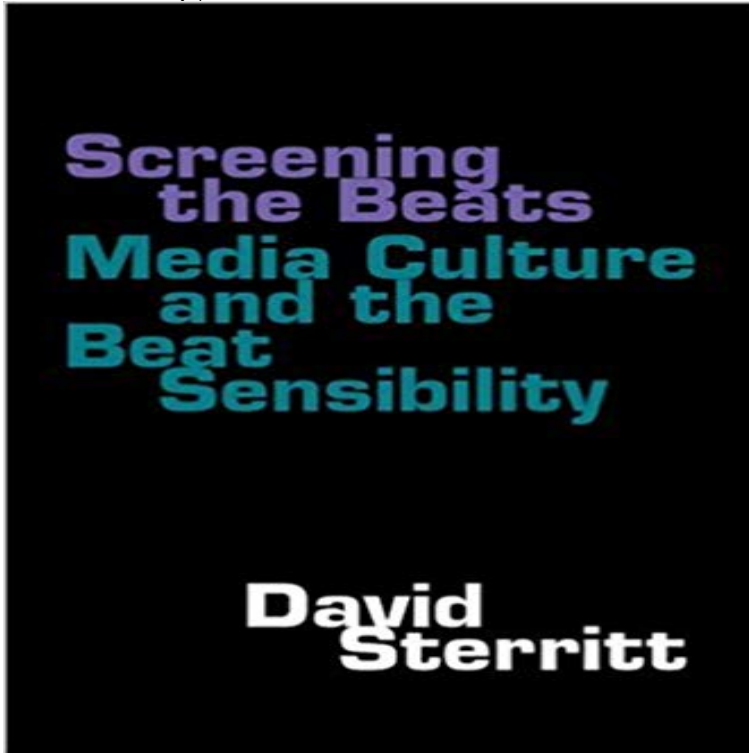


Screening the Beats: Media Culture and the Beat Sensibility



Film critic David Sterritt's *Screening the Beats: Media Culture and the Beat Sensibility* showcases the social and aesthetic viewpoints of lynchpin Beat writers Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg, juxtaposing their artistry with 1950s culture and achieving what Kerouac might have called a bookmovie riff. In clear prose, Sterritt captures the raw energy of the Beats and joins in their celebration of aesthetic freakishness. Tapping into the diversified spirit of the Beat Generation and its nuanced relationship with postwar American culture, Sterritt considers how the Beats variously foreground, challenge, and illuminate major issues in Hollywood and avant-garde film, critical and cultural theory, and music in the mass-media age. Sterritt engages the creative and spiritual facets of the Beats, emulating their desire to evoke ephemeral aspects of human existence. Dealing with both high and low cultures as well as various subcultures, he highlights the complementary contributions to cultural creativity made by these authors. *Screening the Beats* grapples with paradoxes in Beat writing, in particular the conflict between spiritual purity and secular connectedness, which often materialized in the beatific bebop spontaneity, Zen-like transcendentalism, and plain hipster smarts that characterized the writings of Kerouac, Burroughs, and Ginsberg. This interdisciplinary study tackles such topics as Ginsberg's and Kerouac's uses of racial and ethnic stereotypes prevalent in the popular movies of the 1950s era; the uses and limitations of improvisation as a creative tool in literature, jazz, and film; Kerouac's use of cinematic metaphor to evoke Buddhist concepts; and intersections of the grotesque and carnivalesque in works as seemingly diverse as autobiographical novels by Kerouac, a radio play by Antonin Artaud, cultural

theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and the boisterous lunacy of Three Stooges farce. Deftly threading literary, musical, and cinematic works with a colorful array of critical theories, *Screening the Beats* illuminates the relationship between American culture and the imaginative forces of the Beat Generation.

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