World Beats

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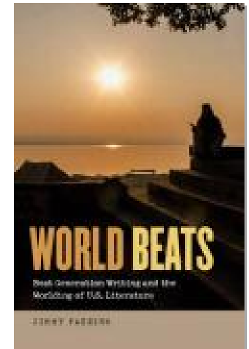

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FOR AFRICA . . . FOR THE WORLD: BRION GYSIN AND THE POSTCOLONIAL BEAT NOVEL

"Hear My Voice"

In the spring of 1960, seven years after Burroughs's yagé experiments in South America, Allen Ginsberg set out on his own quest for the fabled hallucinogen. In Pucallpa, Peru, Ginsberg met a local *curandero* and participated in a yagé cure session that lasted through the night. The following day he wrote a letter to Burroughs, describing his profound and harrowing experience with the drug: "The whole fucking Cosmos broke loose around me, I think the strongest and worst I've ever had it nearly," telling him, "I was frightened and simply lay there with wave after wave of death-fear, fright, rolling over me till I could hardly stand it."[1] Ginsberg pleaded with his friend and former lover for guidance: "I do want to hear from you Bill so please write and advise me whatever you can if you can. I don't know if I'm going mad or not and it's difficult to face more. . . . I'm no Curandero, I'm lost myself, and afraid of giving a nightmare I can't stop to others" (65).[2] Both Ginsberg's letter and Burroughs's reply appeared in the "Seven Years Later" section of *Yage Letters* when the book was finally published by City Lights in 1963, after years of effort by Ginsberg to see it into print.

Given the evident despair of Ginsberg's letter from Pucallpa, Burroughs's cryptic reply may seem rather callous and willfully obscure. He began with an equivocal bit of wordplay, "There is no thing to fear," before providing these instructions:

> Take the enclosed copy of this letter. Cut along the lines. Rearrange putting section one by section three and section two by section four. Now read aloud and you will hear My Voice. Whose voice? Listen. Cut and rearrange in any combination. Read aloud. I can not choose but hear. Don't think

> about it. Don't theorize. Try it. Do the same with your poems. With any poems any prose. Try it. You want "Help." Here it is. Pick up on it. And always remember. "Nothing is True. Everything is permitted" Last Words of Hassan Sabbah The Old Man Of The Mountain." (70)

Although Ginsberg later admitted that he had been looking for more "handholding," taken as a marker of the distance Burroughs has traveled, literally and figuratively, since his 1953 journey in search of yagé, his enigmatic reply is quite revealing indeed. Above all, it marks the growing influence of painter and fellow writer Brion Gysin. Burroughs and Gysin had met in Tangier in the mid-1950s, but it was not until they both found themselves living in Paris a few years later at 9 rue Gît-le-Coeur, the famed "Beat Hotel," that they became friends and began their intense artistic collaboration. What Burroughs offered Ginsberg in the letter is, of course, a version of the cut-up method, which he and Gysin had been working with extensively at the time.[3] His reply makes it clear that *cut-up-thought* had now supplanted *yagé-thought*. Yet insofar as the yagé experience is, as Harris suggests, primarily a textual experience, perhaps Burroughs's instructions to Ginsberg do make a certain sense.[4]

Now that the cut-up technique pointed him and Gysin toward a conception of language and linguistic production that radically decenters the speaking subject, Burroughs had little patience for anything as personal as Ginsberg's crisis of conscience and ego-concern. Burroughs's "Voice" in the letter is *produced* as a textual effect, not its source, and any authorial stability is immediately undercut when he asks, "My Voice. Whose voice?" These performative gestures on Burroughs's part are further complicated by the fact that the epistolary form generally relies on a mutually legible notion of sender and receiver. Gysin's influence is again signaled by the figure of "Hassan Sabbah The Old Man of the Mountains." The legendary Hassan-i Sabbah was leader of the twelfth-century military society and hashish cult known as the Assassins, or Hashashin. Sabbah is a central figure in Gysin's personal mythology, acting at times as a spiritual guide and at times an alter ego. Burroughs closely associates the two of them as well, especially in relation to the occult power of the cut-ups. In Gysin's 1969 novel, *The Process*, a modern-day "Brotherhood of the Assassins" is of immense narrative and thematic significance, and Sabbah's "last words," "Nothing is true. Everything is permitted," become a refrain in the novel. Furthermore, the concept of "Present Time"—Burroughs dates his letter to Ginsberg: "June 21 1960 Present Time Pre- Sent Time" (70)—is vital for understanding Gysin's representation of history and politics in *The Process*.

I begin with this story of Burroughs and Ginsberg in a chapter focused on Gysin because it showcases the dense intertextuality typical of so much Beat Generation writing. Mapping these transnational text-networks, to again use Gillman and Gruesz's term, requires a reading practice attentive to the structures of Dimock's deep time, which in turn requires a planetary, or worlded, perspective to be grasped in its spatial totality. The *Yage–Naked Lunch* text-network, to take our example from the previous chapter, stretches across no fewer than four continents; when Gysin's novel gets added to the mix, the network grows more expansive still. Through a complex and highly inventive set of tropes and tactics, Gysin attempts in *The Process* to figure the world as such. He also manages to create a prime example of what I am calling "postcolonial Beat literature." I say this knowing readers may balk at the idea of Beat Generation writing as postcolonial, but it is exactly this kind of unconventional, even anachronistic, linkage that my work on the Beats seeks to activate.[5] Worlded Beat writing designates in part a body of texts that present a sustained postcolonial critique: in previous chapters, this critique was operative in the Pan-Africanist/black nationalist rhetoric of Ted Joans and Amiri Baraka and in *Yage*'s sardonic assessment of Cold War neo-imperialism; likewise, Gysin's novel persistently interrogates orientalist discourses and engages imaginatively with colonial legacies in a decolonizing world.

Purists may also question the choice to include a chapter on Gysin at all. Was he really a Beat? His presence at the birth of the cut-ups and collaboration with Burroughs on all manner of textual, visual, and psychic experiments at the Beat Hotel alone warrant his presence here, it seems to me. Gysin anchored Burroughs's immensely fertile year in Paris, just as he had helped shape Tangier's expatriate scene during the final years of the International Zone. Through his relationship with the Jajouka musicians of Morocco, he helped introduce a Western audience to what would come to be known as "world music" or "worldbeat," later popularized by the likes of Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel.[6] It is rather the case that one really can't write a book about the World Beats *without* including Gysin. The present chapter puts into practice one of the more promising trends from the new Beat studies and a motivating principle behind my project: to open up the study and understanding of the Beat movement in as many ways as possible. The Beats bled into the New York School, the Black Mountain group, the San Francisco Renaissance, and the New American Poetry and have direct ties to the surrealists and other international avant-gardists. Beat writers learned from bebop musicians, Zen masters, and radicals of all stripes. In the end, the best way

to describe the Beat movement—or perhaps any literary or artistic school or movement—is how Anne Waldman describes it: as an "open system," or like Diane di Prima: as a "jam session."[7]

For every Marinetti or Breton, nervously policing the borders of their reified "-ism," dissidents and defectors like Mina Loy or Antonin Artaud smuggle something across. Gysin rejected the Beat label, it is true, but so did Burroughs. If public disavowal were enough, we might have to strike Kerouac's name from the record too. Even he equivocated, or inflated the meaning of "Beat" *ad absurdum*. All this pushing back against labels is the flipside of the avant-garde impulse to name, and by naming to create. It is the necessary obverse of the performativity of the manifesto, which is "negatively" generative insofar as it conditions and fixes what it breathes life into. The Beats' refusal to be pinned down is part and parcel of a familiar avant-garde rhetoric, which, especially after World War II, becomes a critique of affiliation as such (leading finally to Tim Leary's "turn on, tune in, drop out.") But as this and other chapters try to show, absolute insistence on a Beat politics of *dis*association is untenable. What is needed is a more fluid conception of affiliation and more permeable definitions of "Beat," "American," "literature," and the rest.

"Naked Brion"

Gysin's years with Burroughs at the Beat Hotel, however productive, are only one chapter in a long and multifarious career. He had spent the better part of the 1950s in Morocco, after an initial invitation from Paul and Jane Bowles to join them at their Tangier villa. It was Paul who introduced Gysin to the Master Musicians of Jajouka, who would figure so largely in Gysin's life in Morocco. In 1954 Gysin opened the 1001 Nights restaurant in Tangier to showcase the Jajouka musicians. It was the hottest club in town before closing down after Tangier joined an independent Morocco in 1956. In "Cut-Ups Self-Explained" (1964), Gysin argues that "writing is fifty years behind painting," a charge made all the more trenchant by the fact the Gysin was himself a prolific painter who continues to be known today primarily as a visual artist.[8] During an earlier stay in Paris in the mid-1930s to attend classes at the Sorbonne, Gysin instead fell in with the surrealist group. He was invited to show his work at a group exhibition that included such luminaries as Picasso, Miró, Magritte, and Dalí but was devastated to find, on the day of the opening, his pictures being removed by order of André Breton on murky grounds of "insubordination."[9] The same gallery would later hold a solo

exhibition of Gysin's work, which was beginning to move away from overtly surrealist influences and would become increasingly complex and innovative over the next several decades. By the late 1950s at the Beat Hotel, Gysin was producing canvases that overlaid gridlike patterns with Eastern calligraphic scripts and sought to liberate language in ways analogous to his and Burroughs's cut-up experiments.

Jason Weiss has noted that Gysin's multigenre, mixed-media approach, which seems to vacillate or occupy a kind of middle ground between visual art and the written word, has led to both his unfortunate obscurity and his enduring significance "in this age when scholars and readers are eager to think across the disciplines, to find connections between cultures, to discern the underlying matrix of an artistic moment beyond fixed horizons of identity or traditional expectations."[10] The hybrid identities (formal, linguistic, cultural, and otherwise) that Weiss views as central to Gysin's oeuvre are in many ways the obverse of a loss, even a refusal, of personal identity that becomes equally important to Gysin's mythos and worldview.[11] He once confessed, "I have never accepted the color or texture of my oatmealy freckled skin: 'bad packaging' I thought. Certain traumatic experiences have made me conclude that at the moment of birth I was delivered to the wrong address," adding, "I have done what I could to make up for this."[12] This last statement could apply to Gysin's incessant travels—a self-imposed exile or a pilgrimage with no known destination—and to the sum of his creative endeavors. But it is in *The Process*, where shifting identities and itineraries mirror the ceaselessly shifting sands of the Sahara, that Gysin launches his most profound attempt at "making up" for the very fact of his birth.

The creative detours that cut a meandering path across Gysin's novel add up to something more than an accidental masterpiece by a "peripheral" Beat writer or a relic of late sixties psychedelia. With *The Process* Gysin has made a significant contribution to Beat discourses on race, gender, ethnicity, and religion, as they offer an alternative, even a corrective, to familiar depictions of the "exotic" in Beat writing or the standard fare of what Brian Edwards has dubbed "hippie orientalism."[13] The cross-cultural aesthetics and wildly innovative narrative and figurative strategies that Gysin employs throughout the novel enable him to comment on racial and ethnic difference in a particularly complex and nuanced manner, and Hanson's willingness to "go native" in Morocco, perhaps unsettling at times, is but one highly performative means of counteracting the relentless *othering* that has always been an orientalist hallmark.[14] My reading of *The Process* as thoroughly worlded in scope and decid-

edly antiorientalist in outlook is grounded in the novel's presentation of personal identity and group affiliation as multiple and mutable and yet firmly rooted in local soils and histories, achieved in the novel through a highly wrought set of tropes and images revolving around the nexus of language and landscape. The linguistic and geographic permutations that become the text's most striking feature amount to nothing less than an active "process" of postcolonial world making. The novel, in fact, contains *many* worlds. Changes in perspective, shifts in consciousness, and other like phenomena are consistently described in terms of leaving one "world" for another, and Gysin's novel demands a constant reorientation on the reader's part to account at each step for new horizons, new vistas, and a new relation to an immanent and heterogeneous totality made radically expansive through its profound and paradoxical rootedness in space and time.

Gysin began composing the novel, his first, in 1965 and would spend the next several years in Tangier completing it. The events detailed therein generally take place about a decade earlier, but it is a roman à clef only in the broadest sense. Gysin clearly has something more ambitious in mind, and his novel works on its source material in highly inventive and challenging ways. These transformative operations—some of which are recognizable to anyone familiar with the curious genre of Beat "fiction," some distinctly Gysin's—form the basis of our discussion in what follows. A long opening chapter introduces our protagonist, Ulys O. Hanson III, an African American professor of history trekking through the Sahara to research his next book, which he plans to call "The Future of Slavery." To this end, Hanson has received funds from an obscure group called the Foundation for Fundamental Findings, although he makes it only as far as Adrar, Algeria, before being turned back by French troops—"the Heavy Water Police"—guarding the nuclear test site just to the south. The insidious presence of these and other agents of what Burroughs would call the "control society" permeates the desert, setting the tone for a series of uncertain crossings that structure Gysin's novel. Back in Tangier, having failed to reach "my Black Africa," Hanson is abruptly snatched away be Hamid, his "Moroccan mock-guru." The two of them escape the violently escalating anticolonial unrest brewing in the city and flee to the home of Hamid's uncles, none other than the Master Musicians of Jajouka.

As Gysin's narrative grows increasingly fractured and hallucinatory, the demands of what the novel figures as "Present Time" begin to assert themselves more forcefully. Hanson meets the ghostly Thay Himmer, "last White Rajah-Bishop of the Farout Isles" (204), at a Tangier café, and it turns out that Thay and his wife, Mya, have been bankrolling

Hanson through their Foundation for Fundamental Findings. They mean to embroil him in Mya's plot to take over the entire African continent. Hanson and Thay rendezvous with other members of the Himmer's organization at Mya's seaside citadel, Malamut, and when Hanson learns what the Himmers truly have in store for him, he is faced with a critical decision. The novel ends with one last set of narrative *permutations* (a watchword throughout) and a coda that returns us to a nearly identical scene from the opening chapter, leaving readers to ask whether this whole business has been, as Hanson suggests more than once, "a trap well-enough woven of words."

Whether or not one agrees that Paul Bowles's complaint to Ginsberg about the novel ("an awful lot of naked Brion in there") is cause for disapprobation, Bowles does have a point.[15] In spite of their obvious differences, Ulys Hanson can, and should, be read as Gysin's alter ego. Like Hanson, Gysin once wrote a book about the slave trade in Canada, and like Hanson, Gysin became one of the first "Fulbrighters" on the strength of that book.[16] Hanson's "mock-guru," Hamid, is closely modeled on Moroccan painter Mohamed Hamri, who was instrumental in bringing the Jajouka musicians to Tangier and the 1001 Nights. Hamri first met Paul and Jane Bowles, who recognized his talent as an artist, in 1950. He met Gysin a year later, and in 1952 they mounted a joint exhibition of their paintings in Tangier's Rembrandt Hotel. In his efforts to promote Hamri, Gysin is like Bowles, who championed the work of local artists and storytellers: among them Mohamed Mrabet, Ahmed Yacoubi, and Mohamed Choukri. Brian Edwards has written about his complicated relationship with Choukri in particular and the politics of Bowles's many translation projects.[17] For his part, Hamri offered Gysin a way in (a "passport," as it will be figured in *The Process*) to Moroccan life that would have remained hidden to him, hence the emphasis on initiation in Gysin's novel.[18] The Himmers bear a strong resemblance to John and Mary Cooke, a wealthy American couple and early boosters of Scientology and LSD. Gysin became close with John in particular, and when he got enmeshed in the Cookes' extravagant and tangled affairs in Morocco and Algeria, it ended up costing him his restaurant. This handful of major characters in *The Process* are at least clothed in pseudonyms; "naked Brion" does indeed appear at various points in the novel, as when Gysin refers, by name, to a litany of former lovers.

Compelling though such personal revelations may be, they pale in comparison with the subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways in which the novel's immediate cultural and political context—in particular, the context of Af-

rican decolonization—percolate through the book. There are references to the Algerian War and to the demonstrations and riots that erupted across Morocco in the run-up to Independence: in particular, the 1952 Tangier riot that, as Paul Bowles would later write, "presaged the end of the International Zone of Morocco."[19] The March 30 riot marked the fortieth anniversary of the Treaty of Fez, creating the French and Spanish protectorates in Morocco. Characters include versions of anticolonial torchbearers Mehdi Ben Barka and Frantz Fanon, whose name in the novel, Francis-X. Fard—"world-famous psychiatrist and the internationally Prize-winning author of *Paleface and Ebony Mask*" (175)—also evokes not only Nation of Islam founder Wallace Fard Muhammad but also Malcolm X, the Nation's most controversial former member. This recombinatory gesture on Gysin's part is typical of the author's method and has the effect of linking both Fanon and Fard to a larger history of Pan-Africanism and black power swirling around the novel. (Ben Barka's name becomes "Ben Baraka" and is probably also an allusion to Beat poet LeRoi Jones, who had recently changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka and helped found the black arts movement.) There are additional references to poet Senegalese poet-cum-president Léopold Sédar Senghor and his former surrealist colleague Aimé Césaire, or "the Nabobs of Negritude" (181), to Claude Lévi-Strauss, aka "Professor Levy-Levant," leader of "the Paris school of social anthropology," and, for those more keen on waging a revolution of the *mind*, to psychedelic icons Aldous Huxley and Albert Hoffman (Mya's mentor, "Dr. Forbach of Basel").[20]

Along with these markers of its contemporary sociohistorical context, Gysin's novel weaves together a more remote, even mythic, history. Such is the tale of Persian military and religious leader Hassan-i Sabbah and his band of eleventh-century Assassins. The name "Assassins" is derived from the hashish rituals that adepts are alleged to have performed at Alamut, their mountaintop fortress. The group would inspire the nineteenth-century Club des Hashischins, whose members included Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, and Gérard de Nerval. Gysin was captivated by the mythology of the original Assassins, and in *The Process*, they are figured as a loose-knit "Brotherhood" of Sufi mystics and ritual keef smokers whom Hanson seems to meet everywhere he goes.[21] They are also closely associated with Hamid and the ritual performances of the Master Musicians, and their presence in the novel forms a circuit of reciprocity and mutual respect that exerts a countervailing pressure on the network of colonial authority following Hanson like a shadow across the desert.

"A Trap Well-Enough Woven of Words"

In the end, the strength of Gysin's novel resides not in its verisimilitude but in its willful departure from any one version of reality, and *The Process* differs from a lot of Beat fiction in its sheer narrative complexity, which includes no fewer than eight narrators and extensive transcriptions of tape recordings, journals entries, and computer files. The main narrative is threaded together with interstitial chapters by Hanson, but even his identity is multiple and grows increasingly elusive. Among whites and Europeans, he is Professor Ulys Hanson. To Hamid and other North African Berbers and Arabs, he is Hassan Merikani. Mya takes to calling him Ulysses-Hassan, and the foundation wants to name him "The Ghost of Ghoul" as they enlist him in the wild conspiracy that drives the novel to its conclusion. Gysin's novel describes a proliferation of identities that is also a *loss* of identity, and in the face of this personal and narrational slippage, Gysin's novel organizes itself mainly along geographic lines. Geography and identity become closely aligned; the novel's opening paragraph makes these alignments clear and is worth quoting in full:

> I am out in the Sahara heading due south with each day of travel less sure of just who I am, where I am going or why. There must be some easier way to do it but this is the only one I know so, like a man drowning in a sea of sand, I struggle back into this body which has been given me for my trip across the Great Desert. "This desert," my celebrated colleague, Ibn Khaldoun the Historian, has written, "This desert is so long it can take a lifetime to go from one end to the other and a childhood to cross at its narrowest point." I made that narrow childhood crossing on another continent; out through hazardous tenement hallways and stickball games in the busy street, down American asphalt alleys to paved playgrounds; shuffling along Welfare waiting-lines into a maze of chain-store and subway turnstiles and, through them, out onto a concrete campus in a cold gray city whose skyscrapers stood up to stamp on me. It has been a long trail a-winding down here into this sunny but sandy Middle Passage of my life in Africa, along with the present party. Here, too, I may well lose my way for I can see that I am, whoever I am, out in the middle of Nowhere when I slip back into this awakening flesh which fits me, of course, like a glove. (1–2)

One could easily imagine this scene cinematically. The narrator's voice-over accompanies the film's opening credits as a long, aerial shot finds the tiny specks of a desert caravan. The camera slowly zooms in while the

narrator recounts his "childhood crossing," which is itself set in terms of a bleak urban desert, until it fixes a close-up of Hanson as he "slips back into this awakening flesh." The motion of the camera would parallel the incessant motion of Hanson's childhood, described in formulations like "out through," "down . . . to," shuffling along . . . into," and so on; it would also foreground the thematics of movement and travel that shape the novel.

Considering the gap between author and narrator, a statement like the glib "It has been a long trail a-winding down here into this sunny but sandy Middle Passage of my life in Africa" may be off-putting, but it is reflective of the willfully flippant approach to language in the novel. The hackneyed image of something fitting "of course, like a glove," further belabored by its ironic self-awareness, suggests that the narrator goes about his figuration with at least some ambivalence. Perhaps it is entirely fitting that an African American professor of the history of slavery would map out his own life in terms of a "Middle Passage," Hanson's skin—and the question of embodied identity—remains a major preoccupation throughout the novel. The Middle Passage reference, coming as early as it does, evokes the opening lines of the *Inferno* as well: "Midway upon the journey [*nel mezzo del cammin*] of our life" (Hamid, then, becomes Hanson's Virgil.) Like the name Ulys/Ulysses ("of Ithaca, N.Y."), the echoes of Dante, Homer, and Joyce reinforce, in splendidly ham-fisted fashion, the notion of Hanson as exile or wanderer. However self-reflexive and *constructed* Gysin's novel may be, none of this is meant to suggest that it bears no relation to a world outside of its own creation. Gysin's novel is firmly grounded in the world of history and politics, and unpacking its dense layers of reference and allusion will be essential to our reading.

The distance between author and narrator enables Gysin to imagine scenes that perhaps could not have been presented otherwise. A few years after the novel was published, Gysin would reflect, "I've lived the best years of my life in Morocco and [my 'lousy oatmeal skin'] can't take the sun. When I'm with Africans, I forget that I'm white. But they can't forget it. I stick out like a sore thumb. From miles away across the deserts or mountains, I look like a colonial cop or a mercenary. What side am I on?"[22] Whatever one may think of these pronouncements, it is clear that Hanson, black and able to "pass" as Muslim and African, fulfills a deep-seated desire on Gysin's part to escape his "lousy oatmeal skin." In *The Process*, the idea of passing is thematized, with characteristic facetiousness, in regard to Hanson's career in academia. From his bath in Alger's posh Hotel Saint-Georges, he explains,

> I have taught: I have published. . . . My book could have made me a full professor; with tenure, what is more, in almost any good school in the East, and would have, I think, if I had only been white. As I ponder on this, I play with myself in the suds and stand up, creaming my body all over with soap in front of the full-length mirror. . . . When I applied for my Fulbright fellowship, I sent them this very white photograph of myself. When we all passed muster at a cocktail party before sailing, I thought some members of the board were surprised to see me in the old flesh, as we call it. . . . I laughed and saluted my white sponsors in the mirror, waving my cock at them all, before I rinsed off and became my black self again. (15)

The thematics of passing fit into a larger pattern of disguise and loss of identity in the novel. A few pages later, in a recognizable attempt at "going native" (a variation on passing), Hanson trades his "GI boots, field jacket and worn Levis for sandals, baggy *sarouel* pants . . . and this fine black burnous which has made me feel invisible, here, since it first dropped over my shoulders." From this point on, Hanson is largely assumed by others to be African and Muslim as he goes "more and more deeply disguised" (21). Later on, when he attempts a letter back to Fundamental Funds detailing his progress and need for more cash, he even "considered enclosing a street photographer's shot of me taken in the thick of [Tangier's] Socco Chico crush and scrawling across it, perhaps: '*Which one is me?*'" (121).

Hanson remains the protagonist, but each chapter of Gysin's sprawling novel is narrated by a different character (Hamid, Thay, Mya, several of Mya's associates and operatives) and becomes a world unto itself—complete with its own history, its own language, its own point of view. Chapter titles like "I" and "Thou," "He" and "She," "You (Fem.)" and "You (Masc.)" are a first clue to the novel's polyvocal desire to thematize and to interrogate the very process of subject formation. The narration of illiterate Hamid is recorded "almost by accident" (81) on Hanson's prized UHER reel-to-reel (a favorite of Gysin's as well). Like Hanson, Hamid is adept at passing between worlds, and when he recounts his youth in Tangier as a streetwise hustler and smuggler, it stands in sharp contrast to the idyllic scenes of time spent with his Master Musician uncles in the hills of Jajouka. The centerpiece of Hamid's narration is his depiction of the mysterious Bou Jeloud festival, which Bowles had first taken Gysin to see in the early 1950s and in which Gysin recognized the same Dionysian energies as those which had once animated the ancient Rites of Pan. The next long chapter, narrated by "Cheshire Cat" Thay Himmer, provides an

account of the burgeoning subculture within Tangier's expatriate scene that, with its distinctive mix of spirituality and hedonism, presages the later influx of "hippie orientalists" inspired in large measure by the presence of Gysin, Burroughs, and Bowles.

Mya Himmer's narration, a rush of ellipses and italics, is extemporaneous and performative and looks very typically "Beat" on the page. Her section also serves as an important corrective to the phallocentric narratives of the male characters that make up the first half of the novel. Her telling allows for a very different history of events to emerge, particularly in the account of her Native American upbringing in Canada, surrounded by strong women and the magic of storytelling. In Mya's chapter—and in the final sections of the novel, which involve increasingly experimental narrative tactics (e.g., fragments from a journal; a transcribed computer archive; a pair of chapters from the Africanus twins, brother and sister who speak to and for one another as they merge voices and even sexes)—readers can discern a very deliberate strategy on Gysin's part to attempt to give voice to the Other, whether figured in terms of gender, race, indigeneity, or, finally, as blurring the line between human and nonhuman (the tape recorder, the computer, etc.). This highly fraught enterprise is recognized as such in the novel and made visible through its seemingly endless succession of revisions and reversals.

The apparent chaos of Gysin's method is belied, however, by a surprisingly limited vocabulary of repeated images, metaphors, and verbal formulas. The novel's use of repetition and doubling, and its relatively small cast of characters, all manage to create the illusion of vast space in what turns out to be a rather hermetic, self-contained textual universe. One set of verbal and *tactile* formulas favored by Hanson deals precisely with this idea of a world in miniature and thematizes the correspondences between "big world" (the world out there) and "small world" (his own private world). In the opening scene of the novel, Hanson is able to "slip back into" himself by performing the detailed, well-practiced ritual of fitting his keef pipe together, filling it with keef (the "green passport" Hamid has given him), and lighting it. He explains, "I make these moves not just out of habit but with a certain conscious cunning through which I ever-so slowly reconstruct myself in the middle of your continuum; inserting myself, as it were, back into this flesh which is the visible pattern of Me." This meticulous process, which recurs throughout the novel, is described in terms of an intimate connection Hanson shares with the objects he manipulates. The match and matchbox are limned in especially vivid detail: "Each match is a neat twist of brown paper like a stick

dipped in wax, with a helmet-shaped turquoise-blue head made to strike on the miniature Sahara of sandpaper slapped onto one side of the box" (3). Calling the strip of sandpaper a "miniature Sahara" is not simply a clever metaphor. It becomes a reversal of the synecdochic relationship in Gysin's novel between desert and world, whereby an object in Hanson's immediate consciousness stands in for the desert as whole, renders it legible in its totality.

The matchbox, however, still contains a profound mystery, and one that gets at the core of how language functions and exerts its strange power in the novel:

> I know this whole business is a trap which may well be woven of nothing but words, so I joggle the miniature matchbox I hold in my hand and these masterpiece matches in here chuckle back what always has sounded to me like a word but a word which I cannot quite catch. It could be a rattling Arabic word but my grasp of Arabic is not all that good and no one, not even Hamid, will tell me what the matches say to the box. . . . If I remember correctly, Basilides . . . reduced all the Names proposed by the Gnostics into one single rolling, cacophonic, cyclical word which he thought might well prove to be a Key to the heavens: "*Kaulakaulakaulakaulakau* . . . " Can the matches match that? (3).

What Hanson means by "this whole business" is not yet clear in these opening pages. It most immediately refers to his elusive sense of self, and the notion of language as constitutive of both self-perception and objective reality is a major concern of Gysin's novel. He plays ceaselessly on the homology of "word" and "world," and as the narrative begins to take shape, one begins to suspect that the "trap woven of words" refers to the novel itself. This early passage also raises important issues of communication, of the ability or inability of various characters to communicate with one another, with the landscape, and so on. These appear with increasing frequency as the novel progresses, crystallizing in Hanson's difficulties of translating and transcribing his various narrators, in Thay and Mya's occult study of "grammatology," in Thay's subsequent vow of silence, in Freeky Fard's brother, Amos Africanus, his tongue mutilated at the hands of French colonial troops, and other equally resonant instances. Most significant in this passage is its final reference to the Egyptian Gnostic Basilides, whose "*Kaulakaula*" foreshadows the novel's central conceit and plot device. The *zikr*, or ritual recitation of the names and attributes of God (*Allahu Akbar*, *Subhan'Allah*, *La ilaha ilallah*), is depicted at several points in the novel—with Hanson and the Assassins, with Thay

and the Hamadcha Sufi brotherhood. In Thay's final exhortation to Hanson that he "permutate the *zikr*" (187), which Hanson accomplishes in truly postmodern fashion with splices and loops on his reel-to-reel tape recorder, is the climactic event on which the entire narrative hinges. The act of permutation thus becomes a dominant trope in *The Process*, and just as Sufi initiates cycle through the many names of God, Gysin's novel cycles through its various narrators, tropes, and language games.

Allegorical permutation in the realms of history and politics—especially in relation to colonial history and postcolonial politics—is a tactic that gives *The Process* much of its critical charge. The novel's polyvalent allegories allow untold stories and marginalized voices to be heard in all their unsettling complexity. Readers learn, for example, that Mya was born Jackie Mae Bear Foot, a Native American princess, lending a degree of gravitas and historical significance to her otherwise monomaniacal and seemingly capricious plan to take over Africa—perhaps now on behalf of all the world's dispossessed, of those victimized by all forms of colonialism. The novel offers no easy answers to Mya's motives, yet it complicates them enough for us to imagine multiple possibilities. Mya's chapter also recalls a poignant scene of indigenous female knowledge and community—a world unto itself. She recalls, elliptically,

> In winter, it could be sixty degrees below zero . . . Fahrenheit, of course . . . and we'd all sit in the kitchen in front of the fire . . . all my grannies and me . . . and we'd wait for the mushroom tea to work and, when it did, why it was *true!* . . . we used simply *fly* away to another land that all those poor white people outside . . . those palefaces, never knew. [. . .] Home was another world. We were seven generations of women . . . believe it or not. [. . .] There were no men of *any* kind around our house . . . *ever*. Greatest Granny, as I called her, insisted that men were bad for the mushrooms . . . and she knew *all* about *them*. Dream-mushrooms always came up out of the ground when she called them by name, she said.[23]

This scene, and the magic it contains, provides an antidote to the patriarchal knowledge proffered to Mya by one Aldous Huxley, and with its claim that "men were bad for the mushrooms," the wisdom of Mya's grandmother neatly reverses the usual shamanic line that women's magic is sure to spoil a spell or potion.

The gender dynamics surrounding magic and ritual in Gysin's novel are reminiscent of a scene from an early draft of *Yage Letters*, where women are very much present at an ayahuasca ceremony. This is in spite of the fact that, as one *brujo* tells Burroughs, "if a woman witnesses the prepa-

ration the Yage spoils on the spot and will poison any who drinks it or at least drive him insane."[24] Burroughs is led to conclude that "evidently the taboo on women does not apply [everywhere]" (95). Mya's Borbor sounds remarkably similar to another substance described in *Yage* called *ololuiqui*: "Women are said to put this drug secretly in a man's food with the result that he loses all will power and becomes a helpless slave to the woman. Why the use of *ololuiqui* should be a monopoly of the female sex I don't know" (93). Burroughs, like Gysin, was clearly fascinated by the thematic possibilities of these psychotropic power differentials.

Borbor is described in the novel as a potent magic and a "mysterious substance" that allows women to control the men around them, and Mya is adept at its use.[25] (She calls herself Calypso.) Its intoxicating effects, plus the verbal slippage between Borbor and "bourbon" on more than one occasion, are also telling. Given the politics of keef versus alcohol use in *The Process*, Borbor/bourbon becomes yet another example of the novel's keen negotiations of language, gender, and religion. For a time the novel itself was to be named after Mya's "mysterious substance." According to Gysin biographer John Geiger, "'Bor-Bor' was the favored choice of Doubleday, the publisher interested in the book."[26] Burroughs, too, understood that Mya and her magic potion lay at the heart of Gysin's novel, explaining in 1973, "The basic message of the book is too disquieting to receive wide acceptance as yet . . . for the book is concerned with rubbing out the word as the instrument of female illusion. The Himmer empire is based on the use of Bor-Bor, the drug of female illusion." "After seeing some of the first drafts of *The Process* in 1967," writes Geiger, "Burroughs used the Bor-Bor idea himself in [the novel] *The Wild Boys*."[27] Disquieted or not, readers can discern, especially in Gysin's rendering of Mya's childhood, a fascination with indigenous practices and a respect for female empowerment; this becomes all the more interesting, and unexpected, considering Burroughs's and Gysin's persistent and well-documented misogyny.

It is from Mya that we learn the history of her husband, Thay, as well, and his family saga turns out to be a revision of the white god myth. Mya tells Hanson, "I'm sure you think you know the rest of the story . . . but, *no!* The Himmers were different. In the next generation, the family went native to conform with some local prophecy which allowed them to crown themselves rajahs with full native pomp" (205). Mya overall depiction of Thay's upbringing provides an image of a post/colonial network oriented away from the United States and toward an autonomous and heterogeneous Pacific Rim: "The Himmers were always *very much* of

the East. They shopped in Singapore instead of San Francisco, for example . . . things like that. Black sheep of the family, like Thay's queer Uncle Willy, fled to Hong Kong and Macao before settling down on a remittance in some super-civilized place like Peking. Girls of the family were rather more spartan. They ran away to spin in an ashram in India with Gandhi . . . or took vows as Buddhist nuns at the court of the Queen of Siam" (205). Mya's itinerary posits a deorientalized East that is dynamic, multiple, and modern. Like her provocation—"you think you know the rest of the story"—it reminds us that colonial histories are as contingent as they are mutable, an idea reinforced by Gysin's overall strategy of narrative fragmentation and by the final incommensurability of the novel's many points of view.

Verbal transmutations like "Borbor/bourbon" and especially "word/world" point to profound correspondences between language and landscape in Gysin's novel. An additional permutation returns us to the desert, the organizing principal and a constant presence in the text. One possible referent of the titular process is the ceaseless transformations of the Sahara's substance as rocky plains of *reg* become sandy *erg*, great dunes that in turn proceed to "'colonize' broad expanses of flat *reg*" (290). Portraying the desert as dynamic, as a living, breathing, speaking organism, is a major impulse in *The Process*. The "landscape as body" metaphor could certainly fit in with the kind of shopworn figuration that Gysin's seems to revel in, although something more significant is going on here as well. Much of this trope has to do with *reading* the landscape, making a potentially threatening or aliening place more legible. Hanson is able to "slip back into" himself with the hypersensitive manipulation of his *own* body and relationship with the "miniature Sahara of sandpaper" on his "masterpiece matchbox" (2–3). Farther along, his desert caravan looks into the "watering eye of the mirage [which] is the great Show of the World" (47).

Hanson had tried to convince his friend Hamid to be his guide into the Sahara, but it was Hamid who required "a bout of instruction in the map." Spreading out a map of the North African Maghreb, Hanson explains it in corporeal terms to Hamid: "On this map, one handspan to the right along the Mediterranean shore lies Woran. With your thumb on Woran, your little-finger lands on Algut. If you pivot due south from that white city on the cliffs, your thumb will fall on Ghardaïa, the mysterious desert capital of the Dissident Mozabites." But, as always, the mapping process is fraught with the danger of illegibility, of losing one's way: "The trouble with this map is that it has two big insets of Woran

and Algut . . . and these effectively obscure the desert trails to the south" (8). Hamid, mostly bemused by Hanson's entire project, reads his own meaning in the map: "He pointed out that the Great Desert is in the shape of a camel stretching its neck right across Africa. . . . He laughed like a lunatic to see that the western butt-end of his camel was dropping its Mauretanian crud on the Black Senegalese. . . . The head of Hamid's camel drinks its fill in the sweet waters of the Nile. The eye of the camel, naturally enough, is that fabled city of Masr, where the Arab movies are made and all the radios ring out over streets paved with gold. Us poor Nazarenes call the place Cairo, for short" (9). This conceit continues for several more lines and indicates the novel's overall strategy of depicting geographic space through a process of imaginative remapping. Hamid's benighted attitudes toward the "Black Senegalese" and "poor Nazarenes" also fits into a larger pattern in the novel—a friend of Hamid's, for example, asks the telling question, "why can't [Hanson] be a Muslim like everyone else in the world?" (86)—and are meant not to so much to elicit our censure as to turn the tables on the Christian West and its own universalizing rhetoric. Like so much in Gysin's novel, its discourse on race and religion is characterized by an awareness of their geographic and historical contingency.

A similar passage is worth citing for its even richer geopolitical dimensions. Describing a building style he likes to call "Sudanese Flamboyant," Hanson explains that it is "Mesopotamian in origin, surely, linking this desert with that other called Arabia Felix—not called Felix because it is happy but because it lies *al limine* (the Yemen), to the lucky right hand when you look back east across the Tigris and the Euphrates, east to the Gobi from whence all the palefaced freaklinas of history have always swept down on us poor Africans" (66–67). Depicting a landscape that bears the inscriptions of history is an essential component of worlded geographies in Beat writing and elsewhere.[28] Hanson's evocative descriptions present a worlded vision of connection and collectivity in the face of colonial oppression. A common substance and a common history "links" the Sahara and its inhabitants with far-off places and peoples. The novel repeatedly raises questions of the meaning and status of various racial, ethnic, and cultural identities (Muslim, Arab, Berber, African, black, white, Christian, European, American, etc.) and, in particular, Hanson's identity in the eyes of his interlocutors. For his part, Hanson casts a very wide net in asserting a shared community of all Africans, whereby what is lost in the strategic erasure of difference among Africans is gained in the assertion of a shared history and dedication to a common cause (al-

though the novel is at pains to show diverse, often incommensurable, visions of a united Africa.)

In the worlded multiplicity of Gysin's novel, the world itself emerges as a powerful organizing trope and topos. The novel continuously seeks out apprehensions of a "world-horizon come near." Preparing to meet for the first time with representatives from the Foundation for Fundamental Findings, Hanson muses, "One thing I forgot to tell the Foundation when I applied is that I have left not one foot back in *their world*, as they think, but a mere fading footprint. This foot I put forward into the Sahara is already firmly implanted in *this African world*, where my guide so far has been Hamid."[29] And farther into the desert, he describes, "Here on the desert as out on the sea, the round swell of the Earth is your rise in the road. . . . The watering eye of the mirage is the great Show of the World. On its dazzling screen you assist at the creation and destruction of the world in flames" (47). Eventually Hanson reaches the shrine of Hassan-i Sabbah, with its elaborately decorated mosaic floor, whose effect is not unlike that of Gysin's dream machine. Hanson explains, "These magic carpets in tile can catch up the soul into rapture for hours. They begin with mere optical illusion in which colors leap and swirl but the effect goes in developing to where pattern springs loose as you move into the picture you see. You step from this world into a garden and the garden is You" (61).

The will to transcendence—the sublime sameness of the world as unmarked *global* space—implied in Hanson's world-visions is strategically undercut by their baroque profusion, which occurs in other characters' narrations as well. Thay Himmer, for example, describes his initiation into the Hamadcha brotherhood as "land[ing] in a new world" (138). Leaving the Medina for the Socco Chico is like "leaving one world for another" (140), and Thay later admits, "Living between two worlds, as I did, I got provoked by Mya into doing the one thing one should never do—introduce one world to the other" (152). Sometimes, Africa and the Sahara are synecdochically connected to "the world," as when Mya tells Hanson that she and Thay "would both be happy if you would accept to come with us to 'Malamut' [her desert fortress]. . . . where we have some great plans under way . . . for Africa . . . for the world" (233).[30] Fard's wife and one of Mya's associates, Affrica "Freeky" Fard (née Africanus), writes about the desert's "hostile" fauna in her journal: "They would contend, I suppose, that they fight for water but I see their innate hostility as just one more example of the extreme nature of the Sahara; of the world" (286). Finally, internal and external worlds are linked metonymically in

the figure of the market.[31] A train conductor with whom Hanson shares his keef tells him, "Beyond this town lies Oujda and the border. If you have no baggage [Hanson has none] you can easily go around it. The World is a Market" (72). And soon afterward, Hamid tells him, "We say about people like you: He can walk in the *souk* of my head, the market-place all Arabs live in" (82).

In topographical terms, the world that Hanson and the others most often confront is a desert one, yet when one might reasonably expect the desert in Gysin's novel to be presented as a void place: barren, unchanging, inscrutable—in short, orientalized—it instead presents the desert as full of dynamism and energy, marked by history and eminently legible. Hanson and other characters are able to "read" the desert at every turn. The silence of the desert is a pervasive "humming" silence; in Hanson's words, "All this ululating emptiness aches in my ears like the echo of a shell." He goes on to say, "When I listen down even further into myself, I contact something else which shakes my whole intimate contact with Me. When I try to tune out the constant moaning roar of the wind, my whole being vibrates to a sound down below the threshold of hearing." This is not to say the "voice" of the desert is always benevolent. Often, it is the voice of Ghoul, "the Djinn of the Desert, Keeper of the Land of Fear" (6), who leads travelers astray to madness and death. Other times, however, the voice of the Sahara consists of the "sibilant" sounds of its inhabitants:

> When desert-dwellers meet, they stand off a few paces to whisper sibilant litanies of ritual greeting, almost indistinguishable in sound from the rustling of stiff cloth, as they bare a long arm to reach out and softly stroke palms. They exchange long litanies of names interwoven with news and blessings until a spell of loosely knit identity is thrown over all the generations of the Faithful like a cloak. . . .
>
> Everything crackles with static electricity as if one were shuffling over a great rug. Everyone in the Sahara is very aware; tuned-in to the great humming silence. (21–22)

This poignant image evokes a deep resonance between the "desert-dwellers" and the landscape they inhabit. A hostile place is made hospitable by their rituals and the communities those rituals create and sustain. Hanson has been sensitive to the "voice of the desert" from the outset, but a more complete immersion in the landscape and a corresponding diminution of his identity as American, even as human, are required for a more profound participation to occur. At several points, Hanson will liken himself or

another to the "winsome jerboa" or to the fennec, "that odd desert fox" who hunts it: "My ears are . . . bristly antennae that pick up and tingle with the silky sound of the sand sighing across the Sahara" (120)—in another set of formulas that indicate, with ritual repetition, a renewed ability to apprehend the vibrations and energies suffusing the Sahara.

Language and landscape, sense and signification work together in complex and unexpected ways throughout Gysin's novel to convey a singularly performative conception of community that pulls together the individual and the environment, native and foreigner, human and nonhuman, language and the ineffable. Waiting outside in the rain at a desolate train station early in the novel, Hanson hears "ranked choruses of bullfrogs recit[ing] the interminable Word they were set a long time ago, now, as their *zikr*: '*Kaulakaulakaulakaulakaulakau* . . . ' it sounded like," while "bats looped about the lamps they lit along the track, presently: '*Train coming!*' The bats squealed up into their ultra-sonic radar frequencies like the brakes on distant steel wheels" (12). These are not instances of mere anthropomorphism but rather an initiation into deeper mysteries that exceed classification.

The Brotherhood of the Assassins, which becomes the prime exemplar of the novel's vision of subterranean community and connectivity, stages an impromptu initiation for Hanson when, aided by Hamid's "passport of keef," he appears at their compound with a young adept and hears in a "coded" knock on the door: "the same chuckling word the masterpiece matches say to the box" (30). The loose-knit community of Assassins, which refers us back to the eleventh-century cult of Hassan-i Sabbah, conjures a much longer history of transgression and intrigue. The exact nature and status of their Brotherhood is hard to pin down at any point in the novel, but this is very likely by design. In his usual cryptic manner, Hamid often tells Hanson, "We are all Assassins," and it is as if the Brotherhood must be created anew with each performance of its rituals, just as new worlds are created in the novel with each permutation of the Word. Upon his first night spent in their company and sharing in their rituals, Hanson has this revelation: "There is no friendship: there is no love. The desert knows only allies and accomplices. The heart, here, is all in the very moment. Everything is bump and flow; meet and good-by. Only the Brotherhood of Assassins ensures ritual continuity, if that is what you want and some do; for the lesson our *zikr* teaches is this: *There are no Brothers*."[32]

All of this may appear far too insular or esoteric to have any real bearing on a world outside the text's own making, and with character-

istic shrewdness Gysin's novel seems to endorse exactly such a conclusion. Very near the end, in a supremely self-reflexive gesture, Hanson once again muses that "this whole business is, of course, just a trap well-enough woven of words" (317), yet nothing could be further from the truth. Despite Hanson's demurrals, the novel is never merely a formal exercise, and certainly not, as John Geiger asserts, "a cut-up of memory and pure invention."[33] Earlier, I pointed out just a few of the ways in which the historical imperatives of "Present Time" enter the picture, and it is entirely possible to read the novel—especially its latter sections, where Mya's plans "for Africa . . . for the world" unfold and then unravel—as nothing less than a major work of postcolonial fiction. Gysin's postcolonial critique, launched alongside subtle, quasi-deconstructive gender and queer critiques, allows for a distinctive kind of politics to emerge in *The Process*.

"Fresh Meat and Roses"

Insofar as Gysin's text is committed to the relationship it consistently demonstrates between geographic and historical emplacement and interpersonal connection, readers are presented with a vision of cross-cultural communication and understanding very much at odds with what readers find in Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) or *Let It Come Down* (1952) or Albert Camus's *Exile and the Kingdom* (1957), all of which deal with ill-fated encounters between East and West in the colonial Maghreb. For his part, wider philosophical commitments notwithstanding, Camus's response to the "Algerian question" remained strongly colored by his *pied-noir* background. In "The Guest," the best known of the six stories published as *Exile and the Kingdom*, the interactions between Daru the French schoolteacher and the unnamed Arab prisoner, who are undoubtedly meant to stand in for the larger colonial and native populations in French Algeria, are characterized by an almost utter inability to communicate. Their isolation from each other is reinforced by the desert landscape in which Daru and the Arab find themselves. Seemingly always frigid and relentlessly inhospitable, the desert looms large in the *Exile* stories. But whereas the Sahara in Gysin's novel is a dynamic place, full of signs to be read, words to be heard, and energies to be received, in "The Guest" the desert lies under an "unchanging" sky that "shed[s] its dry light on the solitary expanse where nothing had any connection with man [*rien ne rappelait l'homme*]."[34]

Camus's story presents a situation much closer to what Burroughs

derides as "this inscrutable oriental shit like Bowles puts down."[35] My aim is not to scapegoat Camus or Bowles on behalf of a recuperated set of Beat writers. But with such writers—Gysin, to be sure, but also Kerouac, Ginsberg, even Burroughs—determined to maintain precisely that "connection" which remains (mostly) foreclosed in Camus's and Bowles's texts, there is a very different conception of one's relation to the Other and to the world at large. *The Process* is in many ways a rewriting of *Let It Come Down*, one that seeks to resolve its intractable questions concerning cross-cultural engagement. Bowles and Gysin were traveling through North Africa together while Bowles was composing his second novel (the first to be set in Morocco), and from the beginning Gysin took a strong, almost proprietary interest in Bowles's work in progress. He lobbied hard for Bowles to change the name, and in late 1951 Bowles even wrote to publisher, John Lehmann, asking, "Do you prefer Fresh Meat and Roses to Let It Come Down as a title? Brion Gysin has been insisting for so many months that a change should be made that I no longer have so strong a faith in my judgment."[36] (Bowles would end up using Gysin's suggestion as the title of his novel's pivotal third section.) Bowles's protagonist, New York bank teller Nelson Dyar, has left for Tangier to escape the "motionlessness" and "dead weight" of his life or, as Dyar imagines it, "to exchange one cage for another."[37] Before long, he becomes enmeshed in the crime and intrigue of international Tangier, and, on the run late in the novel, Dyar stumbles into a crowded café, where ritual Sufi music and dance are being performed. The scene crescendos with a Sufi dancer's self-mutilation, and what Dyar witnesses there affects him deeply, opening up a space of understanding and participation that had been previously unavailable to him. This is how Bowles describes the scene:

> Although the room shook with the pounding of the drums, it was as if another kind of silence were there in the air, an imperious silence that stretched from the eyes of the men watching to the object moving at their feet . . . and always the spasms that forced his body this way and that, in perfect rhythm with the increasing hysteria of the drums and the low cracked voice of the flute, seemed to come from some secret center far inside him. . . . Dyar stole a glance around at the faces of the spectators. The expression he saw was the same on all sides: utter absorption in the dance, almost adoration of the man performing it. A lighted kif pipe was thrust in front of him. He took it and smoked it without looking to see who had offered it to him. (506)

The scene crescendos:

> The music had become an enormous panting. It had kept every detail of syncopation intact, even at its present great rate of speed, thus succeeding in destroying the listeners' sense of time, forcing their minds to accept the arbitrary one it imposed in its place. With this hypnotic device it had gained complete domination. . . .
>
> Dyar was there, scarcely breathing. It could not be said that he watched now, because in his mind he had moved forward from looking on to a kind of participation. With each gesture the man made at this point, he felt a sympathetic desire to cry out in triumph. The mutilation was being done for him, to him; it was his own blood that spattered onto the drums and made the floor slippery. (507–8)

In his reading of this scene, Barry Tharaud underscores the "silence" evoked at the outset and serving as a kind of connective tissue that links observer and observed, subject and object. For Tharaud, this silence stands in direct contrast to the "noise" that has predominated in Dyar's experience of Tangier and has signaled Dyar's inability to communicate at any level with the Moroccan world around him. Describing his "move forward" from observation to participation, Tharaud writes, "This is Dyar's ultimate escape from isolation and disconnectedness. . . . His new mode of reality has penetrated to the core of existence, which includes the kind of connectedness and openness that Dyar experienced at the religious ritual." However, as Tharaud also notes—and as is made evident by the tragic events that conclude the novel—this so-called new mode of reality is only fleeting.[38] Dyar's comprehension soon breaks down utterly, and Bowles's novel seems, finally, to foreclose any possibility of the kind of direct, unconditioned cross-cultural communication that it has just offered us a glimpse of.

The silence emphasized by Tharaud is the antidote to the "meaningless noise" Dyar usually hears all around, which for Tharaud signals the foreclosure of communication and connection (29). I would like to suggest that something more ambiguous and productive is going on in this scene that mirrors the complexities of Bowles's own relationship with Morocco. There is a way in which one can read the "noise" that shapes Dyar's experience of Tangier as the only legitimate, ethical way to present cultural difference as such. Dyar's "imperious silence," then, is a bad faith gesture that must be rectified, and he is punished by novel's end. In this case, Bowles's distancing strategy—between Dyar and the new world he finds himself in, between reader and text—would be analogous to that

which Edwards sees operating in *Sheltering Sky*, where Bowles's inclusion of untranslated Arabic produces a similarly alienating effect.[39] For Edwards, this allows Bowles to escape, to a certain extent, Cold War discourses of cultural transparency, the United States as the measure of all things, and so on. In such a reading, Dyar's silence would be analogous to Port Moresby's desire, in *Sheltering Sky*, to wash away cultural difference in the name of a totalizing existential blankness.

But perhaps by reading Bowles *through* Gysin we can manage to locate, in Dyar's openness, connectedness, and participation, the kernel of a genuine, meaningful experience of transcultural engagement and interaction that *does* manage to escape its immediate foreclosure in the text. Bowles's novel hints at the path forward, but his gesturing toward the Other will find its full expression in Gysin's novel. I want to suggest that *The Process* exists entirely in the space opened up by Dyar's epiphany in the café scene. The action of *Let It Come Down* may turn on Dyar's experience there, but large swaths of Gysin's sprawling plot in *The Process* are, in fact, structured by a series of similar encounters between Hanson and the Assassins. Hanson, armed with his "green passport of keef," takes part in the Assassins' ritual dancing on several occasions. There are other significant points of crossing—narratively, thematically, biographically—between Bowles's text and Gysin's future novel. Hamid's character, for example, is clearly a version of Moroccan painter and writer Mohamed Hamri, who lived with Gysin at the Bowleses' first house in Tangier and became Gysin's link to the Jajouka musicians who would figure so largely in Gysin's life in Morocco.

It is Hamid who, in *The Process*, provides Hanson with his "passport" to see him through his travels through the desert. The scene in Gysin's novel, however, where Hamid "borrows" Hanson's suit and radio actually transpired in real life between Hamri and Bowles, making Gysin's protagonist an even more complex amalgamation. In a sense, Bowles enters Gysin's text by way of the suit and radio episodes, and Hamid's catalyzing presence at key moments in the novel reminds us that Gysin has *Let It Come Down* in mind. In his manner and narrative function, Hamid very much resembles Thami Beidaoui in Bowles's novel. Both are smugglers who frequently steal away from the city to stay with their families (in Hamid's case, his uncles the Master Musicians of Jajouka) in the hills above Tangier. Both are incessant keef smokers who act as unsolicited guides and initiators for their new American friends. Both allow local histories to enter into the narrative: Thami is the black sheep of a prominent Tanjawi family whose association with Moroccan nationalists points

the way to Bowles's third novel, *The Spider's House* (1955), and Hamid vividly recounts to Hanson the violence that swept across Morocco in the years prior to independence.

In addition to the presence of this history in each novel, the most relevant point of comparison between them has to do with the role and status of indigenous music and the rituals surrounding it. Bowles had been a musician and composer who studied under Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson and had a successful career in New York before he moved to Tangier and began writing fiction in earnest. His love of traditional Moroccan music is in large part what kept him there. Considering Bowles's description of his earliest encounter with the music of North Africa, of its accordance with his "infantile criteria" for beautiful sound (repetitive, "non-thinking," etc.), it is tempting to assume that Bowles prizes such music precisely for its timeless, even primitive, quality.[40] But as his knowledge and appreciation grew deeper and more nuanced, and certainly by the time Bowles embarked on the Library of Congress recording project, the historical and political nature of Moroccan music was inseparable from its rhythmic and harmonic textures. Publishing an account of his trek through the Rif Mountains, recording what indigenous music could still be found there, Bowles situated that music within a much larger social and historical context: "The most important single element in Morocco's folk culture is its music. . . . Instrumentalists and singers have come into being in lieu of chroniclers and poets, and even during the most recent chapter in the country's evolution—the war for independence and the setting up of the present pre-democratic regime—each phase of the struggle has been celebrated in countless songs."[41]

"Folk music," according to Bowles, has played and continues to play a role in documenting a long history of struggle and rebellion. Morocco's indigenous music is not at all timeless or unchanging but rather dynamic and adaptive, able to meet new needs and record new phases of a living history. In other words, we are *not* dealing here with Kerouac's "fellahin orientalism." Or if we are, it has been tempered with a strong awareness of historical contingency and geographic specificity. A major aim of Bowles's recording project was to show the great diversity among tribal musics and to assert the richness of indigenous Berber culture that has persisted *and developed* through centuries of Arab and Muslim hegemony. In his travel account, Bowles singles out the Moroccan Rif, a region with a particularly intense history of anticolonial resistance.[42] He again emphasizes the consciousness-altering action of its music, writing, "The Berbers developed a music of mass participation, one whose

psychological effects were aimed more often than not at causing hypnosis."[43] The political content of this "music of mass participation"—which, according to Bowles, "celebrates each phase of the struggle"—is manifested for and through a collective body, which serves as both agent and repository of oppositional energies. In his novel Gysin will foreground the subversive and communal aspects of Berber music to an even greater extent, figuring the Jajouka musicians as the modern-day Assassins.

Shortly after Gysin's arrival in Tangier in 1950, he and Bowles attended the Bou Jeloud festival at Sidi Kacem, which is where Gysin declared, "I want to hear that music every day of my life."[44] It is true that Bowles would later admit, "For me Jajouka never had a great musical interest but Gysin went mad about it."[45] In general, the two men seem to have cultivated very different relations to Morocco and Moroccan culture, and these differences become apparent in their respective oeuvres. At one end of the spectrum is Bowles, who, after four decades in Tangier, remained unambiguously Western in his manner of dress and highly critical of the "Rousseauesque" fantasy of "going native."[46] At the other end is Gysin, who often wore a *djellaba* and was considered by Bowles to have "gone native with a vengeance."[47] Each represents an opposing aspect of the "orientalist trap." In the former, cultural difference tends either to be reified and insurmountable; in the latter, such difference is all too easily overcome. So, on one hand, there are Port Moresby in *The Sheltering Sky* and Nelson Dyar in *Let It Come Down*, unwilling or unable to read their surroundings or engage meaningfully with cultural difference, and, on the other hand, Ulys Hanson in *The Process*, the African American professor of history who delights in traveling "in disguise" as African and Muslim. In Gysin's novel, the distance between protagonist and author is clearly marked, suggesting the possibility of inhabiting otherness through and in the act of writing.

Through the world-conjuring power of traditional music, a final uncanny echo of Gysin (and now Bowles) resounds in Burroughs's *Yage Letters*. In the letter dated January 30 [1953], but in fact not composed until early 1955—that is, *after* he had met Bowles and Gysin in Tangier[48]—is where Burroughs first recounts his experience of entering a Colombian cantina and hearing "Shepherd music played on a bamboo instrument like a panpipe" (14). Burroughs' evocative description of "music played on bamboo like a *panpipe*" might very well refer to the annual Bou Jeloud festival, which culminates in the appearance of a boy dressed in goatskins. (Gysin somewhat spuriously interprets this figure as a manifes-

tation of the Greek god Pan.)[49] It is true that Burroughs did not become close with Gysin until Paris, but he did visit the 1001 Nights from time to time, and the possibility of a connection is tantalizing. For Burroughs to gather Pan and Bou Jeloud into his Pasto vision, attributing to the Colombian "mountain music" an "Altantean" origin carried by "phylogenetic" memory, would be typical of the author's figurative assemblages. Such configurations—along with the geographies, communities, and identities they imply—are radically generative: dynamic and multiple yet deeply rooted in time and place.

The representation of history and politics in Gysin's novel requires a concept of worlded time that exceeds, but must also account for, historical time. One of the most pressing, if often submerged, concerns of Gysin's novel is how to represent the folds of worlded immanence that exist within the positivist telos of historical time as "Present Time." So where, and what exactly, *is* history in Gysin's novel? "Present Time" in the novel most often refers to Mya Himmer's plans "for Africa . . . for the world," which, as the narrative progresses, we begin to understand are a response to and continuation of the Moroccan independence movement. An attempt to spark a much broader African insurgency, one "phase" of the Himmers' plot is to free members of the "First Revolutionary Government," including Ben Baraka, in exile at "Fort Tam." The presence of Baraka/Barka and Fard/Fanon among them suggests even larger third worldist ambitions. Thay and Mya continually beseech Hanson to "snap into Present Time" and assume the role of "The Ghoul," leader of their new Africa, which is to say that, for the Himmers, Hanson's usual keef fog clouds out the present moment and would be only a hindrance to their designs. But there is much in Gysin's novel to suggest that keef, and its corresponding "keef time," is the name for another, more radical conception of history and politics. This is made clear enough in a telling passage earlier in the novel, where Hamid describes the forced exile of Morocco's Mohammad V and its aftermath in characteristically keef-inspired language:

> In my little café, I heard Radio Cairo saying our sultan was the prisoner, now, of Mademegascar. Through the keef in my head, I could see this Madame Gascar with her yellow hair and her little yapping white dog she had trained to bite Arabs. If any real French madame had passed through the market right then, I'd have spat on her. And at that very moment, I heard the Whale blow, down below in the Old Town. . . . A voice in my head said; "This Whale is the Whale that's going to eat Tanja!" And it did. It flushed

> up from the port, flooding into the Socco, our little plaza framed with cafés, where it began flailing the flukes of its tail in a spray of plate-glass. . . . If you stopped to pick up a thing, you were lost. Money-changers tossed their bills into baskets and were still scooping up change in their hats when they burst into flames from the blast from a hundred, a thousand! hot Arab faces all bellowing: *O!* (114–15)

The rioting is met with the familiar response: "The policemen popped in and popped out again but, this time, with guns. Their captain screamed: "*Fire!*" In one minute, there were so many people kicking and twitching or dead on the ground that it looked like a movie" (116). The chaos and bloodshed is not restricted to urban Morocco; the Sahara itself has become a police state administered by a series of forts and outposts and their commanders. The captains have authority over Hanson's movements through the desert, but their control is in turn deterritorialized by Hanson and the Assassins he meets, for whom the desert is a space composed of chance encounters and fortuitous connections.

As Mya's officers make their way from Tam to the final rendezvous at Malamut, "present time" and "keef time" seem to converge in a series of increasingly bizarre locations and occurrences. These highly ambivalent scenes are at once the most surreal and the most tightly bound up with North African history and politics. The ruins of the recent colonial past have been occupied by newer, more dubious forces, a shabby amalgamation of imperialist vestiges, Marxism, and Arab nationalism; at Tam, which has the appearance of a "tiny, crenellated white toy fort," the Himmers' secretary, Olav, reports, "We have all been quartered in the Officers' Mess, which was obviously built back in colonial days. Nearby, another unlikely relic lies awash in the sands. It is a long building in concrete built in the form of a transatlantic tanker and is said to have been a brothel whose rooms were the cabins in the superstructure. There was a bar on the captain's bridge. The well-deck was a swimming pool surrounded by walls like the prow of the ship. Today, this astonishing structure has the Cuban flag painted on its side" (267–68). The beached whale of European imperialism lies exposed and desiccated, and history repeats itself as farce as the travelers are questioned by a bearded captain dressed like Fidel Castro. The brothel in the form of an oil tanker is an unambiguous metaphor for colonial exploitation, while the Cuban flag now painted on its side points to a very real history of third world solidarity, yet there is also something rather pathetic about the second-hand nature of the iconography and perhaps even the cause.

Leaving Tam, the party catches a ride atop a "cargo of mattresses" and is driven to the coast, where Olav continues,

> We are in the newly ruined Spanish capital city which must once have been shining white; perhaps, only a year ago. Unless someone catches this place pretty quick, it is going to go back to the desert. Only the barracks are well kept, while private houses and the hotel have been boarded up or have already fallen into ruin since they were broken into and looted. A few Arab fisherman in anonymous rags slouch through the streets and along the abandoned *avenidas* of shut shops. I noticed them hanging their nets from the marquee of a dilapidated movie house down by the beach. (269)

In these final images of a "dying colonialism," to use Fanon's very apt term, the ruined capital becomes a lesson to the well-kept barracks. The nationalist officers, like the captain in Tam with the Castro beard, are using borrowed forms of colonial power and are thus doomed to failure; they are as useless and incongruous as the word *avenida* made to describe rows of pillaged and shuttered shops. The town—and, by extension, the entire colonial-cum-nationalist enterprise it represents—has two sources of possible redemption. One is to "go back to the desert," which, as the novel instructs us, is not a death wish but rather an opening up to the unpredictable but ultimately affirmational energies that permeate the desert landscape. The other source of hope resides in the "Arab fisherman in anonymous rags." Uncanny reminders of a much longer colonial history in the Maghreb, they also suggest the possibility of a lived, material futurity in their improvisatory repurposing of the "dilapidated movie house," where one can still almost imagine the dim flickering of Hollywood dream images on a torn silver screen.

This entire discussion of Gysin's novel began in cinematic terms with a camera tilting down on Hanson's desert caravan. Hamid describes the traumas of "the Whale" as being "like a movie," and a movie house features in the previous passage. It seems appropriate, then, to close with the suggestion that the novel's images of colonialism in ruins anticipate the more surreal moments of a film like Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (screenplay begun in 1969), especially the scene, restored to the 2001 *Redux* version, in which Willard and his crew chance upon a French plantation, and the spectral imperialism implied by this final outpost of Western civilization. The surreal, hallucinatory temporalities of "keef time"—full of gaps and distortions but also unexpected juxtapositions and sudden revelations—represent not an evasion of "present time," not a disavowal of the past's demands on us in the present, but rather their more profound

apprehension in accordance with a worlded sense of history's multiplicity and nonlinearity, of the past's immanence within the present moment.

Thinking about the filmic qualities of Gysin's novel, I am again reminded that genre is a notoriously tricky business in Beat literature. Kerouac's highly constructed works of literary fiction, for instance, have long been read as pure autobiography.[50] But it is Kerouac the *poet*, especially in the 1959 collection *Mexico City Blues*, who is the source of some of Beat literature's most profoundly worlded insights and innovations. Previous chapters have looked at Kerouac's memoir-fiction and the "jazz chorus" sketches of *Mexico City Blues*, the genre of travel writing and Beat travelogues, the manifesto and "manifesto art," and the epistolary form. Gysin's novel is clearly a work of fiction—one of the most overtly fictional works in the entire Beat canon—yet it relies on a very real set of historical, political, and cultural contexts on which it works its textual permutations. With its multiple sites of narration (including a tape recorder and a computer file), rapid jumps in time and space, unaccountable repetitions, and massive self-referentiality ("a trap well-enough woven of words"), Gysin's novel is characteristically postmodern; it shares in another important tradition as well. At least since Sartre and Lukács, fiction—novelistic fiction in particular—has been understood as the privileged category for representing history in literature. This privileging of the novel is doubly true of postcolonial literature; prominent writers from Chinua Achebe to Salman Rushdie and Maryse Condé have often exploited the possibilities within the novel form to recover lost histories or to imagine alternative ones. Reading Gysin within such a lineage allows readers to reevaluate a whole range of Beat texts, whether prose or verse, fiction or memoir, overtly political or not, as also engaged with post/colonial history. Gysin's novel helps us reassess the tangled web of interests and interactions that binds Beat writing to the wider world.