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‘Turning her Over in the Flat of my Dreams’: Visuality, Cut-up and Irreality in the Work of Ann Quin

Abstract: Drawing together dreaming and cut-up in Ann Quin’s work, this article considers the textual juxtapositions of the story, ‘Tripticks’ (1968), the latterly developed novel, *Tripticks* (1972), and Quin’s explicit incorporation of two ‘cut-up dreams’ into the narrative of *Passages* (1969). In placing cut-up segments together, a relationship—and a narrative—emerges, although not necessarily a plot-centric one, for ‘[p]lot can diminish in a forest of effects and accidents’ (Quin 1968, ‘Tripticks’: 14). Examining Quin’s development of ‘causeless’ narrative, with recourse to both psychoanalytic and countercultural accounts of the dream, I contend that Quin uses the motif and aesthetics of the dream to explore issues of agency, and dislocation between subject and environment. While W.S. Burroughs stakes his interest in the dream as a basis for (visual) literary invention in *The Third Mind* in 1967, claiming to be directing his attention ‘outward’, Freud suggests in 1899 that we ‘build our way out into the dark’ in the interpretation of dreams (550). The cut-up functions by the same logic, capitalizing on unpredictability, on not knowing what will come next. While Quin’s cut-ups produce comedy through surprising juxtapositions, their fracturing of temporal and spatial relations, and elimination of causality, result in a somewhat nightmarish ‘reality’ for her depicted subjects, emphasizing entrapment within the dream world over the liberational qualities of dream favoured by Burroughs, narrativising the tension between freedom and constraint inherent in the cut-up form.

Keywords: Ann Quin, ‘Tripticks’, cut-up, collage, dream, irreality, visuality, *Passages*

Ann Quin's story, 'Tripticks', originally published in *Ambit* in 1968, formed her submission to the 'Drugs and the Creative Writer Competition' run by J. G. Ballard (then a co-editor of the magazine). Winning the competition, in her acceptance letter she jokes that the story was composed 'under my usual combination of nicotine, caffeine and of course, the birth pill I take—Orthonovin 2' (1968, 'Ambit': 41). Quin also notes here that, though she has 'never written under the influence of Pot, Peyote, Acid, Hash etc.', taking these did likely have an effect on her work—'open[ing] out a much wider possibility for my writing afterwards'—and that these substances 'are bound to have some effect on a writer's work, visual and psychological' (41). Quin's interest in narratives which are visual and hallucinatory forms the crux of the enquiry in this article, which draws together discussions of material literary experiments with the cut-up, and thinking about the nature of dream. Here, I consider Quin's interaction with psychoanalytical and countercultural notions of the dream, rather than offering a psychoanalytical reading of Quin's use of dream. Primarily, this is an article about the possibilities that dream might open for new avenues of study on Quin's writing; I will argue that the dream is important to Quin's oeuvre as a whole. I focus on the story version of 'Tripticks' rather than the 1972 novel version of the same name because of Quin's distinct interest in dream-narratives around the time of publication: 1968 for the story, and 1969 for Quin's *Passages*, which I discuss here too, albeit in less detail. I will also briefly discuss the novel, *Tripticks*, for important developments it makes upon the combination of dream—or nightmare—and cut-up. Jennifer Hodgson, editor of Quin's stories and fragments, writes that, '[s]tylistically, [Quin's stories] run the gamut from expressionist renditions that blur memory, perception and fantasy to Burroughsian cut/up and montage' (8); as I suggest here, these extremes come together in 'Tripticks'. Ultimately, Quin's use of the cut-up technique in 'Tripticks', to create dreamlike, surprising and often comedic juxtapositions, offers up hallucination as a mode of understanding reality rather than escaping from it.

W. S. Burroughs introduced the cut-up as a literary technique in 1967—citing Brion Gysin as the first practitioner of cut-up with language—in an interview reprinted in their co-authored work of 1978, *The Third Mind*. While Quin actively denies Burroughs as an influence,¹ there is some overlap in their thought about the cut-up, the opening up of narrative possibilities as well as, potentially, new pathways in the brain, the ways in which this hallucinatory narrative technique is somewhat similar to the experience of taking (certain) drugs for both, or to the experience of

1 John Hall's interview with Quin tells us that 'although the book [*Tripticks*] is dedicated to Alan and Carol Burns, it was not influenced by Burns (our own front-running paste man) or by Burroughs' (8).

dreaming; how all of these experiences go towards expanding the mind, have an 'outward' trajectory. However, where Quin's use of the cut-up differs dramatically from Burroughs's, as this article will show, is in the obstacles it identifies to 'breaking free' of the shackles of societal or material conventions. Burroughs's interview stakes his interest in the dream as a basis for (visual) literary invention: 'I am quite deliberately addressing myself to the whole area of what we call dreams. Precisely what is a dream? A certain juxtaposition of word and image'.² The emulation of the dream-state in text, then, could be achieved through placement, or juxtaposition, of 'certain' elements. Quin, too, was interested in dreams, writing to her publisher Marion Boyars while studying at Hillcroft College in 1973: 'I'm into the Gestalt method of analysing my dreams—wow they really turn out like small surreal plays'.³ These studies took place after both versions of 'Tripticks' had been published, but Quin's interest in her dreams as 'small surreal plays' might as well be describing her earlier novels such as *Berg* (1964) and *Three* (1966) which have a theatrical aspect to them, the reader in position as the audience, looking in as the events 'onstage' play out (quite literally at the ending of *Berg*). In 'Tripticks', on the other hand, the scenery is flattened: more like reading a comic strip than watching a play, an American road-trip narrative, in which the protagonist pursues his ex-wife and her new fiancé across a shifting but continuous landscape. Quin said that '[i]n 'Tripticks' I wanted to write about America, about it being a dream, about it having that landscape'; the novel, as Hall's 1972 interview with Quin relays, 'relies heavily on cut-ups from "Time," "Life," television commercials and Yankee sex and criminology pulp' (8). Conveying the dreamscape of America through such materials—of consumerism, pulp fiction and erotica—produces a suitably jarring, dislocated reading experience, unpredictable due to the mutability of the material. Quin's use of cut-up in 'Tripticks' results in surprising juxtapositions and a loss of causality—as in a dream or hallucination—suggesting a more widespread lack of agency on the parts of the represented, fragmented subjects, and the impossibility of meaningful intervention in a system evading any fixed sense of understanding.

2 Unpaginated source.

3 The interest in Gestalt psychology itself would be worth pursuing in further discussions of Quin's visuality, as a theory of visual perception concerning the way in which the human eye sees patterns and interprets complexity as simpler shapes.

Cut-up & Dream: 'Tripticks' 1

As Burroughs suggests, his use of the cut-up method approaches a dream-like narrative style, but also carries a mimetic aspect, as he describes our whole experience of the world through thought and observation as a cut-up: 'a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're

thinking of'. He also claims that '[a]ll writing is in fact cut-ups'. This conflation of dream, reality, writing and visuality is at the heart of the use of literary cut-up, which, as Burroughs notes, brings writing closer to the visual arts: 'The cut-up method brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years'. Even when it is text that is being cut up, the cutting lends a sense of visuality to the text, eliminating as it does the narrative qualities of causality and explanation. Collage, as with the cut-up, brings together previously disparate (visual) elements into a new relationship: the juxtaposition of the collage method describes a visual relationship, of things (seen) beside one another. As subsequent sentences of 'Tripticks' are not linked causally, or in any sensical or predictable way, but are rather juxtaposed—for example, 'I am being hunted by bear, mountain lions, elk and deer. Duck, pheasant, rabbit. Meanwhile I eat a toasted cheese hamburger' (9)—the effect is a conjuring of disparate images, a sort of collage in the mind of the reader. Marjorie Perloff points out that in French, collage carries idiomatic connotations of '[illicit] sexual union, two unrelated "items," being pasted or stuck together'. This illicit nature of juxtaposition, of things not looking how they're 'meant to' look, brings collage and cut-up close, aesthetically and materially, to dream. Similar to how, for Freud, dreams are the 'royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind' (604), cut-ups might in some sense be revelatory, providing their own in-roads into the unconscious. As Dada artist Tristan Tzara's instructions for creating a cut-up poem proclaim, '[t]he poem will resemble you [*i.e.* its creator]'. The use of readymade materials allows for potentially new areas of thought; at the same time, the artist maintains a certain amount of control over the arrangement. Burroughs did suggest that the cut-up could help us escape the rigidity of received concepts: 'Either-or thinking just is not accurate thinking. That's not the way things occur, and I feel the Aristotelian construct is one of the great shackles of Western civilization. Cut-ups are a movement toward breaking this down'.⁴ Cut-ups then, in Burroughs's view, have the potential to radically alter our systems of perception, opening us up to possibilities we might not otherwise be able to identify, while at the same time producing a more accurate representation of an already cut up reality.

There is a sense in which the dream, however, might be restrictive. Evan Thompson, in a book which draws together theories of consciousness from neuroscience, philosophy and meditation, describes the lack of agency associated with the dream state as follows:

In a dream, it's difficult to conceptualize and experience yourself as a self in the act of deciding (a volitional subject), a self in the act of attending

4 Freud says something similar about dreams: 'The alternative "either-or" cannot be expressed in dreams in any way whatever. Both of the alternatives are usually inserted in the text of the dream as though they were equally valid' (332). Like the cut-up and collage, dreams make potentially contradictory options co-present.

(an attentional subject), a self in the act of thinking (a cognitive subject), or a self in the grip of emotion (an affective subject). (137)

If the dreaming subject attempts to recount a dream, there is a fundamental distance which cannot be overcome, a situation integral to Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that the dream in telling is always re-told. As Jean-Paul Sartre puts it: 'As yet we know nothing of the dream, which is difficult to understand, since we can describe it only by using memory while awake'. 'Tripticks's (subtle) structure as dream/memory mirrors this split, where the unreliability of the latter reinforces the uncertainty of the former. Quin's use of the cut-up is a means of approaching the dream state in fictional narrative, where subjects might not seem very volitional or affective because their subjecthood (and ideas we might have about the stability of the subject, in terms of character consistency) is in large part determined by the source material, and the ways in which it comes together in the cut-up. For example, the method of juxtaposition without explanation (how Perloff describes the collage technique: 'juxtaposition replaces exposition') means we rarely receive motivations for a character's actions—lending the narrative the effect of a visual collage.

Quin's writing is now being read in relation to the visual arts and visual thinking—her secretarial work in an art school has been noted, as has her intensely visual way of writing, often impressionistic style, the influence of the *nouveau roman*, a genre obsessed with looking and 'camera-eye' perspective—and while the dreamlike qualities of Quin's writing are often mentioned, the level of Quin's engagement with dream as a structural principle has yet to be discussed.⁵ It is my contention that the visual and dreamlike qualities of Quin's writing are tied together, epitomized in her use of the cut-up. Carole Sweeney touches on the general dreamlike quality of Quin's writing, and how Quin was 'fascinated by the ways in which narrative could transform reality' (205), in her chapter on Quin in *Vagabond Fictions*, featuring many quotes from Quin where she mentions dreaming. One such extract is from 'Leaving School': 'I lived in a dream world and created dreams out of everyday situations until nothing ever seemed what it appeared to be' (Quin 2018: 17). Quin's concern for illusory appearances is evident from her first published novel *Berg*, which revolves around misread sight, the entire premise based on the disguise of the protagonist: both visibly, and anagrammatically as Greb.

Following this dreamlike troubling of boundaries and edges, immediately in 'Tripticks' the subject is split: the first line, 'I have many names' (9), indicates the centrality of the character's ego but the fractious nature of his identity, a play with 'I' reminiscent of the subject trouble in dreams.⁶ This is not to suggest that the character-narrator is meant to be

5 See Hodgson (2018) in which she notes Quin's secretarial work at the RCA, 'where she encountered the British pop art scene that was incubating there' (8). See also Alice Butler's 2013 essay, 'Ann Quin's night-time ink', where she discusses Quin as a writer of 'art-novels', drawing on Quin's correspondences with the visual arts.

6 Jean-Luc Nancy succinctly captures the dissolution of boundaries—of the borders around the 'self—that happens in sleep, with the line, 'I fall inside myself, to describe the experience of falling asleep (5).

asleep or dreaming, but that the dislocation of the dream state is used by Quin to convey a narrative descriptive of the landscape of late 1960s America, which Quin has identified as a dream. The singular 'I' which became 'many' is pluralized as 'they' in the second sentence—the many-named 'I'—following Simon S. Fox Jr. We are given particularities of time, place, temperature, and area in square miles—to signify a specificity of place but in a mode where the abundance of data has an obscuring rather than clarifying effect (we know 1,890 square miles are of water and we are in the Central Standard Time zone, but beyond that we are un-located). In this uncertain location, '[a]ll outdoor sports are possible. Deep sea sleeping, and angling for small game are favourite pastimes', the incongruity of pursuits lending the narration a sort of comedic and eccentric whimsy, a situation to which the quick shifts of vantage point and scene also contribute. 'Eyes fall away to 282 feet before sea level' does suggest a literalized result of '[d]eep sea sleeping'. Then, at the same time as being hunted, the fractured 'I' eats 'a toasted cheese hamburger', and surreally becomes the food: 'My lips are frenchfries teasing cole slaw fingers'. While 'Tripticks' may resist analysis—in the sense that its imagery and relations defy logical explanation and interpretation—the ways in which it approaches a dream state stylistically (not least through the dissolution of boundaries between 'self' and object: the 'I' becomes hamburger) suggest this resistance to meaning is largely the point. Importantly, it is resistant to meaning, not exactly rendering analysis impossible: the imagery may seem random, but the structures into which it fits are not. The list which finishes the first paragraph is preceded by the line '[r]anked according to value', which ambiguously refers to either the 'three wives' or the list of materials which follows, with the resultant suggestion that misogyny and capitalism run deep in the unconscious; the material available from which to produce narrative (the materials Quin cuts up) carries these value systems in it, so to speak. Many of the story's paragraphs descend into lists like this one, creating a sense of dwindling, perhaps nodding off, certainly trailing off that particular line of thinking, indicative of the impossibility of drawing the line to a logical and coherent close.

Julia Jordan, in *Oblique Strategies*, posits an 'erotics of uncertainty at the heart of [Quin's] writing', noting Quin's 'notion of subjectivity [which] is remarkably fluid and dispersed' (142). As I have indicated, the point Quin reaches with the cut-up is continuous with her earlier experiments, such as the shifting fields of pronouns and lack of delineation between characters (to varying degrees) in *Berg*, *Three* and *Passages*. While Jordan does mention the contribution of formal experiment with collage and cut-up to this picture of indeterminacy (141), she does not discuss *Tripticks* at length—though her consideration of the accident, and 'uncontrol', would be

most relevant (143): to both the authorial techniques and positioning of the ‘characters’. On *Tripticks*, Jordan does mention ‘[t]he novel’s dreamlike and fantastical atmosphere [which] conjures both her feelings towards America and her experiences with peyote’ (149). Indeed the ‘atmosphere’ of ‘Tripticks’ may be one of its strongest traits, due to the ways in which the text—fractured and chaotic as it is—frustrates coherent analysis. Nonia Williams calls *Tripticks* ‘the most exaggerated and problematic example of [Quin’s] inclusive, “derivative” method [...], the text which tests and strains the reading process even further’ (157), the culmination of Quin’s formal strategies which thwart formulation and categorization. The text continually performs its semantic instability, just as ‘[p]lot can diminish in a forest of effects and accidents’ (Quin 1968, ‘Tripticks’: 14). Effects without causes, and accidental juxtapositions, make judging authorial choice as difficult as determining character motivation. The text forces us to focus on effects, as we cannot expect a plot to manifest in this ‘forest’; we are limited to the interpretation of surfaces. As if interpreting a dream, we are not trying to make sense of the narrative but to attend to the different elements which appear, and the relationships between.

The dreamlike atmosphere of ‘Tripticks’ enhances the surreal qualities of suburban and commercial America, emphasizing its reproducibility and categorisability. Indeed, as Hodgson notes, Quin’s later work including ‘Tripticks’ is preoccupied by Pop Art’s ‘phantasmic vision of Amerika’ (9). Fittingly, then, the story merges an array of complicated marital relations (‘the fourth husband of my second wife’), the suggestion of suburbia (‘redwood roof timbers’, ‘garden pools’) with a host of rules and prohibitions (‘[n]o dogs’, cats on leash only), ‘cannibalism’ and ‘[p]icnicking’, ‘and a gun’, a nightmarish mixture of endless reproducibility (the mention of ‘[r]eproductions’, the numerical marital chains), and both latent and explicit violence, comically exaggerated (9). Personality, too, is depicted as a selection from a series of categories. The list of sought-after qualities in the protagonist’s ‘fantasy profile’ is comically exaggerated, long and contradictory: ‘Funny’, ‘Serious’, ‘Introverted’, ‘Extroverted’ (11). Following an equally eclectic ‘common interests’ profile (Pets, Pop Art, Ethics, E.S.P.), his special interest is listed as: ‘Living out other peoples’ fantasies’ (12). His ‘special interest’ thus alludes to both his fictional status, and his lack of agency (within a fictional world determined partially by the author, partially by chance). These lists serve the overall flattening of the representation; rather than the illusion of a ‘round’ character, we are given more of an ‘advertisement’ for a personality. The series of lists is followed immediately by the line, ‘[still], what have I managed to say?’ (12). The lack of substance suggested here—the emptiness of the linguistic content (signifiers count for little if constantly contradicting one another, if their relation

to one another nullifies rather than reveals meaning)—is reinforced by the subsequent statement that, ‘this is a performance of extraordinary charm and brilliant technique’ (12). Self-congratulatory, the text deflects from its own inexpressiveness: ‘what have I managed to say?’.

Cut-up Dream: Passages

While ‘Tripticks’ is replete with suggestively, even conceptually, dreamlike qualities, Quin engages more directly with dreaming—as a structural principle and a narrative device—in her 1969 novel, *Passages*. Another pursuit narrative,⁷ *Passages* takes place in a shifting European landscape, in which a man and woman search for the woman’s lost brother. Sleep and dreams are woven into the narrative: ‘Before sleep. After sleep. In dreams. The dream settles into spaces’ (26); ‘Almost impossible to sleep; plagued by dreams as if they were carved on me, on a sheet of metal’ (34). Beyond being thematised, dreams structure the narrative of *Passages*, as they ‘structure the day[s]’ of the characters (36), in the sense that the narrative does not offer definitive information, epitomized from the outset in what is withheld about the story: ‘They say there’s every chance [that my brother is dead]. No chance at all’ (5). Formally, the text is divided into two styles, one for each of the characters, shapeshifting between compositional processes mimicking painting and sculpture, visual poetry, ekphrasis; the text is infused with the visual. Into the narrative are incorporated dreams, in the male character’s section (the female character’s section takes place largely in memory), two labelled explicitly as ‘cut-up dream [s]’ (53, 102–3). I will focus here on the first two consecutive dreams where one is labelled a cut-up. Fundamentally, because of the closeness of the cut-up technique to the imagery in dreams, the ‘original’ dream text might be thought of as already cut up, because of the disparate or illicit pairings it makes:

A glass stairway I climb into the sky, changes into a bank of snow. I collapse. My body covered by fish scales, fins, tails, I try picking off. I swim in snow. I am a star fish. [...] I float between stars, between the sun and moon. [...] I plunge into water. It is ice. (52)

Changes of state figure highly, in fitting with the rest of *Passages*, which shifts just as fluidly between styles, characters, interiority and exteriority, memory and present, so that the dream does not differ materially from the form of the novel, or rather the dream informs the way the novel is composed. Much like ‘Tripticks’, the dream state incorporates vast shifts

7 Describing the dream state, Thompson writes how ‘emotions intensify—sometimes fear, anxiety, or anger; sometimes joy and elation—while basic behaviours such as seeking and fleeing often dominate what we do’ (136).

in scale and location: from outer space to underwater (aquatic landscapes feature prominently in Quin's dream-narratives). Sometimes perception lags a bit behind, or else the changes of state occur more rapidly than can be acknowledged, or there are gaps in the recollection, all of which are appropriate to the dream-state—'I plunge into water. It is ice'—mirroring some of the disorientation of the reading experience. One page later, the dream is reproduced with the title 'cut-up dream':

I am walking in a glass stairway. I climb into the sky, mother's grave. [...] I float between stars, between ladders. I am pursued by the sun and moon. [...] The sun and moon beat their wings on my head. They have been blotted out by a thousand and one centipedes, feet, my genitals. (53)

The cut-up dream enlarges upon the original (I have not reproduced the dreams in their entirety here); in fact it seems to splice the 'original' dream in this pairing with a previous dream on page 35, forming new combinations within set parameters, a literalized version of the oblique statements threaded throughout the narrative, such as 'excess within limitation' (93), or '[a] new order of space' (112). The two cut-up dreams in *Passages* seem to follow this pattern, each splicing together two previous dreams to make a third: a manufactured version of the type of text the dreams create. A suggestive marginal comment in the male character's section suggests that this practice may reinforce the text's play with duality, it being generally unclear whether the characters are separate subjects, or facets of one personality: 'Dream related 1st and 2nd consciousness' (36). The above cut-up dream is followed by the line, 'Fold-in time/order/space', the 'fold-in' being a similar technique also outlined by Burroughs, where folds are made in a page so that the outer parts of the lines come to meet in the centre, forming new combinations of words. Quin thus refers explicitly to material-textual experiments, and the compositional technique used to form both 'Tripticks' and *Passages*. The key point is that the cut-up appears no more or less dreamlike than the original text. As Burroughs makes claims for reality already being a cut-up, Quin draws focus onto how reality is already dreamlike, using the cut-up to represent a situation in which subjects do not experience much clarity or agency.

While the original dream is already somewhat divorced from context, the cut-up dream furthers this separation; Quin is consciously playing with the closeness of cut-up to dream, using one form to reinforce the other. The lack of specific expression achieved by Quin's dreams here is important to the aesthetic of *Passages*, and further related to Freud's writing on dreams, which he compares materially to the 'plastic arts of

painting and sculpture' in terms of their 'limitation', lacking speech as dreams do, that is, lacking explanation; because the material manipulated by both is visual, they lack the expressive capacity of poetry or other verbal media (328-9). The cut-up achieves a similar effect, utilizing the visual quality of juxtaposition, of placing items side-by-side rather than in linear, causal arrangement. In dreaming, for Freud, 'the causal relation is not represented at all but is lost in the confusion of elements which inevitably occurs in the process of dreaming' (332). Quin, then, turns to both visuality and dream (and the two are indeed linked, as in Freud's account)—via the cut-up—specifically because of '[t]he incapacity of dreams to express things', as Freud says (328), that is to produce definitive logical relationships, for example between causes and effects.

Mirage & Memory: 'Tripticks' 2

While 'Tripticks' does not actively represent dreaming, much of the story does take place in the protagonist's memory, and these memories have a daydream-like, hallucinatory, even at points hypnagogic, quality. The surreal present, in which Si is pursuing his ex-wife, is interspersed with remembered segments of his relationship with Lucinda. About half way through the story, the protagonist loses sight of Lucinda and fiancé in 'the rising dust. Then dream shapes formed out of the desert' (12). Undeterred by these mirage images, the protagonist keeps driving, absorbed in '[m]emories held together by the thinnest of threads, nevertheless self-contained and delicious / sunny / boisterous / ironic' (12)—the list suggesting as usual a weakening of connection, trailing off or leading us in new directions, more so as the story goes on. While the protagonist is absorbed in memory, 'all tonality pink, soft and glowing' (13), the text haphazardly shifts back and forth, the direction of pursuit continually reversed. Once turned around, the protagonist muses: 'This is the sin of sins against an awkward power structure, I thought, the refusal really to take it seriously' (13), referring presumably to the triangular power relationship at the centre of the story, him in pursuit of Lucinda and her fiancé. But the phrasing has wider resonances: through not committing to narrative direction, a linear plot with cause and effect, the text performs a similar refusal, the 'awkward power structure' being precisely this imposition of linearity and causality onto a chaotic, sometimes nonsensical, reality. It is unclear from 'Tripticks' whether it is the narrator—arrogant, macho, flippant—who is not taking the power structures seriously, or whether it is the perspective of the text itself, composed of repurposed textual fragments removed from their original 'frames' or contexts for comedic purpose.

Notably, to not take the structure seriously is a ‘sin of sins’; it doesn’t necessarily change anything. It is often the case that Quin’s narratives accommodate both humour and seriousness at once; here, the text seems to make quite a measured statement about the possibility for resistance by these methods. The line is followed immediately by the thought that, ‘[h]owever I still had the gun’, indicating that if his refusal to take them seriously is not enough, he plans to kill them.

Still in the protagonist’s memory of his relationship with Lucinda, conforming to their respective heterosexual roles, he practices many hobbies such as ‘photography’, ‘athletics’ and ‘stocks and shares’, while Lucinda occupies a traditional, much less active, gendered role, knitting clothes for a future child (and reproducing these conventions of binary gender, in ‘pink and blue baby outfits’) while watching television. She sleeps, feels sick, ‘headachey during the day’, while he ‘go[es] for long car trips, [...] get[s] drunk for several days’ (14). Si moves on to remember beds where he and Lucinda ‘played our games’; in his memory he is ‘[t]urning her over in the flat of my dreams’, a simultaneous allusion to the daydream-like nature of his reverie as he drives through the desert, and also the consumerist fantasy of property-ownership, where the ‘flat of my dreams’ is his ideal flat, perhaps the payoff of his interest in ‘stocks and shares’ (16). His sexual fantasies and dreams of economic success merge with the ‘American Dream’ of self-made self-sufficiency, total freedom and autonomy. A cruel joke, therefore, that his world is composed of textual fragments, pieced together, the parameters for his existence pre-determined, recycled, permitting surprising and novel avenues but nothing really new. The ‘flat’ of the article title thus encompasses several things: Si’s dream flat as mentioned above, the ‘flatness’ of the dream-world where agency and volition are restricted, and the flattening effect of visual collage which removes items from their original contexts and pastes them onto the same flat surface, eliminating spatial depth as the cut-up effect eliminates causal explanation.⁸

Despite any ‘flatness’ to Si’s experience, his mind is described as a ‘wilderness’, as he refers to ‘[a]n acre of grotesquely knotted thoughts, accessible only by foot or horse-back’ (16).⁹ The suggestion is of depth, interiority, and a level of the unconscious inaccessible by conventional (conscious) means. The striking emphasis on memory, thought and the mind at the end of the story seems to form a way of narratively drawing things together, not necessarily tying up loose ends, but of making some sense of what has come before, as being the idiosyncratic movements of an individual mind. The story ends finally in memory, with Si’s plan/fantasy to kill the couple never materializing:

8 This ‘flattening’ effect was employed by Pop Artists too of course, largely through the replacement of detailed background with block colour (see Pauline Boty, Peter Blake, Eduardo Paolozzi).

9 An image calling to mind the surrealist painter René Magritte’s work, *The Blank Signature*, of 1965.

It was about that time I guess, due to subnormal daily activities the content of dreams became so dense that the only life within them consisted of small briny shrimp and the pupae of the ephyda fly [...]. Digging below the surface the continuous bucket line operated 24 hours a day [...] and I viewed the dredge, as I continue to do so, from a foreign land. (16)

This return to the subject matter of dream at the end, reminds us that the story's foundations are never solid, the ground always shifting (similarly to the style of *Passages*). Here, Si's unusual daily activities (which would be more usual in dreams, perhaps) result in his dreams becoming so dense—becoming also an ocean, at depths at which not much life can survive. Continually '[d]igging below the surface' has the result of dredging up the past, as has been the preoccupation of much of this story, the mind once again merging with imagery of a body of water, the dredge being an apparatus used to drag material from the bed or a river or sea. We thus finish with an image of the physical aspects of memory recollection: as if the memories are material to be (re)collected, mimicked in the process of collecting textual sources, cutting, arranging, pasting and writing into, that are the methods of the literary cut-up.

This is where the 'outward' movement of Burrough's use of the cut-up, and Freud's conception of the dream, come together. As Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that 'we have been obliged to build our way out into the dark' (550), so Burroughs claims to be directing his attention 'outwards':

What I want to do is to learn to see more of what's out there, to look outside, to achieve as far as possible a complete awareness of surroundings. Beckett wants to go inward. [...] I am aimed in the other direction: outward. (unpag.)

Quin's use of the cut-up draws together these threads of materiality, building, fiction and dreaming, moving both 'outwards' in the sense that the compositional technique results in new and surprising juxtapositions and revelations, and 'inwards' in the sense that the cut-up might have some resemblance to dream. However, Quin's use of the cut-up and dreamlike aesthetic seem to actively deny such a thing as the 'complete awareness of surroundings' that Burroughs describes. In fact, Quin capitalizes on the 'inexpressive' qualities of the dream to depict scenarios where characters have trouble seeing, or acting on, the worlds around them. While the cut-ups provide new pathways, images and scenarios—a sort of freedom within constraint—there is a sense of restriction for the characters or

consciousnesses represented: there is only so much they can do when their actions are to a certain extent determined by the source material, with a certain amount of authorial intervention. This ‘stuckness’ is most clearly represented at the ending of the novel version of *Tripticks*, which takes quite a different turn to the story version, though the plot overall remains roughly the same.

Nightmare: Tripticks

Written several years after ‘Tripticks’, the 1972 novel provides a longer account of the protagonist’s chaotic road-trip across America, in which the ‘X-wives’ are more multiple, and to which are added Carol Annand’s illustrations. These images are presented in several different illustrative styles, akin to the collage-like, composite nature of the text. Offering a more literal version than the story ‘Tripticks’ of Burrough’s dream-directed fiction—as ‘[a] certain juxtaposition of text and image’—*Tripticks* is further fractured by the insertion of these images: sometimes whole page inserts (11, 60), sometimes images interspersed with the text (7, 121), sometimes comic-like strips along the top or bottom edge of the page (28, 92), running alongside the text akin to a television set flickering in the background. The opening page of the novel begins with imagery, featuring more image than text, a combination of panels evoking erotica or pornography, close-up facial features, co-ordinates, distorted faces and—in larger format—what seems to be a double portrait of the protagonist, the two faces identical except for one is shaded and one is solely an outline, a visual indication of his fractured multiplicity. The text opens: ‘I have many names. Many faces. At the moment my No. 1 X-wife and her schoolboy gigolo are following a particularity of flesh attired in a grey suit and button-down Brooks Brothers shirt’ (7). In picturing the protagonist—and adding the ‘many faces’ to the ‘many names’ of the original story text—the novel version exerts a certain amount of control over the visualization of the story elements; and generically, the images add the suggestion of detective fiction, with the depiction of protagonist in sunglasses and trench, the mysterious provocativeness of the panel contents. In general the novel takes further, to use Hodgson’s phrase again, ‘Pop’s phantasmic vision of Amerika’ (9), even concerning its dream content, as evidenced on the second page: ‘If you come filled with dreams it may happen that your dream changes about every 15 minutes’ (Quin 2002: 8). Referencing an expression supposedly inspired by Andy Warhol’s phrase, ‘[i]n the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes’ (qtd. in Sommerlad), the meaning of the original transmutes to evoke the stunted

attention span of the consumerist subject: even the consumption of dreams has increased in volume and rapidity.

The end of the novel, which is to be my brief (and final) focus here, solidifies the additional nightmarish aspects, over and above the nightmare normativity of capitalist and suburban America in 'Tripticks'. Towards the end, the protagonist's musings on reality—which give the text an air of theory—become heightened: he pays attention 'to each element of the situation in an attempt at moment-for-moment truth. [...] Dissolving false and ideological constructs about the world and letting reality emerge as it really is' (191). His search for truth sounds somewhat similar to Burroughs's claims that the cut-up more accurately approaches the representation of reality (if everything is in fact a cut-up). And as, for Tzara, the cut-up poem resembles its composer, cut-ups 'reveal' in the same way that dreams do (for Freud, in any case, dreams reveal as much about the unconscious as it is possible to discern). Quin's use of the cut-up similarly 'reveals' something about the positional possibilities for the subject, as exemplified in the novel's closing lines:

I discovered a breathing space, but a space before the scream inside me was working itself loose. A scream that came from a long series of emotional changes. Fear for safety and sanity, helplessness, frustration, and a desperate need to break out into a stream of verbal images. The pulpit could become an extension of my voice, my skin, my dreams. [...] I opened my mouth, but no words. Only the words of others I saw, like ads, texts, psalms, from those who had attempted to persuade me into their systems. A power I did not want to possess. The Inquisition. (191–2)

The 'scream inside' which stems from fundamental fears and frustrations seems to offer the protagonist a potential outlet for expression, and thus an extension of various aspects of his 'self', conscious and unconscious: vocal, bodily and ideational. However, in a decidedly dream-like manner, his attempts to speak are thwarted (calling to mind Freud's inexpressive capacities of dreams), and he finds himself instead reproducing the 'words of others' in visual form, 'like ads, texts, psalms' (in this flattened postmodern landscape, advertisements and Biblical songs are all one). The power granted to him by this incorporation into systems seems to be the power of conformity, with '[t]he Inquisition' suggesting the heresy of non-conformity in the face of these 'systems'. Thus, at the end of *Tripticks* the protagonist displays an incapacity to act in the face of the restrictions imposed on him, textually and socially: as the cut-up narrative can only go where the source material permits, or the dreaming

subject can only act in the ways the dream permits. In the narrative of *Tripticks*—in which the cut-up subject is on one level a literalisation of the post-structuralist subject composed of texts—the protagonist struggles to deviate from normative standards or structures.

Quin's use of cut-up isn't always expansive, freeing and mind-opening in the ways that Burroughs wants his to be; although in terms of opening up new pathways for narrative and techniques of fiction, Quin's cut-ups can certainly be deemed innovative. Like Beckett in Burroughs's account, however, Quin often delves inwards, using the cut-up specifically to explore the barriers one might experience to Burroughs's sense of total understanding and clear vision. Contrary to Burroughs's sense of what the dream can do for fiction, the way Quin's cut-ups might be identified with dream is in the sense that the subjects she represents are trapped in a world without agency, volition or cognition (to loop back to Thompson's description of the dream-subject). This suggests the usefulness of dream thinking more widely to Quin's work in which subjects are often trapped, unable to act: Berg because inept, S in *Three* because dead, the characters in *Passages* because mutable and ungraspable, the protagonist of 'Tripticks'/*Tripticks* because unreal, fragmented, and overtly textual. While 'Tripticks'/*Tripticks* does not depict a consciousness dreaming, it has something of the limitations of a dreaming consciousness which, as Sartre says, 'cannot perceive' because it is in the midst of imaging a dream world which it cannot step outside of: 'what characterizes the consciousness that dreams is that it has lost the very notion of reality'. Quin uses this dream-like state in fiction to depict a world where the 'real' is not something to be held onto, where the transition between dream, and memory, and wherever this 'real' may reside, is fluid and unmarked.

Conclusion

I have argued that Quin uses a dreamlike aesthetic to signal a lack of agency and volition on the parts of her depicted subjects. Quin specifically employs the cut-up—for its elimination of causality, depth and explanation—to portray dream and hallucination as modes of understanding a reality which often seems nonsensical or unreal. This is to say, the dream state can account analogously for the ways in which reality evades sense, seems beyond logical understanding or intervention. Quin's use of the cut-up technique displays some overlaps with Burroughs's thinking but differs dramatically in effect, in the sense that the dream state for Quin is not necessarily liberating, as it is for Burroughs. Quin's anecdotal use of the dream might help to illustrate this. On finishing *Berg*, she writes:

‘The dream had been realized, but reading what I had written seemed like someone else’s dream’ (2018: 23–4). The dream, for Quin, evokes a sense of distance, misalignment, lack of control or incapacity for expression, pervasive qualities in Quin’s writing on the whole: the loosening of connections, the randomness of juxtapositions, the identity with multiple selves and objects, shapeshifting of identities, states, scenes and styles. While Quin’s interaction with antipsychiatry and psychoanalysis has been explored by many of her critics, the dream (in these frameworks and beyond) has the potential to open up new avenues on Quin’s experiments with the fictional ‘self’. In ‘Tripticks’, *Passages* and *Tripticks*, Quin does not always separate the dream state from waking or reality. In fact, Quin uses dreamlike narrative techniques like the cut-up to portray a somewhat dislocated sense of reality—descriptive of her experience of America in ‘Tripticks’—on the parts of her characters, where agency is compromised, and autonomy not exactly possible.

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