

European Beat Studies Network Inaugural Conference. 5-7 September 2012, www.ebsn.eu
Roosevelt Study Center, Abdij 9, Middelburg, The Netherlands, www.roosevelt.nl

Friday, 7 September

10.00-11.30 Session 12: Beat Receptions [Auditorium]

Chair: Jaap van der Bent

Alan Garfield, “Pilgrimage: A Journey to the Beat Museum” agarfield@dbq.edu

Good morning. The sessions in this conference have been great, haven't they? I've been blown away by the whole thing. In fact, I'm leaving. No, not really. But being on the final day does give me the opportunity to reflection upon the papers and conversations of the conference thus far. And though this is not part of my titled talk, I'd like to reflect for just a moment.

There have been three recurring themes running through the Conference which are relevant to what I want to talk about today. (1) The first is the extraordinary evidence of creativity of interpretations of the Beats. This variety and range have to do, no doubt, in methodological differences in each discipline, even contry, that we've ehard from here. (2) The second theme could be seen as a negative item, but I don't mean it that way. The papers in this conference seem to me to put us in a place that we have literally no idea what's going to happen in this discipline. For those of you who teach the Beats, undergrad or grad school, best of luck. From what I have observed, you have no idea how the 'teaching' part is going to play out. Look, in the next full generation of students (assume in 8 years) in 2020, how are you going to teach the Beats? (3) And the final theme that I've notice deals with the extraordinary capacities we have to examine the Beats through our own particular perspectives.

There, now on to my talk...

In the 1950s, the Beats were the only new cultural game in town. At least that's what Bruce Cook (book editor of the short lived National Observer) believed. He went on record with that idea with in his sympathetic history, *The Beat Generation*, published in 1971 (Scribners, 1971, NY) And why not? Cook was at or near the Beats throughout much of their permutations. In one of the least parochial early books on the subject, Cook examined sources, iconography, the golden epoch, and its later influences - later that is until 1971. And even if you don't agree with Cook when he pronounced the Beats as the “only game”, inferring that it was the only revolutionary game aimed directly at the military and industrial complex and consciousness of the time, he might be forgiven for trying to impose a somewhat artificial order on the chaos of the pure breds, Kerouac, Cassidy, Ginsberg and those that followed.

In a wider sense, of course, the Beats have never stopped, and this conference is but one indication of that continuing interest and influence. The golden nugget might be gone, just as the heroic phase of Surrealism came and went before anyone in this room was even born, but the style and its pervading influences – perhaps with a big or small “B/b” now - clearly lives on.

How does it live on, or more particularly, how with 21st century technological innovation do we see and interpret the Beats? Do the Beats do social networking well? Clay Shirky (NYU prof) in his 2008 book, *Here Comes Everybody* [(Penguin Press, 2008, NY), is not the only one (though he is one of the loudest and most persuasive) to] suggests that advances in technology and social media ennabele new kinds of groups to form with a voice that simply was not present until recently. And this we all know so well. Yes, in 2012 as we are more interconnected and active than ever.

And yet, it didn't seem right to me when I saw someone reading On the Road on a Kindle. But only on one level was it a bit strange. I think we lose a bit of its kryptonetic power when we don't see a cultural movement's environment and its prime objects. If you want to understand the Quattrocento, you really should walk among the stones of Florence, where Brunelleschi, Massaccio and Michaelangelo travelled.

It is not less true with the Beat writers. And this is what my short presentation is about. The Beats and their objects, in one particular place at one particular time.

So, all this globalization notwithstanding, the Beat culture has always been intimately connected with geography: New York, certainly, but primarily, San Francisco. How many of you have read Kerouac's *On the Road* or Cassady's *The First Third*? And how many of you have been to Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore or North Beach in San Francisco? That's the point of this paper: being there. Let's go on the road, then.

This presentation focuses on the story of the Beats from the standpoint of the only museum dedicated to the Beat Generation – the Beat Museum at 540 Broadway, in the North Beach area in San Francisco. A visit to the Museum, comfortably sandwiched between the sex shops of Broadway and a renewed, revitalized and sanitized City Lights Bookstore on Kearny Street, offers the Beat pilgrim a unique experience. These are artifacts, not adjudicated by museum curators or registrars, but chosen, organized and presented by one passionate, loving collector. Though our technology, our social tools, cannot really simulate a trip there, it will have to do for now.

In this virtual tour of the Beat Museum, we will see how the Beats are presented to those who finally make the pilgrimage to North Beach. Obviously, I am interested in your reactions afterwards.

(All photos taken were taken Alan Garfield, March 3, 2012, with the permission of The Beat Museum for presentation at this conference.)



The Beat Museum, 540 Broadway, San Francisco, CA



Google Map: Ferlinghetti's City Lights and the Beat Museum



Some things never seem to change. Panhandler outside of City Lights Bookstore.



View of Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore



The Beat Museum is sandwiched between strip clubs.



Entrance to the Beat Museum, Jerry Cimino (collector/owner)



The Beat Museum website: www.kerouac.com



Busy? Entrance to the Beat Museum is \$8 (students/seniors \$5).



First room at the Beat Museum.



View from 1st room into 2nd room.



Upstairs.



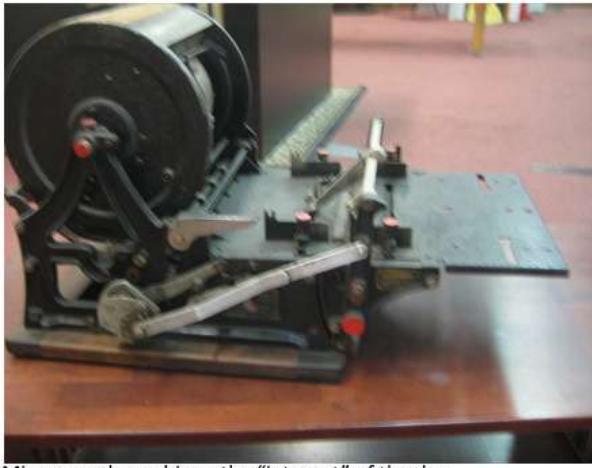
Decoupage artwork at the entrance of the 1st room.



Early Beats - the Neal Cassady section.



Neal Cassady section.



Mimeograph machine - the "internet" of the day.

Mimeography

Mimeograph machines, (sometimes called simply *mimeo*) patented by Thomas Edison in 1876, were used for more than half a century for a variety of printing needs including short-run office copying, classroom materials, and church bulletins. Mimeograph technology was eventually supplanted by the rise of photocopiers in the 1960s, however, mimeography is still considered more economical than photocopying, since the mimeograph machine does not require electricity to operate.

The machine was used by first placing a thin wax stencil into a typewriter in place of paper, and removing the ink ribbon so that the typewriter stylus impacted the wax directly, leaving behind the impression of the typed letters. This was called "cutting a stencil." The stencil was then wrapped around the drum of the mimeograph machine, which then was turned with a crank, forcing ink through the letter marks onto the paper.

The mimeograph was made popular due to its ability to produce many copies far more inexpensively than traditional printing. Mimeograph machines could be used by a single person, and required no typesetting, expensive printing equipment, nor skilled labor to operate.

Strange, really, that we need to explain what a mimeo is .

How the term 'Beatnik' was coined

The story goes the poet Bob Kaufman was sitting in Adler alley, outside of Specs, across from City Lights, when Herb Caen walked by. Herb, of course, was a writer for the San Francisco Chronicle and was a fixture in North Beach and he knew the poets well.

So Bob was banging on his bongo drums reciting his Beat poetry and in between talking with others about Sputnik. He was asking the same questions everyone in America was asking, "What are the Russians going to do with Sputnik? Can they put an atom bomb on Sputnik? When are we going to get our own Sputnik?"

Herb Caen went home and wrote his column for the next day and in an offhanded way wrote, "The Russians may have their Sputnik, but we have our Beatniks, here in North Beach."

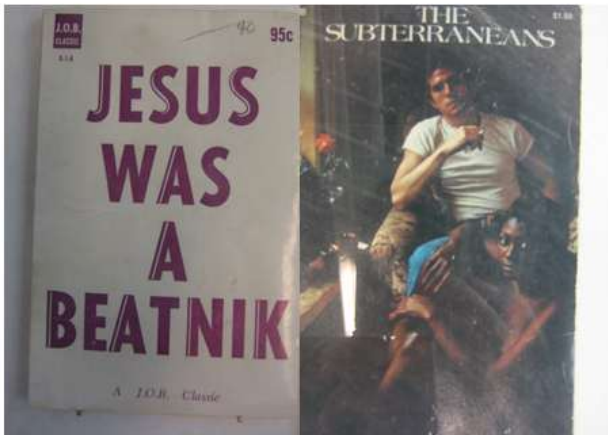
Herb was just having fun playing with words, but the column went out on the Associated Press News Wire and the next week newspapers all over the United States ran stories that read "Beatniks invade San Francisco."

Herb Caen was just poking fun but from that moment on The Beats were forever smeared with that Commie "nik." They were no longer artistic intellectuals they were communist sympathizers.

Explanation of the term 'Beatnik'.



The National Enquirer, always a reliable news tabloid.



Early Beat covers: Jesus was a Beatnik by James Oakes Bryan, 1960.



Sex and drugs. The Beats n



Jack Micheline (Harold Silver)



Micheline. Two watercolors.



Loomis Dean, photographer for Life Magazine.



Patron Saint of the Beats: William Burroughs



William Burroughs.



Small painting by Lawrence Ferlinghetti.



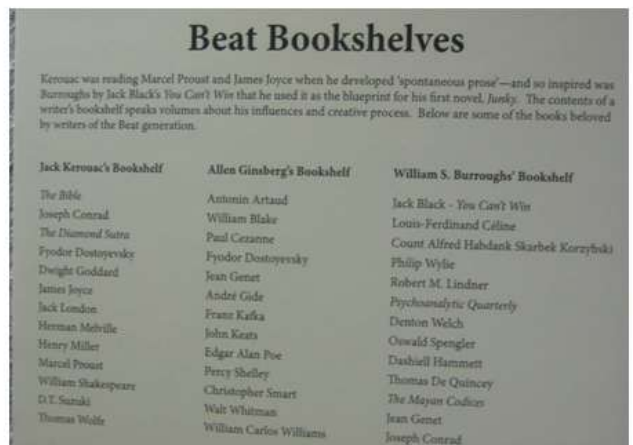
Painting by Lawrence Ferlinghetti.



The Beats were influenced by the 'Classics'.



Sunflower surfboard by Lawrence Ferlinghetti.



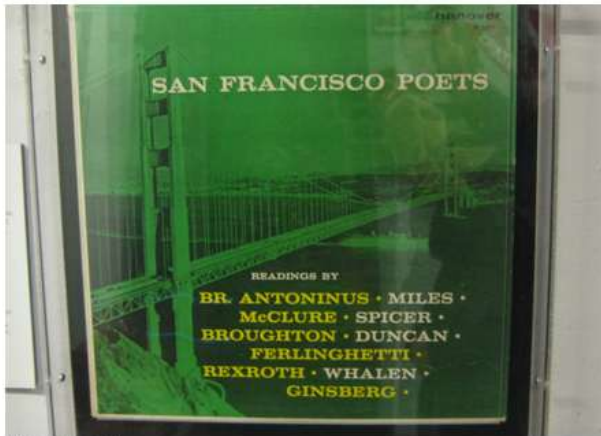
What books influenced the Beats?



The Beatnik Bounce by The Beats.



Vinyl records.



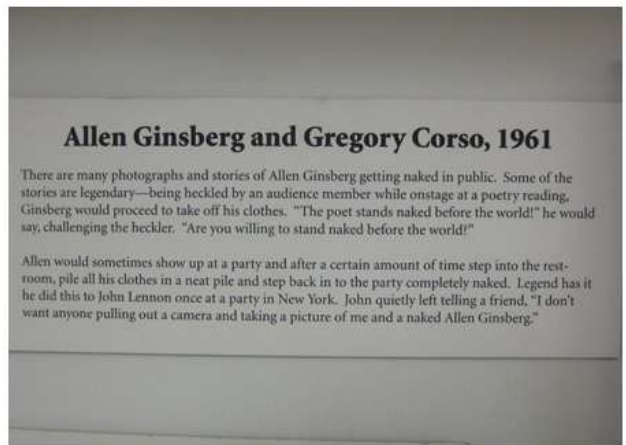
Vinyl records.



Second floor memorabilia.



Ginsberg and Corso on second floor.





Pictures of cast in production of On the Road.



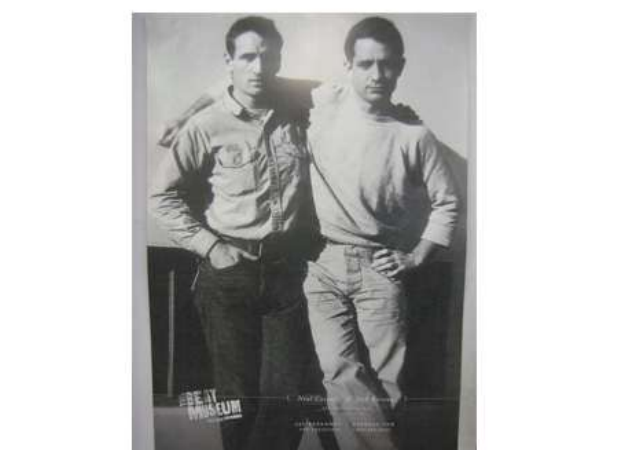
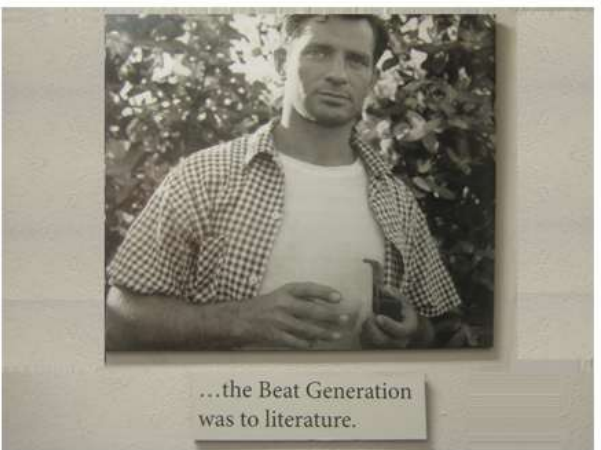
1949 Hudson used in the movie.



1949 Hudson used in the movie.



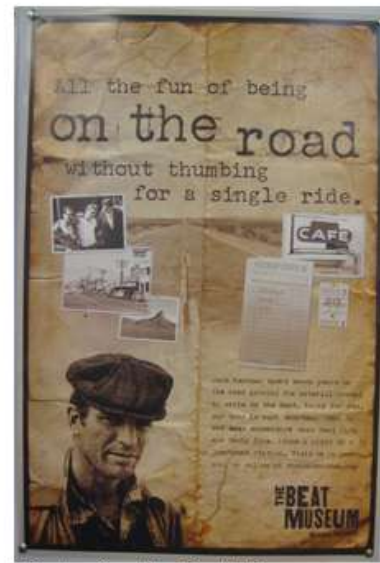
Ad (for sale) of the Hudson.



Self promotion: Poster for the Beat Museum.



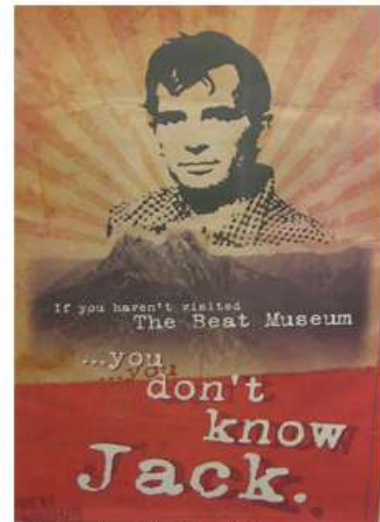
Self promotion: Poster for the Beat Museum.



Self promotion: Poster for the Beat Museum.



Self promotion: Poster for the Beat Museum.



Self promotion: Poster for the Beat Museum.