

## Eating the Real (Merrill's Thesis on *Naked Lunch*)

Contrary to the affirmative American court censorship rulings of the 1960s, William S. Burroughs' 1959 *Naked Lunch* has no redeeming social value. The novel, contrariwise, works to demystify the fundamental fantasy structuring and validating various social "realities" and imagined communities, using the obscene, the monstrous, and the science-fiction as tools to dismantle every appearance of normality or benevolent image of social ordering. The novel's content resists domestication: death by hanging for sexual release; addictive sexual practices with speaking, non-human beings; multiplying and mutating erogenous zones. High modernism vaunts its experimental form as representing the present more truthfully than would be possible with conventional narrative, sometimes even presenting the promise of utopia. *Naked Lunch* abnegates such fidelity, de-fetishizing modernist form through narrative discontinuities, interchangeable characters, unmotivated shifts of perspective, and enforced randomness: "You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point . . . I have written many prefaces. They atrophy and amputate spontaneous." The novel aligns psychoanalysis with other modern social-control mechanisms; however, it appears that North American ego psychology, which would teach the subject how to conform to social reality, is a specific target of satire. *Naked Lunch's* assault on the ego's imaginary identifications and its conformities to our culture's narratives anticipates the therapeutic aims of later Lacanian psychoanalysis, which focuses on having the analysand transverse her or his fundamental fantasy. Even the most outrageous sexual violence turns out in this novel to be only the representation of a representation. The nakedness in *Naked Lunch* is not a direct view of unmediated external reality, but subjectivity stripped bare to expose its fantasmatic accoutrements. Anything but pleasing, the novel turns a dark mirror on our aesthetic consumption.