

The Invisible Generation

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) was the greatest American literary experimentalist of the late 20th century. He was heir to the fortune generated by his grandfather, inventor of the adding machine, precursor to the modern computer. Yet despite this privileged upbringing, Burroughs was a self-described "junkie" and "queer" (to cite the titles of his first two books) whose career was spent in self-imposed exile from mainstream American society and culture. After graduating from Harvard in 1936, he landed in New York, where he befriended Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac and became associated with the "Beat Generation." Following the publication of his most famous novel, *Naked Lunch* (1959), Burroughs wrote a trilogy of novels using "the cut-up method." Emulating the techniques of collage in painting and montage in film, Burroughs took a scissors to old and new portions of his writing, and then spliced together the pieces at random to generate new ideas and connections. The technique was not only a tool of literary invention; it was also a response to Burroughs' view that language is an anonymous force of social control, a mind- and action-controlling virus spread through everyday speech and writing, and most glaringly manifested in the mass media. The cut up method, then, was a means of subverting, or at least resisting, language's normalizing power.

Throughout his later life, Burroughs was a cult figure with a particularly strong standing among musicians. The bands Steely Dan and Soft Machine took their names from Burroughs' novels. Burroughs himself collaborated with Brian Jones (of the Rolling Stones), Ornette Coleman, Laurie Anderson, Psychic IV, the Desperate Heroes of Hip-hop, among others. The following text (the epilogue to his cut-up novel *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962)), reveals Burroughs as both a founder of "sound poetry" and a precursor to DJ Culture. In cut-up form, it describes Burroughs' cut-up experiments with tape recorders and reflects upon the profound effects of sound and recording on our daily experience.

what we see is determined to a large extent by what we hear you can verify this proposition by a simple experiment turn off the sound track on your television set and substitute an arbitrary sound track prerecorded on your tape recorder street sounds music conversation recordings of other television programs you will find that the arbitrary sound track seems to be appropriate and is in fact determining your interpretation of the film track on screen people running for a bus in pincodilly with a sound track of machine-gun fire looks like 1917 petrograd you can extend the experiment by using recorded material more or less appropriate to the film track for example take a political speech on television shut off sound track and substitute another speech you have prerecorded hardly tell the difference isn't much record sound track of one danger man from uncle spy program run it in place of another and see if your friends can't tell the difference it's all done with tape recorders consider this machine and what it can do it can record and play back activating a past time set by precise association a recording can be played back any number of times you can study and analyze every pause and inflection of a recorded conversation why did so and so say just that or this just here play back so and so's recordings and you will find out what cues so and so in you can edit a recorded conversation retaining material which is incisive witty and pertinent you can edit a recorded conversation retaining remarks which are boring flat and silly a tape recorder can play back fast slow or backwards you can learn to do these things record a sentence and speed it up now try imitating your accelerated voice play a sentence backwards and learn to unsay what you just said ... such exercises bring you a liberation from old association locks try inching tape this sound is produced by taking a recorded text for best results a text spoken in a loud clear voice and rubbing the tape back and forth across the head the same sound can be produced on a philips compact cassette recorder by playing a tape back and switching the mike control stop start on and off at short intervals which gives an effect of stuttering take any text speed it up slow it down run it backwards inch it and you will hear words that were not in the original recording new words made by the machine different people will scan out different words of course but some of the words are quite clearly there and anyone can hear them words which were not in the original tape but which are in many cases relevant to the original text as if the words themselves had been interrogated and forced to reveal their hidden meanings it is interesting to record these words literally made by the machine itself you can carry this experiment further using as your original recording material that contains no words animal noises for instance record a trough of slopping hogs the barking of dogs go to the zoo and record the bellowings of Guy the gorilla the big cats growling over their meat goats and monkeys now run the animals backwards speed up slow down and inch the animals and see if any clear words emerge see what the animals have to say see how the animals react to playback of processed tape

the simplest variety of cut up on tape can be carried out with one machine like this record any text rewind to the beginning now run forward an arbitrary interval stop the machine and record a short text wind forward stop record where you have recorded over the original text the words are wiped out and replaced with new words do this several times creating arbitrary juxtapositions you will notice that

the arbitrary cuts in are appropriate in many cases and your cut up tape makes a surprising sense. cut up tapes can be hilariously twenty years ago I heard a tape called the drunken newscaster prepared by Jerry Newman of new york cutting up news broadcasts I can not remember the words at this distance but I do remember laughing until I fell out of a chair paul bowles calls the tape recorder god's little toy maybe his last toy fading into the cold spring air poses a colorless question

any number can play

yes any number can play anyone with a tape recorder controlling the sound track can influence and create events the tape recorder experiments described here will show you how this influence can be extended and correlated into the precise operation this is the invisible generation does look like an advertising executive a college student an american tourist doesn't matter what your cover story is so long as it covers you and leaves you free to act you need a phillips compact cassette recorder handy machine for street recording and playback you can carry it under your coat for recording looks like a transistor radio for playback in the street will show the influence of your sound track in operation of course the most undetectable playback is street recordings people don't notice yesterday voices phantom car holes in lime accidents of past time played back in present time screech of brakes loud honk of an absent horn can occasion an accident here old fires still catch old buildings still fall or take a pre-recorded sound track into the street anything you want to put out on the sublim ether play back two minutes record two minutes mixing your message with the street wait your message ones lips moving uttering away carry my message all over london in our velvet low submarine working with street playback you will see your playback find the appropriate context for example i am playing back some of my dutch schultz last word tapes in the street five alarm fire and a fire truck passes right on cue you will learn to give the cues you will learn to plant events and concepts after analyzing recorded conversations you will learn to steer a conversation where you want it to go the physiological liberation achieved as word lines of controlled association are cut will make you more efficient in reaching your objectives whatever you do you will do better record your boss and co-workers analyze their associative patterns learn to imitate their voices oh you'll be a popular man around the office but not easy to compete with the usual procedure record their body sounds from concealed mikes the rhythm of breathing the movements of after-lunch interestines the beating of hearts now impose your own body sounds and become the breathing word and the beating heart of that organization become that organization the invisible brothers are invading present time the more people we can get working with tape recorders the more useful experiments and extensions will turn up why not give tape recorder parties every guest arrives with his recorder and tapes of what he intends to say at the party recording what other recorders say to him it is the height of rudeness not to record when addressed directly by another tape recorder and you can't say anything directly have to record it first the colossal old tape worms never talk

what was the party like switch on playback
what happened at lunch switch on playback

eyes old unblurred unreadable he hasn't said a direct word in ten years and
you hear what the party was like and what happened at lunch you will begin to
sharp and clear there was a grey veil between you and what you saw or
often did not see that grey veil was the prerecorded words of a control
machine once that veil is removed you will see clearer and sharper than those who
are behind the veil whatever you do you will do it better than those behind the veil
this is the invisible generation. It is the efficient generation, hands work and go
on, some interesting results when several hundred tape recorders turn up at a
political rally or a freedom march suppose you record the ugliest snarling south-
western law when several hundred tape recorders spitting it back and forth and chewing
around like a cow with the alfalfa you now have a sound that could make any
neighborhood unattractive several hundred tape recorders echoing the readers
could touch a poetry reading with unpredictable magic and think what fifty thou-
sand beetle fans armed with tape recorders could do to Shea stadium several hun-
dred people recording and playing back in the street is quite a happening right?
conservative m.p. spoke about the growing menace posed by bands of
responsible youths with tape recorders playing back traffic sounds that confuse
liberalists carrying the faults recorded in some low underground club into mayfair
and picaresquely this growing menace to public order put a thousand young
recorders with riot recordings into the street that mutter gets louder and
remember this is a technical operation one step at a time here is an experi-
ment that can be performed by anyone equipped with two machines connected
by extension lead so he can record directly from one machine to the other since
the experiment may give rise to a marked erotic reaction it is more interesting to
select as your partner some one with whom you are on intimate terms we have
subjects b. and j. b. records on tape recorder 1 j. records on tape recorder
now we alternate the two voice tracks tape recorder 1 playback two seconds
tape recorder 2 records tape recorder 2 playback two seconds tape recorder 1
records alternating the voice of b. with the voice of j. in order to attain any degree
of precision the two tapes should be cut with scissors and alternate pieces spliced
together this is a long process which can be appreciably expedited if you have
access to a cutting room and use film tape which is much larger and easier to
manipulate you can carry this experiment further by taking a talking film of b. and
alternating it with the voice track twenty four alternations per sec-
ond as I have indicated it is advisable to exercise some care in choosing your
partner for such experiments since the results can be quite drastic b. finds himself
talking and thinking just like j. sees b.'s image in his own face who's face b.
and j. are continually aware of each other when separated invisible and perse-
verent presence they are in fact becoming each other you see b. retroactively was j.
by the fact of being recorded on j.'s sound and image tape experiments with
spliced tape can give rise to explosive relationships properly handled of course to
a high degree of efficient cooperation you will begin to see the advantage con-
veyed on j. if he carried out such experiments without the awareness of b. and so
many applications of the spliced tape principle will suggest themselves to the alert
reader suppose you are some creep in a grey flannel suit you want to present a
new concept of advertising to the old man it is creative advertising so before you
goes up against the old man you record the old man's voice and splices your own
voice in expanding your new concept and put it out on the office air-conditioning

the only good communist is a dead communist let's take care of slave driver castro
next what are we waiting for let's bomb china now and let's stay armed to the teeth
for centuries this ugly vulgar bray put out for mass playback you want to spread
hysteria record and play back the most stupid and hysterical reactions

marijuana marijuana why that's deadlier than cocaine
it will turn a man into a homicidal maniac he said steadily his eyes cold as he
thought of the vampires who suck riches from the vile traffic in pot quite literally
swollen with human blood he reflected grimly and his jaw set pushers should be
pushed into the electric chair

strip the bastards naked
all right let's see your arms
or in the mortal words of harry j enslinger the laws must reflect society's dis-
approval of the addict

an uglier reflection than society's disapproval would be hard to find the mean
cold eyes of decent american women to tight lips and no thank you from the shop
keeper snarling cops pale nigger killing eyes reflecting society's disapproval fuck-
ing queens i say shoot them if on the other hand you select calm sensible reac-
tions for recordings and playback you will spread calmness and good sense

is this being done
obviously it is not only way to break the inexorable down spiral of ugly uglier
ugliest recording and playback is with counterrecording and playback the uglier
step is to isolate and cut association lines of the control machine carry a tape
recorder with you and record all the ugliest stupidest things cut your ugly tapes in
together speed up slow down play backwards inch the tape you will hear one
ugly voice and see one ugly spirit is made of ugly old prerecordings the more
you run the tapes through and cut them up the less power they will have cut the
prerecordings into air into thin air

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Record, CD, Analog, Digital

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY & YASUNAO TONE

In the late 1970s, concurrent with the birth of Hip-hop, Christian Marclay (1955) pioneered the use of turntables and found recordings to make experimental music in the context of art. John Cage, Paul Hinkson, and Fred Scherling had begun such experiments forty years earlier. Yet it was Marclay who most fully explored this musical territory, inspired by punk rock and by avant-garde art movements, such as Dada and Fluxus. Marclay used sampling, thrift-store records, to produce percussion effects. He cut up and recombined them into new compositions and employed multiple turntables to produce a multi-layered and often humorous collage. Using found records, album covers, audio tapes, and snapshots, Marclay has also produced a body of photographs, sculptures, videos, and installations that have been widely exhibited in galleries and museums.

Yasunao Tone (1935) has been producing happenings, experimental music, and digital art for more than four decades. In 1960, with Takehisa Koseki, Tone formed Group Ongaku, the first collective improvisation ensemble in Japan, and, in 1962, he became an active member of the Japanese wing of Fluxus. Always interested in the manipulation of technology to create new art, Tone began experimenting with CDs and CD players in the early 1980s. In 1985, he produced his best "wounded CD" by attaching pen-hole, punctured transparent tape to commercial CDs in order to override the CD player's error-correction system and produce "apocalyptic bursts" of white noise.

In this discussion with the editors of *Muse* magazine, Marclay and Tone discuss their work and compare strategies for manipulating analog and digital recordings.

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY: You make CDs skip?
YASUNAO TONE: It's not really skipping. It's distorting information. A CD consists of a series of samples. You know bytes and bits, right? One byte contains sixteen bits of information. So, if I block one or two bits, information will