Cassavetes' treatment of Rowlands and Falk is a textbook example

of the use of psychology to massage souls and spirits. His relationship with Rowlands was extremely rocky at times (to the extent that at one point he told her he would never work with her again). Rowlands on her part felt lost at moments and desperately in need of help, which Cassavetes seemed at times deliberately to withhold. Prior to shooting the homecoming scene, Rowlands pleaded with her husband for guidance. It was months into the shoot; she was tired and confused; more than information, what she probably needed was a little reassurance. Cassavetes not only refused to provide it but undermined what little confidence she had left with the coldness and distance of his response. She wanted to be calmed down; he did everything possible to work her up.

. . .

GR: What do you want me to do?

JC: I don't want to *tell* you. What would Mabel [Rowlands's character] do?

GR: I don't know. Help me. Please! Come on! You could help me! Take me outside. I don't know what she's . . .

JC: Gena, that's enough! I *refuse* to talk to you. No more! (332)

Carney concludes that, "If the result was not one of the greatest performances ever captured on film, Cassavetes' [*sic*] treatment of Rowlands could be called heartless and brutal. What is even more interesting is that when the cameras rolled Rowlands gave Cassavetes something he never expected" (333). Of course, Cassavetes is not the only filmmaker to have tortured his actors: in this case, Rowlands was treated no more brutally than were Brigitte Helm by Fritz Lang in *Metropolis* (1927), Maria Falconetti by Carl Theodore Dreyer in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), or Enzo Staiola by Vittorio De Sica in *Bicycle Thieves* (1928). Cassavetes's directorial methods share much in common with Robert Bresson's actor-model technique, and like Shirley Clarke, Warhol, Morrissey, and other American filmmakers working outside of Hollywood at the time, he relied heavily on the performances of nonprofessional actors. "There's no such thing as a 'good actor,'" he tells Carney, "What it is is an extension of life. How you're capable of performing in your life, that's how you're capable of performing on the screen. Everything else is just a failure to accomplish that" (170).

Cassavetes compares his own role to that of an “animal trainer,” saying that a director

can work with kindness or he can work without kindness; each situation demands a different approach. He must con, cajole, lie. That is the director’s function. He is not an honest person and an actor knows it, but as long as they get the results together it doesn’t matter. You need to play with spirits and souls and working conditions and finances and many other things to get there. (170)

In conversation with Carney, he is wholly unapologetic in resorting to extreme measures in the effort of achieving his goals. Carney relates another anecdote, this time from the set of *Faces*, concerning his treatment of Lynn Carlin, who plays Maria Forst, the wife of John Marley’s Richard Forst, together constituting a portrait of the unhappy, bourgeois postwar America around which Cassavetes’s drama unfolds. *Faces* is the first film appearance for Carlin, who initially made Cassavetes’s acquaintance while working as a secretary for Robert Altman at Screen Gems, a television production company in Los Angeles where Cassavetes was also employed.<sup>12</sup> Carney characterizes Carlin (who was pregnant during production—as was Rowlands, with her and Cassavetes’s second child, Xan, also a filmmaker) as “feeling safe and protected” on the set, but “threatened, bewildered or frightened at other moments,” not to mention self-conscious working alongside Marley, a veteran actor by that point (171). In one instance, Cassavetes threw

---

<sup>12</sup> Cassavetes worked in the “New Concepts” department, officially developing ideas for new television programs—though, Carney writes, “it was not long before it became apparent that Screen Gems and American television didn’t want new ideas” (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 132). He began to develop what was to become *Faces* while receiving paychecks from Screen Gems, which “unknowingly staffed and paid for most of the film’s preparations” (139). As Cassavetes tells Carney, “I was desperately broke. To keep some kind of money coming in, I stayed on as long at Screen Gems, and after they kicked me out, I went over to Universal—my bank—and acted in two lousy TV pilots, which bought me a movie camera—the first Eclair—and film. I then had enough to start the picture” (140). As for Carlin, Carney reports that she “volunteered to type the script for [*Faces*] when Altman was out of town (and had been fired for doing it)” (140).

her against a wall (in a shot which made it to the final cut); in another, he chased her around the set with a butcher knife (171). “I took her once,” Cassavetes tells Carney, “I was going to kill her, had my hands around her throat. The crew had me like this. I said, ‘Where is the kitchen knife?’ I mean, there isn’t anything that you shouldn’t be able to do to get people to do the kind of work that they need to do” (171). As a caveat, he adds, “They know if it comes from kindness or sweetness” (171).<sup>13</sup>

Cassavetes’s professed ideas about acting and directing amount to a theory of embodied cinema that easily lends itself to Deleuze’s and Kouvaros’s interpretations, as well as those of Jean-Louis Comolli, for whom, Kouvaros clarifies, Cassavetes’s is a “nonidealist, reflexive Direct Cinema” (61). Of *Faces*, Comolli writes, “filming is never a moment of repetition or reconstruction of ‘reality.’ Nor is it quite that of a selection inside a pre-filmic reality (as the re-production and elaboration of the script is in representational cinema). Rather it is a moment of *accumulation*” (qtd. in Kouvaros 61). Indeed, Deleuze’s conception of a cinema of bodies follows from Comolli’s “cinema of revelation,” where “the only constraint is that of bodies, and the only logic that of linkages of attitudes” (*Cinema 2* 192-3). In this cinema, Comolli writes, characters “are constituted gesture by gesture and word by word, as the film proceeds; they construct themselves, the shooting acting on them like a revelation, each advancement of the film

---

<sup>13</sup> Though Carlin was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, the award went to Ruth Gordon, for Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), in which, coincidentally, Cassavetes starred. *Faces* earned two more nominations—Cassel for Best Supporting Actor and Cassavetes for Best Screenplay (his second nomination, after a Best Supporting Actor nod for *The Dirty Dozen* the previous year)—but no awards. *A Woman Under the Influence* received Best Director and Best Actress nominations for Cassavetes and Rowlands (who received the same nomination for *Gloria*), respectively, but that is the closest that a Cassavetes film would ever come to winning an Oscar.

allowing them a new development in their behaviour, their own duration very precisely coinciding with that of the film” (qtd. in *Cinema 2* 193). For Comolli, as with Deleuze and Kouvaros, there is no narrative in Cassavetes’s cinema but the development of characters. It is the actors’ bodies that “advance” the plot.

Yet coupled with these critics’ insistence on the centrality of bodies to Cassavetes’s cinema is an emphasis on the cinematic apparatus. Of *Faces*, Comolli writes, “In a number of ways, through the time involved in the making of the film, the use of amateur actors and the disorienting effect, both cinematographic and economic, of the 16mm format, it is the movement of the film itself which *produces* the behavior patterns, the relationships, the fiction, and the characters” (qtd. in Kouvaros 51).<sup>14</sup> Of course, there can be no cinematic body, or cinema of bodies, without cinema, but for Comolli, the body is both an object and a product of film, what Deleuze would call a “becoming”: “Once filmed, I belong to the film by which I become image. The filmed body is a transformation, an alteration of the nonfilmed body. We belong to the films that we make, whether as actor or director; it’s not they who belong to us” (qtd. in Kouvaros 163). In this way, Cassavetes’s films serve not to analyze, re-present, or celebrate the human body so much as they effect a transformation: by filming the bodies of his actors (thus “putting

---

<sup>14</sup> It took Cassavetes five years to complete *Faces*. The final cut of the film is 130 minutes, or five thousand feet of 16 mm film. Though, as Carney notes, in those five years, Cassavetes shot a total of 250,000 feet of film (115 hours), resulting in a shooting ratio of fifty-to-one (whereas the industry standard of the time was roughly eight- or ten-to-one) (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 178). Post-production was something of a nightmare, taking three years due to problems with the soundtrack and the necessity of acquiring more funds to purchase film stock—a problem eventually solved by Cassavetes mortgaging his house and acting in dozens of films and TV shows. Additionally, Cassavetes scrapped and re-edited the film on three separate occasions: as he told Carney, “The editing room becomes *my* improvisation!” (178).



time into the body”), Cassavetes creates new technologized bodies. And in the process, he reveals the ways that those bodies are already technologized.

Alcohol is one technology that has received much attention in analyses of Cassavetes’s films. For Cassavetes, Kouvaros writes, “alcohol is not just about drinking or being drunk. It is about the creation of particular kinds of scenic and corporeal states” (178). He writes of the mark left on Cassavetes’s character by alcohol as “the strange insistence of the world . . . Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s description of the painter Cézanne’s motivating endeavour might just as well have been applied to Cassavetes’s films: ‘[T]o make *visible* how the world *touches* us’” (180). I intend to introduce to Kouvaros’s analysis the problem of the cigarette: like alcohol, it brings about a “modulation of affect” (what Thierry Jousse calls “the before and after of drunkenness” [180]), and like the cinematic apparatus, it “puts time into the body.” And yet, as Klein argues, the cigarette is a body in its own right, with its own gestures and attitudes. Though Cassavetes’s career is commonly celebrated as a late bastion of humanism in American cinema, his reputation as a “master of improvisations,” an American neorealist is ultimately flawed.<sup>15</sup> To reduce

---

<sup>15</sup> The myth of improvisation in Cassavetes’s work is firmly rooted in the famous title card which ends Cassavetes’s first film, *Shadows* (1959): “The Film You Have Just Seen Was An Improvisation.” Improvisation certainly did play a large role in the production of Cassavetes’s twelve directorial efforts, but as Carney reports, “Most of *Shadows* was not shot on ‘location’ or on the streets of New York, but on a stage. No policeman had ever fired a gun at the actors—or over their heads. More than half of the sound was not ‘live’, but had been dubbed, looped or otherwise manipulated during the editing process, And, far from being a six-weeks’ wonder, *Shadows* had taken almost three years to make. Finally, notwithstanding the final title card, at least two-thirds of the film was *not* an improvisation, but was written by Cassavetes in collaboration with a professional Hollywood screenwriter. Every one of the scenes the critics praised in his ‘masterpiece of improvisation’ had been scripted.” See Carney, *Shadows* (London: BFI, 2001) 8. The other primary source of the myth is the film’s soundtrack, a jazz score supposedly improvised by Charles Mingus, in a sort of homage to Louis Malle’s *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud* (1958), which features a score improvised by Miles Davis.

his work to an innovation in realism is to do a disservice to its complexity—as a theatre actor turned filmmaker, Cassavetes understood the limitations of the human body in an electronic world, and he recognized the misguided assumptions operating behind any attempt at isolating the human body to a unified, definable concept. He made movies about plays, but never plays about movies.

The economy of cigarettes in Cassavetes's films, I argue, allows the viewer to see the ways in which attitude and gesture—the language of the body, and thus the language of the cinema of bodies—refuse to mean, in the same way that the spoken language of the characters embraces gibberish. On one hand, I want to consider Cassavetes as a writer: in his screenplays, he explores the limits of representation in both form and content, like the fiction of Henry Miller and Terry Southern. On the other hand, he is also a filmmaker, allowing him to mount his critique of representation utilizing the language of film (image, sound, and bodies) at the same time that he utilizes “literary” language (text). In the preceding chapter, I showed how drugs function as a technology of writing. Of course, the association of cigarettes with writing is as old as the cigarette itself: Evija Trofimova, argues that the cigarette “is a writer’s prosthesis as much as his typewriter or notebook is.

---

While Mingus (a bassist, as well as a composer and bandleader) did in fact contribute to the film’s soundtrack, the vast majority of it consists of solos from Shafi Hadi, Mingus’s saxophonist, which were recorded separately (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 78). Perhaps this information would prove useful to Dudley Andrew, who asks, “Do we credit John Cassavetes for incorporating inventive actors within *Shadows* (1959), since their often spontaneous expressions really do give body to the film? And what about the film’s famed Charles Mingus solo? Improvising while watching a rough cut, did this incomparable jazzman accompany and supplement ‘a film by John Cassavetes,’ in the manner of those silent film ‘performances’? Or should we say that Cassavetes inserted Mingus’ haunting horn within an integrated orchestration of pictures and sounds, whose pointed ‘direction’ comes from him, the director, alone?” See Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 124.

These elements in their own paradoxical way serve as writing tools, while they are also the source and the end product of writing” (30). But in Cassavetes’s films, the prosthetic nature of the cigarette is expanded further. Not merely the tool of the writer, the cigarette is the tool of the actor, the human: it is an object to be reached for when the body is driven to the point of unintelligibility. At the same time that cigarettes put time into the body and thought into life, bodies project humanity onto the cigarette, rendering them, as Klein argues, bodies in their own right.

Mediated by the camera, celluloid, the script, the actor’s technique, alcohol, and cigarettes, etc., the bodies of Cassavetes’s films are revealed as “mechanical,” technological becomings. As a consequence of this, Deleuze’s theory of a cinema of bodies transforms into something like a “cinema of cinema.” Despite Cassavetes’s profession of emotional truth as his objective, his films are marked by a heightened level of theatricality which has, in fact, become codified: a style mimicked and reproduced by contemporary filmmakers for whom the qualifier “independent” is less related to financing than it is to aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> This is no paradox, however. Cassavetes’s rejection of realism by means of stylization amounts to an argument against authenticity. If there were such thing as an authentic self or authentic emotions, Cassavetes’s films suggest, then there would be no need for drama, no need for cinema, and no need for cigarettes. Before I analyze the economy of cigarettes in Cassavetes’s *Faces*, I want to take a closer look at Deleuze’s description of the cinema of bodies in order to unpack the relationship

---

<sup>16</sup> See especially Andrew Bujalski, Joe Swanberg, and other filmmakers associated with the Mumblecore movement. The homage paid to Cassavetes in the stylization of Vincent Gallo’s *Buffalo ’66* (1998) and *The Brown Bunny* (2003) Alex Ross Perry’s *The Color Wheel* (2011) and *Listen Up Philip* (2014) verge on pastiche.

between bodies and time that emerges from Cassavetes's films. For it is at the intersection of time and the body that cigarettes mediate and are mediated.

*What Is a Body?*

When Deleuze uses the term “body,” he does not always intend it to refer exclusively to the human corpus. In his philosophy of cinema, a “body” is simply a noun, as a “quality” is an adjective, and an “action” a verb. Deleuze's historical framework posits that the prewar cinema gave birth to the “movement-image” (“the shot . . . the mobile section of a duration—pure movement extracted from bodies or moving things—a temporal perspective or a modulation” [*Cinema 1* 22]). He categorizes the movement-image—the shot—into three different types, each corresponding to a different part of speech: to bodies correspond the perception-image; to qualities, the affection-image; and to actions, the action-image. As cinema, both art and philosophy, came of age, Deleuze argues, time succeeded movement as the dominant axis of the image.<sup>17</sup> While the classical cinema had access to sensory-motor situations (perception-images, affection-images, action-images)—that is, *indirect* images of time—the postwar cinema realized the direct time-image by creating purely optical and sound situations, which Deleuze calls “opsigns” and “sonsigns” (*Cinema 2* 41). This shift—from movement to time—was the result of “the crisis of the action-image” (3), the breakdown of the sensory-motor situations that defined the classical cinema, a historical crisis that Deleuze locates in the midst of the

---

<sup>17</sup> On cinema as philosophy, Deleuze writes, “Hitchcock produces a cinema of relation, just as English philosophy produced a philosophy of relation. In this sense he is, perhaps, at the juncture of the two cinemas, the classical that he perfects and the modern that he prepares. In all these respects, it is not sufficient to compare the great directors of the cinema with painters, architects or even musicians. They must also be compared with thinkers” (*Cinema 1* x).

Second World War. “Orson Welles is the first,” he writes, “he isolates a direct time-image and makes the image go over to the power of the false” (137).

It is in the volume dedicated to the postwar cinema—the crisis of the action-image, the emergence of the time-image—that Deleuze associates Cassavetes’s films most closely with the body. However, in his analysis of the movement-image, Cassavetes is discussed primarily in the context of the affection-image, that “part of the external movements that we ‘absorb,’ that we refract, and which does not transform itself into either objects of the subject; rather, they mark the coincidence of the subject and the object in pure quality” (*Cinema I* 65). While in the “cinema of poetry,” “the perception-image finds its status, as free indirect subjective, from the moment that it reflects its content in a camera-consciousness which has become autonomous” (74), the affection-image is freed when “the movement ceases to be that of translation in order to become movement of expression, that is to say quality, simple tendency stirring up an immobile element” (66). Deleuze argues that, over the course of his career, Cassavetes transformed the affection-image, usually rendered in the classical cinema as a close-up:

He began with films dominated by the face and the close-up (*Shadows, Faces*) constructed disconnected spaces, with a strong affective tenor (*The Killing of a Chinese Bookie, Too Late Blues*). He thus passed from one type of the affection-image to the other. This is because it was a matter of undoing space, no less as a function of a face which is abstracted from spatio-temporal co-ordinates than of an event which exceeds its actualisation [*sic*] in all ways, sometimes because it procrastinates and dissolves, sometimes on the contrary because it comes into view too quickly. (121)<sup>18</sup>

According to Deleuze, the affection-image is fundamental to Cassavetes’s work. It is worth noting, additionally, that the affection-image is the crucial third term in Deleuze’s

---

<sup>18</sup> The famous close-ups of Falconetti in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* are commonly cited as prime examples of the affection-image.

conception of the movement-image, the intermediary between perception and action. Affect is thus not a failure of the perception-action system, which re-establishes the relation between the two: “it is precisely in affection that the movement ceases to be that of translation in order to become movement of expression, that is to say quality, simple tendency stirring up an immobile element” (66).

Like the Neorealists, Cassavetes and the “New York school imposed a horizontal view of the city, at ground level, where events are born on the pavement and now only have an undifferentiated space as their location” (*Cinema* 1 121). In *Gloria*, Deleuze writes,

the heroine has long periods of waiting, but also has not got the time to look back, her pursuers are already there, as if they had been settled there the whole time, or rather as if the location itself had abruptly changed coordinates, was no longer the same location and yet at the same place as the any-space-whatever. This time, it is the empty space which is all of a sudden filled. . . . (121)

This time, he will later argue, is what Cassavetes “put[s] . . . into the body,” and with his abstractions and actualizations, Cassavetes—often mistakenly considered a realist—strays from Deleuze’s definition of realism, which demands that

Qualities and powers are no longer displayed in any-space-whatevers, no longer inhabit ordinary worlds, but are actualized directly in determinate, geographical, historical and social space-times. Affects and impulses now only appear as embodied in behaviour [*sic*], in the forms of emotions or passions which order and disorder it. (141)

While this model of realism “produced the universal triumph of American cinema, to the point of acting as a passport for foreign directors who contributed to its formation” (141), Deleuze credits Cassavetes, along with Altman, Martin Scorsese, and Sidney Lumet for a “new kind of image” that “one can attempt to identify in the post-war American cinema,

outside of Hollywood” (207). The description of this “new kind of image” appears in the final chapter of *Cinema 1*, on the “origin of the crisis.”

Deleuze identifies five qualities of this new image, which can be seen in the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism as well as the American underground.<sup>19</sup> First, the dispersive situation: “the image no longer refers to a situation which is globalizing or synthetic, but rather to one which is dispersive” (207). Second, the deliberately weak links: “the line or the fibre of the universe which prolonged events into one another, or brought about the connection of portions of space, has broken,” as in Altman’s *Quintet* (1979), in which, “[c]hance becomes the sole guiding thread” (207). “In the third place,” Deleuze writes, “the sensory-motor action or situation has been replaced by the stroll, the voyage and the continual return journey” (208). This “beat journey” or “urban voyage” can be seen in Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976), and Lumet’s *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) and *Serpico* (1973); in sum, he paraphrases Cassavetes saying, “it is a question of undoing space, as well as the story, the plot or the action” (208). The fourth quality Deleuze identifies in this new kind of image is the consciousness of clichés—namely, that the sets are formed by “*clichés*, and nothing else” (208)—and finally, the condemnation of plot, in which “Occult power is confused with its effects, its supports, its media, its radios, its televisions, its microphones: it now only operates through the ‘mechanical reproduction of images and of sounds’” (210). This fifth characteristic, Deleuze argues, “is the one which inspired post-war American cinema”

---

<sup>19</sup> Though Cassavetes’s status as a filmmaker “outside of Hollywood” is mostly uncontroversial, the inclusion of Scorsese, Altman, and Lumet here is somewhat suspect. “New Hollywood” might be a more appropriate description, though it is likely that Deleuze is using “Hollywood” not to describe the American film industry, but rather as shorthand for classical Hollywood cinema, as is often done.

(210). And though Deleuze cites as primary examples of this Lumet's *The Anderson Tapes* (1971), *Network* (1976), and *Prince of the City* (1981), as well as Altman's *Nashville* (1975), I will argue that the same could be said for Cassavetes's films, and especially *Faces*.<sup>20</sup>

Once the crisis has occurred, and the axis of cinema shifts from movement to time, Deleuze finds value in Cassavetes's ability to achieve a direct representation of time. While, on the one hand, time is necessarily an indirect representation ("the present is the sole direct time of the cinematographic image" [*Cinema 2* 34-5]), it is the task of a "direct cinema" to present time directly: "Not only is the image inseparable from a before and an after which belong to it, which are not to be confused with the preceding and subsequent images; but in addition it itself tips over into a past and future of which the present is now only an extreme limit, which is never given" (38). While the style of filmmaking historically credited to Jean Rouch and referred to as "direct cinema"—*cinéma vérité*—is not unique in its direct presentation of time (Welles was "the first," Deleuze reminds us), according to Deleuze, Rouch, Robert Flaherty, Pierre Perrault, Cassavetes, and Shirley Clarke all independently achieved a "new type of story" which, "preserved and sublimated an ideal of truth *which was dependent on cinematographic fiction itself*: there was what the camera sees, what the character sees, the possible antagonism and necessary resolution of the two" (149).

Cassavetes's affinity to the documentary cinema is not on account of any conception of "realism" at work in his films: "The break is not between fiction and reality, but in the new mode of story which affects them both" (150). Deleuze identifies this story

---

<sup>20</sup> Other appropriate examples of this abound—Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), in particular, comes to mind.



in Clarke's *The Connection* (1961) and *Portrait of Jason* (1967), as well as *Shadows* and *Faces*:

the character is continually passing the frontier between the real and the fictional (the power of the false, the story-telling function), the film-maker has to reach what the character was 'before' and will be 'after'; he has to bring together the before and the after in the incessant passage from one state to the other (the direct time-image); the becoming of the film-maker and of his character already belongs to a people, to a community, to a minority whose expression they practice and set free (free, indirect discourse). (153)

Cassavetes and Clarke film "the frontier," which "is equally crossed by the filmmaker in one direction and by the real character in the opposite direction," thus making time "an integral part of the film" (154). In the case of Cassavetes, "what constitutes part of the film is interesting oneself in the people more than in the film, in the 'human problems' more than in the 'problems of *mise-en-scène*,' so that the people do not pass over to the side of the camera without the camera having passed over to the side of the people" (154). Thus, the viewer of Cassavetes's and Clarke's films—as with Rouch, Perrault, Flaherty, et al.—becomes most interested in the "before and after" of the characters, which is the key to this kind of storytelling. By including the "before and after" of the characters, as Godard does with the doubled interviews in *Masculin Féminin* (1966), "the whole cinema becomes a free indirect discourse, operating in reality" (155). In bringing together "the before and after in a becoming, instead of separating them," these filmmakers create a new kind of time-image, the *series of time*, whose "paradox is to introduce an enduring interval in the movement itself" (155). If, in the cinema of bodies, that interval endures within bodies, as time put into the body—whose body? The body of the shot—that is, the object framed by the camera? The character's body? The actor's?

Eager as he is at times to present his philosophy of cinema as a coherent system of concepts, Deleuze's terminology is notoriously slippery, and by this point his use of "body" resembles less the loosely defined "object" or "noun" of his discussion of the movement-image.<sup>21</sup> Now, the word is deployed in the context of "character," "attitudes," "postures," and "gestures"—that is, he seems to be referring specifically to the human body. This transition in usage is exceedingly apparent in a discussion of Michelangelo Antonioni, where the body is discussed in relation to, if not the mind, then thought:

The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life. Life will no longer be made to appear before the categories of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life. (189)

Later, Deleuze will distinguish between the cinema of the bodies and the cinema of the brain (which Alain Resnais and Stanley Kubrick are shown to exemplify), making it clear that the body has become explicitly corporeal.<sup>22</sup> Yet, the confusion between the body of the character and the body of the actor remains: as Comolli argues, the "filmed body is a transformation, an alteration of the nonfilmed body" (qtd. in Kouvaros 163). In the case

---

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze states in the preface to the French edition of *Cinema 1* that he intended the two books as "a taxonomy, an attempt at the classification of images and signs" (xiv). As such, its two greatest influences are Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896)—where the term "movement-image" originates—and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, "a general classification of images and signs" which Deleuze sees as "undoubtedly the most complete and the most varied," comparing it to "Linnaeus's classifications in natural history, or even more with Mendeleev's table in chemistry" (xiv).

<sup>22</sup> He writes, "if the cinema of bodies referred in particular to one aspect of the direct time-image—series of time according to the before and the after, the cinema of the brain develops the other aspect—the order of time according to the coexistence of its own relations" (*Cinema 2* 207). It is worth noting that Deleuze argues that Antonioni's films belong to both the cinema of bodies and the cinema of the brain, which suggests that like most of Deleuze's classifications, these categories are not mutually exclusive.

of *Faces*: into whose body is time put, and by means of which body is thought put into life? Lynn Carlin's, or that of her character, Maria Forst? John Marley or Richard Forst? Gena Rowlands or Jeannie Rapp? Kouvaros argues that, "character is an attribute of the actor's body" (172). He cites Comolli, who writes:

The character reaches us as a bodily effect in the image. He may have been long worked over, defined, constituted in a script, but it is not the order of investigation but the order of exposition that is enounced in a film: first to appear will be the body, the body as an *empty mask*, and the character will only appear later and bit by bit as effects of this mask, effects in the plural, changing, unstable, never quite achieved, thwarted, incomplete. (172)

In Comolli's view, the body exists *before* the character does, and is thus an attribute of the actor (even if it is her primary attribute).

Deleuze agrees with Comolli, in that "the character is reduced to his own bodily attitudes, and what ought to result is the gest, that is, a 'spectacle,' a theatricalization or dramatization which is valid for all plots" (*Cinema 2* 192). Kouvaros spends several pages offering interpretations of Deleuze's use of "gest," a term developed greatly by Bertolt Brecht, who defines it not as "gesticulation," and not "a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes" qtd. in Kouvaros 103).<sup>23</sup>

Elaborating, Roland Barthes writes of gest as "a gesture or set of gestures (but never a gesticulation) in which a whole social situation can be read" (qtd. in Kouvaros 103).<sup>24</sup>

Reading Deleuze and Comolli alongside Barthes, the gest is a set of "overall attitudes" in

---

<sup>23</sup> Brecht continues, somewhat circularly: "A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men" (qtd. in Kouvaros 103).

<sup>24</sup> Kouvaros also cites Fredric Jameson, who adds that the gest "involves a whole process, in which a specific act—indeed, a particular event, situated in time and space, and affiliated with specific concrete individuals—is then somehow identified and renamed, associated with a larger and more abstract *type* of action in general, and transformed into something *exemplary*" (191).

which “a whole social situation can be read,” a spectacle/theatricalization/dramatization that is “valid for all plots,” and a “bodily effect in the image,” a product of the character being “reduced to his own bodily attitudes.” Kouvaros does not contribute much to the conversation in his attempt at a summary: “For Cassavetes, then, the gest is not just about making attitudes visible. It is also about reconfiguring the very conditions of scenic visibility: turning the metaphorical into the literal and bringing the realm of fantasy into collision with the everyday” (192). The salient point is rather that it is through embodying a character fully, incorporating a before and after that are fully realized in the bodily attitudes of the actor, which are subsequently captured by the camera, subsumed into the cinematic apparatus, where they become the story. The character is not the story, but the character creates the story.

This sounds a lot like method acting, which Cassavetes studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in the late 1940s, and which he practiced as the director of his own acting workshop in the mid-1950s, where *Shadows* was initially developed and rehearsed. However, the focus here is not the individual actor’s embodiment of her character, but rather the cumulative gest that results from the mass of bodily attitudes. In becoming spectacle, the point of the cinema of bodies is “less to tell a story than to develop and transform bodily attitudes” (*Cinema 2* 193). Deleuze refers to *A Woman Under the Influence*, *Gloria*, and *Love Streams*, which ask, “How can one exist, personally, if one cannot do so all alone? How can something be made to pass through these packets of body, which are at once both obstacle and means?” (193). “As a general rule,” Deleuze concludes, “Cassavetes keeps only the parts of space connected to bodies; he composes space with disconnected bits solely linked by a gest. This is association of

images being replaced by formal linkage of attitudes” (193). So, while bodies play a fundamental role in Cassavetes’s cinema, they do not constitute what his films are “about”—or, as Deleuze would have it, what makes them “great.” Bodies, instead, are the medium through which direct time is encapsulated, bringing thought into life by means of Cassavetes’s camera.

Asking “what can a body do?,” Kouvaros frames the gest as a “field of affect.” In Cassavetes’s films,

the bodies of the characters bear the weight of time figured either as a dilemma of aging—time running out, the fear of being left behind, no longer knowing how to act—or as something that constantly slips from our fingers and disturbs any sense of the present. This anxiety over time is conveyed primarily through the various attitudes and postures adopted by the characters: overwhelmed, agitated, collapsed. In Cassavetes’s films alcohol, word games, flights of fancy, even ghostly conjurings are part of a field of affect that questions the body’s stability yet also serves as the means by which the characters seek to make a break from or disrupt the routines in which they are caught. (173)<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Kouvaros is not unaware of the kind of film-by-film intertextuality that this assertion implies. Addressing the notion of star persona, he cites Miriam Hansen, who describes it as “diegesis and discourse, between an address relying on the identification with fictional characters and an activation of the viewer’s familiarity with the star on the basis of production and publicity intertexts” (29). In Cassavetes’s work, this intertextuality is usually centered around the figure of Rowlands, whose omnipresence in Cassavetes’s films becomes something of an inside joke. For instance, the Stephen Foster song “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair” is sung at some point in almost all of his films, and the various meanings it conveys change as it is sung in different contexts. Rowlands’s character in *Faces* is named Jeannie, and in *Opening Night* she plays an actress named Myrtle, but whose character (in the play within the film) is named Virginia, Rowlands’s birth name, of which “Gena” is a diminutive. Similarly, in *Husbands*, Rowlands plays the wife of her own husband’s character, Gus (though she is only seen in the introductory photo montage). At one point in the film, Gus calls his wife on a payphone and refers to himself as her “Golden Greek.” Since there is no reason at this point in the film that the viewer should identify Gus as Greek, it begs the question of whether “Golden Greek” is an off-screen pet name Rowlands had for Cassavetes, who was born to Greek immigrants and spent much of his childhood in Greece.

Alcohol is important to Kouvaros's reading. He refers to Gaston Bachelard, who insists that alcohol does not "simply [situate] our mental potentialities. In fact, it creates these potentialities. It incorporates itself, so to speak, with that which it is striving to express itself. It appears that alcohol is a creator of language" (181). It is clear that alcohol—like "word games, flights of fancy, even ghostly conjurings"—are not mere auxiliaries to the bodily attitudes resulting in gest, or a field of affect. They produce this affect, and character, along with the body, thus functioning as bodies themselves, linked rhizomatically to the human bodies of the actors.

The smoking of a cigarette is nothing if not ritual, attitude, affect, and gesture. The act contains both suspension (a break) and stylization (a pose). The cigarette not only provides the smoker with a certain kind of physicality, but puts time into the body by the imposition of a schedule, and puts thought into life by means of the inhalation of smoke, the cinematic shorthand for interiority, as Klein suggests. In effect, cigarettes are so adept at producing character, that the character can be seen to escape the body which develops it, returning to the cigarette itself, utilizing the body as a medium. As Deleuze's analysis argues, it is the stylization of the body that produces subjects, but the subjects produced are no less mediated than the bodies that produce them. Klein writes that the cigarette is not "just an object one holds in one's own hand, it must be considered a subject, a creature alive with a body and a spirit of its own" (10). Deleuze argues that among the most significant transformations to occur in the postwar cinema is that "Occult power is confused with its effects, its supports, its media, its radios, its televisions, its microphones: it now only operates through the 'mechanical reproduction of images and of sounds'" (*Cinema I* 210). By means of the cigarette, Cassavetes transforms the cinema

of bodies into a cinema of cinema, an endless mediation of mediation disguised in the trappings of the human: the timeless drama of love and sex, family and friendship, solitude and pain, youth and age, illness and death.

### *Cigarette Break*

Deleuze argues that *Faces* “is constructed on the attitudes of the bodies presented as faces going as far as the grimace, expressing waiting, fatigue, vertigo and depression” (*Cinema* 2 192). Lethem’s analysis is not far off. He writes, “Cassavetes is film’s Bob Dylan. . . . *Faces* is his ‘Like a Rolling Stone’” (“Two or Three Things” 114), describing the film as both “nothing more than a flash-frozen record of the condition of the marriage of its two main characters” and “a voracious ribald mugging of its viewers’ defensive assumptions . . . about how much a film is allowed to make them feel about men and women and daily life, about the expression or suppression of passionate impulses in a marriage or in a house or in a nightclub or in America in 1965” (109-10).<sup>26</sup> Both *Faces* and Dylan’s most famous song

make a cascading, exuberant attack on the certainties of the audience, both consist of a declaration of revulsion, by the authors, of their subjects . . . one which evolves, uncannily, into a declaration of freedom and renewed possibility on those same subjects’ devastated behalves. And both were delivered in the spirit of a deliberate formal blasphemy (by use of excessive length—of scene, and song—and excessive force, excessive bile) against the formats intended, in their day, to contain them. (114)

---

<sup>26</sup> Carney credits the title of the film to Carlin, who came up with it “after viewing an edit.” Other working titles included *The Marriage*, *Inside-Out*, and *The Dynosaurs*, the last of which “occurred to Cassavetes in July 1966, only after he edited some of the footage of the women’s post-disco gathering (where they and Chettie make ‘dinosaur’ faces at each other). It was not merely an illusion to the ferocity, mechanicalness and brutality of the characters, but to Cassavetes’ belief that they represented an evolutionary wrong turn somewhere in American history, a genetic mistake that would result in their own inevitable extinction” (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 136).

Most significantly, Lethem argues, Cassavetes and Dylan “rely on confusing or surprising their artistic collaborators with sudden reassignments (key changes, new pages in the script) in order to overcome recording mediums which tend to freeze out spontaneity” (115). In the case of *Faces*, this exaggeration of cinematic conventions to the point of critique results in “insane cavorting . . . rituals of drink and song which seem a barely sufficient stand-in for all human yearning, for sex and conversation, possibly for food and air and water” (110). The film’s “pure gibberish and singsong—compulsive unfunny jokes, distorted repetitive song fragments, and hideously banal male pecking-order riffs” lead Lethem to conclude that whatever meaning is to be located in *Faces*, like all of Cassavetes’s films, “is in the faces themselves, and the stances of the bodies as they reel through these hallways, stances of grief and longing the jokes cover and the bodies uncover” (115).<sup>27</sup>

Kouvaros echoes these sentiments as well, arguing that, “a key aspect of Cassavetes’s work is an acknowledgement of the limits of comprehensibility” (26). This apparent incomprehensibility is not limited to the seeming inanity of his scripts or the

---

<sup>27</sup> Throughout his essay, Lethem approaches a description of Cassavetes’s oeuvre by means of analogy. As a writer, Cassavetes reminds Lethem of Stephen Dixon, Grace Paley, and Don DeLillo because of the “exacting and persuasive (and funny) . . . musical irrationality” and “disguised artifice” of his language (“Two or Three Things” 115). “But,” he notes, “the films evade capture in nets of language, and sometimes, in their characters’ inarticulateness, seem *anti-verbal*,” concluding, “This is Beckett or Pinter stuff, really. But the material arises out of a laboratory of actorly and photographic experimentation, and is suffused with a fondness for homely gestures of hesitation, of embarrassment. So the craft disguises itself as happenstance disclosure” (115). The world of Cassavetes’s films is akin to “Charlie Parker, the blues, jazz, beatnik poetry, ‘If you have to ask, you’ll never know,’ Miles Davis with his back to the audience . . . Jackson Pollack, Norman Mailer’s *White Negro*, and the cult of ‘hip,’ all the restless-in-the-fifties romanticism that can seem in retrospect so mannered and indulgent but was in the context of its moment an act, an acting out, likely as necessary as a drowning man’s thrashing to the surface for a gulp of air” (114).



chaotic framing of his shots, but extends to the bodies of the actors themselves. For Kouvaros, the role of alcohol in Cassavetes's films is interesting not because it "carries significance in a social or moral sense," but because it is a "privileged agent for an inebriation that dislocates the body's tenuous stability and thereby affects the presentation of the drama" (xviii). Cassavetes's bodies, it turns out, are as elusive as his language. Gilles Mouëllic argues that in Cassavetes's films,

one always has the impression that the bodies want to get out of the frame. There are constant "deframings," as if the characters are trying to flee a frame that is too confining for them. . . . [T]here's always this impression that the camera operator is chasing after the actors' bodies in order to keep them in frame. So we have a sense here of a cinema built on the physical frame and bodily energy. (qtd. in Kouvaros 36)

This leads Kouvaros to conclude that in films like *Faces*,

These refractory bursts of impulse, sound, and action that work their way across the scene create the sense of a fluid and often volatile social space that cannot easily be controlled or organized around a single personality or point of view. They also direct us toward a conception of cinematic representation where the emphasis lies not on dramatic unity and balance but on a constant movement of revision, hesitation, and rupture. Lyotard refers to this model of cinema as "acinema." Instead of creating well-defined situations, and identities, acinema gives rise to the "most intense agitation." (36-7)

Though, as Kouvaros writes, "emotion is always dispersed across the entire scene" in Cassavetes's films (108), and "crises of emotion and identity are never located or fixed within individuals," but "configured in the unstable places and moments of contact among the characters" (111), in *Faces*, the human face remains ground zero for an "acinema" in which "[o]ccult power is confused with its effects."

And the face can do many things.



**Figure 1**

It can laugh.



**Figure 2**

It can cry.



**Figure 3**

It can speak with anger . . .



**Figure 4**

. . . or tenderness.



Figure 5

It can drink.



Figure 6

And it can vomit.

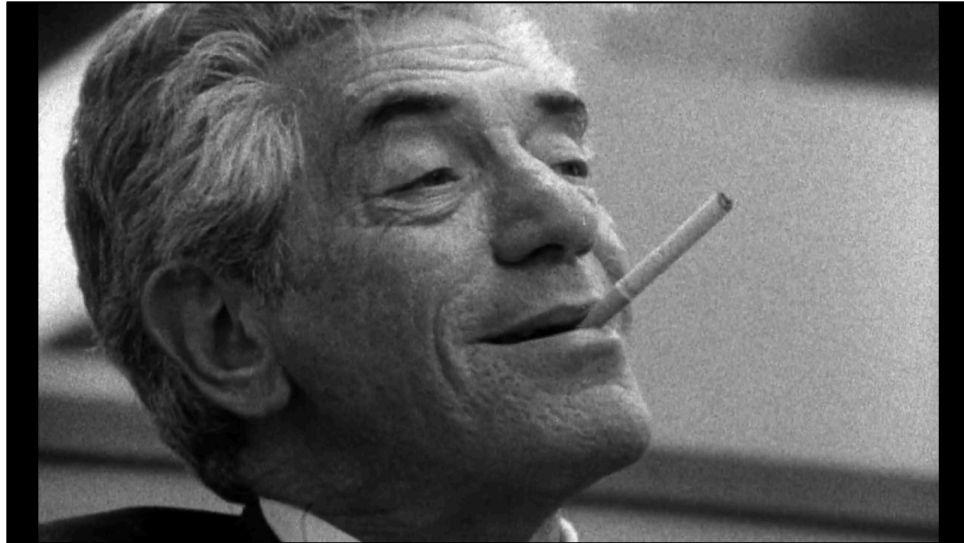


Figure 7

It can smoke. This final image appears near the beginning of *Faces*, when Marley's Richard Forst ("Dickie," as he's called by Rowlands's Jeannie) is first introduced to the viewer. A high-powered business executive, Richard storms into his office, where he is greeted by three female secretaries, one of whom attempts to give him his correspondence ("Don't bother me with that stuff"), and offers him coffee, which he refuses, adding, "You look lousy." He takes a seat and she places a cigarette in his mouth as he orders her to "Get me a list of my maladies." Cigarette in mouth, he revises his desired state of embodiment: "You better get me coffee after all, I don't wanna yawn in his face." She lights the cigarette for him, and the camera cuts to each of the secretaries' faces in close-up. "Will you take this thing out of my mouth?" he barks as the secretary returns with a cup of coffee, and the cigarette is replaced with another drug. Richard's clients arrive; they greet each other and make chitchat ("What are you going to sell us this time, Harry?" "Money!"). A film projector warms up, and the clients begin to sell their product: "We came up with an impressionistic document that shocks," "It's honest, but it's a good piece of itself," "It's a shot in the dark, but it's strong and it's attractive."

“It better be better than the last one, Harry,” Richard warns. The film rolls, revealing a title card: *FACES*.<sup>28</sup>

The self-referentiality of this opening scene is worthy of comment for a variety of reasons. First, the dialogue constitutes a jab at the Hollywood executives who care only for financial gain (though, we learn later, Richard’s actual business is insurance) and a playful apprehension of Cassavetes’s critics.<sup>29</sup> Second, a technological nexus of intoxication that will be important to the rest of the film is presented here first: cigarettes, bodies, coffee, and film are interchanged as instruments of making money (there is no alcohol, yet, but it is still the morning, and there will be plenty later on). That is, the economy of the film is here established. Finally, by presenting the title card of *Faces* within the diegesis of the film, the “before and after” of the characters is hinted at by the film’s very structure. The content of the film that Richard and his clients watch is never explained, though if one were to assume that it is, in fact, *Faces*, then one must accept that the character of Richard, as developed by the body of John Marley, is a separate entity than that same character as it exists in the film-within-the-film. Not only is

---

<sup>28</sup> Robert Frank’s 1969 film, *My Brother and Me*, shares many similarities with Cassavetes’s work, including an early scene in which an audience is seen heckling the very film that we, Frank’s “real” audience, are about to watch. Though he isn’t mentioned by Deleuze, Frank’s films would surely not be out of place were they to be included among the cinema of bodies.

<sup>29</sup> Richard’s line (“It better be better than the last one, Harry”) can be read as a reference to critics’ dismissal of *Shadows*. Though, technically, *Faces* is Cassavetes’s fourth directorial effort, having directed two studio pictures after *Shadows: Too Late Blues* (1961) and *A Child Is Waiting* (1963). These two films, along with *Big Trouble*, are usually elided from Cassavetes’s oeuvre in support of his mythological status as “the father of American independent cinema.” Of course, as Michel Foucault reminds us, the notion of the oeuvre is itself a myth (27). See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 2010).

Richard's body a different body from that of Marley, it is a different body from scene to scene, shot to shot.

After the title card, Cassavetes cuts to Rowlands in close-up as Jeannie, a young prostitute whom Richard and one of his business partners, Freddie Draper (Fred Draper), pick up in a bar aptly named the Loser's Club. Already drunk in the afternoon, they trade nips at a flask for car keys. Freddie is left with the responsibility of driving to Jeannie's house, where the film's longest scene begins: a macho competition for Jeannie's affections (which Richard ultimately wins), full of the "pure gibberish and singsong" which Lethem uses to sum up the entire film.<sup>30</sup> When Richard returns home hours later (nearly twenty minutes of screen time), his wife Maria (Carlin) is on the phone. She warns him that she feels "very bitchy tonight"; "That makes two of us," he retorts. He asks her for a cigarette, but she's all out. "I smoked myself silly today," she says, and he calls her a "conformist." As he searches the apartment for cigarettes, the network of technologies introduced in the opening scene returns. Where Jeannie's apartment was a space of drunken flirtation and showmanly courtship, the mood of the Forst home wavers between tension, unsurfaced rage, and playful affection. "Why don't you take me to a movie?" Maria asks; "Why doesn't somebody fill these stupid boxes?" Richard answers. "You smoke too much. There's a Bergman movie in the neighborhood"; "I don't feel like getting depressed tonight." "But you always like foreign films"; "Where the hell are the cigarettes?" "There's nothing on television tonight," she shouts. "I'm hungry," he replies. "You're always hungry," she combats; "That's because I always come home at dinner

---

<sup>30</sup> Carney notes that much of the "singsong" and dance routines performed by Draper and Marley in this scene were developed by Draper and Cassavetes years earlier, when the two were roommates at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 174-5).

time.” They put up their fists, and she tells him, “I love it when you look like that.”

“Look like what? Tell me and I’ll write it down.” He “smells like a brewery.”

This ambivalent mood is maintained as they sit down to dinner. They argue about Freddie (“He cheats on his wife”) and Maria pours Richard beers. Magically, a cigarette appears, and while Richard smokes, the couple seems happy. They joke about cunnilingus, but Maria would rather go to the movies than have sex. Dinner is over, and they part ways. Richard goes to the billiard room, and a flashback ensues: the two are in bed, laughing uncontrollably.<sup>31</sup> “What’s black and white and red all over?” Richard asks. “A newspaper,” Maria offers. “No,” Richard giggles, “a zebra’s ass!” Maria grows tired of what can best be described as Richard’s popsicle-stick jokes, turning away from him. “You don’t think I’m very funny, do you?” he asks. “You’re not all that funny.” They say goodnight, and the camera frames each of their faces, individually, in close-up. The flashback ends, Richard finds Maria in the kitchen and tells her that he wants a divorce. She laughs; *now* he is funny. But he’s not kidding: he calls Jeannie on the phone, arranges to meet her at the Loser’s Club. “I’ll send for my clothes in the morning . . . I’m on the phone.”

Like the proverbially absent father who steps out for a pack of cigarettes and never returns, what Richard wants is not to be found at home. When he arrives at the Loser’s Club, it’s crowded and lively. He sees an attractive young woman smoking at the bar, but it’s not Jeannie (though she may a call girl as well).<sup>32</sup> The scene cuts to Jeannie’s

---

<sup>31</sup> To my knowledge, this is the only flashback to occur in any of Cassavetes’s films.

<sup>32</sup> Klein notes the historical association between cigarettes and prostitutes in his analysis of Prosper Merimée’s novella *Carmen* (1845), upon which Georges Bizet’s 1875 opera is based: “*Lorettes*, more generally called *grisettes*, were the first women who



apartment, where her and another young woman, Stella (Elizabeth Deering), are entertaining other guests: Jim McCarthy (Val Avery), another middle-aged businessman, and his younger associate, Joe Jackson (Gene Darfler). Jim is more aggressive than either Richard or Freddie were before, and Jeannie runs to her bedroom, put off by the awkwardness of the situation: “What do we want with two whores?” Jim asks, gauchely stating the obvious. Jim follows Jeannie, apologizing, and asks her for a cigarette. Women—the secretary, Maria, Jeannie—are the keepers of cigarettes in *Faces*. Jim sits on the bed, lights up, and casts Jeannie in the role of therapist: “I’ve got a son almost as old as you.”<sup>33</sup> She puts her head on his shoulder as if to console him, and the camera zooms on her face. Abruptly, though, Jim leaves the bedroom, shuts himself in the bathroom, stubs out the cigarette and musses his hair. He returns to the living room, shouting, “Hey, you’re alright Ginny baby!,” suggesting to the others that he and Jeannie just had sex. In another close-up, it’s clear that Jeannie is surprised and confused by this turn of events. She moves to leave the apartment, but Jim stops her, accusing her of “making a scene.” Violently, he forces a kiss, as if to confirm that her proffering of a cigarette was in fact a valid substitute for intercourse.

---

dared to be seen publicly smoking cigarettes. . . . The cigarette gives the *gris* to *grisette*: the smoky grayness at the heart of every *gris-erie* (intoxication), which poisons as it elevates—half menace, half mourning. Killing time, smoking creates another time, a funny atmosphere momentarily outside of ordinary duration, whose dreamy vanishing is postponed within the gray parenthesis of the time it takes to smoke a fag. The lowliest hovel is briefly transcended by rising cigarette smoke, elevating all who are humbled to the degree, to the distinction, of a ghostly, posthumous detachment” (116).

<sup>33</sup> On the historical relationship between the woman-as-therapist, the figure of the prostitute, and media technologies, see Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, as well as William Lindsay Gresham’s 1947 novel, *Nightmare Alley* (New York: New York Review, 2010).

The doorbell rings and Richard arrives, and yet another male pecking-order routine begins, this time with Richard in the role of interloper. Richard and Jim size each other up: they joke, they fight, and Richard comes out on top by virtue of keeping his cool. Finally, Joe observes, “I think that Dickie would like to be alone with Jeannie,” and he, Richard, and Stella take their time exiting the apartment. “I thought they’d never leave,” Jeannie exhales, but Richard is still in the mood for making jokes. She shushes him, but he continues: “Peter Piper picked a pack of . . .” “I can’t, Dickie,” she interrupts, “I’m exhausted.” They kiss, and she mothers him, offering him a bath. She massages his feet, puts on a record, and they dance. As their bodies come in closer contact, no cigarettes are offered, and none are smoked.

For the male characters in *Faces*, the cigarette is an object to be taken from women when sex is not an option. It thus serves as a way of killing time, putting time into the body. But it is also a body in its own right, a surrogate body, a phallic consolation prize: at home, neither sex nor cigarettes were available to Richard; at Jeannie’s, both are on the menu, and so there is no need to smoke (as there was for Jim). As Cassavetes turns his camera to the “female” portion of the film, following Maria and her friends on the same night that Richard spends at Jeannie’s, the cigarette economy is fully fleshed out. Maria and three middle-aged women are led by a maître d’ to a table at a bar not unlike the Loser’s Club. The camera catches them in close-up as they drink and smoke incessantly with all eyes on the dance floor; it spins, intoxicated, as young couples do the mashed potato to funky R&B. One young mod catches the attention of the women, as they do him. Chet (Cassel) puts on a private show for the women as Maria giggles, eying him coquettishly. Embarrassed, she denies him a dance—once, and then twice. A slightly

older, plumper companion, Florence (Dorothy Gulliver) agrees to cut a rug, and Maria exhales smoke as bodies move.

Chet joins the women as they return to the Forst home, an R&B record and a cheap bottle of Ruffino in tow. They are all drunk, but Florence is the drunkest. Florence and Chet want music and dancing; Maria shuts off the stereo, preferring cigarettes and conversation. Chet is all about “expressing yourself”: “Take a guy my age. I gotta have some sort of release. I can’t rob a bank. . . . Just make it, baby!” The camera is obsessed with the cigarette smoke, and as Chet and Maria trade flirtatious glances, the other women trade barbs at their husbands, sending Chet into fits of robust laughter: “You guys are too much, man!” Unlike them, and their (impressions of their) husbands, Chet is a man of action. He starts to dance, singing the refrain, “Put on the red meat, baby,” begging the women to join in. Louise (Freddie’s wife, played by Joanne Moore Jordan) and Billy Mae (Darlene Conley) have had enough and storm out. Florence, enamored of Chet, demands dances and kisses, to which he gentlemanly acquiesces. Maria’s chain-smoking becomes a visual embodiment of her impatience for Florence to leave, so that she and Chet—like Jeannie, a youthful blonde—can get down to business. Florence turns maudlin, and Chet agrees to drive her home in Maria’s car. Maria turns out all of the lights, save one at the back door, waiting in the darkness. A shriek—then silhouettes, laughter. He is back, and he wrestles her to the ground. He runs up the stairs after her. They meet in the bedroom. The camera shows their two faces in close-up as they consider each other. He strokes her neck, inches forward, kisses her breast. He picks her up, they writhe together, kiss. He puts her down on the bed, laughs. Close-up of her, lying back on the bed, as his body comes forward; he kisses her, she turns her head, brings it back: “let

me change.” She gets up, leaves. He undresses on his back, singing like a child. She brushes her hair. While he is naked, she wears old pajamas. Reluctantly, she gives herself to him, turning her head away from his. We see his wolfish eyes as he kisses her; the camera is close enough to Chet’s face that we see his pores. She murmurs: “The lights. I don’t like lights.” He pulls the blanket over them.

The next morning, in Jeannie’s apartment. She locates Richard in the bathroom, naked, and tells him that he has a beautiful body. She brings him breakfast on a platter and he tells her that she’s a lousy cook, “voluptuous” though she may be. She picks up emptied cigarette packs and beer cans and returns to the bedroom, only to find him getting dressed: “Well, that’s a negative attitude,” she says. She offers him a cigarette, to which he replies, “Oh no, I quit.” “I don’t smoke either,” she admits, “Never did. Don’t I get credit for that?” No, Richard tells her. She dwells on the night before, though it clearly meant little to him; she craves domesticity, the very thing he sought to escape in her embrace. She cries over the trashcan, emptying his unfinished breakfast platter, singing “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair,” the film’s refrain, as he ties his tie, readying to leave. She forces a smile at his Peter Piper routine, and the camera zooms in, then cuts to Richard, doing it again.

Back at the Forst home, Maria lies prostrate on the bedroom floor, and a shirtless Chet runs to the telephone and asks for the “Emergency Rescue Squad.” There is a toppled bottle of pills on the floor. He turns on the shower, and carries her under the water, holding her. No response. He sets her down in the tub and runs downstairs, procures a mug, fills it with water and spices (pepper? cinnamon?). She is still unconscious, but he forces it down her throat: “Come on bitch, drink this!” He carries her

to the toilet and forces his fingers down her throat, inducing vomiting. The soundtrack of the film cuts out, leaving only the image, silent faces of agony and fear. He smiles slightly as she coughs. He carries her back to the bed, where she opens her eyes, and he begs her to stay awake. "I don't want you to die." He holds her eyes open, slaps her—two, four, eight, ten times. She covers her face, crying—he laughs. "Cry! That's life, honey!" He rifles in drawers, search for more pill bottles to flush. She's deliriously weak as he offers her coffee; she tries to push him away, but he's too strong. "I'm cold," she coughs, and he covers her with blankets. He lights a cigarette for each of them—his first onscreen—and snuggles up next to her. "I like you," he consoles, "I caused you a lot of pain and a lot of grief, and I almost killed you." This turns into a philosophical rant: "I'm a nice guy, you're a nice guy . . . Nobody has time to be vulnerable to each other, so we just go on . . . I'm so mechanical, it's absolutely ludicrous how mechanical we can be." He imitates a robot and tells her that he hates her. Their cigarette smoke fills the frame, which then cuts to the driveway, where Richard has pulled up in his car, dancing and singing to himself as he approaches the front door.

Richard runs up the stairs and stops short at the bedroom. A struggle ensues as Chet jumps out the window shirtless, sprinting away. Richard stays at the window, looking over at Maria, a wet-haired and smeared-mascara Joan of Arc.



**Figure 8**

He shakes her head and mockingly calls her a “noble adultress.” He finds the bottle of pills on the bathroom floor and scolds her. “All I have to do is find that ten-year-old rapist and kill him,” he shouts as he descends the stairs. She follows him halfway as he walks to the kitchen: “You couldn’t get laid in bed so you came down to the kitchen?” he sneers. He races back, threatening violence; he throws her against the wall. She cries, slaps him twice: “I hate my life. I just don’t love you.”

The camera follows Richard as he walks down the stairs into the kitchen. He finds a carton of Marlboros on top of the refrigerator, retrieves a pack, and puts a cigarette in his mouth. He sits on the stairs. “Throw me a cigarette, please,” Maria says. He throws her the pack. “A light?” He throws her the lighter. She lights up, throws it back. She coughs, he lights. He coughs; both of them cough. “That smoke will tie up your lungs,” he advises, “Ouch.” He turns his back toward the other wall. The camera frames them—her at the top of the stairs facing right, him at the bottom facing left, both smoking. She switches sides, and then he walks up the stairs, stepping over her. “Goodnight.” She sits and smokes as a Charlie Smalls song fades in (“Never Felt This Way Before”).



Figure 9

She gets up to go to the bedroom, and he passes her by, reclaiming his previous seat on the stairs. She returns, cigarette in mouth, and he blocks her way. She mutters, “excuse me,” and walks past him (and the camera). He walks back up the stairs. The frame freezes, end credits roll. The strange choreography of the film’s ending portrays cigarettes as the antidote of the refusal of both language and embodiment to provide comprehensibility. Richard and Maria do not know what to say to each other to the same extent that they do not know what to do with their bodies: whether to embrace or to leave, whether to get on with their lives or go back to bed. So they smoke. The cigarettes, it turns out, have no meaning to offer. Nor does the film.

### *Mechanical Man*

Just as Cassavetes’s characters are constantly trying to escape the frame of the camera lens, as Mouëllic argues, so are they embroiled in an unending attempt to escape the confines of their bodies. This is expressed in *Faces*’s final scene through the aimless crisscrossing of Richard and Maria as well as the fiendish inhalation of cigarette smoke.

Jeannie's inability to truly connect with Richard's "beautiful" body is signaled by his refusal of a cigarette; Chet's failure as a lover is indicated by his late, desperate adoption of the habit. Indeed, every character and every body in *Faces* is just that: a failure. The duration of the film elapses over the course of twenty-four hours, but in the end, those twenty-four hours may as well have never occurred—*Faces* concludes with a striking circularity. Jeannie gave her body to Richard—out of love, perhaps, but he failed to reciprocate, and we see no money change hands between them. Both Freddie and Jim fail to cheat on their wives, and while Richard succeeds, any boost in his ego that may have resulted is surely diminished when he returns home to find himself a cuckold. Chet fails to show Maria a truly good time, just as she fails to kill herself, and the Forsts' marital experiment comes raining down upon them. They are no longer young, and cannot be—the viewer can only assume that Richard will once again go to work and come home drunk, where there will be yet another fight. The fate of Cassavetes's characters is to relive *Faces* for eternity, without epiphany or resolution—a *Groundhog Day* with no Bill Murray.

David Lenson considers the addiction to cigarettes as a "template addiction," writing of nicotine as a "transparent" drug that does not distort cognition at all, and, if anything, seems not to inhibit but to stimulate intellectual activity" (36). Because "smoking cigarettes entails a suspension of regard for one's own life and health, and to some extent the lives and health of others," the "sector of intellect that nicotine stimulates is the one that thrives on the 'pleasure of thinking' rather than on ethics" (36-7). Noting the commonplace "cigarette after sex" and "cigarette after the meal," Lenson argues that "nicotine's principal impact on desire is to create the desire for more of itself, so that any



interruption of that reflexive appetite, even for food or sex, has to be marked by a ceremonial return to it” (37). The cigarette is thus “a chameleon willing to play any drug role that the user casts it in” (37). Throughout *Faces*, Cassavetes’s characters are seen to project their desires and frustrations onto their cigarettes, the puffing of smoke becoming something akin to a film-within-a-film. As such, cigarettes become a signifier of absence, and the absence of meaning in particular. The transparency of cigarettes is thus the same as the transparency of Cassavetes’s film: there is no meaning, only style; there is no content, only form. Though Kael’s reduction of *Faces* to a “Mea culpa” was intended as an insult, it appears to be Cassavetes’s greatest accomplishment, an illustration of cinema as a template addiction, not a projection, but a screen on which to project.

“Nobody has time to be vulnerable to each other, so we just go on,” Chet tells Maria, providing the film’s thesis statement. He refers to this behavior as “mechanical,” and it is, but in a sense more complicated than he seems to fully comprehend.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> The “mechanical man” routine Chet performs for Carlin, Carney notes, “came into the film in the middle of a take when Cassavetes saw the scene getting too serious and abstract and unexpectedly yelled out to Cassel to do it while the camera was rolling” (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes* 175). Like the routines Marley and Draper perform in the first scene in Jeannie’s apartment, the “mechanical man” was something of an inside joke of Cassavetes’s and Cassel’s. Interestingly, Cassel appeared as Jensen in a 1966 episode of the TV program *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, titled, “The Mechanical Man.”

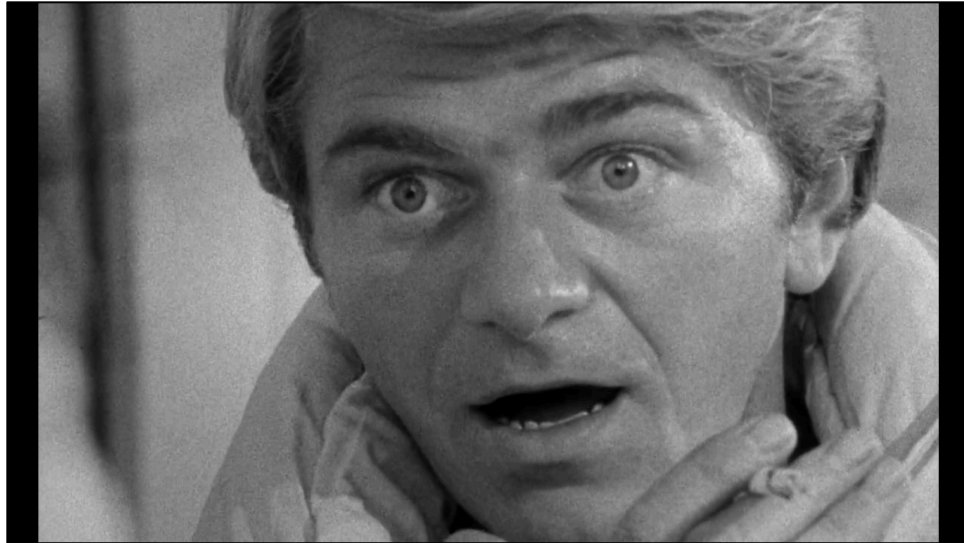


Figure 10

“Give me a body then,” Deleuze writes, is the formula of philosophical reversal, explaining that the body “is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself,” but is now what “forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life” (*Cinema 2* 189). “To think,” he continues, “is to learn what a non-thinking body is capable of, its capacity, its postures. It is through the body . . . that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought” (189). *Faces* confirms that there is nothing more to life than “the attitudes of the body, its postures” (“Cry! That’s life, honey!” Chet reminds us), and yet, those attitudes derive not from the body, but elsewhere. As such, all bodily desires—libido, but also hunger, thirst, addiction, warmth—remain insatiable. The characters learn nothing, and are doomed to repeat the same mistakes (if they can even be called “mistakes”). In the final scene of the film, Cassavetes puts the time of middle-age—if not all of human life—into the bodies of Carlin and Marley: sitting, standing, walking back and forth, aimlessly, to and fro.

While the cigarette, for Klein, represents thought in literature and film, in *Faces*—as well as all of Cassavetes films, perhaps—it signifies the inability of both

language and embodiment to signify. That is, if the cigarette can be said to represent anything it is absence, the thwarting of desire. The cigarette is both transparency and medium, immediate and hypermediated, referring the viewer to the body and back to itself: inhale, exhale, repeat, ad nauseam. Kouvaros is correct when he writes that in Cassavetes's films "emotion is always entirely dispersed across the entire scene" (108); in *Faces*, it is dispersed by means of the cigarette smoke which floats across frames, spaces, and time, constituting new bodies. One could say of the smoking body what Comolli says of the filmed body, substituting one technology for the other: "Once [given a cigarette], I belong to the [cigarette] by which I become [smoker]. The [smoking] body is a transformation, an alteration of the [non-smoking] body. We belong to the [cigarettes] that we [smoke] . . . it's not they who belong to us." It should be no surprise, then, that the filmic body of *Faces*—the reels of celluloid—is held together on both ends by the imprint of cigarette smoke.

Though Carney acknowledges the ways in which Cassavetes's films resist essentialism, he cannot help but essentialize the filmmaker's work:

while the visionary/symbolic tradition [of cinema] takes us up into our heads, Cassavetes calls us to the reality of our bodies. His truth is embodied, enacted, performed. Performed truth is different from metaphorical, essential, or subjective truth because it is anchored in the body. In Cassavetes' [*sic*] work, meaning is not brought into existence intellectually or abstractly. It is not located in the heart or the mind (and thereby able to be communicated by a lighting effect or a musical strain on the soundtrack). It is not visionary (in either the optical or the imaginative sense). It is enacted in a practical expressive transaction between two or more characters. (*The Films of John Cassavetes* 13)

But, as I hope to have shown, there is very little that is "practical" about these transactions, and if Cassavetes's films reveal anything about the human body, it is that it is emphatically not "real." On the contrary, the bodies of *Faces* are constructs,

technological assemblages whose “[O]ccult power is confused with [their] effects” (*Cinema I* 210). The ultimate argument of *Faces* is that the task of the body, like language, is to fail to signify. Body, text, cigarette, film: all are media, representations of representation. Cassavetes offers theatricality and style as alternatives to authenticity and truth, his version of realism is hyperreal. That is to say, reality can only be achieved through artificial means, and ultimately, artificiality is the only reality that there is. This is an idea that William S. Burroughs takes a step further when he, like Dylan, goes electric.

## Chapter 4

### Revolution 23

*Number 9, number 9, number 9, number 9, number 9, number 9*  
*(Turn me on, dead man)*  
*Industrial output / Financial imbalance*  
*Thrusting it between his shoulder blades*  
*The Watusi / The Twist / El Dorado*  
*Take this brother, may it serve you well*

—The Beatles<sup>1</sup>

In 1975, rock critic Lester Bangs wrote a feature about German electronic music group Kraftwerk for *Creem* magazine. The essay, “Kraftwerkfeature,” begins with a somewhat provocative association between German technoculture—the apex of which Bangs identifies in Kraftwerk’s synthesized krautrock—and the American counterculture of the postwar era. Bangs writes,

As is well known, it was the Germans who invented methamphetamine, which of all accessible tools has brought human beings within the closest twitch of machinehood, and without methamphetamine we would never have had such high plasma marks of the counterculture as Lenny Bruce, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground, Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl,” Blue Cheer, Cream, and Creem, as well as all of the fine performances in Andy Warhol movies not inspired by heroin. So it can easily be seen that it was in reality the Germans who were responsible for Blonde on Blonde and On the Road; the Reich never died, it just reincarnated in American archetypes ground out by holloweyed jerkyfingered mannikins locked into their typewriters and guitars like rhinoceroses copulating. (154)

Bangs’s brief history of postwar German-American cultural exchange (an assemblage, a rhizome, a discourse network) spans from American beat literature of the 1950s to rock

---

<sup>1</sup> See The Beatles, “Revolution 9,” *The Beatles* (Apple, 1968).

and roll: not only krautrock, but punk, and the wave of industrial music to emerge in the U.S., Britain, and Germany in the late 1970s and 1980s. His argument here, farfetched as it may initially appear, presupposes a continuous flow, a dialectical conversation between literature and pop music. Indeed, much of his work as a critic is dedicated to showing that Dylan and Reed are as much writers as Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg. And often, the writers wielding guitars are better, Bangs argues, than those still chained to the typewriter: rock and roll, for Bangs, is a branch of the literary tree, an evolutionary development, decidedly not a rupture.

At the center of this discourse network is a seemingly marginal figure: Carl Weissner, German editor, translator, publisher, and cut-up artist, little known in the U.S. except as a footnote in biographies of Charles Bukowski and William S. Burroughs, whose work he translated into German to lasting popular and critical acclaim.<sup>2</sup> But Weissner's contribution to German-American cultural exchange in the 1960s and 1970s far exceeds the realm of literary translation. As editor of the little magazines *Klactoveedsedsteen*, *Gasolin 23*, and *UFO* in West Germany, and as a contributor to a wide range of underground publications in the U.S. and Britain—*My Own Mag*, the *International Times*, the *San Francisco Earthquake*, and many others—Weissner was a freedom fighter in the mimeograph revolution, introducing German readers to the work of Bukowski, Burroughs, and Ginsberg, whose “mundane and even banal observations of the quotidian world,” as Harry Roddy argues, had “no natural antecedents within the

---

<sup>2</sup> Weissner, who died in 2012, was a prolific translator. In addition to texts by Burroughs, Bukowski, and Ginsberg, he translated the works of J.G. Ballard, Andy Warhol, Charles Plymell, Harold Norse, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Nelson Algren, Ken Kesey, Nan Goldin, Paul Bowles, and many other Anglo-American writers, poets, and songwriters into German.

German canon” (17).<sup>3</sup> But Weissner was more than just a curator: he was an artist in his own right, pushing the possibilities of literature even further in his collaborations with Burroughs and the poets Mary Beach and Claude Pélieu, sidelining the typewriter for the tape recorder, using the cut-up—a method “invented” by British artist Brion Gysin and developed as a literary technique by Burroughs—as a weapon. “Language must fuck,” Weissner wrote in 1969: “the bulge in the book and the pants is the same” (26). For Weissner, like Burroughs, the written word was too immaterial, inactive as a participant in the real human world, and thus he sought to transform texts into frequencies. His efforts to make literature electronic show that though the American counterculture may not be inherently cryptofascist, as Bangs playfully asserts, it is not without a good deal of German engineering.<sup>4</sup>

Out of Burroughs’s and Weissner’s experiments with tape recorders emerges a theory of literature as transmission. While Marshall McLuhan and even Kittler take for granted that literature is a medium of storage, Burroughs and Weissner explore the possibilities of literature as a cool medium, like drugs or television, engaging sight and sound, physical sensation and extrasensory perception. The technological capabilities of audiotape and mimeography—to represent realities just out of the grasp of human sense

---

<sup>3</sup> Roddy sees this influence to be most apparent in the work of the so-called “New Subjectivity” poets Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born, and Jürgen Theobaldy. He writes, “The manifestations of society, as well as the particular relationship of self to society, that appear in the work of poets such as Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy, are however pronounced features in the work of many American poets who became known in the 50s, figures including Frank O’Hara, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley. Brinkmann in particular sought to emulate this ‘American style,’ creating a template that he thought would solve the dilemma posed by the increasingly reified elitism of the ‘high art’ poem” (17).

<sup>4</sup> On this note, see the films of Kenneth Anger, and especially *Scorpio Rising* (1963).

perception, to distribute ideas and language quickly and cheaply—reveal to these writers the latent potential of literature to effect real change in the world. In translating their tape experiments into typed, printed manuscripts, Burroughs and Weissner transform literature into an electronic medium, long before the advent of hypertext and the digital humanities.

Here is how this very idea was transmitted: by means of letters, little magazines, and magnetic tapes transferred from one machine to another. This process of transmission calls back to the transatlantic exchange discussed in Chapter 1: Henry Miller’s mediation of the discourse network Paris-New York-California. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the international transmission of the American vein is rerouted to Germany by way of London. Enter Weissner. Born in Karlsruhe in 1940, he studied English literature at the universities of Heidelberg and Bonn in the early 1960s. Dismayed by the curricular focus on the British canon, and the Romantics in particular, Weissner was drawn to contemporary American writers like Kerouac, Miller, and Burroughs, whose books were just then appearing in German. Such writing, “which didn’t have a political program, and didn’t bother with refined highfalutin language,” appealed to Germans of Weissner’s generation, coming of age in a literary milieu in which, “everything was politicized on the left and all writers were interested in was interviewing workers and housewives,” as Weissner describes it (Sounes 174).<sup>5</sup> “Not wanting to belong” was the attitude most

---

<sup>5</sup> Of Weissner’s formative years, Neeli Cherkovski writes, “The West German, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a keen sense of humor and a quick mind, speaks English peppered with Americanese. While talking to him, one is struck by street lingo that is reminiscent of Nelson Algren, Raymond Chandler, and Bukowski himself. Weissner was born in Karlsruhe during World War II and has enough memories of the American bombing raids then, and of the subsequent American occupation, to give a colorful replay of bombs dropping and soldiers handing out chocolate candy. . . . After the war, his neighborhood was occupied by GIs and their families. Directly next door to him lived a black master sergeant with his wife and children. He became versed in American lingo



attractive to young Germans of this “first generation” for whom the German literary tradition was marred by the shadow of Nazism, an attitude embodied by writers like Bukowski, whom Weissner first read in the pages of the British magazine *Iconolatry*, and whom he soon published alongside Burroughs, Ginsberg, Diane di Prima, and Harold Norse in *Klactoveedsedsteen*, beginning in 1965.<sup>6</sup> Named after a 1947 Charlie Parker recording session, *Klactoveedsedsteen* (or simply, *Klacto*) ran six issues over the course of two years, and its form changed with nearly every issue. Issues zero and one appeared as cheaply produced, hastily fastened pamphlets; issue two as a scroll, in cheeky homage to the legend of Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957); issue four as a more or less respectable looking magazine; issue twenty-three (which is actually issue five) as a bound book; and the final issue, *Klactoveedsedsteen 23 International*, as a newspaper dated September 17,

---

and developed an interest in jazz, especially Duke Ellington and Woody Herman. In high school, he played in a band, often performing in American NCO clubs. As far as Weissner was concerned, the university curriculum was as old as the stones of the ponderous castle. There was hardly any interest shown in American literature. The one professor who did talk about it focused mainly on Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, ignoring anything newer that might disturb his theses. The other professors zeroed in on English literature, cramming Thomas Hardy and William Blake into the curriculum. When Weissner read Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, which was popular in Europe at the time, he realized that an important aspect of contemporary literature was being completely ignored in the German universities. He began reading the Beat Generation writers and following their exploits in Tangier, Paris, London, and in the U.S. Along with Kerouac’s work, Weissner began reading Henry Miller, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, and other American writers. The stultifying and bourgeois intellectual climate of the university could not compete with the power of Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* and Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*.” See Cherkovski, *Hank: The Life of Charles Bukowski* (New York: Random House, 1991) 172-6.

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Ploog writes, “In the 1960s, the artistic search in Germany changed from a formalistic orientation to questions of an existential nature. Writing became more political and addressed contemporary issues. What had happened in Auschwitz suddenly mattered in the way a poem was written. Conscience and consciousness, with all their traps and angles, now played a role in writing” (124). Roddy compares the aesthetic innovations of this generation of German writers to “T.S. Eliot’s generation of American poets,” sharing “the luxury of being ‘the first generation’” (23).

1899—the date which concludes Burroughs’s *Nova Express*—“September 17, 1899 over New York”—before the author signs off, “July 21, 1964 / Tangier, Morocco / William Burroughs” (179).

Weissner’s solicitation of manuscripts for *Klacto* had put him in correspondence with Burroughs, and by 1966, the two began collaborating on a series of literary experiments. Burroughs’s significance to the mimeograph revolution of the 1960s and 1970s cannot be understated: though the controversy surrounding the publication of *Naked Lunch* in 1959 had made Burroughs something of an international superstar, his experiments with the cut-up method—the major focus of his literary activity in the 1960s—resulted in a large output of texts deemed unpublishable by all but the editors of little magazines in cities like London, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, delighted to include such a famous name in their tables of contents. In his 1970 essay, *The Electronic Revolution* (first published in West Germany, as a pamphlet by Udo Breger’s Expanded Media Editions), Burroughs dates the cut-up back to 1881, explaining that the “simplest cut/up cuts a page down the middle and across the middle into four sections. Section 1 is then placed with section 4 and section 3 with section 2 in a new sequence. Carried further we can break the page down into smaller and smaller units in altered sequences” (16).<sup>7</sup> Burroughs wrote the three novels composing his *Nova Trilogy* (1961-7) using the method, lifting text from *Naked Lunch* as well as *The Word Hoard*, a collection of approximately one thousand pages of typescript produced by Burroughs in

---

<sup>7</sup> The introductory portion of the essay, “Feedback from Watergate to the Garden of Eden,” was added later, and included in subsequent publications of the text.

Tangier between 1953 and 1958.<sup>8</sup> *The Word Hoard* provided source material for a number of Burroughs's novels, as well as cut-ups produced by other artists, including Weissner, who was the first to experiment with a three-column cut-up, in the pages of Jeff Nuttall's *My Own Mag* in 1966.

In April of 1966, Burroughs wrote a letter to Weissner that anticipates a number of ideas more fully elaborated in *The Electronic Revolution*:

Here is an extension of the panic idea. Turn the sound off on a television set and use an arbitrary recorded sound track—street sounds, music, conversation, recordings from other TV programs, radio, etcetera. You will notice that the arbitrary sound track *seems to be appropriate* to the silent image track on the screen, in other words *what we see is dictated by what we hear*, which is why I find tape recorder experiments more interesting than photographic experiments. You can of course cut back and forth between your recordings and the TV sound track or if you have two TV sets available record the actual TV sound track on a recorder and run your arbitrary sound track on another track so that the two are playing at the same time and play back in the street. Ideal of course would be a TV set in a shop window with arbitrary sound track [*sic*] (*Rub Out the Words* 221-2)

A month later, Burroughs wrote to Gysin in Tangier, mentioning an upcoming trip to Germany, where he has a “new assistant there name of Carl who is working with recorders [*sic*]” (222-3). One result of this “assistantship” was the pamphlet *So Who Owns Death TV?*, co-authored by Burroughs, Weissner, and Pélieu, and published by Beach and Pélieu's Beach Books in San Francisco. Though still very much a “text,” *So Who Owns Death TV?* continues Burroughs and Weissner's conversation about the potential of electronic media to serve as weaponry in a revolution of consciousness—a theory that would be put into action in their later tape experiments. In 1967, Weissner

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Nova Trilogy* is made up of *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962)—both of which, like *Naked Lunch*, were first published in Paris by Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press before being revised and republished by Grove in 1966 and 1967, respectively—and *Nova Express* (1964).

received a Fulbright scholarship, and he left Germany for Buffalo, New York, to write a proposed thesis on poet Charles Olson. Instead, though, Weissner traveled to New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, meeting in person many of the writers and editors with whom he had corresponded, and whose work he had published.<sup>9</sup> While in the U.S., Weissner kept a tape recorder at his side, documenting the New York poetry scene for the German Avantgarde Archive. In capturing hours of readings by Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, John Giorno, Robert Creeley, and other poets to tape, Weissner found his work as an editor, disseminator, and curator of literary taste easily translatable to an electronic medium—one that he would push to extremes, just as he had working within the confines of printed text.

In 1969, Weissner edited *Cut Up*, an anthology of texts by Burroughs, Norse, Beach, Pélieu, Gysin, Nuttall, and Jürgen Ploog. The anthology begins with an essay by Weissner, “The Anti-Environment of the Cut-Up Authors,” in which he writes that the “cut-up writer works with association blocks. The semantic ‘check points’ (which themselves enter into new constellations) indicate the direction and the coordinate system of the cut-up’s process of association” (n.p.).<sup>10</sup> Weissner quotes both Burroughs and

---

<sup>9</sup> On the misuse of his Fulbright year, Cherkovski notes, “He went to Buffalo, where he found that several other people were working on studies of Olson. Not wanting to cover ground already gone over, he dropped the project. Instead, he wrote *The Braille Film*, published three years later in San Francisco, and guest-edited an issue of *Intrepid*, an avant-garde poetry magazine edited by Allen DeLoach. He also put together a documentary on New York poetry for the German Avant Garde Archives. While doing the latter project, he lived in a poor neighborhood on the Lower East Side. All through this time, he was hoping to eventually make it to L.A. and meet Bukowski. He came to the West Coast in the summer of 1968 and stayed with poet-editor Jan Herman in San Francisco, where he explored the North Beach poetry scene. Weissner helped Herman edit his literary magazine, *The San Francisco Earthquake*.” See Cherkovski 176.

<sup>10</sup> The title of this essay is likely a reference to McLuhan, who writes, “As our proliferating technologies have created a whole series of new environments, men have

McLuhan, arguing that, “the printed word (‘the book-printing environment’) is being superseded by electronic environments that pass through and get under our skin. Cut-up texts follow this process closely—they reflect something of the hallucinatory synchronicity of on-screen information” (n.p.). He offers American television as an example of this rapid succession of images and perspectival modes (fictional, documentary, commercial, etc.), citing the cut-up among such “‘intermedia’ forms—fusing and melting hitherto ‘independent’ disciplines in the arts (and their techniques . . . experiments in arts and technology” (n.p.). Weissner includes himself among the cut-up artists “for whom the only purpose left for writing is to lead to other forms of expression and understanding” (n.p.). “Each writing technique,” he continues

only makes sense if it systematically questions the linear structure . . . and pushes for its transformation or destruction. The commitment of the cut-up writers is to contribute to the enhancement and enlightenment of the new landscape of consciousness in the electronic age. They are also committed to questioning the enormous mechanisms of coercion behind official ‘information’ and literature, e.g. inherent control functions that use narcotization and manipulation to immobilize the reader/listener in rigidly determined systems of thought and action. (n.p.)

For Weissner, the tape recorder provided a means for revolution, and with Burroughs, Pélieu, and Beach, he began engaging with experiments in what Len Fulton calls “word/sound bruitage” (28). One recording from 1968 illustrates the possibilities of literature as noise, as Weissner splices together snippets from the radio, television, and his own reading of Burroughs’s words, in an appropriately Burroughsian monotone.<sup>11</sup>

---

become aware of the arts as ‘anti-environments’ or ‘counter-environments’ that provide us with the means of perceiving the environment itself” (14).

<sup>11</sup> See Edward S. Robinson, “Lost Recordings” (n.p.) for mp3 files of Weissner’s, Beach’s, and Pélieu’s “lost tapes.”

Weissner continued to publish transcripts of tape experiments conducted by himself and other cut-up artists in the pages of two magazines he cofounded in 1971 with Breger, Ploog, and Jörg Fauser: *Gasolin 23* and *UFO*. While *Gasolin 23* lasted long after Weissner's tenure as editor, *UFO* died a symbolic death in 1972, releasing its final issue as a cassette tape, the world's first "audio magazine." Weissner used the little magazine in an attempt to transcend the medium of literature, and it is thus unsurprising that his involvement in the underground press lessened significantly following the release of *UFO #3*: though he contributed a few more pieces to American and German zines and collaborated on several one-off publications with the likes of Pélieu, Beach, Ploog, and Jan Herman, by the mid-1970s, most of Weissner's efforts were dedicated to literary translation.

This is not to say, however, that Weissner's work in tape was a passing fancy, and without lasting influence. For Weissner, as well as for Burroughs, the cut-up is "a matter of experimentation, not a philosophical argument" as he wrote in 1973 ("Letter" n.p.). Ploog describes Weissner's 1970 translation of *Naked Lunch* as a watershed moment in postwar German literature, one that can be attributed directly to Weissner's interest in sound. Weissner's translation followed a previous translation of *Naked Lunch* by Katharina and Peter Behrens in 1962, an eight-year gap which Ploog attributes to "the development of the German idiom itself during those crucial years" (128). "Despite the defiance of American policy (especially against the war in Vietnam), in the 1970s," Ploog explains,

there was an undercurrent of attempts in the literary scene to expand the scope of aesthetic expression. This was the result of exposure to Beat and affiliated literature by writers like Charles Bukowski and Frank O'Hara. The idiomatic range of German had widened, not only verbally but also

through music. The words had not changed but after listening to Jim Morrison or the Stones, their sound had. (128-9)

Weissner's translation of *Naked Lunch*, Ploog notes, had much to do with this underground surge: "Weissner had hung out in jazz joints in Heidelberg frequented by GIs, and he'd spent considerable time in the States. He was the man to get the rude and loose intonation across. Where the Behrens had to say 'opiates,' Weissner was able to go straight to 'junk'" (129). Additionally, the enormous popularity of Bukowski's work in Germany is often credited to Weissner's skill in creating an idiom in German to match Bukowski's deadpan, idiosyncratically American tone.

One could argue that Weissner's work as a magazine editor and cut-up artist has had more influence on electronic media than literature itself. Edward S. Robinson notes the enormous influence of the cut-up on industrial music in particular. Bands such as Cabaret Voltaire, Coil, and Throbbing Gristle "were among the first to explore the possibilities of using tape loops, cut-ups, samples, and 'found sounds' to make music"; he quotes Cabaret Voltaire's Richard H. Kirk as saying that *The Electronic Revolution*—a manifesto of ideas Burroughs developed in conversation with Weissner—was "a handbook of how to use tape recorders in a crowd . . . to create a sense of unease or unrest by playback of riot noises cut in with random recordings of the crowd itself" ("Lost Recordings" n.p.).<sup>12</sup> Weissner's experiments with literary form ask us to look past "literature" as a category, and rather, to stare into a media landscape on endless feedback loop. "The message of resistance in Burroughs' writings is clear and simple," Weissner writes: "Shift linguals . . . Free doorways . . . Cut word lines . . . Photo falling . . . Word

---

<sup>12</sup> Cabaret Voltaire is of course named after the nightclub in Zurich, founded by Hugo Ball, so central to the beginnings of Dada.

falling . . . Break Through in Grey Room . . .” (“Anti-Environment” n.p.). Whether this is to be done with a typewriter, a tape recorder, a guitar—or in the case of industrial band Einstürzende Neubauten, a rhythmically repurposed jackhammer—doesn’t seem to matter: it’s all noise, so why call it literature?

The problem posed by the word “literature” is a central one in Burroughs’s oeuvre, and not just in his experiments with tape recording. His texts evade classification: the noir confessional pulp of *Junkie* (1953) and *Queer* (1985),<sup>13</sup> the beatnik insanity of *Naked Lunch*, the poetic abstruseness of his cut-ups (as in most of his prose), the philosophical acumen of his letters and interviews, and the world-building science fiction of *The Nova Trilogy* and *The Red Night Trilogy*.<sup>14</sup> At the very least, Burroughs destroys the distinction between poet and novelist. And further, what constitutes Burroughs’s “artistry” is much more than what he left behind simply as a writer. Inventor of “shotgun art,” sometime film actor, elder statesman of (at least) two seemingly opposed generations (the Beats of the 1940s and 1950s, the punks of the 1970s/1980s), gun rights activist, queer nationalist, uxoricide, and for a time America’s most famous addict, Burroughs means many things to many people.

And yet, Burroughs is first and foremost considered a writer. Though, as Burroughs himself admits, his commitment to the literary life was an unfortunate consequence of real, physical violence. It is well known that Burroughs killed his wife, Joan Vollmer, in a drunken and ill-fated game of *William Tell* in Mexico City in 1951.

---

<sup>13</sup> Burroughs wrote *Queer*, a quasi-sequel to *Junkie* from 1951 to 1953. His second novel, it was not published until 1985.

<sup>14</sup> *The Red Night Trilogy* includes *Cities of the Red Night* (1981), *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983), and *The Western Land* (1987). Like Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett (especially), Burroughs betrayed a tendency toward trilogies.



There have been many interpretations of this event, running the gamut from tragic accident to premeditated murder to assisted suicide. The Mexican courts ruled the killing as a culpable homicide, for which Burroughs (having fled to the U.S.) was convicted in absentia and served a two-year suspended sentence. Regardless, Burroughs writes in the introduction to *Queer*,

I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for Joan's death, and to a realization of the extent to which this event has motivated and formulated my writing. I live with the constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from possession, from Control. So the death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice except to write my way out. (xxii)<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the same could be said about Burroughs's lifelong addiction to heroin, which first emerges as the central theme of his writing, ultimately extending itself as a metaphor for the worldview expressed throughout his work: humanity imprisoned in a society of control, ruled by the algebra of need.

Implicit in Burroughs's understanding of writing as a "way out" of his "lifelong struggle" is the idea that literature—or more broadly, language, words—has the potential to effect change in the "real" world. Admittedly, this is a rather pedestrian notion, taken for granted by writers, teachers, readers, and lovers of literature everywhere—though, it is one that has received a substantial amount of critical attention as of late.<sup>16</sup> Beginning

---

<sup>15</sup> This admission leads Jorge García-Robles to the following, unfortunate apologia: "Burroughs gave Joan her passport to another life. Joan opened an unsuspected door for Burroughs, without which he would never have been able to see or create as he did. The gods know how to run this world." See García-Robles, *The Stray Bullet: William S. Burroughs in Mexico*, trans. Daniel C. Schechter (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013) 127.

<sup>16</sup> Not only in texts like Rita Felski's *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), but especially in the "cognitive turn" in literary studies, for which Lisa Zunshine's work serves as a nice introduction; see Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction*:

with *The Ticket That Exploded*, Burroughs continually figured language as a virus, writing, “It is a grand feeling—Language of virus (which is these experiments) really necessary? Message of life written ‘We have come to eat?’” (100). Literature is something to be contracted and consumed: the title of *Naked Lunch*, suggested by Kerouac, Burroughs tells us, “means exactly what the words say: *naked lunch*, a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork” (Grauerholz and Miles 199). Literature as disease, drug, meal is consumed by its host, consuming him, and forcing him to act.

### *On the Record*

In *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986), a media archaeology influenced greatly by Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1966), Kittler explores the ways in which the three media technologies of the title emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and laid the conceptual groundwork for what we now call “modernity.” To each of these technologies he offers a corresponding register of Jacques Lacan’s “methodological distinction,” because, he argues, the “methodological distinctions of modern psychoanalysis clearly coincide with the distinctions of media technology” (16). The typewriter, Kittler writes, corresponds to the symbolic order, which “encompasses linguistic signs in their materiality and technicity”: “That is to say, letters and ciphers form a finite set without taking into account philosophical dreams of infinity. What counts are differences, or, in the language of the typewriter, the spaces between the

---

*Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006). Much recent debate has centered around the 2013 study by psychologists David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” in *Science* 342 (18 Oct. 2013) 377-80.

elements of a system. For that reason, Lacan designates ‘the world of the symbolic [as] the world of the machine’” (15). To the imaginary order belongs the cinema:

The imaginary, however, comes about as the mirror image of a body that appears to be, in terms of motor control, more perfect than the infant’s own body, for in the real everything begins with coldness, dizziness, and shortness of breath. Thus, the imaginary implements precisely those optical illusions that were being researched in the early days of cinema. (15)

The primary reason that Kittler singles out the typewriter and film as technologies representative of the symbolic and the imaginary, respectively, is their active differentiation of the central nervous system. The typewriter “provides writing as a selection from the finite and arranged stock of its keyboard. It literally embodies what Lacan illustrated using the antiquated letter box. In contrast to the flow of handwriting, we now have discrete elements separated by spaces. Thus, the symbolic has the status of block letters” (16). Though the sensory realm of those block letters is still visual, it is writing that belongs to the symbolic; the optic belongs to the imaginary: “Film was the first to store those mobile doubles that humans, unlike other primates, were able to (mis)perceive as their own body. Thus, the imaginary has the status of cinema” (16). “Of the real,” Kittler writes, “nothing more can be brought to light than what Lacan presupposed—that is, nothing. It forms the waste or residue that neither the mirror of the imaginary nor the grid of the symbolic catch: the physiological accidents and stochastic disorder of bodies” (15-6). It is thus the acoustic realm that corresponds to Lacan’s real, as “only the phonograph can record all the noise produced by the larynx prior to any semiotic order and linguistic meaning” (16).<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Further, he notes, “To experience pleasure, Freud’s patients no longer have to desire what philosophers consider good. Rather, they are free to babble. Thus, the real—

Kittler historically locates this differentiation of the central nervous system into optics, acoustics, and writing “around 1880” (16).<sup>18</sup> The synchronous appearance of the gramophone, the typewriter, and film “exploded Gutenberg’s writing monopoly,” making “the fabrication of so-called Man” possible: “His essence escapes into apparatuses” (16). While the steam engine took over the function of muscles, this tripartite differentiation of the central nervous system allows for “a clear division . . . between matter and information, the real and the symbolic” (16). As such, “the age-old dreams of humankind are no longer sufficient” and human physiology becomes the exclusive property of scientific research. “For mechanized writing to be optimized,” he continues, “one can no longer dream of writing as the expression of individuals or the trace of bodies. The very forms, differences, and frequencies of its letters have to be reduced to formulas. So-called Man is split into physiology and information technology. (16) As writing becomes mechanized, Kittler urges, so does humankind.

Kittler’s theory of media is one of difference: with the standardization of texts demanded by the typewriter,

paper and body, writing and soul fall apart. . . . Everything that has been taken over by technological media since Edison’s inventions disappears from typescripts. The dream of a real visible or audible world arising from words has come to an end. The historical synchronicity of cinema, phonography, and typewriting separated optical, acoustic, and written data flows, thereby rendering them autonomous. That electric or electronic media can recombine them does not change the fact of their differentiation. (*Gramophone* 13-14)

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argue that all “media technologies constitute networks or hybrids that can be expressed in physical, social, aesthetic, and economic

---

especially in the talking cure known as psychoanalysis—has the status of phonography” (*Gramophone* 16).

<sup>18</sup> N.B. Burroughs’s location of the genesis of the cut-up in 1881.

terms” (19), crediting the emergence of new technologies to “our culture’s contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy,” the “double logic of *remediation*” in a culture which “wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them” (5). For Kittler, though, the historical significance of the gramophone, film, and the typewriter lies in their individual alterations of the capabilities and processes of hearing, seeing, and writing—the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. This is why, in abandoning the typewriter for the tape recorder, Burroughs is referred to by Kittler as an “ex-writer”—a problem I will return to shortly.

Kittler traces the history of phonography from its invention by Edison in 1877, through its use at the turn of the century in deposition psychology (“This new science is designed to cleanse the oral depositions of court protocols, medical reports, personal files, and school reports from all guile and deceit on the part of the speakers” [*Gramophone* 85]), and its ultimate transformation into audiotape, following the invention of the magnetophone by the Nazis in the 1940s. According to Kittler, the birth of audiotape can be credited to the uselessness of using Edison’s wax cylinders for archival purposes under combat conditions. As such, the “propaganda ministry that turned radio into ‘the cultural SS of the Third Reich’ needed a recording and storage medium as modern and mobile as Guderian’s tank divisions” (106). By chance, he argues, Nazi technicians “hit upon the technique of radio frequency premagnetizing, thus turning Valdemar Poulsen’s experimental telegraphone of 1898 into an operational audiotape with a 10 kilohertz frequency bandwidth” (106). With this innovation, “the record-radio media link” was no longer “a one-way street” (106). Of course, as Kittler points out, “the enemy was not yet

in possession of magnetic tapes,” leaving the Germans with the responsibility of revolutionizing secret transmissions (107). More than that, though, the development of audiotape “inaugurated the musical-acoustic present,” creating “empires of simulation” which allowed for the invention of the computer (107-8).<sup>19, 20</sup> This leads Kittler, like Bangs, to a war-centric genealogy of contemporary popular culture, as he shows how magnetic tapes “aroused sleepy U.S. electric and music giants who had, naturally, taken on duties other than commercial ones between 1942 and 1945” (108).<sup>21</sup> Audiotapes modernized sound production and distribution; the installation of tape decks in cars “made music consumers mobile” (108).<sup>22</sup>

Not only did audiotape fulfill the preconditions for rock and roll to emerge: it also changed human perception, experience, and understanding of reality. On the one hand, it complicated our experience of time. As Kittler writes, “Ever since the combat reports of Nazi radio, even live broadcasts have not been live. The delay that in the case of tapes is

---

<sup>19</sup> “In England,” Kittler writes, “Turing himself considered using a captured German Magnetophone as the storage mechanism for his projected large computer. Like the paper strip of the universal discrete machine, tapes can execute any possible manipulation of data because they are equipped with recording, reading, and erasing heads, as well as with forward and reverse motion. Which is why early, cheap PCs work with attached tape decks” (*Gramophone* 108).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Margaret Atwood’s poem “White Cotton T-Shirt,” in *The Door* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007) 59-60.

<sup>21</sup> Kittler’s entire theory of media seems to presuppose, as he quotes German World War I General Erich Ludendorff saying, “the mass usage of technological equipment can be tested much better in wartime than would ever be possible in peace” (*Gramophone* 107).

<sup>22</sup> He elaborates: “Thus, the ‘American mass market’ was ‘opened up’ by the ‘car playback system.’ To minimize the leadership vacuum and exploit the possibilities of stereophony, the only things missing were new VHF stations with rock’n’roll and traffic reports on the transmitting end and car radios with FM and decoders on the receiving end. Six-cylinder engines whisper, but the stereo equipment roars. Engine and radio are (to paraphrase Guderian and Nehring) also the soul of our tourist divisions, which under so-called postwar conditions rehearse or simulate the blitzkrieg” (*Gramophone* 108).

due to separate head monitoring (and that is now more elegantly achieved by digital shift registers) suffices for so-called broadcast obscenity policing lines” (*Gramophone* 108).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, audiotape allows for time axis manipulation: real-time frequency shifts made possible by “rock bands with harmonizers that are able to reverse—with considerable electronic effort—the inevitable speed changes, at least to deceivable human ears”; and, in particular, time axis reversal, which “allows ears to hear the unheard-of: the steep attack of instrumental sounds or spoken syllables moves to the end, while the much longer decay moves to the front” (36). This time axis manipulation makes “the unmanipulable as manipulable as symbolic chains had been in the arts,” noting that, with the development of multi-track recording and various corrective technologies, musicians “do not even have to be able to sing anymore,” and “Berliner’s primitive recording technology turns into a *Magical Mystery Tour*” (109).<sup>24</sup>

Kittler argues that when Pink Floyd first sang “Welcome to the Machine” in 1975, what they really meant was “tape for its own ends—a form of collage using sound” (*Gramophone* 109).<sup>25</sup> Having adapted collage as a literary technology with the cut-up and

---

<sup>23</sup> Playfully, Kittler continues: “It appears that listeners, once they have been called by a disc jockey and or on the air, are prone to exhibit an unquenchable desire for obscenities. Today everybody can and (according to Andy Warhol) wants to become famous if only for two minutes of airtime. In the blind time to which media, as opposed to artists, are subject, chance is principally unpredictable. But the 6.4 seconds of dead time the broadcast obscenity policing line inserts between the telephone call and actual broadcast make censorship (if not art) possible in the data flow of the real” (*Gramophone* 108).

<sup>24</sup> N.B. Kittler’s association between time axis manipulation and schizophrenia, which I discuss briefly in Chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> Pink Floyd references abound in Kittler’s work—he may be their biggest fan in the world of German media theory. He adds here that when Roger Waters and David Gilmour “were unable to hit the high notes in ‘Welcome to the Machine,’ they simply resorted to time axis manipulation: they dropped the tape down half a semitone while recording and then dropped the line in on the track” (*Gramophone* 109).

the fold-in, it should be no surprise that Burroughs would be attracted to audiotape.<sup>26</sup> Burroughs's friend Ginsberg had already been using a tape recorder since 1965, when he began to compose the poem that would become "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (published in 1966's *Planet News*). As Barry Farrell reports, this involved Ginsberg traveling "across America in a Volkswagen Microbus, noting whatever struck him, from newspaper headlines to bits of conversation to billboards to music and news he heard on the radio," a journey that was simultaneously captured on film by Robert Frank in 1969's *Me and My Brother* (*Spontaneous Mind* 54).<sup>27</sup> Farrell notes that this technique—the fruits of which were mostly collected in *The Fall of America: Poems of These States* (1973)—was "influenced by a gift, a state-of-the-art, portable, reel-to-reel Uher tape recorder he received from Bob Dylan that same year" (*Spontaneous Mind* 54). Daniel Kane argues that the tape recorder "encouraged Ginsberg to transcribe environmentally specific

---

<sup>26</sup> Of course, Burroughs was not the first to be attuned to the literary potential of collage, which is in many ways a fundamental technique of modernism, from John Dos Passos and T.S. Eliot to Tristan Tzara.

<sup>27</sup> Frank's sometime collaborator Alfred Leslie reports an even earlier instance of Beat fascination with tape recording, from the set of Leslie and Frank's 1959 film, *Pull My Daisy*, which stars Ginsberg, Corso, and other Beat figures. As Leslie states, upon reading a draft of Kerouac's play, "The Beat Generation: The Bishop of the New Aramanian Church," upon which *Pull My Daisy* is based, "He had given me the play and I thought, well, the play didn't do anything for me, none of the things did, except as literature. I could *read* them but to take that next step and find the concept for the work, the overriding concept for the film, I didn't get it clearly. When he left, he left a note beside his tape recorder, and he had made a tape-recording of his reading out loud, he said 'Maybe this'll give you a different perspective of the play' or something like that. Now, when he was reading it on the tape, he was listening to Symphony Sid. So he's reading this play, and probably high, and in the background is Symphony Sid—'Oh hey there, man, this is Sid, now we're gonna hear Illinois Jacquet . . . '—and this music comes on, so at that point I realized all of the characters in Jack's novels were Jack Kerouac. There were no characters. There were no separate people. It was just one long prose poem, as it were, from beginning to end, and that he was impersonating, when I heard his voice, I said this is the way the film has to be done. So that's the way I found the concept through the language of his connecting to the sound" (Kane 19).



language into the poem that was predicated not on his own internal will but on what was happening outside”; quoting Ginsberg biographer Michael Schumacher, he continues: “The machine not only afforded him the opportunity to record his thoughts instantly without even the slight intrusion of having to put them on paper but it also had the effect of providing him with an instant cut-up when the machine picked up all the sounds around him” (119).

For Kittler, phonography and audiotape are technologies of death, magic, truth, and poetry—natural terrain for the Beat sensibility. “The realm of the dead,” Kittler writes,

is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture. As Klaus Theweleit noted, media are always flight apparatuses into the great beyond. If gravestones stood as symbols at the beginning of culture itself, our media technology can retrieve all gods. The old written laments about ephemerality, which measured no more than distance between writing and sensuality, suddenly fall silent. In our mediascape, immortals have come to exist again. (*Gramophone* 13)

Paranormal voices, Kittler points out, are so large a part of contemporary sound technology that they “inform their researchers of their preferred radio wavelength” (12). The tape thus becomes a storage medium for otherworldly transmissions: “If you replay a tape that has been recorded off the radio, you will hear all kinds of ghost voices that do not originate from any known radio station, but that, like all official newscasters, indulge in radio self-advertisement” (12).<sup>28</sup> With time axis manipulation, the conjuring of the dead approaches the level of magic: “The Beatles are said to have used this trick on ‘Revolution 9’ to whisper the secret of their global success to the tape freaks among their fans: that Paul McCartney had been dead for a long time, replaced on album covers, stage,

---

<sup>28</sup> See Jane Gillooly’s 2013 film, *Suitcase of Love and Shame*.

and in songs by a multimedia double” (36). While the tape recorder is used by deposition psychology, psychoanalysis, and other legal and moral institutions as an instrument of fact, it is uniquely adept at telling the truth slant: “TAM as poetry—but poetry that transgresses its customary boundaries” (36).<sup>29</sup> While all technological media “turn magic into a daily routine,” time axis manipulation

affects the raw material of poetry, where manipulation had hitherto been impossible. Hegel had referred to “the *sound*” as “a disappearing of being in the act of being,” subsequently celebrating it as a “saturated expression of the manifestation of inwardness.” What was impossible to store could not be manipulated. Ridding itself of its materiality or clothes, it disappeared and presented inwardness as a seal of authenticity. (36)

Through time axis manipulation, tape recording expands the boundaries of the real, allowing poetry to escape the realm of the symbolic, tuning human consciousness into other worlds that subsequently shed the aura of the supernatural.

This conclusion, that the tape recorder reveals the real as endlessly manipulable, allows Kittler, like Burroughs, to understand language as a virus. In its evolution into tape, phonography is no longer a mere tool of documentary evidence or “truth” as it was for deposition psychology (the still ubiquitous tape recorder of the journalist notwithstanding) but rather, a weapon: “Sense turns into nonsense, government propaganda into the white noise of Turing’s vocoder, impossible fillers like *is/or/the* are edited out: precisely the ingredients of William Burroughs’s tape cut-up technique” (*Gramophone* 109). Kittler turns to Burroughs’s 1973 text, “Playback from Eden to Watergate,” in order to show how the commercial availability of “[w]orld war weapons

---

<sup>29</sup> Kittler writes of Jean-Paul Sartre’s “Psychoanalytic Dialogue,” an anonymous tape which he received and then published in 1969. The tape documents the following: “A., a 33-year-old patient in a lunatic asylum, smuggled a tape recorder into his last session and recorded everything: associations, interpretations, and ultimately the terror of the doctor upon discovering the machine” (*Gramophone* 93).

like the Magnetophone,” in the form of the tape recorder, replace the “classic rift between the production and reception of books” with “a single military interception” (110).<sup>30</sup> For Kittler, Burroughs’s description of “a number of weapons and tactics in the war game” in *The Electronic Revolution* and “Playback from Eden to Watergate” is as “simple as any abuse of army equipment”:

If “control,” or as engineers say, negative feedback, is the key to power in this century, then fighting that power requires positive feedback. Create endless feedback loops until VHF or stereo, tape deck or scrambler, the whole array of world war army equipment produces wild oscillations of the Farnborough type. Play to the powers that be their own melody. (110)

And yet, in doing so, Burroughs becomes for Kittler an “ex-writer,” joining “Laurie Anderson in producing records” (110). By adopting the tape recorder as a literary technology, Kittler seems to argue, Burroughs abandons literature for the world of rock music, which “maximizes all electro-acoustic possibilities, occupies recording studios and FM transmitters, and uses tape montages to subvert the writing-induced separation into composers and writers, arrangers and interpreters” (110-1). In rock music, the “theme of love . . . has run its course,” its singers “sing of the very media power which sustains them” (111) and all that remains is “[i]nterception, chopping, feedback, and amplification of war reports,” of which the Rolling Stones’ “Sympathy for the Devil” (1968) is the apotheosis (112).<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> This text was initially published in the November 1973 issue of *Harper’s*, and later added as the preface to English editions of Daniel Odier’s *The Job: Interviews with William Burroughs*, first published in French in 1969. Its title can be read as a reference to, and perhaps revision of, the first section of *The Electronic Revolution*, “Feedback from Watergate to the Garden of Eden.” Cf. note 7.

<sup>31</sup> On the Stones, Kittler continues: “Legend has it that the Rolling Stones used cut-up techniques to produce the lyrics for *Beggars Banquet*. They cut out newspaper headlines, pasted them to the studio wall, and shot at them. Every hit was a line. Anticipating modern statistics, the precondition of cut-up and signal processing in general,

While Burroughs certainly serves as a convenient node through which Kittler might render Anderson, the Beatles, the Stones, Pink Floyd, and Jimi Hendrix “literary” (which, admittedly, seems somewhat redundant), his conception of literature is limited by its exclusion of audiotape technology. Of *Electric Ladyland* (1968), he argues that before Hendrix “cuts his machine-gun-like guitar to the title song, tape technology operates for its own sake: tympana, jet engines, pistol shots. Writing can write nothing of that (*Gramophone* 114).<sup>32</sup> That is to say, by means of tape, the axis of literature shifts from a medium of storage to one of transmission—becoming rock and roll—in a way that cannot be transcribed symbolically, i.e., written. While it is true that Burroughs did participate in the production of a great number of rock records between the 1970s and the 1990s (with Anderson, Giorno, Frank Zappa, John Cage, Philip Glass, Sonic Youth, Kurt Cobain, R.E.M., and many others), Kittler’s characterization of him as an “ex-writer” elides the fact that Burroughs wrote and published seven novels after *The Electronic Revolution*, not to mention a bulk of novellas, short fiction, and other texts.<sup>33</sup> Surely, literature can be said to have existed before Gutenberg’s press and even alphabetization. Why, then, once it is produced by electronic means must it become, for Kittler, rock? Instead of focusing on the apparent rupture caused by the tape recorder’s introduction into the literary

---

Novalis remarked: “The individual facts are random events—the combination of random events—their concurrence is itself not subject to chance, but to laws—a result of the most profound systematic wisdom” (*Gramophone* 111). He concludes that “the random distribution of newspaper headlines results in the law of information technology and a martial history of rock music” (111).

<sup>32</sup> Though, he points out, “The *Songbook* for *Electric Ladyland* notes the tape’s forward and backward motion as well as its changing speed and the test points of a blind but manipulable time. The title on the cover—that which does not cease to write itself” (*Gramophone* 114).

<sup>33</sup> One could say as much about Burroughs’s work in film, with credits spanning from Conrad Rooks’s *Chappaqua* (1966), through *Saturday Night Live* and Gus Van Sant’s *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989).

apparatus, as Kittler insists, I want to emphasize it as a symptom of continuity in Burroughs's work: though it may be the most perfect tool for Burroughs's literary methods, these methods, rooted in writing itself, can be seen to mature beyond Burroughs's experiments with tape.

### *Sci-Fi Revolution*

Burroughs's biographer, Barry Miles, traces the origin of the cut-up method to an incredibly precise moment in time: "Around lunchtime on the first of October 1959, Brion Gysin was in room 25 of the Beat Hotel, cutting mounts for some drawings, slicing through the mat boards with his Stanley knife and simultaneously slicing through the pile of old copies of the *New York Herald Tribune* he was using to protect the table" (*Call Me Burroughs* 362). Upon discovering the newsprints to be sliced, Gysin saw that "the words on the next page showed through and could be read across, combining stories from different pages," resulting in "combinations so amusing that the people in the next room knocked on the door, concerned that he was having a hysteria attack" (362). After Burroughs returned to the hotel later that afternoon, Miles recounts, Gysin shared with him his new discovery, which Burroughs saw less as an amusement than "a project for disastrous success," enabling one "to 'read between the lines' and find out what the newspapers were really saying" (363).

Over the course of the following months, Burroughs and Gysin continued their cut-up experiments, combining text from the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Time*, and *Life* with texts by Rimbaud, Shakespeare, Shelley, Eliot, and Pound. Burroughs and Gysin evangelized their new technique to other denizens of the Beat Hotel, who collaborated

with them to produce *Minutes to Go*, published at the end of 1959 and later cannibalized to produce *The Soft Machine* and *The Exterminator* (1960).<sup>34</sup> Miles notes that it “was clear that from the beginning Burroughs saw cut-ups as a weapon,” adorning early copies of *Minutes to Go* with the phrase “Un règlement de comptes avec la littérature”—a settling of accounts with literature (*Call Me Burroughs* 365). Not long after this, Burroughs and Gysin began extending the cut-up method to tape recordings: reading texts aloud and recording them, rewinding the tapes at random and cutting in new passages. Burroughs took these experiments even further: “inching the tape past the record heads, superimposing tracks, playing the tape backward and recording the drop-ins in the other direction, speeded-up and slowed-down recordings, echoes, and the addition of music and sound effects” (366). From early on, Burroughs invested in these tape cut-ups a power that, if not supernatural, had a mysterious and very real effect on the world: “I would say that my most interesting experience with the earlier techniques was the realization that when you make cut-ups you do not simply get random juxtapositions of words, that they do mean something, and often that these meanings refer to some future event” (366).

Though, as Miles points out, it would be a few years before the technology existed “to publish and distribute these new experiments” (*Call Me Burroughs* 366), by the late 1960s, the mimeograph revolution was in full swing, and the cut-up “went on to

---

<sup>34</sup> Miles notes that Gregory Corso’s participation in this project was not without some hesitation, quoting him as saying, “I join this venture unwilling and willingly. Unwillingly because the poetry I have written was from the soul and not from the dictionary; willingly because if it can be destroyed or bettered by the ‘cut-up’ method, then it is poetry I care not for, and so should be cut-up. [ . . . ] to the muse I say: ‘Thank you for the poesy that cannot be destroyed that is in me’—for this I have learned after such a short venture in uninspired machine-poetry” (*Call Me Burroughs* 364). Additionally, *The Exterminator* ought not to be confused with Burroughs’s later collection of short stories, *Exterminator!*, published in 1973.

encompass an avant-garde genre of its own, with magazines such as *Fruit Cup*, *Rhinozeros*, *Insect Trust Gazette*, and *Bulletin From Nothing*, devoted to publishing the work of its adherents” (*The Beat Hotel* 211). The mimeograph revolution, a second wave of the little magazine zeitgeist in the U.S. and Europe in the 1920s, had its precursors in a number of small presses to emerge in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as Fulton points out, mentioning Tuli Kupferberg’s *Birth*; Ed Sanders’ *Fuck You/A Magazine of the Arts*; Robert Bly’s *The Fifties*, *The Sixties*, and *The Seventies*; LeRoi Jones’ *Yugen*; and John Bryan’s *Renaissance* (25-6).<sup>35</sup> Fulton attributes the proliferation of little magazines in the mid-1960s to, among other things, the transition from the letterpress to offset printing presses, the abundance of which “is the basic technical stimulus to the entire small and underground press movement” (26).

The advantages of these offset presses, as Fulton explains, were many:

This process was made-to-order for the fluid, “do-it-yourself-*now*” current that began to engulf the sixties. It took no accessory equipment on the order of that required in letterpress, and the advent of direct platemaking and direct masters simplified things still more. Little space was required for storage and operation, and many smaller models could be moved by one man quickly and entirely. Most of all, however, for the little magazines justified typesetting could be done for a nickel a line—or for just about nothing by the editor on his own typewriter. And if a given contributor’s work went beyond the usual “straight matter” (prose or poetry) toward visual art, this could be reproduced faithfully at little or no extra cost, and with little or no condescension to the intervening printing technology. This last of course is critical, for finally the experimenter and

---

<sup>35</sup> Among the most “important” American little magazines of the 1920s were *The Dial* (first established in 1840, revived in 1880, and re-revived in 1920 by Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson, under whose tenure Eliot’s *The Waste Land* first appeared in the U.S.), *Contact* (edited by William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon), and Margaret Anderson’s *Little Review*, all of which published prose, poetry, and visual art by modernists from both the U.S. and Europe: H.D. and Wallace Stevens, Sherwood Anderson and Jean Toomer, Georgia O’Keeffe and Constantin Brâncuși, Kenneth Burke and Bertrand Russell, etc.

his editor (often one and the same) were wholly *free* in point of technological fact. (26)

Because of its economic and technological practicality, Fulton argues, mimeography was the ideal vessel for transmitting new genres of writing that transversed visual and symbolic modes: concrete poetry and the cut-up in particular. Further, Fulton notes, “When the small magazine or press could not be a primary vehicle for this ‘new’ poetry (as it could not, for example, with much intermedium art, with ‘happenings,’ autocreative-destructive art, or environmental poetry such as glass poetry) it became an effective promoter and cataloger,” citing the dedication to happenings espoused by Dick Higgins’s *Something Else Newsletter*, the publication of “poejazz” in Marcel van Maele’s *Labris*, and the inclusion of tape experiments in Weissner’s *Klacto* and *grOnk*, a magazine founded by Toronto concrete poets bpNichol and David UU, among others (30).

Having seen the potential of the cut-up method as a revolutionary weapon since the very beginning, Burroughs recognized the little magazine’s unique value as a medium of dissemination and evangelism—especially following the formation of the Underground Press Syndicate in 1967, which “allowed member papers to freely reprint content from any of the other member papers” (*Shift Linguals* 69). By the time that Weissner first wrote to Burroughs in 1965, soliciting work for *Klacto*, the latter was already a major figure of and advocate for the mimeograph revolution, a movement which, in their correspondence and collaboration, they sought to make electronic. In a 1974 letter to Victor Bockris, Weissner recalls his first face-to-face meeting with Burroughs, which ultimately amounts to something of a ghost story:

In 1966 I was living at 1-3a Mühlthalstrasse, Heidelberg, West Germany, in a room about the size of a 3<sup>rd</sup>-class passenger berth of an Estonian saltpeter freighter on the Riga-Valparaiso run. On June 6, at precisely 8.20



PM, there was a knock on the door. I opened the door and for a fraction of a second before the hall light went out I caught a glimpse of a tall thin man, about 52 years of age, black suit black tie white shirt w/ black needle stripes black phosphorescent eyes black hat. He looked like Opium Jones. (*With William Burroughs 8*)

After Weissner invited him in, Burroughs asked his host whether he had his tape recorder ready; Weissner affirmed, and Burroughs immediately suggested that they “compare tapes”: “We played his tapes, then some of mine. Nothing was said. Except at one point he stopped his tape, wound it back for a second or two, and played it again. ‘You hear that?’ he asked. ‘ . . . “wiring wiring” . . . It’s the voice of a friend of mine from the south. Haven’t seen him in twenty years. Don’t know how his voice got on there” (8). As they continue listening to the tapes, “switching back and forth between tracks at random intervals,” things get even creepier—most notably, an insistent recurrence of the number “23.” And, as Weissner concludes the tale, “At approximately 1.30 AM Mr. Burroughs took a cab to the Hotel Kaiserhof. At approximately 1.36 the receptionist handed him the key to his room. It was the key to room 23” (9).<sup>36</sup>

To the extent that this apocryphal anecdote seems like little more than drugged-out mumbo jumbo spiritualism, the influence of yet another technology in a discourse network which already includes mimeography, audiotape, narcotics, and writing should be remarked upon: namely, Scientology. Burroughs’s experiments with the cut-up method and tape recorders as well as his contributions to the mimeograph revolution coincided with his flirtation with the religion founded by fellow science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard in 1952—a flirtation which began in 1959, when Gysin introduced

---

<sup>36</sup> This incident seems to provide background for Weissner’s publication of the fifth issue of *Klacto* as number 23, as well as the title of his subsequent magazine, *Gasolin 23*.

Burroughs to Dianetics, and came to an end with complete disillusionment in the early 1970s. As Miles reports, Burroughs was approached in 1964 by Graham Masterton to write an investigative piece about Scientology for *Mayfair*, the British men's magazine for which Masterton had been recently appointed deputy editor. It was not until three years later, in 1967, that the two men visited Saint Hill, the British headquarters of Scientology in East Grinstead, using fake names (William Lee, Burroughs's pseudonym, and Graham Thomas), and accompanied by filmmaker Antony Balch, who documented the trip. Never one to be too reverential, Burroughs purchased a number of postcards bearing Hubbard's face, and upon returning to London, Burroughs set up one of the postcards as a target "and took aim at it with his Webley .22 air pistol. As he pulled back the hammer to cock it, it snapped back on his thumb, almost breaking it. Bill carried the scar for life: 'Boy, he was really spitting back a curse there!'" (*Call Me Burroughs* 466).

In addition to writing twenty-one bulletins (from "the Burroughs Academy") about Scientology for *Mayfair* between 1967 and 1970, Scientology left its mark on Burroughs's novels, receiving mention in *Nova Express*, and appearing under the name "Logos" in *The Ticket That Exploded*: "a system of therapy they call 'clearing.' You 'run' traumatic material which they call 'engrams' until it loses emotional connotation through repetitions and is then refilled as neutral memory. When all the 'engrams' have been run and deactivated the subject becomes a 'Clear'" (qtd. in *Call Me Burroughs* 467).<sup>37</sup> Though Burroughs's association with Scientology was not without a heavy dose of chicanery, Miles insists that his belief in a number of its teachings was genuine, to the surprise and confusion of a number of his friends, including Paul Bowles and his

---

<sup>37</sup> Burroughs also wrote extensively on Scientology in *Ali's Smile: Naked Scientology*, a collection of short works published in 1971.

sometime lover Ian Sommerville.<sup>38</sup> In addition to spending around £1500 on clearing courses at Saint Hill and the London and Edinburgh Centres (graduating “as a Grade 5, ‘power’ release. . . . Clear number 1163” [468]), he trained to become an official auditor, spending years running “Scientology audits, repeating them until they ran flat on the E-meter, on one session spending eight hours a day for six weeks,” and even recruited Norse, offering to pay for his friend’s courses (471).<sup>39</sup> Upon reaching “Clear” status, Burroughs remarked, “It feels marvellous! [*sic*] Things you’ve had all your life, things you think nothing can be done about—suddenly they’re not there any more! And you know these disabilities cannot return” (468).

As with his other pseudoscientific fascinations (Wilhelm Reich’s orgone boxes, in particular), Burroughs was most intrigued by the machinery involved. In the case of Scientology, this meant the E-meter, “a polygraph that shows the person’s reaction to a series of questions by measuring people’s galvanic skin response” (*Call Me Burroughs* 467). The E-meter is used to “clear” “engrams,” which are words that Hubbard believed to be lodged in people’s memories unconsciously, and thus the root causes of pain and suffering. Miles describes the use of the E-meter as follows:

A small electrical charge is introduced by the subject holding a pair of empty soup cans. It is a primitive form of the lie detector, which uses the same system. A scientology “auditor” asks a series of questions, and when the needle jumps, that means a blockage has been detected. These are gone

---

<sup>38</sup> Miles writes that upon a visit to Saint Hill in 1968, “Burroughs snooped around the grounds of L. Ron Hubbard’s quarters dressed as a gardener, tape recorder in hand, hoping to surreptitiously record him through a window, but Hubbard, alas, was not in residence” (*Call Me Burroughs* 468).

<sup>39</sup> Though, Burroughs didn’t exactly follow through on this promise: “Harold took the course, but when Bill forgot to pay a few pounds, Harold was inundated with threatening messages: ‘You are now a non-person required to report to the castle for correction [ . . . ] pack your bags immediately. You are to fly to Valencia and report to Sea Org for extreme liability’” (*Call Me Burroughs* 470).

over from every possible angle until they no longer give a reading. When you get a floating needle to all the questions that particular session is complete. There are very many questionnaires. (467)

Miles argues that Burroughs's belief in the efficacy of the E-meter was such "that he was able to suspend belief in the other areas of Scientology doctrine, despite the belief in 'Thetans' required to become an 'Operating Thetan,' the next level up from 'Clear'" (470); at one point, Sommerville accused Burroughs of studying Scientology only as a way to control other people, which, Miles reports, Burroughs did not deny (468).

Burroughs's ties with the organization were officially cut in 1969, after the church convicted him of "treason" for his writings about Scientology in *Mayfair*,<sup>40</sup> but he continued practicing on his own for several years, soliciting restricted materials from high-level defectors, and even using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house: "He mounted an attack on Scientology's London headquarters at 37 Fitzroy Street in Bloomsbury. Over a period of some weeks he haunted the premises, taking photographs and making tape recordings. Sure enough, after a couple of months, the Scientologists packed their bags and moved to 68 Tottenham Court Road" (494).<sup>41</sup> Burroughs ultimately

---

<sup>40</sup> It is interesting that Burroughs's official association with Scientology lasted as long as it did, considering his famous drug habits and sexual orientation, both of which went against church doctrine. Acknowledging this, Miles writes, "Despite Hubbard's hostile attitude toward homosexuality in his writings, no one at Saint Hill seems to have been concerned by Burroughs's open admission of his sexual preference. Scientology's position on homosexuality was that it was a false identity, a 'valence' in Scientology metalanguage, and that homosexual urges would disappear when the adept reached OT level III, where the 'body Thetans' that cause the problem would be audited away" (*Call Me Burroughs* 469).

<sup>41</sup> One of these restricted texts was *Excalibur*, of which Miles writes, "According to Hubbard four of the first fifteen people who read it went insane because the material was so powerful. After that Hubbard only sold copies to people who had reached the highest levels and could deal with this fast formula for clearing. Each copy was specially typed for the recipient, bound in cold with a lock, and signed by Hubbard. It sold at \$1,500 a copy. Bill made a dozen photocopies and sent them out to people like Allen

arrived at the conclusion that, “Scientology is evil and basically ill-intentioned and nasty,” leading Miles to editorialize, writing that Burroughs’s “period in London was poisoned by his obsession with Scientology. Without doubt his life would have been utterly different, happier, more sociable, and more productive if he had never heard of the E-meter” (471).

Regardless of Scientology’s actual value as a “weapon,” Burroughs identified the same truth-revealing potential in the E-meter as he had in the cut-up, the mimeograph revolution, and the tape recorder. Miles writes that at one point the organization became skeptical about Burroughs’s commitment to Hubbard’s doctrine and required him to take “the Jo’burg test,” a “series of 215 questions about criminal activity” (*Call Me Burroughs* 468-9). The results are strikingly reminiscent of his reaction to Gysin’s discovery of the cut-up as well as the “comparison” of tapes at his first meeting with Weissner:

He was asked, “Have you ever hidden a body?” He said no and got a reading. Then Bill had a clear picture of himself hiding a body somewhere. Then the auditor asked, “In this life have you ever hidden a body?” That was clear. It must have been a past life. Next came, “Have you ever committed forgery?” Bill said no but got a reading. Then he remembered he had forged a narcotic prescription. “So the machine knows things that you don’t know, or that you don’t remember. On a conscious level I didn’t think I had at all, I was thinking of forging a check.” (469)<sup>42</sup>

---

Ginsberg and the author of this book, who read it with no apparent ill effect” (*Call Me Burroughs* 494). Burroughs refers to his “attack” on Scientology in *The Electronic Revolution*, writing, “We carried out this operation with the Scientology Center at 37 Fitzroy Street. Some months later they moved to 68 Tottenham Court Road, where a similar operation was carried out . . .” (10).

<sup>42</sup> Miles continues, noting Burroughs’s adeptness at out-manipulating his manipulators: “The questions reminded Bill of the Moscow purge trials: ‘Have you ever had unkind thoughts about L. Ron Hubbard?’ But by now Bill had learned the techniques. ‘I can’t help resenting his perfection,’ he replied. There were agents provocateurs, Jo’burg people waiting outside the room who would sidle up to him and say, ‘What do you think about this latest bulletin from L. Ron Hubbard?’ and he’d say, ‘Well, I’m sure Mister Hubbard knows what he’s doing’” (*Call Me Burroughs* 469).

In *The Electronic Revolution*, Burroughs refers to Hubbard's claim that "certain words and word combinations can produce serious illnesses and mental disturbances," asking rhetorically whether "these are magic words? Spells, in fact?" (25-6). The answer, he seems to believe, is "yes," and he proposes electronic recording technologies as the appropriate tools to conjure a "magic that turns men into swine" (27).

What happens to a word, or words, in the translation between text (image) and sound? And what is the difference between recording and transcription? These are the main themes of *The Electronic Revolution*, which begins with Burroughs aping the Apostle John: "In the beginning was the word and the word was god and has remained one of the mysteries ever since" (4). Following Alfred Korbynski, Burroughs argues that it is writing that defines the human ("the time binding animal"), and that "the spoken word as we know it came after the written word" (4). After a brief summary of Korbynski's general semantics, Burroughs states his thesis: "My basic theory is that the written word was literally a virus that made spoken word possible" (5). For Burroughs, written language is a virus, the human (and the Caucasian in particular, he suggests, tracing the "white myth" back to the Garden of Eden) its host, the initial mutation of which most likely was "occasioned by radioactivity" (6). This virus, present in all of human history, is relevant again circa the early 1970s, Burroughs argues: because of "the tape recorders of Watergate and the fall out from atomic testing the virus stirs uneasy in all your white throats. It was a killer virus once. It could become a killer virus again and range through the cities of the world like a topping forest fire" (7).

To the same degree that Burroughs's novels can be read as poetry as much as they can be read as fiction, *The Electronic Revolution* is simultaneously a work of philosophy,

media theory, and science fiction—as well as a political manifesto. Burroughs’s virus, he writes, “IS a very small unit of word and image” whose reality is best unleashed by means of tape recorders (7). He offers instructions on how to make a simple word virus:

Let us suppose that our target is a rival politician. On tape recorder 1 we will record speeches and conversation carefully editing in stammers mispronouncing, inept phrases . . . the worst number 1 can assemble. now on tape recorder 2 we will make so a love tape by bugging his bed room. We can potentiate this tape by splicing it in with a sexual object that is inadmissible or inaccessible or both, say the senator’s teen age daughter. On tape recorder 3 we will record hateful disapproving voices and splice the three recordings together at very short intervals and play them back to the senator and his constituents. This cutting and playback can be very complex involving speech scramblers and batteries of tape recorders but THE BASIC PRINCIPAL IS SIMPLY SPLICING SEX TAPE AND DISAPPROVAL TAPES IN TOGETHER. Once the associations lines are established they are activated every time the senator’s speech centres are activated which is all the time heaven help that sorry bestard if anything happened to his big mouth. So his teen age daughter crawls all over him while Texas rangers and decent church going women rise from tape recorder 3 screaming “WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN FRONT OF DECENT PEOPLE” [*sic*]. (7-8)

The political philosophy expressed here can easily be read as an anarchist one—a mischievous jamming of the system. Throughout the essay, Burroughs lists a number of objectives of the electronic revolution: “TO SPREAD RUMOURS” (12), “TO DISCREDIT OPPONENTS” (13), “AS A FRONT LINE WEAPON TO PRODUCE AND ESCALATE RIOTS” (13), “AS A LONG RANGE WEAPON TO SCRAMBLE AND NULLIFY ASSOCIATIONAL LINES PUT DOWN BY MASS MEDIA” (13), and so on. Ultimately, the goal is to spread discord, to rebel against systems of power and control—in this way, it is very much a negative philosophy. Burroughs singles out a number of technologies, in addition to the tape recorder, that should be used in service of the revolution: the mimeograph machine; the cut-up method, which he believes would allow the underground press to “function much more effectively” (14); and the auditing

techniques of Scientology, which are “very easily subject to experimental verification” (26).<sup>43</sup>

After Burroughs surveys the various “screen effects” of “reassuring material” (“RM”—what Hubbard calls “ally engrams,” such as “I think he’s going to be alright”) and provides his own sci-fi history of the world, going back as much as “400,000,000 years ago,” through the Spanish overthrow of the Mayan civilization, he returns to the differentiation between the written word and the spoken word, asking his reader to “[c]onsider now the human voice as a weapon” (*The Electronic Revolution* 33). He acknowledges that it may be theoretically possible to weaponize the human voice without the aid of a tape recorder (“Learning to speak with your mouth shut, thus displacing your speech, is fairly easy. You can also learn to speak backwards, which is fairly difficult”), the tape recorder is a tool that allows one to scramble speech—a capability that, according to Burroughs, is only inherent in one existent language: Chinese (33). “The aim of this project,” he writes, “is to build up a language in which certain falsifications inherit [*sic*] in all western languages will be made incapable of formulation” (33). These “follow-falsifications” include: the “IS OF IDENTITY,” “THE DEFINITE ARTICLE THE,” and “THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF EITHER/OR” (33-4). By removing these categories from language, Burroughs believes, we will arrive at the “END OF THE WAR GAME,” though, this will not be without casualties: “There are no games where

---

<sup>43</sup> The underground press, Burroughs writes, “serves as the only effective counter to a growing power and more sophisticated technique used by establishment mass media to falsify, misrepresent, misquote, rule out of consideration as a *PRIORI* ridiculous or simply ignore and blot out of existence: data, books, discoveries that they consider prejudicial to establishment interest” (*The Electronic Revolution* 14).



everybody wins. That's what games are all about, winning and losing . . . Yet every player must believe in final victory and strive for it with all his power" (35-6).

It should be clear, then, that Burroughs is not an "ex-writer," as Kittler supposes—his turn to the tape recorder is only an intermediate step in arriving at the final weapon, an alternative to "the atom bomb which could end the game by destroying all players" (*The Electronic Revolution* 35). What Burroughs calls for, instead, is "a tonal language, like Chinese, it will also have a hieroglyphic script as pictorial as possible without being to [*sic*] cumbersome or difficult to write. This language will give one option of silence. When not talking, the use of this language can take in the silent images of the written, pictorial, and symbol languages" (35). This "proposed language" is what "will delete these virus mechanisms and make them impossible of formulation in the language" (35), not tape recording itself, which only manages to scramble. Burroughs writes that the original purpose of scrambling devices

was to make the message unintelligible without scrambling the code. Another use for speech scramblers could be to impose thought control on a mass scale. consider the Human body and nervous system as unscrambling devices. A common virus like the cold sore could sensitize the subject to unscramble messages. Drugs like LSD and Dim-N could also act as unscrambling devices. Moreover, the mass media could sensitize millions of people to receive scrambled versions of the same set of data. Remember that when the human nervous system unscrambles a scrambled message this will seem to the subject like his very own ideas which just occurred to him, which indeed it did [*sic*]. (16)

The tape recorder only serves to transform writing into voices; what is really needed, Burroughs argues, is a written language that is able to accurately contain those voices, a true synthesis of sound and image. "Scrambles is the democratic way, the way full cellular representations . . . the American way [*sic*]," but this is precisely what Burroughs wants to get past: an idea that one would not be incorrect in assuming simply by virtue of

the fact that *The Electronic Revolution* is a written and printed text, distributed by a small, underground press, and not a mere inscription on magnetic tape (24).

*The Electronic Revolution*, like many works of science fiction and political philosophy, is simultaneously utopian and dystopian, full of contradictions, announcing the need for a solution that it is not clear that Burroughs believes to actually be possible. If audiotape, as Kittler argues, records reality, then reality is clearly not enough for Burroughs—at least not the kind of reality that can be fully contained within a storage medium. Indeed, a kind of dialectical movement emerges throughout *The Electronic Revolution*: Burroughs first establishes the insufficiency of written language and then proposes the tape recorder as an alternative, a more advanced weapon. But then, he returns to the written word—albeit a fictitious one, a hieroglyphic script that does not exist and may very well be impossible—as the only possible solution to our society of control: the dissolution of the “I,” the “is,” the “either/or,” the human. In this way, Burroughs illustrates Bolter and Grusin’s “double logic of remediation,” the unending tension between immediacy and hypermediacy. Media are as much our saviors, he argues, as they are the very roots of oppression.

### *The Braille Film*

A similar argument—that electronic media divorce us from reality even as they bring us closer to it—is performed by Weissner in his 1970 cut-up “novel,” *The Braille Film*. Though Weissner is listed as the text’s sole author, it is fully collaborative, featuring a “counterscript” by Burroughs, as well as “fade-ins” from Pélieu, Wolf Vostell, and

Alistair MacLean.<sup>44</sup> The novel begins with a quotation from McLuhan’s *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), which reads, “TV engineers have begun to explore the braille-like character of the TV image as a means of enabling the blind to see by having this image projected directly onto their skin. We need to use all media in this wise to enable us to see our situation” (qtd. in *The Braille Film* 3). Not only does this passage, and the metaphorical use of braille throughout the text, bring to mind the origin of the title of *Naked Lunch* (“a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork”), but as Robinson notes, it “provides a useful insight into Weissner’s preoccupations as manifested within *The Braille Film*,” also apparent in “the visual similarities between some sections of *The Braille Film* and McLuhan’s texts of the 1960s,” notably McLuhan’s collaborations with graphic designer Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (1967) and *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968) (*Shift Linguals* 111). Further, Robinson argues, Weissner’s use of mixed media collage in *The Braille Film*, like *The Medium is the Massage*, reflects the content in the form, “differentiating different source texts not only through punctuation, but typographical sensation,” revealing the medium and the message as “interdependent, synergised [*sic*]” (116). In this respect, *The Braille Film*—though it borrows heavily from Burroughs’s own texts—predates Burroughs’s “most extreme” experiments with collage: “while Burroughs spoke frequently of the analogy between the cut-ups and the editing of film,” Robinson writes,

---

<sup>44</sup> Further, it is noted that different versions of the some of the texts were previously published in a number of little magazines, including *The San Francisco Earthquake*, *Vincent*, *Intrepid*, *Klacto*, *Fruit Cup*, *International Times*, and others.

“it was Weissner who first realised [*sic*] the filmic nature of the method through the combination of word and image” (116).<sup>45</sup>

That Robinson emphasizes the filmic nature of *The Braille Film* is unsurprising given the text’s title as well as much of its content. However, I want to suggest that the text is in fact a performance of the kind of synthesis of “scrambling” that Burroughs’s describes in *The Electronic Revolution*, and that its appropriate technological analog is thus transmission media—the tape recorder, as it is weaponized by Burroughs, and television—as opposed to the camera and film, mediums of storage. Film, Kittler reminds us, operates in the territory of the imaginary, and not the real, whereas, as Robinson himself writes,

By engaging directly with the prevalent “terror” over who is plotting, ordering and controlling, and exposing the reality of what lies behind the images beamed directly into every living room across the developed world, Weissner uses the cut-ups to the ends Burroughs had intended, namely to expose the true meanings of the propagandist texts circulated by the mass media. (*Shift Linguals* 118-9)

The text’s status as a medium of transmission will perhaps be made more apparent by a brief discussion of Burroughs’s, Weissner’s, and Pélieu’s earlier collaboration, *So Who Owns Death TV?*. According to Robinson, this pamphlet was the direct result of the trio’s experiments with tape recorders, which is readily apparent in the text’s form. Pélieu’s contribution, “Objective Galactic Time: Demolition Plan 23,” reflects audiotape’s time-axis manipulation in its abrupt shifts in semantics, typography (upper- and lower-case), and punctuation, only to be interrupted halfway through with “TWENTY COMMERCIALS BROADCAST BY NUEVA PRESCENCIA. STATIONS NYLON &

---

<sup>45</sup> Burroughs’s own collage experiments include *The Book of Breeething* (1974), *Sidetripping* (1975), and *Ah Pook Is Here* (1979).

CAROLINE. *HEADQUARTERS OF ALL THE GREY GENERATION*. 4 p.m. 3/12. D.P. 23” (n.p.).<sup>46</sup> Weissner’s portion of the text alternates between a two-column cut-up, and loose bits of quoted dialogue, such as this (credited to “The Tamil Times, July 4, 1874”): “TV organisms running in generic botulism fits—they check the bacteria ‘reasonable poison’ . . . Identity Track is ‘A Dead Gringo’ . . . deadliest fix from paranoid vision . . . photo organisms . . . /” (n.p.). Burroughs’s concluding (untitled) contribution begins in disjointed prose, as do Péliu’s and Weissner’s, only to transform into a three-column cut-up, suggesting that *So Who Owns Death TV?* is a transcript of each author’s experiments with tape: Péliu using one tape recorder, Weissner using two, and Burroughs using three, as he describes in *The Electronic Revolution*. As a transcription of electronic noise, it serves to reveal all language—all literature—as noise, presenting reality as incoherent, refusing meaning, suggesting that it is only by exposing the nonsense behind the veneer of what we think of as “sense” that we are able to make sense of anything.

Weissner takes this idea further in *The Braille Film*, and the success of its argument primarily relies on its presentation of itself as a novel—that is, a more or less coherent narrative, which it absolutely is not. In this way, it is a sort of conceptual text: a performance of the media landscape as pure chaos. As with concrete poetry, language is presented as a synthesis of image and sound—and yet, it is still literature. Weissner introduces the novel, writing

The passengers of this hopped up mixed media set are on a trip to the end of the nervous system, to the end of the Invisible Environment. There is no guide no voice no word. Walled in by oscillographs of the past the crew plot a precarious course in dead space of random topographies. Infra-red

---

<sup>46</sup> N.B. the recurrent presence of the number “23” here, as well.

TV screens, exposed nerve ends, phosphorescent comics, roentgen films & tapes of fictitious events, wind-tunnels of gossip, rigged history. LAUTLOSER FLUG DURCH VERFALLENES FLEISCHE. **Et pas de commissions.** SAUVE QUI PEUT [*sic*]. (5)

The multilingual nature of the texts reflects not only the mediated environment in which the narrative elapses, but reminds the reader of Weissner's collaborations with Burroughs and Pélieu, an American and a Frenchman, respectively. The novel follows Karel, or "K.," presumably a German, like Weissner, psychedelically exploring a thoroughly Burroughsian sci-fi dystopia, beginning in California.<sup>47</sup> Weissner describes the media landscape of the novel in the form of a scene description, keeping with what Robinson describes as the "script" theme of *The Braille Film* (*Shift Linguals* 110):

**"Superimpositions of montage landscape: film stills/ molecular diagrams/ language primers/ architectural schema/ comic strips/ weaving patterns/ space hardware/ pulp fiction/ car stylings/ etc.)"** (*The Braille Film* 6).<sup>48</sup> The pulp mood remains strong throughout the novel; Weissner introduces his protagonist, writing, **"Karel, gun in hand, was coming silently down the stairs"** (8). Intercut with the narrative are many uncredited quotations, slips into cut-up poetry, and reproductions of images and texts from other publications. Of the latter is included the following: the McLuhan epigraph already mentioned; a facsimile of Burroughs's first letter to Weissner, from April 21, 1966; a page of McLean's screenplay for Brian G. Hutton's 1968 film *Where Eagles Dare*; a number of images of war taken from *The Medium Is The Massage*; a newspaper

---

<sup>47</sup> Or, it is in fact possible that this is a reference to Karel Čapek, early twentieth-century Czech science fiction writer, author of the play *R.U.R.* (1921), whose full title (translated as *Rossum's Universal Robots*) introduced the word "robot" to the English language.

<sup>48</sup> These images, again, bring to mind Anger's films, and *Scorpio Rising* in particular.

clipping from the British United Press titled, “Fading shadow of a man dead 20 years”; and seven articles “copied” from a fictional magazine titled *The Electric Times*, and a final one, from *The Last Times*. These latter dispatches are dated as follows: (1) *The Electric Times* Vol. II No. 48, July 4, 1874, Cut City USA; (2) *The Electric Times* Vol. II No. 49, October 23, 1965, Cut City USA; (3) *The Electric Times* Vol. II No. 50, April 3, 1969, N.Y.—S.F.; (4) *The Electric Times* Vol. III No. 51, June 19, 1968, N.Y.—S.F.; (5) *The Electric Times* Vol. III No. 23, September 17, 1899, Cut City USA; (6) *The Electric Times* Vol. IV No. 60, March 3, 1970, Paris; (7) *The Electric Times* Vol. III No. 52, December 3, 1969, Cut City USA; and (8) *The Last Times*, Demolition 23, Stop Press Fadeout Bulletin.<sup>49</sup> In addition to, as Robinson points out, mimicking “the newspaper format while simultaneously echoing Burroughs’ *The Coldspring News* and *The Moving Times*,” as well as Weissner’s own magazines, these bulletins provide the reader with a kind of map of the media landscape of *The Braille Film*. K.’s journey, and the text itself, traverses time and space (back and forth between the late 1800s and the 1960s and 1970s; New York, San Francisco, Paris), fiction and nonfiction (the “real world,” and “Cut City USA”). In this way, *The Braille Film* is a science fiction novel, a beat journey that treats an excursion between different media as time travel—the very time axis manipulation which Burroughs and Kittler ascribe to the invention of audiotape.

Robinson notes the self-referential dimension of *The Braille Film*, and points out that “Weissner can be seen to be incorporating the ideas put forward by Burroughs within his work, achieving not only a thematic continuation from Burroughs’ work in his own, but also forming a direct intertextual correspondence between his work and earlier cut-

---

<sup>49</sup> Here’s “23,” again.

ups” (*Shift Linguals* 118). He praises Weissner for standing “out as a writer who arguably advanced the [cut-up] technique the furthest, by realizing Burroughs’ ambitions of creating a truly multimedia mode of writing that would not only create a style of text that was credibly analogous to film but that would also bring art closer to life” (120). Though the cinematic references are strong—the script form, the use of “montage,” though it may as well just be called “collage”—it is likely that Weissner is using “braille film” as a metaphor, rather than attempting to create a “filmic” text. Additionally, as Robinson himself acknowledges, Weissner here takes the “multimedia mode of writing” further than Burroughs ever did—and as my reading of *The Electronic Revolution* suggests, the ultimate mode of writing which Burroughs calls for is one that is not multimedia so much as it is monomedial: a language capable on its own of containing the potential of all media, a sci-fi Rosetta Stone, a hieroglyph as simple as it is complex.

The end of *The Braille Film* is supersaturated with images of electronic media as weaponry:

The cremation specialist wanted to “wipe away all traces” in the sinister esperanto of his profession—He refused gasoline & sent for the “acoustic laser” . . . Just make sure we don’t got no more VD Comics reverberating in the gyms when this show is over . . . “Just goes to show what a dirty film can do . . .”—And remember the Black Death was also Made in Germany—Broadcast aborted as static covered the singed lip and the ‘Spritzer’ jerked in cancer tides of blood . . . **(The microphone sags in my throat . . . Johnny’s body multiplies on the yellow screen)—** Trapped eyes sputter newsprint carrion—**(I felt the tic inside my skull as albino flesh detonated fatal film)**—Sirenas de alarma hung in the Electric Room—). (102)

“**Man we been sublimated already,**” the Alien concludes, and JB, the broadcaster, commands, “Ok, closing-time . . . Roll credits & fade to black . . .” (103)—but even then, there’s another bulletin, *The Last Times*, and though the newsletter invokes the end of all



things (“What deaths by color TV in Los Angeles?” [105]), it is clear that the media landscape will continue to exist, infinitely, on feedback loop. When McLuhan envisions the possibility of braille film, he is describing the inscription of an image on human skin—that is, a media technology that will achieve immediacy, transcending the symbolic and approaching the real. In titling his novel *The Braille Film*, Weissner seems to argue that such a media technology already exists: literature, albeit reconceived as a medium of transmission, and not just of storage.

### *Transmission*

In *Literature, Media, Information Systems*, Kittler writes that with the invention of Turing’s Universal Discrete Machine,

the circle of technical media was closed, and history, that old continent of writing, brought to its end. The coupling of a storage medium and a transmission medium, of a typewriter and a radio network, finally resulted in a universal medium of computation, that is, a machine capable of registering, transmitting, and computing any data whatsoever without human intervention. (125-6).

Short of suggesting that Burroughs and Weissner, in their translation of audiotape into typewritten text, brought literature to the level of computation, I want to conclude by arguing that their experiments with tape reveal a theory of literature rooted in transmission. This theory, like many theories of literature, is necessarily paradoxical. On the one hand, it figures language as a virus in whom humanity is imprisoned as a host—the root of war, suffering, power, control, oppression, and death. Further, it blames language for the very concept of the human, an ideological jail cell from which we must be freed. It points to McLuhanite technophilia and science fiction as tangible solutions, envisioning a revolt of machines operated by humans who refuse the constraints put upon

them by the “I,” the “is,” the “either/or”—the shackles of the word-as-virus, i.e., meaning. And yet, literature is not left by the wayside: typewriters are still typing and presses are still printing. The way to destroy the virus is to do away with the host: let writing write, let the real speak for itself, as Kittler writes, “without human intervention.” What Burroughs and Weissner seem to have discovered, is that it is not literature that is the enemy, but rather, the writer.

The first major innovation of the audiotape, Kittler argues, is that it combines a capacity for storage and transmission within a single medium. As transmitted frequencies are stored, they can be played back, manipulated, and retransmitted.<sup>50</sup> In *The Electronic Revolution*, Burroughs explores the political potential of this retransmission: international revolt. And yet, in writing his methodology, rather than just playing it back, he endorses the medium of literature as a means to transmit—not just implicitly, but in calling for a new hieroglyph, a new language that does away with human intervention, providing a medium of silence as well as noise. A language that, as Kittler would say, writes itself. *The Braille Film*, as a storage of transmission and a transmission of storage, does away with sense entirely, refusing to mean. While the text bears the signature of an author (Weissner’s photograph is present as well), its authorship is undermined by an acknowledged multiplicity: a surfeit of media, many of which are recombinations of other media, ad infinitum. By reconceptualizing literature as a transmission medium, Burroughs and Weissner arrive at the failure of language to mean as literature’s central concern and its most urgent task. Literature need not make sense, but it absolutely must

---

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Samuel Beckett’s 1958 play, *Krapp’s Last Tape* (New York: Grove, 1999).

make noise. As Weissner writes, “Language must fuck”; that is to say, it must be felt physically, as frequency, in advance of intellectual or emotional processing.

The potential of literature to transmit, to produce and reproduce itself with minimal human intervention, is an idea that I have returned to many times in the preceding pages. All of these chapters are concerned with writers and filmmakers turning to various technologies as a means of doing away with the self, the human. In each case, none of these artists is able to escape the media landscape or to successfully dispel a belief in purity, a “real world,” just out of reach, despite their respective rejections of meaning and sense. This is a problem with which literature and cinema continue to negotiate in the twenty-first century, and one I will treat head on, in the epilogue.

For now, though, I want to return to Weissner’s role not as artist, but disseminator, in order to propose that in a world of transmission media, this may in fact be the artist’s most important task. In 1970, Weissner translated into German Bukowski’s *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* (1969), a collection of columns Bukowski wrote for the underground press throughout the 1960s. Weissner had caught wind of Bukowski’s brief epistolary exchange with Henry Miller, whom Bukowski often praised as the most important living American writer, and thus decided that it would not be altogether ridiculous to include a fabricated blurb from Miller on the back cover of the German edition of the book. And so, Weissner wrote, “Each line in Bukowski is infected by the terror of the American nightmare. He articulates the fears & agonies of the vast minority in the no-man’s-land between inhuman brutalization and helpless despair” (qtd. in Debritto 110). Weissner sent the blurb to Bukowski, admitting its false authorship; the latter replied, writing, “I’m not too happy with the fake H.M. quote, and I would not tell [John Martin, Bukowski’s

American publisher] about it or he'd flip—maybe. But if you think it will make a difference in selling 2,000 or 5,000 go ahead. It's best that we survive. By the way, I like the blurb itself. Quite accurate" (qtd. in Debritto 110).<sup>51</sup> The blurb was ultimately included in the German edition, and Weissner never got into any trouble for it.

With this bit of fraud, Weissner writes another Henry Miller into existence, returning the Brooklyn boy to Europe not as Surrealist-in-training, but as Beat-laureate, elder statesman. There is surely poetic justice in German Americophile Weissner using German-American Miller to endorse German-born American Bukowski—here Bangs's "holloweyed jerkyfingered mannikins" are repatriated to the Fatherland. More than that, though, Weissner as editor, translator, and publisher is here able to write the real into existence, privileging the fakery of writing over the falsity of meaning. In his short pastiche of Miller, Weissner explores the possibilities of literature as transmission, and reveals Miller's own writing as transmission in retrospect: Henry Miller is not a person, Henry Miller is an idea. Foucault writes of authorship as a function:

A private letter may well have a signer—it does not have an author; a contract may well have a guarantor—it does not have an author. An anonymous text posted on a wall probably has a writer—but not an author. The author function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society. (108)

Ten years later, Joy Division's Ian Curtis sings, "Well I could call out when the going gets tough. / The things that we know are never enough. / No language, just sound, that's all we need know, / To synchronize love to the beat of the show" ("Transmission"). In "Digital," Curtis—who hanged himself in 1980, on the eve of Joy Division's first

---

<sup>51</sup> Debritto also notes that Weissner is the likely source of the supposed declaration by Sartre and Jean Genet that Bukowski was "the best poet in America"; there does not appear to be any record of either of them every having said or written this (111).

American tour, having just watched Werner Herzog's *Stroszek* (1977), and listened to Iggy Pop's *The Idiot* (1977), recorded in Munich and Berlin—expresses a “fear . . . closing in . . . as patterns seem to form.”<sup>52</sup> In mathematics, a function is defined as a “variable quantity regarded in its relation to one or more other variables in terms of which it may be expressed, or on the value of which its own value depends”; in computing, it denotes “[a]ny of the basic operations in a computer, esp. one that corresponds to a single instruction” (“function, *n.*” n.p.).

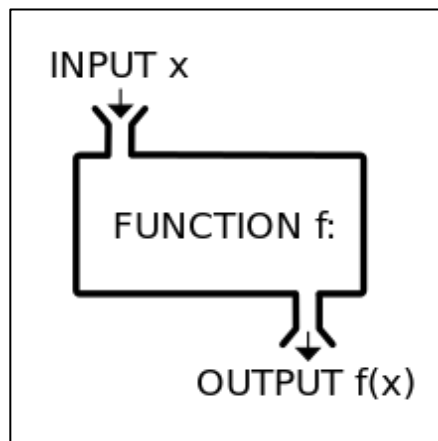


Figure 11

As literature in the twenty-first century becomes fully electronic—computerized, digital, online—the author becomes functional in all of these senses. The writer is nothing but editor, translator, publisher: herself, a transmission medium, through which an uninterrupted flow of texts are input and output, as Curtis sings, “Day in, day out, / Day in, day out . . .” (“Digital”).

---

<sup>52</sup> See Deborah Curtis, *Touching From a Distance: Ian Curtis and Joy Division* (New York: Macmillan, 2007).

## Epilogue

### Another Country

The Real World *is*  
*the real world is*  
 The Real World *is*  
*the real world.*

—Chuck Klosterman<sup>1</sup>

As the poet, critic, and digital archivist Kenneth Goldsmith—pink-suited professor of “Wasting Time on the Internet” (a course currently offered by the University of Pennsylvania), honored guest of Barack Obama and Stephen Colbert, recently controversial appropriator of “The Body of Michael Brown”—writes in his 2011 book *Uncreative Writing*, “From the looks of it, most writing proceeds as if the Internet had never happened” (6).<sup>2</sup> Citing Brion Gysin’s 1959 proclamation that writing is fifty years

---

<sup>1</sup> See Klosterman 91.

<sup>2</sup> On March 13, 2015, Goldsmith read the autopsy of Brown—the eighteen-year-old black male shot dead by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014—to the audience of “Interrupt 3,” a conference held at Brown University. The reading resulted in no small amount of backlash from the conference attendees, resulting in a viral controversy that spread far and wide across the Internet. Goldsmith defended his reading in a Facebook post, writing, “I altered the text for poetic effect; I translated into plain English many obscure medical terms that would have stopped the flow of the text; I narrativized it in ways that made the text less didactic and more literary. I indeed stated at the beginning of my reading that this was a poem called “The Body of Michael Brown”; I never stated, “I am going to read the autopsy report of Michael Brown.” But then again, this is what I did in *Seven Deaths and Disasters*. I always massage dry texts to transform them into literature, for that it (sic) what they are when I read them. That said, I didn’t add or alter a single word or sentiment that did not preexist in the original text, for to do so would be go against my nearly three decades’ practice of conceptual writing, one that states that a writer need not write any new texts but rather reframe those that already exist in the world to greater effect than any subjective interpretation could lend.” Attendees were taken aback, especially, by the

behind painting, he argues that, “in spite of the successes of modernism, literature has remained on two parallel tracks, the mainstream and the avant-garde, with the two rarely intersecting” (13). With the Internet, “writing has encountered a situation similar to what happened to painting with the invention of photography, a technology so much better at replicating reality that, in order to survive, painting had to alter its course radically” (14).<sup>3</sup> While painting’s response to technology was impressionism, Goldsmith does not see literature heading in an abstract direction. Rather, he advocates “uncreative writing,” a vision of conceptual writing rooted in “replicating, organizing, mirroring, archiving, and reprinting,” imagining the contemporary writer as exhibiting “the expertise of a secretary crossed with the attitude of a pirate” (220); following Marjorie Perloff’s concepts of “*unoriginal genius*” and “*moving information*,” he argues that “today’s writer resembles more a programmer than a tortured genius, brilliantly conceptualizing, constructing, executing, and maintaining a writing machine” (1-2).

Goldsmith is not alone in identifying plagiarism and collage as digital culture’s most striking contributions to literature in the twenty-first century: Goldsmith’s sometime collaborator, Marcus Boon, makes a similar argument in 2010’s *In Praise of Copying*; novelists Jonathan Lethem and David Shields both mount intriguing defenses of

---

concluding line of Goldsmith’s reading: “The remaining genitalia system is unremarkable.” Goldsmith later requested that Brown University not release audio or video of the reading, citing the “pain” it had caused. See Jillian Steinhauer, “Kenneth Goldsmith Remixes Michael Brown Autopsy Report as Poetry,” *Hyperallergic* 16 Mar. 2015, Web, 26 Mar. 2015, <http://hyperallergic.com/190954/kenneth-goldsmith-remixes-michael-brown-autopsy-report-as-poetry/>.

<sup>3</sup> Media theorists such as Kittler, Jonathan Crary, Jay David Bolter, and Richard Grusin would more likely attribute this shift to painting’s anticipation of photography, arguing that the invention of photography was only possible after nineteenth-century painters had perfected realist perspective. See Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*; Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT, 1990); and Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*.

uncreative writing in 2007's "The Anxiety of Influence" and 2010's *Reality Hunger*, respectively, in the form of fully plagiarized texts, following Walter Benjamin's mantra, "I need say nothing, only exhibit" (qtd. in Shields 6). And while Lethem succeeds in making a compelling argument in favor of the art of plagiarism (sampling Steve Erickson's 2005 novel *Our Ecstatic Days*, he writes, "Whatever charge of tastelessness or trademark violation may be attached to the artistic appropriation of the media environment in which we swim, the alternative . . . is far worse. We're surrounded by signs; our imperative is to ignore none of them" [63]), it is difficult to accept that the copy/paste-sample-remix aesthetic proposed by Goldsmith, Boon, Lethem, and Shields is the only, or even primary, episteme of literature in the digital age. In fact, by privileging the collage as "innovation" while simultaneously acknowledging its fundamental contribution to the development of modernism across all media in the twentieth century, it seems that Goldsmith & Co. are the very ones responsible for any supposed "rut" in which literature may be stuck today. Perhaps the problem is that the literary avant-garde is no longer avant-garde. Perhaps the avant-garde, as a concept, has finally run its course.

To be fair, Goldsmith is a poet, and thus does not show much concern for the novel in his analysis of literature after the Internet. Shields, however, has more to say about the subject, noting that, "Every artistic movement from the beginning of time is an attempt to figure out a way to smuggle more of what the artist thinks is reality into the work of art" (3), adding that since its coining as a term (appropriating J.M. Coetzee's language), the novel has "had the vaguest of meanings; it meant the form of writing that was formless, that had no rules, that made up its own rules as it went along" (13). For Shields, the contemporary novel is marked by a blurring of fiction and nonfiction, a trend



that can be seen in “nonfiction novels” such as Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X* (1991) as well as it can in fabricated memoirs like James Frey’s much scandalized *A Million Little Pieces* (2003). Shields attributes this rise in “reality-fiction,” as he calls it elsewhere, to—among other things—the proliferation of reality television and the infinite virtual realities made possible by Internet and mobile technology.<sup>4</sup> “Reality-based art,” he writes, is a “metaphor for the fact that this is all there is, there ain’t no more” (55).

Reviewing Choire Sicha’s 2013 “novel” *Very Recent History: An Entirely Factual Account of a Year (c. AD 2009) in a Large City* for the *New York Observer*, M.H. Miller argues that the book is an “exemplary entry in—and in many ways a blistering critique of—a style of writing” which Miller refers to as “post-fiction” (n.p.). Post-fiction, he writes, “represents a chiasmus between the real and the made-up, blurring the two into nonrecognition, confronting a reader with all those issues one is trained by the Western academy not to look for: namely, the author herself, hiding behind the words. It has more in common with the epistolary novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> century than with Don DeLillo” (n.p.).<sup>5</sup> Among the writers Miller classifies as “purveyors of post-fiction” are:

Sheila Heti, whose *How Should a Person Be?* [2012] presumably includes actual transcripts of conversations between the author and her friends (all of whose names have not been changed); Lydia Davis, who has written stories about how she wrote her own earlier stories; Tao Lin, whose novels convey more about their author’s public persona with the word “and” than most memoirists do in hundreds of pages; Ben Lerner, whose first novel, *Leaving the Atocha Station* [2007], in its remarkable verisimilitude (our

---

<sup>4</sup> See Sonya Chung, “The Millions Interview: David Shields (Part Two), *The Millions*, 11 Feb. 2010, Web, 26 Mar. 2015, <http://www.themillions.com/2010/02/the-millions-interview-david-shields-part-two.html>.

<sup>5</sup> However, it is worth noting that DeLillo, too, has incorporated the Internet into his fiction: the end of his magnum opus *Underworld* seems to dissolve into cyberspace, with the author asking in free indirect discourse, “Is cyberspace a thing within the world or is it the other way around? Which contains the other, and how can you tell for sure?” See DeLillo, *Underworld* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) 826.

hero takes a shower, smokes a cigarette, reads the paper, etc.), is an epic about being bored; and Chris Kraus, author of *I Love Dick* [1997], which stars Chris Kraus writing a series of fantasy love letters and diary entries to a man—Dick Hebdige, with many attributes changed—that she eventually sends to him in the novel and in real life. (n.p.)

Miller doesn't say much about the Internet in his description of post-fiction, except to note Sicha's significant Internet presence: onetime Gawker editor (not to mention, like Miller himself, *Observer* employee), Sicha is most well-known for founding the popular website The Awl, a "working satire of the Internet, updated every hour or so," the constituent sentences of which "appear to be simply tossed off," the "language passive in a way that borders on apathy," though, Miller believes, Sicha "knows exactly what he's doing" (n.p.). He identifies a suggestion in *Very Recent History*—a book about journalism, though the field never receives mention by name, only as a "job"—that "journalism, like any other form of narrative writing, can't help but be several layers removed from reality—at best, mimetic, even as certain details are presented as fact" (n.p.). Sicha "critiques journalism even as he plays by its rules, which furthers the book's novelistic tone"—a move which reminds Miller of Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), "the standard definition of what a novel is, which argues that there is no standard definition of what a novel is, referring to the genre, as one might refer to Mr. Sicha's writing on a whole, as 'both critical and self-critical'" (n.p.). Scrolling down to the bottom of Miller's review, the reader will come across seven comments, posted via Facebook. The first—posted on July 31, 2013, at 4:43 AM—reads, "enjoyed reading this. [ . . . ] moving & stimulating/interesting" (n.p.). As of this writing, the comment has received three "likes." The author: Tao Lin.

Lin's place in the post-fiction canon is an interesting case in point, and not only because he began his career publishing poetry and short fiction in online literary magazines associated with the Alt-Lit community (Word Riot, Bear Parade), subsequently climbing the ranks of the publishing world—first through small presses (Action Books and Melville House), and most recently, Vintage, which published the novel *Taipei* in 2013 to much critical acclaim.<sup>6</sup> (His *Selected Tweets* will be published by Hobart's SF/LD imprint later this year.) Both Lin's poetry and prose manifest a kind of pokerfaced irreverence—labeled by some as “post-ironic,” a quality that ties together a loosely-knit, multimedia movement referred to as “the New Sincerity”—perhaps most immediately apparent in Lin's poem “i went fishing with my family when i was five”:<sup>7</sup>

when i was five  
 i went fishing with my family  
 my dad caught a turtle  
 my mom caught a snapper  
 my brother caught a crab  
 i caught a whale

that night we ate crab  
 the next night we ate turtle  
 the next night we ate snapper  
 the next night we ate whale  
 . . . (n.p.)

---

<sup>6</sup> The book received a long, glowing blurb from novelist Frederick Bartheleme; Ellis tweeted, “With ‘Taipei’ Tao Lin becomes the most interesting prose stylist of his generation, which doesn't mean that Taipei isn't a boring novel . . .” See Ellis (BretEastonEllis), 4 Mar 2013, 2:00 AM, Tweet.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, A.D. Jameson, “What we talk about when we talk about the New Sincerity, part 1,” HTMLGIANT, 4 Jun. 2012, Web, 26 Mar. 2015, <http://htmlgiant.com/haut-or-not/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-new-sincerity/>; Jameson, “What we talk about when we talk about the New Sincerity, part 2,” HTMLGIANT, 11 Jun. 2012, Web, 26 Mar. 2015, <http://htmlgiant.com/haut-or-not/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-new-sincerity-part-2/>; Matthew Collins, “Post-irony is real, and so what?,” *The Georgetown Voice*, 4 Mar. 2010, Web, 26 Mar. 2015, <http://georgetownvoice.com/2010/03/04/post-irony-is-real-and-so-what/>.

The “joke” of the poem is that, in its published form, the final line (“the next night we ate whale”) is repeated a total of three thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine times; in readings, it has become a trademark of Lin’s to repeat the line for marathon stretches of time, sometimes for as long as eight minutes.<sup>8</sup> The hybrid of minimalism and maximalism on display here bears the influence of digital culture to a great extent, both in terms of the relative ease of production allowed by the copy/paste technique with which Goldsmith, et al., are so obsessed, as well as the fact that only online, where space is practically infinite and word counts are more or less irrelevant, would such a text be deemed publishable: it’s likely that only the most radical of print editors would ever approve the poem to run in toto.

When asked by *Review 31*’s Katie Da Cunha Lewin the somewhat absurd question, “What are the concerns of the contemporary novel?,” critic Perry Meisel responds by offering three distinct “directions” of the form in the twenty-first century. First, what Meisel calls “imitation modernism”: a conventional trajectory pursued by writers like Paul Auster, Jennifer Egan, and Jonathan Franzen, it is “both popular and critically praised—the familiar novel of psychological inwardness, an inheritance from High Modernism, whose protocols have become conventionalized, together with a return to the generic plot structure of the kind of realist fiction High Modernism presumably superseded” (n.p.).<sup>9</sup> The second category Meisel assigns to “the fantastical mode . . .

---

<sup>8</sup> The line is repeated so many times, in fact, that Microsoft Word crashed when I attempted to copy/paste the poem, in order to arrive at an accurate count.

<sup>9</sup> Franzen is among the most vocal critics of Internet culture. At number eight in his “Ten rules for writing fiction,” Franzen instructs, “It’s doubtful that anyone with an Internet connection at his workplace is writing good fiction.” Indeed, contemporary writers as diverse as Zadie Smith and George R.R. Martin have admitted to writing on machines without Internet capabilities—a Luddite trend worth further exploration. See

members of the School of Barthelme,” by which he means Donald, and not Frederick, and which he associates with Ben Marcus, Nicholson Baker, and Will Self (n.p.). The third category belongs to “media fiction,” the inheritors of what David Foster Wallace called the “literature of the image” in his 1990 essay “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction” (n.p.).<sup>10</sup> Meisel notes that though “Wallace—a better critic than a novelist—never wrote this kind of fiction, others have begun to,” among them Jay Cantor (whom Wallace mentions in his essay), Max Jacobson, and Tao Lin. Media fiction, Meisel writes, is “the most promising new direction for fiction, though it is only just opening up despite the many cultural pressures that make it an inevitability” (n.p.). He notes Lin’s incorporation of Google Chat in *Taipei*, “which explores the incursion of social media into our daily discursive universe,” resulting in a novel that

is not fiction about fiction in the old ‘metafictional’ sense—a story about a story—but is itself realist in the strictest sense: These presumably ‘other’ or distinct media are in fact the very stuff of the real. Dr. Johnson’s original sense of the novel’s specificity—that it represents the real languages of life by participating in them—is reinvented here. Representing media is, in the classic Johnsonian sense, the representation of the way we live now. (n.p.)<sup>11</sup>

---

Elmore Leonard, et al., “Ten rules for writing fiction,” *The Guardian* 19 Feb. 2010, Web, 26 Mar. 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/20/ten-rules-for-writing-fiction-part-one>.

<sup>10</sup> Wallace’s title is an inversion of the de facto motto of the U.S.—replaced by “In God we trust” in 1956—*E pluribus unum* (“Out of many, one”), included in the Great Seal and on American currency. “E unibus pluram,” meaning “out of one, many,” originates as a mishearing of the motto by the character Giles Goat-Boy in John Barth’s 1966 novel of the same name—though, Wallace gives credit to Stanley Cavell, who used it as an epigraph in *Pursuits of Happiness* (1981). Humorously, either Meisel, Lewin, or the *Review 31* editors misprinted Wallace’s title as “E Unum Pluribus,” which translates to mean the same thing as “E pluribus unum,” and not its inversion.

<sup>11</sup> Meisel continues, adding, “It is, ironically, imitation psychological modernism that is, by contrast, metafiction in the weak sense—a story about a story of isolated inner space once told and now no longer alive because no longer true” (n.p.).

Media fiction—or post-fiction, or reality fiction, or image fiction—can thus be seen as a reaction to the postmodern metafiction of the 1960s and 1970s, which came of age in response to television, as Wallace argues, providing an avant-garde outlet for the hip, ironic “aesthetic of rebellion” which television itself institutionalized (184).<sup>12</sup> While the early practitioners of image fiction—“hyperrealists” or “post-postmodernists” such as William T. Vollmann, Stephen Dixon, and even filmmakers like Steven Soderbergh and David Cronenberg—attempted to “impose some sort of accountability on a state of affairs in which more Americans get their news from television than from newspapers and in which more Americans every evening watch *Wheel of Fortune* than all three network news programs combined” (172), they ultimately failed, because “TV has beaten the imagists to the punch,” by which he means, “for at least ten years now television has been ingeniously absorbing, homogenizing, and re-presenting the very cynical postmodern aesthetic that was once the best alternative to the appeal of low, over-easy, mass-marketed narrative” (173).<sup>13</sup>

1990 was of course too early for Wallace to have commented on the impact of digital culture on American fiction—though he does make some remarkable predictions which sound a lot like YouTube and Netflix: with the “telecomputer,” he writes, “everybody’ll get to be his own harried guy with headphones and clipboard. In the new

---

<sup>12</sup> Wallace identifies two waves of metafiction from the 1960s through the 1980s. The first wave, made up by John Barth, William Gaddis, Thomas Pynchon, James Cummin, Robert Coover, Max Apple, and Bill Knott, “found pop images valid *referents* and *symbols* in fiction” (171). The second wave—Stephen Dobyns, DeLillo, and others—started “to treat of pop and TV and watching as themselves fertile *subjects*” (171). In contrast, he argues, the hyperrealists use “the transient received myths of popular culture as a *world* in which to imagine fictions about ‘real,’ albeit pop-mediated, public characters” (171).

<sup>13</sup> “How TV’s done this,” Wallace adds, “is blackly fascinating to see” (173).

millennium, U.S. television will finally become ideally, GOPishly democratic: egalitarian, interactive, and ‘profitable’ without being exploitative. . . . We will, in short, be able to engineer our own dreams” (187).<sup>14</sup> As such, his conclusion is self-consciously opaque, and has become something of a rallying cry for the generation of writers to which Lin, Heti, Lerner, etc. belong—that is, Millennials, those born after Wallace’s (not to mention Goldsmith’s) Generation X.<sup>15</sup> If there is a predominant theme of Wallace’s essay, it is intergenerational struggle: indeed, Lethem, Shields, and Goldsmith all plagiarize a passage in which Wallace writes of a “certain grey eminence” whose “ganglia were formed pre-TV” and thus believed that fiction must “eschew ‘any feature which serves to date it’” (167).<sup>16</sup> Concluding the essay, Wallace writes,

The next real literary “rebels” in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of “anti-rebels,” born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and fatigue. These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naïve, anachronistic. Maybe that’ll be the point, why they’ll be the next real rebels. Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk things. Risk disapproval. The old postmodern insurgents risked the gasp and squeal: shock, disgust, outrage, censorship, accusations of socialism, anarchism, nihilism. The new rebels might be the ones willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the “How banal.” Accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Credulity. Willingness to be suckered by a world of lurkers and starers who fear gaze and ridicule above imprisonment without law. Who knows. (193)<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Though Wallace wrote the essay in 1990, it was first published by the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* in 1993, and later included in Wallace’s 1997 essay collection, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again* (New York: Little, Brown, 1997) 21-82.

<sup>15</sup> Davis and Kraus are both of an earlier generation; their anticipation of post-fiction is a subject worthy of exploring further.

<sup>16</sup> Lethem is also a Gen-Xer; Shields, born in 1956, is technically a baby boomer.

<sup>17</sup> Continuing, he writes, “Today’s most engaged young fiction does seem like some kind of line’s end’s end. I guess that means we all get to draw our own conclusions. Have to. Are you immensely pleased?” (193).

If the pioneers of post-fiction have accepted Wallace's prophecy wholesale, actively striving toward fulfilling its promise, who is to blame them? How better to rebel against the anti-authoritarian generations that came before than to bow down to their authority, to take their word as gospel?

Briefly, I want to consider a number of ways in which Lin's 2010 novel, *Richard Yates*, more or less insignificantly named after the author of *Revolutionary Road* (1961), responds to Wallace's call—not unlike Whitman's response to Emerson more than a century-and-a-half prior. The novel centers around two characters named after Hollywood actors who came to prominence as children: Dakota Fanning, sixteen, and Haley Joel Osment, twenty-two, who meet each other on Gchat, and begin a harried, even abusive, long-distance relationship which mainly consists of the two comparing, online and via text message, their respective intensities of depression, baiting each other into committing suicide.<sup>18</sup> Once they meet in-person, their relationship becoming physical as opposed to merely electronic, new problems arise: Dakota Fanning's troubled family life and struggles with bulimia; Haley Joel Osment's jealousy, control issues, and emotional instability. The novel is a *Romeo & Juliet* for the digital age as much as it is a *Lolita*—compounded with that, it is also a documentary, composed almost entirely of email, chat, and text exchanges between Lin and his ex-girlfriend, E.R. Kennedy, a fact which is the source of recent controversy surrounding the novel, with Kennedy publicly accusing Lin

---

<sup>18</sup> Yates's role in the novel begins when Dakota Fanning steals one of his novels from a Barnes & Noble (along with a Daniel Clowes comic). His face, as it appears on the back of *The Easter Parade* (1976), becomes a symbol for Haley Joel Osment's existential ambivalence ("I keep staring at Richard Yates' face on the back of *The Easter Parade* but not having any reaction to it. Just looking" [*Richard Yates* 94]; "He stared at Richard Yates' author photo and grinned while thinking 'Party girl' and feeling a little confused" [98]), and is ultimately used by Haley Joel Osment as a "mouse-pad" (150).



of statutory rape, emotional abuse, and unauthorized appropriation, despite having previously given Lin legal permission to include his language in the novel in advance of its publication.<sup>19</sup> To complicate things further, Lin concludes the novel with an index, listing nouns and their occurrences from “9/11” to “zombie,” sub-listing twenty-three different kinds of “facial expression.”<sup>20</sup>

Early in the novel, while eating—consumption abounds in Lin’s fiction such that food could be said to have its only place in his media landscape—Haley Joel Osment thinks to himself, “I fear social interaction. . . . Probably more than anyone I know. More than so many people. Seems ‘surreal,’ like it’s not really true. Talking to Dakota seems ‘surreal,’ because of her level of creativity maybe. It seems fun. I like talking to her. I like her writing” (12). The protagonist then, Lin writes, “walked to the kitchen, picked up a container of organic flaxseeds, walked to his room, put organic flaxseeds on his pasta” (12). This passage, so representative of Lin’s prose, certainly risks “the yawn, the rolled eyes, . . . the ‘How banal’” of Wallace’s prediction, and one may not be wrong to read a strange brew of sincerity and repression into Haley Joel Osment’s interior monologue. And yet, the emphatic repetition of “seems” and the Jamesian quotation marks betray the writing as wholly lacking in credulity; there is nothing here if not self-consciousness and fatigue. If Lin has achieved Wallace’s “literature of the image,” as Meisel has it, it is not

---

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, formerly known as “Ellen,” now identifies as male, hence my use of the masculine pronoun. See Erin Gloria Ryan, “Alt-Lit icon Tao Lin Accused of Statutory Rape and Abuse,” *Jezebel* 2 Oct. 2014, Web, 30 Mar. 2015, <http://jezebel.com/alt-lit-icon-tao-lin-accused-of-horrific-rape-and-abuse-1641641060>.

<sup>20</sup> These include, in alphabetical order: alert, amused, angry, bored, calm, concerned, confident, confused, depressed, distracted, excited, expectant, friendly, happy, intense, nervous, neutral, sad, scared, shy, strange, upset, worried. “Nervous facial expression,” receives the most mentions in *Richard Yates*, occurring four times in the novel.

without a style of his own: a sheepishly hesitant, ambivalently earnest fear of the world that Wallace may not have been able to imagine from his historical position, though to which, it could be argued, he ultimately succumbed in his writing and his life. The retreat into cyberspace, by both the individual and the culture-at-large, which Lin is able to capture in his fiction is not a technophilic embrace of the simulacrum: in *Taipei*, Lin makes his analogy between the Internet and designer drugs like MDMA painfully explicit. On Gchat, Haley Joel Osment tells a character named Julia that he has no friends; she responds, “I am your friend”; he corrects himself, typing, “I mean in real life”; she replies, “Nobody wants to discuss how lonely life is . . . Everyone is more interested in toothpaste” (76).

It is despite himself that Haley Joel Osment so avidly believes in this distinction between “real life” and the Internet; Lin’s narration belies this belief, revealing it to be false:

Haley Joel Osment stayed on his bed one afternoon reading *The End of the Story* lying on his stomach looking at the book on the floor. It was about a relationship that ended and Haley Joel Osment focused on finding things about his own life in it. One night at 1:30 a.m. Dakota Fanning text-messaged “I miss you so much.” Haley Joel Osment text-messaged, “I miss you, sad, editing stories, drank alcohol energy drink.” He made a comic for her about a hamster that goes on a killing rampage against humans. She emailed three photos of herself. “You look like an elf, a tall person, and an elf,” said Haley Joel Osment and thought that she had lost weight and looked very professional and clean and pretty. Dakota Fanning said she was an elf. They talked about writing a book called *How to Steal from American Apparel, Whole Foods, Virgin Megastore, and Duane Reade* and putting it on the Internet. She mailed him a giant box with a forty-page letter inside and he read it on his bed and text-messaged her that he was happy. The letter included photocopies from the copier at Dakota Fanning’s mother’s office. One photocopy was of Woody Allen’s head next to a squid. “Shit,” said Dakota Fanning on Gmail chat Thursday. “I forgot to talk to my mom about tomorrow. I’m going to try to stay home.

So you can come. I'm going to tell her I want to go to Subway to look for a job." (83)<sup>21</sup>

This media landscape—which includes literature, text messages, comics, photographs, the Internet, photocopies, and Woody Allen—is literally inescapable, an intertwining of the virtual and the real so perfect that neither can be said to fully exist. But Haley Joel Osment refuses to do away with the distinction, acknowledging that after his relationship with Dakota Fanning is complicated by their in person meetings, he “would always think ‘I’m not going to be with her anymore’ but then we would talk on Gmail chat and text messages and I would like you again” (111). Lin’s translation of electronically documented correspondence into a novel—much like Heti’s *How Should a Person Be?* and Kraus’s *I Love Dick*—brings the novel back to its British origins, when a novelist like Samuel Richardson, disguised as mere “Editor,” felt compelled to preface his epistolary *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by noting the book’s “*Foundation in Truth and Nature*,” presenting it as a work of nonfiction in order to fit its stated mission to “*Divert and Entertain, and at the same time to Instruct, and Improve the Minds of the Youth of both Sexes*” (3). Where the eighteenth-century British novel sought to legitimize its fictitiousness by means of an appeal to truth—reality—the twenty-first-century American novel does the opposite, cloaking “reality” in the pretext of fiction.<sup>22</sup> It is not that the poles have reversed; rather, they were never there in the first place. In this way, the controversy surrounding Lin’s right to publish the novel—with or without Kennedy’s permission—is undermined by the fact that Lin and Kennedy are Haley Joel

---

<sup>21</sup> Lin did in fact writing a book with a similar title to the one mentioned here, *Shoplifting from American Apparel*, a novella published by Melville House in 2009.

<sup>22</sup> The same could be said of the rise of the mockumentary genre in film in the 1990s, and the introduction of this mode into the TV sitcom of the early 2000s in shows like *The Office*.

Osment and Dakota Fanning, respectively, to the same extent that Haley Joel Osment and Dakota Fanning are “Haley Joel Osment” and “Dakota Fanning.” As Chuck Klosterman reminds us, during the premiere of *The Real World* in the summer of 1992, he “saw kids on MTV who reminded [him] of people [he] knew in real life,” but by 1997, “the opposite was starting to happen” (94). What post-fiction shows us, as the novel always has, is that while there is no such thing as the virtual, there is also nothing else.

### *Spring Break Forever*

While Lin reacts to the digital age with a neutral facial expression, Harmony Korine celebrates it with neon colors, electronic dance music (EDM), and—as the character Alien (James Franco) in Korine’s 2012 film *Spring Breakers* puts it—“bikinis and big boobies, y’all, that’s what life is about.” Like Lin, though, Korine manages to remediate the digital on the level of form and content into the medium of his choice—in this case, what appears to be on the surface a conventional Hollywood film. When *Spring Breakers* was first announced, it caused a stir for a number of reasons. In the first place, there was a cognitive dissonance of Korine, widely known as an experimental filmmaker, directing what the trailer and marketing campaign sold as a straightforward if dark “teen movie”: a band of four bikini clad college girls head to Florida for spring break, where they meet a tattooed bad-boy Svengali (Alien), and get caught up in a life of drugs, guns, money, and crime. Compounded with that is Korine’s choice in casting: two of the stars of *Spring Breakers*, Selena Gomez (Faith) and Vanessa Hudgens (Candy), were reared on the Disney farm, gaining notoriety for their roles in preteen family-friendly TV: Gomez previously starred in the Disney Channel sitcom *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and Hudgens

in the Disney Channel's made-for-TV movie franchise, *High School Musical*. On first glance, *Spring Breakers* seems to fit in with the good-girl-gone-wild cliché of Hollywood casting, providing a platform for young actresses to shed their wholesome reputations and break out as unabashedly sexualized women: "real" actresses.

What is remarkable about *Spring Breakers* is that it fully works on this level while simultaneously critiquing all of these clichés. Viewers of the film expecting to see Gomez and Hudgens wearing almost nothing while snorting cocaine and dancing to Skrillex will not be disappointed—but they will also be exposed to a complex critique of capitalism, racism, and American culture in the process. For instance, after Faith, Candy, and their two partners in crime (Ashley Benson's Brit and Rachel Korine's Cotty) are bailed out of jail by Alien, a white rapper who wears his hair in cornrows and sports gold-plated grillz on his teeth ("I was the only white boy in my entire neighborhood," he tells them), he takes them to a rather benign party in a garage: a group of mostly men shoot pool, smoke blunts, dance to hip hop, and laugh. Candy, Brit, and Cotty seem to dig the scene, but Faith—presented as the "good girl" of the group, a devout Christian who regularly attends bible studies—is noticeably uncomfortable. "This is weird," she tells her friends, "I don't know these people. . . . These people touching us and talking to us. This isn't why we came here." This, of course, comes after the viewer has witnessed scene after scene of the girls packed like sardines into crowds of naked, sweaty, and drunk strangers in motel rooms and on the beach, engaging in behavior which is on all levels more "threatening" than what is on display here. Except all of those strangers are white. Further, much of the spring break debauchery is an appropriation of African-American culture as mediated to the girls by hip hop culture: the music, the dancing, the style of

partying. Once Alien, the human embodiment of cultural appropriation, brings them to the “source” of that culture, which is comparatively tame, Faith gets a “bad feeling” and decides to go home. Without having to state it explicitly, Korine makes it rather obvious what that “bad feeling” is.

Throughout the film, Korine reconstructs the crime caper as a digital fantasy. All of his symbols are overdetermined—but so is our culture, he argues, juxtaposing the narrative—shot on film—with digital footage of real spring breakers: young men suggestively eating popsicles, a line-up of young men pouring beer cans held at their waists into the mouths of young women lying beneath them. This documentary “reality” is not limited to the digital footage, either: Korine shot on film many of the spring break scenes at actual spring break parties in St. Petersburg; during production, images of Hudgens snorting cocaine off a naked girl’s chest leaked online, spawning rumors that it was the “real thing.” Even so, this is no instance of *cinéma vérité*, as Korine is fully aware that spring break, as it is portrayed in the film, is a necessarily mediated event whose genesis can be traced back to 1986, when MTV began its annual broadcast of co-eds going wild in Daytona Beach, resulting in an entire industry of spin-offs, perhaps the most unfortunate of which is Joe Francis’s *Girls Gone Wild* pornography franchise, which has been filming women’s breasts and filing liability release forms since 1997.<sup>23</sup> As a film about spring break, then, *Spring Breakers* is a film about media.

This is familiar territory for Korine, whose 2007 film, *Mister Lonely*, takes place on an island inhabited by celebrity impersonators (Diego Luna as faux-Michael Jackson, Samantha Morton as faux-Marilyn Monroe). His 2009 film, *Trash Humpers*, is more of a

---

<sup>23</sup> Technically, the first media representation of spring break is Henry Levin’s 1960 film *Where the Boys Are*, starring George Hamilton.

conceptual art piece than it is an actual film: a document of people having sex with trash cans (as the title suggests), the film is reminiscent of viral videos like the *Bumfights* series, grindhouse stagings of disadvantaged people doing unsavory things. Like several of Korine's films—including 1999's *Julien Donkey-Boy*—*Trash Humpers* was filmed without a script, just a series of loosely construed ideas, and Korine filmed it on VHS tapes, reporting that at one point he considered not releasing the film at all, “just making a bunch of copies and leaving them on the sidewalk somewhere, and seeing what would happen” (Ebiri n.p.). This fascination with medium and process is notable in a filmmaker like Korine, who began his career as a writer, having penned the screenplay for Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995) when he was only nineteen years old.<sup>24</sup>

Though *Spring Breakers* is rigorously scripted, the film's origins are rooted in the kind of digital collage advocated by Goldsmith. In an interview which occurred shortly after the film's release, Franco reported that about a year after he signed on to the film, only having read a brief treatment, Korine, “a great Internet researcher,” sent Franco “all the weirdest things you could possibly find on the Internet, and they all went into the mix. . . . The weirdest stuff you can imagine. . . . Interviews with odd people, weird photos—you know, like gangsters that have Miley Cyrus tattoos” (“Episode 374”). Explaining further, Korine says, “You react to certain images and things—or, I do—and I just compile them . . . Audio clips . . . Clips of people getting in fights in gas stations and stuff,” noting, “There are websites which are specifically for that, it wasn't like a fetish” (“Episode 374”). In crafting his media fiction, Korine, like Lin, goes right to the source,

---

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the screenplay for *Kids* was published by Grove in 1995, Faber and Faber published Korine's *Collected Screenplays* in 2002, and Nieves published *Mister Lonely* in 2008. Additionally, Korine published an experimental novel, *A Crack Up at the Race Riots* in 1998.

carving a narrative out of what is already there, remediating cyberspace into a Hollywood film.

As I suggested before, at the same time that Korine's symbols are overdetermined, they manage to exaggerate reality only slightly, to the point of implied critique ("I need say nothing, only exhibit," Benjamin writes). Werner Herzog, who acts in both *Julien Donkey-Boy* and *Mister Lonely*, was an early admirer of Korine's first feature, *Gummo* (1997), especially "the where the kid in the bathtub drops his chocolate bar into the dirty water and just behind him there's a piece of fried bacon stuck to the wall with Scotch tape" ("Gummo's Whammo" n.p.). This taped bacon, Herzog says, is "the entertainment of the future," and Korine replies, saying, "It's the greatest entertainment. Seriously, all I wanted to see is pieces of fried bacon taped on walls, because most films just don't do that" ("Gummo's Whammo" n.p.). In *Spring Breakers*, it is the signifiers of the media landscape that constitute the taped bacon, but instead of the absurd presented as commonplace, it is the commonplace presented as absurd. In an early scene of the film, Candy smokes pot out of a bong in a dismal dorm room as Cotty is sleeps on the couch in a bikini. In the background of this scene, the children's cartoon *My Little Pony* plays on a TV (later, in Florida, we see Candy and Brit watching the show on a laptop)—a rather overt wink at Korine's stars' Disney past. Just after that, Korine shows us a darkened lecture hall, illuminated by dozens of neon screens.





**Figure 12**

While the professor speaks of “the Black Freedom struggle . . . the Second Reconstruction,” Candy and Brit doodle in their notebooks, giggling: “I want penis” bordered by a heart, “Spring Break Bitch” written inside of the outline of a penis. The girls decide to rob a diner so that they can afford to go on spring break; Candy downplays their anxieties, telling them, “Just pretend like it’s a videogame. Act like you’re in a movie or something.”<sup>25</sup> We see the robbery take place, initially, through a screen: Cotty, playing getaway driver, slowly passes by the restaurant, viewing Candy and Brit wearing ski masks, terrorizing the customers with a mallet and a particularly realistic squirt gun, previously used by Brit to take shots of liquor.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Thelma & Louise*, dir. Ridley Scott (1991).

<sup>26</sup> Korine returns to the robbery later in the film, showing it from the interior of the restaurant, as Candy and Brit recount what happened to Faith (who wasn’t there) in the parking lot of a liquor store in Florida, just after the girls have completed a rousing rendition of Britney Spear’s “. . . Baby One More Time” (1998).



**Figure 13**

Of course, the girls already act like they are in a movie: Candy’s repeated mime of shooting a gun recalls some of Jean-Luc Godard’s heroines; when she’s given a real gun by Alien—in a montage of armed robberies ironically accompanied by Britney Spears’s “Everytime” (2003)—she already knows how to use it. In the film’s final sequence, Candy and Brit assist Alien in enacting revenge on Big Arch (Gucci Mane)—Alien’s best friend turned nemesis—blitzkriegering Arch’s compound in the middle of the night, Alien is the first to fall casualty, while Candy and Brit manage to kill dozens of armed men, including Arch himself, taking off in his muscle car. Alien may be “a G . . . a gangsta with a heart of gold,” but it is the white college girls who are the real gangsters, fully aware of the omnipresence of the simulacrum.

Like the characters in Lin’s fiction, Korine’s spring breakers utter nothing but pure inanity: as the camera shows the girls bathing in beer and urinating in public, Faith tells her grandmother over the phone how “special,” “spiritual,” and “beautiful,” St.

Petersburg is, describing how “we found ourselves,” nostalgizing the present (“We’ll always remember this trip”), even telling her grandmother, “I want to come back here next year with you.” In a particularly exaggerated celebration of consumerism, Alien commands Candy and Brit, “Look at my shit!,” pointing out his extensive collections of designer clothes, weapons and ammunition, furniture, cologne, and “*Scarface* on repeat.” Korine’s overdetermined signifiers lead nowhere, and once again, language fails to mean. What the viewer is left with, though, is a faithful portrayal of American culture in the twenty-first century: a carnival of images, sounds, and words repeated and reproduced to the point that all referents are lost. Korine’s celebration of the digital, it turns out, goes no further than Lin’s: a neutral facial expression, a consortium of media presented without comment.

### *America the Digital*

In concluding a prehistory of digital culture with a treatise on the current digital moment, I seek to show that the consistent failure to make language mean by postwar American writers and filmmakers has resulted in a presupposition of contemporary art: meaning is probably not a valid concept, and if it is, it certainly isn’t what art is about. The human is a constantly changing, unstable entity, a network of theoretical and material technologies. As such, literature, film, and indeed all art, as expressions of the human, are mechanical reproductions. For Benjamin, this posed a very real threat: “Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (“The Work of Art” 242). Fascism managed to

aestheticize human destruction in a literal way, but Henry Miller, Terry Southern, John Cassavetes, William S. Burroughs—and now Lin and Korine—all aestheticized the destruction of “mankind” as a concept. This is not a destruction as far-reaching as that of fascism, no doubt, but it is decidedly not fascist, and has more to do with art. Fascism could not exist without a concept of man—nor could communism, which Benjamin argues, “responds by politicizing art” (242). How is one to politicize art when there is nothing left but machines? How is one to “outrage the public,” as the Dadaists did, when shock (as Wallace tells us) has become passé (238)?

The answer, it seems, is to undifferentiate art and life. Evident in each of the texts that I have discussed is an attempt to bridge this gap. In Miller’s novels, his life is rewritten as fiction, prompting the idea that one’s life is no more authentic than a novel, the virtual no less true than the real. That he is able to get drunk on water suggests that the technology is not apart from us—we come pre-technologized, the possibility of drunkenness already innate within us. Similarly, for Southern, the blood of a wig is a placebo—it is not Chin Lee, but Southern’s stand-in, who arrives at the “outsider” literature which he sought. And yet, the narrator is not the narrator, nor Southern himself, any more than he is an assemblage of a typewriter, drugs, and the blood of Chin Lee. The projection of his consciousness, his creativity, onto that of another reveals him as multiple: the human is not in competition with the machine; rather, it is part of it. Cassavetes’s attempts to authentically represent human emotion, human life, result in a cinema that is endlessly theatrical, mediated not only by a camera, but the bodies of his actors, mechanical at their core. For Burroughs, the tape recorder and the cut-up method provide access to a reality which is out of the reach of the human neural network. That

the real is only accessible by means of the virtual is a liberating realization: to be a writer is not to be human, but to be a kind of radio tower—a medium through which the real is transmitted. There is no life, they all conclude, outside of art. Virtual reality is a redundancy; the virtual and the real are one and the same. If in the American vein there once flowed blood, now there is only light. Carrying electromagnetic waves of information, linking the U.S. to Europe, bringing Miller to Mongolia.

## Bibliography

- Adler, Renata. *Speedboat*. New York: New York Review, 2013. Print.
- Balakian, Anna. "Breton and Drugs." *Yale French Studies* 50 (1974): 95-107. Print.
- Bangs, Lester. "Kraftwerkfeature." *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: The Work of a Legendary Critic: Rock 'N' Roll as Literature and Literature as Rock 'N' Roll*. Ed. Greil Marcus. New York: Vintage, 1988. 154-60. Print.
- Béhar, Henri. "Gena Rowlands on 'Unhook the Stars.'" *Film Scouts*. Film Scouts LLC, 30 Oct. 1996. Web. 3 Dec. 2014.  
<http://www.filmscouts.com/scripts/interview.cfm?File=gen-row>.
- Benjamin, Walter. *On Hashish*. Ed. Howard Eiland. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006. Print.
- . "Surrealism." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Peter Demetz. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken, 2007. 177-92. Print.
- . "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 2007. 217-51. Print.
- Benzon, Paul. "Lost in Transcription: Postwar Typewriting Culture, Andy Warhol's Bad Book, and the Standardization of Error." *PMLA* 125.1 (Jan. 2010): 92-106. Print.
- Bockris, Victor. "Epilogue: Drugstore Cowboys: a Conversation with Terry Southern and William S. Burroughs." *Now Dig This* 248-58.
- Bockris, Victor, ed. *With William Burroughs: Reports from the Bunker*. New York: Macmillan, 1996. Print.
- Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000. Print.
- Boon, Marcus. *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.
- Brassaï. *Henry Miller: The Paris Years*. Trans. Timothy Bent. New York: Skyhorse, 2011. Print.
- Burroughs, William S. *The Electronic Revolution*. Göttingen: Expanded Media Editions, 1970. Print.
- . *Naked Lunch*. New York: Grove, 1990. Print.

- . *Nova Express*. New York: Grove, 1992. Print.
- . *Queer*. New York: Penguin, 1985. Print.
- . *Rub Out the Words: The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1959-1974*. Ed. Bill Morgan. New York: Ecco, 2012. Print.
- . *The Ticket That Exploded*. New York: Grove, 2011. Print.
- Burroughs, William S., Claude Pélieu, and Carl Weissner. *So Who Owns Death TV?* San Francisco: Beach Books, 1967. Print.
- Carney, Ray. *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001. Print.
- . *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.
- Cassavetes, John, dir. *Faces*. Continental/Walter Reade, 1968. Film.
- Caws, Mary Ann, ed. *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2001. Print.
- Charters, Ann, and Samuel Charters. *Brother-Souls: John Clellon Holmes, Jack Kerouac, and the Beat Generation*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2010. Print.
- Cohen, Sara Jo. "Medical Screening: Medical Imag[in]ing, the Body, and the Self." Diss. U of Minnesota. 2011.
- Debritto, Abel. *Charles Bukowski, King of the Underground: From Obscurity to Literary Icon*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986. Print.
- . *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. New York: Penguin, 1977. Print.
- . *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987. Print.
- . *What Is Philosophy?* Trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Verso, 1994. Print.

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet. "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature." *Dialogues II*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. 36-76. Print.
- Dempsey, David. "Stupefying Peep Show." Rev. of *Blue Movie*, by Terry Southern. *The New York Times*. 13 Sep. 1970. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/06/17/specials/southern-blue.html>.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997. Print.
- . "The Rhetoric of Drugs." Trans. Michael Israel. *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity*. Ed. Anna Alexander and Mark S. Roberts. Albany: SUNY P, 2003. 19-43. Print.
- Doane, Mary Ann. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.
- Dunning, Stephanie. "Parallel Perversions: Interracial and Same Sexuality in James Baldwin's *Another Country*." *Melus* 26.4 (2001): 95-112. Print.
- Ebiri, Bilge. "Harmony Korine on How Fatherhood Influenced His New Movie About Having Sex With Garbage Cans." *The Vulture* 9 Oct. 2009, Web, 16 Apr. 2015,  
[http://www.vulture.com/2009/10/harmony\\_korine\\_on.html](http://www.vulture.com/2009/10/harmony_korine_on.html).
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson: 1820-1872*. Ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes. Vol. 5. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911. Print.
- Enns, Anthony. "Media, Drugs, and Schizophrenia in the Works of Philip K. Dick." *Science Fiction Studies* 33.1 (Mar. 2006): 68-88. Print.
- "Episode 374—James Franco, Harmony Korine, Nate Bargatze, Peter Sagal." Narr. Marc Maron. *WTF with Marc Maron*. 1 Apr. 2013. Podcast. 15 Apr. 2015.  
[http://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episodes/episode\\_374\\_-\\_james\\_franco\\_harmony\\_korine\\_nate\\_bargatze\\_peter\\_sagal](http://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episodes/episode_374_-_james_franco_harmony_korine_nate_bargatze_peter_sagal).
- Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Peter Rabinow. New York: Vintage, 2010. 101-20. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: Norton, 1989. 436-43. Print.
- Fulton, Len. "Anima Rising: Little Magazines in the Sixties." *American Libraries* 2.1 (Jan. 1971): 25-47. Print.



- “function, *n.*” *OED Online*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015. Web. 9 April 2015.  
<http://www.oed.com.ezp2.lib.umn.edu/view/Entry/75476?rskey=Ooutar&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>.
- Gelmis, Joseph. “The Film Director as Superstar.” Rpt. in *Conversations with Norman Mailer*. Ed. J. Michael Lennon. Oxford: U of Mississippi P, 1988. 155-75. Print.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems 1947-1997*. New York: Perennial, 2006. 74. Print.
- . *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews 1958-1996*. Ed. David Carter. New York: Perennial, 2001. Print.
- Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. Print.
- Goodchild, Philip. *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire*. London: Sage, 1996. Print.
- Grauerholz, James and Barry Miles, eds. *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*. By William S. Burroughs. New York: Grove, 2001. Print.
- “Gummo’s Whammo.” *Harmony-Korine.com*. Nov. 1999. Web. 16 Apr. 2015.  
<http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/whammo.html>.
- Hassan, Ihab. *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*. New York: Knopf, 1967. Print.
- Joy Division. “Digital.” *Substance*. Factory, 1988. Record.
- . “Transmission.” *Substance*. Factory, 1988. Record.
- Kael, Pauline. “The Corrupt and the Primitive.” *The New Yorker* 7 Dec. 1968: 200-204. Print.
- Kane, Daniel. *We Saw the Light: Conversations between the New American Cinema and Poetry*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1999. Print.
- Kaufman, Philip, dir. *Henry & June*. Universal, 1990. Film.
- Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1999. Print.
- . *Literature, Media, Information Systems: Essays*. Ed. John Johnston. London: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Klein, Richard. *Cigarettes Are Sublime*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993. Print.

- Klosterman, Chuck. "What Happens When People Stop Being Polite." *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*. New York: Scribner, 2003. 86-121. Print.
- Korine, Harmony, dir. *Spring Breakers*. A24, 2012. Film.
- Kouvaros, George. *Where Does It Happen?: John Cassavetes and Cinema at the Breaking Point*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004. Print.
- Latham, Sean. *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- Lenson, David. *On Drugs*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995. Print.
- Lester, Toby. "A New Geography." *A New Literary History of America*. Ed. Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009. 1-6. Print.
- Lethem, Jonathan. "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism." *Harper's Feb.* 2007: 59-71. Print.
- . "Two or Three Things I Dunno About Cassavetes." *The Disappointment Artist*. New York: Vintage, 2005. 107-23. Print.
- Lewin, Katie Da Cunha. "Imitation Modernism: An Interview with Perry Meisel." *Review 31* 1 Feb. 2014. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.  
<http://review31.co.uk/interview/view/12/imitation-modernism-an-interview-with-perry-meisel>.
- Lin, Tao. "i went fishing with my family when i was five." *Monkeybicycle* 10 Feb. 2008. Web. 26 Mar. 2015. <http://monkeybicycle.net/old-archive/Lin/poem.html>.
- . *Richard Yates*. Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010. Print.
- Macé, Marielle. "Ways of Reading, Modes of Being." Trans. Marlon Jones. *New Literary History* 44 (2013): 213-229. Print.
- Mailer, Norman, dir. *Maidstone*. Supreme Mix, 1970. Film.
- Mailer, Norman. "TLS from Norman Mailer." 21 Jan. 1971. TS. Terry Southern Archive, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, New York.
- . "TLS from Norman Mailer." 26 Apr. 1971. TS. Terry Southern Archive, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, New York.

- Masschelein, Anneleene. "Rip the veil of the old vision across through the rent: Reading D.H. Lawrence with Deleuze and Guattari." *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*. Ed. Stephen Ross. London: Routledge, 2009. 23-39. Print.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Berkeley: Gingko, 2011. Print.
- Miles, Barry. *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Corso in Paris, 1958-1963*. New York: Grove, 2001. Print.
- . *Call Me Burroughs: A Life*. New York: Hachette, 2014. Print.
- Miller, Henry. *Black Spring*. New York: Grove, 1963. Print.
- . *Plexus*. New York: Grove, 1965. Print.
- . *Sexus*. New York: Grove, 1965. Print.
- . *Tropic of Capricorn*. New York: Grove, 1961. Print.
- Miller, M.H. "Choire Sicha's 'Very Recent History' and the Rise of Post-Fiction." *The New York Observer* 30 Jul. 2013. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.  
<http://observer.com/2013/07/book-reviewed-choire-sichas-very-recent-history-and-the-rise-of-post-fiction/>.
- Morgan, Bill, and Nancy J. Peters, eds. *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2006. Print.
- Norden, Eric. "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan—A Candid Conversation with the High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media." *Essential McLuhan*. Ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone. New York: BasicBooks, 1995. 233-69. Print.
- Plimpton, George, ed. *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*. Vol. 2. New York: Viking, 1963. Print.
- Ploog, Jürgen. "A Bombshell in Rhizomatic Slow Motion: The Reception of *Naked Lunch* in Germany." *Naked Lunch @ 50: Anniversary Essays*. Ed. Oliver Harris and Ian MacFadyen. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2009. 123-32. Print.
- Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.
- Rimbaud, Jean Nicholas Arthur. *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters, a Bilingual Edition*. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010. Print.

Robinson, Edward S. "Nothing Here Now But the Lost Recordings: The Lost Tapes of Carl Weissner, Claude Pélieu and Mary Beach, 1967-1969." *RealityStudio: A William S. Burroughs Community*. Supervert. 7 Feb. 2012. Web. 9 Jan. 2014. <http://realitystudio.org/scholarship/nothing-here-now-but-the-lost-recordings/>.

---. *Shift Linguals: Cut-Up Narratives from William S. Burroughs to the Present*. New York: Rodopi, 2011. Print.

Roddy, Harry Louis, Jr. "Germany's Poetic Miscreants on the Road: From Beat Poetics to Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy." Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2004. Print.

Ronell, Avital. *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2004). Print.

Rothstein, Mervyn. "Running Cool." *Cigar Aficianado*. Cigar Aficianado Online. Autumn 1994. Web. 3 Dec. 2014. <http://www.cigaraficianado.com/webfeatures/show/id/6052>.

Server, Lee. "Introduction: An Interview with Terry Southern." *Now Dig This* 1-14.

Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. New York: Knopf, 2010. Print.

Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Dell, 1966. Print.

Southern, Nile, and Josh Alan Friedman, ed. *Now Dig This: The Unspeakable Writings of Terry Southern 1950-1995*. New York: Grove, 2001. Print.

Southern, Terry. *Blue Movie*. New York: New American Library, 1970. Print.

---. "Drugs and the Writer." *Now Dig This* 206-8.

---. "On Screenwriting: An Interview from *Movie People*." *Now Dig This* 65-71.

---. *Red-Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes*. New York: New American Library, 1967. Print.

---. "Toward the Ethics of a Golden Age." *Writers in Revolt: An Anthology*. Ed. Terry Southern, Richard Seaver, and Alexander Trocchi. New York: Berkley Medallion, 1963. 11-7. Print.

---. "When Film Gets Good . . ." *Now Dig This* 197-205.

Trofimova, Evija. *Paul Auster's Writing Machine: A Thing to Write With*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. Print.

- Tully, David. *Terry Southern and the American Grotesque*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2010. Print.
- Waldberg, Patrick. *Surrealism*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. Print.
- Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 (1993): 151-94. Print.
- Weissner, Carl. "The Anti-Environment of the Cut-Up Authors." *Cut Up*. Darmstadt: Joseph Melzer Verlag, 1969. Trans. Matthias Penzel. Rpt. in *RealityStudio: A William S. Burroughs Community*. Supervert. 22 June 2012. Web. 8 Jan. 2014. <http://realitystudio.org/publications/death-in-paris/the-anti-environment-of-the-cut-up-authors/>.
- . *The Braille Film*. San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1970. Print.
- . Letter to Roy Pennington. 26 Feb. 1973. TS. *RealityStudio: A William S. Burroughs Community*. Supervert. 24 July 2009. Web. 6 Mar. 2014. <http://realitystudio.org/publications/death-in-paris/correspondence/>.
- Williams, Linda. *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1981. Print.
- Williams, William Carlos. *In the American Grain*. New York: New Directions, 1951. Print.