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| Burroughs, William S. (1914-1997) |
| Burroughs, William Seward |
| Born in St. Louis, Missouri, William S. Burroughs was a major figure of the Beat Generation. He is known primarily for his controversial novel *Naked Lunch* (1959)—the subject of a U.S. obscenity trial—and for his use of the cut-up technique, developed by his friend, British-born artist Brion Gysin. |
| Born in St. Louis, Missouri, William S. Burroughs was a major figure of the Beat Generation. He is known primarily for his controversial novel *Naked Lunch* (1959)—the subject of a U.S. obscenity trial—and for his use of the cut-up technique, developed by his friend, British-born artist Brion Gysin. The technique involves cutting up and reassembling text or film in random order to produce non-linear anti-narratives; influences include Dadaist collage procedures and T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’. Using this technique, Burroughs collaborated with Gysin and filmmaker Anthony Balch to produce short experimental films, including *Towers Open Fire* (1963), *The Cut Ups* (1967), and *Bill and Tony* (1972). The films juxtapose and overlay documentary footage of Burroughs and others with stock footage, as well as surreal, pornographic, and science-fiction imagery. Burroughs also narrated portions of the films, in part using text appropriated from Scientology manuals and film scripts—notably Tod Browning’s *Freaks* (1932). Fragments from *The Soft Machine* (1961), part of the science-fiction *Nova Trilogy*, appear in the narration of *Towers Open Fire*. Burroughs also appeared in numerous feature films. Select Bibliography Burroughs produced dozens of books, including novels, short fiction, non-fiction, and other collected materials. This list is necessarily partial.  *Junkie* (Ace, 1953)  *Naked Lunch* (Grove, 1959)  *The Soft Machine* (Olympia, 1961)  *The Ticket that Exploded* (Olympia, 1962)  *Nova Express* (Grove, 1964)  *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz: A Fiction in the Form of a Film Script* (Cape Goliard, 1970)  *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs* (Conducted with Daniel Odier; Grove, 1970)  *The Third Mind* (Co-authored with Brion Gysin; Viking, 1978) (Includes cut-up texts and essays on the cut-up technique) Select Filmography Many of these films were collaborations between Burroughs, Balch, and Gysin, among others. Burroughs contributed to writing, narration, and appeared in many of them. The list is necessarily partial. Virtually all of Burroughs’s films are available on YouTube and from other sources.  *Häxan* (1922)  (Swedish film directed by Benjamin Christensen; re-released by Balch in 1968 with the subtitle *Witchcraft Through the Ages*, with expanded narration by Burroughs)  Link: <https://archive.org/details/WitchcraftThroughTheAges-haxan-WilliamBurroughsNarration>  *Towers Open Fire* (1963)  Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjB--bgcBa0>  File: burroughs\_towers.jpg  1 From Towers Open Fire  *William Buys a Parrot* (1963)  Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME-t5lZ5r9U>  *The Cut Ups* (1967)  Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7_Y0NvLtH4>  *Bill and Tony* (1972)  Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFrTAJUQKq4>  *Ghosts at Number Nine* (1982)  (Consists of footage filmed by Balch between 1961-1965)  Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmeeNFRn7ys>  File: burroughs\_ghosts.jpg  2 From Ghosts at Number Nine  *Naked Lunch* (1991)  (Feature film directed by David Cronenberg, adapted from Burroughs’s 1959 novel and biographical materials)  *Ah Pook Is Here* (1994)  (Animated short directed by Phillip Hunt, written and narrated by Burroughs)  Burroughs reads from *Nova Express* in 1974  The entire reading (by John Giorno and Burroughs) is available via creative commons. Burroughs begins at 40:50, and that particular section ends at 43:52.  Audio link: https://archive.org/details/AM\_1974\_11\_07\_c1 |
| Further reading:  (Baldwin)  (Bridgett)  Link: <http://brightlightsfilm.com/39/cutups1.php>  (Burroughs)  (McLuhan)  (Murphy)  (Sargeant)  (Schneiderman and Walsh)  (Skerl and Lydenberg) |