

## **Weaponizing Noise: William S. Burroughs' Sound & Music Experiments**

This paper examines the effect European art movements, particularly Dada and Surrealism, had on Burroughs' tape experiments that were part of his 'cut-up' project, in order to reveal Burroughs' wider attacks on notions of authorship and contemporaneous American culture & society.

Burroughs is an American writer regarded as an iconic figure of 20<sup>th</sup> Century avant-garde art and literature. The cut-up technique was discovered by chance by Burroughs' friend, the artist Brion Gysin. Derived from Tristan Tzara's Dada game of creating poetry by drawing words out of a hat, and other Surrealist collage techniques, the method involved different permutations of cutting-up and folding-in sections of texts, including Burroughs own work, but also work of other authors and non-literary texts, and rearranging them to create often surreal and jarring juxtapositions and new words. Burroughs used the method to assist the writing of his 'Nova' trilogy of novels of the 1960s. He was introduced to the magnetic tape recorder in the mid-1960s and immediately realised the potential for experimentation presented by using the cut-up methodology with this new technology.

Burroughs' theoretical aesthetic of the 1960s had moved beyond traditional Modernist targets such as mechanised, urban existence and overt mechanisms of state control to responding to less apparent, more abstract forces of control, particularly the mechanisms that control information. His responses were through new forms of personal and political resistance typified by the tape experiments. In his essay "The Electronic Revolution" (1966) the tape recorder is presented as a key weapon of resistance against both overt and covert

methods of state power. These techniques are demonstrated in the experiments released as *Nothing Here But the Recordings* (1981) and *Break Through In Grey Room* (1986) where Burroughs' spoken word is juxtaposed in a disorientating way with Moroccan trance music, electronic squeals, tape noises, commercials and news reports.

**Biography:**

Benjamin Heal is a doctoral candidate currently completing a thesis entitled "Transatlantic dialogue: European influences on Paul Bowles and William Burroughs' Writing" at the University of Kent, supervised by Professor David Ayers. His publications include a chapter in the forthcoming collection *Paul Bowles: The New Generation, Do You Bowles?* (Roldolphi Press). He has presented papers at several international conferences including 'Do You Bowles?' Paul Bowles' centenary conference in Lisbon, 2010 and the inaugural European Beat Studies Network conference in Holland, 2012. His research interests include American Literature, Science Fiction, and Film Noir. He organised a multi-platform event at the Cube Nanoplex, Bristol, UK in 2009 as part of the worldwide Nakedlunch@50 celebration of Burroughs' classic novel. He is currently working on a journal article examining Bowles and Burroughs' representations of China.