



DVD Review: *Destroy All Rational Thought*

Written by [Richard Marcus](#)
Published December 06, 2006

Ireland has been home to artists who have fled its shores to find room to breathe so that they could write clear of the oppressive atmosphere of both the heavy hand of the Catholic Church and the violence of their country's politics. James Joyce landed in France and when the Germans came he left to end his days of exile in Switzerland.

Before him Oscar Wilde descended upon London who loved him until he was betrayed and forced into exile in Paris where he died a broken and sad man. After Joyce the playwright Samuel Beckett left Ireland for France, where aside from chauffeuring Andre the Giant to and from school, he wrote the masterpiece of existential theatre, *Waiting For Godot*

Ireland, the cold and clammy land of bogs and peat, appears to be light years apart from the heat and desert sun of Tangiers and the international zone of the fifties and the sixties. But in 1992 the artistic current that birthed the aforementioned luminaries extended its reach beyond its borders to celebrate and remind the world of the work produced in the land of sand, sun, and lawlessness.

From the end of World War Two to the time of independence in the '60s Tangier was divided up into three zones. The British had one, the French another, and the third was a neutral buffer zone between the two called the international zone. Nominally there was supposed to be some sort of rule of law, but pretty much a blind eye was turned to everything.

It became a Mecca for a couple types of people — artists looking for an inexpensive and inspirational place to live and those hangers-on who always seem to appear where artists congregate, the rich and the thrill seekers who like to pretend they live the bohemian life style. They would "discover" an artist for a season and show him or her off to their friends, dabble in the free flow of drugs, and be delightedly shocked at the proliferation of both male and female prostitutes.

But amidst the parties and the hedonism there were the artists who were delving into the darkness that is so much a part of contemporary man but is studiously ignored by all but the brave and the insane. In some instances the line between the two became so blurred as to be indistinguishable.

The Here To Go Show in 1992 Dublin was a commemoration and celebration of the life and work of two of the minds and talents that were honed and refined in the hothouse atmosphere of Tangiers — [William S. Burroughs](#) and [Brion Gysin](#).



While Burroughs is both famous for his writings, *Naked Lunch*, and infamous for his addictions and lifestyle (*Naked Lunch* was the synergy of both as it depicted his withdrawal from heroin in prose that was both fragmented and potent), Brion Gysin has nowhere near the same impact. The Here To Go Show was an attempt to correct that lack of recognition.

Although Burroughs didn't attend the event, he agreed to tape an interview that was broadcast at the opening of the gathering. Judging by the content of the interview it almost seems as though Burroughs saw this as one more chance to try and ensure that his long time collaborator and friend would receive some of the acclaim that he never achieved during his lifetime and still was being denied after his death.

The DVD *Destroy All Rational Thought* is an attempt to document the happenings of the Here To Go Show. The focal point of the show was an exhibit of Gysin's artwork with pieces being contributed from private collections all over the world, including those that Burroughs' owned. But Gysin was more than just a man who painted static pictures to be hung on the walls of galleries.

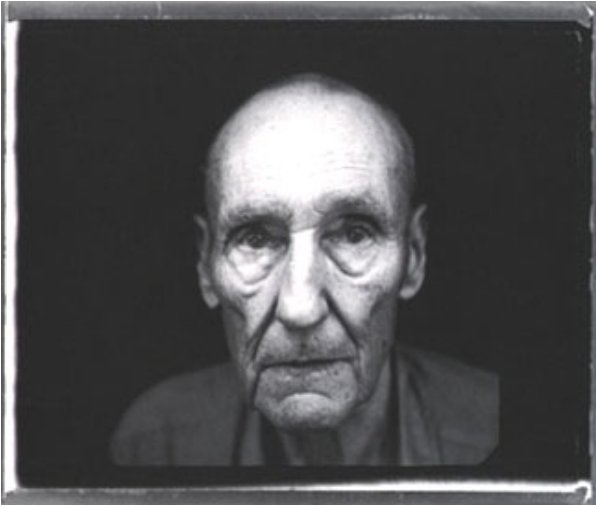
While the documentary does fill in some details of his life — there are some fascinating clips from experimental films he and Burroughs made in the sixties — very little actual information about the man is imparted that will shed light on his work. Ostensibly about him, it ends up being more about the people involved with putting the show on and the happenings and musical events that took place.

While the music of the Master Musicians of Joujouka from Morocco was fascinating and absorbing, after a while I began to wonder what repeated footage of them playing with various Irish musicians in pubs, radio stations, and loft parties had to do with the supposed subject of the event. If the filmmakers have compiled an accurate picture of the event, then the objective of spreading the word about Brion Gysin seemed to be less important than the organizers celebrating themselves.

I was reminded all too vividly of descriptions I've read in the biography of Paul Bowles, *The Dream At The End Of The World* by Michelle Green, of the various parties and what not given by the diletantes and hangers-on during the original times in Tangiers. Although I'm sure there were nights of music and impromptu poetry readings in those times, the ones filmed from this event felt too contrived to have any level of believable spontaneity.

Far too often while watching *Destroy All Rational Thought* I found myself thinking

that people were trying too hard to establish their "cool" credentials instead of being concerned about the art that was being displayed or the artist himself. Did the Here To Go Show really have so little to do directly with Brion Gysin? If not, why did this documentary about the show have relatively little to say about what was done specifically about Mr. Gysin? It was as if the filmmakers had made the assumption that you already knew about Gysin and explanations weren't needed for more than a few of his ideas, and even then they were just tantalizing tidbits.



While watching the movie there was something nagging at me the whole way through that was disturbing me. I wasn't able to put my finger on it until this moment as I was writing this review and I realized what had led to my disquiet. Two men who had openly spurned success and the limelight to be as true to themselves and their art as possible were being treated like celebrities. It wasn't because of the quality of their work that they were being commemorated, but because they were something that others wanted to emulate.

William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin were cut from the same cloth as the men who had been born and bred in Ireland and the city that was supposed to be celebrating them in 1992. But like the Bloomsday events that now honour the memory of James Joyce have more to do with Joyce the celebrity than honouring his work, the documentary *Destroy All Rational Thought* gives the same impression of the Here To Go Show in regards to them.

If that was truly what the Here To Go Show was like then it did two giants of the twentieth century a disservice. If the creators of *Destroy All Rational Thought* has simply created that impression from the way they've put the film together, then they have lived up to their title for all the wrong reasons.