"WRITING IS FIFTY YEARS BEHIND PAINTING"[1] – WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS AND THE ARTS

Anna Białkowska
ORCID: 0000-0002-4840-7198

Jagiellonian University in Cracow
Faculty of Philology, Institute of English Studies

Abstract

William S. Burroughs (1914–1997), one of the most controversial American writers of the 20th century, is an example of a "total artist", who does not limit himself to one genre or medium. He is best known for being an experimental writer, the co-creator of the avant-garde "cut-up" technique – a variant of collage. His cut-ups, however, were not limited to literature, as he was also the author of musical recordings, experimental videos and various visual arts projects. These were collaborative undertakings that the artist carried out with his friends – mainly with Brion Gysin (painter), Ian Sommerville (electronics technician and computer programmer) and Anthony Balch (film director). This article discusses William Burroughs' lesser-known works like, "The Third Mind", "Ah Pook Is Here", and "The Book of Breeething", as they are multi-media, interdisciplinary projects, created with the help of popular painters or illustrators, e.g. Bob Gale or Malcolm McNeill, and best demonstrate Burroughs' unconventional approach towards collaboration and the crossing of boundaries between different forms of art. The article also briefly comments on Burroughs' final decision to turn to painting and his eccentric "Shotgun Art".

Key words

William S. Burroughs, Brion Gysin, cut-up, visual arts, multi-media projects, Shotgun Art

To most readers William S. Burroughs is best known as a controversial, experimental writer. Certainly, he started out as a writer and came to fame and notoriety because of his novels; it should be noted, however, that his massive creative output encompasses paintings, graphics, calligraphy, type, photography, film, audio-video recordings and collages, assemblage, poetry, spoken word, and music. That being said, it is evident that a non-interdisciplinary approach to Burroughs' oeuvre is very limiting, if not pointless altogether. Fortunately, nowadays, there are numerous studies devoted to Burroughs' non-literary projects which allow the critics, and fans, to see Burroughs as a "total artist," who does not confine himself to one medium or genre. In his works, Burroughs regularly blended different kinds of art, mixed so called "high" and "low" culture,

---

[1] Qtd. in Odier 1989, 28.

switched registers, changed styles and modes of expression. In addition, he often used technology – mainly tape recorders, cameras, video cameras and, perhaps surprisingly, firearms – when creating his artwork. The utilization and incorporation of so many tools and means of artistic expression made up for a highly original and extremely diverse oeuvre. What is more, for many years Burroughs clung to and also put into practice the romantic idea of an artist turning his life into art. In his case this concept was realized in the writing of autobiographical or semi-autobiographical prose, in playing the main role in video and tape recordings or other performances, and in creating a legend, an artistic persona that Jennie Skerl identifies as a continuation of the "poete maudit tradition" (1985, 3). Burroughs – like many other artists of the Beat Generation – had a myth-making tendency and delighted in blurring the lines between facts and fiction.

Burroughs' involvement in so many artistic fields facilitated cooperation with various artists. As a matter of fact, Burroughs had rarely carried out individual projects – instead, he worked with painters, illustrators, poets, film directors, computer engineers and musicians. The impressive list of his collaborators includes such artists as: Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Ian Sommerville, Anthony Balch, John Giorno, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Les Levine, Robert Mapplethorpe, David Cronenberg, Tom Waits, and Kurt Cobain. Thus, Burroughs is not only a perfect example of an artist creating multimedia artworks with the use of "multidisciplinary praxis". His projects also confirm the thesis that "the total work of art" ("Gesamkunstwerk") is "a collaborative practice and communal experience" (Menninger 2016, 6).

The most important and probably most fruitful partnership established in Burroughs' career, was that with Brion Gysin. In an essay on Burroughs' art, James Grauerholz – Burroughs' assistant, editor, bibliographer, virtually his factotum – insisted that "any attempt to 'contextualize' Burroughs as a painter must begin with Gysin, who, if we approach the question purely as a matter of art history was Burroughs' teacher" (1991, 239). I would argue that any attempt to contextualize Burroughs as an artist in general must be done in relation to Gysin who was not only a teacher, but more of a mentor and also a lifelong friend. Undoubtedly, he exerted a huge influence on Burroughs' art and life. As the co-creator and advocate of the avant-garde cut-up technique, Gysin had set the course for Burroughs' literary exploits. He introduced Burroughs to Arabic culture – or at least some aspects of the local lore, which the writer readily developed in his prose[2]. Gysin is responsible for Burroughs' conversion to Scientology as he is the one who introduced him to the, at that time,

---

[2] The figure of Hassan i Sabbah – the 11th century legendary leader of the Assassins – serves as a good example. Hassan i Sabbah became one of the key characters in Burroughs' mythology, whereas his supposed last words "Nothing is true – everything is permitted" echoes through most of Burroughs' works (Miles, 2016 "Through the Magic Mirror").

incipient New Religious Movement (Wills 2013, 3)[3]. Lastly – and sadly – he reinforced Burroughs' misogynist and paranoid worldview.

Gysin was a jack of all trades – a painter, writer, sound poet, performance artist and even a restaurateur. Born in 1916 of Swiss/Canadian parents, educated in England, fluently speaking four languages, Gysin soon became a citizen of the world. At the age of nineteen he decided to go to Paris and began painting at the Sorbonne. At that time, his circle included Max Ernst, Meret Oppenheim, Valentine Hugo, Salvador Dali, Dora Maar, and Pablo Picasso (Grauerholz 1991, 239). Legend has it that Gysin's paintings were removed at the last moment from the Surrealist exhibit of 1935 – at which he would present his works next to that of Picasso, Arp, Dali, Duchamp, Ernst, or Magritte – at Andre Breton's command, while Gysin himself was expelled from the group. The exclusion was supposedly provoked by a poster in which a calf's head bore too close a resemblance to that of Breton's (Grauerholz 1991, 239).

After his failure with the Surrealists, Gysin left for New York; there he "shared a studio with [Roberto] Matta, and saw Arshile Gorky and Jackson Pollock" (Grauerholz 1991, 240). During WWII, he was drafted and sent to a Japanese school where he learnt calligraphy – Japanese and Arabic script would later become an important motif in his works (Morgan 2012, 322). After the war, he was awarded a Fulbright scholarship which he quickly abandoned and moved to Tangier. The Moroccan port city was his home for the next twenty-three years. While living there, Gysin was fascinated with Arabic culture – he studied calligraphy, Islam and learned about magic from the Master Musicians of Joujouka (Grauerholz 1991, 240). In Tangier, he was in his element as he was naturally drawn to the exotic and esoteric, mainly due to his inclination toward mythmaking and his general paranoia. For Gysin, the universe was ruled by magical forces; things happened as a result of curses and secret rituals, there was no easy explanation for even the simplest, everyday occurrences. Once they met, Gysin rubbed off a lot of this paranoid, mystical attitude on to Burroughs (Morgan 2012, 322-23). Surely, Gysin's immersion into Arabic culture had a huge bearing on his art – it inspired "illusionistic" paintings of the desert and Moroccan marketplace, or the calligraphic abstractions of the 1950s which are usually seen as his best works (Grauerholz 1991, 240).

Despite his prolific output and the influence he exerted on many generations of artists, nowadays, Brion Gysin remains an obscure presence, "drifting on the borders of avant-garde anti-canon"[4] (Pisarski). He is "seldom mentioned in standard art history texts" even in connection with the Surrealist movement that he started out with

---

[3] Burroughs' involvement with the Church of Scientology is often overlooked or downplayed (probably because of the many controversies surrounding that organization); yet, I believe it should not be ignored as, for many years, Burroughs believed that the Church offers effective methods of both intellectual and spiritual development.

[4] My translation after Mariusz Pisarski, "Maszyna Snów Briona Gysina": http://www.ha.art.pl/projekty/felietony/1366-mariusz-pisarski-maszyna-snow-briona-gysina.

(Grauzerholz 1991, 241). Today, he is mainly known as the inventor of the "cut-up" technique and one of William Burroughs' closest associates.

Burroughs knew Gysin from their "Tangier days", as he sometimes visited Brion's restaurant "One Thousand and One Nights". At that time, however, neither one was impressed with nor interested in the other. Only when they ran into each other again in 1958 in Paris, did they hit it off to the point of becoming almost inseparable (Morgan 2012, xi-xii).

It was during his stay at the famous Beat Hotel that Gysin made his accidental, life-changing discovery. One day in 1959, while preparing a mount for his drawings, he cut through a pile of newspapers – the newly formed paper strips rearranged themselves into an interesting composition. Gysin was merely amused by that coincidence, but when he showed it to Burroughs, the writer thought that his friend made a momentous, ground-breaking discovery. On that occasion Gysin also declared that "writing is fifty years behind painting", and suggested that the methods already used by visual artist for years, could – and should – be applied to prose compositions (qtd. in Odier 1989, 28). The cut-up technique, perfected and used obsessively over the years by both artists, is one of the keys to understanding Burroughs as a writer and visual artist. It is the ultimate expression of Burroughs' notions concerning the fallibility and arbitrariness of language and, at the same time, a tool with which he wanted to deconstruct this flawed system. It became an elementary method of composition and was applied not only to prose but to all kind of artworks. Burroughs' used it with tape recordings, videos – he claimed that cut-ups are very similar to film montage – and paintings. Even though at the end of his career he limited the use of cut-ups and fold-ins, he had never abandoned it altogether.

The cut-up is a variant of collage; it is simply the cutting up of the original text or manuscript, and mixing it with parts of other, different texts. Inspired by Tristan Tzara's Dadaist poems and the Surrealist use of chance in drawings, the method presented itself to Burroughs at the perfect moment of his career (Morgan 2012, xxii). He had already finished *Naked Lunch* and was drifting further away from traditional narrative, searching for the medium best resonating with his ideas concerning language. Burroughs claimed that "the word is a virus" (Burroughs 1967, 49). What he meant is that language is the most powerful instrument of control and indoctrination and, according to him, the only way to break away from this arbitrary system is by deconstructing it. Slashing his own texts, or texts by other authors – Rimbaud, Eliot, Joyce – and mixing them with manuscripts or random newspaper clippings, allowed Burroughs to destroy the fictitious connections between words and enabled him to move outside the system of binary oppositions so deeply rooted in Western culture. Burroughs wanted to disrupt the artificial linearity, common to most of literature and enable the reader to travel freely on the axes of time and narration. The avant-garde cut-up method, according to Burroughs, broadened the perception by creating new

associations and collocations and forced the reader to consider the text from a new, "untrained" perspective. It was an attempt at de-conditioning the reader from commonly accepted, erroneous, ideas and values; "an attempt to restore truth to writing" (Hemmer 2007, 290).

Thus, the cut-up was a tool for liberation. At first, Burroughs – paradoxically – fought words with words. The avant-garde method was initially applied to prose; Burroughs – almost always in collaboration with other artists – produced hundreds of scrapbooks, albums, regular-, super- and meta-collages, two collections and three full-length novels: "Minutes to Go", 1960 – by Burroughs, Gysin, Corso, Beiles; "The Cut-up/ Nova" trilogy 1961-67 (which includes "The Soft Machine" (1961/66), "The Ticket That Exploded" (1962/67), "Nova Express" (1964)); and "The Third Mind", composed by Burroughs and Gysin and published in 1978. According to Grauerholz, "Burroughs' first participation in visual art may have been the development of his 'scrapbook' form, in collaboration with Gysin. These joint works of drawing, photography, typing, clippings, and collage continued from Paris in the mid-sixties through the early seventies, when Burroughs and Gysin moved to [...] London" (1991, 242).

"The Third Mind" is a combination of literary essays, poems, interviews, and theoretical texts explaining and advocating the cut-up technique. As stated by Grauerholz, the collection was "Burroughs' written exploration of the limits of collaboration and the breakdown of boundaries between forms of art" (1991, 245). The manuscript included more than one hundred collages – graphics, photos and illustrations made by either Gysin, Burroughs or by both of them, often using a grid system that Gysin had "worked out as the visual base" (Miles 2002, 169). It is difficult to analyze a work that is so diverse and extensive. Without doubt, it is an extremely important collection and serves as an explanation, a kind of a guidebook to most of Burroughs' cut-up projects. In the book, both authors expound on the methods they use – they give detailed instructions on how to create cut-ups, fold-ins and other collages[5]. They also clarify the philosophy behind their projects: "Tristan Tzara said: 'Poetry is for everyone.' And Andre Breton called him a cop and expelled him from the movement. Say it again: 'Poetry is for everyone'. [...] Cut-ups are for everyone. Anybody can make cut-ups. It is experimental in the sense of being something to do. Right here write now. Not something to talk and argue about" (Burroughs and Gysin 1978, 18). The artists believed that cut-ups can be used by everyone to produce works of art. However, they serve another purpose as well – they help to demystify the arbitrary and manipulative nature of language:

---

[5] "Take a page of text and trace a median line vertically and horizontally./ You now have four blocks of text: 1, 2, 3, and 4./ Now cut along the lines and put block 4 alongside block 1, block 3 alongside block 2. Read the rearranged page" (Burroughs and Gysin 1978, 10).

> Yes, it [the straight declarative sentence] is unfortunately one of the great errors of Western thought, the whole either-or proposition. You remember Korzybski and his idea of non-Aristotelian logic. Either-or thinking just is not accurate thinking. That's not the way things occur, and I feel the Aristotelian construct is one of the great shackles of Western civilization. Cut-ups are a movement toward breaking this down. I should imagine it would be much easier to find acceptance of the cut-ups from, possibly, the Chinese, because you see already there are many ways that they can read any given ideograph. It's already cut up (Burroughs and Gysin 1978, 5-6).

The artists also claimed:

> All writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read heard overheard. What else? Use of scissors renders the process explicit and subject to extension and variation. Clear classical prose can be composed entirely of rearranged cut-ups. Cutting and rear ranging a page of written words introduces a new dimension into writing enabling the writer to turn images in cinematic variation. Images shift sense under the scissors smell images to sound sight to sound sound to kinesthetic. This is where Rimbaud was going with his color of vowels. And his 'systematic derangement of the senses'. The place of mescaline hallucination: seeing colors tasting sounds smelling forms" (Burroughs and Gysin 1978, 19).

"The Third Mind", ultimately, "was denatured from its original 'scrapbook format' and reduced to a more or less traditional book form" (Grauerholz 1991, 245), as "the last thing [that the publisher] wanted to see from Burroughs was an oversize illustrated book which would cost tens of thousands of dollars to produce and in all probability sell very few copies" (Miles 2002, 169). It should also be mentioned that the collection includes one of the earliest permutation poems – that Brion Gysin generated with the help of Cambridge educated mathematician and computer engineer, Ian Sommerville – entitled "I AM THAT I AM" (Higgins and Khan 2012, 247).

Another attempt made by Burroughs to have "a fully illustrated 'comix-format'" was the edition of "Ah Pook Is Here" which was supposed to be published with Malcolm McNeill's illustrations (Grauerholz 1991, 245). As it turned out, "this project was ahead of its time" as when it was finally published in 1979, "Ah Pook" did not meet with critical acclaim or with much interest from readers (Grauerholz 1991, 245). Burroughs explains in the Foreword to the novel:

> [It] was originally planned as a picture book modeled on the surviving Mayan codices. Malcolm McNeil was to do the illustrations, and I was to provide the text. Over the years of our collaboration there were a number of changes in the text, and Malcolm McNeill produced more than a hundred pages of artwork. However, owing partly to the expense of full-colour reproduction, and because the book falls

into neither category of the conventional illustrated book nor that of a commix publication, there have been difficulties with the arrangements for the complete work [...]

The book is in fact unique. Some pages are entirely text, some entirely pictorial, and some mixed. Finally Malcolm McNeill and I have decided to publish the text without the artwork, still in hopes of seeing the eventual publication of this work that has been eight years in preparation (1979, 6).

The title of the "commix" novel refers to the Maya death gods, who appeared under several names and guises. One of their "incarnations" is called Ah Puch (Britannica 1998). The plot is a rather confusing mixture of an adventure story – about Mr. Hart who steals the surviving Mayan codices and learns about immortality and total control – cut up with disturbing anti-establishment scenarios, homosexual fantasies and science-fictional, apocalyptic visions of biological annihilation. As mentioned in the above quote, it was supposed to have over 100 pages of integrated text and image, of text alone and some pages which featured only pictures. In the end, only the text (approximately 60 pages) and 2 symbolic drawings made it to the final, published version.

Another perfect example of Burroughs' attempt "to make an explicit connection between writing and painting" – according to Grauerholz (1991, 245) – and one that shows his "interest in visual representation" – according to Robinson (2011, 126) – is "The Book of Breeething". In "The Book" Burroughs uses a pictorial language based on Mayan and Egyptian hieroglyphs; the volume is illustrated with original artwork created by Bob Gale. Edward S. Robinson explains that Burroughs' "foray into mixing alphabetic language with hieroglyphs and other pictorial images, attempting to recreate 'moving pictures' in a written text [...]" was made in order to "reveal the manifold ways in which an image can be interpreted, and the way in which elements can be incorporated within a picture to convey a specific meaning" (2011, 126). It was another of Burroughs' endeavors at devising a better, less biased and less arbitrary means of communication.

Burroughs' fascination with Mayan and Egyptian mythology is well-known; however it should be mentioned that the artist did not literally recreate these systems – he selected only those ideas that were of interest to him and built his own, original mythology (Wild 2008, 38-57). In addition, Burroughs created a pictorial language in which, e.g. the phrase "coming forth" is expressed by images of legs, mouth and eye; "waiting" is represented by a road and a hand; "for thee" is conveyed by means of a mouth and a cup; sheaves of wheat, owls and ejaculating phalluses represent abstract concepts (the phrase "in presence of" is a picture of an owl and an "ejaculating phallus"; "in the absence of" is "ejaculating phallus" and an "owl" – see the illustration below); different combinations may be made to express a specific meaning.
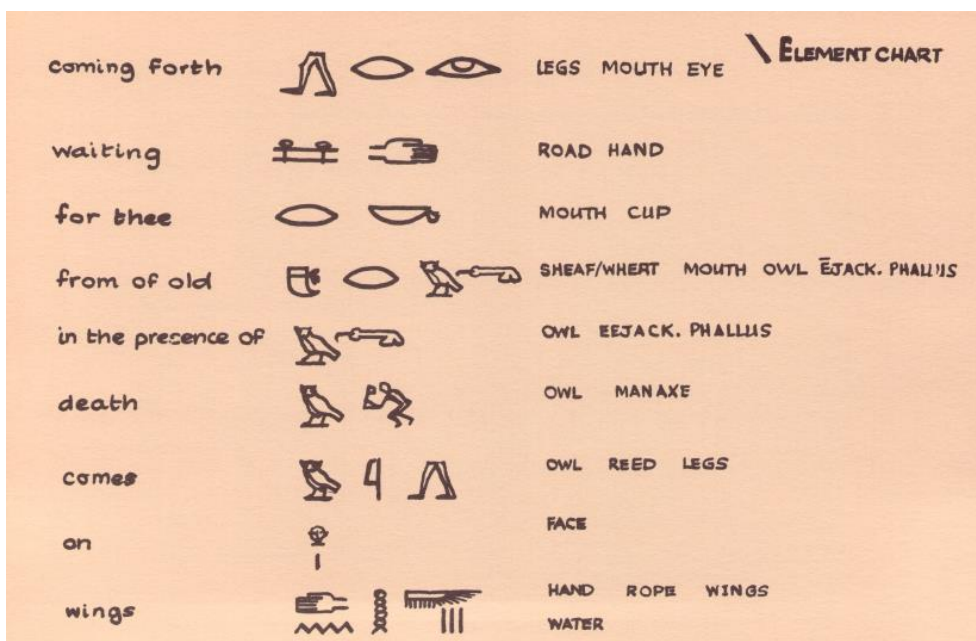
Fig. 1: "The Book of Breeething" (Burroughs 1975, 12). "Element Chart"

The book consists mainly of pictures, yet Burroughs also includes pieces of text – short stories that are rendered into hieroglyphs and then into pictures. For example, a short text about the Pharaoh Tutankhamen – "The Curse of King Tut" – contains an inscription: "Death shall come on swift wings to who toucheth the tomb of the pharaohs," which is then presented in the form of hieroglyphs:
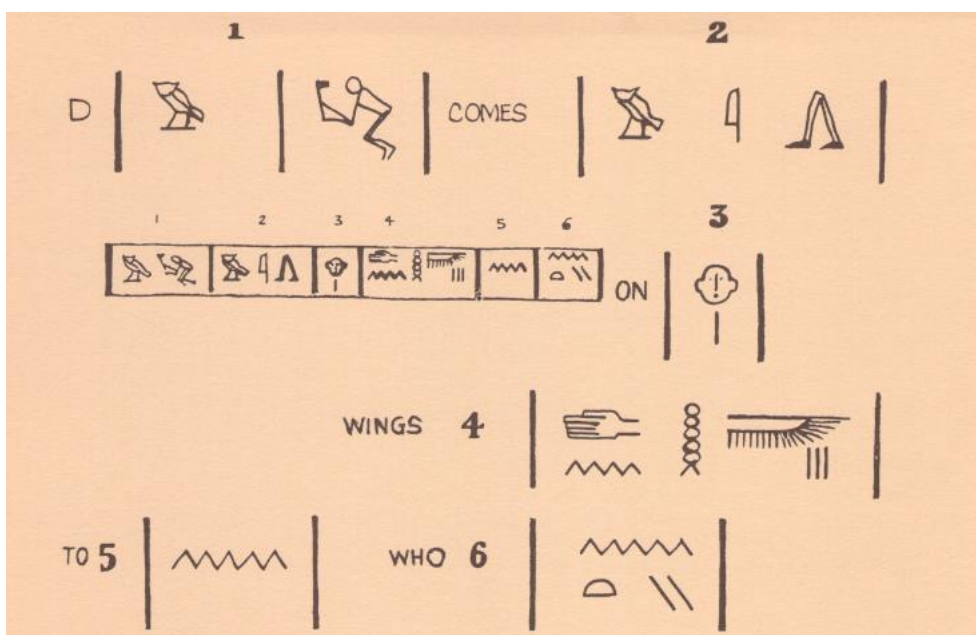

Fig. 2: "The Book of Breeething" (Burroughs 1975, 33). "The Curse of King Tut"
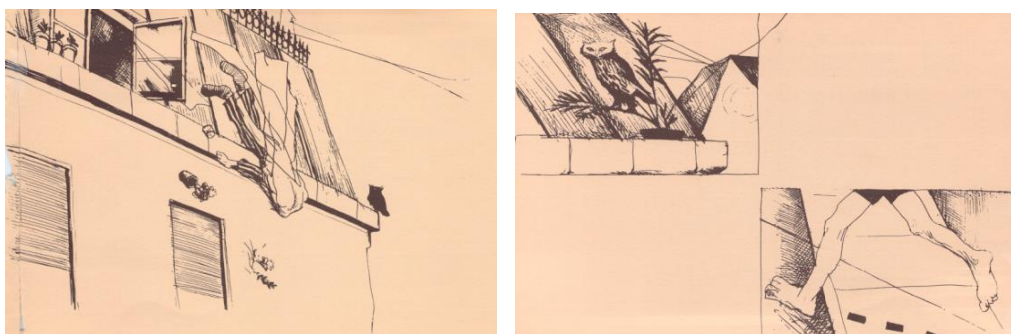
And then turned into pictures:

Fig. 3 and **4:** "The Book of Breeething" (Burroughs 1975, 41-42). "The Curse of King Tut"

It is also worthwhile looking at the book's introduction in which Burroughs again conveys his theories about language and its many flaws:

> In the beginning was the word and the word *was* God and has remained one of the mysteries ever since.
>
> What *is* word?
>
> To ask this question assumes the is of identity: something that word essentially *is*.
>
> Count Alfred Korzybski, who developed the concept of General Semantics [...] has pointed out that the is of identity has led to basic confusion in Western thought. The is of identity is rarely used in Egyptian pictorial writing. Instead of saying he is my servant they say he (is omitted) *as* my servant: a statement of relationship not identity. Accordingly there is nothing that word itself essentially *is*. Word only exists in a communication system of sender and receiver. It takes two to talk. Perhaps it only took one to write (Burroughs 1975, 9).

"The Book of Breeething" is Burroughs' only and perhaps most radical assaults on language, it was a realization of his project to "rub out the word" (Morgan 381).

Burroughs' use of Mayan and Egyptian hieroglyphs mirrors Gysin's adoption of Japanese and Arabic scripts. Both artists incorporated these ancient systems into their texts, paintings and cut-ups to reinforce their theory that "painting and writing were originally one" (Grauzerohlz 1991, 245). What is more, Edward S. Robinson suggests that "Burroughs' Multimedia Texts of the 1970s" (the mentioned "The Third Mind", "Ah Pook Is Here", "The Book of Breeething" and also "The Last Words of Dutch Schultz"), "serve a tripartite function". Firstly, they "bring new dimensions to Burroughs' attack on the systems control that run through the printed media". Secondly, "they signify his increasing fascination with non-linguistic modes of communication [...]". Thirdly, they

"preface the great emphasis Burroughs would place on the Mayan and Egyptian Books of the Dead during his final trilogy" (2011, 126).

Similarly to Grauerholz, Robinson attributes the publishing failure of Burroughs' multimedia texts to the fact that, as with so many of Burroughs' other projects, also these formats were "very much ahead of [their] time" (2011, 126).

In his later work – novels written in the 1980s, especially the so called "Red Night" trilogy – Burroughs drifted away from the cut-up and fold-in methods and turned back to more conventional, linear narrative: "I started painting when I was writing "The Place of Dead Roads" and continued while I was writing «Western Lands». [...] I don't do very much cut-ups these days. Sometimes I will make a cut-up to find something new. If I'm looking for something. Maybe I'll just throw it out or maybe I'll use it" (Hibbard 1999, 197). He became quite skeptical about the idea of overcoming language through the use of words. The "decline" of the cut-up was probably one of the reasons why during the last phase of his career, Burroughs made a complete turn to visual art.

As a controversial, avant-garde novelist, Burroughs had been in contact with many painters since the 1950s. In Tangier, he got acquainted with Francis Bacon. In New York, he met and collaborated with Robert Rauschenberg (in 1981 they worked on a six lithograph series known as "American Pewter with Burroughs", in which Rauschenberg chose phrases from Burroughs' works and incorporated them into his collages (Grauerholz 1991, 242; 246)).

Burroughs' shift from writing to painting was made in reference to Gysin's slogan *Writing is fifty years behind painting*. In a series of interviews conducted in the 1960s by Daniel Odier, when asked about the reasons for the gap between the two media, Burroughs explained:

> [the gap occurs] [b]ecause the painter can touch and handle his medium and the writer cannot. The writer does not yet know what words are. He deals only with abstractions from the source point of words. The painter's ability to touch and handle his medium led to montage techniques sixty years ago. It is hoped that the extension of cut-up techniques will lead to more precise verbal experiments closing this gap and giving a whole new dimension to writing. [...] This in turn could lead to a precise science of words and show how certain word combinations produce certain effects on the human nervous system (1989, 28).

The poignant words at the very end of "The Western Lands": "The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words" (Burroughs 2010, 258), may also be used to explain Burroughs' decision to turn to painting as they imply his final abandonment of the written word.

As may be expected, Burroughs' paintings are far from conventional. After his conversion to visual arts, he started producing pieces categorized as "Shotgun Art".

Burroughs' love of guns and weaponry was well-known among his friends and readers. He was a collector and an expert. He would carry a gun on him almost at all times, especially when he was living in South America. Even after the shooting accident with his common-law wife, Joan Vollmer Adams – in 1951, Burroughs accidentally shot her in a drunken "Wilhelm Tell act" – he would not give up on his "hobby" (Morgan 2012, 214).

In 1981, Burroughs moved to Lawrence, Kansas, and lived in a small rustic house outside the city limits, where he could indulge in his lifelong passion for shooting and combine it with a newly found interest in visual art. Burroughs' painting method was uncommon but simple. He would place or hang cans of spray paint in front of pieces of wood or canvases and then shoot at them. When shot, the cans exploded and the splashes of paint arranged into interesting patterns all over the canvases. Sometimes the "painter" would just leave the splashes, sometimes he would work on the them further, turning them into collages. James Grauerholz claims that it is doubtful that Burroughs was aware of the gun-art experiments of the French artist Nikki de St. Phalle, or of the lithographic-target series of his friend, artist and professional marksman, David Bradshaw (1991, 246). He claims that Burroughs developed the technique on his own as his method and its final effects are quite different from those achieved by the mentioned artists.

In the shotgun paintings, Burroughs wanted to accentuate the randomness factor of his works. He claimed: "The shotgun blast releases the little spirits compacted into the layers of wood, releases the colors of the paints to splash out in unforeseeable unpredictable images and patterns" (qtd. in Grauerholz 1991, 243). According to Burroughs, the paintings were very different from his cut-ups as with the production of cut-ups a very meticulous editing process was involved. The paintings were a matter of pure luck.

Burroughs' debut show took place in 1987 at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York. Twenty-nine of his works on wood, thirteen newer works on paper, and two works on metal were presented at the exhibition. His artwork was well received and critically acclaimed. Since then, numerous exhibitions, held during Burroughs' life and after his death, in galleries around the world, met with critical acclaim and serious consideration.

It is hard not to notice that Burroughs' "Shotgun Art" is gruesome – the paintings are very dark, violent – again, even more disturbing in light of the accident with Joan Vollmer Adams. Zoe Pilger, the reviewer of one of the London exhibitions of Burroughs's art, suggests that the paintings and the obsessive shooting may be seen as a form of auto-therapy, "a sign of guilt, the motif of sin repeated ad nauseam until the end of [Burroughs'] long life" (2014).

Brion Gysin died in July 1986 in Paris. After his death, Burroughs declared: "He was the only man I have ever respected. I have admired many others, esteemed and valued others, but respected only him" (Burroughs and Gysin 1992, 71). William

Burroughs died in August 1997 in Lawrence, Kansas. Both artists were successful in their attempt to blur the line between painting and writing. They exerted an indelible influence on many generations of artists – writers, painters, musicians. Yet, I believe that their mission to "rub out the word" proved unsuccessful.
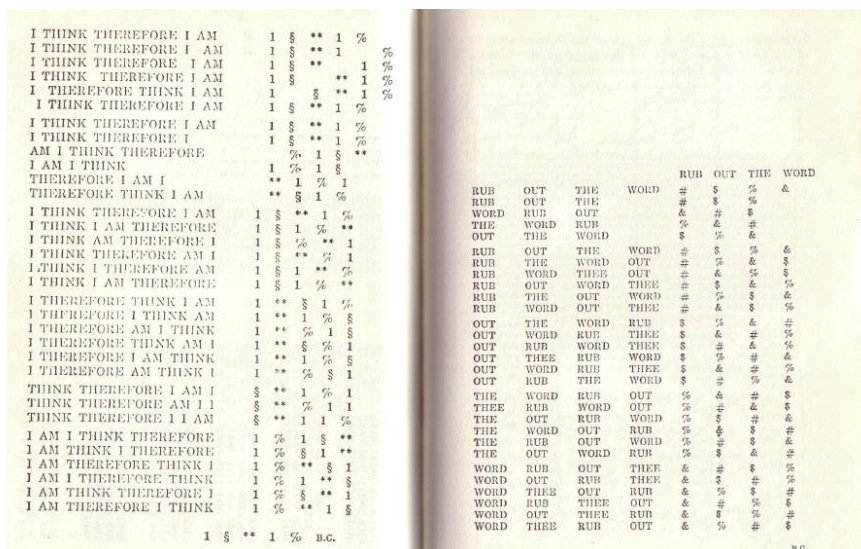
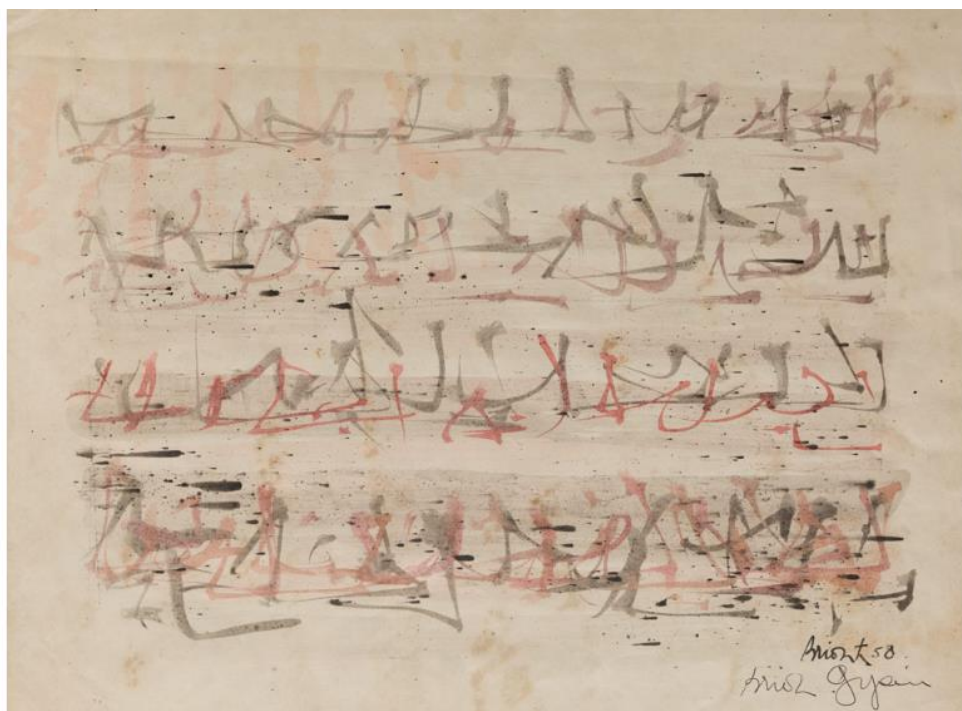

Fig. 5: "The Third Mind" (Burroughs 1978, 33)

Fig. 6: Brion Gysin, "Written Desert" (1958). Ink on paper, 26 x 34 cm

Fig. 7: Brion Gysin, "Calligraffiti of Fire" (1985). Oil on Canvas (in ten panels), 130 x 1640 cm

Fig. 8: William S. Burroughs posing in front of his paintings, brandishing his "paintbrush" (Cumming 2012)
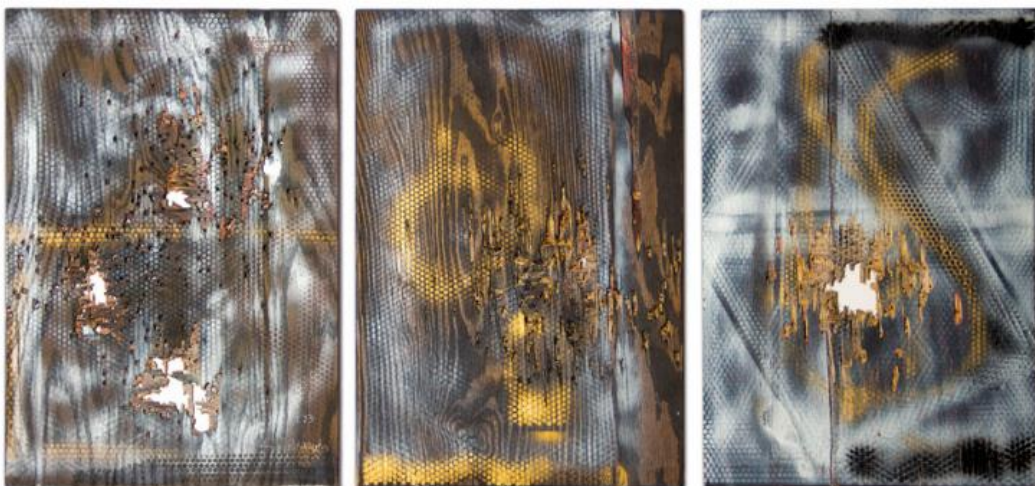

Fig. 9: William S. Burroughs, "Untitled Triptych" (1993). Spray paint and shotgun blasts on plywood, 73x55 x 6 cm each © Estate of William S. Burroughs

Fig. 10: William S. Burroughs, "The Furnace" (1989). Ink on paper, 36 x 24 cm
© Estate of William S. Burroughs. Photo: Jonathan Greet

References

"Ah Pook Is Here – William S. Burroughs, Malcolm McNeil". http://www.burroughsmcneil art.com/art-12.html.

Burroughs, William. 1979. *Ah Pook Is Here*. London: John Calder.

———. 1975. *The Book of Breeething*. Berkeley: Blue Wind Press.

——— . 1978. *The Third Mind*. New York: Grove Press.

———— . 1967. *The Ticket That Exploded.* New York: Grove Press.

———— . 2010. *The Western Lands.* London: Penguin Classics.

Grauerholz, James. 1991. "On Burroughs' Art". In *William S. Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception, 1959-1989*, edited by Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg, 239-249. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Hemmer, Kurt ed. 2007. *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature.* New York: Facts On File, Inc.

Księżyk, Rafał. 2013. *23 cięcia dla Williama S. Burroughsa.* Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo w Podwórku.

Odier, Daniel. 1989. *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs.* New York: Penguin Books, Inc.

Higgins, Hannah B. & Douglas, Kahn, ed. 2012. *Mainframe Experimentalism – early computing and the foundations of the digital arts.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. https://books.google.pl/books?id=WbMwDwAAQBAJ&pg =PA247&lpg=PA247&dq=first+permutations+poems&source=bl&ots=Mg93X7PFyk&sig= ACfU3U1cNUPnBO_VUVkpO4gz6iEQCzI-Sw&hl=pl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj8o_XP1ILjAh VsAxAIHSTQDcIQ6AEwDHoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=first%20permutations%20poems &f=false Access Date: June 25, 2019.

"Cizin". The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 1998. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. July 20, 1998. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cizin. Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Cumming, Tim. 2012. "William Burroughs: All Out Of Time and Into Space, October Gallery". The arts desk.com, Monday, 10 December 2012. https://theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/william-burroughs-all-out-time-and-space-october-gallery. Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Robinson, Edward S. 2011. *Shift Linguals: Cut-up Narratives from William S. Burroughs to the Present.* Amsterdam – New York. https://books.google.pl/books?id=N3qLaHkz5bkC &pg=PA48&lpg=PA48&dq=the+rapacious+corporate+manipulation+Murphy+2002&sour ce=bl&ots=eZ7ZDCDn4_&sig=toBavSrkQjpEOmUgwDkMPHeLPJw&hl=pl&sa=X&ved=0a hUKEwjbibjt5pjMAhVLCiwKHXKNCl4Q6AEIIDAA#v=onepage&q&f=false Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Morgan, Ted. 2012. *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs.* New York: W.W. Norton &Company, Inc.

Miles, Barry. 2002. *William Burroughs – El Hombre Invisible.* London: Virgin Books. https://books.google.pl/books?id=2abLDAAAQBAJ&pg=PT143&lpg=PT143&dq=Barry+Miles +%E2%80%9CThrough+the+Magic+Mirror%E2%80%9D&source=bl&ots=Rdfox0GnDa&sig =ACfU3U0aktZ1Qw2oMJs03b6na9NCyM-5vg&hl=pl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjnpZer95btAhW KjqQKHbMlDvYQ6AEwDHoECAUQAg#v=onepage&q=Barry%20Miles%20%E2%80%9CTh rough%20the%20Magic%20Mirror%E2%80%9D&f=false Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Miles, Barry. 2000. *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso in Paris, 1957-1963.* New York: Grove Press.

Octobergallery.co.uk. "William S. Burroughs". http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/ exhibitions/ 2014wsb/index.shtml Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Octobergallery.co.uk. "Brion Gysin". http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/artists/gysin/index. shtml Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Pilger, Zoe. 2014. "Naked and the dead: William Burroughs's artwork". *Independent*, Sunday 2 March 2014 16:01. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/ reviews/ naked-and-the-dead-william-burroughss-artwork-9163658.html. Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Pisarski, Mariusz – *Maszyna Snów Briona Gysina*. Korporacja ha!art, online – felietony. http://www.ha.art.pl/projekty/felietony/1366-mariusz-pisarski-maszyna-snow-briona-gysina. Access Date: June 25, 2019.

Skerl, Jennie. 1985. *William S. Burroughs*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Wild, Paul H. 2008. "William S. Burroughs and the Maya Gods of Death: The Uses of Archaeology". *College Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Winter): 38-57. The Johns Hopkins University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25115477. Accessed: 31-08-2018 13:46 UTC.

Wills, Davis S. 2013. *Scientologist! William S. Burroughs and the 'Weird Cult*. Beatdom Books.