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DESTROY ALL RATIONAL THOUGHT PART 2

By [Paul H](#)

Here is Part 2 of my interview with writer, musician and art-terrorist Joe Ambrose. Along with fellow musician, cultural historian and writer Frank Rynne, they organised The Here To Go Show, which took place in and around Dublin in the early nineties. The film, Destroy All Rational Thought, which documents many aspects of the Here To Go Show, is now available in an enhanced edition, on DVD.

I wanted to look into some of the individuals who contribute performances, in one shape or another, to the Destroy All Rational Thought DVD, and their impact during the Here To Go Show. In Part 1 we talked about the influence of the Tangier Beat Scene and picked out some of its characters. I would like to return to this and start back on arguably its most well known figure, William Burroughs.

Paul H: Lets just re-establish Burroughs` influence and significance, as it relates to this scene`s genre and the Destroy film. Joe, you spoke of him as a trail-blazer in Part 1, who left his mark on so many aspects of 20th cent culture, can you elaborate on what you meant ?

Joe Ambrose: Hardboiled fiction, hip hop, literary fiction, songwriting Lou Reed or Dylan-style, painting very much so, punk rock in a fundamental way, cyberpunk, comic art, experimental cinema, style, science fiction... these are just a few of the areas he touched.

PH: The autobiographical nature of the Scene`s artists and writers within their work was a significant step away from the writer portrayed as superhero, as was the convention previously. In what ways did this happen?

JA: Not just in their autobiographical work - and much of what Kerouac, Burroughs, and Ginsberg did was direct autobiographical. People like Huncke, Bowles, Ginsberg, and Burroughs allowed themselves to be interviewed a great deal, to be photographed and filmed a lot. This is not necessarily part of the gig involved in being a writer. Salinger and Pynchon, for instance, are writers who shared many intellectual interests with the Beats but who did not go along with the cult of the personality or play the game the way the media wanted them to. Laki Vazakas did a justly celebrated documentary, Huncke and Louis, which is an absolutely searing portrayal of Herbert Huncke during a very difficult time in his life. Laki kept on filming when somebody came into a room in the Chelsea Hotel and told him that his long-term partner, Louis, had just been found dead. You see Huncke breaking down and crying, quite inconsolable. I found this awfully hard to look at because I knew and liked Huncke very much. So did Laki, who was not some exploitative BBC-style documentary maker but a sympathetic pal. Laki is one of the good guys. Hur never asked him to turn off the camera though he was being documented at his lowest point. This sort of chronic documentation was very much ahead of its time. Documenting the whole deal - good and bad, warts and all - is everything.

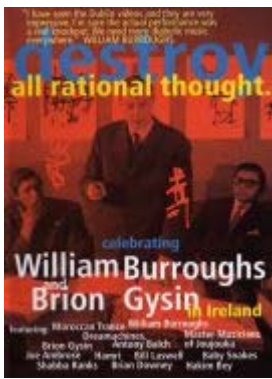
PH: You obviously have a great deal of respect for the work and ethos of the Tangier Beat scenesters, can you tell me the influence it has had on your work?

Frank Rynne: For me it is the production work I have done with Master Musicians of Joujouka that most closely links me to that ethos. I learned how to get around in Morocco from Hamri who imparted similar knowledge to Brion Gysin and William Burroughs in the fifties and sixties.

PH: Joe, who would you cite as influences ?

JA: Hamri, Bowles, and to a lesser extent the writer Mrabet, are the Tangerinos who`ve influenced me. Since I`m not a painter it`s more as a man that Hamri has influenced me. He gave me a thousand stories to tell and a count to write about. And of course I`ve part-inherited his thorny crown of Joujouka. Like an old Joujouka legend, he`s a lion pulling a plough. I seem to be shackled up to that same plough now, like a few other lions. His life would`ve been so much simpler without Joujouka. Frank talked about Paul Bowles in Part 1 of this interview and Bowles is





only writer I aspire towards resembling in any way. It's a tricky business writing novels when you're an intelligent prodigy like he was but he managed to pull it off. He was a murderer, a sadist, a voyeur, a poisoner, a polymath, sexual exploiter of adolescent boys. He tried to kill Hamri once. Most entertaining company. Mrabet is the last surviving member of the Tangier Beat Generation Scene. To some extent he is a Bowles' satellite, insofar as Bowles collaborated with him on all his books but Mrabet very much has a voice of his own. He is good at putting the feeble God into dippy white men and I like that.

PH: How long did the Here To Go Show take to plan and actually put on ?

FR: About one year. It was like a production line. In the last months there was a book in production, Brion Gysin's Here to Go Tapes being edited, galleries being contracted, flights being booked, hotels, visas, everything was happening at once. I don't know how we did it. Terry Wilson was central to the project. I struck up a conversation with him at a terrible art opening in Notting Hill in London. Soon myself and Joe Ambrose were sitting cross-legged on a mattress in his apartment going through box after box of Burroughs and Gysin manuscripts, letters and work art. It seemed crazy not to do something with this material.

JA: The Show took its title from a book Terry wrote with Gysin, Here To Go, which is available on Creation Books and which anyone interested in countercultural life should buy and read.

FR: Terry connected us with various participants. However I think it was the fact that we were new faces to the scene that allowed myself and Joe to cut through the petty squabbles that preoccupied many of Gysin's friends.

JA: Terry Wilson marked our cards about the choppy shark-infested waters we were drifting into. Many of the people around Gysin had been right-wing, effete, and snobby. I'm none of these things so Terry's knowledge of the who area was good to have. Gysin really knew how to divide but was not so great at conquering. As a result it was hard to get all his friends to cooperate with each other without neutral third parties stepping in. London literary whores sell container-loads of consumer-friendly novels and leave no space or niche for Terry or for a thousand others like him. I feel he'd do a lot better somewhere like New York where aesthetics and art ideas still mean something. As regards the Here to Go Show, he opened a hundred doors.

PH: Who else contributed, apart from yourself and Frank, in making the Here To Go Show happen?

JA: Gordon Campbell was the Show's sponsor. He paid for all the plane tickets, the hotel bills, the venue hire, a very very modest wage for us. On the streets of Dublin during the Show, there would have been no creativity or spark of originality without Hamri and the Master Musicians. They were the oil which made the wheels go round. Most of the fun which made the event endurable for me derived from that Moroccan contingent.

FR: Mohamed Hamri and The Master Musicians of Joujouka were the glue that held the whole together. There were also the designers. Plus Mark Siung, Daragh McCarthy and Paul Duane who shot the footage of the show. There were many people who helped look after the musicians. Felicity Mason's son Alasdair Carnegie was also of great help.

JA: Niall Sweeney was the graphic designer who came up with the visual package - the book, the posters, the t-shirts, loads of other stuff. People said that he was a talented young man but his unprofessional confrontational attitude did damage to the entire Show. Still, he did some nice designs which were - in terms of a cultural backwater like Dublin - ahead of their time. Mark and Daragh's filming proved to be as valuable as anything else going on during that week. Thanks to them - and to Stuart MacLean who showed us how to knock their disparate pieces of footage into the film we have today - the documentation of the Show was total and can be experienced a new generation fifteen years later.

PH: How would you describe the atmosphere during some of the shows ?

JA: There were conflicting atmospheres. When Joujouka were playing it was always an emotional high. - all good and the Baby Snakes set was great for me. I can't say what it was like for the band. They were working. On the same bill as the Baby Snakes were the Revenants, a fine band led by Stephen Ryan, whose parents were old school bohems and whose mother, Sammy Sheridan, I once had the honour to publish in book form. There were a lot of spoken word events during the Show which you don't see too much of in Destroy because either those events weren't filmed or else there was some technical problem with the footage like if the sound was bad.

PH: The Open Writers Forum, part of which is on the DVD, was one of those, how did that go ?

JA: The atmosphere at some of these spoken word events was foul. There was a great deal of tension between some of the participants, all vying for supremacy over one another.

FR: Felicity denounced Gysin's latter day sponsor, Jim McCann. She also encouraged Hamri to discuss Brion Gysin and Burroughs frankly and relate his bringing Brian Jones of The Rolling Stones to Joujouka in 1967 and 1968. Hal Bey discussed his vision of an anarchic copyright free world. Terry Wilson and Trolley Bus related many personal accounts of their times with Gysin and Burroughs. Ira Cohen as always related inspired insights into the Tangier scene he participated in from the early sixties.

JA: You bring a gang of writers and painters and musicians together and you definitely get vibes. Terry and Hamri and the Canadian painter Trolley Bus did well on Gysin's behalf.

PH: I really want to explore another big theme that stands out within this interview and the DVD, that of the

presence, music, energy and the cultural symbolism of The Master Musicians of Joujouka. Theirs is a compelling role, you both said that they were acting as the glue, the oil, that lubricated the Show and yet held it together. unique property for anyone or thing. What was the aura like during their mesmerizing shows?

FR: The volume these men achieved playing just acoustic instruments was astounding. The musicians played with furious intent and purpose. They were at once frightening in their intensity and beguiling through their repetitive trance inducing beats. Hamri's presence and his care for the music and its performance was evident in its wild authenticity. There was nothing remotely "Real World" or "World Music" about these performances. It was easy to understand the phrase "one thousand year old rock'n'roll band" which Timothy Leary and Burroughs, in the early 70s, used to describe the Master Musicians of Joujouka. It was evident attending the Dublin shows. However, I endeavored not to be beguiled by the half baked acid casualty baggage that attached itself to the Joujouka story when written up by people like Robert Plamer in the 70s. Unfortunately that brand of American hippy rubbish has and has little relevance to the actual music and lifestyles of the village. Bob Palmer actually believed that the Joujouka sits on was a spaceship.

PH: A lot of interest surrounds this music, the culture and the village...

FR: I have spent years working with and living with the musicians. When you know them and their families, spend a lot of time in their individual homes and see their children grow up over a period of years it gives you a very different and more accurate knowledge about the music and the villagers' lives. It is easy to understand the cult shock that those hippies experienced. For me Joujouka is not too dissimilar to the area of Co. Clare in Ireland where my grandfather farmed. The music too is often quite similar to real Irish folk music. However, as an acid freak hitting the place in 1971, it may have appeared rather strange especially with mounds of kif clouding perception of the "real" reality.

PH: Would you say the cultural history of Joujouka is core to the music as well as the work of Hamri ?

FR: Gysin's paintings especially his Moroccan ones were heavily influenced by Sufi sects. I have recently seen a review of a 1956 art show by Hamri which Gysin organized at the 1001 Nights restaurant. Gysin and Hamri set up 1001 Nights to allow the Master Musicians of Joujouka to be seen by a wider audience. The reviewer noted that a Mohamed Hamri's works were related to the local magic of his home village of Joujouka/Jajouka, and the titles reflected this. I think it will emerge just how much influence Hamri had on Burroughs and Gysin when writers and researchers start to look in that direction.

PH: The scene of The Master Musicians of Joujouka playing with drummer Brian Downey, from Thin Lizzy, and Hamri, cajoling and gently teasing more from the musicians is another real highlight for me, what memories do you have of that gig ?

FR: The first time I saw Brian Downey he was in the recording studio nailing his drum kit to the floor for the first session of my band The Baby Snakes' first album, Sweet Hunger. We finished the drum tracks by nine that night. Brian Downey is possibly the greatest rock drummer still with us and ranks with Charlie Watts and John Bonham easily. To get Brian and The Master Musicians of Joujouka together was a major musical moment. Brian is as instinctive as they are and he gelled instantly. His love of the blues and jazz informed the cool sound of Thin Lizzy. With Joujouka he provided a masterful and powerful sequence of rhythms that completely fitted their beats. That was a remarkable event and improvisation. Ramuncho Matta, the surrealist painter Roberto Matta's son, provided abstract murals on his guitar and The Baby Snakes guitarist Niall O'Sullivan gave Boujeloud a hard rock edge. Nothing interfered with the Joujouka sound, it all just got harder and nastier. Beautiful. The musicians loved it. They have a great fascination with drum kits.

PH: What is the connection to your collaborative cultural vehicle, The Islamic Diggers?

JA: The Diggers started life as a sort of anarchist movement. I edited an underground magazine called The Digger after I left university and that name derived from the Digger proto-anarchists in the English Civil War (as opposed to the contemporaneous Levellers who were proto-socialist), Emmet Grogan's Diggers in San Francisco during the Summer of Love (also anarchist in orientation), and Oscar Wilde's university-days Diggers movement which sought to dig out a road which disappeared into a bog - in other words a road going nowhere. I had these political/aesthetic frames of mind in my head around the time that it became obvious that the leftist Islamic militancy of the Seventies - that of the PLO, Gadaffi, and Saddam - was losing ground to the more Koranic militancy of Osama and his merry men. I related more to the leftist anti-imperialist rebel Seventies stance and thought it'd be great if there was an anarchist Islamic movement, hence the concept of Islamic Diggers. I've been involved with the politics of the Arab world since I was eighteen. When we started recording music together, we decided to call ourselves that name. The militancy continued hand in hand with the music. The principal manifestations of this activism are the Cultural Intafadas against the so-called Islamic heretic, Hakim Bey and against Bachir Attar's Jajouka. Hakim Bey is a fake mystic and a fake revolutionary. Bachir Attar leads a commercial pseudo-Joujouka crossover act called The Master Musicians of Jajouka Featuring Bachir Attar. In both of those Cultural Intafadas, we are reasonably successful and they are both ongoing. As far as I'm concerned Islamic Diggers is an ongoing project which can't be discontinued or prevented. We included a new track, El Fna, on the Destroy DVD. This was produced by Paul Schroeder, best known

for his incredible work on the Stone Roses' second album, *Second Coming*. A tragically underestimated album.

PH: What are you working on now ?

FR: Musically I am working on a project with Niall O'Sullivan which brings me back to my roots as a rock'n'roll singer, performer and songwriter. We started working together on *The Baby Snakes*, when we were 17 years old, it feels good to get back to that energy.

JA: I have my next book, *Chelsea Hotel Manhattan*, out in April. I'm very excited about it because this is something I've been working up towards for a few years. I think it's my best book - I have total faith in it. It's also my most unconventional book insofar as I'm normally a pretty conservative prose stylist. Stylistically it bears comparison to my first novel, *Serious Time*. I hope *Chelsea Hotel Manhattan* will make people laugh and cry. I'd like to work on something with Chuck Prophet again but Chuck has his own book to do and I'm sure it'll be quite a book because Chuck is a cool customer in every sense of the phrase.

FR: I have known Chuck Prophet and Dan Stuart since the mid 80s and last met up at the Green On Red show in Amsterdam last summer which was great. Chuck is one of the greatest guitarists and that is the direction my music is going these days. I suppose we are all people who, both, knew and respected Jeffery Lee Pierce of *The Gun Club*, Stanley Booth, Tav Falco the whole Memphis thing around Jim Dickinson and Alex Chilton also unites us in taste and connections.

PH: Those Green on Red shows were good, I liked the re-scheduled Astoria gig in January last year, the anti-Iraq slides shown during the encores were a powerful statement.....

JA: I'm also hoping to see a book which I wrote with Frank called *Hashishin* out with *Sidcartel* in the not too distant future. I had a big success in Ireland late last year with a book of Irish history and I'm doing a sort of sequel to it which should be out before the summer. I have a handful of other projects on the boil but I tend not to talk too much about future plans because future plans are just fantasies until you've signed a contract and been given a release date. My main project is my third novel which is a long way from being finished. I'm pretty confident that the couple of filmic projects will come to fruition. I also intend returning to activism in a pretty serious way. I've been working in front of a computer too long and I've let some people get away with stuff for too long.

FR: I am working on a movie project with a French film director which involves me mixing my training as a historian with writing an epic movie. I have been working with *The Master Musicians of Joujouka* for the last year for the first time since Hamri's death in 2000. Last year I was down there six times and brought the musicians to Porto to play an amazing show at Casa Da Musica. The CD *Boujeloud* which I spent four years working on was released at the end of 2006 and is getting a great reception. It contains all the music from the Boujeloud ritual, *The Pipes of Pan*. The musicians had a good year in 2006 and they are keen to promote the real Sufi music of Joujouka globally. They were visited by Billy Corgan in March when he was researching the new *Smashing Pumpkins* album. I have an interview with Ulick O'Conner and a piece on Herbert Huncke in Joe Ambrose's forthcoming *Chelsea Hotel* book and the book on Hassan I Sabbah, *Hashishin* that myself and Joe wrote will be out this year. I am also currently working on a detailed study of the Irish revolutionary movement the Irish Republican Brotherhood or Fenian Brotherhood and their involvement in the Irish Land War 1879-83.

And here endeth the interview. Many issues have been covered and opinions given. I hope this has enabled the context as well as the content of the *Destroy All Rational Thought* DVD to be examined and discussed, as the *Her To Go Show* has proved to be a unique and powerful event.

The controversy surrounding of *The Master Musicians of Joujouka / Jajouka* continues. Notable is the sporadic popularity of a "Jajouka" band, led by Bachir Attar, whose father was a Master Musician of Joujouka. Attar's musicians have toured and enlisted the support of the likes of Talvin Singh, whose own music adorns the coffee tables of many around the world. Of particular interest to me in this is the talismanic significance of the position of a 'celebrity in production and promotion' of Bachir Attar's Jajouka band. This is of considerable value, indeed heavy with currency, suggesting to the consumer cultural and authentic worthiness. Adding a celebrity producer enhances an aura of authenticity, according to Philip Schuyler's interesting essay on Moroccan Music and Euro-American Imagination, to the industry 'product', ie, in this case, to Attar and Singh's Jajouka CD. It follows that one can be led to believe without said 'celebrity', the product is therefore 'lacking' (in the consumer's eyes) in the marketplace, i.e. the World Music Section in the supermarket, or, the full page advert in *Mondomix*, for example. Schuyler proposes that the addition of 'celebrity' is one of a group of signifiers within the Music industry (1). The term, World Music, being a Music industry created niche market. These signifiers are included, contrived and attached to instill the attributes of authenticity, spirituality and originality in the product, making it an attractive purchase and legitimising consumption of the product. The extent to which the village and the people of Joujouka fully feel the impact of sales, in the bettering of their lives and in preserving their cultural heritage, is difficult to establish. That is a fascinating piece of work I intend to research in the future.

Many thanks to [Joe Ambrose](#) and [Frank Rynne](#)

Destroy All Rational Thought is available through the websites of Joe and Frank and all reputable outlets.
Distributed by MVD in the USA.
Screened everywhere else.

[DESTROY ALL RATIONAL THOUGHT INTERVIEW #1](#)

Paul H.
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1. Taken from Chapter 6, Moroccan Music and Euro-American Imagination by Philip Schuyler, in Mass Mediations - New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond, edited by Walter Armbrust, University of California Press, 2000.

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