The Relationship Between Language and Power: The Evolution of the Cutup from John Dos Passos to William S. Burroughs

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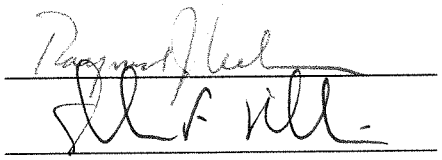

Introduction

In his introduction to the 1932 edition of *Three Soldiers*, John Dos Passos reflected on the expectations and ideals he held in 1919 when he began to write what was to be his first major novel:

> Lenin was alive, the Seattle general strike had seemed the beginning of the flood instead of the beginning of the ebb, Americans in Paris were groggy with theatre and painting; Picasso was to rebuild the eye, Stravinski was cramming the Russian steppes into our ears, currents of energy seemed breaking out everywhere as young guys climbed out of their uniforms, imperial America was all shiny with the new idea of Ritz, in every direction the countries of the world stretched out starving and angry, ready for anything turbulent and new, whenever you went to the movies you saw Charlie Chaplin (v).

Thirteen years after the completion of *Three Soldiers*, Dos Passos is hardened, disillusioned, and in the midst of the Great Depression. Although he briefly laments the loss of the world of 1919, his purpose in the essay is not to express regret so much as it is to assert a theory of writing based on lessons learned. By 1932 Dos Passos had grown into a passionate and well-informed critic of capitalism who viewed the novelist as the producer of "a commodity that fulfills a certain need" (vi). However, his essay is primarily concerned with how a writer can transcend the utilitarian function of the daydream machine and, instead, participate in the shaping of history. By dealing with the speech of his generation, he argues, and by making "aspects of that speech enduring by putting them into print" the writer's function expands to that of "the architect of history" (viii). At first glance, this vision of the writer seems as grand as Shelley's claim for the poet as the "unacknowledged legislator of the world" and in many ways Dos Passos fits Shelley's conception of

what the historian-poet. But Dos Passos's claim is based on a more narrow theoretical criterion than Shelley's, and on his valuation of the chronicler over other sorts of writers. If a writer is to transcend pulp fiction and day dreams he must engage in what Dos Passos calls "straight writing" (vii). Dos Passos argues that Joyce is the model of the straight writer who is concerned with confronting the language of his time as opposed to merely absorbing it. "He whittles at the words and phrases of today and makes of them forms to set the mind of tomorrow's generation. That's history. A writer who writes straight is the architect of history" (viii). For writers such as himself, writers caught up in the relatively new world of mass produced media, Dos Passos believes that it was imperative to "deal with the raw structure of history now . . . before it stamps us out" (ix).

As a writer Dos Passos undoubtedly confronted the anxiety of detachment that so many laborers of the imagination face, and by this I mean a detachment from a certain conceptualization of reality that privileges political activity. "By the nature of his occupation," he once remarked in a speech, "the man of letters tends to become a man of words and not of deeds" (Pizer 274). Dos Passos' anxiety as a young writer or, perhaps more precisely, a young thinker, is given tongue in *U.S.A.* in characters such as Charley Anderson, Mary French and, in particular, Richard Ellsworth Savage. With the onset of World War I and the rise of the labor movement, these characters feel an impulsion to examine life directly through participation in the aviation corps, miner's and textile worker's unions, and in Savage's case, like Dos Passos', the foreign ambulance services. For these characters, examining and participating in life directly is often portrayed as a choice

between staying in America or going abroad, staying in the Midwest or going to the big city, or working in a department store rather than a union office. However, Dos Passos' anxiety is perhaps best expressed in terms of the "words" and "deeds" that he speaks of as mutually exclusive. This dichotomy is key to his concept of "straight writing" and the participation of the writer in the shaping of history.

The onset of World War I, as Raymond Williams describes it in his article "Advertising: The Magic System," forever altered the public's relationship with language. Williams describes the advertising industry, prior to 1914, as crude, "quack," and, although occasionally manipulative, insofar as it played on people's fears of illness, transparent. However, with World War I came the "psychological warfare" from agencies such as George Creel's Committee on Public Information. Williams' primary example is informative:

> Where the badly drawn men with their port and gaspers belong to an old world, such a poster as 'Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?' belongs to the new. The drawing is careful and detailed: the curtains, the armchair, the grim numb face of the father, the little girl on his knee pointing to her open picture-book, the boy at his feet intent on his toy-soldiers. Alongside the traditional appeals to patriotism lay this kind of entry into basic personal relationships and anxieties.(418)

The techniques that public information bureaus developed in World War I were taken into the marketplace when the war ended. Publicity men, like J. Ward Moorehouse and Richard Ellsworth Savage in *U.S.A.*, transferred their new skills to the free market. Like Savage, Dos Passos was an undergraduate at Harvard in 1914 but, unlike Savage, Dos Passos saw through and continued to see through increasingly complex messages disseminated by the media in his time. The beginning of World War I, Dos Passos said once in an interview, "was my first

experience with the fantastic way people's minds become imprinted with slogans. Overnight, almost, men I'd known at Harvard who were quite respected--I won't mention their names--turned from extremely reasonable beings into fanatical Hun haters" (Pizer 277). This moment of crisis in language, although certainly not the first instance of censorship or state sponsored media, is one of the central event of modernism. From this moment on language takes on an overt appearance of threat and thus requires confrontation. Whereas advertisements and political promises were certainly marked by lies in the past, they were at least identifiable within their separate contexts. Once a widescale collusion between government and media begins, as in the case of the CPI, this discernibility in no longer apparent. To confront language suddenly means to participate in a war of words. Like weapons, words were met with night sticks and jail sentences and an unparalleled scale of governmental control. *U.S.A.* swells with accounts and instances of this struggle of words as deeds.

It is not a struggle that is over, either. The slogans and advertisements found in newspapers then are merely the seeds of more complex media appeals to public anxieties today. As crooked as they may appear, these appeals represent in name the "speech straight" of our time and although, as Dos Passos writes, "working with speech straight is vigorous absorbing devastating hopeless work," it is also extremely important work lest the "raw structure of history" stamp us out (*Three Soldiers* viii). This paper will deal with two writers who confront speech straight: Dos Passos in the *U.S.A.* trilogy and William S. Burroughs in *The Nova Trilogy.* Burroughs, who was a satirist and not a chronicler, is nonetheless a descendant of

Dos Passos in terms of his use of the cutup as a confrontational narrative technique. A cutup is a device of defamiliarization in which an author intervenes in a sentence, a phrase, a word, or even phoneme for the purpose of revealing new linguistic possibilities within its conditions. Fundamental to this thesis is an analysis of the use and theory of the cutup method. It is my argument that Dos Passos was using what Burroughs called cutup before the term was popularized as an image of simply folding one text randomly into another. The popularized conception of the cutup as random splicing is no longer sufficient, nor is it supported by the work Burroughs has left behind. By demonstrating Dos Passos' use of the cutup before it was familiarized as a term, I aim to assert a lineage between these two authors and chart the development of the cutup between their two bodies of work. Additionally, both writers will be viewed not only as subjects for theoretical analysis but also as important theorists of culture and media.

By examining *The Nova Trilogy* as a descendant of *U.S.A.*, I hope to place Burroughs in a historical framework which will make his works more accessible to academic discourse. Burroughs and Dos Passos came from similar upper-class backgrounds and shared many of the same concerns about capitalism, information machines, advertising, and power relations. Because of Burroughs's affiliation with writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, it is often assumed that he was of and only of the Beat Generation, whatever that term has now come to mean. However, Burroughs, who was eighty-three when he died in 1997, was a writer whose body of work as a whole currently defies historical categorization. Although Timothy Murphy, in his book-length study of Burroughs, places his works outside

of the Modernism-Post-Modernism debate by claiming they represent a third category he calls "amodernism," it cannot be denied that they share some of the dominant assumptions and techniques of both schools. This paper will not try to place Burroughs in an abstract school of thought but will instead examine the substance and impulse of his work, for the substance and impulse, or the praxis and theory, are intertwined in his text and not located solely in contemporary power-theoretics. This is not to say that Burroughs' work is not tied to or even informed by the thinking of Deleuze and Foucault, but rather that *The Nova Trilogy* and the *U.S.A.* trilogy arrived before the evolution of their school. These authors are perhaps better understood against the relief of their own historical moments and the "speech straight" that flooded their eyes and ears as they walked through cities staring at billboards, listening to wartime stump speeches, and turning away or accepting a pamphlet that might contain poems, advertisements, or something so clever that the difference between the two seemed indistinguishable.

Chapter I

"He does propaganda for the Morgans and the Rockefellers. Well, she said that all this year he's been working with a French secret mission. The big interests are scared to death of a revolution in France. They paid him ten thousand dollars for his services. He runs pro-war stuff through a feature syndicate. And they call this a free country."--Ben Compton in *U.S.A.*

In *Words that Won the War*, written in 1937, James Mock and Cedric Larson confronted the newly released and carefully truncated archives of the Committee on Public Information. World War II was not yet a concept to them but the possibility of "the European War" exploding into a worldwide conflict loomed over their heads and infected their writing. Although their book contains a great deal of evidence concerning the Committee's abuses of power, their tone toward George Creel and Woodrow Wilson is cautious and reverent throughout. With each acknowledgment of abuse comes a response regarding its political expediency or its mitigating circumstances. Undoubtedly, this tone is attributable to the uncertainty that World War I had created in the minds of people. Was the distortion of truth propagated by the CPI an act of patriotism and virtue in some bigger picture? Furthermore, with the possibility of a second general war involving the United States seeming greater and greater, it must have seemed to Mock and Larson that another mobilizing of full-scale government propaganda would be potentially necessary if new adversaries were to be defeated and democracy was to again be preserved. Yet it is not the

purpose of this paper to argue, even from a contemporary historical vantage, whether or not the ends have justified the means of propaganda, but rather to examine the ways in which an evolving body of "public information" is perceived in the works of John Dos Passos and William Burroughs. The formation of the CPI, I believe, was a monumental moment in this evolution.

The public information that Mock and Larson were left to sift through contained, in a dense package, media materials that were spread out over the United States during World War I, during John Dos Passos's formative intellectual years and William Burroughs's childhood. The scope of this information is staggering. Beyond the newspapers which were choked with CPI releases and articles by CPI employees,

> the postoffice bulletin board was adorned with copies of the Committee's Official Bulletin, and posters in the general store and on telephone poles up and down the countryside were those designed by the Committee's artists, the same pictures appearing again and again with the persuasive insistence of modern cigarette advertising. Both the children and their mother read war stories suggested or actually briefed by the Committee. On Sunday the pastor thanked Providence for blessings that had been listed by one of the Committee's copywriters, and prayed for achievement of an objective glowingly described by another. When the Lady's Aid held its monthly meeting, the program was that suggested by the Committee's division of women's war work, and the speaker came bearing credentials from the Committee's speakers' bureau.(7)

The CPI projects, which were merely the largest examples of coordinated propaganda during the War, seemed to pervade every element of American society during the years of 1917-1919, clearly compromising the opportunity for dissident opinions to gain significant attention. After the war, as Mock and Larson put it, "the problem boils down to this: Can any wartime compromise be 'temporary'?

Can modern war, a war of populations, be waged without permanent loss of some of the things for which America entered the World War of 1917" (18)? In other words, once the media that Wilson conscripted out of mistrust was released with its new skills in the postwar peace, once the "psychological warfare" of modern advertising began, could it be controlled? Furthermore, if it could not be controlled, with what "compromises" did it confront Americans?

In regard to the latter question the individual seemingly has three options. He can take an apocalyptic stance and view the inception of modern advertising as the dawn of brainwashing and anxiety manufacturing (a stance that certainly possesses some real claims), acknowledge the utility and general transparency of modern advertising, or admit to being stuck in between a state of attentiveness and erudition that is occasionally deficient and therefore susceptible to an image, and occasionally sufficient and thus cognizant of the motives behind the advertiser's appeals. Within these three choices is the fate of the individual as an agent, a fate that Dos Passos and Burroughs view with differing degrees of fatalism.

The instruments of mass society place the individual at risk. Even in his early novels, Dos Passos reveals this concern as one of his central themes. In *Manhattan Transfer* he begins to address it through the use of experimental narrative techniques, a "machine prose for a machine world"(Kazin 344). But, as Kazin argues, Dos Passos's "mind had not yet begun to study seriously the configuration of social forces, the naturalism and social history, which were to become his great subject in *U.S.A.*"(349). Dos Passos's use of the newspaper in *U.S.A.* demonstrates the remarkable development of his social consciousness. *U.S.A.* is filled with

examples of the new media in his "Newsreel" sections and comments on them as the text moves through the narratives. He excerpts pitches from the CPI, pharmacies, and unnamed firms looking for employees. He also fills his "Newsreels" with headlines from papers all over the world. The way in which this information impresses itself upon Dos Passos's characters will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, however, I would like to take a look at the various arms of the media he was confronting and place them in his historical moment.

In 1930, when Dos Passos began the *The 42nd Parallel*, the first book in his trilogy, the newspaper was still a dominant medium of communication. One of the most popular newspapers in the country at this time was William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*. The most popular magazine was Hearst's *American* weekly, and the greatest features service in the business was also run by Hearst (Chaney and Cieply 45). King's Feature Service claimed 52 million readers, the *American* claimed 9.9 million readers, and Hearst's newspapers, the *Examiner* foremost among the 16 separate dailies he ran, were constantly in competition with their national and regional rivals (Chaney and Cieply 45). On top of all of this, Hearst owned his own news service (International News Service) and "smaller" magazines such as *Harper's, Cosmopolitan*, and *Good Housekeeping*. In nearly all of the American cities that Dos Passos's characters traveled through--San Francisco, Boston, New York, Chicago--William Randolph Hearst wielded a mighty stick and an often overt political agenda. Dos Passos gives his reader a thumbnail sketch of Hearst's life and political intrigues up until 1930 in the biographical piece he titles "Poor Little Rich Boy." In this account he writes of how Hearst was at least

complicit in instigating the Spanish-American War by announcing a declaration of war three months prior to the United States Government's official declaration. Dos Passos was aware of Hearst's attraction to the Hollywood scene but he did not discuss the way that this attraction impressed itself on Hearst's agenda as a newspaper magnate. Rather, through the biography of Rudolph Valentino, the "Newsreels," and the character of actress Margo Dowling, Dos Passos seems to intuit the consequences of a media dangerously infatuated with the entertainment industry.

In *My Pilgrim's Progress*, George Trow attempts to illuminate the current state of the media by recreating what he calls the "world moment" of 1950, a juncture in history that is, according to Trow, "perhaps the last year when you can see culture in definite, immediate, but troubled and conflicted reference to the idea of protection"(18). Trow's basic thesis is that culture, since this moment, has begun to take on a life of its own and, like the post World War II military complex, it has begun to expand in ways that are no longer commensurate to its original purpose, which, he argues, was to protect people. 1950 is also a sort of crossroads between the careers of Burroughs and Dos Passos. Burroughs, at this moment, was beginning work on *Junkie*, his first novel, while Dos Passos was beginning to criticize Marxism and settle into much more formulaic, less experimental, novels. Trow's concept of the media in 1950 is basically that of a machine in the beginning of overhaul; still composed of the same players and parts from Dos Passos' era, but on the verge of transformation. Trow's value to this study lies in his notion of "the assumed dominant mind.". The assumed dominant mind is nothing short of the

contexts in which media backgrounds its productions. Trow's study repeatedly emphasizes the evolution of the entertainment industry as this dominant context. In other words, Trow recognizes the tendency in this country for people to view their lives in reference to the images and fictions of the entertainment industry and as he looks at the state of the media in 1950 he sees the beginning of this trend in the empire of William Randolph Hearst.

Trow, who has written several studies on modern media and has contributed to both *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, argues that the Hearst publications created in America, for good or bad, a cult of personality that was ultimately bound up in the figure of Hearst himself. Hearst's papers, Trow writes, "derived a certain authority from the fact that Mr. Hearst had been a world figure, and this is, of course, an incestuous relationship that all newspaper proprietors seek to manifest, though none did it so well as Mr. Hearst"(35). The ethos of a name that in the early twentieth century stood for social justice carried an authority that became dangerous in light of the fact that Hearst had grown out of his interest in the working class. It is Trow's contention that those who affiliated with Hearst's earlier sympathies unknowingly transferred their own sympathies through the act of trusting the authority of his publications, publications that became increasingly devoted to the context of entertainment.

Both Dos Passos and Burroughs have taken a keen interest in Hearst in their own work. The life of William Randolph Hearst is evidence of the unwieldy amount of control that one interest can wield over many through the use of "public information." Dos Passos's plea for a writing that confronts the raw structure of

history gains weight from figures such as Hearst and Creel because the lives of these men demonstrate that there are dominant agendas propagating through public information which, if not challenged and reorganized, may be swallowed whole. Finally, there is the question of the meanings that media sends through its many arms. Hearst is important not only as a figure at the fulcrum of media history, but because he embodies Trow's assumed dominant mind and the meanings implied in a world in which entertainment is the dominant context. Whereas George Creel's dominant context was war, Hearst's, and ours today, is entertainment.

Trow's study of modern media attempts to recreate the experience of reading a Hearst newspaper at mid-century, the moment at which Burroughs was beginning his first novels and Dos Passos was writing his later chronicles. In an anecdotal sense this re-creation is interesting insofar as it illuminates issues which today might seem irrelevant or petty. For example, Burroughs once stated his belief that the Queen was an antiquated symbol in which the British placed too much reverence. Reading his comments today one might have a difficult time sympathizing with his extreme hostility:

> I think I can get 5,000 people in Trafalgar Square saying "Bugger the Queen." That bitch. Sitting there soaking up the energy of forty million people. People say, "The Queen isn't important. She's just a figurehead." A figurehead of kissing her ass. Worthless wench. She should be sweeping floors.(Hibbard 22)

Trow casts light on such animosities by explaining the strong revival of the Queen-symbol as a function of England's role in World War II and the reemergence of issues concerning legitimacy and bravery. The historicity of such issues is important to remember when studying authors such as Dos Passos and Burroughs

who were deeply concerned with portraying and parodying the social energies in which they felt themselves trapped.

Moreover, Trow tells us how, physically, a newspaper was read at mid-century. In the chapter entitled "Folding the New York Times," Trow recalls how his father taught him how to read the folio editions of The New York Times:

> It was assumed that you would read a large-format newspaper, and that you'd be sitting close to your neighbors on the subway, and you had to know how to do it, how to follow the story over from page one to page thirty-two, folding the newspaper while existing in a small, confined space. This skill, which I don't think I have anymore, by the way--resembled origami, Japanese paper folding. It was fairly complicated. My father did it beautifully; he could read contentedly for an hour on the subway, folding and following and moving back and forth. In any case, the variety of what I'm calling the folio newspapers in New York in 1950 has been forgotten, and we have to remember that the television mind hadn't yet formed, and that the newspaper mind was dominant in New York City, and of course New York City, as it had been for some time, was the dominant city in the country as to culture, especially as to mass culture, certainly as to media, and of course as of 1950, the country had assumed a position at the pinnacle.(Trow 29-30)

Another term Burroughs used interchangeably with cutup was fold-in. In an interview with the *Paris Review* in 1965, Burroughs gives a lengthy description of the cutup and his perceived history of its use. He refers to Eliot's *Wasteland* as a cutup and he refers to the work of Dos Passos as an inspiration to his own. But more to the point Trow makes, Burroughs describes his personal view of the cutup or fold-in method:

> Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eyes follow the column in the Proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That's a cutup. I was sitting in a lunchroom in New York having my doughnuts and coffee. I was thinking that one does feel a little boxed in New York, like living in a series of boxes. I looked out the window and there was a great big Yale truck. That's a

> cutup--a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of.(*Paris Review*156)

Burroughs's description of reading a New York newspaper is remarkably similar to Trow's and suggests the environment in which the cutup technique was bred. If one is to study authors who are engaged with confronting various bodies of media, one cannot neglect the modes of their interactions. Burroughs's cutups have often been branded as both random and mechanical, but the more that we engage Burroughs's texts and not his mystique, the clearer it becomes that his works involved the same types of selections that all artists must make, whether it be with paints on a palette or a series of fragments one wishes to compose into the central poem of the 20th century. Now there are many different creation myths concerning the cutup, but whether or not the founder was Dos Passos, Joyce, Eliot, or Burroughs's artist-friend Brion Gysin is relatively unimportant. What is important is that William Burroughs came to see the cutup in terms of the hegemonic space in which a newspaper reader was confined during the rise of American political hegemony at home and abroad. The cutup can thus be viewed as a product of this physical and mental space in which public information was consumed. Consequently, the folio newspaper and the Hearst agenda represent a dominant concept of the form and content of media during the formative years of Dos Passos's and Burroughs's work.

The Nova Trilogy and *U.S.A.* are not reactions simply to the newspaper or Hollywood. A misguided media is merely a symptom of the larger issue of control. Over nearly a century, the evolution of the media has certainly impressed the context of entertainment upon consumer's lives but consumers have certainly given

producers good reason to pursue this emphasis. However, the Hearst legacy may lie in the overrepresentation, by a media which ascribes to Trow's assumed dominant mind, of our fascination with popular culture. A media that concerns itself deeply with the often trivial vicissitudes of public life inescapably diverts our attention from other sorts of information. This is the form of control that seems to be saying, "look over there." Diversion as propaganda. Joseph Goebbels, Joe McCarthy, A. Mitchell Palmer, and J. Edgar Hoover are a few of the names of the withholders of what should have been public information, but the story of this "other" information is not the story of a cabal. It is the story of individuals who had at their disposal vast media resources that enabled them to articulate an agenda. It is the story of the millions who bought into *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* the culture ministries in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, the two major red scares in this country, and homophobia and racism here and abroad. It is not necessary to begin a broad discussion on the ways in which these strands of history coalesce under the symbol of propaganda and control, nor is it news to demonstrate how early newspapers propagated phobias in this country by either silence or direct complicity. However, by a brief discussion of one example, it is possible to gain an understanding of the danger of control John Dos Passos perceived in these putatively separate strands of propaganda.

In 1927, three years prior to beginning his work on the *U.S.A.* trilogy, Dos Passos published a short book entitled *Facing the Chair.* It is an account of the conspiracy which ultimately led to the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, the two Italian anarchists convicted for first degree murder and robbery in 1921. *Facing the*

Chair details the governmental espionage that penetrated communist and anarchist groups in Massachusetts, local Boston newspapers which condemned Sacco and Vanzetti, and even working class circulars within the Boston Area. Dos Passos, rightfully, viewed these intrigues and the plight of Sacco and Vanzetti in terms of post World War I sentimentality:

> No one knew where the lightning would strike next. The signing of peace had left the carefully stirred up hatred of the war years unsatisfied. It was easy for people who knew what they were doing to turn the terror of government officials and the unanalyzed feeling of distrust of foreigners of the average man into a great crusade of hate against reds, radicals, dissenters of all sorts.(*Facing the Chair* 47)

The "people who knew what they were doing" are the concern of Dos Passos. In this passage, he is referring specifically to Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and the famous red raids of 1919 and 1920 in which Palmer rounded up thousands of suspicious foreigners for deportation hearings. However, more broadly, the "people who knew what they were doing" were also the public relations men Palmer had working for him as well as those just released into the free press from the Creel Committee. It is hard to believe that these men, who campaigned so vigorously and hatefully against certain factions in World War I, did not have the impress of that hatred still branded on their thoughts. Whether or not the press was swarming with spies and government agents, as Dos Passos insinuates by citing the pamphlet on *Illegal Practices of the Department of Justice*, is ultimately unimportant(*Facing the Chair* 48-50). What must be recognized is Dos Passos's perception of the relationship between the post World War I media and Sacco and Vanzetti.

Sacco and Vanzetti became symbols through their persecution and ultimate

execution. To some they became a symbol of the virus of immigration, while to others like Dos Passos, they represented the way in which America treats those who seem different. The affidavit from Federal Investigator Lawrence Letherman, which Dos Passos uses as one of his central pieces of evidence in *Facing the Chair*, demonstrates how it was the opinion of public officials, convinced of Sacco and Vanzetti's innocence, "that a conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti for murder would be one way of disposing of the two men"(15). From such statements one gains a sense of the threat and hatred that was triggered in the minds of Americans by such words as *anarchy, communism,* and *foreigner*. To Americans, Dos Passos argued, Sacco and Vanzetti represented an historical amalgamation of many such terms. With the assassination of President McKinley by self-proclaimed anarchist Leon Csolgz, "a picture was formed in the public mind of the anarchist"(56). "Since the Russian Revolution," Dos Passos continues, "the picture has merged a little with that of the sneaking, slinking, communist Jew, enviously undermining Prosperity and Decency through secret organizations ruled from Moscow"(56). Dos Passos wrote this last sentence six years before Hitler had come to power. Dos Passos's efforts, from the beginning of his career as a pamphleteer, seem channeled toward calling attention to the dangerous associations history imposes on our minds. The possibility that we might see one thing as another, a Jew as a communist, a communist as an anarchist, or an anarchist as a queer, is extremely dangerous. This distortion of perception is enabled by an understanding of symbolic language and defanged by the historian-poet who, in confronting history, reveals language in its component parts.

For Burroughs, the victim is not the anarchist or the communist but the queer

and the junky. Nevertheless, Burroughs's characters are described as victims of the same media that produced anti-Communist and anti-Semitic propaganda and his interest, quite often, lies in demonstrating the ways in which our inherited prejudices are the products of linguistic constructs or what Burroughs calls "association blocks." Cutting up these blocks, found in newspapers and literature, and reconfiguring them in the *Nova* novels, is one of the ways Burroughs meets Dos Passos's challenge to confront the raw structure of history.

The difficulty in assessing Burroughs's trilogy in comparison to *U.S.A.* is the absence of a single historical moment as a frame. For Dos Passos, World War I is the central event of his character's lives and the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti represent the culmination of post-World War I paranoia and prejudice. But for Burroughs World War I is a series of grainy images and history lessons. As a member of the generation famous for being born during the first World War and doomed to die in the second, Burroughs understandably assumes a Spenglerian, cyclical, perspective of history during the forties. In the Nova trilogy there is an insistence that every character and event is an "ersatz" representation or double of some original. The fact that World War II was basically set up in the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles must have been deeply troubling to students of history like Burroughs, but what must have seemed worse was the appearance of another round of red raids and xenophobic hatred led by the offspring of A. Mitchell Palmer, Joseph McCarthy. McCarthyism was the product of the war that was played out on United States soil. Burroughs, who attempted to enter the Navy but failed his physical and ended up working at an *advertising agency* and an *extermination*

service during the War did not see combat, but he did read about and suffer through the attitudes of the time.

Whereas Dos Passos's analysis of post World War I America benefits in certain ways from the author's first hand experience in the ambulance service, it is also sentimentalized by his involvement in those experiences. Burroughs's perspective, conversely, is often cold and unsympathetic to those who would cloud issues of power with appeals to emotion, for such appeals are the territory of manipulation and propaganda. As he says in an interview in 1961,

> Political conflicts are merely surfaced manifestations. If conflicts arise you may be sure that certain powers intend to keep this conflict under operation since they hope to profit from the situation. To concern yourself with surface politics is to make the mistake of the bull in the ring, you are charging the cloth. That is what politics is for, to teach you the cloth. Just as the bullfighter teaches the bull, teaches him to follow, obey the cloth.(Hibbard 1)

For Burroughs, war and conflict of all kinds become the exclusive domain of language. The cutup is a weapon.

Chapter II

"A word is a package. Packages are the national obsession. No need to look inside if you say the right word." --John Dos Passos

The cutup is used sparingly in the *U.S.A.* trilogy. The "Newsreel" sections, in which Dos Passos's splicing and merging of phrases creates issues of comprehensibility, is the only place where we see it consistently incorporated. Dos Passos's isolation of his experimental devices renders *U.S.A.* highly readable, but it does not marginalize the significance of the cutup, both as a working component of the narrative and as a dominant theoretical statement about language. *U.S.A.* is full of instances of characters engaged in cutup, even when the author is not. This is one of the primary structural differences between *The Nova Trilogy* and *U.S.A.* With the latter the cutup is more often *described* as an effect of characters' interaction with media. In other words, Dos Passos seems bent upon demonstrating how entire phrases enter and infect the minds of his characters. This phenomenon, found most often in the descriptions of J. Ward Moorehouse, is an illustration of cutup thinking that mirrors the actual cutups in Dos Passos's experimental sections.

In the first pages of *The 42nd Parallel* Dos Passos sets up a major theme of the trilogy: the word for sale. Mac McCreary, the first character, gets his first job working for his uncle Tim's printing press. "The first print Uncle Tim set up on the new machine was the phrase: Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains"(25). When his uncle's shop is closed by a bank because of his

pro-labor stance, Mac goes to the newspapers to find a new job. The first advertisement that catches his eye reads: "Bright boy wanted with amb. and lit. taste, knowledge of print. and pub. business. Conf. sales and distrib. proposition $15 a week apply by letter P.O. Box 1256b"(27). The advertisement is a con. What the advertiser wants is an errand boy to help him sell books around the country, but he is not interested in paying the fifteen bucks a week. Mac never sees a cent. It is a small-scale con by a corrupt peddler named Doc Bingham, but it foreshadows the larger cons of J. Ward Moorehouse, the public relations agent whose involvement in the CPI renders him the central figure of the trilogy. Whether it be smut sold to an eleven year old boy in Michigan by Bingham or advertisements sold to munitions makers in France by Moorehouse, the word is for sale. Mac McCreary, as one who knows how to run the press, is the unknowing complicitor in whatever "the word" propagates. This is the relationship between capital and labor--the controller and the controlled--that manufactures language in the trilogy.

U.S.A. is a deeply tragic story about the growing disillusionment of characters such as Mac who constantly fall prey to lies and promises. However, it is also a deeply wrought organization of texts with seams often obscured by Dos Passos's extraordinarily sensory narration. The "Newsreel" and "Camera Eye" sections are challenging and upon a first read may seem to be mere devices of texture. Yet it is in these fragments that we begin to understand one of the subtle claims of *U.S.A.*: We are trapped in the language of this country when we accept it without analysis. "The minute a slogan is imbedded in part of the brain and becomes an automatic response to any given stimulus," Dos Passos argues, "the perceptivity of that part of

the brain is lost and you no longer can have a genuine reaction to that stimulus"(Pizer 281). Thus, the stakes for these characters seem to be not just the right but the very ability to think freely. The story of Mac's youth suggests Dos Passos's understanding of exploitative tendencies in America prior to wartime metastasization.

The "Newsreel" and "Camera Eye" sections continually locate the narrative in a particular historical moment by giving the reader the slogans, songs, and headlines of the period. For example, just after Mac has replied to the newspaper advertisement, "Newsreel II" presents a series of headlines pertaining to Andrew Carnegie, Jesse James, and senator Hazen Pingree of Michigan. Both the "Newsreel" and the "Camera Eye" provide the reader with important historical insights but the emphasis in these sections is equally upon the arrangement of the information. The line "It is the best band in the land," from the song "Alexander's Ragtime Band," is followed, without punctuation, by the following cutup in Newsreel II:

> say circus animals only eat Chicago horsemeat Taxsale of Indiana lots marks finale of World's Fair boom uses flag as ragbag killed on cannibal isle keeper falls into water and sealions attack him.(29)

In some instances the breaks between segments are obvious whereas at other times the borders seem intentionally porous. One effect of this sort of play, such as the image of circus animals declaring a band the best in the land, is comic whereas another, such as the following, presents something more serious. In "Camera Eye 3" Dos Passos describes, through the eyes of a child, a train passing a series of black chimneys at night. The child's caretaker, perhaps his Mother, says, "Potteries dearie

they work there all night"(30). There is no punctuation before or after this segment but, instead, a question from the child: "Who works there all night?" What follows is: "Workingmen and people like that laborers travailleurs greasers/you were scared"(30). At the conclusion, the child says

> one night Longago Beforetheworldsfair Beforeyouwereborn one night Mother was so frightened on account of all the rifleshots but it was allright turned out to be nothing but a little shooting they'd been only shooting a greaser that was all/that was in the early days.(30)

What this segment reveals quickly through its manipulation of language is the groupings by which one word, such as "laborer," becomes synonymous with another, such as "greaser." The result is the transfer of prejudice in the child's mind from a small, specific group of people, to a more generalized conceptualization. Laborers as anarchists, Jews as anarchists, and so forth. This is Dos Passos demonstrating how generalized prejudices grow by groupings, phrasings, the factionalization of language. The "Camera Eye" sections, located in small towns and intimate settings, are basically the local level of demonstrating this principle, while the "Newsreel" operates on a more global level with its use of "public" information. But, in the principle of their operation, the two techniques are the same. There is no regard for punctuation and no consistency of grammar, just the words. Dos Passos definitely seems more bent upon narrative in the "Camera Eye" sections, but that is a constraint that he places upon himself.

Dos Passos's use of cutup is largely ignored by critics. The clipping and rearranging of newspaper headlines was at first a private hobby, something he merely found "amusing," not the public spectacle it was with Burroughs(Pizer 290).

Burroughs used the term "cutup" while Dos Passos's experimental devices, although fundamentally similar in principle if not in scale, were often given modernist labels such as "montage." Additionally, although the cutup as form directly informs the content of so many of the stories in *U.S.A.*, it is only ancillary to the progress of plot and thus does not create the same issues of coherency that it does with Burroughs. One can get a great deal out of *U.S.A.* without engaging the experimental "Newsreel" and "Camera Eye" sections. Finally, it is also quite possible that Dos Passos benefited from his reputation as a contemporary and friend of respected, modernist writers such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald, whereas Burroughs was often vilified by his association with beatnik authors whose writing, to many, represented a threat to the dignity of literature. The perception of the cutup as a threat is useful in continuing the discussion of Dos Passos.

By cutting up the most famous slogans of his time, such as Woodrow Wilson's promise to "make the world safe for democracy," he threatened to turn the words of politicians against themselves. In "Meester Veelson," Dos Passos sketches a brief biography of Wilson, setting his life in the context of one who grew up "in a universe of words linked into an incontrovertible firmament by two centuries of calvinist divines"(564). As the son of a Presbyterian minister, "God was the word/and the word was God" for the future president. Years later, during the war, this mentality would influence Wilson's policies concerning media. Throughout "Meester Veelson," Dos Passos quotes the president at length in order to demonstrate Wilson's belief in rhetoric and its consequences, showing his speeches to be characterized by poetic flourishes and direct commentaries on the importance

of harnessing the powers of the press: "We are witnessing a renaissance of public spirit," Wilson said in his first term, "a reawakening of sober public opinion, a revival of the power of the people, the beginning of an age of thoughtful reconstruction"(567). Using cutup, Dos Passos holds Wilson to account on the slogans that he used to get elected, such as "He kept us out of war," and the slogans he used to promote war, such as the famous promise to "make the world safe for democracy"(567). "If you objected to making the world safe for cost plus democracy you went to jail with Debs," Dos Passos writes, demonstrating the power of cutting into a slogan. In an earlier biographical sketch of radical theorist Randolph Bourne, Dos Passos quotes Bourne's famous pronouncement that "war is the health of the state"(448). Referring to Wilson's increased power upon the declaration of war in 1917 in "Meester Veelson," Dos Passos reinserts Bourne's phrase next to the statement "Wilson became the state," thus attacking Wilson with a slogan that was not published until after the war and probably would have been censored had it been submitted. What we see here is the cutting and pasting of not only external texts such as newspaper headlines, but the text of *U.S.A.* itself. The effect of blurring the lines of these texts renders them interactive and desanctified, dialogic where once, during the war, the relationship was monologic and thus controlled.

The controlling force behind the single voice of the Wilsonian slogans, the man behind the man, was arguably George Creel. The character of J. Ward Moorehouse, Dos Passos said in a 1962 interview, was largely based on one of Creel's right hand men, a publicity agent by the name of Ivy Lee. In Mock and Larson's account, Lee

is described as "the No. 1 public-relations adviser of American businessmen" during the war. Lee, who, like Moorehouse, joined the CPI in 1917 met Dos Passos in a hotel in Moscow as the author was beginning his work on *The 42nd Parallel*(Pizer 245). Dos Passos's interviews with Lee led to the creation of a character who seemed to think and speak in cutup.

Moorehouse, like Mac, embodies the theme of "The word for sale." As a young boy growing up in Delaware, he wanted to be a songwriter. He shows noticeable talent in the area but upon reaching adolescence channels those talents toward real estate and advertising with a company in undeveloped Ocean City, Maryland. From there his fortunes lead him into one of the many horrible marriages of *U.S.A.* and, upon divorce, the city of Pittsburgh, one of the centers of labor controversy in the country at that time. In Pittsburgh, as a journalist, Moorehouse witnesses the relationship between capital and labor and begins to develop ideas for shaping the tarnished public image of both big businesses and the working class. However, when the opportunity arises, Moorehouse drops his job as a journalist and begins working again in advertising for a man named McGill. His work in advertising removes him from the "Italian weddings, local conventions of Elks, obscure deaths, murders and suicides among Lithuanians, Albanians, Croats, and Poles," and introduces him to the country club men who run the businesses his firm represents(215). When World War I begins, Moorehouse has his own firm, and like Lee, is viewed as one of the top publicity agents in the country. Like so many men with talent in language, he joins the CPI.

In one of his first major assignments, Moorehouse and his retinue of assistants

and stenographers are sent to Mexico City to stir up support for the American cause. In Mexico there is civil unrest due to the rebel forces led by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and mistrust toward Americans due to the presence of German espionage and the squatting of big oil firms from Texas. While in Mexico City, Moorehouse runs into Mac, who owns a book store and occasionally makes pro-labor speeches straight from the mouth of Big Bill Haywood, president of the Industrial Workers of the World(I.W.W.). Speaking to Mac and Ben Stowell, a writer for *The Mexican Herald*,

> J. Ward Moorehouse said that speaking as an old newspaperman himself he thoroughly understood the situation of the press, probably not so different in Mexico City from that in Chicago or Pittsburgh and that all the newspaperman wanted was to give each fresh angle of the situation its proper significance in a spirit of fair play and friendly cooperation, but that he felt that the Mexican papers had been misinformed about the aims of American business in Mexico just as the American press was misinformed about the aims of Mexican politics.(277)

Moorehouse, at this early stage, is already beginning to see his interests under the title of a single heading: American business. He is the representative of many businesses, but he represents business as a whole. Likewise, in his role with the CPI, Moorehouse's publicity program is described as representing America as a whole, although evidently not all of the pacifist, anarchist, and working class characters that make up most of the cast of *U.S.A.* The conglomeration of interests by the individual, and at the expense of the individual, is one of the archetypes of *U.S.A.*, whether it be demonstrated through news blurbs citing the accumulation of financial and natural resources by monopolies, biographical sketches of men like Wilson, J.P. Morgan, and William Randolph Hearst, or through fictional characters

such as Moorehouse. The accumulation of interests, the factionalization that takes place on all levels, is one of Dos Passos's primary concerns, and his method for addressing it is the method of the poet: Break the blocks up into their component parts, their speeches into broken phrases, their companies into each neglected employee, and all of their lies into one headline after another.

Dos Passos does not characterize Moorehouse as an evil man, but as a man who loses his contact with, and thus his sympathy for, laborers. Moorehouse represents factions of interest, the great threat to a democracy that Dos Passos valued deeply. Moorehouse, like Mac, is often described as thinking in popular phraseology or slogans, not ideas. By showing the limits of this kind of thinking on both sides of capitalism, Dos Passos demonstrates with fairness how complex and difficult communication was during this period. However, Moorehouse's skills with language are put to the use of the munitions makers, oil producers, and the steel magnates that profited so greatly from the war, leaving Moorehouse in New York and Mac in Mexico. In *The 42nd Parallel*, Dos Passos describes Moorehouse on a train to Chicago dictating to one of his many stenographers, Miss Rosenthal:

> He forgot everything in his own words . . . American industry like a steamengine, like a highpower locomotive on a great express train charging through the night of old individualistic methods . . . What does a steamengine require? Cooperation, coordination of the inventor's brain, the promoter's brain that made the development of these highpower products possible . . . Coordination of capital, the storedup energy of the race in the form of credit intelligently directed . . . labor, the prosperous contented American working man to whom the unprecedented possibilities of capital collected in great corporations had given the full dinnerpail, cheap motor transport, insurance, short working hours . . . a measure of comfort and prosperity unequaled before or since in the tragic procession of recorded history or in the known regions of the habitable globe.
>
> But he had to stop dictating because he found he'd lost his

voice.(234)

"He had lost his voice." This is the slogan at work. "He forgot everything in his own words." He is thinking in groupings for groups, for industry as a whole. To Moorehouse the working class, described under the title of "the prosperous contented American working man," is the recipient, not the cause, of wealth in America. For socialist Dos Passos, Moorehouse's phrasing undercuts the idea that inventors, promoters, and laborers all make prosperity possible. Furthermore, Dos Passos's description and spacing of Moorehouse's thoughts in this segment suggest that his vision is limited by association blocks, otherwise known as slogans.

The Moorehouse angle on industry, or, historically speaking, the Creel angle on industry just prior to and during the war, would permanently alter the voice of the American press, leading to the "modern" media that I alluded to in the previous chapters: a manipulative media whose basic context is entertainment and whose function, in spite of the triviality of its context, is setting the words and phrases of public information. The newspaper represents a central component of Dos Passos's concept of the "raw structure of history," the machine that churns out language that the writer must deal with, lest he be absorbed or stamped out.

Why does Dos Passos, in his introduction to *Three Soldiers*, suggest the danger of being stamped out? Although fair play and cooperation between the media and both sides of capitalism has never been a reality in America, he contends that there were strong voices for the laborer before the war. The independent candidacy of Eugene Debs and the growing unions that supported him in 1912 are his evidence of this. So are the early newspaper stories of the Hearst media empire.

As Mac says in *The 42nd Parallel*, "Hearst's on the side of the people"(60). If one separates *U.S.A.* into its three parts, one can recognize a distinct evolution of Dos Passos's characterization of the media. In *The 42nd Parallel,* Dos Passos describes strong, working-class papers that undoubtedly meet resistance, but nonetheless persevere. He cites such events as the elections of 1908 and 1912 as evidence of growing grassroots support for pro-labor thinkers like Debs and Bill Haywood. He cites trials, like the Steuenberg bombing, in which labor leaders are acquitted and heralded in the press(88). The "Newsreel" sections indicate this progress at first, but as *The 42nd Parallel* approaches World War I, cutups such as this suggest a change in course: "WILSON WILL TAKE ADVICE OF BUSINESS/admits he threw bomb policewoman buys drinks after one loses on wheat slain as burglar"(210).

1919 shouts "BONDS BUY BULLETS BUY BONDS" and "AGITATORS CAN'T GET AMERICAN PASSPORTS," signifying CPI propaganda and hostility to agitators who could be just pacifists, anarchists, socialists, or laborers(445). As Mock and Larson detail, "scholars will long discuss the precise division of "real opinion" in America when war was declared, but there can be no uncertainty regarding articulate opinion as it was expressed in newspapers, books, pamphlets, cartoons, and public addresses--it was overwhelmingly and wholeheartedly on the side of the Allies and in favor of our belligerence"(8). The wide scale propaganda of the CPI obscured the opinions of "agitators" during the war, using the classic excuse of a state of emergency, the same excuse Hitler and Goebbels used so many times to suppress dissidents. Debs was sent to Atlanta Federal Penitentiary for ten years for

his opposition to the war, as was Dos Passos's character Ben Compton, a Jewish pro-labor activist. So in order to address the media that emerged out of World War I, Mock and Larson's question needs to be repeated: "Can modern war, a war of populations, be waged without permanent loss of some of the things for which America entered the World War in 1917" (18)? In light of the fact that some of America's explicit goals in the war, such as making the world safe for democracy, turned out to be veils over largely economic motives, one could obviously claim that the war weakened public faith in politicians and the media. As the character of Jerry Burnham says, "a newspaperman had been little better than a skunk before the war but that now there wasn't anything low enough you could call him"(544). But the media's collusion with the CPI and its consequent abnegation of its duties as a free press did more than just weaken public faith; it incited the paranoia and distrust that occasioned the multimedia techniques of *U.S.A.* The cutup, the montage, the dadaist poem, or any number of modernist experimental forms can be seen as critical responses to conventional formats of information that had been suddenly rendered inadequate. For the press did not return to its prewar condition, imperfect as it may have been before the CPI. The post World War I media that Dos Passos describes in *The Big Money* is an institution made up of men like William Randolph Hearst, whose interest in the position of the individual and the working class passed like a fad as the war commenced. However, what did not change with the war was the wealth of Hearst and thus his influence. The emergent media of the 1920s is the Hearst empire.

The three novels that compose *U.S.A.* each have their own geographical loci.

The 42nd Parallel, as its title and a "Newsreel" from the 1930 edition suggest, is set upon the 42nd parallel of latitude and cities thereabouts(Dos Passos 1270). *1919*, like the famous treaty signed in that same year, is centered largely in Paris and European locales. *The Big Money*, on the other hand, takes place almost exclusively in New York and Hollywood where the two contending forces of media, print and film, were based. The CPI men return to the private sector newspapers, many of which are owned by Hearst, and film begins to emerge in Hollywood, a stone's throw away from Hearst's mansion in San Simeon.

In his biographical sketch of Hearst, Dos Passos writes:

> And more and more the emperor of newsprint retired to his fief of San Simeon on the Pacific Coast, where he assembled a zoo . . . And there spends his last years amid the relaxing adulations of screenstars, admen, screenwriters, publicitymen, columnists, millionaire editors,/a monarch of that new Eldorado/where the warmedover daydreams of all the ghettos/are churned into an opiate haze/more scarily blinding to the moneyless man/more fruitful of millions/than all the clinking multitude of double eagles/the older Hearst minted out of El Dorado County in the old days (the empire of the printed word continues powerful by the inertia of bigness; but this power over the dreams/of the adolescents of the world/grows like a cancer).(1168-1169)

What Dos Passos is suggesting is clear. Hearst, the former advocate of the people, like Moorehouse, has lost touch. And men like Moorehouse--the "publicitymen, columnists, millionaire editors"--who run the papers Hearst owns, are at his beck and call. The danger, according to Dos Passos, is to be understood in the metaphorics of contagion that Burroughs would later develop: Hearst's "power over the dreams of the adolescents of the world grows like a cancer."

The Big Money is the story of postwar greed and the tragedy of characters who attempted to stay loyal to the cause of labor. In particular, the jailing and

ostracism of activist Ben Compton and the wilting of the energies of Mary French after the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, make *The Big Money,* by Kazin's account, "one of the saddest books ever written by an American"(Kazin 352). However, there are characters who succeed on the terms of the times. If one can ignore the causticity in Dos Passos's tone, one must acknowledge the success story of the actress Margo Dowling. Sandwiched between two biographical sketches of entertainers, Isadora Duncan and Rudolph Valentino, the first glimpse into the life of Margo Dowling is exemplary of the trilogy's archetypes: A portrait of a young, innocent and precocious child in a working-class household with a father who is an alcoholic. Dowling's talent is acting and through several utilitarian relationships (like so many characters in the trilogy, Dowling despises the institution of marriage), finds herself ascending through the ranks of the New York theater, the Miami dancing scene, and, finally, Hollywood film. In contrast to the two other main characters in *The Big Money*, Charley Anderson and Mary French, Dowling is not only successful, but the center of attention everywhere she goes. At the parties of Eveline Hutchins, one can't help but detect, as the trilogy progresses, the growing malaise among the guests concerning the cause of the labor movement. Talk of the social revolution and Sacco and Vanzetti, once the centerpiece of a Hutchins party, finally exhausts the guests of 1927 and leaves them talking about Margo Dowling, a character whose public identity was constructed for Hollywood. The following conversation about Dowling is representative of the early infatuation with movie stars:

> "'I met her. She had the loveliest manners . . . I don't know why

> I expected her to be kinda tough. They say she came from the gutter."
> "Not at all," said George. "Her people were spaniards of noble birth who lived in Cuba.'"(1234)

Dowling's only connection with Cuba and anything remotely Spanish was her first short-lived marriage to a poor Cuban bisexual named Tony. But, this gossip is the sort of news that the Hearst empire had begun to propagate. The biographical sketch of Rudolph Valentino tells of "tens of thousands of men, women, and children" packing the streets outside of Valentino's funeral parlor in New York, some fainting, some even committing suicide in response to the adagio dancer's death. Several years later in the story, Dos Passos describes Mary French and other activists failing in their attempts to rally a crowd in protest of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. This stark contrast is Dos Passos's final statement as the roaring twenties approach 1929, a date whose significance Dos Passos merely hints at from the vantage point of 1933. In one of the final "Camera Eye" sections, Dos Passos speaks with exhausted passion about Sacco and Vanzetti and the broader social justice movement behind them:

> our work is over the scribbled phrases the nights typing small releases in the smell of the printshop the sharp reek of newprinted leaflets the rush for Western Union stringing words into wires the search for stinging words to make you feel who are your oppressors America/America our nation has been beaten by strangers who have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul(1157).

The "work" Dos Passos speaks of is a service to language. The inherited words of "our fathers," which represent a tradition Dos Passos cherishes, have been bastardized by propaganda that publicitymen and activists alike in their "search for stinging words to make you feel." For Dos Passos, "we are two nations"(1157).

The oppressors and the oppressed. As *U.S.A.* begins, he seems to have faith that a war of words can be won, that resolution can be attained from within the frame of the duality. But the constant losses and setbacks in the elections, strikes, and trials strain that faith. Burroughs, whose generation was raised on war, will challenge these dualities and attempt to offer the reader a different sort of battleground.

Like his characters in *U.S.A.*, John Dos Passos had the bunting stripped off of his illusions and was, by some accounts, never the same writer after he completed the trilogy. The "Camera Eye" sections were dropped from his later chronicles and "The Newsreel" sections became less involved with the conditions of the characters that followed them until they, too, disappeared. But *U.S.A.* left its mark as one of the most massive and intricate works of fiction completed in the twentieth century. Dos Passos's careful attention to the relationship between the modern media, the state, and the individual, prefaces our most contemporary concerns about living in an age of information saturation. As such, it is a model for future writers like Burroughs who have the stamina and the courage to confront the raw materials of language. "These years of confusion," Dos Passos wrote in 1932, "when everything has to be relabeled and catchwords lose their meaning from week to week, may be the reader's poison, but they are the writer's meat"(ix).

Chapter III

"Bring together state of news--Inquire onward from state to doer--Who monopolized Immortality? Who monopolized Cosmic Consciousness? Who monopolized Love Sex and Dream? Who monopolized Life Time and Fortune? Who took from you what is yours?"

--William S. Burroughs

When *The Soft Machine* was first published in 1961, the media was in a state of rapid transformation. Although still the dominant medium for public information, newspapers were suddenly in competition with televisions in every household. In the late fifties many began speculating that television would eventually replace reading and that the ever evolving IBM information processing machines would eventually replace the need for analytical thinking. In *Understanding Media*, published in 1964, Marshall McLuhan writes of the human mind in crisis, suggesting that man enters a new mental environment with each new mode of technology and that "as our proliferating technologies have created a whole series of new environments, men have become aware of the arts as 'anti-environments' or 'counter-environments' that provide us with the means of perceiving the environment itself"(McLuhan viii). "The young student today," McLuhan argues, "grows up in an electrically configured world. It is a world not of wheels but of circuits, not of fragments but of integral patterns"(vii). Patterns, in the form of association blocks, allow information to move quickly and in code, and William

Burroughs examines the danger of these processes in the "counter-environment" of the cutup. For what is thinking but association? Accepting associations whole, in the form of phrase, slogan, or code, is equivalent to allowing someone to think for you. Moving from slogan to slogan, like a second rate politician, enables speed as it simultaneously disables thought. Burroughs is deeply concerned with the potential of modern media to alter the processes of the mind, but he is also aware that there is a long history of thought control that goes back far beyond television to our most primitive uses of image and code.

The Nova Trilogy is an amalgamation of cutup voices and different genres. Using the voice of a detective novel and the archetypes of science fiction (apocalypse, utopia, extraterrestrial invasion/infestation), Burroughs narrates the intergalactic struggle between the Nova Police and the Nova Criminals. The goal of the Nova Police is to return control of the "Reality Studio" to the prisoners of the earth. The goal of the Nova Criminals is to maintain control of the studio and its codes. The cutup is Burroughs's dominant medium of narration throughout the trilogy, but it is also one of the solutions he presents, under the title of Inspector Lee, for overthrowing the Nova Criminals. In a Nova novel, however, the function of the cutup goes far beyond the issues of the plot. Burroughs's cutups challenge our most basic expectations of language while his subject matter simultaneously challenges our tolerance for horridly graphic imagery. In short, a Burroughs novel is a shock treatment whose aim seems to be the awakening of readers to a linguistically centered concept of reality. His characters are almost all junkies and homosexuals and the habit of the junky is presented as analogous to the experiences

of "earth's prisoners" with language. Habits of all kinds are dangerous to Burroughs, but habits in language construction are to be considered particularly insidious. "Thinking in association blocks instead of words," says Inspector Lee, "enables the operator to process data with the speed of light on the association line--Certain alterations are of course essential"(*Nova Express* 96).

One can detect the presence of a Nova Criminal through the habits of the earthly prisoners. In *The Ticket that Exploded,* Inspector Lee explains:

> Nova criminals are not three-dimensional organisms--(though they are quite definite organisms as we shall see)--but they need three-dimensional human agents to operate--The point at which the criminal controller intersects a three-dimensional human agent is known as 'a coordinate point'--And if there is one thing that carries over from one human host to another and established the identity of the controller it is *habit*: idiosyncrasies, vices, food preferences--(we were able to trace Hamburger Mary through her fondness for peanut butter)--a gesture, a special look, that is to say the *style* of the controller--A chain smoker will always operate through chain smokers, an addict through addicts.(57)

To greatly oversimplify, *The Nova Trilogy* is composed of short routines in which these criminals-- under monikers such as "Mr. Bradly Mr. Martin," "the Subliminal Kid," "Willy the Rat," and "Hamburger Mary"--create conflict among the prisoners of earth and threaten to intrude upon the Nova Police's work in the "Rewrite Room" or the "Reality Studio." Until Inspector Lee and his men decided to infiltrate the "Reality Studio," the Nova Criminals and their earthly accomplices were in control of this vast media network whose function was the maintenance and aggravation of existing conflicts.

The Soft Machine is the first book of the trilogy and sets the Nova Conspiracy in a broad historical framework. If one were to accept the assumptions that the

various routines of *The Soft Machine* set forth, one would have a cyclical view of history in which human consciousness has remained relatively stagnant. Random events, instead of evolution, are important in the Burroughs model of consciousness. For instance, a virus falls from space into a camp of apes, suddenly rendering the animals sick with speech. The arrival of the word virus is the event that concludes *The Soft Machine*, but it in no way creates a linear chronology in the trilogy. However, from the moment of speech on, Burroughs suggests, it's been all down hill. Silence is the most desirable and natural state and it is the belief of the Nova Police that the prisoners of earth must ascribe to a regimen of silence and apomorphine in order to safely withdraw themselves from the sickness of word and junk. *The Soft Machine*, Burroughs's name for the human body, is a description of the ways in which the body is infiltrated by the agencies of language, or, rather, the Nova Criminals(Miles 120-121). It introduces most of the characters of the trilogy but does not operate in cutup except for in short bursts. *The Ticket that Exploded*, published in 1962, introduces some new characters and is done almost entirely in cutup. The capstone of the trilogy is *Nova Express*, written in 1964. *Nova Express*, as the word "nova" implies, describes the explosion of "the Reality Studio," and the resultant world of broken control. All three novels are guided by a voice that sounds like a detective from a Dashiell Hammett novel, but this voice, generally assumed to be that of Inspector Lee, appears and disappears at irregular intervals.

In *The Soft Machine*, the criminals are represented at one point as Mayan shamans. The detective, known in this routine as "The Mayan Caper," trains for his mission to overthrow the shamans by studying in cutup:

> I started my trip in the morgue with old newspapers, folding in today with yesterday and typing out composites--When you skip through a newspaper as most of us do you see a great deal more than you know--In fact you see it all on a subliminal level--Now when I fold today's paper in with yesterday's paper and arrange the pictures to form a time section montage, I am literally moving back to the time when I read yesterday's paper, that is traveling in time back to yesterday . . . The next step was carried out in a film studio--I learned to talk and think backwards on all levels--This was done by running film and sound track backwards . . . My basic training in time travel was completed and I was now ready to train specifically for the Mayan assignment.(*Soft Machine* 85-86)

Burroughs is describing part of a linguistic theory that he equates with time travel. By entering the association blocks of the past and manipulating a variable as simple as a single noun, one enters a hypothetical space in which one has the power to alter the outcome of a past sentence, or the relationship between a sentence and an accompanying image. The future is locked in the variables of old sentences and word-image pairs, and relationships with language are static as long as these association blocks remain unaltered. The maintenance of this stasis, according to Burroughs, is tantamount to the maintenance of a world order that is fundamentally prejudiced. Cutups reveal these prejudices like this: "I stand on the Fifth Amendment, will not answer the question of the Senator from Wisconsin: 'Are you or have you ever been a member of the male sex'(*Soft Machine* 168). By taking Joseph McCarthy's infamous question and switching "male sex" for "communist party" Burroughs demonstrates how the seemingly serious can be suddenly rendered absurd by the alteration of a single grammatical variable. By cutting into words and recombining them, one becomes capable of revealing the latent motives behind a

sentence and thus altering or at least calling attention to relationships of power. The case of the Mayan Caper is a clear and straight prose narration of the Nova Police's use of cutup to dismantle an entire system of codes:

> The Mayan calendar starts from a mythical date 5 Ahua 8 Cumhu and rolls on to the end of the world, also a definite date depicted in the codices as a God pouring water on the earth--The Mayans had a solar, a lunar, and a ceremonial calendar rolling along like interlocking wheels from 5 Ahua 8 Cumhu to the end--The absolute power of the priests, who formed about 2 percent of the population, depended on their control of this calendar . . . The Mayan writings have not been fully deciphered, but we know that most of the hieroglyphs refer to dates in the calendar.(Soft Machine 86-87)

As the singular lexical apparatus of the Mayans, the calendar becomes central in the Nova investigation. The image that Burroughs sets up is of a chain link code in which celestial movements, agricultural directives, and religious meanings are inscribed. It is the job of the Mayan Caper to infiltrate the order of the priests and gain access to the room where the calendars are kept.

In order to remain incognito, the Caper undergoes "the transfer operation," a surgical procedure that is repeated in other routines in the trilogy and is bound up in the theory of the cutup. The transfer operation involves locating a young boy to serve as a suitable vessel. Young boys are the guinea pigs of the Nova trilogy, both for the police and the criminals. Their bodies are routinely raped, hung, and altered for the purpose of the warring authorities. This is perhaps Burroughs's metaphor for a helpless younger generation. The young Mayan boy, in this case, is sequestered for intensive interviews with the Caper and subjected to constant tape recording and photo shoots. From these sessions, the Caper absorbs the speech of the young Mayan and a special doctor obtains numerous photographs for creating a

model composite. When the operation is complete, the Caper inhabits the body of the young boy and enters the Mayan community. By acting like an idiot, the Caper goes undetected and gains the trust of one of the priests, who employs him as a janitor in the control room. It is at this moment that he decides that "it is time to act."

> Using the drug the doctor had given me, I took over the priest's body, gained access to the room where the codices were kept, and photographed the books--Equipped now with sound and image track of the control machine I was in position to dismantle it--I had only to mix the order of recordings and the order of images and the changed order would be picked up and fed back into the machine--I had recordings of all agricultural operations, cutting and burning brush etc.--I now correlated the recordings of burning brush with the image track of this operation, and shuffled the time so that the order to burn came late and a year's crop was lost--Famine weakening control lines, I cut radio static into the control music and festival recordings together with sound and image track rebellion . . . Inexorably as the machine had controlled thought feeling and sensory impressions of the workers, the machine now gave the order to dismantle itself and kill the priests.(*Soft Machine* 96-97)

"The Mayan Caper" routine introduces the archetypal images of the trilogy: The monopoly, the control room and its store of coded information, the investigator, the insane doctor, and the young violated body. It is also one of the few passages written in straight prose. Breaking into the control room, or "the Reality Studio," is the consistent goal of the Nova Police, but as the trilogy moves into *Nova Express*, Burroughs exchanges his straight narrations about subversion for actual acts of subversion, cutting up the association blocks in the minds of his characters and thus demonstrating the possibilities of altering linguistic variables. The infiltration of the Mayan codices is the model for the trilogy's plot, but not its dominant medium.

Aside from valent images, there is very little unifying the routines that make up

the trilogy. Instead, one's attention is sustained, if it is indeed sustained, by the vividness of the images that flood the text. "For many critics," Timothy Murphy writes, " Burroughs's use of the cutup technique in the trilogy was proof a priori that his writing could no longer be interrogated for objective meaning or structure . . . but had to be treated like Rorschach inkblot tests of the reader's associative patterns"(103). However, as one enters the disorienting space of *The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express*, there is a rather simplistic way of understanding the movement of the text from one routine to the next, and that is by viewing the landscapes and the dialogues as mirrors of the cutup theory. In other words, each cutup routine seems to be a narrative example of the ways in which cutup can alter perception. This may seem reductive and obvious, but it is worth considering if you are a reader who brings certain expectations of plot and continuity to a text.

"A Distant Thank You," a routine from the middle of *Nova Express*, demonstrates the clarity that the perspective of form-informing-content provides. A couple begins the routine speaking in cutup:

> "I am having in Bill&Iam," she said--
> "But they don't exist--tout ca--my dear have you any idea what--certain basic flaws in the--"
> "You can afford it--You told me hole is always there to absorb yesterday--and whatever--"
> "The market you understand--Bill tossed a rock and a very dear friend of mine struck limestone with dried excrement purposes. And what purpose more has arisen--quite unlooked for--"
> "All the more reason to redecorate Silent Workers--"
> They had arrived where speech is impossible.(*Nova Express*111)

If we look at this routine and others as examples of the consequences of the breakthrough in the "Reality Studio," then we begin to see some of the effects of

breaking through association blocks. In this case, conversation between the couple becomes impossible. What is suggested, however, is that other things have become difficult as well. Bill & Iam, spoken of as a pair, no longer exist. Although Bill appears and is quoted speaking of Iam just after this scene, Iam never enters the scene. Burroughs believed that Aristotelian logic or either/or thinking was one of the great faults of Western thought because it perpetuated the structures of opposition. When the control room has been unwired, such structures collapse. Dualisms such as love expressed in the terms of a married couple disappear. Each phrase in this excerpt seems to hint at the consequences of removing fundamental structures ("basic flaws") from language. The cutup is the "hole" that is always "there to absorb yesterday." It is a "Silent Worker" working for silence and the dissolution of the word. For Burroughs, this is a good thing, for all systems of control and power take root in "the word:" ""What scared you all into time? Into body? Into shit? I will tell you,' Inspector Lee writes. 'The word'"(*Nova Express* 12). Theoretically, it is fascinating to consider how we would talk if we thought one word at a time, instead of in association blocks. Burroughs, who was a notoriously slow speaker, offers these routines as examples of the chaos that would be conferred if this transformation were to suddenly take place. Another result of the breakthrough, Burroughs insinuates in "A Distant Thank You," is an alteration of visual experience. Like the Mayan Caper, who travels in time by folding in past and present documents, the couple in this routine see the past and present drift past each other in the sky in front of them: "The studio had set up a desert reek Mayan back to peasant hut--In a few minutes there mountain slope of the Andes--House had

stood in the air"(112).

The mention of a studio sets up the ambiguity of whether the setting is in fact an altered reality or perhaps just a movie or photo set. This possibility is worth considering because of the keen interest in film Burroughs demonstrates throughout his writing, but "studio" is a word that Burroughs regularly uses to describe a dominant construction of reality, so one must be careful. As the dialogue progresses, there is further evidence that the couple is living in a world whose codes have just recently been altered:

> "I am having in Bill&Iam"--she said during breakfast--
> Her husband went pale-- "My dear, have you any idea what their fee is?--"
> "You can afford it--You told me only yesterday--"
> "That was yesterday and whatever I may have told you in times long past--The Market you understand--Something is happening to money itself--A very dear friend of mine found his *special* deposit box in Switzerland filled with uh dried excrement--In short an emergency a shocking emergency has arisen--quite unlooked-for--"(114)

The Reality Studio, presumably, contains not only the codes that enforce order upon perception and speech, but also upon other systematic institutions, such as banks. Burroughs revels in the hypothetical chaos of a breakthrough in the Reality Studio, but by narrating in cutup and thus disappointing all expectations of phrase and sentence, he offers the reader a taste of what that chaos might actually be like on the grammatical level.

"Remember I was Carbon Dioxide" directly follows "A Distant Thank You" and offers another example of what the cutup can reorder. Routines like "A Distant Thank You" illustrate why French theorists like Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze herald Burroughs as a prophet of their schools(Murphy 34-35). "A Distant Thank

You" is a clear demonstration of the way cutups blur the concept of authorship. As Mr. Martin, another of Burroughs's alter egos, narrates his way through "A Distant Thank You," one is not sure whether the writer is Burroughs, T.S. Eliot, or some third composite:

> Through all the streets no relief--I will show you fear on the walls and windows people and sky--Wo weilest du?--Hurry up please its accounts--Empty is the third who walks beside you--Thin mountain air here and there and out the window--Put on a clean shirt and dusk through narrow streets--Whiffs of my Spain from vacant lots--Brandy neat--April wind revolving lips and pants--After dinner sleep dreaming on rain--The soldier gives no shelter--War of dead sun is a handful of dust--Thin and tenuous in gray shivering mist of old Western movies said: "Fill your hand Martin."(123)

The game in this passage seems to be counting how many of the words are derived from Eliot's "The Waste Land." Fragments as brief as two words, such as "no relief," are eventually apparent and so are the more obvious extractions like "Wo weilest du" and "I will show you fear." Yet what is most striking about this passage is its self-consciousness, or, rather, its seemingly purposeful placement of these fragments. Too often Burroughs's writing is written off as random or inaccessible for objective scholarly analysis (whatever that may be) but his manipulation of phraseology is often as calculated as "The Camera Eye" sections from *U.S.A.* or "The Waste Land" itself. In this passage, we see a close adherence to the metaphorics of "The Waste Land," as Mr. Martin walks through streets like Prufrock and even dreams of rain. "Empty is the third who walks beside you" is a statement that encapsulates the very theory of cutup in the midst of praxis. From the commerce between the mind of Burroughs and the text of Eliot comes this third voice. It is very difficult to credit the former or the latter with this passage, leading

us to question the very issue of credit or authorship. Texts merge and interact with each other every time a book is written, but Burroughs is one of the few authors who makes this transaction so explicit. His concern is not with maintaining a secret or developing a reputation as a diviner, but instead to reveal the apparatus of control. The image of an author as one who has special access to vision and voice is quite often the thing that sets him or her apart from the reader, rendering the author the authority and the reader the slave who follows words left to right, left to right, beginning to end. In *The Nova Trilogy*, language is often rearranged to such an extent that the reader is compelled to produce connections of his own from word to word.

Burroughs's obsession with control undoubtedly has roots in his own confrontations with authorities throughout his life. The characters of Hauser and O'Brien, police officers who appear throughout *Naked Lunch* and *The Nova Trilogy*, are loosely based on cops Burroughs confronted during his days of harboring criminals and massive quantities of drugs at 69 Bedford Street in New York. Certainly the investigation into his life subsequent to his wife's death at his hand contributed to his paranoia as well. Burroughs's life on the lam has been exhaustively documented, both by biographers and the author. What has been ignored, however, is the insight into media that Burroughs had by virtue of family ties. Ivy Lee, the character after whom Dos Passos modeled J. Ward Moorehouse, was Burroughs's uncle. In several of his novels and in the novels of Kerouac, Burroughs's alter egos occasionally assume the name of Lee, but little mention has been made of this side of Burroughs's family other than in a passing reference from

a *Paris Review* interview from 1965. When asked about where he derived the inspiration for his characters, Burroughs answered:

> The carny world was the one I exactly intended to create--a kind of Midwestern, small-town, cracker-barrel, pratfall type of folklore, very much my own background. That world was an integral part of America and existed nowhere else, at least not in the same form. My family was Southern on my mother's side. My grandfather was a circuit-riding Methodist minister with thirteen children. Most of them went up to New York and became quite successful in advertising and public relations. One of them, an uncle, was a master image-maker, Ivy Lee, Rockefeller's publicity manager(160)

Burroughs himself worked for an ad agency in 1942, but this experience, like the entirety of that year, is treated breezily and superficially in biographies(Miles 33). Now it might be presumptuous to suggest a deep connection between Burroughs and his uncle, but it is worth thinking about for a moment when considering his relationship to Dos Passos. The propaganda of the CPI, in which Ivy Lee was deeply complicit, is crucial toward understanding the motive behind the Dos Passos cutup. It is partially due to the collusion of the press and the government during World War I that writers like Dos Passos felt impelled to create a "counter-environment" to the media. In *The Nova Trilogy*, Burroughs's motives are often quite similar and I believe it is hasty criticism that disregards biographical information about Burroughs's criminal history when addressing the motives behind his fascination with control. Burroughs had read *U.S.A.* Even if he wasn't aware of his uncle as Dos Passos's model for Moorehouse, he was certainly aware of America's history of propaganda and the role his uncle played as an agent with the CPI and Standard Oil(*Paris Review* 153). On the other hand, it is possible that Burroughs, as a voracious reader, did recognize his debt to Dos Passos. Although

critics and contemporaries made a lot of noise about the first Burroughs cutups, the author never claimed authorship of the technique, but instead credited Dos Passos, Eliot, and Tristan Tzara. Timothy Murphy makes a compelling case for Burroughs as an author who transcends the modernism/post-modernism duality. But Burroughs's fiction owes a great deal to the devices of modernism as well as its archetypes. One of the salient concerns of modernists, Dos Passos in particular, was capitalism. For Burroughs, capitalism is a product of the oppositional structures (dialectics) that limit the imagination and the social possibilities of Western man. The gulf between capital and labor was merely a problem of image and perception for advertising agents like Ivy Lee, but Dos Passos and Burroughs saw more in this gap than just poor public relations. The beginning of *Nova Express* seems directed right at the advertising agencies:

> Listen to my last words anywhere. Listen to my last words any world. Listen all you boards syndicates and governments of the earth. And you powers behind what filth deals consummated in what lavatory to take what is not yours. To sell the ground from unborn feet forever--
>
> "Don't let them see us. Don't tell them what we are doing--"
>
> Are these the words of the all-powerful boards and syndicates of the earth?
>
> "For God's sake don't let that Coca-Cola thing out--"(11).

The "Coca-Cola thing," as parodic as it sounds, may in fact refer to real concerns that countries such as France had about Coca-Cola marketing schemes. Then again, it may mean nothing. In light of the activities of the CPI, however, Burroughs's satirical syndicates don't seem so outlandish. To speak of the government in the same breath as the syndicates is to simply foresee the corporate America that doesn't even bother to hide itself anymore. When one considers the dominating

presence of figures such as William Randolph Hearst, the notion of a syndicate that extends across the borders of government, entertainment, and the media does not seem like the paranoid delusions of a dope fiend. Yet still we hesitate to read Burroughs because we are comfortable in the conventions of literature, as if those conventions were somehow isolated from the social conventions Burroughs criticizes. *The Nova Trilogy* is not a series of hallucinations or Rorschach tests but a prescriptive program of silence and alertness developed by a careful student of power. In one sense, Burroughs's prescription is that of the poet. His desire is to break up anachronistic conceptions into their original component parts and thus revitalize language and vision. But Burroughs's vision is also that of the cultural therapist who sees the factionalization of language as symptomatic of the larger factionalizations that corrupt American culture. "Bring together state of news," says Inspector Lee. "Inquire onward from state to doer--Who monopolized Immortality? Who monopolized Cosmic Consciousness? Who monopolized Love Sex and Dream? Who monopolized Life Time and Fortune"(*Nova Express* 13)? Life, Time, and Fortune, the names of three of the largest magazines in the United States, are also words unto themselves that Burroughs seeks to reclaim through the cutup.

As he does in *The Soft Machine* and *Nova Express,* Burroughs begins and ends *The Ticket that Exploded* in relatively straight prose, leaving the reader with a sense of relief and suspicion as he reaches the end of the book. Beginnings and endings are the conventions of the novel and Burroughs realizes this, but he also seems to want his readers to recognize conventions even as they are being used. "Plot,"

Burroughs said, "has always had the definite function of stage direction . . . And that will continue, but the new techniques, such as cutup, will involve much more of the total capacity of the observer"(*Paris Review* 157). Through these clear narrative moments that Burroughs peppers his texts with, his writing yields fairly easily to scholarly analysis. The cutups, on the other hand, do present the reader with a highly subjective, almost entrancing imagistic space in which analysis becomes painstaking, like a close reading of a modernist poem. It is single words, and the new ways that Burroughs yokes them together, that must be confronted when reading a *Nova* novel, rendering the text something like an image that is approached and retracted through a telephoto lens. As Burroughs pulls back from the text one final time in *The Ticket that Exploded,* pulling back from a final deluge of cutup in the chapter titled "silence to say goodbye," he once more addresses the subject of the cutup in straight narrative. The answer to the problem of collusive and thus corrupted language, he argues, must be dealt with by individuals, for "the techniques and experiments described here have been used and are being used by agencies official and non official without your awareness and very much to your disadvantage"(215). Burroughs's last words are a prescription:

> The first step is to isolate and cut association lines of the control machine carry a tape recorder with you and record all the ugliest stupidest things cut your ugly tapes in together speed up slow down play backwards inch the tape you will hear one ugly voice and see one ugly spirit is made of ugly old prerecordings the more you run the tapes through and cut them up the less power they will have cut the prerecordings into air into thin air(*The Ticket that Exploded* 217)

Conclusion

What did Dos Passos mean by "the raw structure of history" and why was he afraid that it might stamp us out? I think that his leftist bent suggests that he believed in such a thing as an abstract structure to history, perhaps a dialectical one. However, I also think that Dos Passos was deeply concerned with the machines that he saw churning out information, and by "machine" I refer to the new technologies that were beginning to produce information on a massive scale as well as the machines that were once the title of political conglomerations like Tammany Hall. Factions are the great threat to a democracy and, when they are in the business of packaging information, it is the job of what Dos Passos calls the "straight" writer to unpack. Although the CPI was certainly not the first example of a media machine in this country, it was perhaps the largest and most single-minded and for that reason alone Dos Passos had reason to fear it and confront it in all of its slogans and codes.

Burroughs, as the nephew of Ivy Lee and a member of the generation that was born during war and doomed to die during war, had equally good reason for a fear of power bordering on paranoia. But what Burroughs shows us is that our fears should not be invested in what he calls "surface manifestations." The political machines and their versions of news and history are dangerous, but so is an argument against them using their logic. Language is the basic medium of almost all human transactions and a static system of language inescapably perpetuates itself in larger transactions. Language, or "speech straight," is a resource available to any

writer who chooses to view it as such and those who do "dominate the machine of production, while the daydream artist is merely feeding the machine"(Dos Passos viii). "The whole point," Burroughs once said in an interview, "is I feel the machine should be eliminated. Now that it has served its purpose of alerting us to the dangers of machine control"(Hibbard 3). Of course, like so much of his satire, Burroughs's comment pays little heed to conventional wisdom concerning the intractability and irreversibility of technological evolution. Despite his cynicism and his occasional lapses into cyclical views of history, Burroughs constantly maintains hope that changes can be made. If *The Nova Trilogy* does nothing else, it shows readers how they can alter their consciousness and docility with scissors and sobriety.

In *Information Multiplicity*, John Johnston attempts to develop a lineage of authors who deal with "media assemblages." His focus is on Thomas Pynchon, Don Delillo, William Gaddis, Joseph McElroy, and William Gibson. However, he argues, "that trajectory begins with William Burroughs's machinic alternatives to writing conceived as representation or expression"(5). It is my hope that Dos Passos's place in this family is now apparent. Ever since he disaffiliated himself with other writers of the left at the end of the 1930s, Dos Passos's prominence as a major innovative figure in literature has diminished. For numerous reasons extraneous to the text of *U.S.A.*, and some internal issues such as instances of racist and misogynist language, Dos Passos's work is disappearing from literature courses. But if a deep and historical understanding of the manufacturing of information is important, and it definitely is, then Dos Passos belongs at the center of American

literary studies.

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