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My Hipster Fearing Friend and I

One Summer's day while sipping in a pub beer garden with my friend, a conversation emerged between us regarding counter cultures. My friend made this statement: 'A spectre is haunting the 21st century, that of the hipster.'

Well what else could I do but scoff at such a statement!

'That is downright ridiculous, hipsters are not new, they have always been part of this world!'

The conversation got heated and the blisteringly hot sun shining down on us didn't help! My friend went on to tell me how hipsters are a new counter culture and the conversation resulted in tables being turned and glasses being thrown and a barring order for the both of us from the drinking establishment. I then went home to re-read my very worn out copy of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*.

I knew that in order to find the hipster I needed to read the roots of the hipster and I was hell bent on proving my friend wrong.

Google can kiss my ass on this one I thought to myself as I stumbled in the door home where I searched for the hipster in the one place from where it sprung, that 1957 publication about one man's mad journeys across America with his even madder friends.

On the Road was a book I didn't read until after I graduated from university, I now know it should have been a book to be read while I was a student but, parties on campus and pure idleness got in the way of that.

It was the day after my final year exams and feeling incredibly idle and carefree I wandered into town to my favourite bookstore where I picked up a copy of *On the Road*. I still don't know what made me pick it up and spend 10 Euro on it, money which I could have easily spent in a bar but I purchased the book, went home and spent the rest of that summer sinking into it.

The poet Allen Ginsberg once said that he saw the best minds of his generation destroyed by madness, well it was that book which generated that madness, the only thing it destroyed was anything mundane that got in its way.

Almost every youthful generation have been labelled with some sort of tag. The hipster tag is a slang which may have emerged with the jazz aficionados of the 1940s but, its social awareness came about with the beatniks and as my friend had informed me, that hipster culture, is haunting us now. I had told my friend and told in the most snapping of tones that the hipster is nothing new, yes it has transformed to set itself into modern world mechanics but I stressed that the hipster counter culture is not new. In today's world it is used to describe the urban chic, young adults who reject aspects of mainstream life such as music and fashion, some may call them Scenesters but whatever they are and whoever they are, they have always been with us throughout the generations and they all have one thing in common, they are all the mad ones.

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I sent a text message to my friend later that night after the episode in the beer garden which saw us at each others throats. We organised a meeting for a few drinks for the next day, all animosity quickly goes under the bridge, especially if there is a river of booze flowing underneath it!

Hipsters today champion the underground music scene as they did in the 40s and 50s with music such as bebop, a music which transcended the great divide of that time: race. Black and white jazzed together, used the same slang, dressed the same way, smoked the same drugs, flouted the same sarcasms, they adopted the lifestyle some frowned upon or some could only dream of. Back in the beginning of it all Artie Shaw, a legend of the swing age, went so far as to call Bing Crosby the 'first hip white person in the United States!' Yes even the squares wanted in on the new culture! A culture which emerged from the jazz underground and writings of so called mad men, now it transcends out of Indie music and the tweeting of know alls.

So the following day I met with my friend. We went to a different bar on a different side of town and I was armed to the tooth with Kerouacism's. Many G&T's later and it was a free for all beatnik induced talk, wall to wall Kerouacism!

The only ones for me are the mad ones.... the most quoted of all sentences in *On the Road* describes in its utter simplicity who the hipsters were and are. they are mad to talk, and to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing but burn burn burn....

My friend was not impressed.

'Well they didn't burn enough because they are still here with us today!'

I rejoiced that she finally was able to understand how hipsters were always here, that they are not something new and nothing to fear. Ah yes therein was the next hurdle, my friend and her fear of the hipster, something I failed to notice the day before, something lost in the translations of altercations.

If *On the Road* is the hipster guidebook then *Howl* is the hipster's verse. I must confess that I do not have much interest in Ginsberg's meandering words but *Howl* does have the mother of all beginnings: I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness.

Hipsters can attribute that to their own stance in society. Mad is a word which pops up over and over again regarding hipsters, it is a word not to be fooled with or a status not to be fucked with, the mad minds made that way by madness can enjoy what so many long for: freedom.

Even if it means a life of poverty, it costs nothing to have freedom of the mind. Hipsters in the beginning had freedom of the mind and in great quantities but I fail to think today's hipsters have free imaginations as much as their predecessors had.

'What is it that you do not like about hipsters?'

Before my friend could answer my question I just kept on talking, my brutish manner came from the fact that I just didn't want to hear anymore

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of her pitiful fear induced words, she hated and feared hipsters and I just didn't like it.

'You know hipsters have great ecstasy of the mind, unlike you and me they are not restrained to the modern world.'

Kerouac's road was a route found only in dreams, he was a dreamer yes but aren't all hipsters just that?

Somewhere in the first part of *On the Road*, Kerouac wrote that 'the air was soft, the stars so fine, the promise of every cobbled alley so great that I thought I was in a dream.' Well it was a dream Mr. Kerouac because that America and that world is gone, by Christ it wasn't even there in the first place, it was all a dream but a mighty one at that.

'You don't bode well with hipster ideology?' I enquired of my friend, a nod was the reply. 'Well I'll soon fix that' I said with a fake smile, faked because I knew I couldn't fix anything at all, our friendship was doomed.

'Now I know that we are not middle class like the hipsters but we can lie through our working class teeth! The hipster does pretty much anything to play down their middle class back round, so we'll fit right in, the problem may lie within the adoption of a carefree life style, I can adopt it, can you?'

A shake of the head and a scornful look was the reply from my friend so I stopped talking and let a brief breeze come by and fill in the forthcoming silence.

Hipsters gained their quality from the anti-establishment attitudes they used to freely fling around, these days hipsters are still anti-authoritarian, to a point. Non-conformity is the back bone of modern hipsters. Spontaneous creativity seems to have been left to the beat generation but it may rear its hedonistic head again, for as long as the world turns, so too does culture.

The beaten down is from where the beatnik name sprung from and when they were turned from being the beaten down into tired beatniks they jumped up and developed into hipsters. Kerouac's circle of friends gave birth to craziness, craziness gave birth to the beats, the beats gave birth to a natural generalization: the hipster. It spread and prolonged through the decades.

'Anti-conformists usually end up just joining the masses in the end.'

My friends words were spat out in a certain way that I couldn't help but agree with her, somewhat. Then I went off on another booze induced rant.

'The hipster may in the end JOIN the masses but the hipster will never BE one of the masses, the hipster may join them on the street, you may pass one and not think twice as to whether he or she is a member of a counter culture but the hipster mind will NEVER be part of the masses, the hipster mind is a kind which REJECTS the mainstream.'

When I finished my mini rant my friend pointed out to me; 'Of course a hipster will stand out on the street, a hipster is quite visible on the street, what with them Elvis Costello type glasses and little or no body fat, they

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sport a starved for days look.'

The skinny jeans, shoulder strapped bag and bored to death expressions may carry the hipster through life but, the conversation between my friend and I regarding this counter culture did not carry us through the day and many gin and tonics later the conversation ended and we both parted ways that evening.

All went well I thought, at least we didn't get into a hot headed argument and get thrown out of the pub again! But just as Sal Paradise sat on the pier at the end of On the Road looking into the sunset he thought and thought deeply on religion, on America, on not knowing what would happen in the future and he finished his thinking with thoughts of his road buddy, Dean Moriarty the maddest of them all. I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty.

I went home that night and looked out my window at the grey road outside and the red sky above it and thought of the alternatives who walk amongst us and those who are weary of them, my friend, the one who fears the hipster.

I went once more for my favourite book and turned the pages until I found the page I was looking for; what is that feeling when you are driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing?- its too-huge world vaulting us, and its goodbye. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies.'