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Watershed February 2011 Podcast

2011 will be the year of the beat generation: those angel-headed hipsters who transformed American culture in the 50s through drawing together such influences as French poetry, jazz, buddhism and drugs and gave birth to the counterculture. Thus setting a whole new generation of artists and musicians such as Bob Dylan and Tom Waits on a poetic, expressive path. Jack Kerouac, hipster in chief, wrote one of the defining books in **On The Road** in the early 1950s. This not only described the experiences of a whole new post-war generation but transformed the way American fiction and culture would be thought about and created. On The Road is an intensely personal and poetic novel but also one which is intensely cinematic. It is, after all, the original road movie in book form. Plans for adapting it for film have been numerous with the most tantalising being Gus Van Sant's planned film followed by Francis Ford Coppola. However, it has finally happened under the direction of Brazilian Walter Salles with Coppola producing. Story has it that Coppola saw *Motorcycle Diaries* and was so impressed he wanted Salles to direct. Filming started last year with Salles undertaking research from the primary source of Carolyn Cassady who not only features in the book but was married to Neal Cassady - one of the main characters under the name Dean Moriarty - and had an affair with the author and other main character Kerouac/Sal Paradise. I am convinced the film will be at the Cannes film festival in May this year and will prompt further rediscovery and appreciation of all things beat.

I say further because appreciation will be starting this month thanks to the film **Howl**, a multilayered exploration of the creation and impact of that other landmark creation of the beat generation – Allen Ginsberg's seminal poem *Howl*. Created around the same time as Kerouac was writing *On the Road* and William Burrough's *Junkie*, *Howl's* jazz-infused incandescent writing captured the essence of the alternative life style. The now infamous opening sets the tone:

*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

The cascading of images is as powerful a piece of writing and commentary on the Beat generation as you will come across. Apart from being a seminal piece of American art *Howl* also resulted in an obscenity trial similar to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the UK in its use of language. It is these themes, which the film explores and presents weaving together Ginsberg (played with preternatural brilliance by James Franco) reflecting on experiences that informed the poem, a full recitation in a suitably smoky club and a re-enactment of the trial, the latter of which is hilarious. It is an amazing testament to the resonance and transformatory power of a few words.

Howl opens on **Fri 25 Feb**.

It remains to be seen if my prediction regarding Walter Salles' film and Cannes comes to pass. However you can read a recent interview with a now 80 odd year old Carolyn Cassady at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/18/beat-poets-cassady-kerouac-ginsberg>

This month also sees the presentation of the latest round in Watershed's **Media Sandbox** programme. Now in its third year Media Sandbox is a development programme enabling creative companies to research emerging possibilities in interactive, digital media to create new ideas and deliver innovation with a view to exploring their applications in either or both the commercial or cultural world. This recent round have awarded seven £10,000 commissions to support research and development of innovative content, applications and experiences under two strands: open data and pervasive media. They range in scope from explorations into apps that map gradients and advise on the easiest or most challenging ascents in the city to voice controlled games and intuitive musical instruments. These are all Bristol and South West-based young companies that are pushing at the boundaries of innovation and technology. Well worth a look at the talent, ideas and potential technological developments of the future.

The **Media Sandbox Showcase 2010** is on **Fri 18 Feb at 14:00hrs** see

<http://watershed.co.uk/exhibits/2781/> for more information on the event and
<http://www.mediasandbox.co.uk/> for more information on the scheme.