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Recalling All Active Agents by William S. Burroughs (1914-1997)

William S. Burroughs
(1914-1997)
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Excerpt from tape made in 1960 by Brion Gysin at BBC Studios in London, using BG's permutational technique.

Break Through in Grey Room is a collection of William S. Burroughs' speeches and cut-up recordings performed and recorded between 1960 and 1976. Some are actual pieces, and others are discussions of the pieces, such as "Origin and Theory of the Tape Cut-Ups," which he read at Boulder's Naropa University in 1976. Burroughs' incredibly detached voice only sounds better with age. He seems to exist between two worlds, and he constantly jumps back and forth from the conscious to the subconscious. In fact, one can hardly tell at any time which world it is that he inhabits. The bulk of the disc is consumed by one cut-up piece entitled "K-9 Was in Combat With the Alien Mind-Screens," which Burroughs claims was the result of writing as an art form, attempting to catch up to the advanced world of collage painting. This was one of Burroughs' earlier collaborations with Ian Sommerville. The Brion Gysin piece that Burroughs uses as a sample ("Recalling All Active Agents") is a brilliantly textured two-track recording that was made at the BBC studios in 1960 utilizing the drop-in method that Burroughs speaks about. This method entails a tape recorder recording a different player whilst randomly speeding up, slowing down, reversing, and advancing the second player. What occurs is a blubbery and blurry mess of words that surprisingly creates new sentences and phrases. Here Burroughs claims, "When you cut into the present the future leaks out." Other tracks are simply found sound field recordings. One such piece, "Jojouka," features Ornette Coleman playing in the hills of Morocco, recorded in January of 1973. This is a thoroughly interesting record of all of the types of recordings in which Burroughs took part in during his 87-year life, and serves as the perfect introduction to the tape experiments of the most intriguing of all of the beat writers.



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