

Brion Gysin Interviewed in Paris

Jon Savage

From a forthcoming book of interviews with Brion Gysin, edited by Genesis P-Orridge. In Paris, Jon Savage asked the questions . . .

R/S: You said it was worth surviving the whole cancer operation because there were some things you wanted to do-

BRION: Oh, you make that sound much too optimistic-too positive! No no . . . the only reason for surviving was to wrap up some odds and ends, and some of them are already wound up. I mean like getting The Third Mind published. Less satisfactory - getting Dreamachines into production, which they are, only partially. And getting some shape to my life as a painter-and that hasn't really happened yet-I mean, some successes along the way like this show at the museum . . . but this will take more work.

R/S: Do you mean wrapping things up, or just sort of putting things in perspective, or continuing-

BRION: Mostly wrapping them up. Because I have plenty of things to continue. Let's say-the songs that I've written with Steve Lacy [Steve Lacy and Brion Gysin Songs (12" LP + 7" 45), Hat Hut Records, Box 127, West Park, NYC, NY 12493, or, Box 461, 4106 Therwil, Switzerland.]-I want to get that all onto a record . . . if that's the ideal receptacle for it, whatever. I have a long manuscript that I would like to finish, but I found I'm not the activist I once thought I was. It's very difficult to do too many things at once-in fact I can't really ever do two things at once.

R/S: Is the manuscript The Beat Hotel?

BRION: Yeah.

R/S: The bit that was published in Soft Need - was that the beginning or-

BRION: That was just a small piece in the middle.

R/S: Ideally, would it be a book like The Process?

BRION: It would have a form, yes, and I have found a form - it took me many years to find the exact form. And I really have wanted to fill the form that I now can see ahead of me.

The Process certainly is a very formed book - the whole idea actually end-to-end. So in that same way-Yes, I do now have an exact receptacle of the form into which I would pour all this.

R/S: Is that how you worked with The Process as well?

BRION: Yes, I only was able to work when I had found the form . . . it filled itself in, sort of inevitably. Once the form was recognized, then the material slipped into its proper place quite easily.

R/S: Because - in The Process . . . there's an enormous mixture. On one level there were all sorts of allusions to Othello and Homer, and then . . .there seemed to be people like Mya who were definitely sort of creations that you'd actually known. Also, there was lots of ethnic stuff about Morocco . . . there seemed to be a lot of different things-

BRION: Well, I had decided very definitely to put into it practically everything that I know about Morocco, because it would be impossible for me to write any more, inasmuch as it's rather the stomping ground of Paul Bowles, who has invented his own mysterious, murderous Morocco which is not mine. But, it's his territory as much as Malaysia was the territory of Maugham . . . My good friend Sanche de Gramont has written a very successful book about him (Maugham).

R/S: To a lot of people you're only known as a writer - is painting actually harder to organize?

BRION: They're both very hard to organize. There are definite forms for getting a book published or not published, and getting some money or not getting any money from it . . . Whereas painting is much more formless, much more mysterious . . . As to how a piece of spoiled canvas or scribbled-on paper suddenly becomes worth an enormous amount of money . . . has nothing to do with the case of literature and life and a career.

R/S: In all the books you put out you're actually communicating to a large number of people instantly, because-let's say the book has a run of two thousand-there'll probably be about ten thousand people who read it-and that's a lot of people. That's more than will probably ever see a picture of yours . . .

BRION: Yeah, that's true . . . And certainly more people can read a book than can "read" a picture, in any case. The level of pictorial education is not the same as just the ordinary literacy level of people who can read a book and get one kind of sense out of it, at any rate. Pictures reverberate much longer than a book does, because of the fact that they exist in a very different time from the time of a book. The time of a book is the imagined time in which the book is written (which it is meant to represent) . . . and the time that it takes to read it. The time in music is the time that it takes to play it from the beginning to the end. Whereas a picture changes with every second of the day because of the changing light . . . all of what I do changes that dramatically, even. And many people that I have known who own pictures of mine have said, "You know, I owned that picture for several years before one day, I happened to look at it and then I saw it. I had already bought it because I liked it, but I hadn't really seen it until several years after I had owned it." Well - that's not the same time that a book exists in.

R/S: Do you actually prefer either medium, or is that irrelevant - or do you just like them both for different reasons?

BRION: Yes, apparently. It's rather troublesome to me as a matter of fact - to like them equally well.

R/S: Do you think the course of your career would have been different if . . . I think people find it very hard to cope with the fact that one does two different things at once-

BRION: I certainly do, and I don't do just two, I do more than two. Yes-as you understand the word "career"-it's certainly a mistake to do more than one thing. In fact, even if it's only in sports or in a physical skill of some kind, you are better off to do just one thing . . . Not everybody can be a decathalon hero . . .

R/S: How do your paintings get out? Do they all go through galleries, or-

BRION: No, exhibitions. I've never had a gallery that really occupied itself with my career at all, and that's a very considerable lack. As I was saying to you, it's insane that my work should be in all the museums in France and all the important museums in America, and not in any gallery. But that's obviously my fault . . . more my fault

than theirs, at any rate.

R/S: Presumably, painting is actually also different from a business point of view, in that you presumably (if you have an exhibition, sell paintings) make a fair amount of money every few years. Whereas with a book, you may not make any money at all, but they might come out more frequently-

BRION: No, it doesn't really work that way. If you make a book which is a hit book, you make quite a good deal of money. If you make anything less than a hit, you make nothing at all. Because they find ways of charging it off to advertising or public relations or god knows what, and you really get only your advance. I personally have never seen any royalties, except some so ludicrous that they're not even worth mentioning.

In regard to pictures, they are sold by a gallery which takes a percentage according to whether you have made an agreement for just that one show, or - if you are going to work a number of years with that gallery, they will then pay you a monthly stipend, and they take a much greater percentage of the price for which the picture is sold at that time. And if the picture is re-sold after that, you have no lien at all on the money. As in the case of the Jasper Johns that he sold for nine hundred dollars eleven or twelve years ago . . . and has now been sold for the ludicrous sum of a million dollars.

R/S: I bet he's pissed off-

BRION: Not really - he said he just doesn't understand it. He was brought up during the years of the Depression, and such sums are really quite unreal to him . . .

BRION: One of the reasons is that . . . I think it scares people . . . Because of the fact that it deals with the area of interior visions which has never been tapped before. Except in history, one knows of cases - in French history, Catherine de Medici for example, had Nostradamus sitting up on the top of a tower (which is now just being restored, at the present time, over there). and there was no pollution in those days . . . one didn't have any screen between the man on top of the tower and the sun. and he used to sit up there and with the fingers of his hands spread like this would flicker his

fingers over his closed eyes, and would interpret his visions in a way which were of influence to her in regard to her political powers . . .

they were like instructions from a higher power.

R/S: But they were good visions-

BRION: They could also foretell bad things too. Peter the Great also had somebody who sat on the top of a tower and flickered his fingers like that across his closed eyelids . . . And any of us today can go and look out the window or lie on a field and do it, and you get a great deal of the type of visions - in fact, it's the same area in the alpha bands of excitation of the brain - within the alpha band between eight and thirteen flickers a second. And the Dreamachine produces this continuously, without interruption, unless you yourself interrupt it by opening your eyes like that.

So, the experience can be pushed a great deal further - into an area which is like real dreams. For example, very often people compare it to films. Well, who can say who is projecting these films - where do these films come from? If you look at it as I am rather inclined to now-like being the source of all vision-inasmuch as within my experience of many hundreds of hours of looking at the Dreamachine, I have seen in it practically everything that I have ever seen-that is, all imagery. All the images of established religions, for example, appear - crosses appear, to begin with; eyes of Isis float by, and many of the other symbols like that appear as if they were the Jungian symbols that he considered were common to all mankind.

And then one goes very much further - one gets flashes of memory, one gets these little films that are apparently being projected into one's head . . . one then gets into an area where all vision is as in a complete circle of 360 degrees, and one is plunged into a dream situation that's occurring all around one. And it may be true that this is all that one can see . . . that indeed the alpha rhythm contains the whole human program of vision. Well-that is a big package to deal with-and I don't think anybody particularly wants . . . amateurs sitting in front of Dreamachines fiddling with it, perhaps . . .

R/S: Are you paranoid or realistic (depending on your definition of that). Do you think that part of the fact that the Dreamachines haven't turned out is deliberate?

BRION: Somebody said that the lesson of the 60s was the fact that all the paranoids turned out to be right!

R/S: I think William Burroughs said that: a paranoid is somebody who knows what's going on-

BRION: Who see what's happening. And it's a very easy package of dismissal into which to dump every kind of objection to what is going on. Who can say? I don't really know - it seems to me much more random than that. I don't feel paranoid in that-I don't think there's some sort of agency after me-or if they are, they're doing it with kid gloves . . .

R/S: Talking about dream-like states . . . is there any sort of Surrealist source in that? Because they were trying . . . they made some attempts to merge the two states . . . Has the Dreamachine and even cut-ups taken it a whole stage further?

BRION: Oh, but quite a different stage. It's actually dealing with the material involved - I mean, cut-ups are taking the actual matter of writing as if it were the same as the matter involved in sculpting or in painting . . . and handling it with a plastic manner. The Dreamachine is something else again, as it gives an extended vision of one's own interior capacities, which could also be overwhelming. After all, people could think that these were being imposed upon them - before they were capable of realizing that these were a part of all human experience. And from there - say they did realize that - well, a great deal of what they see in life would be changed, it's true.

In some people's lives, they say, "Oh yes, I've had visions like that when I rubbed my thumbs in my eyes," or "Yes, I remember one time I was going past a row of trees" or something or another like that. It would become more general knowledge that this is part of one's interior vision, and I think that-I would even go as far as saying that this particular century in which we live has given a great importance to painting, and this knowledge of one's own interior possibilities would rather lessen the importance - as there have been

other centuries which have given greater importance to say, architecture or music. Painting itself looks to me like it's on its way out - as though it were dying on the vine. And this recognition of one's own interior possibilities might very well supplant it.

R/S: Why would you say painting is dying on the vine? Is it because of the gallery system . . . is it because of the social and cultural place it has?

BRION: No, it really began with the Einstein apprehension of the physical quality of the world, where the energy of the world (which is supposed to be represented in the arts, after all) is declared to equal m , which is the mass of the earth times the speed of light squared. And anybody who realized that you can change the forces in an equation-you can change the elements from one side to the other of the equation-in the same way people realized that the matter of painting (which for the last few centuries has been considered to be colors, ground colors floated in oil and laid onto a surface and dried, producing an effect of luminosity and transparency) could be changed by adding pieces of cut-up newspaper as the Cubists did, or throwing sand into the mixture to produce exploding kind of matter itself. So, matter was being played with very early in painting . . . by the beginning of the twentieth century, at any rate . . .

Here's the energy-which is sort of the talent or the genius of the artist-represented by the speed of light squared which is a flash vision forward. And the m is the oil and vinegar mixture-like I always said-like you're making a salad . . . here was oil and linseed oil and lengtheners like turpentine and whatnot were used as a medium in which to float colors and produce an image of the world. But then one says that that image was not sufficient. By the time that photography had jumped into its place in the middle of the nineteenth century, people had announced it: "As of today, painting is dead!" That was the announcement with which photography was hailed, at the time, and there was such a grain of truth in this, that one thought that obviously pursuing the exact representation and the way of . . . hyperrealism was no longer interesting - so let's try and change the

nature of the matter. And so - sand was thrown into the canvas . . . collages were invented, and that's why I thought that all of those techniques which had entered into the arts in the beginning of the nineteenth century hadn't even touched the realm of literature yet.

R/S: I think you'd be surprised to see how much cut-ups have actually been assimilated and taken for granted-

BRION: That's true - even in France, where it doesn't work nearly as well because of the nature of the language . . . Almost immediately, within the very first few months, there was a group of American poets that brought out a two-volume book of their 'genius' work called *Locus Solus*, which was all cut-ups. But they never acknowledged it - it happened within six months of the publication of *Minutes To Go*, in January 1960.

R/S: How did you work the cut-ups-was it an accident which you then observed and then built upon systematically?

BRION: Yes - that's what it was, an accident . . . but which I recognized immediately as it happened, because of knowing of all the other past things - I knew about the history of the arts, let's say. And it seemed like a marvelous thing to give to William, who had a huge body of work to which it could immediately be applied. It wasn't applicable to my condition because I didn't have that body of work just to take and cut up and produce something new with. I would have to produce new work which then I would cut up - it seemed like a contradiction in terms. and William was doing so well with the marvelous subjects that he had, which were drugs, sex and rock'n'roll - he was doing good with it. So-let him have it!

R/S: And indeed *The Process* is cut-up-

BRION: No, there are lots of cut-ups in it and lots of things that came out of using cut-ups, but very thoroughly assimilated-

R/S: It's more stylized, I think, and the temporal cut-ups are very clear . . . they're mated, actually. A lot of William's books are quite hard to read all the way through because you just sort of jump and pick bits out . . . I just like savoring bits, all the gamey bits, or whatever. But *The Process* is much more like a proper novel . . . it would seem to be scripted.

BRION: It's tooled actually . . . The general all-over picture is that there's no voice of an omniscient author, and that these are a series of voices which are the different presences of speech. There's I, thou, he, she, it, and you-they, etc . . . As I said, they were tooled down until they fitted like that, and lots of the pieces going through the information was cut-up and echoes of Herotodus, echoes of T. E. Lawrence - echoes of all kinds of people are cut up right into it to give it that sort of particular timeless flavor.

THE BURROUGHS ARCHIVES

BRION: . . . I was always telling William - in fact it's the thing that did pull us out of the hole - was my insisting on this with William, who had always just thrown, practically abandoned, his manuscripts everywhere. Lots of manuscripts have disappeared and god knows if they'll ever see the light of day. The suitcase full of material that never went into Naked Lunch was left behind in Tangier and the street boys were selling it for a dollar a page!

R/S: So somebody somewhere has got them-

BRION: A few pages here and there . . . But there is a huge amount of material in Lichtenstein . . . you've seen the William Burroughs Archive [catalog]? All of that stuff hasn't been seen by anybody. One hopes . . . very soon it will be sold to somebody else or sold to a university who will know how to catalogue it and put it at the disposal of people who want to consult it. But as it is now, it's just wrapped up in boxes in Lichtenstein.

R/S: Why is it there?

BRION: It was bought by somebody in Lichtenstein.

R/S: Are they doing any research on it?

BRION: No. Nobody's allowed to look at it at all . . . The man who owns it has a very good reason - that he knows nothing about how to catalogue it, and as it has once been catalogued as it appears in that printed book, he wants the material to remain just in that order, in order to be able to hand it on intact to somebody else. Because he made a poor investment for reasons which had to do with the enormous money gap that occurred between the dollar and the

Swiss franc. Like, if he sold it today for a sum which is offered, he would make a profit of forty-five percent on his dollars, but he'd be losing money on his Swiss francs . . .

R/S: When did you first start thinking about films?

BRION: Right then at that time, particularly saying to William that . . . we should get hold of somebody that could help us - that was in the business already. And right in that same short street which is only one block long, somebody that I knew just as a neighbor invited me to a party, and that's where we met Antony Balch.

Antony had been intent on making films since he'd been twelve years old . . . Our plans didn't work out - I mean, we made only those two short films, after all, and we had meant to make at least Naked Lunch - that's never been made yet, although I wrote two scripts for it at different times. A lot of money was spent . . .

R/S: I've seen the storyboard for one of those . . . that Genesis P-Orridge has.

BRION: We saw it when Antony died-it was very nearly thrown away, all of that material-his mother didn't know anything about him, and none of his business associates did, because they were really quite on a different beam with him. And it seemed the best idea for Gen to have it - which is why I sort of shoved it off in that direction. He has the storyboard and a whole layout of the pictures . . . of camera angles and shots and stuff like that.

R/S: Cans of film-

BRION: Which he hasn't seen yet.

R/S: I'm dying to see that stuff-

BRION: So are we all.

R/S: Was it all on 16mm?

BRION: Thirty-five. There may be some 16mm in there, but everything they shot was always in 35mm . . . and in 70mm.

R/S: Did you actually find it difficult to do at the time?

BRION: Of course! The money's always enormous! It's always very expensive. Antony was a very successful distributor of films, and made a good deal of money. He also spent a good deal of money, as one does in that movie world. You have to spend that sort of money

in order to be able to get to the people who will put up a good deal more money. You have to travel around as we did and see them and meet them and whatnot, and none of those things worked out.

Antony spent a really . . . I have no idea of how much, but, say- fifty or a hundred thousand pounds, perhaps already was spent on those film projects . . .

R/S: William also did a bok recently called The Blade Runner - do you know if that's to be made into a film?

BRION: No, nothing's been made into a film and put on the screen except the two that we did together, Towers Open Fire and the Cut-ups, and then Antony and he did Bill and Tony on 70mm. And then the material that Genesis now has which has never been seen by anybody . . .

R/S: Where were those films done?

BRION: They were done in Paris, London, New York and Tangier.

R/S: Over a period of years?

BRION: No, not all that long.

R/S: When they came out, were they actually shown?

BRION: Sure they were shown. And even now they're still shockers when they're shown. People yell and scream and jump up in their seats and are very affected by them, still. They still look very, very new to people.

R/S: I'd agree with that. I saw them . . . when Throbbing Gristle was playing . . . people were actually completely flipped out, and the whole concert ended up in a huge fight. The whole evening was very, very charged . . . I felt, not as a result (but pretty damn nearly) of seeing those two films first, in combination with all of that.

BRION: Sure. Well, the same thing happened in New York, where you would think the audience might be more blase, but they were not - people were also jumping up and down there too. Almost everything that we've done still has that kind of charge in it . . .

R/S: In a way that's wonderful-

BRION: Well, it's also difficult to live with, because people - as recently as this week, where I've been frequenting all the art dealers that I know who are now sitting there ensconced in their art fairs dealing in million dollar, half million dollar pictures that they have

hung around the walls of their stalls - are just sitting there on their balls saying, "You know that's what we're doing, and you, dear Brion, as much as we appreciate you, you're still very avantgarde . . . We're tired old gentlemen, you know - if you'd only come to us twenty years ago when we were full of enthusiasm . . . " Of course, twenty-

I did . . . I've known them that long, and they gave the same answer then. They were all after ten minute masterpieces by Andy Warhol or Frank Stella or any of those stars that they've invented, who sell for huge sums of money . . .

R/S: Were those two films originally part of larger things?

BRION: No, they were meant to be what they are. For the Cut-ups, a great deal more film was exposed than that, and that's presumably what Genesis has there now - the stuff that one didn't use . . . more than that, even. I'm not quite sure myself - Antony was always fairly vague about it, even . . .

We were always going to see that old stuff again, but there was always new stuff to see - we'd be visioning that, and I'd say, "When are we going to vision all the rest of the stuff that you have there?" - "Well, it's at, you know, the B.F.I. in cans . . . " So, I'm not sure what Genesis has. A good deal of it is photographs of me working in Paris, and working . . . painting a huge great big paper in New York that William just - left the studio and left the paper behind. It was shoved up into a place where you could easily have forgotten it, but he's always been a great one for just picking up his hat and what he can hold in one hand and-a portable typewriter in the left hand-he leaves his own manuscripts behind, so I can't really complain too much when he's left a great deal of my work behind. He has-he's destroyed an enormous amount of my work-but he's destroyed a great deal of his own by just letting go . . .

R/S: I suppose at the time it didn't seem to matter.

BRION: Well, one was just so busy and, having all these tons of paper to move around and-where were you going to put them-and, where one was going one wasn't quite sure-it wasn't as if one was going home . . . we were just settling some place else for awhile . . .

~ BRION GYSIN INTERVIEW ~

"Romance is about losing, essentially. Delights are about control . . . "

JOHN GACY AND ROSALYN CARTER

BRION: The American scene is certainly full of death. Full of it, my god. The Monster of Augsburg - in my childhood there was a horrible cat who, at the end of the war, 1919, had eaten some thirty-two boys. He made them into pates and sold them to his friends and stuff like that. Well, this was considered very extraordinary: a case for Krafft-Ebing. But now, here's Rosalyn Constable Carter, whatever her name is, in a photograph with-

SLEAZY: Yeah, but the fact that Gacy was around just meant that he was a little bit more-

BRION: You're absolutely mad, man, he was a community leader. He dressed up as Santa Claus and he gave Santa Claus performances; he wasn't disguised at all. That's who he really was, he was Santa Claus . . .

He was a pillar of society, like a Norman robber baron. You got all these people buried under you, you put them through the dungeons - you got them like that. Why shouldn't you go up and shake the President's wife's hand and get your picture taken? . . .

We've arrived back where we've always been. Now things are getting back to normal when this is happening. Who did Eleanor of Aquitaine have for dinner? She had Gilles de Rais, who had eaten one-hundred-and-thirty five boys, or something like that - that's who came to dinner in those times. Little Mrs. Carter from the South - she's getting right up there in history! She's in there with Empress Theodora and Messalina. She's rubbing elbows with good company like that. She's got the Monster of Augsburg right there, turned into a fat Kiwanian. I think that's the way it's going . . .

SLEAZY: I don't think any of that stuff actually happens in New York.

It always happens in suburbs, doesn't it?

BRION: Oh no, it happens on the WestSide . . .

SLEAZY: You don't get mass murderers in New York. You get murderers obviously. You get muggings, you get stuff like that, but you don't get people that are really specialized.

BRION: You kidding yourself? You just haven't been frequenting the specialists . . .

ON PAPER

BRION: Paper was invented by the Chinese, and got to the Arabs about the eighth century. Before then, there'd been papyrus paper from Egypt, which was older, of course. But the sort of paper as we know it appears in Europe only about the twelfth century, and came from Arab sources through Sicily, through the German kings - Hohenstauffen. Kings of Sicily imported paper first of all, because they had large schools set up of people, copying manuscripts for the first time onto paper. And so paper making made its way in Europe connected with good water, which is very important - the water source. All the paper mills were set up along rivers that were then still very clear. The Rhine was clear until my day; I saw the Rhine clear in 1930. Now it's a great big sewer . . . dangerous sewer.

My first cousins had a paper factory on the Rhine from about 1500, maybe earlier, and made paper from reclaimed linen sheets and things like that; made that fantastic handmade linen paper that's so tough you can barely tear it. And they made money for bank notes too, for a long time - centuries.

As a child, I made paper there too, where there was this big mess like porridge-Genesis P-Orridge!-and you'd grab a dollop of it in a big wooden spoon and throw it into a box that had a net at the bottom like a sieve, and you'd dump it up and down in a mortar like that until a sort of drool was distributed evenly all over the surface of your mesh. Then you'd turn it out on a marble slab and roll it either cold or hot . . . and that was handmade paper.

In the S----- Museum they still have those things shown, materials that they used and the machines that they had, stuff like that. Their paper went up and down the Rhine-from Amsterdam-it went quickly and easily to London; that was the nearest port. So they and people from Basel used to go back and forth from London from Elizabethan times regularly. Well, the Holbein, who was the principal painter at the court of Henry VIII, came from Basel, and worked on paper. And this woman that I know has this collection of papers that are of such value that she's always been afraid to distribute them in any way, because of the fact that they could fall so easily into the hands of forgers. And she should worry.

All collections are full of fakes and forgeries, in any case. I spent a whole winter working and going through the archives that the Louvre has here in Paris. You have to get special permission and a letter from your embassy and all kinds of stuff to get in - I did that. And I was particularly interested in the German and Basel painters and graphistes like Durer and Holbein and Urs Graf and Nikolaus Manuel Deutsch, of which they have a big collection. And half of their Durers are fakes! At least half. Obvious fakes. And they say, "Yes, yes, we know they're fakes, but you know, they've been here so long - they were given by somebody in the eighteenth century, so they have some kind of historical value, and we're not saving them simply because they are real or are very good, but . . ." - You know, those kind of museum-ology-type stories that they tell; I guess they're reasonable enough. But this woman has given me quite a lot of these different papers. I have still big wads of them in there that I haven't used. And I have used them on some very interesting projects, but I don't have enough to . . . a book of this size, for example. I wouldn't even be able to make a single copy.

GEN: That's a nice sort of connection, timewise, isn't it?

BRION: As I said, it was studying Japanese-the Japanese language school-that got me so interested in paper and ink, really. It's a whole study and it's the basis of their aesthetic. As a matter of fact it's based on the two-

GEN: Actually coming from the materials rather than imposing them.

BRION: Right.

GEN: Strange coincidence that there is a family connection . . . Can't escape your roots, boy! - What is it he says in Towers Open Fire?

"You can't deny your blood."

BRION: I deny that statement!

GEN: I got a horrible sensation the other day watching myself on a video. I suddenly looked and - I did an expression identical to my father. It was horrible, I thought, "Oh shit!" . . . That always worries me a bit - being trapped.

BRION: "Somber moor, looking like Othello."

(tape ends)

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN . . .

BRION: . . . We live in a period, I think, unique in all history. No house has an attic anymore, there's no granny to put it in the attic - granny's gone away to Florida to an old age home in St. Petersburg. Nobody even knows her maiden name. You ask any American the maiden name of either one of his grandmothers and he hasn't got any idea. So there's no connection anymore - most of them don't want any connection. They've decided that they're going to be just Americans, for one reason or another.

More than that, we have this enormous privilege which I think is unique and comes about for the first time in any society - of it being possible to have a room of one's own. Nobody has a room of his or her own ever in all of history. Everybody lived with . . . dogs . . . and camels . . .

GEN: You mean, even within somebody's family you have your own room-

BRION: Yeah, it was never possible. You always slept with brothers and sisters, and mothers and fathers and grandparents and all sorts of people; maids living in the house, sleeping behind the kitchen door. Do you know how much the idea of having a room to yourself has changed the whole sexual scene? In fact, I think that really the basis of the sexual scene is the fact that it's been possible to be able

to be alone to do these fancy things that you've thought up. It was never possible if you lived in the bosom of a family, how can you possibly? People do get up in some really kinky situations but not like that.

And I think a society like Muslim society where all sexuality occurs with your clothes on! I was once sitting with a man who had four wives and I suggested that any one of his wives might have seen him with his clothes off and he was shocked at the idea. And sex is very quick, and religious law demands immediate washing after it so it's all bangbangbang and shoo . . . zoot to wash yourself! None of this languorous lying around and this luxury situation that everybody's thought about; for our ancestors that never really existed at all.

Maybe sometimes for a sultan and his harem, yes. But even so, just think of that: all of them tattling on each other and jealous of each other and poisoning each other's children - all that happened regularly, and still does.

GEN: The only way to change a society properly is to break down the family units and the atomic structure of whatever they call it. 'Til you break it down you can't break any other system of control. At the moment most societies still are based on the assumption of families, so it's one of the key areas to fight if you want to change things.

BRION: Yeah, but do you? Does one? Are you going to change it into what?

GEN: Change it into what!? Why do people always have to change things into something else?

BRION: William changes it into a Wild Boys scene - you and I know that William himself wouldn't survive a wild boys scene! (laughs)

GEN: . . . I think . . . loose alliances you choose, not a family in the normal sense, but people you find you relate to more naturally than you do people who are related by blood. Whom you tend to associate with more often than you do with (what do you call them?) filial family. I've never understood the logic of the filial family - why just because somebody came out of the same fanny you should like them, or because somebody was your mother's sister you should like them.

BRION: Well, it hardly ever happens, does it?

GEN: No, but it's traditional that you keep in touch with aunts and uncles and cousins and all that shit, you know. And it's very unlikely you even like your own family. But it's still suggested to you from an early age that it's quite natural and reasonable to like relatives. And to dislike relatives is unnatural.

BRION: Not in my family . . .

DEAD FINGERS TALK

GEN: How did William lose part of his finger?

BRION: The most commonly told story is that he cut it off himself and threw it into the face of a psychoanalyst who was questioning him in an army examination . . .

GEN: And that's the story he tells?

BRION: No, he doesn't tell it, other people tell it. He's never told it to anybody. He doesn't say anything-

GEN: As usual. I guess that's a good technique sometimes: to clam up. I do remember it now.

BRION: He's not the only one. Partly the legend may be due to Maraini, who was an Italian who wrote a very admirable book called Secret Tibet twenty years ago, and more recently a monograph that was written also twenty years ago (it has come out only now) about Japan. And he and his wife and three daughters were taken prisoner by the Japanese at a time when he had come as a diplomatic-cultural expert from Italy to Japan, and then Mussolini joined with the Axis and all the Italians were demanded-obliged-to take their fascist oath. And they refused and so they were thrown out to the Japanese prisoner camp where they were very badly treated.

Maraini demanded an interview with the general and- here's this Japanese general sitting with regimental sword in front of him like that, and Maraini . . . took his sword, and cut off his own finger and threw it into the man's face. And that had absolutely the desired effect - it was the thing that really impressed the Japanese more than anything else that he could have done. Everybody got more

food, and lives were saved by this gesture. So maybe it's partly that true story that's been loaned to William as part of his legend. But that didn't happen quite that way.

GEN: So you've lost a toe, and he's lost some finger-

BRION: Everybody loses a little something here and there on the way through this rat race . . .

This excerpt is from a forthcoming book of interviews with Brion Gysin, edited by Genesis P-Orridge, Genesis and Peter (Sleazy) Christopherson asked the questions . . .

"Real total war has become information war, it is being fought now . .

. "