

# *Dream Machine*

by Blake Brooker

A One Yellow Rabbit (Calgary) Production

## Study Guide

**THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE  
PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES  
2006-2007 SEASON**

**Peter Hinton  
Artistic Director, English Theatre**



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This Study Guide was researched and written by **Deborah James** for the National Arts Centre, English Theatre, August 2006. It may be used solely for educational purposes.

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## About This Study Guide

This Study Guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages, which may be used separately or in any combination that works for your classes. The two colour pages (production photos) at the end of the Guide are meant for classroom display but may also be copied for distribution.

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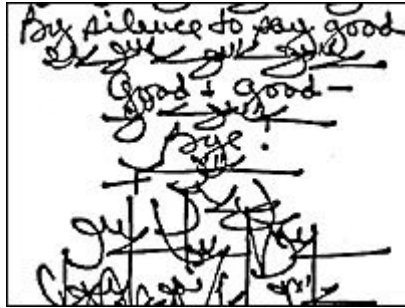
**ArtsAlive.ca**

*Have You Heard?*

This NAC-hosted website offers a wealth of educational resources for teachers and students of music, English theatre, French theatre, and dance. It's well worth a visit.

<http://www.artsalive.ca>

## Introduction



Detail from a calligraphic painting by Brion Gysin

Peter Hinton, Artistic Director of the NAC English Theatre, has chosen to focus his first programmed season around the theme of the artist in society. One Yellow Rabbit's acclaimed production of *Dream Machine* is an ideal choice: both the company that created *Dream Machine* and the Beat artists who inspired it have taken personal and professional risks to defy convention and expand the boundaries of the possible.

The Calgary-based One Yellow Rabbit theatre ensemble has been taking risks since its inception in 1982. In the early 1990s the company satirized holocaust-denying history teacher Jim Keegstra in *Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp*; their recent hit, *Doing Leonard Cohen*, dramatized Cohen's avant-garde novel *Beautiful Losers*; and in *Permission*, they turned stage directions and insults from Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* into a dramatic meditation on power in relationships. The artists who make up One Yellow Rabbit are recognized in Canada and internationally as immensely talented innovators at the cutting edge of contemporary theatre.

*Dream Machine's* principal inspirations—Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Brion Gysin--were also cutting-edge artists at war with conventions of all kinds, rebelling against the consumerism, conformity, and paranoia of Cold War America. Their scathing rejection of mainstream values and culture catalyzed profound and enduring transformations on many fronts. Ginsberg's poem *Howl* and Burroughs' novel *Naked Lunch* struck blows for freedom of expression in landmark censorship trials in the fifties and sixties, while Gysin's experiments in a variety of media, his cut-ups and permutation poetry, and his advocacy of mysticism and consciousness-expanding experiences—culminating in the creation of the *Dream Machine*—continue to inspire artists in many disciplines.

One Yellow Rabbit's *Dream Machine* is a provocative musical meditation inspired by one group of rebel artists, created by another.

## About One Yellow Rabbit

What began as a small troupe in 1982 has grown into one of Canada's best-known theatrical voices at home and abroad. Drawing from an ensemble of skilled and imaginative artists who work professionally in the disciplines of acting, directing, writing, dance, choreography, music and the visual arts, One Yellow Rabbit (OYR) freely blends elements such as drama, dance, poetry and monologue into an unpredictable whole. The result is a unique, multi-faceted form of expression OYR calls "performance theatre."

OYR's mandate (as stated on the company's website) is "to forge a theatrical voice that is experimental yet professional, challenging yet captivating, and indigenous in that it is conceived and performed by artists from the community to explore subjects of significance to the community."

For more information about the OYR theatre ensemble, visit the company's website at <http://www.oyr.org/>.

### **Suggested Activity: Exploring One Yellow Rabbit's performance history**

Thanks to OYR's rich online archive of video clips and reviews of past performances, students with Internet access can take a "crash course" in OYR history in a single class period.

Video clips are available at [http://www.oyr.org/audio\\_video.html](http://www.oyr.org/audio_video.html)

A press kit of past reviews and newspaper articles is available at <http://www.oyr.org/press/index.html>

Divide the class into small groups, and ask each group to become experts on a past OYR production by going online to view video clips and read about the production in the press kit. Past OYR productions include *Featherland*; *Somalia Yellow*; *Doing Leonard Cohen*; *Thunderstruck*; *The History of Wild Theatre*; *Mata Hari: Tigress at the City Gates*; *Serpent Kills*; *The Ugly Man*; *The Erotic Irony of Old Glory*; *Alien Bait*; and *Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp*.

Challenge students to synthesize their research by coming up with three specific examples from the work(s) they've learned about that demonstrate OYR's distinctive "performance theatre" style. How do OYR productions compare to other plays they've seen? What themes crop up repeatedly in OYR's work? Which aspects of the OYR's approach consistently draw reviewers' comments?

## About *Dream Machine* – Page 1 of 2

### Synopsis

*Dream Machine* isn't a conventional drama with characters, conflict and a plot. Instead, through a series of tightly choreographed songs, the show explores aspects of the lives and aesthetics of seminal Beat figures Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin. Writer and director Blake Brooker describes *Dream Machine* as "a musical without characters or plot" that attempts "to induce in the audience the emotions of these courageous, idiosyncratic and frustrated minds."

The show opens with performer Michael Green's powerful delivery of Ginsberg's poem *America*. The songs that follow draw on a wide range of musical styles, juxtaposing poignant, playful and disturbing subject matter in a cabaret-like pastiche.

Song titles (in order of performance):

- "Dream Machine"
- "We Are the Beats"
- "Fun"
- "Sick with Words"
- "Killer in a Movie"
- "Cage"
- "Dear Allen"
- "William Tell"
- "Les Voleurs"
- "Hieroglyphics"
- "Pain Killer"
- "Surrounded by Chrome"
- "Postcards from International Genteel Poverty"
- "Red-Haired Boy"
- "Wild Boys"
- "Tears from Mohammed's Eye (In Tangiers)"
- "Daddy Can't Keep You Warm"

**Running Time:** Approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

**FYI:** Several audio and video clips from *Dream Machine* are posted online at [http://www.oyr.org/audio\\_video.html](http://www.oyr.org/audio_video.html)

(Continued on next page)

**About *Dream Machine*** – Page 2 of 2

## **Themes**

Each piece in *Dream Machine* approaches its subject from a different perspective. Poetically compressed and theatrically complex, the show represents OYR's highly subjective response to the best and the worst of the Beats. The exuberance and bravery of their relentless drive toward personal and artistic freedom is sharply contrasted with the self-destructive excesses of their "nothing is true; everything is permitted" philosophy. Particular consideration is given to the following ideas, which recur in different contexts:

- The shape-shifting nature of the artist in society (artist as outcast, as rebel, as exile, as mystic, as criminal, as reviled freak, as sacrificial victim, as spoiled brat, as misunderstood visionary genius)
- Life in exile; spiritual homelessness; the quest for a culture that fits with one's identity
- Experimentation in art and life
- The inner journey as potential dead end

## **Staging**

Denise Clarke choreographs the production with an intense and inventive physicality. Clarke and ensemble performers Andy Curtis, Onalea Gilbertson, Michael Green and David van Belle present a seamless flow of movements and images that add a fascinating layer of meaning to the text and music.

## **Music/Sound Design**

David Rhymer composed the music for the show. Richard McDowell designed the sound and controls the live mix. The music is performed live by a quartet comprising David Rhymer on keyboards, Brent van Dusen on drums, Jonathan Lewis on violin, clarinet and bass, and Richard McDowell at the mixer and controlling the sound effects.

## **Lighting and Visual Design**

*Dream Machine* takes place in front of a scrim<sup>1</sup> onto which visual designer Chris Cran projects selected images, like the famous Zapruder footage<sup>2</sup> of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and calligraphic designs from Brion Gysin's work. The hallucinatory atmosphere of the piece is also enhanced by Blake Brooker and Ian Wilson's flickering, moody lighting design and by the presence on stage of a working Dream Machine (which the performers describe as "a mutant Stanley Cup").

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<sup>1</sup> A drop curtain that appears opaque to the audience when lit from the front but transparent when lit from behind.

<sup>2</sup> A silent, 8mm home movie shot by Abraham Zapruder in Dallas, Texas, during the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

## About the Beat Movement – Page 1 of 3

*Imagine answering to nobody*

*No book no man no animal*

*Suddenly you're free*

– From “Surrounded by Chrome”

(Blake Brooker, *Dream Machine*)

The term “Beat Generation” was coined in November 1948 by the American writer Jack Kerouac during a late-night conversation with fellow writer John Clellon Holmes. “Beat” was a slang term originally used by jazz musicians and street hustlers in the 1940s to describe a state of extreme exhaustion or being down and out and poor. For Kerouac and Holmes the term captured the “weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world”<sup>1</sup> being felt by alienated youth coming to maturity in a post-World War II world struggling to recover from the psychic aftermath of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

Disregarding conventional authority and rejecting the materialistic basis of middle-class aspirations, the Beats as Kerouac conceived of them were “characters of a special spirituality who didn’t gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization.”<sup>2</sup> The Beats’ profound sense of existential isolation was offset by an exuberant embrace of life in all its variety and intensity. Marc H. Aronson vividly summarizes the essence of the Beats:

[Beat founders Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac and their original inner circle] were trying to live the mad/desperate lives of nineteenth-century French poets Rimbaud and Baudelaire, hanging out with jazz musicians and hobos and criminals, seeing American history through the eyes of its victims—jailed and executed anarchists, lynched and segregated blacks, damned and hunted homosexuals—and sensing through all the yearning and darkness and striving for ecstasy that they knew some truth, some flash of revelation, that made the soothing hum of everyday life a horrible lie.<sup>3</sup>

*(Continued on next page)*

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Charters, editor, *The Portable Beat Reader* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992), p. xix (Introduction).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Marc H. Aronson, “After the Beat: On to the Hippies,” *Beat Voices*, David Kherdian, editor (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), p. xxiii.

**About the Beat Movement – Page 2 of 3**

*Heaven's walls are made of  
The flesh inside your skull  
Unending velvet dark*

– From “Daddy Can’t Keep You Warm”  
(Blake Brooker, *Dream Machine*)

The compulsion to explore inner space and altered human consciousness makes up one strand of the Beat experience highlighted in *Dream Machine*. The device that gives the play its title is a concrete example of this preoccupation. Invented by artist Brion Gysin and mathematician Ian Sommerville, the Dream Machine was a spinning cylinder that emitted rhythmic flashes of light onto a viewer’s closed eyelids to stimulate alpha waves in the brain, bringing on vivid images and waking dreams. The Beats also sought altered states of consciousness by experimenting with drugs of all kinds—alcohol, marijuana and hashish, benzedrine, opiates, peyote, yage, LSD—which were believed to enhance creativity and extend perception to new realms. Alternative spiritual practices offered a third path: Ginsberg turned to Zen Buddhism, Burroughs got involved with Scientology, and Gysin practised magic.

*Dream Machine* presents different aspects of the Beats’ pursuit of ecstasy, from the relatively positive take on living-in-the-moment hedonism in “Fun” to the surreal horror of “William Tell,” which recalls the true story of William S. Burroughs’ shooting of his wife Joan Vollmer Burroughs during a particularly wild party in Mexico, and the allusions to Burroughs’ recurring struggle with heroin addiction in “Red-Haired Boy.”

*The sterile, aggressive individual ego  
Imprisons as it creates  
Pure shameless total  
Viva the thief*

– From “Les Voleurs”  
(Blake Brooker, *Dream Machine*)

The quest for new forms of artistic expression is another dimension of the Beat aesthetic explored in *Dream Machine*. Allen Ginsberg’s poem *America* (which opens the show) demonstrates the poet’s confessional style, wherein every facet of his experience, no matter how mundane or potentially shocking, is considered a fit subject for art. In contrast, Gysin and Burroughs experimented with techniques designed to free the written and spoken word from the tyranny of authorial self-expression. They wanted to bring a new level of abstraction to the writing process, to release the hidden meanings of words and tap into realms of significance above and beyond the ego of the individual writer. The startling juxtapositions of sounds and actions in “Cage”, the jumbled word order in “Pain Killer”, and the ideas expressed in “Les Voleurs” recall their experiments and beliefs.

*(Continued on next page)*



**About the Beat Movement – Page 3 of 3**

*I will kiss you stranger  
How I like your style  
The universe the music  
My heartbeat and your smile*  
– From “Fun” (Blake Brooker, *Dream Machine*)

A greater tolerance of sexual diversity is one of the enduring legacies of the Beats’ rebellion against the repressive, homophobic culture of middle America in the 1950s. Promiscuity, both heterosexual and homosexual, was accepted in Beat culture as yet another route to ecstatic experience. Ginsberg, Burroughs and Gysin were open about their homosexuality at a time when many gay men felt compelled to live their public lives in complete denial of their sexual orientation. *Dream Machine’s* “Dear Allen” looks at Ginsberg and Burroughs’ shared sexual orientation in a series of letters, while “Wild Boys” evokes Burroughs’ sexual exploits and fantasies.

## A Production Who's Who

A professional theatre production represents the collaborative efforts of many, many people, each with a specific job to do. The combined talents of the following people made this production of *Dream Machine* possible:

Written and directed by **Blake Brooker**

Music composed by **David Rhymer**

Staged by **Denise Clarke**

Sound production by **Richard McDowell**

Set design by **Chris Cran**

Lighting design by **Blake Brooker and Ian Wilson**

Assistant directed by **David van Belle**

Produced by **Stephen Schroeder**

Production managed by **Ian Wilson**

Stage managed by **Oliver Armstrong**

### The Maverick Think Tank

**Denise Clarke, Andy Curtis, Onalea Gilbertson, Michael Green, David van Belle**

### Musicians

Strings, clarinet and bass: **Jonathan Lewis**  
Sequences and sound effects: **Richard McDowell**  
Percussion: **Brent van Dusen**  
Keyboards: **David Rhymer**

### **A One Yellow Rabbit (Calgary) production**

The world premiere of *Dream Machine* was coproduced by Six Stages in Toronto in February 2003.

The performance is 90 minutes long with no intermission.

### **NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE**

**Artistic Director** .....Peter Hinton  
**Managing Director** .....Victoria Steele  
**Production Director** .....Alex Gazalé  
**Publicist/Media Relations Coordinator** .....Laura Denker

[www.nac-cna.ca](http://www.nac-cna.ca)

***Dream Machine* Suggested Pre-Show Activity 1:  
A Closer Look at Allen Ginsberg's *America***

– Page 1 of 2

*Dream Machine* begins with a powerful recitation of Allen Ginsberg's poem *America* (written in January 1936), the only complete literary work from the Beat movement included in the show. To introduce your students to both the Beat movement and the play, have them read the text of *America* and follow up by having them view the online video clip of OYR's Michael Green delivering the poem.

The text of *America* is available online at

[http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g\\_1/ginsberg/onlinepoems.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_1/ginsberg/onlinepoems.htm)

Scroll down the page to find it.

View Michael Green's performance of *America* from *Dream Machine* on OYR's website at

[http://www.oyr.org/audio\\_video.html](http://www.oyr.org/audio_video.html)

Scroll down to "Performance Clips" and select "*Dream Machine* Part 1".

**Discussion Questions on *America***

1. How does this poem differ in style and subject matter from other poems you have read?
2. What is the attitude of the speaker in the poem towards America? What is his attitude towards himself? With whom does the speaker identify?
3. What is the dominant tone of the poem?
4. How is *America* still relevant today?
5. Can you think of other literary or musical works that express similar ideas?
6. How does Michael Green's interpretation in the video version of the poem compare to the way you understood the poem on first reading? What does the actor's delivery add to the poem?

*(Continued on next page)*

**Dream Machine Suggested Pre-Show Activity 1:  
A Closer Look at Allen Ginsberg's *America* – Page 2 of 2**

**Definitions of Some Terms from *America***

**Israel Amter** (1881–1954): A founding member of the Communist Party in America.

**Mother Bloor:** Ella Reeve Bloor (1862–1951), a radical American labour organizer, socialist and communist.

**Sacco & Vanzetti:** Italian immigrants with radical political views who were convicted of murder on largely circumstantial evidence, and executed in Massachusetts on August 23, 1927.

**Scott Nearing** (1883–1983): An American conservationist, peace activist, educator and writer who advocated a return to the land in his 1954 book *Living the Good Life: How to Live Simply and Sanely in a Troubled World*.

**Scottsboro Boys:** Nine black youths falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama in the 1930s. The rapid conviction of the young men and the later successful legal battles to overturn those convictions make this case one of the most shocking travesties of justice in American legal history.

**Spanish Loyalists:** Spanish citizens who championed workers' rights and fought against a fascist takeover of their country by General Franco during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).

**strophe:** A group of lines forming a section of a lyric poem.

**Tangiers:** A city in northern Morocco. In the forties and fifties it was an International Zone under the joint control of France, Spain, Britain, and Italy, and a favourite destination of artists. William S. Burroughs wrote *Naked Lunch* in Tangiers; the novel is set in "Interzone," a fictionalized version of Tangiers.

**Tom Mooney** (1882-1942): An activist and member of the Industrial Workers of the World who spent 22 years in a California prison as a result of a wrongful conviction. The flagrant injustice surrounding the Mooney case attracted international attention.

**Trotskyites:** Supporters of Leon Trotsky's theory of communism (as opposed to Stalin's).

**Wobblies:** Members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an association (still active today) that advocates the joining together of all workers in a single union, the abolition of the class system, and an end to the unfair generation and distribution of profits derived from labour.

## ***Dream Machine Suggested Pre-Show Activity 2: Exploring Text and Movement***

Divide the class into several groups (3 to 8 participants per group is best). Give each group a copy of Blake Brooker's text *We Are the Beats* included in this guide. Ask the students in each group to create a physical-theatre style staging for the text, using their bodies, movements and facial expressions to the full to emphasize the meaning of the piece as they deliver it. To accomplish this task they will need to:

- invent at least one specific gesture/movement/stage picture for each section of text
- link the movements they decide upon together with smooth transitions that keep the overall momentum of the text flowing
- make decisions about which lines are performed by the whole group and which are delivered by a single person or by different combinations of people
- pay attention to the rhythm in the text and incorporate it into the pacing of their presentation

After your students have had a chance to develop their presentations and share them with the whole class, have them view the online video clip of Denise Clarke's choreography of this same text at [http://www.oyr.org/audio\\_video.html](http://www.oyr.org/audio_video.html)

## ***Dream Machine Extension Activity: Cut-Ups, Fold-Ins, and Permuted Poetry***

– Page 1 of 2

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, surrealist authors advocated automatic writing as a way to capture raw material from a writer's unconscious before it was censored and diluted by the conscious mind. Continuing in this tradition, Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs experimented with writing techniques that subverted the social control implicit in words by randomly rearranging sections of one or more printed texts and then looking for meaning in the product thus created. In this excerpt from *The Third Mind*, Gysin explains the why and the how of the cut-up:

Writing is fifty years behind painting. I propose to apply the painters' techniques to writing; things as simple and immediate as collage or montage. Cut right through the pages of any book or newsprint... lengthwise, for example, and shuffle the columns of text. Put them together at hazard and read the newly constituted message. Do it for yourself. Use any system which suggests itself to you. Take your own words or the words said to be "the very own words" of anyone else living or dead. You'll soon see that words don't belong to anyone. Words have a vitality of their own and you or anybody else can make them gush into action.<sup>1</sup>

Gysin also experimented with composing poems by systematically rearranging the words in a single statement into multiple permutations, most famously with the Biblical pronouncement "I Am That I Am": "I Am That I Am/I Am That Am I/Am I That I Am," etc. This permuted poetry was a way to "set words spinning off on their own, echoing out... into an expanding ripple of meanings which they did not seem to be capable of"<sup>2</sup> within the original sentence.

To hear Brion Gysin performing some of his permuted poems, visit Ubuweb at <http://www.ubu.com/sound/gysin.html>

Students can experiment with cut-ups and permuted poems, respectively, online at <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~cantsin/permutations/gysin/cut-up.cgi> and [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~cantsin/permutations/diy\\_proteus/diy\\_proteus.cgi](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~cantsin/permutations/diy_proteus/diy_proteus.cgi)

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<sup>1</sup> Brion Gysin, "Cut-Ups Self-Explained," in William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

**Dream Machine Extension Activity**

**Cut-Ups, Fold-Ins, and Permuted Poetry** – Page 2 of 2

You can also explore these techniques in your classroom:

**Cut-ups:** Provide each student with a pair of scissors and a page from a newspaper, magazine, or damaged book. Have the students chop their page into several columns, rearrange them randomly, and scan through the newly created page for any striking combinations that arise. Alternatively, they can cut the page into four rectangular blocks that they then fit back together at random.

*For more on cut-ups, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cut-up\\_technique](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cut-up_technique).*

**Fold-ins:** For this activity, students will need a selection of single pages and a roll of tape. Ask students to work with a partner who has a page from a different text whose line spacing will match up fairly well with their own. Fold one sheet in half on the vertical and place it over the corresponding half of the partner's page. Tape the pages together at the fold and at the corners. Scan the new fold-in text for any striking new phrases that occur.

Have students record the most interesting new word groupings from their cut-up and fold-in experiments to use as the basis of a prose poem or as a starting point for a longer piece of writing.

**Permuted poems:** Have students create permuted poems by rearranging the word order of sentences they find at random or write themselves, trying out a minimum of 20 different permutations. Students can chop up the sentence and shuffle the text manually to vary the order and record the results, or work in groups where each person is assigned a word in the sentence, and word order is altered when the group members change positions.

Sample sentences to try:

We'll be friends forever, won't we?

Life is short and art is long.

I don't want to see you now.

The devil is in the details.

## **Biographical Notes: Allen Ginsberg**

– Page 1 of 2

*I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,  
starving hysterical naked,  
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for  
an angry fix,  
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection  
to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night...*

– Howl (1957)

Allen Ginsberg was born in Newark, New Jersey on June 3, 1926, the younger son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. His father, Louis, was a high-school English teacher, and his mother, Naomi Levy Ginsberg, was active in the Communist Party USA during the Depression. While still a child, Ginsberg witnessed his mother's struggle with severe mental illness, an experience that profoundly affected his life and work.

As a scholarship student at Columbia University in the late 1940s, Ginsberg joined an eclectic group of friends that included fellow student Lucien Carr, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Herbert Huncke, John Clellon Holmes and Neal Cassady. By 1949 this group had become the centre of a new literary and lifestyle movement that called itself "the Beat Generation".

In the summer of 1948, after he had a vision of William Blake reciting the poem *Ah Sunflower*, Ginsberg accepted his vocation as a poet. Ginsberg believed that the poet's task was to bring his readers into contact with a visionary's insight into the nature of reality, a state of mind he cultivated by experimenting with a wide variety of drugs.

In the early 1950s, spurred by his interest in exploring different drugs and a desire to reconnect with Neal Cassady, Ginsberg travelled to Mexico and then to San Francisco, where he met and fell in love with Peter Orlovsky. Their relationship was to last more than 40 years, until Ginsberg's death in 1997.

In October 1955, Ginsberg read his groundbreaking poem *Howl* at the Six Gallery in San Francisco, taking his place alongside fellow poets Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen and Philip Lamantia in what came to be known as the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance.

*(Continued on next page)*



**Biographical Notes: Allen Ginsberg** – Page 2 of 2

*Howl and Other Poems* was published in 1956 by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a poet and owner of San Francisco's City Lights Bookstore and City Lights Press. Ferlinghetti was subsequently charged with publishing an obscene book because of the work's many references to illicit drugs and explicit sexual content, both heterosexual and homosexual. After a highly publicized trial, Judge Clayton Horn exonerated Ferlinghetti on the grounds that *Howl* did have redeeming social value. No other contemporary American poem is more widely read today.

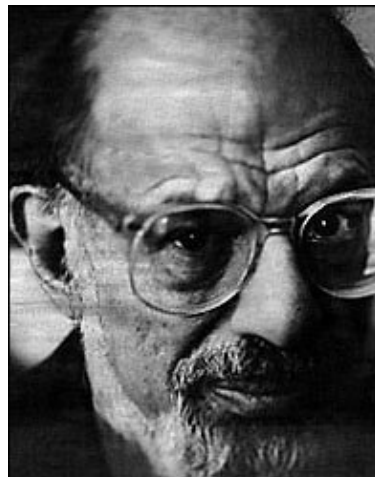
In 1957, Ginsberg and Orlovsky visited William S. Burroughs in Tangiers and helped him pull together the text that would become his novel *Naked Lunch* (1959). During extensive travels that took him to South America, the famous Beat Hotel in Paris, Morocco and India, Ginsberg found a new path to spiritual enlightenment in the meditation practices and philosophy of Zen Buddhism.

Back in America, Ginsberg became widely known as a leading proponent of the 1960s peace movement. He coined the term "flower power", chanted "Om" during the anti-Vietnam War protest at the Democratic National Convention in 1968, and was one of the chief organizers of the 1967 Gathering of the Tribes for a Human Be-In, a mass gathering of hippies.

Ginsberg founded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in Boulder, Colorado in 1974. He taught creative writing there and at Brooklyn College in New York until his death from liver cancer on April 6, 1997.

Adapted from biographical entries by Ann Charters and Thomas Gladysz; full text at [http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g\\_l/ginsberg/life.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_l/ginsberg/life.htm)

(Below, left to right) A young Allen Ginsberg in New York in 1948; in the heyday of Sixties counterculture; and in the 1990s, distinguished lecturer and literary icon.



# Biographical Notes: William S. Burroughs

– Page 1 of 2

During the 1950s, William S. Burroughs—American novelist, essayist, social critic, painter and spoken word performer—set out to probe the meaning of human suffering, and his self-destructive obsession with the means to this end became an enduring facet of popular culture. Though more often referred to than read, Burroughs influenced every artistic medium. From subversive comedic diatribes on oppressive government to gritty, realistic crime dramas, Burroughs made hip, literate cynicism both popular and culpable.

William Seward Burroughs was born on February 5, 1914, to a wealthy family in St. Louis, Missouri. His grandfather invented the Burroughs adding machine and his mother was a direct descendant of General Robert E. Lee.

Soon after graduating from Harvard, Burroughs became fascinated with the criminal underworld of the 1930s and sought to emulate the gangster lifestyle, dealing in stolen goods and eventually morphine, to which he became addicted. He moved to Chicago for a time to support his habit, then to New York City where, in 1943, he met Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg at Columbia University. He encouraged these hipster prodigies to write, and though they rarely joined Burroughs in his escapades they were impressed by the older man's dark wit and genteel poise weathered by years of hard living.

In 1947 Burroughs entered into a common-law marriage to Joan Vollmer, an amphetamine addict he had met at Columbia. They moved to New Orleans, where drugs were more easily obtainable, then to Texas, where they grew oranges and marijuana and raised two children (one of them fathered by Burroughs). On the advice of a friend, Burroughs began work on a "memory exercise" which would become his first book, *Junky: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*, published in 1953 under the pseudonym William Lee.

On September 6, 1951, while in Mexico City on the run from the law, Burroughs shot and killed Joan, allegedly during their "William Tell routine": after a night of heavy drinking, Burroughs suggested that his wife place a glass on her head and he would shoot at it from across the room. "Why I did it, I do not know," he later claimed. "Something took over." His son went to live with his grandparents, but Burroughs was never prosecuted. Instead, he embarked upon a quest to exorcize what he called "The Ugly Spirit" that had compelled his lifestyle decisions and now convinced him he "had no choice but to write my way out."

*(Continued on next page)*

**Biographical Notes: William S. Burroughs** – Page 2 of 2

Burroughs fled to South America in search of the mystical drug yage, and wrote *The Yage Letters* (1963) to Allen Ginsberg. He eventually ended up in The International Zone of Tangiers, Morocco. He began “reporting” from his own hallucinated “Interzone,” a psychotic battleground of paranoid intrigue whose denizens dealt in deceit and humiliation, controlling addicts of sex, drugs, and power in a crumbling society spiritually malnourished and bloated on excess.

When Kerouac and Ginsberg came to Tangiers in 1957, they found Burroughs in the throes of opiate withdrawal. He had been sending them “reports,” reams of handwritten notes which they helped to compile into Burroughs’ jarring magnum opus *Naked Lunch* (1959). The novel’s blistering satire of post-World War II, pre-television consumer culture, and its stark portrayal of tormented lost souls, were the talk of the burgeoning beatnik scene in the States.

Burroughs came to be regarded as the godfather of the Beat Generation, a demographic that came of age during World War II and aimed to plumb the depths of existence in post-modern America. Mainstream appeal eluded these writers, however, until *Naked Lunch* became the focus of a censorship trial in 1965. The proceedings drew attention to—and testimony from—such illustrious literary figures as Norman Mailer, John Ciardi, and Allen Ginsberg.

Burroughs went on to publish *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), and *Nova Express* (1964). All used “cut-ups,” an editing technique with which he had experimented in Tangiers: the random physical manipulation of existing words and phrases into coherent juxtapositions.

In the 1970s, Burroughs holed up in his New York City “bunker” as his writing became the subtext for his image as a gnarled old junkie. He enjoyed a spate of speaking tours and cameos in films. He also published books revisiting the themes of his early routines, and in 1983 was inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He later recorded and performed with John Giorno Poetry Systems, Laurie Anderson, Material, the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, and Kurt Cobain of Nirvana, among others.

In the 1990s his face and silhouette, as well as his unmistakable thin, rattling voice quoting his writing out of context, were used to promote everything from running shoes to personal computers. He spent most of his last years in seclusion in Lawrence, Kansas, where he died on August 2, 1997.

Source: *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*, eds. Tom and Sara Pendergast (.Detroit: St. James Press, 2000). Reproduced in the online *Biography Resource Center* (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Thomson Gale. 2006).

## **Biographical Notes: Brion Gysin**

– Page 1 of 2

Brion Gysin has had a significant impact on 20<sup>th</sup>-century art and culture. Throughout his prolific career he has worked in a wide range of media, including visual art, literature, music, performance, sound poetry and cinema. Though widely recognized as a catalyst of the Beat Generation, Gysin did not consider himself a part of the movement, always maintaining his individuality and creative vision. His progressive ideas and methods influenced many other artists, including William S. Burroughs, John Giorno, the Fluxus group, Steve Lacy, Keith Haring, David Bowie, and former Rolling Stones member Brian Jones.

Gysin was born in England on January 19, 1916 to a Swiss father and Canadian mother. When he was five years old the family moved to Edmonton, and he spent his formative years in the atmosphere of the Canadian prairies in the 1920s. Gysin left home at the age of 16 to experience the world. He studied in England (1932–34) at Downside College, a prestigious public school, where he began to dabble in poetry, then moved to Paris and studied at the Sorbonne. It was there, in the studios, salons, and cafés of pre-war Paris, that he acquired his practical training, and there that he met Max Ernst, Valentine Hugo, Salvador Dali, Gala Dali, Dora Maar, and Pablo Picasso, and visited Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas.

In 1935, at the age of 19, he was invited to participate in a surrealist exhibition that included works by Arp, Duchamp, Magritte, Miró, Man Ray, and others. Unfortunately, his relationship with the group broke down, and on the eve of the exhibition opening André Breton ordered that Gysin's work be removed from the Galerie Aux Quatre Chemins. (Undaunted, Gysin displayed his drawings on the pavement outside.) Gysin eventually achieved international acclaim for his style, which blended Japanese and Arabic calligraphy, self-taught painting techniques, and the use of his "magical grid."

In May 1939, at the outbreak of World War II, Gysin made his way to New York. For a time he worked as a scenic painter, assisting designer Irene Sharaff on Broadway musicals. He gave that up and became a welder in the New Jersey shipyards, where he experimented with welded sculptures. In 1943 Gysin was drafted into the Canadian army, where he studied Japanese calligraphy—an event that left its echoes in his later fascination with calligraphic forms in art.

*(Continued on next page)*

**Biographical Notes: Brion Gysin** – Page 2 of 2

In the winter of 1950, the expatriate American writer Paul Bowles urged Gysin to visit him and his wife Jane in Tangiers. Soon afterwards Gysin settled in the Moroccan city, immersing himself in Arab mysticism and an ancient form of indigenous music called Joujouka, which he would later popularize via Brian Jones and the Rolling Stones. Here he exhibited his paintings of the Sahara and enjoyed a brief and successful stint as a restaurateur, managing the Moroccan restaurant 1001 Nights from 1954 to 1958.

After the restaurant closed in 1958, Gysin returned to London, then Paris. Though their paths had crossed in Tangiers, it was in Paris—at the famous Beat Hotel—that Gysin and William S. Burroughs began an intimate friendship. In the summer of 1959 Gysin proposed his “cut-up” method of writing, where pages of text were cut up and rearranged haphazardly. He and Burroughs used this technique to produce *Minutes To Go* and *The Exterminator*, combining text from a variety of sources including newspapers, letters, the Bible, the Koran, and *Naked Lunch*.

With the help of mathematician Ian Sommerville, Gysin expanded the cut-up concept to audio tape, creating audio cut-ups that presented the startling impact of linking words, sounds and time through juxtaposition. In 1960, the BBC asked Gysin to create sound works for broadcast. Among those recorded for the event were *i am that i am*, *recalling all active agents*, and *pistol poem* (which permuted the recorded sound of a gun firing at varying distances).

Gysin and Sommerville also collaborated on the Dream Machine, a spinning, flickering cylinder that was designed to affect the alpha rhythms of the human brain, allowing access to one’s inner visual capacities. It was first exhibited in 1962 in Paris.

In 1965 Brion Gysin returned to Tangiers with the poet John Giorno, who had been part of Andy Warhol’s New York circle. Gysin experimented with photomontages and roller work in the 1970s and 1980s, and continued his literary collaborations with Burroughs.

Brion Gysin died in Paris on July 13, 1986.

*Sources:* Various, including The Knitting Circle website at <http://www.knittingcircle.org.uk/briongysin.html>; and online notes for the exhibition *Brion Gysin: I Am That I Am* (Art Gallery of Alberta, 1998) at [http://www.artgalleryalberta.ca/exhibitions/past/1998/i\\_am\\_that\\_i\\_am.html](http://www.artgalleryalberta.ca/exhibitions/past/1998/i_am_that_i_am.html).

## **Additional Resources – Page 1 of 2**

Suggested resources for those who want to learn more about the Beat Generation and the major figures associated with it.

### **Books**

*The Portable Beat Reader*, Ann Charters, editor (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1992).

*Beat Down to Your Soul*, Ann Charters, editor (New York: Penguin Group [USA], 2001).

*The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: The Beat Generation and American Culture*, Holly George-Warren, editor (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1999).

*Ginsberg: A Biography*, Barry Miles (London: Virgin Publishing Ltd., 2001).

*Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*, Ted Morgan (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1988).

*Nothing Is True – Everything Is Permitted: The Life of Brion Gysin*, John Geiger (New York: The Disinformation Company Ltd., 2005).

### **Selected Web Links**

The Beat Page

<http://www.rooknet.com/beatpage/index.html>

Literary Kicks (Beat section)

<http://www.litkicks.com/BeatPages/category.jsp?what=Beatitude>

The Psychedelic 60s: Literature and Social Change

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/sixties/>

Allen Ginsberg: Ashes and Blues

<http://www.levity.com/corduroy/ginsberg/home.htm>

The William S. Burroughs Internet Database

<http://cstl-cla.semo.edu/gurnow/burroughs/main.htm>

Brion Gysin

<http://www.brainwashed.com/h3o/dreamachine/dreamachine.html>

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**Additional Resources** – Page 2 of 2

**Online Audio**

Ubu.com has an incredible archive of vanguard audio, including a page of unparalleled Burroughs recordings, along with clips from Ginsberg and Gysin.  
<http://www.ubu.com/sound/burroughs.html>

**Additional NAC Resources for Teachers**

**ArtsAlive.ca** (English Theatre)

A lively, comprehensive, interactive web-based educational resource for Dramatic Arts and English teachers. Find information on theatre superstitions, lists of great Canadian plays, interviews with Canadian theatre artists, definitions of terms like “vomitory” and “gobo”, links to a host of exciting theatre-related sites, and more.  
[www.ArtsAlive.ca](http://www.ArtsAlive.ca) (English Theatre section)

**Programming**

- **Skill-Building Workshops** — Theatre professionals and students get together at your school for hands-on group workshops.
- **Pre- or Post-Performance Workshops!** — These workshops, scheduled before or after a student matinee, allow for a full-day visit to the NAC.
- **Professional Development for Teachers** — One- and two-day teacher workshops covering areas like Lighting, Voice, Movement, Acting Technique, and Design.
- **Backstage Visits** – Tours of backstage areas for student groups.

**Preparing for the 2006–2007 Season**

- **Workshop:** *Getting to Know the Jacobethans*, taught by Artistic Director. Peter Hinton.  
Saturday, November 18, 2006 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Fee: \$100.00
- **Open rehearsal:** Observe a rehearsal for The Ark’s performance of *The Jacobethan Imagination: From Riot to Restoration*  
Saturday, November 25, 2006  
(The Ark is a three-week NAC workshop directed by Peter Hinton, during which professional actors and designers will explore “Jacobethan” works—by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Middleton, Johnson, Webster and others—and develop a performance drawn from these texts.)

For more information, see the ArtsAlive publication available from the NAC, or contact Martina Kuska, NAC Outreach Coordinator, at (613) 947-7000, ext. 522, or [mkuska@nac-cna.ca](mailto:mkuska@nac-cna.ca).

# We Are the Beats

(Excerpt from *Dream Machine* by Blake Brooker.)

We are the Beats  
Toxic, clever and effete  
Lock up your daughters and your sons  
Our habits are injurious  
Our ambitions are furious  
Sticking it half an inch into your eye

You may find it odd  
That when we talk of God  
Our hats are on  
But our gloves are off

Enjoy ignoring us  
We'll hide among you nonetheless  
Although we're lazy we can't rest  
We'll make a mess of your success

We are the Beats  
And we walk through the streets  
Our actions are verging on bizarre  
Lifestyle notorious  
Idleness is glorious  
Sticking it half an inch into your eye

We talk the talk  
We talk the hands right off the clock  
Our tongues are as rough  
As our hands are soft

Enjoy ignoring us  
We'll hide among you nonetheless  
Although we're lazy we can't rest  
We'll make a mess of your success

My body speaks  
I think it is my god  
Warmer than the nearest star  
Cover me  
Don't make an enemy  
Of the only light I see  
The light that comes through me





**The cast of *Dream Machine***  
***Left to right:* Brad Payne, Andy Curtis, Onalea Gilbertson,  
Michael Green, Denise Clarke**

Photo: Blake Brooker



**OYR's *Dream Machine* ensemble gathered around a Dream Machine**

Photo: Blake Brooker



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