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World Beats

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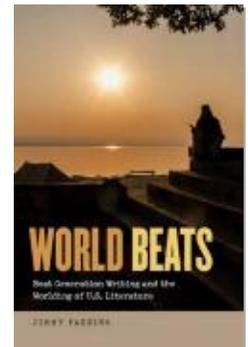
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INTRODUCTION: WORLDING THE BEATS

IN THE EARLY 1960S Allen Ginsberg spent fifteen months traveling around India with partner Peter Orlovsky. They were joined for a spell by Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger visiting from Japan, where Snyder had been studying Zen Buddhism. While in Kolkata, Ginsberg was naturally drawn to Sunil Gangopadhyay and the group of dissident Bengali poets known as the “Hungryalists,” or, in a clearer echo of Ginsberg and his Beat comrades, the “Hungry Generation,” who felt disaffected by the fervent nationalism they saw all around them in a still newly independent India and were dismayed by the escalating militarism that followed the 1962 war with China.¹ Like the Beats, the Hungry Generation poets would be censored and even jailed for their literary licentiousness and antinomian views. They discussed with Ginsberg the need to break free from the stifling legacy of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore—to them what T. S. Eliot had been to Ginsberg and so many others—and Ginsberg urged them to write in Bengali and abandon Western models in favor of a renewed and native spiritualism. In particular, his new friends in Kolkata were searching for a way beyond both colonialism and a nationalism that did not, they believed, truly serve India’s needs, and their example highlights the multivalent legacies of European imperialism, the complexities of decolonization, and, to a much greater extent than has been acknowledged, the interest of Beat Generation writers in such matters.

The tensions within Bengali intellectual life and among Kolkata’s *adda* poets: between the past and the present, colonial rule and national independence, “their gods” and “the gods of modernism,” as Deborah Baker puts it, mean that India for Ginsberg is not timeless or unchanging or utterly exotic (hallmarks of orientalist thinking) but vital and dynamic; it retains the specificity of its historical moment and engages with

the poet on its own terms.² To grasp the nature and significance of this engagement requires a transnational perspective on Beat writing. The Beats were prolific travelers, and the fact that they produced some of their most significant and enduring works abroad—including Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, Jack Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues*, William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, and Gregory Corso's *Happy Birthday of Death*, just to name a few—suggests that their calling as writers was somehow predicated upon their leaving the United States behind. This distance from home is what opens up a space for all sorts of unexpected connections and crossings to arise in their work. Beat Generation writers were profoundly engaged with the world at large, particularly colonial and postcolonial spaces in what was then called the third world. Living and writing abroad at the great moment of decolonization across the globe, the Beats were more than just tourists (as more than a few critics have asserted), that is to say, unconcerned or altogether unaware of the immediate and usually fraught political situations unfolding around them. They could in fact be very attuned to local struggles and local histories, although it can take a certain kind of *worlded* reading practice to unearth these histories in their work.

Every travelogue is, at some level, a comment on home, and the worlded and worldly view gained by Beat writers abroad often involved a new perspective on the United States as well. When Amiri Baraka, for instance, visited Cuba in 1960 along with a delegation of African American artists and activists under the banner of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, his experiences there marked a real shift in consciousness for him.³ Among other things, Baraka's time in Cuba gave him a different point of view on the U.S. civil rights movement, which was then in full swing. He saw firsthand how incredibly overdetermined and far from universal the discourse on race had become in the United States and how limited the solutions offered by the mainstream protest movement. He became open to the possibilities of a broader, more radical conception of political struggle and social change; as Todd Tietchen has argued, Baraka's experience of Cuba was the first step on a path that would lead him to black nationalism and then third world Marxism.⁴ He was deeply affected by the presence of fellow traveler Robert Williams. As an NAACP chapter head in North Carolina, Williams had recently made waves by arming the local African American community against the Klan. Williams, who would return to Cuba in 1961, wanted by the FBI, represented a more militant wing of the civil rights movement. He would inspire the future Black Panthers, and his philosophy was something that Baraka began to find more and more appealing as the 1960s wore on.

Even Gregory Corso, seemingly the most apolitical of Beat poets, has something to say about the global affairs of the day. Barry Miles, writing specifically about William Burroughs but expressing a more general sentiment about the Beats in Paris and elsewhere abroad, argues that Burroughs's "experience was much more internal; his was more a landscape of ideas, and in many ways he could have been living anywhere."⁵ Yet Corso, however committed to the lyrical and averse to the earthbound, did not remain unaffected while in Paris by the tense political situation that existed there during the final months of the Fourth Republic—driven largely by the turmoil of the Algerian War. And he cannot help but figure these issues into his poetry, notably in "The Sacré-Coeur Café" and in "Bomb" (the centerpiece of his 1960 volume of Paris poems, *The Happy Birthday of Death*), where Corso makes his immediate political and historical context quite visible. On the surface, "The Sacré-Coeur Café" is a standard lament for a romanticized Paris of yore, no longer available to an artist and dreamer like Corso. The city's literary past colors the poet's perceptions of it in the present, and much of the poem deals with the gap between his expectations of Paris and the workaday reality he finds there. But the past Corso longs for is specifically a revolutionary past. The opening image:

The fierce girls in the Sacré-Coeur Café
 bang their wines on the table
 screaming Danton triumphed having denied liberty
 While the garçon demands Murat triumph on all that triumphs

gets utterly transformed by the poem's end:

Ah but there are plastic tables in the Sacré-Coeur Café
 The fierce girls all work in the Post Office
 The proprietors have no Cosette but a big fat son
 who sits dunking croissants.⁶

"Cosette" appears because in the poem's middle section the speaker imagines himself in the world of *Les Misérables* (which Victor Hugo wrote in exile following Louis-Napoléon's 1851 coup d'état and which dramatizes the 1832 republican uprising against the July Monarchy), playing the role of fellow "ex-convict" Jean Valjean and rescuing "little Cosette—the size of eternity."⁷ Most striking in Corso's poem, however, are the ways in which it registers the situation in Algeria. After invoking Danton and Murat, Corso writes, "The bombed Algerians observe each others' burning teeth / A scarey café the Sacré-Coeur Café." And the poem ends,

“And the Algerians / they don’t go to the Sacré-Coeur Café.” Their conspicuous absence from the scene makes the Algerians’ presence all the more palpable, and the poem implies that it is those currently engaged in armed insurrection against France itself who are the rightful inheritors of that nation’s revolutionary history. It is the “Algerian question,” along with the dying colonialism it comes to stand in for, that converts Corso’s quaint Parisian scene from make believe to reality.

World Beats arrives at the convergence of two developments: (1) the flowering in recent years of critically capacious, theoretically informed scholarship on Beat Generation literature and (2) the concurrent shift in U.S. literary studies toward a transnational understanding of cultural production. Though long regarded as quintessentially “American,” the mid-twentieth-century countercultural phenomenon known as the Beat Generation is not only what we would now recognize as a transnational literary movement par excellence but is thoroughly worlded in all the ways that I attempt to describe in this book. Situating my work in relation to the burgeoning field of Beat studies as well as the much broader zone defined by the transnational turn in the humanities, I argue that the study of Beat writing offers new approaches for transnationally minded criticism in the twenty-first century.

As approaches to Beat Generation writing become more theoretically capacious, and as the study of the Beats seems to be increasingly legitimated within the academy, critics reach a point where merely reflecting on what it means to be “Beat,” asking who was or was not a Beat, or calculating when the Beat movement can be said to have begun or ended will no longer suffice. A collection of essays edited by Jennie Skerl and published in 2004, *Reconstructing the Beats*, called attention to the limitations of Beat scholarship and began to challenge the adulatory mythology that has characterized the study of Beat writing. The volume’s goal, as Skerl states in her introduction, was “to provide a scholarly reassessment that will chart new directions for criticism and teaching at the beginning of the twenty-first century.” Her elaboration of this mission neatly summarized the state of Beat studies: “This collection has several purposes: to re-vision the Beats from contemporary critical perspectives, to reassess their place in mid-century American history and literature, to recontextualize Beat writers within the larger arts community of which they were a part, to recover marginalized figures and expand the restricted canon of three to six major figures established from 1956 to 1970, and to critique media stereotypes and popular clichés that influence both academic and popular discourse about the Beats.”⁸

The dozen or so essays in *Reconstructing the Beats* make progress in all of those areas Skerl delineates, especially where they are concerned with expanding the Beat canon to make room for female and minority voices like those of Kyger, Lenore Kandel, Ted Joans, and Bob Kaufman, each of whom has made significant contributions. Their emphasis on Beat interactions with other artistic, cultural, and historical developments also points the way to future work on the Beats, which must always insist on looking to and for the margins of Beat writing. The “new directions” that Skerl and others have begun to chart reorient scholarly attention toward a number of potential outsides—those of the nation and national identity, along with those of period, genre, gender, race, and ethnicity—that require a willingness to cross borders and transgress boundaries that have long served to isolate Beat studies by keeping it tethered to a single postwar countercultural moment. Skerl’s 2012 follow-up collection, *The Transnational Beat Generation*, coedited with Nancy M. Grace, represents the next step in the evolutionary process of scholarly work on the Beats, now with an explicitly stated interest in wresting Beat writing away from the immediate U.S. contexts that have dominated prior understandings of the Beats and their significance. In their introduction Grace and Skerl write, “When viewed through the lens of transnationalism, with its many complicated and contradictory definitions and interpretations, the Beat Generation emerges as a global configuration of artists whose work in total resists the simplistic binaries of square versus hip 1950s culture and the equally simplistic binary of bad nationalism versus good transnationalism.”⁹ The study of transnational Beat literature, in other words, has as much to say about transnationalism as it does about the Beats themselves.

Charting the transnational dimensions of the Beat Generation requires an equally timely expansion of the Beat canon, not least because Beat transnationalism involves important contributions from “minor” figures who bring Beat writing into contact with a diversity of cultural and sociopolitical formations. While most scholars and critics have traditionally focused their attention on the major figures of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs at the expense of other voices within the movement, particularly those of women, African Americans, and other minorities, Ronna Johnson and Nancy Grace have done pioneering work on questions of the Beats and gender, and A. Robert Lee and Aldon Nielsen have written on the intersection of race and Beat Generation writing. *World Beats* continues along these important trajectories and moves between major figures like Kerouac and Burroughs and those, like Philip Lamantia and

Brion Gysin, who are less well known but deserve greater attention. I devote chapters to African American Beat writing and—pushing temporal as well as spatial boundaries—to Chinese American novelist Maxine Hong Kingston and a group of primarily women “post-Beat” writers working today. Writing from the “margins” (to borrow Maria Damon’s term), they have been central to shaping and defining the Beat movement as a whole.¹⁰

Two recent books on the Beat movement as such that have managed to escape being circumscribed by the domestic scene are Baker’s *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India* and Todd Tietchen’s *The Cubalogues: Beat Writers in Revolutionary Havana*. Baker’s group portrait is an exemplary work of rhizomic Beat criticism whose thematic and narrative complexity mirrors the Beats’ own entanglements with India. She dispenses with the usual Beat historiography by making the heretofore largely unknown Hope Savage a central figure in her book, along with Sunil Gangopadhyay and the Bengali poets Ginsberg befriends in Kolkata. Baker has taken material from an array of journals, letters, and other published and unpublished accounts and reassembled it in a manner that allows submerged indigenous and minority voices to enter into her densely polyvocal narrative web. And Tietchen, whose work on Amiri Baraka, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and others in *The Cubalogues* resonates strongly with my own, does much to revitalize a politically minded understanding of the Beats, although his book (like Baker’s) is necessarily limited in terms of geographic coverage. I have drawn on their insights to speak about an even larger cast of characters and to begin theorizing Beat travel and Beat geography to an even greater degree.

In this task I am indebted to two additional works that bridge the gap between transnationalist criticism and Beat Generation writing with great insight: Brian Edwards’s *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America’s Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express* and Rachel Adams’s *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America*. Edwards works through the thorny topic of Beat orientalism by placing Beat writing (through Burroughs in particular) within a persistent set of tropes surrounding Arab North Africa, and Adams has demonstrated the usefulness of applying a specific outernational model (the continent) to the work of Jack Kerouac. Also useful has been Jahan Ramazani’s *A Transnational Poetics*, which brings a transnational and translocal method to bear on the poetry of Amiri Baraka, as well as analogous work, such as Vera Kutzinski’s *The Worlds of Langston Hughes: Modernism and Translation in the Americas*, published in other areas of U.S. literary stud-

ies. It is alongside such perspicacious studies that I hope *World Beats* is read, as like-minded scholars continue to forge a new, worlded vision of U.S. literature today.

The language of *worlding* marks the point of contact between my work on the Beats and current discourses on transnationalism. Over the past two decades transnationally oriented criticism has become a dominant force in the humanities, with scholars across the disciplines recognizing the need to look beyond a strictly nation-based paradigm of human culture. In American studies and U.S. literary studies in particular, the transnational turn has led to new habits of thought and new modes of reading whose implications continue to be vigorously debated today. New works by prominent Americanists (e.g., Donald Pease, Paul Giles, Caroline Levander, José David Saldívar) make it clear that the borders of U.S. literature remain hotly contested and its terrain insufficiently surveyed. They challenge the field as a whole to keep refining its methods and scope—while remaining mindful of the blind spots inherent in any critical approach—to apprehend the multivalent, polycentric realities of cultural production in the era of globalization.

It is onto this still-unsettled landscape that I wish to project an image of the world as such, not as one term among many in the proliferating series of descriptors that has come to define transnational criticism (hemispheric, transatlantic, diasporic, and so on) but as a critical concept that gathers together the most productive elements of these various models. The world therefore denotes a set of attributes as much as it does a physical place. First and foremost, it becomes an oppositional term that upholds the local and the contingent in the face of the deracinating transcendence of the global. Rob Wilson and Chris Connery have traced the world as a model back to an ensemble of thinkers that includes Jameson, Said, and Spivak, hence its deep resonances with Marxist and postcolonial theory and its kinship with the ethical, even utopian, dimensions of Spivak's "planetarity."¹¹ The world, like the planet, is an image of totality, and a worlded critical method is informed by Marxian conceptions of time and space (in particular, the radical articulations of "social space" from Henri Lefebvre and Pierre Bourdieu to David Harvey and Kristin Ross). Alternately a critical method, a reading practice, and a habit of mind, worlding is the self-criticism of transnationalism.

In the domain of transnational theory, several notable volumes have emerged from the fields of American studies, cultural studies, and U.S. literary studies in recent years. These include *Re-framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, edited by Winfried Fluck, Donald Pease, and

John Carlos Rowe; *Globalizing American Studies*, edited by Brian Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar; *Hemispheric American Studies*, edited by Caroline Levander and Robert Levine; *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization*, edited by Connery and Wilson; and *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, edited by Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell. These collections are wide-ranging by design and serve as provocations to future, more in-depth research. Recent monographs by Pease, Giles, Levander, Amy Kaplan, and John Muthyala have been similarly broad, often with the whole sweep of U.S. literary history as the object of inquiry. These field statements are, in a sense, what I take as a starting point—choosing rather to concentrate on a single moment (i.e., the Beat Generation) along with its broader implications for the study of U.S. literature.

The debates surrounding the transnational turn in the humanities are far too numerous and extensive to rehearse here, but I do want to highlight some approaches that can be brought to bear most usefully on the transnationalism of Beat Generation writing. Among these are Susan Gillman and Kirsten Silva Gruesz's "hemispheric text-network," especially its manner of thinking beyond traditional notions of literary influence. Like Adams's continental approach—which she stages as a response to a mere comparativism that, in the case of North America, "has often proceeded in terms of bilateral conversations between the United States and its neighbors, rather than an equitable dialogue involving many different parties"—Gillman and Gruesz likewise position their text-network as a critique of comparativism as such: "It is not mere semantic fussiness to begin by ruminating on how we talk about the United States in relation to the world."¹² In an overview of recent developments in transnationalist literary scholarship, they set comparative literature's obstinately U.S.-centric understanding of comparativism in opposition to more capacious and fluid paradigms such as those of Micol Seigel and Wai Chee Dimock.

Gillman and Gruesz envision a "transnational analysis [that] would draw multiple circles, replanting the foot of the drawing-compass in different, central points, moving across different scales of observation. In so doing, it aims to avoid what is all too frequently, as Seigel demonstrates, the outcome of comparative analysis: a patronizing affirmation that the Other is different, but essentially just like Us."¹³ Their title alone—"Worlding America: The Hemispheric Text-Network"—registers multiple levels of analysis: nation, hemisphere, and world, and within this productive slippage of terms lies the recognition that the hemisphere, like

the nation, is not a hermetic system. Or perhaps its critical enclosure as hemisphere is what makes the world visible as the world. In any case, Gillman and Gruesz, both identified with the “hemispheric turn” in U.S. literary and cultural studies, are now engaged in what John Muthyala calls “re-worlding” the hemisphere and the Americas: to use Muthyala’s formulation, they are interested in revealing the “cultural, political, economic, and social processes that bring the world into [the] America[s] and [the] America[s] into the world.”¹⁴

In *A Transnational Poetics* Ramazani employs two terms that also capture the in-betweenness of worlded thought, lest transnationalism itself become just one more of the “geographically inchoate rubrics” Adams cautions against. Very early on Ramazani introduces James Clifford’s concept of the “translocal” along with an account of Gayatri Spivak’s “planetarity,” which in his words is a necessary “distinction between the abstract geometry of the global and the lived history of the planetary.” The planet, like the rhizome, is fundamentally an ecological image of the world as organism: earth as *ecos* (home) and lived space. Clifford’s translocalism is similar to Rob Wilson’s “local/global” or his image of the “world-horizon come near.”¹⁵ In opposition to globalization’s transcendent abstractions—for example, the market—these authors speak the language of transgression, contamination, hybridity, mapping, and movement.

Worlding entails a crucial dialectic of near and far that is at the core of thinking transnationally. In this regard, it too draws on Clifford’s translocal sense of cultural adaptation. Buell associates these shifting spatial scales with the planetary “ecoglobalism” of environmental activists and writers.¹⁶ In the Beat ecopoetics of Gary Snyder—to take a case from my own area of emphasis—the etymology of “eco-” as *oikos* (house, family) is made worldly and worlded in *Earth House Hold*, Snyder’s 1969 collection of *Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries*. That is to say, the lived, material experience of the near-at-hand (one’s “household”) is, in Snyder’s conception, the necessary ground on which one might imagine communal ties that run much deeper than the nation (*oikos* as earth/planet). The world, then, becomes a necessary “third term,” preserving the local within the global as it navigates the nefarious logic of East-West, colonialism-nationalism, communism-capitalism, and, finally, self-other.¹⁷

Manifestations of the near-far dialectic—“making the world-horizon come near and become local and informed,” as Wilson puts it—arise again and again in Beat Generation writing, but these expansive gestures on the part of Beat writers can bring new dangers, such as a too-easy

identification with the Other or the elision of cultural difference altogether.¹⁸ The latter appears in Kerouac as the “worldwide fellahin,” the notion of entire peoples existing somehow outside of history, timeless and utterly essentialized, which Kerouac and others adopted so enthusiastically from Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*. This mindset has generally gone by the name “orientalism,” and my work is ever mindful of what Brian Edwards has called “the orientalist trap” as it pertains to Beat writing.¹⁹ As Snyder’s *Earth House Hold* suggests, a worlded view can emerge only through a meaningful, material engagement with local histories and a good-faith reckoning with alterity, and I argue that Beat writers (even Kerouac) can be read as interrogating and problematizing the same orientalist discourses they appear to recapitulate in their work.

For Ramazani, the translocal and the planetary are versions of a middle path between what Clifford calls “the excessive localism of particularist cultural relativism” and “the overly global vision of a capitalist or technocratic monoculture,” and Ramazani borrows from Spivak an emphasis on lived experience and local histories while also recognizing “the widening, deepening and speeding up of world wide interconnectedness” in the twenty-first century.²⁰ But in *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak sends out a warning: “To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided ‘natural’ space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. . . . The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan.” The planet is thus associated with the Other and with the uncanny (*unheimlich*, or “unhomely,” which brings us closer to Snyder’s *ecos* and Heidegger’s *weltende Welt*, or “worlding world”). Spivak’s final injunction to the reader in *Death of a Discipline* to “keep responsibility alive” in “this era of globalism triumphant” makes planetarity an ethics rather than an ontology and points to the productively irresolvable tension between the world or planet’s physical and figural dimensions.²¹

Donald Pease argues that in its rise to become a dominant paradigm within the humanities, transnationalism writ large “has exercised a monopoly of assimilative power that has enabled it to subsume and replace competing spatial and temporal orientations to the object of study—including multicultural American studies, borderlands critique, postcolonial American studies, and the more general turn to American cultural studies—within an encompassing geopolitics of knowledge.” Worse yet, this shift toward the “unmarked” space of the transnational recapitulates and mirrors the same global flows of capital and corporate power that

transnationalist critics want to interrogate. I wish to posit, however, that transnationalism as *worlding*, with its counterhegemonic animus, its emphasis on materiality and historicity, and its attention to the always uneven encounter between the local and the global, is particularly well suited to retain the lessons of older critical formations, especially postcolonial theory. With roots in Spivak's planetarity and Said's global-materialist outlook, worlding privileges precisely those "peripheralized geographies and diasporized populations" that, for Pease, have been marked and marginalized by the transnational.²² The idea, finally, is that a worlded reading of Beat Generation literature can help navigate some of the impasses that still surround the so-called transnational turn in the humanities and help clarify what a materially grounded, transnationally minded criticism can look like.

In their shared emphasis on worlded reading practices, Spivak is in conversation with Dimock, another important theorist of planetarity, whose work charts the spatiotemporal coordinates of literary inspiration and influence across the structures of what she calls "deep time." She writes, "Instead of upholding territorial sovereignty and enforcing a regime of simultaneity, literature . . . unsettles both." For Dimock, these structures of deep time are transgressive and transnational and effect a literary becoming-other of the individual as well as the collective:

Reading ushers in a continuum that mocks the form of any finite entity. It mocks the borders of the nation, just as it mocks the life span of the individual. As a global process of extension, elaboration, and randomization, reading turns literature into the collective life of the planet. Coextensive neither with the territorial regime of the nation nor with the biological regime of a single human being, this life derives its morphology instead from the motion of words: motion effected when borders are crossed, when a new frame of reference is mixed with an old, when foreign languages turn a native tongue into a hybrid.²³

Dimock has been especially interested in the expansive intimacies of writers reading other writers' work—radically transformative events that leave even the most iconic and canonical texts permeated by diverse elements and energies. Within the U.S. canon, this applies to Emerson and Thoreau perhaps above all. In her "Deep Time" essay, Dimock writes,

The Transcendentalists were avid readers. Comparative philology and comparative religion—two newly minted disciplines of the nineteenth century—were high on their reading lists. The relative claims of various civilizations

were hot topics for them. Henry David Thoreau, immersing himself in a translation of Manu's Sanskrit text, the *Institutes of Hindu Law* (1825), was as elated as Malcolm X would be by ancient Islam: "I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindoos without being elevated as upon the tableland of the Ghauts. It has such a rhythm as the winds of the desert, such a tide as the Ganges, and seems as superior to criticism as the Himmaleh Mounts. Even at this late hour, unworn by time, with a native and inherent dignity it wears the English dress as indifferently as the Sanscrit." The Ganges and the Himalayas easily dwarf the landscape around Concord; they put America in perspective.²⁴

Ultimately, in the work of Thoreau and Emerson, and also Whitman, the worlded view does not just put the United States "into perspective"; it unmakes the nation. Dimock concludes her essay with the bold claim: "Going back hundreds of years, triangulating at every step, reading the Koran by way of German, and looking forward to Malcolm X and James Baldwin by way of Goethe and Hafiz, Emerson is *American* only in caricature."²⁵ Paul Giles is similarly interested in the spatiotemporality of literature and the "deterritorializing" effects of time on the nation. Giles makes the point that when Emerson or Whitman write about "America" (or when we today call them "American" writers), the term accrues very different meanings then and now, not least simply because the nation as a physical entity was very different then; it was a "conception . . . that had not yet received any firm sense of territorial grounding or enclosure."²⁶

The bottom line for Giles, Dimock, and like-minded critics and theorists is the transnationalism that exists at the core of the U.S. canon, and here is where the Beats are useful. It has been well remarked that Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau all exerted a major influence on Beat Generation writers, yet this influence usually gets talked about in terms of Emersonian individualism or Whitmanian democracy; what they have most in common, in other words, is their Americanness. This manner of linking the Beat movement and the American Renaissance is not without merit, but it tends to ignore the complexity of the relationship. Instead, I want to argue that the Beats' inheritance from U.S. literary history, and from American Renaissance writers in particular, lies not just in their transnationalist dimensions but, more precisely, in their worldedness. Through an act of critical triangulation, then, a worlded Beat Generation can be used to survey the broader contours of U.S. literature and history.

The American experiment, from the "Pilgrim Fathers" onward, has been predicated on actual movement and very specific ideas about place.

As Sacvan Bercovitch and others have argued, America as the “New Jerusalem” or “New Canaan” has always represented the dislocation that precedes a new rootedness. Significantly for Bercovitch, Puritan ideology does not revolve around the old forms of family or nationality; rather, “they invented themselves . . . as God’s people in America, meaning by this a community in process, and therefore released from the usual national restrictions of genealogy, territory, and tradition.”²⁷ This curiously postnational formulation of Puritan identity is perhaps more closely allied with later expressions of the transnational than one might have expected. The rhetoric of America as the New Jerusalem soon gives way to the logic of manifest destiny. Just over a century after Plymouth Rock, George Berkeley would write his “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America,” which famously conclude,

Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The four first Acts already past,
A fifth shall close the Drama with the day;
Time’s noblest offspring is the last.²⁸

The purest expression of America as telos, Berkeley’s lines will become the measure by which all other iterations of manifest destiny may be judged as we chart the global history of the U.S. imperium through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is also an argument about U.S. *literary* history, tracing a different inheritance from the American Renaissance writers to the Beats. Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman all, at times, produce their own versions of manifest destiny and thus reaffirm its logic (even if idiosyncratically). But the exact opposite is also true; at a time of massive territorial expansion in the 1840s and 1850s, some of the most canonical American Renaissance texts work to unwrite manifest destiny in complicated, often antinomian ways. It is their legacy of reimagining the United States’ place in the world that the Beat writers would inherit and further transform.

Deborah Baker’s study of the Beats in India refers at several points to what they were reading along the way. Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* was a torchbearer, but no text is more emblematic of their journey than Whitman’s “Passage to India.” What “redeems” Beat travel writing from being just another imaginative appropriation of the Other is that so many of their accounts center on failure (failure to communicate, failure to reach one another, failure to find a guru). These often become *productive* failures that lead to unexpected encounters and fortuitous crossings. In a sense, the Beats are continuously reenacting Columbus’s originary failure

to find the East, and perhaps no one in the U.S. literary tradition is more attuned to this ur-narrative of America as a journey gone awry than Walt Whitman. While it comes to dominate later poems like “Passage to India” and “Prayer of Columbus” and the prose work *Democratic Vistas* (notably, all three were composed after the Civil War), the specter of failure haunts the poet from the very first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855). It is a major theme of the 1860 *Calamus* poems, and in each successive case failure becomes a more pressing concern because the fate of Whitman’s poetic project becomes increasingly tied in the poet’s mind to the fate of the nation.

The Whitman who asks himself if he is the true embodiment of Emerson’s Poet: a seer, prophet, and liberator, is the Whitman who resonates so strongly with Ginsberg, who wants to take up Whitman’s mantle but feels a similarly pervasive sense of doubt. The result of this doubt, of course, is the grandiosity of their poems, and in “Passage to India” Whitman’s concern for his project and his nation are inflated to worlded proportions. Composed in 1870, occasioned by the triple achievement of the Suez Canal, the transatlantic cable, and the transcontinental railroad, the poem opens on an accordingly triumphal note:

Singing my days,
Singing the great achievements of the present,
Singing the strong light works of engineers,
Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven outvied,)
In the Old World the east the Suez canal,
The New by its mighty railroad spann’d,
The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires.²⁹

In “Song of Myself” and elsewhere, Whitman praises science and progress per se; here, he singles out technology’s ability to “span” the globe, to make “the distant brought near.” The earth as “Rondure” could easily become an abstraction without the voluptuousness of the word to make it tangible. And as with Thoreau and Emerson, the physical always has its spiritual counterpart. The flight of the soul has it within its grasp to “Eclaircise the myths Asiatic,” which become the necessary analogue of progress (paradoxically into the past). The poem declares, “Nor you alone ye facts of modern science, / But myths and fables of eld, Asia’s, Africa’s fables, / . . . / You too with joy I sing” (531). But as his song unfolds, the poet becomes plagued with doubt. What next? he asks. We’ve spanned the globe, but where has it gotten us except right back where we began? The speaker of “Facing West from California’s Shores” faces

a similar conundrum, and, in Whitman's view, it is the task of the poet to answer such questions, for the poet is set apart precisely in being able to comprehend a worlded *totality* or "ensemble" (to use Whitman's term). In "Passage to India," questions arise, one after another, as the speaker awaits "the poet worthy that name / The true son of God" and repeats "that sad incessant refrain, *Wherefore unsatisfied soul?* and *Whither O mocking life?*" (534). These same questions will haunt Ginsberg too, whose questing through India and all over the world became a means to face or, alternatively, to escape them.

Standing in stark contrast to the triumphalist rhetoric of U.S. expansion, Whitman's "Prayer of Columbus," published as a kind of addendum to "Passage to India," suggests to readers that the history of the nation, along with the entire colonial enterprise, has been a history of failure. His portrait of Columbus, whose own passage to India was cut exceedingly short, is not as hero but as "A batter'd, wreck'd old man, / . . . / Sore, stiff with many toils, sicken'd and nigh to death" (540). A similarly pessimistic, and undervalued, text is Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. If the earlier *Calamus* poems were a record of failed connection and comradeship at the interpersonal level, then *Democratic Vistas* is a record of failed democracy, a failed union. In that very ambiguous work as well, Whitman engages with the discourse of expansion. He warns, "In vain do we march with unprecedented strides to empire so colossal," lamenting, "In vain have we annex'd Texas, California, Alaska, and reach north for Canada and south for Cuba. It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul" (962).³⁰ And the very late poem "A Thought of Columbus," said to be Whitman's last, represents a final redemptive effort that merges the poet's imagined legacy with that of the nation.

Of Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau, it is Thoreau who presents the most challenging attitude toward U.S. expansion. His act of "civil disobedience," refusing to pay his poll tax, was in protest of U.S. belligerence toward Mexico and its likely outcome: the annexation of new slave territories. Yet in his unremitting desire to slough off the dead weight of Europe, the poet-prophet of American individualism sometimes can sometimes sound a lot like Bishop Berkeley. Such contradictions are themselves a way for Thoreau to short-circuit the ideology of manifest destiny and to forge a new narrative of his nation's place in the wider world. "Resistance to Civil Government" and "Plea for John Brown," two of his most powerful and polemical pieces, are in explicit response to the most pressing issues of Thoreau's day, but even *Walden* shares in a worlded imaginary

that unites Thoreau the polemicist, Thoreau the environmentalist, and Thoreau the transcendentalist. In various ways, the Beats will conjure all of these roles as they look to his polyvalent example.

Like Whitman, Thoreau is interested in the curious warp-zone effect produced by the mere fact that on a round planet, one can, as Columbus intended to show, go east by going west. Thoreau's most concise formulation of this appears in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (self-published in 1849, not long before *Civil Disobedience*), where he writes, "As we have said, there is an orientalism in the most restless pioneer, and the farthest west is but the farthest east."³¹ Exactly what kind of geography is being conjured here? It could simply be the relativism produced by Thoreau's awareness of the fundamental contingency of one's point of view—from Asia's perspective, after all, "the West" lies to the east—or the even more banal reminder that the earth is indeed round, and those who travel west long enough will eventually find themselves on Asian shores. But Thoreau's landscapes are always charged with spiritual and symbolic as well as topographical significance, so the question becomes, what is it about the West that for Thoreau is better expressed in terms of the East? If Thoreau figures the East, as he does in *A Week*, primarily as a frontier, then the pioneer becomes primarily a *seeker*. But a seeker after what? Later on in *A Week*, he seems ready to do away with (extensive) geography altogether, writing, "The frontiers are not east or west, north or south, but wherever a man *fronts* a fact" (198), a sentiment that he gives fuller expression to in this later passage:

It is easier to discover another such a new world as Columbus did, than to go within one fold of this which we appear to know so well; the land is lost sight of, the compass varies, and mankind mutiny; and still history accumulates like rubbish before the portals of nature. But there is only necessary a moment's sanity and sound senses, to teach us that there is a nature behind the ordinary, in which we have only some vague preëmption right and western reserve as yet. We live on the outskirts of that region. (249)

In these lines, as elsewhere in Thoreau, nature becomes the mediating "third term" between East and West, self and other, known and unknown, and we seek our "western reserve" only in our blindness before nature's truths.

In the early essay "A Winter Walk" (1843) nature as reserve is further described in terms of a subterranean continuity; Thoreau writes, "There is a slumbering subterranean fire in nature which never goes out, and which no cold can chill" and reiterates the point: "as where we detect the

vapor from a spring forming a cloud above the trees. What fine relations are established. . . . Such is the beginning of Rome, the establishment of the arts, and the foundation of empires, whether on the prairies of America or the steppes of Asia.”³² With Thoreau’s worlded geography again in play, the “vapor from a spring” recalls a similar passage in *A Week* that F. O. Matthiessen singles out for praise and ends with the image of a clear, vaporous flame rising up in thin smoke to the sky above, a poignant formulation of cosmic connectedness.

To think of movement or exploration, whether in Thoreau’s work or in Beat writing, always in terms of an internal process of *self*-discovery misses the point because, for Thoreau, actual, physical movement westward, away from Europe and toward the East, is absolutely essential. The late essay “Walking” is where he bestows the greatest significance upon the literal act of “going west,” writing, “Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free. . . . It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes or sufficient wildness and freedom behind the eastern horizon . . . but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun.” And a bit later: “I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe.”³³ And considering that, for Thoreau, walking is intimately connected with *writing*—Matthiessen cites Emerson’s “trenchant” observation that “the length of his walk uniformly made the length of his writing. If shut up in the house he did not write at all”—these lines become all the more important to the present discussion.³⁴ But here again one finds several points where Thoreau sounds less than critical about the then prevailing notions of manifest destiny and the fate of the nation. After a short space are these further assertions: “And that way [westward] the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progresses from east to west. . . . The eastern Tartars think that there is nothing west beyond Thibet. ‘The world ends there,’ say they; ‘beyond there is nothing but a shoreless sea.’ It is unmitigated East where they live.”³⁵ At crucial moments, Thoreau, who imagines that “Columbus felt the westward tendency more strongly than any before” (605) and that “to Americans I need hardly to say, ‘Westward the star [*sic*] of empire takes its way’” (608) seems to view U.S. expansion as underwritten by nature’s occulted pathways.³⁶

In the telos and rhetoric of the “Walking” essay, the reader is presented with further world-visions that reverse anew the expected east-west binary to proclaim: “We go east to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future.” Here, the East is again the West (as Western civilization), and

the West—now inevitably inflected by his “West as East” thinking—is associated with futurity instead of something like “irrevocable Asias of the past.” Thoreau further complicates matters, however, when he proceeds to equate this futurity not with progress but with a kind of (mythic) forgetting. He continues, “The Atlantic is a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions. If we do not succeed this time, there is perhaps one more chance for the race left before it arrives on the banks of the Styx; and that is in the Lethe of the Pacific, which is three times as wide” (604). In Thoreau’s worlded tableau of space and time, Asia ultimately comes to stand not for the past, which one might expect from the terms of this equation, but rather for a new chance at the future. He concludes, leading up to those words so dear to environmentalists: “The West of which I speak” (*the East*, it turns out), “is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World” (609).

Just as Kerouac will project his own world-visions from the depths of his darkest isolation in Mexico, Thoreau’s vividest apprehension of a “world-horizon come near” is born of his solitude at Walden Pond. In one of the last chapters of *Walden*, “The Pond in Winter,” Thoreau observes a team of ice-cutters extracting pond ice for sale across the United States and around the world and provides an occasion for us to connect Matthiessen’s reading of Thoreau with several of our transnational approaches to both the American Renaissance and Beat writing. Musing on the implications of the ice company’s trade at distant ports, Thoreau concludes,

Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta. . . . I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Bramin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.³⁷

Matthiessen, contrasting Thoreau with John Donne at one point, calls Thoreau’s experience “inevitably more literary” and says that “one of his chief distinctions . . . is the infusion of his reading into his percep-

tions.” Matthiessen’s appeal to Thoreau’s literariness should call to mind Dimock’s emphasis on reading in her planetary conception of transnational literature. Matthiessen has to this say about Thoreau at Walden Pond: “The waters have become mingled in a double experience: as the ships of the ice company complete their route around Africa, a further chapter in the history of transportation, in the conquest of space which has been progressing since the Renaissance, Thoreau also affirms his conquest—that of time—which can empower the provincial New Englander, while firmly rooted by his own green pond, *to make the remote near*.”³⁸

If Matthiessen concludes that in this passage Thoreau is celebrating a personal conquest of time, which happens to run parallel to the whole history of Western imperialism, there is also a corrective to Matthiessen’s reading—a *material* rather than an allegorical one—suggested by David Trotter’s recent analysis of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Trotter’s reading centers on the status of rubber as a hot commodity at the time of the novel’s composition. This material approach to *Lady Chatterley* allows one to read it in terms of what Trotter calls “techno-primitivism” (with rubber its figure in the novel: a substance at once natural and, like its successor, plastic, endlessly manipulable through machinic technology) rather than a static or assumed primitiveness destroyed by modern conventionality.³⁹ Through a similar reading of *Walden*, we get from Thoreau the commodity’s eye view of the situation and the transactional nature of his worlded experience is integral to the world-dynamics he tries to represent. He wishes to forge a living connection to India and the East.

Emerson is not as restless a thinker as Thoreau, but Emerson’s transcendentalism—“East meets West” as Hinduism and Hegelianism—spatializes thought in equally complex ways. The transnational dimensions of Emerson’s philosophy are not simply an appeal to syncretic spiritual traditions or the oneness of creation; even Emerson must acknowledge the historicity, contingency, and site specificity of all religions. And even Emerson intimates from time to time that the same world-historical forces that have opened up the world and allowed the wisdom traditions of the East to migrate along their uncertain and unpredictable routes have also brought domination and oppression. A poem in this direction—uncharacteristic in tone though not in sentiment—is Emerson’s 1846 “Ode” to socialist clergyman William Henry Channing. The “Ode” is equivocal and contradictory, yet its startlingly poisonous sarcasm does give the poem a unity of voice. A few stanzas into the poem, the speaker asks, “But who is he that prates / Of the culture of mankind, / Of better arts and life?”

Could this refer to none other than Bishop Berkeley, whose “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America” is where he writes that “Westward the course of empire takes its way”? Emerson characterizes the march westward as the progress of a “blindworm,” writing, “Go, blindworm, go, / Behold the famous States / Harrying Mexico / With rifle and with knife!” He then makes the connection explicit between the pioneering spirit of the American individualist and the enduring institution of slavery in a further question: “Or who, with accent bolder, / Dare praise the freedom-loving mountaineer? / I found by thee, O rushing Contoocook! / And in thy valleys, Agiochook! / The jackals of the negro-holder.” The speaker’s own “bold accent” is shaped by these indigenous references to the New England landscape. The poem’s middle section ranges from growing national tensions over slavery to a more expansive meditation on reification and the commodity fetish (“Things are in the saddle / And ride mankind!”).⁴⁰

The polemical tone of the poem is out of the ordinary for Emerson, but most of its content is standard fare: the politics of a Northern reformer, the transcendentalist’s protest against base materialism. With the final two stanzas, however, Emerson’s poem leaps into a worlded critique of imperialist geopolitics—territory as worlded critique. The poem concludes with these lines:

The over-god
 Who marries Right to Might,
 Who peoples, unpeoples,—
 He who exterminates
 Races by stronger races,
 Black by white faces,—
 Knows to bring honey
 Out of the lion;
 Grafts gentlest scion
 On pirate and Turk.

The Cossack eats Poland,
 Like stolen fruit;
 Her last noble is ruined,
 Her last poet mute:
 Straight, into double band
 The victors divide;
 Half for freedom strike and stand;—
 The astonished Muse finds thousands at her side.⁴¹

Why does Emerson all of a sudden jump across the Atlantic to find an analogy for his nation's drive to annex Mexico? Who exactly are these "victors" who "strike and stand" for freedom? The "angry Muse" at the beginning of the poem is now the "astonished Muse"—astonished as those trying to make sense of this ending. Is this a deliberate echo of Berkeley's "Verses," which begins, "The Muse, disgusted at an age and clime / Barren of every glorious theme, / In distant lands now awaits a better time, / Producing subjects worthy fame"?⁴² A provisional conclusion might be that just as Gregory Corso, that most lyrical of Beat poets, writing from Paris intuitively registers the Algerian War as the necessary corollary of his impossibly romanticized view of France—or as Walter Benjamin puts it in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism"—Emerson's "Ode" recognizes that the Polish nationalists rising up against imperialist Russia, like "harried" Mexico, like those at home suffering the torments of slavery's "jackals," like those everywhere alienated under the new hegemony of industrial capitalism, are all caught up in the same world-system.

The pathbreaking "world-systems analysis" pioneered by Immanuel Wallerstein has become part of a recognizable and increasingly consolidated canon of worlded thought among its practitioners. This canon includes Spivak and Said, both of whom point to worlding's postcolonial origins and its materialist bent. If globalization is top-down and transcendent, a view from above, then worlding is bottom-up and immanent, a view from below (or, from Wallerstein's perspective, the "periphery"). I want to hold on to these key characteristics and major thinkers even as I open up a more expansive genealogy that pushes into new domains: a discrepant tradition comprising metaphysics and phenomenology, and poetics and biology, in addition to literary and cultural theory and criticism. Sketching this larger field of play will help pull the conversation into a specifically Beat orbit; it will also help draw out certain aspects of the worlded world that are crucial to the story I want to tell about the Beats and about U.S. literature.

Wallerstein makes an important distinction when defining "world-system," writing that "a world-system is the system of *the* world, but a system *that is a* world and that can be, most often has been, located in an area less than the entire globe."⁴³ The world indicated by Wallerstein's world-system is neither identical to nor coterminous with the world as empirical object (he uses "globe"). It is thus a nontotalizing totality, a totality in the Marxian sense, that is to say, a critical concept that func-

tions descriptively but also works to denaturalize what it describes, just as our “species-being” is determined by yet exceeds the “totality of social relations” under the prevailing economic system. For Marx, the totality serves a dialectical function; it is precisely the *universality* of capitalism that sets the stage for the universal liberation of proletarian revolution. (Transferring it from base to superstructure, Peter Bürger makes an analogous argument when he writes that it is only after the aestheticists declare the supremacy of “art for art’s sake” that avant-garde movements like Dada can come along and attempt to negate *any* distinction between art and life.)⁴⁴

The Marxian world-system as a nontotalizing totality means that civilization progresses, in dialectical fashion, from one world to the next (e.g., from the feudal world to the capitalist world). But what if multiple worlds, an infinite number of worlds, can exist simultaneously? This is the conclusion to draw from the work of biologist and proto-posthumanist Jakob von Uexküll, whose concept of Umwelt (environment, life-world) posits that each species’ sensorium is fundamentally unique and constitutes a world unto itself. In Uexküll’s most enduring work, *A Foray into the Worlds (Umwelten) of Animals and Humans*, he asks readers to take an imaginary stroll with him:

We begin such a stroll on a sunny day before a flowering meadow in which insects buzz and butterflies flutter, and we make a bubble around each of the animals living in the meadow. The bubble represents each animal’s environment and contains all the features accessible to the subject. As soon as we enter into one such bubble, the previous surroundings of the subject are completely reconfigured. Many qualities of the colorful meadow vanish completely, others lose their coherence with one another, and new connections are created. *A new world [Eine neue Welt] arises in each bubble.*

The author emphasizes the salutary estrangement involved in such a pursuit when he writes, “Only when we can vividly imagine this fact [of the “bubbles”] will we recognize in our own world the bubble that encloses each and every one of us on all sides.”⁴⁵ Uexküll’s perspective, which radically decenters human consciousness and imagines a dense, rhizomic web of inputs and interactions among all life forms, is picked up by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* and has come back to the fore in the field of animal studies and among today’s theorists of posthuman biopolitics.

This talk of worlds and bubbles is strangely reminiscent of Leibniz even, whose rationalist abstractions seem miles away from Uexküll’s empiricist

phenomenology. Yet Leibniz's "monad" is but the metaphysical counterpart to Uexküll's model of ecological interdependence. On the surface, the self-sufficient monad—a substance without windows or doors, as Leibniz puts it—is an image of extreme isolation, but the exact opposite is true. The "monadology" works only because we live in a universe where everything is connected to everything else and everything affects everything else; transculturally speaking, it is a version of Indra's net. The philosopher writes, "This interconnection or accommodation of all created things to each other, and each to all the others, brings it about that each simple substance [i.e., monad] has relations that express all the others, and consequently, that each simple substance is a perpetual, living mirror of the universe." Leibniz also plays on the tension between singularity and multiplicity inherent in the monad, and like Uexküll he is interested in perspective, writing, "Just as the same city viewed from different directions appears entirely different and, as it were, multiplied perspectively, in just the same way it happens that, because of the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which are, nevertheless, only perspectives on a single one, corresponding to the different points of view of each monad."⁴⁶

Leibniz's monism offers a new way to read Beat writers and their supposed isolation from and indifference to the wider world—an antidote, in other words, to Barry Miles's claim that the Beats "could have been living anywhere." The common view of the Beat Generation as essentially isolationist is similar to what George Orwell once said about Beat precursor Henry Miller. Orwell's essay "Inside the Whale" centers on Miller as it contemplates the proper relationship between art and politics in an era of totalitarianism. He recalls the time in 1936 when he first met Miller. Orwell was on his way to Spain to serve the republican cause, an act that Miller told him was "sheer stupidity."⁴⁷ He comes to agree, arguing in the essay that a literature of utter passivity (e.g., Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*) is far preferable to the "committed" literature of the day (e.g., Auden, Spender), and more honest.

To capture the full extent of Miller's passivity and attitude of acceptance—the latter he shares with Whitman, according to Orwell—the author adapts an image that Miller himself uses to describe Anaïs Nin: he compares him to "Jonah in the whale's belly." Orwell writes,

And however it may be with Anaïs Nin, there is no question that Miller himself is inside the whale. All his best and most characteristic passages are written from the angle of Jonah, a willing Jonah. Not that he is especially

introverted—quite the contrary. In his case the whale happens to be transparent. Only he feels no impulse to alter or control the process that he is undergoing. He has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, *accepting*.

“Short of being dead,” Orwell calls this “the final, unsurpassable stage of irresponsibility,” but maybe irresponsibility is sometimes more principled than its opposite.⁴⁸ The ambivalence of Orwell’s description is signaled by a central paradox: Miller is trapped in the belly of the whale, but “the whale happens to be transparent.” Put another way, he is inside one of Uexküll’s “bubbles”; only in Miller’s case the bubble happens to contain the entire world.

Wallerstein’s differentiation between a conceptual world and an empirical globe points to the dual nature of world as both physical and figural, topological and tropological. And the space opened up by the distinction is what makes possible the worlded imaginaries that are the subject of this book. In “Inside the Whale,” Orwell ponders the idea of “books that ‘create a world of their own,’ as the saying goes”—books that, like *Tropic of Cancer* or *Ulysses*, “open up a new world not by revealing what is strange, but by revealing what is familiar.”⁴⁹ (He uses “world” exactly two dozen times in the essay.) The book-as-world, alternately poem-as-world, is certainly an old and venerable trope. Often, the world of the poem is held in contrast to the “outside world,” as in Donne’s “The Canonization” (*We’ll build sonnets in pretty rooms*), which is the source of the New Critics’ much-loved “well-wrought urn” and the sentiment behind their nothing-outside-the-text philosophy. There are other times, though, when the text-world is what gives the poet privileged access to the world at large, such as Saint-John Perse’s enigmatic *monde entier des choses* (“whole world of things”) in *Vents*, which was a favorite of Burroughs.⁵⁰

As similar examples proliferate, each draws out a different aspect of the worlded world: some its materiality, some its multiplicity and heterogeneity, others its oppositional force, and still others its yoking together of the near and the far. Fellow New Jersey native and mentor to Allen Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams mobilizes them all in his epic poem *Paterson*, where he proclaims,

The province of the poem is the world.
 When the sun rises, it rises in the poem
 and when it sets darkness comes down
 and the poem is dark .⁵¹

At the outset of book 2 Williams gears up for his meticulous description of a “Sunday in the Park” at Passaic Falls with these lines:

Outside
 outside myself
 there is a world,
 he rumbled, subject to my incursions
 —a world
 (to me) at rest,
 which I approach
 concretely—⁵²

With this last word a play on the poem’s emphatically urban setting, in addition to being a statement of purpose from Williams the “objectivist” poet, the speaker suggests that the world as such can be approached only locally, through its tangible specificity and nearness at hand. While always, and necessarily, in contact with the tangible and material—the poet’s dictum: “No ideas but in things” becomes a refrain in *Paterson*—the many worlds of the poem are often associated with thought, memory, and the imagination, which stand in contrast to the corrupted and lamentable workaday world. Within the dialectical movement of the poem, one requires the other.

Paterson notably incorporates entire letters that Williams had received from friends and admirers. Three of those letters are from Ginsberg. In the first and longest, written before the two had met and when Ginsberg was but twenty-three years old, the younger poet hits on the great themes of Williams’s epic. Ginsberg tells him, “I envision for myself some kind of new speech . . . out of the subjective wanderings through *Paterson*. This place is as I say my natural habitat by memory, and I am not following in your traces to be poetic: though I know you will be pleased to realize that at least one actual citizen of your community has inherited your experience in his struggle to love and know his own world-city.” In book 5 Williams follows another letter from Ginsberg (enclosed with the poem “Sunflower Sutra”) with these lines: “the virgin and the whore, which / most endures? the world / of the imagination most endures”—that is to say, it trumps dull binaries like virgin and whore and, ultimately, poem and world, art and life.⁵³

Finally, essential for a worlded understanding of the global flows of cultural production and power has been the borderlands critique pioneered by Gloria Anzaldúa and José Saldívar. Thinking transnationally means thinking about and beyond borders of all kinds, and transnationalism as

worlding keeps a concept of *transgression* front and center. Worlding is interested in transgressive acts, whether they involve borders internal or external, textual or otherwise; worlding seeks to *be* transgressive: that is to say, counterhegemonic, reading against the grain, writing against empire and globalization transcendent. The latter is tricky business, as Pease and others have shown, and a worlded critique needs to take into account its own entanglements within the always uneven interchange between the local and the global, core and periphery. Where transgression is concerned, the accounting has to involve asking who has the privilege, the authority, the power to transgress and who gets denied passage, whether the crossing is undertaken willingly and to what ends.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* is a classic that spans disciplinary boundaries (Latin American and Chicano/a studies, queer theory, and borderlands critique, among others). Her central insight that borders are not just lines on a map but something we carry inside ourselves means transgression is something lived and also something performed. Borders are multiple and overlapping, spatial and figural, and transgression is both an act and a state of being. One can think of a border zone of constantly shifting identifies and allegiances. In *Rogues*, Jacques Derrida points out that transgression and sovereignty are always linked: the sovereign proves its sovereignty precisely by being the exception to its own rule (giving rise to what Giorgio Agamben calls a "state of exception").⁵⁴ Angela Davis would argue that in the twenty-first century what is truly sovereign is capital. In this age of free trade on an increasingly global scale, capital is what is free to cross borders—factories, jobs, commodities, and natural resources also move from core to periphery and back again: everything but people, in other words.⁵⁵

The caveats by Davis and Anzaldúa will serve as guardrails throughout this book, reminders that travel and movement, writing and representation, always involve relations of power. The Beats were primarily, though by no means exclusively, white and male with U.S. passports, which means they possessed an extraordinary freedom to move in the world. It becomes all the more important, then, to expand the Beat canon to include a larger, more diverse group of writers. As an African American, Ted Joans's experience of Morocco is likely to be different from that of William Burroughs; Japan and India are bound to make different impressions on Kyger than they do her husband and traveling companion, Gary Snyder, although while in India, they were both uncomfortably aware of the luxuries afforded them as white and Western. By and large the Beats are hip to such dynamics and use their privilege strategically to thematize

both cultural difference and Cold War geopolitics, as when Burroughs, traveling in Colombia, let himself be mistaken as a representative of the Texas Oil Company, which got him better accommodations, yes, but also gave his writing a greater critical purchase on U.S.–Latin American economic relations and their effects at home and abroad.

Burroughs the oilman is a great example of how the Beats were constantly *performing* transgression, so to speak. Such performances often began with the particular locales Beat writers were drawn to. To visit Castro's Cuba (Baraka, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti) or Nicaragua under the Sandinistas (Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti) was to make a political statement. Even if that statement is equivocal: Ginsberg was famously expelled from Cuba and then Czechoslovakia in the space of a few months, both times under murky circumstances having something to do with Ginsberg's homosexuality (transgression upon transgression). The transnational geographies of Beat travel writing notably include Latin America, India, and North Africa, parts of the world that were supremely affordable and usually offered easy access to drugs, sex, and a sense of permissiveness that comes with being in an alien culture. There is something predictably exoticist and undeniably exploitative about such an arrangement that needs to be reckoned with. Thinking back to Burroughs and Texas Oil, a slightly different way of phrasing the question could be, how is transgression represented in Beat writing? More often than not, it is about making connections, or "contacting," as Burroughs would say, with local histories and ways of being (e.g., Lamantia's participation in native Cora ceremonies in Mexico, Ginsberg's *ayahuasca* cure session in Peru), which Beat writing consistently figures as subversive and disruptive of established power structures. The Beats abroad, and especially in the third world or Global South, bring into sharpest relief the legacies of Western imperialism as well as the United States' expanding footprint internationally after World War II.

The most profound forms of transgression in Beat writing, however, are textual: the Beats share with their modernist precursors and post-modernist contemporaries a perfect willingness to blur the boundaries of genre and form. Genre has long been notoriously tricky in the study of Beat writing. *On the Road* . . . is it fiction or memoir? That question has vexed readers for decades, and the failure to attend to it properly has led to some fairly reductive readings of Kerouac's work. In 2007 the Library of America published its first volume of Beat Generation writing: *Jack Kerouac: Road Novels, 1957–1960*, an evocative title that goes some way to describing a distinctive genre, one that bridges the gap,

uncovers a hidden dialectic, between memoir and fiction in Kerouac's oeuvre. A transgressive genre in and of itself, the road novel is akin to the travelogue, which has long functioned as a form of social critique. Travel writing in the West came into its own during the age of discovery and is thus linked to colonialism and the modern world-system. It was during the Enlightenment that Denis Diderot and the philosophes began to see the critical potential of the travelogue. Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772) "supplements" the just-published *Voyage autour du monde* by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, the first Frenchman to circumnavigate the globe. Diderot's satirical version is sharply critical of colonialism and missionary activity, and he uses the handy (because new at the time) trope of the noble savage to decry European decadence and heavy-handed morality.

Accounts by Bougainville and fellow explorers to document "primitive" societies resemble early attempts at ethnography. When Antonin Artaud alludes to Diderot in his 1945 "Supplément au voyage au pays des Tarahumaras"—one of a series of texts by Artaud documenting and reflecting on his peyote quest in Mexico (published in English as *The Peyote Dance*)—he does so in regard to a voyage that was itself undertaken in a quasi-anthropological manner.⁵⁶ And when Burroughs, who had pursued graduate work in anthropology at Harvard, travels to the Amazon in search of the mythical hallucinogen ayahuasca, or *yagé*, the resulting *Yage Letters* read even more like ethnography, but a satirical ethnography that complicates in canny ways the power and the privileged knowledge of the scientist. As the title suggests, the *Yage Letters* also plainly involves an epistolary element: an opportunity for more genre bending on Burroughs's part but also a mark of the interpersonal dimension in Beat writing and the strongly collaborative nature of Beat Generation literature.

The essential point about Beat transgression is the extent to which crossing textual boundaries is activated by, and in many cases predicated on, first crossing physical borders. Accordingly, the following chapters are organized around particular writers and texts but also around specific locations. Geography thus acts as a cohesive force across chapters. Prominent locales are Latin America (Colombia, Peru, and especially Mexico) and North Africa (chiefly Morocco but also Algeria and Mali), which in the Beats' transnational imaginary become radically transformed, or deterritorialized, and linked textually to the United States, Europe, the Pacific Rim, and so on. An additional structuring principle is the overlapping formal and rhetorical tactics by which Beat writers engage with the

world, and the book's recursive structure allows writers to speak to one another across chapters in mutually illuminating ways: Joans and Lamantia through their shared commitment to surrealism, Burroughs and Gysin through their mutual development of the cut-up technique, Kerouac and Kingston through the character of Wittman Ah Sing in Kingston's novel *Tripmaster Monkey*. Underlying all of this, however, is a desire not merely to apply transnational theory to Beat Generation writing but to demonstrate that Beat writing can help advance a vision of what a truly worlded literary criticism might look like.

Most of the following chapters center on single authors, while always looking outward to the broader contexts and text-networks that shape that author's work. Chapter 1 focuses on Kerouac, presenting Dean Moriarty's ecstatic "It's the world!" (uttered just after he and Sal Paradise cross the border into Mexico in the final section of *On the Road*) as the zero degree formula for worlded Beat writing. Chapter 1 also opens up a discussion of the "subterranean" in Beat literature. A central Beat trope, an image of rhizomic connection, and a reading practice, subterranean thought is an important corollary of worlded thought, and Kerouac's practice of using travel and immersion in one location to construct radically expansive textual landscapes becomes a template for other Beat writers to follow.

Chapter 2 explores the transnational assemblages of influence integral to the work of African American Beat writers Amiri Baraka, Ted Joans, and Bob Kaufman. Joans, for example, wrote jazz- and Beat-inflected verse animated in equal parts by the avant-garde legacies of surrealism and by the Pan-Africanist rhetoric of black nationalism. He believed these disparate interests were fully compatible, and through the lens of his poetry, Beat writing becomes a swirling matrix of transgressive energies. Chapter 2 places the Beat movement within the venerable tradition of avant-garde art and literature that includes the Dadaists, the futurists, and especially the surrealists. Lamantia, at the center of chapter 3, was likewise influenced by the international avant-garde. Next to Joans's playfully idiosyncratic, politically canny poems, Lamantia's hermetic verse reads as very purely surrealist, yet his writing is also quite porous, shot through with competing interests and obsessions. Lamantia's career bridges the gap between avant-garde New York in the 1940s (where many European artists and writers had sought refuge during World War II) and the San Francisco Renaissance a decade later.

While the first half of the book fleshes out the various world-conjuring tactics employed by Beat writers, the next two chapters present extended

readings of key texts. In a variation on Dimock's deep time, chapter 4 argues that William Burroughs's breakthroughs in *Naked Lunch* are the result of a collaborative process spanning several continents. A worlded reading of Burroughs's novel ultimately reveals its Latin American origins, for the seeds of *Naked Lunch* were planted in the less well-known *Yage Letters*, where his dream of a great "Composite City" projects a utopian vision of a transgressive community and worlded connectivity. Chapter 5 focuses on Gysin's 1969 novel *The Process*, which I read as an exemplary work of postcolonial Beat fiction. Set during the tumultuous years preceding national independence in the French Maghreb, Gysin's novel dramatizes the events in Morocco and Algeria in a kaleidoscopic manner that allows him to imagine alternative histories and inhabit a variety of subject positions. The plot unfolds around protagonist Ulys O. Hanson, an African American professor of history traveling through North Africa to research his book on the "future of slavery." For much of the novel, Hanson (aka Hassan Merikani) passes as African and Muslim, a situation that raises important questions of racial, religious, and ethnic difference, testing the limits of narrative identification while suggesting new possibilities for community building within a postcolonial—even postnational—framework.

Finally, chapter 6 loops back around to Kerouac by way of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, taking seriously the notion of post-Beat writing that signifies both rupture and continuity with regard to the Beat canon. Kingston is best known as the author of *Woman Warrior*; in *Tripmaster Monkey*, she dramatizes her own deeply ambivalent alliance with the Beats. Kingston's protagonist, Wittman Ah Sing, is a Chinese American beatnik (the novel is set in San Francisco in the mid-1960s) who wrestles with Kerouac's ghost and rewrites the Beat mythos in more inclusive terms. Kingston presents Wittman as a kind of latter-day flaneur, whose wanderings across San Francisco trace a subversive geography in the mode of the lettrist/situationist *dérive*. I use these concepts together with other models of "social space" to emphasize the point that post-Beat writing likewise engages an active process of world making, or worlding. I also point to the emergence of a cluster of contemporary Bay Area writers and activists whose work unites language, landscape, and political struggle in ways that further transform the tactics and traditions of worlded Beat writing.