Narrating Demons, Transformative Texts

O'Hara, Daniel T.

Published by The Ohio State University Press

O'Hara, Daniel T.
Narrating Demons, Transformative Texts: Rereading Genius in Mid-Century Modern Fictional Memoir.
The Ohio State University Press, 2012.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/24253.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/24253
Visionary Contact in the Interzone

On the Beat State in *Naked Lunch*

Gentle reader, we see God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm . . . Through these orifices transmute your body . . . The way OUT is the way IN . . . ” (191)¹

THESE LINES, a few pages from the end of the Atrophied Preface attached to *Naked Lunch*, combine the major features of this anti-novel’s novel discourses.² As a would-be fictional memoir of the surreal and visionary experiences in Tangier of its putative author, William Lee, while taking the cure (yet again) for his addiction to heroin and other substances, these lines cram together willy-nilly a handful of discursive strains. The address to the reader, a century out of date, is knowing, hipster parody/pastiche, and yet, strangely as such, it is nonetheless being used to convey the sincerely meant message that what follows should be read as true advice in this explicitly self-advertised “how-to” book (in the original introduction, 199–206). The seeing of God is the romantic or transcendental “other level of experience” in danger of being totally lost (187) to homogeneous barbaric trivialization in the post-war atomic age of emergent worldwide consumerism. “The desecration of the human image,” which the novel both renders and focuses as “an assault upon the reader,” is an ultimately self-destructive desecration, ironically squared
(Letters 365). For we can thus see God now only via such a literally vile orifice due to the body’s revolt against its oppressive normalization by a newly global, instrumental American culture, which knows as recognition of identity only the celebrity of its deviant sexualities. The mysticism of St. John Perse, as translated by T. S. Eliot’s own late mysticism, is revised for this present occasion, just as the basic modernist techniques of ironic juxtaposition, cinematic montage, and collage-like mosaics of The Waste Land are put to use throughout this text’s apparently randomly assembled collection of perversely surreal, vaudeville-like routines, as if Abbott and Costello were sadomasochistic, gay, and on junk—and two parts of the same psyche.

Beat attitude, ironically antique narrative gestures, modernist literary techniques, therapeutic guidebook point of view, sociological critique, tabloid and pornographic pop-cultural sensationalism, mystical visionary purposes, and intentionally obscene, even criminal (for the time) models of selfhood—all these elements knock against each other, never fusing into the usual seamless whole-cloth of the secondary revisionary lie à la the dream in Freud’s famous analyses. Naked Lunch is closer to the raw dream-stuff than any other would-be fictional rendition of primary processes, despite (or because of ?) its famously mediated composition by several hands and random events. And yet, it is most like a repeated lyric cri du coeur in which schizoid word salads are as likely as faux illiteracy.

Brian Edwards usefully terms all this intentional debris or waste as a project for “disorienting the national subject” (158), a process of disruption and subversion that, as Edwards cites Deleuze as claiming, can produce the equivalent of a foreign language within language, “a grammar of disequilibrium” (158). Composed from letters and routines originally written to and for Allen Ginsburg, Naked Lunch, the quintessential instance of collective composition by Burroughs and his Beat buddies, Ginsburg, Kerouac, and others, produces its “grammar of disequilibrium” to disorient the Cold War American subject of the straight story, and linear narrative development, of facile binary oppositions, of McCarthyism and homophobia, of racism and sexism, in the interest of a vision of future possibility existing in a visionary now, a preposterous moment when the International Zone that is the multi-planed Tangier, or what Burroughs nicknames these many different Tangiers for diplomats, expatriate artists, cold warriors, nationalist and revolutionary native parties, and, back home, avid American consumers of popular media images
of this most “notorious” city: “The Interzone.” It hovers between its earlier administration by ten nations and its reincorporation into the new, independent Morocco. This period, roughly coinciding with Burroughs’s continuous residence there (1954–57), extends his extraterritorial rights as an American in Tangier (his portable exceptionalism), even as it opens him to the potential violence against such Euro-American imperialist exploiters of hungry Arab boys for sex and to a growing understanding of possession by this spectral shadow that only this space beyond national or effective international control fosters. Tangier at this period is a haven for every form of investment speculation, criminal transgression, libertarian marketplace of desires, and revolutionary or utopian hopes. As such, despite its apparent differences, it prefigures remarkably our contemporary moments of fugitive breakdown in the global world system. *Naked Lunch,* in this context, is not only, or rather not primarily, a visionary epic in the tradition of Blake’s *Jerusalem,* but also, or even more so, a visionary initiation that passes a last judgment, much as Blake’s *Milton* does, upon all—including the recalcitrant dimension of the creative subject—that would block access to the imaginative sources of ethical knowledge and radical enlightenment. It is not simply, in other words, the U.S. national subject that *Naked Lunch* would disorient; it is that subject’s parasitic existence in and fatalistically demonic possession of the would-be visionary writer William Burroughs that must be more than disoriented. It must be expelled and abjected, in its turn, within the innovative, multidimensional, and ceremonial spaces of Burroughs’s savagely comic routines, his modern form of the medieval dream-vision psychomachia. This interstitial zone of judgment and self-judgment is what I mean by “the Beat State.” It is multidimensional, equally external and internal conditionality, which inspires and supports, transiently to be sure, such transformative textual, personal, and political emergences exemplified by the creation of *Naked Lunch* and its universally singular triumph.

“Possession’ they call it . . . Sometimes an entity jumps in the body—outlines waver in yellow orange jelly—and hands move to disembowel the passing whore or strangle the nabor [sic] child in hope of alleviating a chronic housing shortage” (184). What Burroughs foregrounds in these lines is his latter-day version of the theory of genius. His is like Yeats’s more famous theory: “I shall find the dark grow luminous, the void fruitful, when I understand I have nothing, that the ringers in the tower have appointed for the hymen of the soul a passing-bell.” That is,
it is modeled on rape, total if temporary usurpation of the host-body-
psyche by what in the introduction to the 1985 publication of Queer he
calls, thanks to Brion Gysin’s coinage, “the ugly spirit” (xix). This spirit is
attracted to the disintegrating mask of public persona. Due to passionate
love or passionate addiction or really any expression of passion, Bur-
roughs sees the mask fall apart. And like a ghost attracted to the blood
of the sacrificed sheep in the fosse at the entrance to Hades in Homer’s
Odyssey, the daemonic being enters and possesses the writer, wholly, not
only to inspire writing but even more to act out in the world, to lead
from the performance of one routine or another, in a bar or at a party,
to the fulfillment of destructive intentionality—whether writer’s, victim’s,
daemon’s, or all of them at once combined.

At best, the writer can hope to patrol the perimeters to ward off poten-
tial invaders and to monitor and prevent, if possible, potential acting out.
Burroughs learns to do this from the accidental death of his wife, Joan
Vollmer, who died when they attempted to do a William Tell routine, with
Burroughs shooting a glass of champagne off her head with his 45 revolver.
This blood sacrifice, Burroughs claims here, inadvertently made him into
a writer, for by thereafter having to channel his routines into writing, he
also learned to write his way out of complete domination by the ugly spirit
so that he could discover the gentle reader of his would-be audience and
muse—at first particular potential love-partners, Lewis Marker and Allen
Ginsberg, and then generalized to his readership at large. A gentle reader
would vanquish the ugly spirit via the gift of inspiration.

Burroughs, in his letters and journal-entries attributed to his writer-
surrogate William Lee, thinks he discovers via analysis and his imagi-
native memoir writing the traumatic origins of his troubled gay subjec-
tivity—split between self-acceptance and self-loathing—in his being made
to perform oral sex, when a toddler, on his nanny Mary’s boyfriend. Then
again when three years old, and being forced by an older boy to do the
same, he bites down hard on the latter’s penis, getting a delayed revenge
and causing a tempest in the household, or so he remembers it.

Of course, it would be too easy to see Naked Lunch in light of any
reductive analogy with these origins, as an act of revenge on straight
society mounted (from the rear, as it were) by an aggressively Beat gay
hipster. But to feel even a touch assaulted by Naked Lunch is to feel, I
think, what the Ugly Spirit, as channeled by Burroughs, intends the
Gentle Reader to feel, thereby establishing authentic “contact,” a word
that, in all its possible senses, is the signal guide to the value system Burroughs maintains throughout his life-work.

To understand why this situation arises, however, we do not need to repeat well-known biographical or historical facts. Rather, we need to understand the rather neglected crisis in the literary system that *Naked Lunch* instances. Basically, this crisis can best be expressed in a question—what is it that we know when we know a work of literature? Is it an ideological illusion perpetrated by the bourgeois upon the rest of us in support of their life-world? Is it a more human form of understanding than natural or social sciences can give us? If so, to what extent is it different from knowledge of the deceptions and self-deceptions human beings are heir to? What positive knowledge, moral or otherwise, beyond the world-wise reinforcement of a radical skepticism, does literature as a cultural institution and practice grant us readers? Is the knowledge that we gain only knowledge of ourselves as members of some identity group or other? Or if it is knowledge of general human nature, as traditionally contended, how is it different from what we learn elsewhere more readily via a more rigorous and disciplined method? Surely the Kinsey Reports on human sexuality give greater knowledge of American sexual practices than literature has done up until that time. In short, the literary system, and especially the novel, were at the time being challenged and made to seem outmoded not only by modern popular media, such as photography, movies, radio, and TV, but by the inability to provide a serious defense of literature as anything other than socially sanctioned imaginary play therapy, essentially no better than pipedreams, for real problems. Although Burroughs asserts repeatedly that his routines, like dreams, could break into reality at any time, just as any reality could pass into the dream-world to become enlarged and transfigured there, what *Naked Lunch* demonstrates, more than this claim, is that knowledge that literature grants us, for better and for worse.

Such knowledge is the instantaneous intuition of all phases of the development of an entity, or, in the extreme-limit case of the idea of god, of the totality of entities. This intuitive knowledge is not derived from sense-data or from the operation of conceptual categories, but is generated in the discovery of the definitive principle for a being, or for the whole, at whatever level or scope. Just as we can determine the nature of the circle from the right angles, infinite in number, that constitute the circle’s all possible chords, so too can we know the principle of develop-
ment of a being, its rule or law, from the operation of our imagination of it. Like any other art at its best, literature in its respective fashion completes the draft of being. To paraphrase the romantic visionary terms of Wallace Stevens, from “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour,” we can say that the finite imagination of the text and the infinite imagination of god become one: the inherent emergent development of the literary system coincides in principle with a particular writer’s singular composition. We can see the nature of the expressive future. What Naked Lunch reveals emerging is the fatally mad collective mind of full-blown consumer culture. It is the fictional memoir of its conception, gestation, birth, and death throes, composing an intellectual and emotional complex, an iconic cultural image, all presented in an instant of time. In saying this, I mean to underscore the essentially modernist project of Naked Lunch, even as it presents a vision of the divine perhaps more appropriate to the postmodernist nightmares of Jacques Lacan commenting on the god of the psychotic Dr. Schreber.

In fact, Schreber’s god has a lot in common with the most bizarre characteristics of Naked Lunch. Long, protoplasmic tendrils or tentacles of light grope the soul and impregnate the receptive subject ready to give birth to the new messiah. The latter is to save us from the end of the world apocalypse that has just happened all because one morning, while dressing, Schreber has thought it might be nice to be a woman, having more pleasure than any man can have. It is as if Schreber’s vision completes that of Burroughs.

From a Lacanian perspective, God, whether Schreber’s or any other’s, is the conventional name for the Big Other, that illusory other of the other and ourselves, the Father, who ensures the threat of castration so that the socially symbolic system of signification works from gender division on up the ladder. And it would be interesting to speculate that the invasive God of Burroughs is modeled upon what he comes to believe is his first traumatic experience of the adult world: his sexual abuse as a toddler by his nanny and her boyfriend. One could conclude that his early personal experience happens to coincide in some important ways with the widespread psychic effects of the U.S. population during the decade or so after World War II as the multimedia assault upon people to change them into consumers so that they then will buy, buy, buy kicks into high gear.

However this may be, there are clearly differences between the literary vision of Burroughs and the paranoid fantasies of Schreber, not
least the formal intentional differences between literature and madness. But the vision of god—whether explicitly owned up to or not, or rationally argued for via geometric models and analogies à la Spinoza, or enthusiastically embraced via drugs and debauchery à la Burroughs—does express the norm of maximal energy or power that the subject can enjoy. The god of the subject is, of course, the superego writ large; and, in the case of the representative artist of a culture, assuming that there still may be such creatures, it also coincides at most points with the cultural superego. That we live now in an age of polytheism may be no improvement, however, on the theory that more means a dispersal of intensity; for it may just mean we have many more raging madnesses to evade than ever before.

Intuition is usually thought to be a non-rational mode of knowledge, if it is thought to be knowledge at all. For Spinoza, there is nothing non-rational about it. Rather, it is the mind’s immediate perception of a principle of formation at work, like that (as we have seen) of the generation of a circle of a certain size from the specific dimensions of a right angle to be inscribed within it that produces its chords. This geometrical or axiomatic knowledge is Spinoza’s favorite instance of the universal knowledge of how rules of combination and differentiation create forms of thinking and acting upon the world. It is intuitive knowledge of the mind at work. It is the mind’s loving self-imagination in the moment of creation. Burroughs’s fascination with Sufism can be seen in this light.

Similarly, Burroughs’s routines, begun to make and keep in contact with prospective beloveds (among others), evolve into techniques of discovery, both of the self and of its more general models of humanity, and so in this way at least instances the intellectual love of god, to put the matter in Spinoza’s terms. For the self-loathing queer junky Burroughs, whose routine of playing William Tell with his wife led to her death, such a sublimated use for the routine demonstrates how becoming a writer of routines saved him, not to mention others, perhaps. But the cost of this intuitive or imaginative knowledge of the mind at work can be, as it is for Burroughs, great.

“Interzone,” an article originally written for The New Yorker (it was never accepted), suggests as much in its characterization of Brinton, an American living in Tangier before full Moroccan independence in the mid-1950s who is, like William Lee, an ironic version of Burroughs:
Some of these men have ability and intelligence, like Brinton, who writes unpublishably obscene novels and exists on a small income. He undoubtedly has talent, but his work is hopelessly unsalable. He has intelligence, the rare ability to see relations between disparate factors, to coordinate data, but he moves through life like a phantom, never able to find the time, place or person to put anything into effect, to realize any project in terms of three-dimensional reality. He could have been a successful business executive, anthropologist, explorer, criminal, but the conjuncture of circumstances was never there. He is always too late or too early. His abilities remain larval, discarnate. He is the last of an archaic line, or the first here from another space-time way—in any case a man without context, of no place and no time. (50)

Some of this is self-serving, of course, which is why Burroughs assigns it to his new mask Brinton, not even giving it to Lee, who is too recognizably himself. But there is also real insight here. Burroughs, like the modern or post-romantic writer or artists generally, suffers from irony as a condition of death-in-life. Abstracted and alienated from his actual historical position in space-time, the modern artist like Burroughs is a principle of possibility, too early or too late, without context, of no place and no time. Why? Because he can see the full development of a thing, a career, a way of life, and so can never be fully in it. Which is what makes him like the last of a kind or the first of a new alien breed. The modern artist, like Burroughs, is a caesura, a hiatus, more than anything else, a hole in reality. Like the figure in Naked Lunch of the Buyer (a narc who needs the junk he buys to make his busts), or like the junk itself in this text when personified as driven living capital, Burroughs as ironic modern artist is most of all “a creature without species” (17), and thus, in his art, the visionary perception incarnate of the principle of species-making. The intuitive knowledge of all that he lacks by way of determinant formation gives Burroughs then access to the actual templates of being—which is why he can play comic, pornographic, nihilistic, and unspeakable variations on the normal or proper—but also lyrical—paeansto love.

The centerpiece of Naked Lunch and what many critics refer to as its Bataillean “general” or “anal” economy is of course “the talking asshole routine” (110–13). Originally the tail end of a letter to Ginsberg, meant to amuse and entice him, in revised form it ends up in the “Ordinary Men
and Women” chapter of the novel. Drs. Schafer and Benway—the latter Burroughs’s spokesman for modern medicine gone wild in its experimentation and drive to help control the population—are discussing absurd ways to surgically remake the human body to make it more efficient in its functioning—recreating form to perfect its function: “Why not one all-purpose blob?” (110). Benway suddenly recalls the story of “the man who taught his asshole to talk” (110).

This ass talk had a sort of gut frequency. It hit you right down there like you gotta go. You know when the old colon gives you the elbow and it feels sorta cold inside, and you know all you have to do is turn loose? Well this talking hit you right down there, a bubbly, thick stagnant sound, a sound you could smell. (110–11)

Benway goes on to explain that the man worked for a carnival and treated his talking asshole as part of a novelty ventriloquist act, which fits nicely with the passage above, as ventriloquism is originally a religious practice in ancient Greece called gastromancy, or “speaking from the stomach,” or in this case, the colon!

The act at this point sounds most like minstrel show routines, such as

“Oh, I say, are you still down there, old thing?”

“Nah! I had to go relieve myself.” (111)

But then the asshole starts talking on its own, ad-libbing and tossing back gags at the straight-man ventriloquist every time. It gets worse, Benway says, when the asshole develops teeth-like “little raspy incurving hooks” and starts eating. At first the man thinks this is cute and funny, but then the asshole begins to eat its way through his pants, exposing him in public, shouting on the street that it wants “equal rights” (111), getting drunk and having crying jags, saying “nobody loved it” and all it wanted is to be kissed “same as any other mouth” (111). Finally, the asshole talks “all the time day and night,” with the man shouting for it to shut up, beating it with his fist, “sticking candles up it” (to curse the darkness, I guess). Then one day the asshole says to him, “It’s you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don’t need you around here any more. I can talk and eat and shit” (111).
After that [the man] began waking up in the morning with a transparent jelly like a tadpole's tail all over his mouth. This jelly was what the scientists call un-D.T., Undifferentiated Tissue, which can grow into any kind of flesh on the human body. He would tear it off his mouth and the pieces would stick to his hands like burning gasoline jelly and grow there, grow anywhere on him a glob of it fell. So finally his mouth sealed over, and the whole head would have amputated spontaneous—(did you know there is a condition occurs in parts of Africa and only among Negroes where the little toe amputates spontaneously?)—except for the eyes, you dig. That's one thing the asshole couldn't do was see. It needed the eyes. But nerve connections were blocked and infiltrated and atrophied so the brain couldn't give orders any more. It was trapped in the skull, sealed off. For a while you could see the silent, helpless suffering of the brain behind the eyes, then finally the brain must have died, because the eyes went out, and there was no more feeling in them than a crab's eye on the end of a stalk. (111–12)

Dr. Benway's mad tale has the routine coming full circle, now reaching the point of intersection with Dr. Schafer's original demonic parody of a visionary proposal to alter the inefficient human body into something resembling a giant eel: “Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of order why not have a one all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate? We could seal up nose and mouth, fill in the stomach, make an air hole direct into the lungs where it should have been in the first place . . .” (110). But the routine continues, not closing, but opening up to three new themes: 1) how sex leaks out of even the least sexy of our communications; 2) how modern democracy is really a fatal virus of bureaucracy, a deadly parasite in the body politic; and 3) finally, on a lighter note, as it were, how love perhaps does conquer even the asshole in us all.

Oliver Harris has shown that the first of these new themes, how sex leaks out of every pore in the body of communication, is originally in the letter where this routine is hatched. In that epistolary context, it is in the first, not one of the final, positions. It all fits better there. But in this novelistic context, one wonders how sex leaking out of even the least of our communications, squeezing pass the censor bureaus, quite works—I mean, beyond the very general and obvious sense that the routine deals with the body and does end with a surreal scene of anal sex. As a reference to the passage about the Undifferentiated Tissue, it is not clear how it works, at first.
I think what Burroughs means, however, goes beyond any general and obvious points. His story about the asshole that talks, wants equal rights, is subject to drunken crying jags when neglected, develops vicious teeth in a parody of the *vagina dentata*, is his version of Milton’s and the Bible’s creation of Eve, adjusted for either straight or queer application. Instead of the feminine being born of the rib of the masculine, it is born of the anus.

Similarly, the idea of modern democracy as a deadly parasite, a fatal virus like a cancer of bureaucracy, is Burroughs’s revision of the myth of modern democracy as a direct descendant of the Athenian political system. Rather, because of the censorship of sex, especially in its homoerotic forms, modern bureaucratic democracy, especially in its drive for mastery and control of the population, represents the end of the human species as we have known it—hence, the sci-fi degeneration and devolution where one might have expected or hoped for mutation to the next rung on the evolutionary ladder. The homosocial dimension of modern democracy, long recognized but also usually repressed except in certain rare instances, such as that of Whitman’s poetry, gives rise in the context of the repression of the 1950s to the nightmare scenarios in the novel, as well as in the culture at large. The final new theme, of comical but also quite loving, sexuality, in this instance appropriately homoerotic and anal, is the necessary sign from Burroughs’s Ugly Spirit for the Gentle Reader to pay heed, as Blake says in *Milton*, to mark his words as they are of our eternal salvation. Burroughs in *Naked Lunch* revises—satirically, parodically, and creatively (I will argue)—the Judeo-Christian and classical cultural legacies of the Western tradition.

Burroughs, however, is also a legatee of that tradition’s most virulent “diseases” of misogyny and misanthropy, with strong taints of racism and Orientalism, and even (especially given the historic immediacy of the Holocaust) anti-Semitism. Burroughs ironically puts everything into the mouths of characters or the author-surrogates in the novel, and hence much of what passes his lips in these crazed routines remains open to considerable debate. To put it another way, as the self-appointed Anus of the Western World (Joyce was only Ireland’s), we know that in reading Burroughs we are going to get dirty, to say the least. This abjection of the reader is of course a large part of his authorial intention, especially in *Naked Lunch*. The first time I read an excerpt from it in *Evergreen Review* a half century ago, I gagged and buried the magazine in an old wooden
chest my father had made for his gear when in the Navy during World War II. It had been turned into a toy chest and then was the depository for old magazines. At age twelve this reader’s sensibility felt ravaged. But this is the point I now realize. More than a deal with the devil, more than a pedophile’s love-letter to his lost love(s), *Naked Lunch* is that rare thing, a book that probably is really obscene, filled with what Burroughs calls “the Ugly Spirit” hunting down to destroy the last vestiges of innocence in any “Gentle Reader” who falls into the traps of its demonic routines. Force the American Readers to face the worst of what their existences presume everyday as preconditions. As the cherry on top of this heap of messy word-salad sundaes, add the self-loathing expressions of a junky queer from the U.S. heartland (in every sense), who finds every vicious underground from around the miserable world of the 1950s. And as radical cure for maniacal consumerism, *Naked Lunch*’s imaginary dripping fork in pure waste has now virtually global reach: “The title means exactly what the words say: NAKED Lunch—a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork” (199).

Benway’s conclusion to the “Talking Asshole” routine may at first continue in the same hard-edged, cynically brutal vein, but it suddenly ends with a new tone and perspective:

> In Timbuktu I once saw an Arab boy who could play a flute with his ass, and the fairies told me he was really an individual in bed. He could play a tune up and down the organ hitting the most exogenously sensitive spots, which are different on everyone, of course. Every lover had his special theme song which was perfect for him and rose to his climax. The boy was a great artist when it came to improvising new combines and special climaxes, some of them notes in the unknown, tie-ups and seeming dis- cords that would suddenly break through each other and crash together with a stunning, hot sweet impact. (113)

Underneath all the obvious crudity in this passage, Benway reports on an imaginative perception about the nature of virtuosity in love-making (taken from “fairies”). This sharp intuition rises to a plausible generalization about the rare genius in the art of love. It is perhaps based upon Burroughs’s own experiences in Tangier or Mexico, and so he identifies himself as in this flaming group of gay men. It also says something pertinent about the visionary writer’s individualizing designs of aesthetic
enjoyment. They are palpable upon the reader’s body, but in an interpenetrative spirit, as is any other more recognizable form of jouissance. In other words, Benway is channeling Burroughs here, even as Burroughs may be channeling, at least for this masterfully comic vision of love at play, the transfigured memory of his own boy-lover Kiki. The Ugly Spirit and the Gentle Reader are, momentarily, reconciled.

How are we to understand this admittedly brief and unexpected vision of reconciliation in a novel that is perhaps the most indigestible of all? I think Spinoza’s theory of conatus and its relation to the intellectual love of God may help us to understand Burroughs, as strange as that may sound.

“Conatus” is the term that Spinoza calls the activity of any being directed to its continuation in existence as the being it is. This activity in itself gives pleasure. Conatus is neither desire nor will, unless one sees it as a pleasuring or a willing that is in fact an acting to ensure a being’s existence as such. “The highest conatus of the mind,” Spinoza says, and the mind is the idea of the body that the body has of itself, and the mind’s “highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge” (154). That is, not by sensuous perception, nor by rational understanding, but by intuition. From this third kind of knowledge or intuition, the mind learns the intellectual love of God, which is Spinoza’s end-all and be-all, as it defines the ultimate conatus of existence, of being rather than nothing.

The mind’s intellectual love toward God is the love of God wherewith God loves himself not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explicated [in his attributes and their modes] through the essence of the human mind considered under a form of eternity. That is, the mind’s intellectual love toward God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself. (157)

Each region of being constitutes a divine attribute, of which we know two, the res cognitans and res extenza, the thinking thing and the extended thing, subject and object. The modes of these attributes are as many and different as there are entities in existence. The intellectual love of God is “of” him in two senses, then: both the love we feel toward God and the love God feels toward us and all that exists, that expresses its conatus. This view has gotten Spinoza accused of being a pantheist and notoriously excommunicated from the Jewish faith, as it would no doubt appall any monotheistic religionist, despite its being a rather curious pantheism:
there is one God, interchangeable with the Nature of modern science; that is, with the universe of matter and its laws. In any event, Spinoza’s *Ethics* may well express the visionary’s highest sense of virtue, which is why I find it useful in this context.

In conclusion, I would recall these programmatic words from “Islam Incorporated and the Parties of the Interzone,” where there is a naked lunch menu printed out for the reader to assimilate. Without getting into the niceties of these different Interzone parties, the one Burroughs favors, the Factualists, has as its platform, in part, the following rejection of the use of telepathy, which was being investigated seriously at the time by U.S. and Soviet Union intelligence agencies for its potential mind-control power over its respective populations (at least):

> We oppose, as we oppose atomic war, the use of such knowledge to control, coerce, debase, exploit or annihilate the individuality of another living creature. Telepathy is not, by its nature, a one-way process. To attempt to set up a one-way telepathic broadcast must be regarded as an unqualified evil. . . . (140)

What Burroughs calls “The Human Virus” (141) is the coercive use of knowledge, as opposed to its free intellectual pursuit. The “Deteriorated Image” of the human species, the “broken image of Man moves in minute by minute and cell by cell,” (141), like cancer, or junk, or self-loathing. But “The Human Virus can be isolated and treated” (141).

How? through God’s love, of course:

> Gentle reader, we see God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm . . . Through these orifices transmute your body . . . The way OUT is the way IN . . . . (191)

Thus saith the Divine Asshole? More “notes in the unknown” (113).

No wonder, then, that the creatively disjunctive discourses of Burroughs’s genius-work of visionary imagination transforms with exuberant laughter the actual architecture and urban design of Tangier’s central district into a cubist collage depicting the modern inferno as a gigantic Dadaist toilet bowl especially equipped with the monstrous sounds of infinite suction. An American Standard: Beat-Style, Beat-State.