

American Culture 103-1
Fall 2014
M/W 4:00-5:30
Dentist Bld: B312B

Prof. Manan Desai
Office: 3722 Haven
OH: M/W 5:40-6:30

✧ **First-Year Seminar: American Countercultures** ✧

“Art is not a mirror held up to the world, but a hammer with which to shape it.”
– Bertolt Brecht

“Turn on, Tune in, and Drop out.”
– Timothy Leary

“You will not be able to stay home, brother. / You will not be able to plug in, turn on and cop out.”
– Gil Scott-Heron, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”

The Marxist critic Raymond Williams famously stated that culture was one of the most complicated words in the English language. A slightly more modest claim may be made about the term “counterculture.” Since being coined in the mid-20th century, “counterculture” has become a slippery signifier, encompassing everything from political protest to aesthetic expression to lifestyle choices.

In this seminar, we will be tracing the historical origins and legacy of the idea of a “counterculture,” while examining the work of activists, visual artists, musicians, and stand-up comedians associated with the term. While the word “counterculture” is so closely linked to the ‘60s and ‘70s, our seminar will keep an eye on the present and consider a few key questions: What is the relationship between culture and political change? And in our era of mass consumer culture, what could constitute a countercultural practice today?



Peace Rally, Diag, University of Michigan: September 20, 1969

Required Texts

For this course, our readings will be posted as PDFs through CTools. This means, you will not need to purchase any books for the course. As a concession, though, I will be requiring you to print out the readings before class (and ideally, you should print these out so you read them).

Over the course of the semester, if we decide as a class that having a laptop for your reading is beneficial to your learning (for taking notes, accessing readings, etc.), then we can discuss that as a group and rework the policy. Just as there might be moments during the course that having access to your laptop is beneficial, there might be times when it is a detriment to our discussion and I will tell you that this to put your electronic devices away or in “Airplane Mode.”

Assignments

There are several different types of assignments for this course.

- 1) **Short Response Papers:** Over the course of the semester, I will be assigning two-page response papers. These assignments are meant for you to engage the readings and concepts for the day, and will be graded for effort, critical thinking, and engagement with the prompt. The grading scale ranges from 1 to 3 (“1” being the lowest, “3” being the highest). Response papers are meant to be spaces for you to hone your skills of close reading, and also a check marker for me to see if you’re understanding the concepts.
- 2) **Formal Essays:** You will be writing two essays based on our reading, one shorter and the other longer. Your second essay will be a longer research paper, which will involve several different steps, from identifying a subject, writing a bibliography, researching and putting together an outline, a draft, and then, submitting a final draft. Many of your response papers will build towards these essays, and I highly recommend you coming to office hours as you’re considering ideas to develop.
- 3) **Reading Quizzes:** As a way to make sure you’re keeping up with the reading, I will periodically give you short reading quizzes. These will entail short answer responses, and if you have done the reading, these will not be difficult.
- 4) **Presentation:** You will be giving a presentation that deals with issues pertaining to the class during the semester. More details on this assignment to come.

Grades

Participation:	15%
Responses:	10%
Quizzes:	10%
Essay 1	25%
Essay 2:	40%

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is mandatory for this course, and an essential part to how the course is designed. The strength of this course will depend on establishing a community of writers, readers, and thinkers who take one another’s work and opinions seriously. In order to do that, you should be fully present, on time, and with all the readings covered.

If you have to miss a class period because of a religious holiday, please let me know in advance and your absence will be excused. Similarly, if you are sick, provide a doctor’s note in order to be excused. If you don’t have official documentation explaining your absence, you will be marked for an unexcused absence. In other words, an email saying you don’t feel well isn’t enough to count as an excused absence.

That said, you are allowed a grand total of **two** unexcused absences over the course of the semester. So, if for whatever reason – you’re not feeling well but it’s not the sort of thing you can go to UHS for – then you can miss that class. By the third unexcused absence, however, your grade will be negatively affected a half a letter grade (a B+ becomes a B, a B becomes a B-, etc.) If an assignment is due and you know that you will be absent, please make arrangements to submit it early. If you have an unexcused absence during a quiz, you will not be able to make this up.

Discussion Rules

We will be forming, in the first few weeks of class, a set of rules about discussion that facilitate the best learning experience for the class as a whole.

Plagiarism

The university’s usual standards for academic integrity will be upheld in this course. If you’re not familiar with them, please read the guidelines regarding plagiarism posted on the LSA website (<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/>), and ask me if you have any questions or concerns. In short, make sure to quote and cite with footnotes *any* words or ideas that you include in your paper that you first found elsewhere. Be particularly careful to avoid using material from websites without quotation marks and attribution: just like printed sources, texts from websites must be quoted and cited. It’s better to be safe than sorry – an extra citation or two won’t bother anyone, but neglecting to quote or cite properly will lead to serious consequences for your academic career.

Special Circumstances:

Students with special circumstances (disabilities, athletic schedules, etc.) should speak with me as soon as possible so that proper arrangements can be made. Athletes and those involved with student activities that require travel during our meeting time should provide an official copy of your travel schedules with conflicting times highlighted.

Office Hours

I have scheduled my office hours this term between 5:40-6:30 on Monday and Wednesday, immediately after our class. My office is at 3722 Haven Hall. Haven Hall is in the large aggregate of buildings (including Angell Hall, Mason Hall, the “Fishbowl,” etc) on the western edge of the diag. The best way to reach my office is to enter through the doorway facing the diag, and take the elevator to third floor. I’m all the way down the hall. Office hours are a great chance for us to extend a conversation we had in class, to get some feedback on any assignments you’re working on, or even if you want to discuss any other issues regarding the class. I have scheduled the office hours later in the day, on the advice of other students who preferred office hours in the evening. That said, if you can’t make that time, please feel free to email me or talk to me after class to schedule another time to meet.

Sweetland Writing Center:

If you would like more help on your essays beyond classroom workshops or conference during office house, consider going to the Sweetland Writing Center. Sweetland is located at 1310 North Quad on State Street, and you can contact them at sweetlandinfo@umich.edu.

* Semester Schedule *

Our schedule is subject to change, depending on our pace of reading and writing. If there are any changes, I will let you know in class *and* through Ctools. The readings should be completed on the day scheduled (i.e., if a reading is listed for Sep. 10, then you should complete it by that date). For the space purposes, I did not include full citational information for the readings; I will include that over Ctools so you can create proper “Works Cited” pages.

Sep 3: Introductions

What is Culture? Cultural Resistance? Counterculture?

Sep 8: Stephen Duncombe, “Introduction” to *Cultural Resistance Reader*
Christopher Hill, “Levellers and True Levellers”

Sep 10: Raymond Williams, “Culture”
Matthew Arnold, from *Culture and Anarchy*

Sep 15: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, from *German Ideology*
Antonio Gramsci, from *The Prison Notebooks*

Sep 17: Umberto Eco, “Does Counterculture Exist?”
Watch “Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer” (dir. Mike Lerner and Maxim Pozdorovkin)

→ Sep 18: *Pussy Riot/Zona Prava, 5:10pm at Michigan Theater* (We will go as a class; show up at 4:30)

The Counterculture and the Sixties

Sep 22: Terry Anderson, “Cold War Culture”
Braunstein and Doyle, “Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s”

Sep 24: Students for Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement”
Terry Anderson, “The Struggle”
Begin Screening: *Rebels with a Cause* (dir. Helen Garvy)

Sep 29: Continue Screening: *Rebels with a Cause* (dir. Helen Garvy)”

Oct 1: Michael William Doyle, “Staging the Revolution: Guerilla Theater as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-68”
Doug Rossinow, “‘The Revolution Is About Our Lives’: The New Left’s Counterculture”

- Oct 6: Stokely Carmichael, "White Power" and "Black Power"
Douglas Hartmann, "Unforgettable Fists"
- Oct 8: Dorian Lynskey, on James Brown's "Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud"
Dorian Lynskey, on Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"
-

Countercultures: Rock 'n' Roll

- Oct 13: Jeff A. Hale, "The White Panthers' Total Assault on Culture."
Wendy Walters, "Blackness in Present Future Tense"
- Oct 15: Mark Crispin Miller, "Where All the Flowers Went"
Michael J. Kramer, "Introduction" from *The Republic of Rock*
*Brian Ward, "I Hear You Knockin'"
-

- Oct 20: Fall Break / No Class Today
- Oct 22: Listen: Jimi Hendrix, "Star-Spangled Banner"
Lauren Onkey, "Voodoo Child: Jimi Hendrix and the Politics of Race in the Sixties"
-

Countercultures: Punk & Hip Hop

- Oct 27: Dick Hebdige, "The Meaning of Mod"
John Clarke, "The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Community"
Jeff Chang, "Furious Styles"
- Oct 29: Jeff Chang, "Loop 1" from *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*
-

- Nov 3: Riot Grrrl, "Riot Grrrl Is..."
Kathleen Hanna, interview in *Punk Planet*
John Roderick, "Punk Rock is Bullshit"
Ally Schweitzer: "A Few Thoughts on that 'Punk Rock is Bullshit' Essay"
- Nov 5: E.J. Hobsbawm, from *Primitive Rebels*
Robin D.G. Kelley, "OGs in Postindustrial Los Angeles"
-

Counterculture and Gender/Sexual Identity

- Nov 10: Virginia Woolf, from *A Room of One's Own*
Jean Railla, "A Broom of One's Own"
- Nov 12: Judith Butler, "Subversive Bodily Acts"
Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman"
-

- Nov 17 Jose Esteban Munoz, "Introduction" to *Disidentifications*
George Chauncey, "Long-Haired Men and Short-Haired Women"
- Nov 19: Robert McRuer, "Gay Gatherings: Reimagining the Counterculture"
Screening: Stonewall Uprising (dir. David Heilbroner and Kate Davis)
-

Nov 24: Stonewall Uprising (Cont'd)

Nov 26: Thanksgiving

Humor as Political Strategy

Dec 1: Beck Krefling, "A History of Charged Humor"

Dec 3: Beck Krefling, "Laughing Into the New Millenium"

Counterculture Today?

Dec 8 Thomas Frank, "Why Jonny Can't Dissent"
Andrew Boyd, "Truth is a Virus: Meme Warfare and the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)"

Dec 10: Last Day of Class