

MASTER IN ADVANCED ENGLISH STUDIES:
LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN CONTACT

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

2015-2016



Universidad de Valladolid

Final Master Thesis

And the Virus Spread: Infection as a Bond Between William Burroughs's and David
Cronenberg's Dystopian Works

Pedro Alberto Martínez Martínez

VALLADOLID 2016

The work presented in this MA thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master in Advanced English Studies:
Languages and Cultures in Contact

to
Universidad de Valladolid

by
Pedro Alberto Martínez Martínez

July 2016

Student's signature _____

Approved
Dr. Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Stracham

Supervisor's signature _____

ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with infection in the American Beat Generation author William S. Burroughs and the Canadian film-maker David Cronenberg. I have chosen Burroughs's *Cut-Up trilogy* (formed by *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express*) and Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future*, *Shivers* and *Rabid* as my main frames of reference to carry out this study. The main purpose of this comparative analysis (which is not exempt of similarities and differences in the way these two authors tackle the same subject matter) is to explore a research gap in order to shed some light to the means by which the two authors perceive infection and parasitism as ever-present elements in their works that provides them with philosophical ideas that go well beyond the genres which they seem to be ascribed to on the surface. It will be seen how labels fall short to explain these two authors given the roughly experimental nature of their methods. As a conclusion, my research is also concerned with sex and monstrosity in both authors as a direct result of infection.

Keywords: William Burroughs, David Cronenberg, Parasitism, Sex, Monstrosity

INDEX

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
1. The concept of parasitism and infection in Burroughs' and Cronenberg's works.	
1.a. Cronenberg's parasites	4
1.b. Burroughs's infectious words	12
1.c. Burrough's experimental technique	16
1.d. Infection as addiction in Burroughs	23
1.e. Plot in Burroughs	26
1.f. Artists as parasites/Cronenberg and Burroughs as parasites	28
2. Sex in Burroughs and Cronenberg.....	30
3. The nature of the monstrous for Burroughs and Cronenberg	34
4. Conclusion	35
Works cited	37

Introduction

Sickness is such an undesirable thing. The feeling of being sick constitutes one of the most primal fears that human beings have to face at any given time. However, if there is one thing that can be attributed to that fear without the shadow of a doubt is its ever-changing nature, its resilience and its capacity to evolve so it can nest not only inside the human body but also in the mind. When infection influences imagination it can blur the lines between reality and fiction by making both of them unbearable. On these terms, it is therefore difficult to argue with the more often than not parasitic nature of infections. The idea of having some sort of otherness inside of the self that can actually harm the body and dispossess it of its agency is both terrifying and threatening. Parasitism is tightly knitted with what is unpleasant, what is abominable, in other words, what is monstrous. As a result of infections, bodies can mutate and show a monster-like shape. In regards to this, the philosopher José Miguel G. Cortés argues in *Orden y Caos* that seeing monstrous shapes reminds human beings that life is not as safe as they think (Cortés 21). It is interesting to see how in the case of some artists the fear of infection can be used for something that is above the sake of entertainment. In other words, art can make use of that fear to force human beings to meditate about the meaning of life. By using monsters and deformed creatures in the realm of fiction it is actually possible to mirror existence and address what is wrong with the world at the same time. In addition, the infection and subsequent changes a virus might entail on the human body are another source for fear considering that one of the foundations of this modern society is perfection through a flawless physical image. The overpowering feeling of getting sick and its corrupting potential puts human beings in front of decay and its ultimate outcome, death.

The focus on infection has among its influences the analysis made by Michel Foucault in *Naissance de la Clinique* (1963). Miguel Morey argues that in this work Foucault is trying

to explore the medical regard (Morey 103). In Foucault's *Histoire de la Folie* Foucault elaborated his ideas on the binomial Reason-Unreason. He asserts that at the beginning of category this categorical pair overlapped with another binomial, the one formed by Normal-Pathological. He goes one step beyond in *Naissance* confronting Unreason and illness against health and Reason (Morey 104). My interest lies in up to what extent Foucault's medical regard can be applied to Burroughs and Cronenberg. Far from acknowledging any sort of influence of Foucault on them I try to show the imperceptible subtleties of the medical regard which are a sign of its relevance. They constitute what is called the cosial imaginary, a series of beliefs shared by most people which remain unquestioned as a result of that.

There are two authors that have challenged their public with their respective takes on infection and monstrosity: William Burroughs and David Cronenberg. Even though they practice different disciplines (literature in Burroughs's case and film-making in Cronenberg's) it is not absurd to draw a parallel between them since they both share a common obsession with infection, viruses, parasites as well as the decadence associated to them. David Cronenberg has also mentioned numerous times that Burroughs's influence has been more than essential in his movies ("he belongs to my nervous system. All my movies have something of him"(*Freixas*318)). The topics analyzed by the two authors are nothing but the means they use to deliver a message charged with a deep philosophical insight. They do not want to just entertain. Their work goes beyond that, since it is designed to shake consciences and challenge what is considered normal. This statement is clearly supported by the fact that they both use experimental techniques that are anything but average to put their messages across. It would be a mistake then to think that either of them sticks to one genre in particular since the expand of their craft boils down to a constant pushing of boundaries, a transgression of sorts that sets both of them beyond fixed formulas or archetypes present in their fields of expertise.

The purpose of this paper is to show the way in which these two authors showcase monstrosity, infection, parasitism and sex as well as to explore their similarities and differences. In order to do that, I intend to use as my main frames of reference Burroughs's so-called *Cut-Up trilogy* (formed by *The Soft Machine* (1961,1966) *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962,1964,1967) and *Nova Express* (1964) and three of Cronenberg's most seminal works: *Crimes of the Future* (1970), *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977) as well as references to *Consumed* (2014) the first literary effort perpetrated by the Canadian film-maker.

The steps of my research are going to be fundamentally concerned with the different sources of infection in Cronenberg and Burroughs's aforementioned works as well as their distinctive takes on sex and monstrosity that will showcase how these two authors are similar and yet different at the same time.

Many authors have dealt with the idea of sickness and infection in Burroughs and Cronenberg (Ramón Freixas, José Miguel G. Cortés, Oliver Harris and Robin Lydenberg among others). However, most of the time they have done it separately and without making exhaustive comparisons focused on the subject matter of infection which is why I think this paper fills a much needed gap in terms of research. What they do in most cases is either describe the physical consequences derived from infection and the physical changes derived from it (especially in the case of Cortés and Freixas when it comes to Cronenberg) or use infection as a starting point to give a more general and exhaustive portrayal of the author's imaginarium (such is the case of Harris and Lydenberg when it comes to Burroughs).

1. The concept of parasitism and infection in Burroughs's and Cronenberg's works.

- 1.a. Cronenberg's parasites.

As I have already advanced in the introduction, parasitism and infection are essential concepts in Burroughs's and Cronenberg's oeuvre. However, the sources of infection are somewhat different in these two authors and that is something that needs to be explained because although there is a difference on the surface that does not mean that the common ground between the two authors is non-existent. In the case of Cronenberg, parasites are usually disgusting creatures that infiltrate in the body of human beings. Not only that, *Crimes of the Future*, *Shivers* and *Rabid* seem to have a progression that delves into the film-maker's views on parasitism and infection. Cronenberg has always been a director that escapes labels and that alone might explain why his movies have something that is in debt with reinvention and a questioning of reality that derives from the film director's own existentialism given the fact that in an interview he goes as far as mentioning Burroughs to address his views on society:

At the beginning of *Naked Lunch* is the quote "Nothing is true, everything is permitted". Although I don't think it was originally conceived by Hassan I. Sabbah as an existentialist statement, in a way it is. It's saying: because death is inevitable, we are free to invent our own reality. We are part of a culture, we are part of an ethical and moral system, but all we have to do is take one step outside it and we see that none of it is absolute. Nothing is true. It's not an absolute. It's only a human construct, very definitely able to change and susceptible to change and rethinking. And you can then be free. Free to be unethical, immoral, out of society and agent for some other power, never belonging. Ultimately, if you are an existentialist and you don't believe in God and the judgment after death, then you

can do anything you want: You can kill, you can do whatever society considers the most taboo thing. (Breskin)

This perfectly sums up Cronenberg's approach to art and it acknowledges once again the huge influence of William Burroughs on him. It also explains Cronenberg's own obsession with taboo subjects as well as the fictional means with which he mocks, criticizes and subverts reality. He understands that constraints are something to break away from rather than a set of beliefs or preconceived notions that have to be followed blindly. Cronenberg is making clear his own disgust with normalcy. What he basically means with this quote is that in the end reality is what humans are prone to make of it. That is exactly where the idea of infection stems from for him. Viruses and parasites are threatening because they are part of the unknown. They have a potential to create chaos. That chaos threatens integrity and forces individuals to change their perspective, to make decisions. In other words, infection opens up a completely new and uncharted territory that has very little to do with a standardized and archetypal vision of reality. To Cronenberg, everything comes down to accepting a new scenario:

Se trata de intentar comprender las interrelaciones entre los organismos, incluso aquellos que percibimos como enfermedades [...] creo que la mayoría de las enfermedades se quedarían atónitas si tuvieran la menor idea de que se las considera enfermedades. Es una connotación muy negativa. Para ellas, apoderarse de nuestro cuerpo y destruirlo es algo muy positivo. Es un triunfo. Todo ello forma parte de invertir el entendimiento normal de lo que nos pasa física, psicológica y biológicamente. (Gorostiza, Pérez 47)

As it can be seen, the idea of being infected is not necessarily a bad thing for the filmmaker. Quite the opposite in fact, since it can also be a source of improvement. Infection

does not always equal disaster in Cronenberg's eyes no matter how different the viewer perceives it. An interesting example can be seen in Cronenberg's literary debut, *Consumed* in which a couple of journalists investigate the strange murder of a famous philosopher by her husband, another notorious thinker that being dissatisfied with his crime ends up eating pieces of his wife. There is a certain part of the novel in which one of the journalists after having a one night stand with a cancer patient has a conversation with her in which she sarcastically talks about her sickness/infection as an improvement:

So many women have cancer now. Do you think a new esthetic can develop? Cancer beauty? I mean, if there could be heroin chic, the esthetic of the death-wishing drug addict? Will non-cancerous women be begging their cosmetic surgeons to give them fake node implants under their chins and around their necks? Under their arms? In their groins? So sexy, that fullness... (Cronenberg 50)

Another remarkable case in point is that of the movie *Shivers* which mainly deals with parasitism. Cronenberg says that by being infected the characters are getting access to a more privileged perception of things since they are not grey, rusty and stagnant anymore once the parasites take over their bodies. It could be said that before the invasion of the parasites and the subsequent spread of the infection the characters were already sick so to speak. The parasites are therefore the cure by Cronenberg's standards as David Sanjek points out:

These comments reveal that Cronenberg wishes his audience to be brought, kicking and screaming (like some of *Shivers's* characters) if necessary, to accept his view that Dr. Hobbes's parasites constitute a positive form of disease and bring about a welcome change in the Starline Towers' residents and, by extension, society at large. If Cronenberg neither idealizes nor condemns the infection, he does conceive of it as a painful but necessary process of desirable metamorphosis.

As the infected characters leave in their cars at the film's conclusion, they act as agents in the transformation of what the director believes to be a truly diseased and desiccated culture. "They look", the director observes, "very beautiful at the end of the film. They don't look diseased or awful, they're well dressed. (Sanjek 61)

Cronenberg's portrayal of infection hides criticism to a society that has grown to accept conventions. Parasitism is then a necessary evil, a wake-up call in a world that has unavoidably succumbed to absurdity. The infection is the agent of chaos that comes to set up a new order in a society that is already sick without its presence.

According to Ramón Freixas, Cronenberg is fascinated with the ideas of mutation, change and loss of identity as a result of infection (Freixas 308). Freixas goes even further and argues that the filmmaker is especially interested in what happens once a parasite/creature assumes the control of a human body. By all intents and purposes, a relationship is established, an unequal bond that invariably results in a dehumanizing binomial between host/parasite. This is further explored by José Miguel G. Cortés who says that the central element of Cronenberg's movies is the representation of the body as a vulnerable setting that degenerates itself over time in order to emphasize decadence (Cortés 188). As a matter of fact, the three movies that are going to be analyzed in this paper follow a progression, an evolution of Cronenberg's takes on decadence infection-wise (or degeneration-wise for that matter) that turns them from my perspective into a trilogy of illness. *Crimes of the Future* (1970), which Cronenberg himself has described as an avant-garde movie. It is important to note that at the beginning of his career Cronenberg was heavily influenced by experimental film-makers such as Kenneth Anger, Ed Emschwiller, Jonas Mekas, or the Kuchar brothers (Gorostiza, Pérez 82)). This movie was the first step that would later lead on to a more obvious idea of

infection and parasitism in *Shivers* and *Rabid*. The movie tells the story of Adrian Tripod, a dermatologist who works for the House of Skin, a Clinic founded by his mentor Antoine Rouge. What is particularly striking about the plot is that the story takes place in a dystopic world where women have ceased to exist due to the development of a cosmetic that made them get a strange infection called Rouge's disease. As a result of this, the world has become a place in which men have gradually started to gravitate towards their feminine side more and more. The movie deals with infection in a two-fold way: on the one hand, the infectious physical nature of Rouge's disease itself, which also happens to affect men and that always results in death. On the other hand, the way in which femininity, as another half inside of men, that is to say a parasite, infects males dispossessing them of their identity until it finally damages their personalities. It is a psychological infection. One of the characters gets so obsessed with his feminine side that he desperately tries to give birth by getting rid of his organs. This concept of the psychological infection has been debated over many times. Prestigious authors like Susan Sontag have gone up against it:

Moreover, there is a peculiarly modern predilection for psychological explanations of disease, as of everything else. Psychologizing seems to provide control over the experiences and events (like grave illnesses) over which people have in fact little or no control. Psychological understanding undermines the 'reality' of a disease. That reality has to be explained. (Sontag 56)

Sontag has a more realistic approach to sickness whereas Cronenberg prefers to take into account all the variables, including those that can be more slippery, unrealistic and fictional. This is obviously related to the "nothing is true, everything is permitted" motto.

Even though *Crimes of the Future* is a roughly experimental film and it was silent when it first got released it already contains ideas that would be recurrent in Cronenberg's

filmography, especially those concerned with infection and the idea of the other half, the internal struggle between two sides inside the human mind. The film paved the way to what is considered Cronenberg's first film feature, *Shivers* (1975), which was a departure and a change of pace for Cronenberg in what regards to genre. *Shivers* has the structure that could easily make it part of the horror genre. However, the use of that label with movies like *Shivers* would be a mistake since it is clear they are not intended to scare with the sole purpose of entertainment. These movies are far from the horror stereotypes according to Richard Porton:

Unlike old-fashioned horror films' fascination with the supernatural, Cronenberg emphasizes what is frequently referred to as 'body horror.' Instead of two-headed monsters, the villains – and in some perverse respects, the heroes—of his films are the inner demons spawned by modern technology and sexual anxiety. (Porton 4)

In *Shivers* the 'heroes' in Porton's terms are phallic creatures that use the body of humans as hosts to perpetuate their infection until they ultimately take over the population of an entire resort. Cronenberg has a tendency to gravitate towards a literal idea of parasitism, that is to say, monsters that infiltrate inside people's bodies. The human body turns into a host that suffers abuse and infection. As a result of that, bodies change and agency and free will are lost. It is important to mention that in *Shivers* the parasites have been designed by a doctor (Doctor Hobbes, whose name echoes that of the materialist philosopher Thomas Hobbes) with the purpose of improving people's lives until they go out of control. One of the characters, Rollo Linsky, explains the intentions of Hobbes perfectly at the very beginning of the movie:

- "Why not Breed a parasite that can do something useful? A parasite that can take over the function of a dead organ. You breed a parasite that you implant in the human body cavity. It hooks around the circulatory system and it filters the blood just like a kidney

does. And so it takes a little blood for itself once in a while. What would you care? If you've got enough you can afford to be generous." 16: 15

Shivers was written and directed by Cronenberg before AIDS started to be a major concern in society as an epidemic. In a way, since the movie deals with the spreading of an infection by means of sexual intercourse (the parasites use the mouth of their hosts and their sexual organs to get access to their bodies) it would not be ridiculous to assert that in *Shivers* Cronenberg showcased a prophetic vision that was ahead of its time. Coincidentally or not, his movie foretold something that ended up happening in reality (of course without phallic monsters and apocalyptic endings). Be that as it may, the truth is that when scholars started to establish this parallel, Cronenberg denied it vehemently according to scholars like Ernest Mathijs. However, the truth is that far from damaging his art the AIDS theory asserted by the critics has empowered even more the message of the director, making it relevant:

In general, the Cronenberg discourse has used topical references to rhetorically promote its own arguments, thereby obtaining cultural status. Critics have tried to maintain this status by linking the references to AIDS to new arguments, ensuring a consolidation within the discourse and creating and supporting a network of arguments that build a general view of Cronenberg's films... Thus, odd to state perhaps, and politically incorrect to write, for Cronenberg criticism, AIDS has indeed been "not such a bad disease after all". (Mathijs 39)

Years later, Cronenberg would recognize how understandable these interpretations were especially in his movie *The Fly* (which is not analyzed in this paper) with the short essay "The Beetle and the Fly" which served as an introduction to the translation of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* done by Susan Bernofsky:

When *The Fly* was released in 1986, there was much conjecture that the disease that Brundle had brought on himself was a metaphor for AIDS. Certainly I understood this—AIDS was on everybody's mind as the vast scope of the disease was gradually being revealed. (Cronenberg 2014:13)

Shivers follow-up, *Rabid* (1977), also deals with failed medical procedures. After a plastic surgery procedure to treat 3rd degree burns with skin grafts, Rose turns into a deformed vampire with again a phallic-like tentacle that comes out of her armpit. The tentacle is the new organ with which she feeds herself from other people's blood while infecting them by turning them into infectious zombie creatures. Rose is the carrier of a virus that she cannot help but transmit. Like *Shivers*, the movie ends with a massive infection. Another similarity with *Shivers* is how easy it is to think of AIDS when watching the film since the way in which Rose transmits the infection is voraciously sexual to say the least. In the end, Rose's sexual appetite is abruptly ended since she, the carrier, dies. However, *Rabid's* ending is anything but optimistic considering the apocalyptic landscape that Rose creates and it only adds up to the way in which Cronenberg has avoided the idea of a happy ending throughout his career. Humans are always defeated. The process always starts with alienation and a consequent loss of identity. The pessimistic outcomes of Cronenberg's universes are always related to chaos and those things that cannot be seen because they take place in another space, the body:

De ahí que todas las criaturas abyectas, inmundas, rastreras y con capacidad para descomponerse y recuperarse (...) suponen la venganza de lo informe, el triunfo de la cloaca, la epifanía de las vísceras (...) en el momento en que la indecisión de las fronteras desaparece o, mejor dicho, cuando la relación entre lo interior y lo exterior se invierte, cuando el mundo se invagina. (Freixas 297)

In Cronenberg's movies things happen the other way round, mainly because they are focused on what happens on the inside rather than the outside. It is a very individualistic approach that fights against what human beings take at face value and defies what is supposed to be the establishment in moral terms. That is precisely why it is important to emphasize how in these three movies everything revolves around the body and tries to achieve some sort of perfection/welfare that is never reached and that results in deformity and infection. Cronenberg is blindly following his own existentialist ethos giving not only his public but his characters the opposite of what they want and infection is the resource he uses to do so.

1.b. Burroughs's infectious words.

In William Burroughs's works the foundation, the primary source of infection is much more subtle. For the Beat Generation author there is definitely the element of creatures getting inside human bodies but the agents of infection are substantially more numerous and widespread. With that said, for Burroughs, the most primary virus/parasite is none other than the word. The word is the inception of corruption. It is the ultimate parasite as Burroughs himself makes quite clear:

My general theory since 1971 has been that the word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host; that is to say, the Word Virus (*The Other Half*) has established itself so firmly as an accepted part of the human organism that it can sneer at gangster viruses like smallpox and turn them in to the Pasteur institute. But the word clearly bears the single identifying feature of virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself. (Burroughs 2013: 59)

The binomial human body/virus seen in Cronenberg is also used by Burroughs. The reckless nature of the word definitely bears a more than striking resemblance to Cronenberg's parasites. The word's sole purpose is to voraciously replicate itself until its reach is so broad that it has finally created a successful symbiotic bond with its hosts that guarantees a normative environment. This binary bond is just as strong as that of the parasites that invade human bodies in Cronenberg's movies. It is basically a struggle for survival in which the body of the host is at stake:

“If we can infer purpose from behavior, then the purpose of a virus is TO SURVIVE. To survive at any expense to the host invaded. To be an animal, to be a body. To be an animal body that the virus can invade”. Such a parasitic invasion – whether biological or verbal- spells danger to individual life. (Burroughs 2008, 201)

It is all an either/or opposition that needs to be overcome. The word is such a basic thing that human beings are completely unaware of its omnipotence and power in the parasitical sense. It is at the top of the food chain when it comes to parasites and infections because it enhances their development: word begets image and image is virus (Burroughs 2014c, 49). From Burroughs's perspective, without the word there would not be any other parasites: “In the beginning was the word. In the beginning of what exactly?” (Burroughs 2014b, 56). This biblical reference made by Burroughs wonders about when exactly the word first showed up since in all likeness it is actually logical to think that human beings as such appeared before the word. That obviously reinforces the idea of the word being an external agent:

Burroughs, on the other hand, understands writing as essentially a force *alien* to the human. He refers to it as “a virus that made the spoken word possible” (Odiar

13), and fingers it as the culprit responsible for the growth of totalitarian control systems of all shapes and sizes. (Wood 13)

Burroughs describes how the word has become so indissoluble with human beings that the thought of not using it is simply not an option. Human beings are puppets in the word's hands. The word makes their most important decisions for them and as a result of that freedom is restricted. The human body has become a vessel for the word:

The "Other Half" is the word. The "Other Half" is an organism. Word is an organism. The presence of "The Other Half" as separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words can now be demonstrated experimentally... The word is now a virus. The flu virus may have once been a healthy lung cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the lungs. The word may once have been a healthy neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk. That organism is the word. (Burroughs 2014, b:56)

There is also a striking resemblance between the word in Burroughs and the parasites of Cronenberg, which is that of their apparent harmlessness on the surface (the creatures of *Shivers* are meant to substitute organs and the carrier in *Rabid* is a beautiful angel-like and therefore apparently harmless woman) and the way in which they both take over human bodies.

Burroughs understood the viral/parasitic nature of the word as a reality. There is not a single metaphorical or figurative approach to it as Oliver Harris clarifies: "To say the word was a communicative sickness was not, for Burroughs metaphoric analysis or poststructuralist

platitude but an awareness integral and material to the act of writing, and this is what the toxicity of Burroughs's textual politics insists upon, *ad nauseam*". (Harris 247).

It can be inferred then that by writing, authors are playing a key role in the spreading of the word virus unless like Burroughs they are fully conscious of the word's pernicious influence. Whatever the case, the word is a source of hopelessness because it dispossesses individuals of their capacity to ultimately make their own choices. For Burroughs language is the way in which humans are fooled into a make believe hoax that enslaves them in a never-ending progression of necessities and addictions:

Language is the most pervasive and deeply rooted form of addiction to the artificial pleasures that sap the vitality of those who depend on them, and its ability to create fictions detached from reality opens up multifarious possibilities of control and seduction. Discourse, in the form of "word lines controlling thought feeling and apparent sensory impressions", lodges itself in the human host and reproduces its scripts, argumentative routines, and programs in ways that entangle the individual subject in a world it can neither master nor effectively negotiate. As the host of a language virus, the individual body becomes a mere "flesh script" or "soft machine", a grid of received discourses obsessively realized through desires and needs. (Dolan 536)

All in all, it is only logical to think that if language is a virus there must be a way to fight against it. To Burroughs, the solution would be silence. However to reach that point it is necessary to follow a strategy that would grant success against the infection and that is fully developed in Burroughs's *Cut-Uptrilogy*.

1.c. Burrough's experimental technique.

Now that the main viral/parasitic source of infection for Burroughs has been brought up and before detailing the widespread expand of infections and viral phenomena present in his dystopian world, I find it important to explain the way in which the *Cut-Uptrilogy* works in terms of structure.

The three books that form it (*The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express*) defy the category of novels because they are nowhere near the genre in any shape or form. While it is undeniable that they tell a story it is also not less true to say they do it in a non-conventional way because Burroughs makes use of unorthodox methods in this endeavor. They have elements that can confuse and frustrate the reader especially if that reader is not familiarized with the author's work. The generic term *book* fits the *Cut-Up trilogy* like a glove since it is impossible to consider these three books as a trio of novels. The genre label *novel* would fall short to explain what Burroughs was attempting to do with his infamous trilogy. As James Grauerholz says, "The Novel could no longer hold Burroughs" (Grauerholz ix). What is more, it would be completely inaccurate to say that *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express* have any introduction, denouement and conclusion. Anyhow, even though every single element of the *Cut-Up trilogy* revolves around experimentation that does not mean that it does not tell a story to a certain degree regardless of the unorthodox nature of Burroughs's method. An example of that can be seen in how Oliver Harris explains the relationship that exists between the titles of the trilogy:

The Ticket that Exploded also sums up the other titles in Burroughs's trilogy, *The Soft Machine* and *Nova Express*: as a figure for cultural and genetic programming, the "ticket" is written into us on the "soft typewriter" of the body, and it is

exploded after a countdown to Nova that is for Burroughs our only hope of rewriting the scripts that dictate our lives. (Harris, xii)

Burroughs thought that the novel was not the means to tell a story anymore. He found the novel an anachronistic genre that has not been able to keep up with the times which is why he decided to take a step in a completely different direction:

I think that the novelistic form is probably outmoded and that we may look forward perhaps to a future in which people do not read at all or read only illustrated books and magazines or some abbreviated form of reading matter. To compete with television and photo magazines writers will have to develop more precise techniques producing the same effect on the reader as a lurid action photo. (Burroughs 2008: 27)

Sadly, Burroughs's words about the future of reading were extremely prophetic. As for his method of experimentation, it is safe to say that it constitutes an active response, a rebellion. As it can be inferred from his own words, Burroughs wanted to keep himself up to speed with the times but the way in which he pushed the boundaries of literature was certainly much more than an attempt to modernize stagnant genres. There was also a purpose that kept this new approach going:

If there is an ultimate goal envisioned by Burroughs, it is to escape both the body and the language, to travel in bodiless space and silence... He argues and demonstrates that it is only by making the world material, tangible, and visible, by revealing the intersection of body and language, that we can see "the enemy direct". Burroughs fiction, therefore, is relentlessly literal, its narrative not just a voice but a body. (Lydenberg 56: 24 June 2016)

Burroughs experimentation is not a random exercise of aesthetics but an extremely conscious attempt to destroy the word *Virus* by using new forms of expression. Like in Cronenberg's case it is a way of finding order by creating chaos. This idea makes complete sense since the word *virus* is part of a normative and organized environment. From my perspective, he had no choice but to use deconstruction to find a new language. That is why traditional forms of writing are of no use for him: " 'I am a recording instrument', Burroughs says; 'I do not impose 'story', 'plot', continuity... Insofar as I succeed in *direct* recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have a limited function..' " (Kostelanetz 127). Needless to say, this methodology comes with its risks since sometimes forgetting about those elements can be anything but beneficial when trying to make sense out of a literary text.

In fact, Burroughs goes so far experimentation-wise in the trilogy that for a non-experienced reader it would be difficult to make sense out of its content while reading the books. He was conscious of the obscureness of the trilogy:

I have been accused of being unintelligible. At this point I wish to make myself as clear as possible. By "this point"—December 1965, when he wrote the Appendix-- Burroughs had been working on the *Soft Machine* for over six years and from the origins of the edition in summer 1959, making himself clear was always the issue. (Burroughs 2014 a:xv)

This might explain why at times it seems like there is a complete absence of plot and the lack of punctuation and linearity present in the trilogy does not make things any better. This derives from the fact that Burroughs is using a specific experimental (avant-garde would also be appropriate) technique called the Cut-Up method. This technique was developed with the help of the painter Brion Gysin, the mathematician Ian Sommerville and the movie

director Antony Balch. Barry Miles explains how this method came about in *El Hombre Invisible*:

One day in late September 1959, Brion Gysin was in his hotel room, mounting some drawings, slicing through the boards with his Stanley knife and simultaneously slicing through the pile of old *New York Herald Tribunes* he was using to protect his table. When he finished, he noticed that there were a strip of a page was cut away, the newsprint on the next page lined up and could be read across, combining stories from different pages, often with hilarious results... Bill (Burroughs) had been to lunch with two reporters from *Lifemagazine* and when he returned, Brion excitedly showed him his discovery. Bill immediately saw its importance and pronounced it “a project for disastrous success”. (Miles 112)

Burroughs took inspiration from painting to create the Cut-Up method. Soon it spread not only to his writings but to other artistic endeavors such as the use of tape recorders to find hidden messages by means of constant repetition or even the use of images, photographs and cinema as derivative forms of the most primary virus in the Saint Louis author’s opinion, the word. He was fighting fire with fire by creating his own language as Robin Lynderberg argues: “One telegraphic message which runs through Burroughs’s fiction announces the demise of the old and the emergence of a new language: ‘Word falling, image falling, photo falling—Break through!’” (Lynderberg 69: 24 June 2016).

Burroughs also wanted to be the pioneer of a progression of literature since according to his friend Brion Gysin it had got stagnant compared to painting. He explains this in *The Job*:

Mr. Brion Gysin who is both painter and writer wrote “writing is fifty years behind painting”. Why is this gap? Because 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 to be 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. (Burroughs 2008: 27)

The Cut-Up method started out as a collage-like technique in which texts get mixed randomly with the purpose of obtaining new messages. This is not something new since the Surrealists and Tristan Tzara already used similar methods of experimentation. However, they never went as far as Burroughs, who applied it by default in his art during a long period of time. Burroughs applied two different techniques for his Cut-Up strategy: The cut-up procedure and the fold-in procedure.

The cut-up procedure basically consists on cutting pieces of texts and put them back together randomly so new messages are obtained ("He writes on several pages, cuts them up, scrambles the scraps and sets down the result in a fixed final form" (Kostelanetz 129)). It is a way of exposing what has been hidden by the constraints of language, a way of liberating individuals:

The Cut-Up method is a kind of ritual dismemberment. Gérard Georges Lemaire has described the dependence of "the Burroughs Machine" on "that pair of scissors", on the analytical gesture transformed into a movement castrating the continuum of meaning "the analytical gesture" of metaphor and mimesis – the sorting out of similarity and difference, the translation of work into world – is replaced by the clarity and literal violentness of metonymy. Like the metonymic image, the work of Burroughs 's narrative scissors reveals what is hidden; the cut-

up text makes concrete and literal what he sees as the true nature of all language and verbal thought". (Lydenberg 70: 24 June 2016)

The fold-in procedure was described by Burroughs at the Edinburgh International Writers' Conference in 1962:

I have used what I call 'the fold in' method that is I place of one text folded down the middle on a page of another text (my own or someone else's)—the composite texts read across half from one text and half from the other—. The resulting material is edited, rearranged, and deleted as in other form of composition. (Burroughs 2014 b: xxxi-xxxii)

This methodology is not something that Burroughs used randomly. It definitely had a purpose and it echoes his vision of things that goes well beyond telling an average science fiction story:

...the absolute dismembering of conventional narrative in Burroughs's science fictional works indicates a self-consciously operational inspiration, as opposed to a metaphoric one. The anti-narrative in his sf-derived works is what sets Burroughs apart from the science fiction writers whose work he appropriated and those he has influenced, and is the reason Ballard has called Burroughs "the most important writer to emerge since the Second World War." (Wood 12)

The Cut-Up method is also the way in which Burroughs desperately looks for answers to fundamental existential questions that are difficult to resolve. According to William L. Stull *Naked Lunch*, the novel that is considered the precursor of the *Cut-Up trilogy* gives some pointers about this when Lee (Burroughs's alter ego in the novel) starts to wonder about these questions:

What was the beginning? Since early youth I had been searching for some secret , some key with which I could gain access to basic knowledge, answer some of the fundamental questions. Just what I was looking for, what I meant by basic knowledge or fundamental questions, I found it difficult to define. I would follow a trail of clues. (Stull 240)

Like Lee, Burroughs is involved in a quest to answer all those questions and his main weapon is the Cut-Up method because it is the only way to find reliable answers far from the infection of the word-virus. Those answers can only be found with confrontational methods that make sure language as a parasite is destroyed, turned around and detracted of any meaning that could steal the individual's essence. The *Cut-Up trilogy* showcases the way to reach the natural state stolen by the word: Silence. The Cut-Up method is nothing but the cure. Burroughs is applying this cure in an almost self-reflexive way since he goes as far mentioning the method he is using to tell a story while at the same time in an exercise of overt metafiction he makes his characters use it as well. This clarifies that Burroughs's strategy is not something that can be taken lightly since cut-up texts surpass fiction and deliver a message that is not exempt of a purpose at the same time: "The Cut-Up texts they produce attempt to counteract the parasitism and the numbing lubricity of conventional language with open structures of meaning which permit reversibility, expansion, anonymity and ultimately silence" (Lydenberg 424: 21 June 2016).

That silence is the return to a primary state in which men did not have to worry about any other types of infection since, as it has been explained, for Burroughs the source of all infection, the virus that originates other viruses is the word: "What scared you all into time? Into body? Into shit? I will tell you: 'the word'. Alien Word '*the*'. '*The*' word of Alien Enemy

imprisons ‘*thee*’ in time. In Body. In Shit. Prisoner, come out. The great skies are open” (Burroughs 2014 c:3).

1.d. Infection as addiction in Burroughs.

However, infection does not stop with the word in Burroughs since it is present in various shapes and forms throughout the whole *Cut-Up trilogy*. It is safe to say that in the case of Burroughs’s dystopic trilogy infection and parasitism are more widespread phenomena than in the case of Cronenberg because they happen to assume almost infinite shapes.

The first infectious phenomenon that is important to mention is junk, also known as heroin. Burroughs struggled his whole life with a severe addiction to heroin that made him realize of his dependency. Addiction is perceived by Burroughs as a sickness and junk is a powerful parasite that enslaves those who resort to it in order to get a fix. It is clear that Burroughs’s own addiction inspired his theories about the different types of viruses present in the *Cut-Up trilogy*. Burroughs first novel, *Junky*, deals with his experiences as an addict. It is understandable then that Burroughs could write about parasitism and infection with such accuracy because he had undergone the pains of addiction and withdrawal. He knew what it was like to be the host of a parasite that had assumed possession of his body. His own addiction was a relevant source of inspiration for the way in which he developed the *Cut-Up trilogy* according to Oliver Harris: “‘Heroin Addiction’, writes David Ayers, ‘provides Burroughs with the metabolic model of control which structurally informs other models of control which he will subsequently deploy’” (Harris 1999: 245).

The junk virus as Burroughs called it, is the main element of what the author came to describe as the Algebra of Need. Junk is such a powerful influence that it leaves little to no

space for anything else. This is made clear in the *Cut-Up trilogy*, especially in *The Soft Machine* where Burroughs addresses the influence that junk has in the brain:

Since the parasites occupy brain areas they are in a position to deflect research from “dangerous channels”. Apomorphine acts on the hypothalamus to regulate metabolism and its dangers to the parasitic inhabitants of these brain areas can be readily appreciated. You see junk is death the oldest visitor in the industry.

(Burroughs 2014a: 210)

Just as the Cut-Up technique is a way of getting a cure for the word-virus, apomorphine, which helped Burroughs with his own severe addiction by blocking the part of the nervous system that had been infected by junk, helped him to give up his habit. Barry Miles detailed how Burroughs decided to leave his addiction behind and the effects of apomorphine:

Bill realized that something more dramatic was needed. He borrowed 500 dollars from his parents, settled his debts and in February 1956 he moved to London to take the apomorphine cure pioneered by Dr. Yerbury Dent. Apomorphine is a metabolic regulator and cures addiction by returning the body cells to their normal metabolic balance. The cellular need for the drug is removed, making the cure more successful. (Miles 76)

The effectiveness of apomorphine proved the extent to which drug addiction was a sickness more than anything. At the same time it helped in the de-stigmatization of drug addicts, who were regarded as dope fiends rather than the victims of a parasitic infection as Burroughs would see them. The *Cut-Up trilogy* deals with the topic of addiction as a parasite and in it Burroughs explains how apomorphine works too. It is undeniable that it represents a solution to infection that is equivalent to the cut-up technique as the way to reach silence:

“Apomorphine is no word and no image – it is of course misleading to speak of a silence virus or an apomorphine virus since apomorphine is antiviral” (Burroughs 2014: c 48).

Like the word virus, junk metaphorically reaches its tentacles to everything since it has the ability to mutate in order to corrupt society: “The transformations of the junk metaphor through ‘the many forms of addiction’ include heroin itself, control, sex, bureaucratic power, technology and even time” (Stull 228).

By talking about the junk virus and his side-effects Burroughs leaves the addict realm. He knows the dangers of junk. He has been at his worst because of it and more importantly, he knows how to get rid of it. The depictions of junk and junk usage that he makes in the *Cut-Up trilogy* are those of the survivor. After all he has been able to break the bond parasite/host that he was up against so he has every right to do an exhaustive analysis of the disease of addiction: “For criticism, the autobiographical paradigm produces the neat diptych of ‘Before and After’ offered in 1970 by Tony Tanner, when dubbing Burroughs an addict turned diagnostician, a victim of sickness now devoted to the analysis of diseases” (Harris 1994: 246).

The *Cut-Up trilogy* is a science fiction work but there is basically a feature that makes it come into its own compared to any other science fiction book or author: drugs. The worlds portrayed by Burroughs in the trilogy are so unreal and confusing that his descriptions clearly surpass any other author of the genre and they remind of the side-effects produced by drugs. It is well known that some drugs can induce dream-like states that make it possible to distort reality and turn it into something that is far from it. The dystopian scenarios portrayed by Burroughs certainly produce that effect but in all fairness the vibes the reader gets are not precisely pleasant. By doing that, Burroughs is once again remarking the nature of addiction

as something infectious, a disease, a parasite that transports his victims to a world of border-line nightmares:

The “hallucinations” which make up the bulk of the book are not the futuristic and numinous visions reported by users of LSD, but are rather clarified visions of present reality made more terrible by what we have already described as the addict’s absolute dependence on real things in their aspect of maximum power. Burroughs, in *Naked Lunch* and more blatantly in *The Soft Machine* and *Nova Express*, is a brilliant writer of science fiction. (McConnell 674)

Addiction is thus one of the fundamental pillars upon which Burroughs builds up his Cut-Up strategy in order to shed some light beyond fixed and pre-established patterns. Far from being whimsical, he used his own long time addiction to give an unheard-of perspective on infection.

1.e. Plot in Burroughs.

With the main sources/carriers of infection explained, it is only logical to delve into the part of the *Cut-Uptrilogy* that is concerned with “plot”. Indeed there is a story to tell, or better said, a series of stories although they are not linear or systematized (systematizing would be as much as historicizing and according to Burroughs “history is fiction” (Burroughs 2014c: 3)). There is one main character, inspector Lee, whose main mission is to destroy reality as it is. Burroughs portrays a chaotic landscape of constant conflict in which Venus has taken over the world through parasitic means, the word being the main one. Lee fights against the Nova Mob, a group of non-three dimensional individuals (therefore parasites) whose main purpose is to create confusion infecting the world by using contradictory messages (viruses/parasites). The means by which inspector Lee (again, Burroughs’s alter ego)

fighters the Nova Mob are the use of tape recorders among other Cut-Up strategies. According to David Ayers:

The agent employs Burroughs's favored technology in his attempt to break the control of the priests: the tape recorder. The recording and playback of everyday sounds and messages achieves an alienating effect which, claims Burroughs, can effectively liberate the subject from the subliminal effect of those messages.

(Ayers 226)

This strategy of the tape recorder is used by an agent (in all likeness inspector Lee as well although it is not specified by Burroughs) who in *The Soft Machine* travels back in time with the purpose of fighting against Mayan priests. Lee uses the same exact method whenever he has to battle the Nova Mob too. This group of parasites is part of what it's called the Nova Conspiracy: "The basic figure of the early work is the Nova Conspiracy, in which alien criminals live parasitically off earthlings by yoking them to their addictions, above all to the need for power and meaning—or language" (Dolan 538).

As it can be seen, no matter how the members of the Nova Mob ("Sammy the Butcher", "Green Tony", "Iron Claws", "The Brown Artist", "Jacky Blue Note", "Limestone John", "Izzy The Push", "Hamburger Mary", "Paddy the Sting", "The Subliminal Kid", "The Blue Dinosaur" and "Mr. and Mrs. D" also known as "Mr. Bradly Mr. Martin" also known as "The Ugly Spirit" thought to be the leader of the mob (Burroughs 2014c: 55) get access to earthlings everything leads back to the primary source of infection, language. As long as language is kept untouched parasitism would be able to prevail. The Nova Mob constitutes the most sophisticated parasitic agent of infection in the *Cut-Up trilogy*. They are the culprit of what the Word virus is able to produce.

Throughout the *Cut-Up trilogy* inspector Lee dedicates himself to capture all the members of the mob one by one:

The Nova Police take the Nova Criminals to the Biologic Courts, but the book ends in a stalemate. It is, after all, the readers who are on trial. It is up to them to wise up, to reject the present administration ...”Heaven and Hell exist in my mythology”, said Burroughs. “Hell consists of falling into enemy hands, into the hands of the virus power, and heaven consists of freeing oneself from this power, of achieving inner freedom, freedom from conditioning. I may add that none of the characters of my mythology are free”. (Miles 143)

Burroughs gives his readers the possibility of freeing themselves from the infectious parasitism initiated by the Word virus by making them look at those characters that are doomed to remain trapped in his “Hell”. In a way, Burroughs is not just setting an example. He is calling to arms against addiction, the word virus and any kind of infection or parasitic relationship that enslaves/conditions.

1.f. Artists as parasites/Cronenberg and Burroughs as parasites.

With the sources of infection explained in both Burroughs and Cronenberg it is important to bring the focus of attention to the last source that bond them above the rest, which is that of the artists as parasites themselves that take part in different kinds of infections. In the case of Burroughs, his forward-thinking techniques together with the fact that he got involved in lots of artistic endeavors besides literature contributed to the gradual increase of his popularity making both his persona and his work iconic. Burroughs reputation spread to the point he became a highly recognizable figure in popular culture. The author underwent a similar process to that of the viruses and parasites he wanted to cut ties with:

And so Burroughs dedicated himself to immortality by becoming what Richard Dawkins , in *The Selfish Gene*(1976), called a ‘meme’: “a unit of cultural transmission or a unit of *imitation*”...This is Burroughs: all poets worthy of the name are mind parasites, and their words ought to get into your head and live there, repeating and repeating and repeating. (Harris 1994: 244)

As for Cronenberg, his case is different from Burroughs because he acts out as a parasite in the sense that fiction becomes the host upon which he feeds himself. This explains why Cronenberg has always escaped genres in cinema and yet he has made use of their conventions for his own particular purposes. It all comes down to taking elements that are already there and transforming them into something new. Cronenberg’s parasitism is something positive. According to Ramón Freixas it is almost as if the film-maker were a virus infiltrated in fiction’s tissue delving into it, defying its conventions, subverting its clichés, reelaborating its dogmas, and feeding his own capacity to question what has been already accepted. (Freixas 294)

Cronenberg and Burroughs have a conception of the artist as a social parasite.This is strongly related to the prevalence of artists in society. Throughout his book *El Héroe y el Único* (1990) Rafael Argullol argues that the importance of artists in society has gradually diminished from the second half of the 20th century onwards whereas before that their importance was second to almost none.

To conclude with this section and since existentialism has been mentioned at its beginning I find it convenient to bring up what one of its forerunners, Jean Paul Sartre, had to say in *Being and Nothingness* about the concept of illness which has a lot to do with the relationship parasite/host in infection:

The psychic object apprehended through pain is illness. This object has all the characteristics of pain, but it is transcendent and passive . It is a reality which has its own time, not the time of the external universe nor that of consciousness, but psychic time. The psychic object can then support evaluations and various determinations. As such it is distinct from consciousness and appears through it; it remains permanent while consciousness develops, and it is this very permanence which is the condition of the opacity and the passivity of illness. But on the other hand, this illness in so far as it is apprehended through consciousness has all the characteristics of unity, interiority and spontaneity which consciousness possesses – but in degraded form. (Sartre 359)

This quote perfectly sums up the ideas of Cronenberg and Burroughs about infection/parasitism. Like them, Sartre acknowledges that the realm of infection is completely different from the one that is external to human beings. He also points out the way in which an infection/parasite remains untouched while it is inside its host while the said host changes as a result of its influence. In other words, infection is a corrupted form of consciousness that does not have the ability to provoke change unless it is inside of a host.

2. Sex in Burroughs and Cronenberg.

Both David Cronenberg and William S. Burroughs have dealt with sex in their works in challenging and unconventional ways. However, even though their approaches are definitely somber and thought-provoking they are also slightly different. In Cronenberg's case sex or better said sexual promiscuity, is always portrayed as a result of a disease provoked by parasites. Out of the three movies this dissertation has dealt with, *Shivers* is the case that stands out the most in that regard. The mention of sex as a venereal disease is constant. In fact, there is a poster in one of the character's office that says: "Sex is the

Invention, a clever venereal disease”. There is also another poster with a quite self-explanatory quote by William Blake: “The Road of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom”. The quote is a pointer as to where the movie is going to go in terms of message. As it has been pointed out in the previous section, Cronenberg does not see the spread of the infection in *Shivers* as a negative thing per se since in his eyes it happens to improve the lives of the characters after all of them get infected. However, this idea of a bunch of human beings addicted to sex as a result of a parasitical infection might cause some discomfort in the most sensitive viewers. After all, the movie portrays the triumph of instinct over everything else. Cronenberg does not seem to share this discomfort. He actually sees sex as a field full of possibilities:

Why not have new sexual organs? We can do that surgically. We could invent a new version of sex. People would probably like it, they'd buy it, I would sell, it could become a commodity. Sex has become a commodity, as well as a political weapon, in an unprecedented way. It's many things besides just reproduction.

(Porton 6)

This might be the reason why when he portrays sex as a venereal disease this does not have to be something negative. Towards the end of the movie, there is an interesting scene in *Shivers* in which after the girlfriend of one of the main characters gets infected she starts to say a series of things related to sex as if someone (the parasite) were talking for her:

- Everything's erotic. Everything's sexual. Even old flesh is erotic flesh. Disease is the love of two alien kinds of creatures for each other. Even dying is an act of eroticism. Talking is sexual. Breathing is sexual. To physically exist is sexual. (1:15:38).

It seems like the parasites are not only content with spreading the infection. They also have ideas of their own about sex that are instantly transmitted to their hosts. Even their way

of transmission is sexual. As Jorge Gorostiza and Ana Pérez argue the penis-shaped parasites penetrate in every single orifice of their hosts (Gorostiza, Pérez 98). Vagina and mouth are the preferred entrances. Ramón Freixas asserts that sexuality is belligerent and pathological in Cronenberg (302). Apart from *Shivers*, *Rabid* is another good example of that since from the moment she gets infected, Rose starts an almost ritualistic behavior to spread the infection. The penis-shaped appendix that comes out of her armpit is also a sexual weapon but before she makes that come into play she seduces her victims in a very sexual way (by moaning, undressing, spreading her legs...).

Lastly, it is also important to mention that in Cronenberg's movies women are usually the carriers of infection (*Shivers-Annabelle*, *Rabid-Rose*) as David Sanjek points out:

This question takes on greater urgency when it is observed not only that the principal victims in Cronenberg's first horror narratives are women but also that these women can be labeled monsters because of the actions of men. Specifically, a series of women in *Shivers* are transformed into murderous sexually rapacious figures by venereal parasites concocted by Dr. Emil Hobbes. Rose in *Rabid* (1977) develops a penislike protuberance in her armpit following radical plastic surgery that requires her to satiate an unnatural appetite for human blood. (Sanjek 57)

Even though I personally see that women definitely play a role in the movies that Sanjek mentions I could not disagree more with his statement for two reasons. First, Cronenberg is interested in new approaches to sex especially as an infection and second, the fact that women are the primary carriers of infection is empowering in gender terms, especially considering that in the case of Rose she develops an appendix shaped like a penis. Even with men being responsible for the fate of women with their procedures it is ironic that those men end up paying for their actions which is why I do not see any gender-biased

intentionality on Cronenberg's part. If anything, he is being sarcastic and not precisely in a derogatory way towards women.

In regards to William Burroughs, sex is also a means of transmitting infections but the main difference lies in the fact that the *Cut-Up trilogy* is full of explicit sexual passages in which the sex act takes place between men. This obviously mirrors Burroughs's own homosexuality as well as his misogyny, which was not exactly a secret: "In the words of one of a great misogynist plain Mr. Jones, in Conrad's *Victory*: 'women are a perfect curse'. I think they were a basic mistake, and the whole dualistic universe evolved from this error" (2008: 116).

Burroughs sexual passages in the *Cut-Up trilogy* are extremely graphic and they express a desire of breaking boundaries. Sexuality is depicted in a frequently brutal way that has nothing to do with love:

—Pubic hair sprouted all over him tearing the flesh like wire—Eyes squinted from a smell I always feel—Hot spit burned his rectum open—The warm muscle contracts—Kicked breathless coughing and spitting adolescent image blurred in film smoke – Through the gums the fist in his face—Taste of blood—His broken body spurted life in other flesh—Identical erections in the kerosene lamp—Electric hair sprouted in ass and genitals—Taste of blood in the throat—Hot semen spurted idiot mambo—One boy naked in Panama—Who?—Quiénes?—Compost heap stench where you know me from – A smell I always feel when his eyes pop out—. (Burroughs 2014 a: 55)

This sexual chaos portrayed by Burroughs leads to wrongly think that he does not necessarily see sex in a positive light or as something enjoyable when it is quite the opposite

in fact. For Burroughs sex (especially far from traditional sex) is a way to challenge the establishment:

And this brings us to the subject of SEX. In the words of the late John O'Hara, "I'm glad you came to me instead of those quacks on the top floor". Psychiatrists, priests, whatever they call themselves, they want to turn it off and keep tape recorder three in business. Let's turn it on. All you swingers use movie cameras to record and photograph your sessions. (Burroughs 2008:16)

3. The nature of the monstrous for Burroughs and Cronenberg.

Both authors are concerned with the idea of physical change/mutation after infection. Cronenberg's characters always suffer some sort of physical change that invariably results in their degeneration and subsequent disappearance. Deformity is the beginning of the end for them. José Miguel G. Cortés says that in the body image portrayed in Cronenberg's movies the viewers do not recognize themselves since their certainty is questioned (Cortés 190).

His monsters do not come from the outside. They are inside of us, they are our own bodies. Hence the reason why some of Cronenberg's movies have been labeled as body horror. The monstrosity the viewers perceive in his movies is more concerned with infection than anything else. The characters change externally as a result of something that is happening inside of them.

In the case of Burroughs a broad expand of creatures are all over the place in the *Cut-Up trilogy*: flying scorpions, giant centipedes, green boy-girls, crab parasites, mollusks, the Sex Skin (a critter found in the rivers here wraps all around you like a second skin eats you slow and good (2014b: 5), fish boys, giant grasshoppers, mugwumps... they're all part of a scenario where reality and fiction are not a certainty ("Nothing is true, everything is

permitted”). There are also body transformations caused by infections. Burroughs would later on say about this that these transformations were not that far from reality after all:

Even on a scientific level we’re very near being able to make all sorts of alterations in the human body. They are now able to replace the parts, like in an old car when it runs down. The next thing, of course will be transplanting of brains. We presume that the ego, what we call the ego, the I, or the You, is located somewhere in the midbrain, so it’s not very long before we can transfer an ego from one body to another. Rich men will be able to buy up young bodies. Many of the passages in my work, that were purely fanciful at the time, are now quite within the range of possibility. (Burroughs 2008: 113)

While in Cronenberg monstrosity is associated with internal change originated by infection, Burroughs contemplates that same possibility in the *Cut-Up trilogy* and he adds the already mentioned beings to the mix.

4. Conclusion.

Parasites are conceived by Cronenberg as creatures that inhabit the human body. They have a bodily existence by themselves as well, in other words, they are tangible. Instead of being an external threat they are very much internal. More often than not, their development is the direct consequence of scientific progress.

Burroughs’s vision differs from Cronenberg’s in the sense that the primary source of infection for him is the word as the almighty creator of reality. This obeys to a deconstructive subversion of John I, 1: “In the beginning was the Word” that has its pinnacle in the Cut-Up technique.

Burroughs reflects on his own experience as a drug addict and uses it as a means of inspiration to explore the topic of infection even further. In fact addiction is portrayed as yet another source of infection in the *Cut-Up trilogy*.

The cure for all the types of infections portrayed by Burroughs in his trilogy is none other than the way in which he deals with basic narrative structures such as plot and characters which grants the possibility of freeing oneself from infection.

For Burroughs and Cronenberg the only thing left to do for the artist in terms of prevalence is to parasitize society as well as its technological progress since the role of the artist has experienced a decay over the years society-wise.

Both Cronenberg and Burroughs understand sex as a means to an end, the transmission of infection. This challenges the traditional vision of women and in the case of Burroughs it gives a derogatory vision of them.

Works Cited

Argullol, Rafael. *El héroe y el único*. Barcelona: Destino, 1990. Print.

Ayers, David “The Long Last Goodbye: Control and Resistance in the works of William Burroughs” *Journal of American Studies*, 27(2),1993: Print.

Breskin, Brian. “David Cronenberg. The Rolling Stone Interview”. David Cronenberg Web. Last accessed: 26 June 2016.

Burroughs, William.1961. *The Soft Machine: The Restored Text*. New York: Grove Press, 2014a. Print.

Burroughs, William.1962. *The Ticket that Exploded: The Restored Text*. New York: Grove Press, 2014b. Print.

Burroughs, William. 1964. *Nova Express: The Restored Text*. New York: Grove Press, 2014c Print.

Burroughs, William. 1985. *The Adding Machine*. New York: Grove Press, 2013. Print.

Burroughs, William. 1969. *The Job*. London: Penguin Books, 2008. Print.

Consumed. Directed by David Cronenberg. 2014. London: Fourth Estate. DVD.

Crimes of the Future. Directed by David Cronenberg. 1970. Canada: Emergent Films Ltd. DVD.

Cronenberg, David. “Introduction”. In Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. New York and London: Norton, 2014. 9-17. Print.

Dolan, Frederick M. "Poetics of Post-Modern Subversion: The Politics of Writing in William S. Burroughs's "The Western Lands"". *Contemporary Literature*, 32 (4), 1991, 534-551. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Folie et Dérison. Histoire de la Folie à l'Âge Classique*. Paris: Plon, 1961. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Naissance de la Clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical*. Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1963. Print.

Freixas, Ramón: "David Cronenberg. La perversión de la realidad". Antonio José Navarro. Ed. *La Nueva Carne: Una estética perversa del cuerpo*. Madrid: Valdemar, 2002. 291-324. Print.

G. Cortés, José Miguel. 1997. *Orden y Caos*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2003. Print.

Gorostiza, Jorge and Ana Pérez. *David Cronenberg*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2003. Print.

Grauerholz, James. "Introduction". In William Burroughs. *The Adding Machine*. New York: Grove Press, 2013. vii-xxiii. Print.

Harris, Oliver. "Can you see a Virus? The Queer Cold War of William Burroughs". *Journal of American Studies*, 33(2), 1999: 243-266. Print.

Harris, Oliver. "Introduction". In William Burroughs. *The Ticket That Exploded* New York: Grove Press, 2014b. vii-lii. Print.

Kostelanetz, Richard. "From Nightmare to Serendipity: a Retrospective Look at William Burroughs". *Twentieth Century Literature*. 11(3), 1965: 123-130. Print.

Lydenberg, Robin. "Negative Poetics in William Burroughs and Roland Barthes". *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15 (4), 1978: 414-430. Print.

Lydenberg, Robin. "Notes from the Orifice: Language and the body in William Burroughs". *Contemporary Literature*, 26 (1), 1985: 55-73. Print.

McConnell Frank "William Burroughs and the literature of Addiction". *The Massachusetts Review*, 8(4), 1967: 665-680. Print.

Miles, Barry. *El Hombre Invisible*. New York: Hyperion, 1993. Print.

Morey, Miguel. 1983. *Lectura de Foucault*. México: Sexto Piso, 2014. Print.

Porton, Richard. "The Film Director as Philosopher: An interview with David Cronenberg". *Cineaste*; Sep 1999; 24, 4; MLA International Bibliography. Print.

Rabid. Directed by David Cronenberg. 1977. Canada: Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC). DVD.

Sanjek, David. "Dr. Hobbes's Parasites". *Cinema Journal*, 36 (1), 1996: 55-74. Print.

Sartre, Jean Paul. 1943. *Being and Nothingness*. London and New York,. Print.

Shivers. Directed by David Cronenberg. 1975. Canada: Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC). DVD.

Sontag, Susan. 1978. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphor*. London: Penguin Books, 2002 (originally published in 1978). Print.

Stull, William L. "Cosmology and myth in the works of William S. Burroughs, 1953-1960". *Twentieth Century Literature*. 24 (2) 1978: 225-242. Print.

Wood, Brent. "William Burroughs and the language of Cyberpunk". *Science Fiction Studies*, 23 (1), 1996: 11-26. Print.