Introduction

I chose the cut-up project because I wanted to determine the author's intentions for cutting up and rearranging texts. I was curious to find out how it varied in procedure and differed itself from, for example, mathematical poetry. At the time of beginning this project, it was my goal to strip the term "deconstructionist" from the work of Burroughs. While Burroughs is usually treated as a pioneer of this movement, I instead hope to push back against this idea by attempting to strip the term "deconstructionist" from the work of Burroughs. By considering the cut-ups in this new light, I hope to begin diving deeper into the materials available in the collection.

Methodology (continued)

Using notes taken during the examination of the pieces combined with quotes pulled directly from the studies, I was able to create a flexible body of knowledge that in turn became the loose formation of my essay. Once the paper had a free-forming shape, I was able to begin diving deeper into the materials available in the collection.

Finally, I concluded the ten-week library fellowship with a phone interview with James Grauerholz. Burroughs' editor and estate holder. This conversation proved to be the most fruitful of all endeavors undertaken within the project. Talking with James allowed me to question him on the positions of Burroughs' beliefs, but more importantly, it allowed me to gather James' outlook on the technique. During the interview, I discussed deconstruction with James as well as asked him to consider his initial reaction to the cut-ups. While James was hesitant to put forth any definitive answers toward questions relating to Burroughs' personal beliefs, he was more than willing to share his perspective. James' attitude proved to be a remarkable chance to discover some unknown facts about the cut-ups, such as finding that it was James' idea for Burroughs to move away from such heavy use of the cut-ups in his novelizations. Using this piece of information alongside the rest of the interview, I created a final, argumentative section to my essay in attempts to prove that Burroughs did not move away from the cut-ups for a loss of faith in their practicality, but rather that he tried to restructure them as an ulterior way of skewing perception.

Results

INTERVIEWER: Instead of going to the trouble of working with scissors and all those pieces of paper, couldn't you obtain the same effect by simply free-associating at the typewriter?

BURROUGHS: One's mind can't cover it that way. [...] Suppose I should cut this down the middle here, and put this up here. Your mind simply could not manage it. It's like trying to keep so many chess moves in mind, just you couldn't do it. The mental mechanisms of repression and self-selection are also operating against you. [...] Cut-ups make explicit a psych sensory process that is going on all the time anyway. Some body is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That's a cut-up...

...from a 1966 interview of William S. Burroughs by Conrad Knackracker as featured in the opening pages of The Third Mind.

Conclusions

"There is another method: the use of words that the reader will not recognize it? It makes a hole in your mind, a hole in the page in front of you, and you don't want to read any further because you are stuck back there in that hole. (Burroughs)

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"If you think in words, a complete sentence, and you rehearse it, you are in the presence of a radically different kind of technology. This technology allows you to construct a new world, because the thought processes are not linear. They are nonlinear. This allows you to create a new world by constructing a new kind of language. (Burroughs)

"The Third Mind of the scrapbooking technique employed by Burroughs. This same method was later used to create "identities" for characters within his novels.

The cut-ups enabled Burroughs to question someone's ability to own "own" words, and he delved into ways of keeping their previous sentiment while allowing them to become works of his own conjuring, or perhaps 'collaborations.'

In the Conard Knackracker interview, Burroughs writes that source material is inherently subject to variances that others may apply to it, and that by the processes of applying these differences, the products themselves remain valid as continuations, not obtrusions, of the original material. These variances validate the continuations.

Collage cut-ups come closer to grasping the imagined quality of fragmented memories. The mind jumps from one remembrance to another through the occurrence of surface materials and fragmented moments creates an at-all once realization, or appreciation of the remembered time. Burroughs believed the cut-ups, made possible by their very own collation, tapped into this immediacy and were able to induce it within the reader by relying on them the message in the same format through which they received it: juxtapositioned, random, and all at once. Not only are they nonlinear, but their ability to place the reader near the signified allows the passages to move beyond the word; that is, they become like puzzle pieces of images that enable the reader to relive the juxtaposed fragments in an ensemble. These juxtapositions promote the understanding of the signifier to the signified, but also highlight how a misunderstanding of this relationship can be exploited by various outlets.