Abstract: In the early 1960s Brion Gysin, while experimenting in various genres and media, “re-invented” the cut-up technique that first had appeared in the 1910-1920s in Dadaists art practices. The accidental selection of texts’ or visuals’ fragments and the randomness in their combination in cut-ups were aimed to represent multiple experiences occupying the human mind. Methodologically I draw upon “natural” narratology developed by Monika Fludernik, who redefines narrativity in terms of experientiality. Correspondingly, cut-up technique can be regarded as a means of representing human perception and other mental processes (unobservable directly), especially by mapping the simultaneity of external observations and internal reflections that exist in constant relationships between minds and their environments. The paper brings into correlation the enactivist idea of cognition without content, elaborated by Daniel D. Hutto and Eric Myin, with the idea that cut-up narratives in a sense also have no content. As there are no consistent and coherent story in cut-ups, there could be difficult for the reader to produce a clear mental representation of what is happening in the text. My paper proposes a new reading of texts that initially seem to be uncommunicative.

Keywords: Cut-ups, Experimental prose, Representation of mind, Cognitive narratology, Enactivism

1 Introduction

At the end of the 1950s, Brion Gysin unwittingly “reinvented” the cut-up method, a technique proposed by Tristan Tzara in the 1920s. Counted as Gysin’s greatest artistic innovation, the cut-up method is an aesthetic strategy aimed at composing of a work of art from fragments that were found or literally cut out of already existing texts or visuals. Gysin was a fountain of creativity in many art forms:
painting, collage, music, sound poetry, performance, multimedia works. At the same time, he had experimented with, as Laura Hoptman (2010: 59) puts it, “something more ineffable that might be called ‘perception’”. Gysin’s “invention” of cut-ups, however, was quite in tune with contemporary processes in literature. In the 1960s, a type of prose that uses various forms of the cut-up/montage technique that had appeared earlier in the 1920s in the works of Dadaists emerged again. Surprisingly, such works appeared simultaneously in various cultures even without direct contact or influence between their authors. Many writers, such as Gysin’s friend and collaborator William S. Burroughs, Alan Burns, Christine Brooke-Rose, and Samuel Beckett used the technique temporarily, from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s as experiments.

This paper explores Brion Gysin’s cut-up writings of the early 1960s alongside his paintings. The art experiments of Brion Gysin are chosen as a case study because it was his reinvention of cut-ups in the 1960s that started the influential trend which can be traced in a wide variety of art forms and media (visual art and literary narrative for instance). This aspect emphasizes the specificity and universality of the method, that was to become of great importance in cultural production. I seek to demonstrate that although these cultural products used different codes, they have much in common in how they narrativize and make sense of human experience. H. Porter Abbott (2008: 13) defines narrative as “the representation of events or a series of events” as opposed to a description, exposition argument or lyric. “The capacity to represent an event, either in words, or in some other way, is the key gift and it produces the building blocks out of which all the more complex forms are built.” (my emphasis) Abbott (2008: 15) is of opinion that narrative is a mediated story – by a voice, a style of writing, actor’s representations – and is involved in re-presentation. So that what one calls the story is something constructed. Johnathan Culler calls it the “double logic” of narrative, since at the same time story appears both to precede and to come after the narrative discourse. “Before the narrative discourse is expressed, there is no story” (cf. Culler 1981: 169–187) One may suggest that there are no pre-existing stories in cut-ups, that they evocate human experience/mental functioning at the very moment they were produced. But at the same time, as a reader sees them, as words on paper, she re-enacts what they may represent. The specificity is, that what is represented here is not a story but a discourse of human experience. The paper treats cut-ups writings as narratives of human experience, if by “narrative” to understand the “representation of mental functioning” (Palmer 2004, Palmer 2010), or “quasi mimetic evocation of real life experience” (Fludernik 1996).

The paper describes cut-up experiments within their historical contexts and analyses their major features and functions by juxtaposing Gysin’s and his
colleagues’ declarations and narrative strategies. I focus on interconnections between writing and painting and compare the ways in which both practices make sense of experience. But how do these practices understand human experience? And how does acknowledging that our minds are coupled with the environment, the body, and other minds enrich our understanding of experimental montage prose? These procedures and considerations form the basis of my discussion of some cognitive narratological approaches to the study of fictional mental functioning and philosophical reflections on how the mind works. To reassess these questions, I suggest correlating the radical idea of cognition without content (Hutto and Myin 2012, Hutto and Myin 2017) with the fact that cut-up narratives do not have content if by ‘content’ we understand a consistent ‘story’, a ‘plot’ derived from the work of art. Because there isn’t a coherent story in cut-ups, it could be difficult for the reader to produce a clear image or mental representation of what is happening in the text. To achieve this goal, I will establish demonstrable correlations between the cut-ups as object, or a result of the writing, and the cut-ups as device, that is, as a way of writing which simultaneously reflects the writing process and its results as a never-ending work-in-progress.

2 Representation of mind in experimental prose

Earlier accounts of experimental cut-up prose (e.g. Lydenberg 1987; Fahrer 2009; Robertson 2011) analyzed history and theory of cut-ups putting them within the frames of avant-garde and postmodernist paradigms, within historical contexts of their literary predecessors and their actual political connotations, their techniques of writing, modes of expression and communication. They studied the way cut-ups were used as narrative method, or a means of breaking narrative, undermining authority, warning the readers about the instability of words’ meanings. Cut-ups were subject to the thematical and intertextual analysis. I take the perspective of cognitive narratological studies. These studies do not build a unified theory or consistent approach within a single framework, but rather, offer several areas of research hypotheses about how real minds work support, enrich and help in understanding fictional minds (e.g. Palmer 2004; Zunshine 2006; Herman 2009, Herman 2010 and Herman 2011a; Bernaerts et al 2013; Caracciolo 2014). My paper focuses on opportunities for narrative analysis that provide enactivist approaches with the idea that cognition and mental functioning occur in the interaction with the body and its environments. In their seminal book, Varela, Rosch and Thompson (1991: 172–173) propose speaking about the ‘co-dependent arising’ of the subject and object of cognition. It is through the interac-
tion between the individuals and the environment that the individuals and their environment constitute themselves as such. As they posit it: “by using the term embodied we mean to highlight two points: first that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological and cultural context”.

On the one hand, in the scholarly literature, representations of the mind as a base for narrative construction are mainly studied with the help of analysis of minds (thematical, the what of mind representation) of a character or a narrator in prose (e.g.: Alber 2002; Bernaerts 2014); alternatively, researchers have studied how representational narrative techniques change historically (e.g. Herman 2011b). On the other hand, there are explorations of readers’ perceptions and ‘processings’ of literary work that inquire into why and how people read fiction (Zunshine 2006; Caracciolo 2014). My suggestion is to analyse cut-ups to show how such experimental texts may represent mental functioning on the level of discourse, rather than on a thematic one. The notion of ‘narrative’ is applied to the cut-ups as a typological, comparative concept intended to capture texts’ structures, functions, etc., in contrast to a classifying concept explicating a kind of texts (for example, description). I proceed from the premise that the major feature of cut-ups is the representation of mind(s) embedded in and interacting with their environments. The key-concept in narrative’s definition of cut-ups is not event, but experience as represented there. This opportunity is given within the framework of Monika Fludernik’s conception of experientiality that presents text’s functions rather than its features: “Narrativity can emerge from the experiential portrayal of dynamic event sequences which are already configured emotively and evaluatively, but it can also consist in the experiential depiction of human consciousness tout court.” (Fludernik 1996: 30)

I will describe the levels and principles of this representation. The corresponding question here is that of mimesis, or what exactly is represented? “Fictional mental functioning,” as Alan Palmer (2004) defines it, can be treated thematically on the level of the story and functionally on the discourse level. But what is to be done, if most of the narrative information is missed? How should one construct mental states in such cases? And whose mental states should they be? Should they be multiply embedded minds or a “complex amalgamation of dynamically interacting emotions and cognitions”? As Daniel Hutto and Erik Myin state in their book Radicalizing enactivism (2012), a philosophical manifesto of the radical form of embodied cognition, most humans’ actions and experiences are to be understood as dynamic interactions within their environments. Nevertheless today, they continue, the mainstream in cognitive science is still com-
mitted to content-based information processing’s account of mind, a representa-
tionalist view of the mind. These approaches suppose that the mind can be
reduced to disembodied mental representations which are detached from their
environments. Mental representations might come in a wide variety of forms:
they might be images, schemas, symbols, models, sentences, maps, etc. Enactive
approaches in their turn question the divide between what is mindless, disposi-
tional and behavioural, and what is properly mental, representational, inten-
tional and phenomenal. Enactivism is inspired by the idea that the embodied
activities of living beings provide the appropriate model for understanding minds
(Hutto and Myin 2012: 4). My suggestion is to project this view on the interpreta-
tion of cut-up prose and visual experiments of Brion Gysin. And to analyse them
as a representation of dynamic interactions of humans with their environments,
rather than disembodied representations of any stories, images or situations. I
would suggest that the object of representation is radically changed here (in
comparison to the conventional prose): in cut-ups we do not have events but
experiences of events.

Furthermore, Hutto and Myin problematize the thesis that cognition involves
content. They argue that there can be intentionally-directed cognition and even
perceptual experience without content. The authors stress that not all activity
requires individuals to construct representations of their worlds. This argument
is based on the ideas claiming that the perceived world is constructed through
complex patterns of sensorimotor activity (Varela et al, 1991: 164). Hutto and
Myin (2012: 13) state that “our most elementary ways of engaging with the world
and others – including our basic forms of perception and perceptual experience –
are mindful in the sense of being phenomenally charged and intentionally
directed, despite being non-representational and content-free”. There are plenty
of conceptions of what constitutes a mental representation. However, it is mainly
characterized as a structure which possesses a property, or a combination of
properties, and resembles some aspects of the environment. It is used in con-
temporary philosophy and cognitive science as an umbrella term to include not
only pictures and maps but also words, sentences, concepts, indeed virtually
everything that is a vehicle for intentionality, i.e. anything that stands for
‘means’, ‘refers to’, or ‘is about’ something (Rey 2015: 171). Radically enactive
account of cognition rejects the idea that representational content is an inherent
feature of the intentional or phenomenal. Basic forms of cognition that lie at the
roots of cognition might be intentional (targeted) but not intensional (as being
specified under a descriptive mode of presentation). “Acts of perceptual, motor,
or perceptuo-motor cognition – chasing and grasping a swirling leaf – are
directed towards objects and states of affair [...] yet without representing them”
(Hutto and Myin 2015: 62).
It may seem that the most important and impressive feature of a cut-up work is its formal specifics; hence, it may be and often is compared to abstract art. It may appear that these complex relationships of forms, lines and spots, as in abstract painting, or of words, sentences and senses, as in abstract writing, move to the background in meaning construction of cut-ups. What is crucial here, however, is the representation of the specifics of mental processes, such as perception and imagination. Literature is always about content because its medium is language, and language operates with contentful representations. According to Hutto and Myin, language expressions that have truth conditions in certain contexts of use are clear cases of contentful representations. But what do we have in cut-up prose? Perhaps the goal of cut-ups is to represent the inconceivable, because the object of this representation does not have (representational) content? It turns out that the goal of cut-ups may be to represent a non-representational way of grasping reality — perceiving reality, the processes of perception of an object rather than specific objects or subjects. This method of cultural production attempts to produce the concept, the image, the narration of something without representational content.

Enactive approach to narrative in contrast to the text-centered approaches is concerned with interactions between the organism and its environment, the embodied nature of such interactions (Caracciolo 2014: 16–20). Cognition therefore is inseparable from the subject’s body and from the context in which it is situated. Enactivists have focused on activities like perception and action, whose relationship with the body is obvious. However, even higher-order mental capacities such as conceptualization and language are now associated with embodiment, often through the mediation of perception. Marco Caracciolo (2014: 20) speaks on the role of the image schemata like “containment”, “source – path – goal”, “center – periphery”, “balance”, “link” which enable us to handle abstract concepts. In relaying the narrative (events?) and shaping them in the process of reading, non-spatial, highly abstract compositions of textual fragments, random arrangements of words, meaningless to conventional readings, can be transformed into the spatial and bodily activity. Relationships between fragments may correlate to an implied subject interacts with the environment.

3 Cut-ups as a literary form and device

Since their appearance in the 1910-1920s, cut-ups (generally understood as fragmented and montage prose) have earned increasing popularity, but they still remain an experimental and marginal practice. William Burroughs, renowned as a proponent of cut-ups in the 1960s, supposed them to be “a weapon and a pre-
existing condition” for the contemporary culture. Cut-ups are not always distinguished from other artistic techniques like collage for instance; however, cut-ups are specific in method (See Fahrer 2009: 18). The accidental quality of the selection of different fragments and the randomness in their combination were the predominant compositional principles formulated by the Dadaists. Historically, the simultaneity of multiple impressions and experiences pelting and occupying the human mind was one of the most important aspects of modern life as defined by Futurists, the forerunners of the Dadaists who “invented” the technique. The Futurists tried to represent the simultaneity of experience, presenting all the sensations that can be perceived or imagined at a given moment (Berghaus 2000: 280). The Dadaists, who did not believe in the stability of the universe, or in finding harmony behind chaos, attempted to free their artistic production from the rules of reason by welcoming the random factor into the creative act itself (Watt 1975: 5). In the year 1920, Tristan Tzara wrote down a kind of recipe for making a Dada poem (Tzara 1978: 44). His idea was to grasp the moment when everything was untouched by the mind's inevitable imposition of order. These ideas of free creativity were evolved by Surrealists, with their group Gysin was associated in the 1930s. Surrealists were interested in the unconscious and the irrational grounds of human activities, especially the role of automatic writing and dreaming in the artistic practices aimed at the expansion of the reality as a substitute for the distinction between the real and the imaginary. The automatic writing was a technique used for spontaneous production of literary texts exploring the sub- or unconscious mind and playing with free associations of words and images, and emotional experiences suggested by them. Already the Dadaists performances in the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 stressed the role of the coincidences of chance verbal conjunctions (Huelsenbeck 1920). Surrealists also wanted to free people from restrictive customs and structures. In his Manifesto of Surrealism (1924) Andre Breton defined it as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought.” (Breton 1969: 27) Further, Surrealist visual art stressed that the important was not the objects themselves chosen for the pictures but the circumstances or their viewing and their positions in relation to other things (for instance, in the art works of Salvador Dali, Giorgio de Chirico, or Joan Miro). As Peter Stockwell (2015: 49) puts it: “The writing, art, sculpture, film, music, and other forms were all attempts at a method for accessing the true nature of human perception”. In contrast to Dadaists with their chaos and spontaneity as “regulating” principles, Surrealists were attended to find unity in the universe, to the capacity of human mind for synthesis of dreams and reality. Gysin was rather closer to Dadaists in his initial presuppositions. In their manifesto book The Third Mind Gysin and
Burroughs (1978: 11–12), aimed at advantages of collective creation drawing out the idea that poetry belongs to everyone, were still critically enough to the surrealist practices of collectively assembled texts or images: “...[b]ut since the “exquisite corpses” did not depart from the existing laws they were meant to escape, they were rapidly abandoned – as was automatic writing – in favour of a literary art that was individual and deliberate”.

In 1959, Gysin assembled his first cut-ups from textual fragments taken from the London Observer, the Daily Mail, and the New York Gerald Tribune newspapers. Minutes to Go (1960) was one of the first cut-up collaborations Gysin did with Sinclair Beiles, Gregory Corso, and William Burroughs. In his own explanatory essay “Cut-Ups: A Project for Disastrous Success” (1964) appeared originally in the Evergreen Review, Gysin reveals that, at first sight, the method brings nothing new. Rather, it draws attention to the fact that cut-ups release the artist from the pre-given clichés in which his own consciousness, according to Gysin, operates:

I picked up the raw words and began to piece together texts that later appeared as First Cut-Ups in “Minutes to Go.” [...] I can tell you nothing you do not know. I can show you nothing you have not seen. Anything I may say about Cut-Ups must sound like special pleading unless you try it for yourself. You cannot cut up in your head any more than I can paint in my head. Whatever you do in your head bears the pre-recorded pattern of your head. Cut through that pattern and all patterns if you want something new. Take a letter you have written, or a letter written to you. Cut the page into four or into three columns—any way you may choose. Shuffle the pieces and put them together at random. Cut through the word lines to hear a new voice off the page. A dialogue often breaks out. “It” speaks (qtd. in Weiss 2001: 126–127).

The writer stresses several things here. Firstly, the most important declared aim of the new method was to free creativity from the rationality of the modern world, the thought-process which makes the mind to move in the way of dominant ideologies and clichés. To achieve this goal, the artist should rearrange already existing texts, statements, and words in order to disassociate them from their received meanings and reveal new ones. Gysin’s ambition was “to destroy the assumed natural links of language, that in the end are but expressions of Power, the favourite weapon of control” (qtd. in Hoptman 2010: 76). Secondly, words were equivalent to brushstrokes for Gysin, and writing was only one medium among other available means of expression. Throughout his career, Gysin experimented not only with cut-ups but also with the permutations of language, forms and sounds within an abstract structure. William Burroughs observed that “these pamphlets are to be considered abstract literature observation and mapping of psychic areas. [...] Abstract literature. Not Personal Opinions. [...] Just writing what I see and hear in my imagination. Pure abstract literature.” (qtd. in Geiger
2005: 134). Thirdly, the new cut-up method operated in the realm of the banal within common-sense practices. For Gysin “Nobody owns words”: there was nothing sacred about them. Cut-ups show nothing new. They acquire their value not with the novelty, but with changing contexts (similar to the modern art practices, such as *The Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp). Therefore, on the one (critical) side, cut-ups were an aesthetic strategy to relinquish the convention of the novel with characters that follow a narrative line of events. On the other (constructive and creative) side, it was a new way to represent the perception, not the “what” of a story, but the “how” of it.

In 1965, Gysin and Burroughs finished their next collaborative book consisting of fragmented texts and combinations of images and newspaper collages, laid over pages marked with Gysin’s signature grid pattern, which he created using a paint roller. *The Third Mind* was meant to be a manifesto of the cut-up method, but due to the financial and technical difficulties with its production, it was published only in 1975. One of the main ideas was that the visuals in the book were not illustrations for the texts. Writing and painting were fused into a multimodal system of sense-making with the co-existence of different semiotic modes in one text. Both words and images were text’s constitutive parts, equally contributing to the construction of new meanings. The team declared that they did it to reclaim consciousness from social control. But at the same time, *The Third Mind* was much more than this.

Tristan Tzara, the man who “invented” cut-ups, once said to Gysin: “Would you be kind enough to tell me just why your young friends insist of going back over the ground we covered in 1920s?” Gysin replied: “Perhaps they feel you did not cover it thoroughly enough,” (qtd. in Geiger 2005: 132). Their approaches differed profoundly. Gysin cut and rearranged texts to destroy their common determined meanings and to reveal new ones. Unlike the Dadaists, he was not above all interested in the aesthetic outcomes of the chance principle and chaos. As Laura Hoptman (2010: 77) notes: “phrases to be cut up were chosen with the utmost care, and no chance operations were involved, only considered re-matching”. Gysin believed that such practice would open the way to a new consciousness. Perhaps, it was more about the representation of mental functioning. A new vision and a method to express a new dimension of consciousness. Erasing, cutting and shuffling words liberates them from their cultural background, Gysin concluded. It draws attention to their formal aspects and raises new nonlinear relationships in which the meaning appears outside the subject, and outside his or her actions. The meaning appears accidentally, spontaneously just as in the desultory interactions of human beings with their environments.
First Cut-ups

/1/
It is impossible to estimate the damage. Anything put out up to now is like pulling a figure out of the air.
Six distinguished British women said to us later, indicating the crowd of chic young women who were fingerling samples, “If our prices weren’t as good or better, they wouldn’t come. Eve is eternal.”
(I’m going right back to the Sheraton Carlton and call the Milwaukee Braves)
Miss Hannah Pugh the slim model – a member of the Diner’s Club, the American Express Credit Cards, etc. – drew from a piggy bank a relent which is a very quintessence of the British female sex.
“People aren’t crazy,” she said. “Now that Hazard has banished my timidity I feel that I, too, can live on streams in the area where people are urged to be watchful.”
A huge wave rolled in from the wake of Hurricane Gracie and bowled a married couple off a jetty. The wife’s body was found – the husband was missing presumed drowned.
Tomorrow the moon will be 228,400 miles from the earth and the sun almost 93,000,000 miles away (qtd. in Weiss 2001: 70).

This first section of the ‘First Cut-ups’ can be divided into five fragments. Events are described here, but they are not the focus of the text. Instead, they mark the simultaneity of experiences in their many forms: a news report, a story, an accident description, a declarative sentence. What happens in this prose, if anything “happens” at all? The classical definition of an event, a core-concept in plot-oriented narratology, does not seem to be applicable here: “A change of state manifested in discourse by a process statement, in the mode of do or happen. An event can be an action, or act, or a happening” (Prince 2003: 28). On the one hand, we find here some event descriptions in the fragments that constitute the text. On the other hand, they do not make a story that could be deduced from the discourse. Their composition instead discloses the performative aspect of narration. It provides the reader with various occurrences simultaneously, involving the reader in processes of interacting experiences and switching the frame of reference from the content to the ways it is represented.

The standard conceptual framework for ‘time’ (based on Genette’s concepts (1980) of order, duration and frequency) is also problematized here. Brian Richardson (2000: 28) points out that the “opposition between story-time and discourse-time [...] presupposes that it is possible to deduce a consistent story from a text; in many recent works it is not the case”. One can hardly speak of order here because the fragments are composed at random. They do not use any logical sequence, but rather a rhythmic one. Duration compared to the time of events in the story, with the time it takes to retell them in narrative discourse, is also non-applicable: there is no single story to take out from the discourse in this text. When we speak of the category of voice (who speaks?), or point of view
(who perceives?), more problems occur. There is no narrator in the text and it
does not fit any norm: with its chaotic composition, paradoxically connected
fragments, random series of states of affairs which may only indicate some
directions the meaning-making of this writing might have taken. I will argue that
such texts represent “fictional mental functioning”. In other words, it narrates
experience as it is being experienced (perceived, recalled, etc.) by the contem-
porary mind installed in various information streams, reading newspapers,
receiving visual impressions, seeing advertisements, hearing conversations, feel-
ing fear or anger, remembering something. And it conveys collective rather than
individual experience. Cut-up experiments conceive of these conditions as struc-
tured anticipation of experientiality; they seek to come out of the constraints of
reason imposing order on the multiple projections of the different experiences. Is
that what Brion Gysin achieves? He is supposed to offer “a way of breaking
through a writer’s own controlling consciousness, to open one’s patterns of
thought to the subversive will of language”. Whose consciousness is it? At the
first sight, it does not belong to anyone. Or, of someone estimating the damage,
of six British women, of miss Hannah Pugh, of a reporter, and of another
reporter. It is the consciousness of no one in particular, but at the same time, it
is a collective consciousness. It is a contemporary technological reality with
informational streams. “It” may refer to collective consciousness, unobservable
in single cases. Further, this fragment may operate as an impulse that not only
illustrates, expresses (or represents) something, but evocates it. Acting as a way
of transition from “what we see/read/perceive” to “how we experience”, from
the given of images, events or existents to the processes of their elaboration. It is
not only the representation as representational could words on paper be: they
have meanings and their rhythmical and syntactic constructions bear definite
semantic information. But beside the given, it could be a way of experiencing
fragments of outer’s texts and cultural constructions, the way of being in the presence (cf. Gumbrecht 2003).

“The Poem of Poems” (1961) is another example which Gysin first produced
on a tape recorder by way of the cut-up. As he explained in an interview, cut-ups
should use only the best, high-charged material: King James’ translation of the
Song of Songs of Solomon, Eliot’s translation of Anabasis by St. John Perse,
Shakespeare’s Sonnets and a few lines from the “Doors of Perception” by Aldous
Huxley, about his experiences with mescalcon-based hallucinogens.

Let him kiss me,
The onlie begetter of these good ointments
All happinesse and that eternitie
(or do the virgins love thee?)
Promised by our ever-living poet.
The king hath brought me into his chambers.  
After four and forty winters the sun enters the sign of the  
Let the counterweight be removed  
As the curtains of salt after the fall of Rome.

O, the provinces blow many winds.  
My mother’s child will be a tattered weed.  
Tell me, O, thou that my soul loveth,  
black because the sun hath looked upon thee –  
Have I not kept thy livery?

Asked where all thy beauty lies I sing:  
My beloved is the tallest tree of the year.  
His flocks are watered by the lakes of golden lotus.  
He is herb with leaves the colour of lapis lazuli (Gysin quoted in Jason Weiss Reader 2001: 102).

This high-charged material seems to contradict Gysin’s claim to free the mind from pre-given meanings and the impositions of rationality. Because each of the units of this cut-up text bears the enormous train of meanings, connotations and reuses. But it may instantiate the contemporary mind and cultural practices which would become ubiquitous in the digital age. For Gysin, words were only one of many possible means of artistic expression.

The question is how to represent something without representations, e.g. perception of daily streams of impressions fraught with cultural interpretations. Should it be an abstract prose? The fragment quoted above demonstrates not only a construction of patterns of mind-body-world interactions, interplay of visual and verbal stimuli, but also it uncouples them from their “normal” contexts and puts into them unusual disturbing connotations. It may be a translation/ transformation of inconceivable into a literary text or into a piece of visual art, a painting, in order to share, to evaluate it, to ascribe the cultural value for to approach the more thorough and detailed understanding of creative acts. Gysin suggests cut-ups as they do not have evident content or story but includes all these various objects of the outer and inner reality, and the ways of interactions. I suppose Gysin’s cut-ups could grasp at what could not be told or retold, what could not be depicted in a detail, that instead of a story about something, you get a story of yours, someone’s, any reaction and response on this something. That unconceivable also needs its own images, for to be shared in cultural practices, which regulate, put in order and include this unconceivable on a human scale, put into language and make sense of it. A reading of such text is not a passive consumption of a given, it is an interaction of a reader with suggested fragments and their possible (and impossible) connections. One may raise an objection that an experienced reader always interacts with a literary
work, tracing the intertextual allusions and drawing on his own imagination, recollections etc. Yes, indeed, but dealing with cut-up prose a reader gets almost nothing without active participation. So, I suppose that Gysin’s cut-ups reintegrated in a new frame of references may provide a kind of a model for the analysis of processes widespread in contemporary culture. Its implication for narratology seems to be the emphasis on the experimental realm of narrative, on the edge of literary text and visual art that gives a transmedial perspective in which something inconceivable in representations finds its meaning and can be shared and interpreted.

4 Cut-ups and contemporary painting

Let us compare, therefore, what he did with words with his experiments in paintings. This comparison follows the trend started with the work of John Dewey Art as Experience (1934) where he speaks on the common patterns in various experiences: “[..] no matter, how unlike they are to one another in the details of their subject matter. There are conditions to be met without which an experience cannot come to be” (Dewey 1980: 43). Dewey stresses that every experience is the result of an interaction between a live creature and some aspects of its environment. An experience, says Dewey, has pattern and structure. It is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but their relationship. The relationship is what gives meaning. Gysin with his cut-ups, permutations of words, signatures and images in his paintings transformed the very principle of artwork, making language operate in a new way by replacing the grammatical constructions of a textual structure with the compositional principles of visual art.

In his painting experiments of the 1960s, Gysin, who studied both Japanese and Arabic calligraphy, placed rhythmic calligraphic forms within grids that he mechanically printed with carved roller. His non-representational “writing paintings” experimented with various forms of language appearance, repetitions and permutations of forms. He pursued the same experiments in language.

Gysin’s permutation poem Breathe in the Words composed for The Third Mind (c.1965) consists of repeating four words (“breathe”, “in”, “the”, “word”) on a ready-made typographical grid which structures the whole composition. Similar experiences in painting made him sensitive to the importance of gesture. “[..] Art, as we understand it today, lies in action and in gesture, and this was realised before the advent of action painting”. (qtd. in Hoptman 2010: 35). Burroughs observed that Gysin did in painting what he was trying to do in writing. He regarded his painting as a hole in the texture of the so-called “reality,” through which he explored outer space. This meant perhaps that painting itself was not so
significant. It was also a vehicle to explore the way one perceives, imagines or recalls something. He moved into the painting and through it. Through the gestural movements of ink on paper, Gysin sought to communicate the “vibrant immediacy of the thought expressed” (quoted in Geiger 2005: 69). Not the thought itself, but its qualities — the way it appears and exists.

In 1963, Brion Gysin took part in the exhibition *La Lettre et le Signe dans la Peinture Contemporaine* at the Galerie Valérie Schmidt in Paris. The show presented a mixture of texts, paintings, photography, collages, magazines, book publications, jazz music, and films. Gysin’s paintings were represented alongside with the works of Cy Twombly, Arman, and others. Gysin based his works on crossings of grid patterns, which incorporated letters and photos into the grids for multi-directional perception. He explored structural problems of perception and the random ordering of forms through the permutations of his personal calligraphic signature. Under the influence of Max Ernst’s method, Gysin discovered that there were the same problems in painting as in writing: “I saw that the idea was to force the painting to make itself.” Remember that William Burroughs once said the goal of writing is to make it happen (Burroughs 1993: 63). Gysin concluded that: “It was certainly not a matter of applying yourself to making it, but of seizing the means of production, finally some elementary means, and combining them in such a way as to obtain a very immediate, very fresh result, as those which arose in Max’s *frottages* of wood, like *Histoire naturelle.*” (qtd. in Hoptman 2010: 35). Gysin’s *Ecritures* were not meant to expose readable words (in contrast to Lettrists paintings), the repetitive signature of his name was meant to erase it. (Figure 1)
This manipulation of multiple repetitions should defeat materiality, free words, and images from their common meanings, or at least expel the authorial voice replacing it with rhythmical constructions and gesture as such. At the same period, Gysin together with Ian Sommerville invented the Dreamachine with flickering lights that were supposed to be perceived with closed eyes. This experience could trigger something approaching hallucination. Gysin believed that this new form of artmaking, which results were not seen but perceived, could provide direct access to artistic consciousness, leaving aside the material world. It was less an artwork than a tool for creative production that did not necessitate painting or writing. Instead of a conventional way of seeing, the Dreamachine severed visuality from the materiality of the object. Similar observations may be found in the literary theories of Roland Barthes in his essay The Death of the Author (1967), or in Susan Sontag’s essay The Aesthetic of Silence (1969). Both present ideas of the liberation the artist from himself, art from the artwork and history and of the mind from its perceptual or intellectual limitations.
In addition to this, Gysin’s painting experiments may be fruitfully put in the context of Roland Barthes’ analysis of Cy Twombly’s drawings (Barthes 1985).

In his essay, Barthes explains the principle of Twombly’s artistic experiences rather than his works. Barthes draws attention to the fact that Twombly’s works were a kind of writing, that they had some kind of relation to calligraphy. This relationship, however, was neither imitation, nor inspiration — Twombly only alluded to writing. Every line in his drawings, notes Barthes, has nothing to illustrate. Rather, it is a perception of its own realisation (Figure 2). The essence of writing is neither a form nor a usage, but only a gesture (Barthes 1985: 158). Twombly retains writing’s gesture, not its product. Even if it is possible to consume the results of his work aesthetically and even if his productions link up with a history and theory of arts, observes Barthes, what is shown is a gesture. The specific feature of a gesture is that it is a surplus of an action. It surrounds the action with an atmosphere. Whereas a message seeks to produce information, a gesture “produces all the rest without necessary seeking to produce anything” (Barthes 1985: 160). Words in Twombly’s works, in contrast to those on Gysin’s whose repetitions should erase their initial meanings, not only call up the whole idea, they are a kind of citation, notes Barthes. But Twombly’s canvases are as unreadable as the cut-up prose. Something has been
written and then unwritten, but these two movements exist simultaneously, they remain superimposed, as various traces in a kind of a palimpsest. Drawing’s materiality constitutes its meaning which appears in constant becoming, referring, alluding, questioning and reinterpreting. There is no product here. Instead, production and gesture draw attention to the artistic practice as it appears.

These observations seem to indicate a person’s “internal” position in relation to the represented subjects and processes as an important feature of cut-ups. Cut-ups do not illustrate or represent any observable reality. Instead, they artistically represent the processes of perceiving or imagining such a reality in new cultural conditions. The idea is that our attention should be directed toward the world as we experience (perceive, recall, or imagine) it. We should attend to the modes, or ways in which things appear to us. Gysin with his experiments is interested not in what things are, but rather in exactly how they are experienced. He appears preoccupied with the ways in which combinations of images, words, and sounds generate the very texture of meanings, in how word and image get around on very complex associations.

5 Conclusion

My analysis proposes a new reading of texts that initially seem to be uncommunicative. By redefining narrativity in terms of experientiality, “natural” narratology provides a basis for an analysis of cut-ups. Gysin’s writing experiments juxtapose and interweave fragments of discourses deprived of their initial contexts and evocating new meaningful configurations of memory, emotions, ideas. Such texts are unreachable for the plot-oriented narratology and may challenge narrativization on the textual level. It is difficult to invent a lot from the distorted information disseminated on the page of a cut-up work. There are no pre-given stories that could be derived from these texts. But if the reader turns to the next level of observation, one can narrativize the experiences which may engender such texts rather than the texts themselves. The reading can be more convincing, therefore, when texts are analysed not just in terms of style, narrative modes etc., but also with a discussion of cognitive modes. On the other hand, these cognitive modes may engender such compositions; on the other hand, readers bring these modes into them.

Enactivist approaches rest on the idea that the embedded and embodied activities of individuals underline their constantly interactive mental functioning. Instead of object-based descriptions of the minds (in the text, for instance) and their activities, this approach proposes a contextualised and an on-process-
oriented understanding. Cut-up analysis would be enriched if put into the contexts of abstract painting and experiments with perception (such as Gysin’s *Dreamachine*). At the same time, cut-ups may be explored as visuals because the creative principle itself erases the distinction between words and images. Furthermore, these “unreadable” texts may acquire new readings. They are read as a representation of the ways the human mind may operate, rather than as a representation of characters and their actions or even as projections of the “narrator’s” mental functioning. This approach follows the ideas of radical enactivism and asserts that there can be cognition and experience without content and without representations.

In addition to these observations, the analysis of Gysin’s experiments demonstrates how the narrative structure breaks apart, transforms and at the same time constitutes a kind of a visual structure. Cut-ups act as abstract forms in which sentences lose their grammatical structures and codes, transform syntax and semantics, erase any pre-given meaning, and leave their author aside. They acquire additional layers and form multidimensional space. Cut-ups operate in the realm of banal collective clichés, shifting the focus of literary work from representing the individual experiences of a single author to nameless, infinite collective practices. They create a common general cause. Finally, cut-ups represent something non-representational with projections in words, the way basic cognition – perception and imagination – operates.

These practices mark a new cultural trend in the representation of human perception; cut-up technique can be regarded as a means of representing mental processes (unobservable directly), especially by mapping the simultaneity of external observations and internal reflections that exist in constant continuous relationships between minds and their environments. I have analysed Gysin’s verbal and visual compositions and explored their structural and functional specificity in this regard. Cut-ups exist as sets of visual, verbal, perceptible and emotional fragments which each reader or viewer should construct, reconstruct and deconstruct as a new model each time they encounter them. Cut-ups might appeal to the idea that the consciousness is cut by various random factors in contemporary culture. Cut-ups point to the inseparable tie between perceiving and thinking, acting and interacting.
References


