Literature and Counterculture
Fall 2019
ENG 161a

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Class Schedule:
Tue / Fri 11:00-12:20
Olin-Sang 124

office hours: Thur 12:00-1:30, Fri 12:30-1:30, and by appt.

What is poetry if not the revolutionary moment of language…?
— Situationists

Our crisis is a crisis of aesthetics.
— anonymous, Adbusters

This is a course on the arts of subversion and textual counterpublics. On cadres. Coteries. The avant-garde. The peculiar edges and experimental outsides of art and literature. We’ll investigate how creativity is used to circulate texts in unexpected ways and create performances in unlikely spaces. I’ll argue that this sort of subversive art, put out in the world untamed, is a significant way of deploying social power, a compelling political gesture.

Through case studies, theoretical readings, and research projects, we’ll discover the work of the imagination in creating alternative audiences and political solidarity in marginalized contexts. We’ll encounter guerrilla theater, subvertising, spoken word, street art, culture jamming, zines, and other shapeshifting forms for the cultural imagination in a stance of resistance or cultural provocation.

Our guiding concepts for considering the potentially subversive relation between art and public spheres will include the carnivalesque; the circulation of affect, that is, social structures of emotion and the social life of emotion; aesthetic estrangement from routine perception and the defamiliarization of the familiar; parody, as serious play; and subculture, as both stylistic and political formation. These various concepts gather around the idea of counterculture, which we will approach as a worldly aesthetic project.

Our work will move between analysis and creative design, research and invention, theory and practice. There will be a workshop component to the course, in which we’ll help one another develop ideas for engaging new audiences with writing, performance, or visual art.

This is a four-credit course. I expect students to spend at least nine hours a week preparing for class sessions and completing assignments.

Learning Goals
In this course, you will:
• research and use public sphere theory, as this field addresses the role of literature and art in publics and counterpublics
• learn to analyze the role of media technologies for circulating literary texts to create publics and counterpublics
• study the history of modernist avant-garde movements and their contemporary legacies
• research and use theories of cultural subversion, including culture jamming and guerrilla aesthetics, as these involve art, literature, public sphere theory, affect theory, and counterpublics
• develop research skills to interpret a specific artist or group that engages questions of aesthetic subversion and the public sphere
• develop original ideas for expressive practices in different forms and media for engaging a public; ability to play with guerrilla art techniques and related counterpublic-oriented creative expression

Required Texts (at Brandeis Bookstore):
Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mi Revalueshanary Fren (Ausable – Copper Canyon Press)
Tyehimba Jess, Olio (Wave Books)
*All other assigned readings are available on LATTE*

Books on Reserve at Goldfarb Library:
Ken Knabb, ed. Situationist International Anthology. HM1206.C85 2017
Black Public Sphere Collective. The Black Public Sphere. E185.86.B533 1995
Pendleton, Adam. Black Dada Reader. [Instructor Copy]

Class Policies and Requirements:
• Laptops may be used in class only for accessing relevant course materials on LATTE. If you use a laptop for other purposes (email, web browsing), you will be asked to leave the class and be considered absent for the day. Bring other materials (e.g., paper, pens) for taking notes. No ebooks.
• Use of cell phones in class for talking, texting or reading/writing email is prohibited. If you wish to leave your cell phone on in silent mode because of an ongoing emergency situation that you may need to respond to, please speak to me at the start of class to let me know.
• Three unexcused absences lowers the final course grade by one plus/minus, and each additional absence by another plus/minus.
• Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions
about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781-736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

• You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

**Grades, Assignments, and Projects:**

**Summary:**
Flash Fiction / Public Space Proposal: Due 9/6. Credit/no credit, 10%
Manifesto Critical Analysis: Due 9/17. 10%
Fictional Avant-Garde: Due 9/20. Credit/no credit, 10%
Critical Responses, 1-4: Due 9/27, 10/18, 10/29, 11/19. 5% each
Interpretive Essay: Due 11/12. 20%
Final Portfolio: Outline due 12/3. Final due final exam day, with class presentation. 40%

**Flash Fiction / Public Space Proposal:** Propose a hypothetical public flash fiction campaign. In 3-4 pages, imagine a way to circulate, publish, post, install, or otherwise render public very short, pointed stories for strangers. Include details about four elements of this project: 1) the place, setting, or situation in which the stories will reach readers; 2) the materials and medium necessary for this project; 3) several flash fictions or other information about the texts themselves, as examples of your style, techniques, or themes; 4) and a short critical discussion of your proposal, explaining your ideas, with attention to the social purpose of this project, the reasons for focusing on this place and medium, and the relation between the place and the content of these flash fictions.

In this proposal, think creatively about authorship, literary composition, readership, and public space. You should feel free to feature unlikely, strange ideas in this hypothetical proposal, projects that might be impossible for financial or legal reasons but nevertheless interesting to imagine. These flash fictions might be original compositions, found writing, remixes from other texts, products of algorithms, or similarly inventive. Create a name for your project and be prepared to describe it in class. Feel free to use visual or other materials as a part of your proposal.

Due 9/6. Credit/no credit. Full credit will be given to proposals that discover an innovative possibility for engaging a public space with flash fiction and offer a thoughtful discussion of the relation between the texts and their form of circulation. This proposal should suggest a compelling idea and thought-provoking discussion, even without complete planning details.10%

**Manifesto Critical Analysis:** Analyze a manifesto from our syllabus, in 4-5 pages. Describe its impactful formal and stylistic features, aesthetic strategies, rhetorical construction, and poetic or narrative energies. Consider the relation between its visual form and written text, the physicality of the text. Offer an argument about the larger significance of this manifesto and its performative style, what larger matters seem to be at stake. How does it generate a distinctive combination of
affects, fashion an unfamiliar sense of time and space, animate desires or revulsions, suggest ideas about identity or community, or otherwise offer an experimental, imaginative picture of the world? You may organize your paper as a comparative analysis of two manifestos in conversation with one another, if you explain their relevance. Due 9/17. 10%

**Fictional Avant-Garde:** In groups of 3 or 4 people, provide a detailed account of a fictional avant-garde movement of your own invention. Create your fictional group using your knowledge of historical avant-garde movements. Imagine this group’s specific history, ideology, and activities. Invent this group’s manifestos and other relevant documents, such as newspaper reports, personal correspondence, pages from a literary work, meeting minutes, visual art or plans for visual art, interview transcripts, police reports, or other historical traces. This is an opportunity to play with ideas, in a fictional frame, for reaching publics in artistically experimental ways.

Your account of this invented group can take various forms: an encyclopedia entry with excerpts from relevant historical documents, scholarly debate, play or short story, small archive of collected documents and souvenirs, catalog from a museum exhibition, short documentary film, or other forms that provide a vivid sense of this group. Your account should move among different levels of information, from biographical sketches of individual participants, the theoretical or philosophical ideas expressed by the group, and a sense of its public artistic activities. Your materials should consist of several pages, depending on their genre—enough material to suggest what the group would have been like had it existed, the contours of its unique story.

Please prepare a 7-10 minute group presentation about this avant-garde group, in which you present this fictional group as if it were real and discuss your strategies for representing it. Please consider locating this fictional group within the larger genealogy of avant-garde movements or other cultural movements.

Due 9/20; group presentations on 9/20. Credit/no credit. Full credit will be given for work that demonstrates background knowledge of the historical avant-garde, an inventive perspective on collaborative art, persuasive accounts of individual people and events in the group’s history, and detailed care in composing the materials that represent this group. 10%

**Critical Responses, 1-4, 5% each:**

1) *Due 9/27:* Habermas, Fraser, Baker. Trace a conversation between Habermas and either Fraser or Baker. In a paragraph, provide a detailed summary of Habermas’s concept of the public sphere. Gather his crucial phrases and interweave his quotations with your own explanations of the idea. In a following paragraph or two, still using quotations, explain how Fraser or Baker elaborate, question, or deploy Habermas’s ideas. How does the concept of the public sphere change in this writer’s work, what other issues or commitments enter the picture? What do you find significant about this contribution to public sphere theory? 2-3 pages.

2) *Due 10/18:* Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics.” Part 1: gather an annotated stockpile of quotations from Warner’s chapter, 1-2 single-spaced pages. Transcribe passages you find helpful or significant with your own brief commentary (paraphrases, questions, connections, related ideas, etc). Part 2: in about one double-spaced page, develop your own concept or picture of a counterpublic. This concept can be exploratory and
suggestive, and might be based on a specific group or community. What should a counterpublic do or offer, how does it function, what tensions does it mobilize? Feel free to use anything else we’ve read this semester to help explain your ideas.

3) Due 10/29: Warner, “Private and Public.” In a paragraph, explain how Warner demonstrates the ambiguity between “private” and “public.” Why are these spheres difficult to fix or decisively locate? Use quotations to support your discussion. In a following page or two, discuss the implications of this ambiguity between private and public for reading Rich’s poetry. How does Rich seem to be working through similar issues? How does this volume of poetry represent the struggle for public voice or action, the creation of a counterpublic, or similar concerns? In this interpretive sketch, you can focus on just one or two poems or gather relevant lines from many poems, across the book.

4) Due 11/19: Bakhtin and Parvalescu. How does each writer conceptualize the relationship between laughter and freedom? In 1-2 pages, briefly characterize, with a few quotations, the way each claims that the pleasure of laughter undermines coercive social conventions, evades authority, resists domination, or otherwise animates agency in the face of constraints. Offer your sense of how these ideas might be useful or compelling, including in relation to other issues we’ve discussed this semester.

Interpretive Essay: Develop an interpretive claim, through close reading, about texts by Johnson, Jess, Rich, and/or Whitman. 5-7 pages. Topics tbd. Due 11/12. 15%

Final Portfolio: Your portfolio should consist of approximately 20 pages of material from academic and creative projects involving our investigations into experimental literature, counterpublics, subcultures, avant-garde movements, and other issues involving aesthetic explorations of counterculture. This material can include revised, elaborated work from previous assignments. This material can be in various forms, depending on the nature of your projects and their potential audiences: written text, visual essay, podcast, physical archive, exhibition or installation space, wiki or other digital resource, and more.

Your portfolio can include academic work, such as a critical analysis of assigned literary texts, research paper about an avant-garde or related movement, theoretical investigation into public sphere theory and literary theory, ethnography of a literary counterpublic (eg, spoken word venues, arts collectives), publisher’s proposal for an anthology or edited collection of writing, literary mapping project, and archival research into literary histories relevant to our course.

Your portfolio can also include creative work and proposals for creative projects that invent possibilities for literature’s publics. These might be detailed plans for circulating literary texts in public space in an innovative way, an avant-garde manifesto and program, short story or play thematically addressing the core questions of the course, or other creative work.

The final portfolio should include an introductory cover letter and earlier drafts of your final work that demonstrate your revision process (these drafts do not count toward the final page count). The portfolio outline, with your initial plans, is due 12/3. Be prepared to workshop your draft materials in class on 12/3, 12/6, and 12/10. The final portfolio is due on our assigned final exam day, with brief class presentations. 35%
Class Schedule:
Fri 8/30
Introduction—counterpublics and the sense of the outside—“authoring” subversive art—manifesto as social action—ephemeral literature—from theory to practice.

Tue 9/3
Michael Warner, “Introduction,” from Publics and Counterpublics
Sidewalk poetry:
- Raining Poetry, Boston: http://www.masspoetry.org/rainingpoetry
- Cambridge, MA: https://www.cambridgema.gov/arts/Programs/poetryprograms/sidewalkpoetry
- Saint Paul, MN: http://publicartstpaul.org/project/poetry/#about_the_project
- Seattle, WA: https://www.citylab.com/design/2015/03/this-seattle-street-art-only-appears-when-its-raining/388529/
- Northfield, MN: https://www.ci.northfield.mn.us/630/Sidewalk-Poetry

Fri 9/6
*Assignment One Due: Flash Fiction / Public Space Proposal*
Jaron Lanier, “Why Is the City Square Square?”

Manifestos and the Avant-Garde
Tue 9/10
Mary Ann Caws, “The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness” and “A Rough Chronology,” from Manifesto: A Century of isms

Dada
- “Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love,” “Colonial Syllogism,” “Lecture on Dada,” “Dada Excites Everything,” “Note on Art,” “Dada Manifesto 1918,” “Mr. Antipyrene’s Manifesto,” “Note on Poetry,” “Mr. AA the Antiphilosopher Has Sent Us This Manifesto,” “Proclamation without Pretention”

Surrealism

Fri 9/13
Marjorie Perloff, “‘Violence and Precision’: The Manifesto as Art Form”

Futurists

Vorticists
**Blast** v. 1 and 2 (skip and browse—but here are some recommendations: v. 1, pp. 1-50, 147-149, 151-158) and v. 2, 19-22, 33-34, 49-51, 91-93)

**Tue 9/17**
*Manifesto Analysis Assignment Due*
Martin Puchner, “The Manifesto in the Sixties” and “Debord’s Society of the Counterspectacle”
Rachel Greenwald Smith, “Fuck the Avant-Garde”

**Black Arts Movement**

**Situationists**
“A User’s Guide to Détrournement,” “Definitions,” “Theses on Cultural Revolution,” “Action in Belgium Against the International Assembly of Art Critics,” “Theory of the Dérive,” “The Use of Free Time,” “The Adventure,” “All the King’s Men”

**Fluxus**
*An Anthology of Chance Operations*

**Fri 9/20**
*Fictional Avant-Garde Assignment Due*

**Group Presentations**
Roberto Bolaño, excerpts from *The Savage Detectives* and *Distant Star*

**Poetry, Public Sphere Theory, Counterpublic Formations**

**Tue 9/24**
Jürgen Habermas, selections from *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

**Fri 9/27**
*Critical Summary Assignment 1 Due*
Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy”
Thomas Holt, “Afterword: Mapping the Black Public Sphere”
Houston Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere”

*Tue 10/1: no class in observance of Rosh Hashanah*

**Fri 10/4**
Tyehimba Jess, *Olio*

**Tue 10/8**
Catherine Squires, “Re-thinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres”
Tyehimba Jess, *Olio*
Fri 10/11
*tdb*
*Tue 10/15: no class, Brandeis Monday*

Fri 10/18
*Critical Summary Assignment 2 Due*
Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics”

Tue 10/22
Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mi Revalueshanary Fren

Fri 10/25
The Nuyorican Poets Cafe website: [https://www.nuyorican.org](https://www.nuyorican.org)
Paul Devlin, dir., *SlamNation: The Sport of Spoken Word*
Tyler Hoffman, “Slam Nation: Immediacy, Mediatization, and the Counterpublic Sphere”

Tue 10/29
*Critical Summary Assignment 3 Due*
Michael Warner, “Public and Private”

Fri 11/1
Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language*

Tue 11/5
Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language*

Fri 11/8
Whitman, “Song of Myself”
Optional: Michael Warner, “Whitman Drunk”

**Subculture, Culture Jamming, Carnival**

Tue 11/12
*Interpretive Essay Due*
Dick Hebidge, from *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*
Optional: Emily Hage, “Bay Area Dadazines and Punk Zines in 1970s San Francisco”

Fri 11/15
Marilyn Delaure and Moritz Fink, “Introduction,” *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance*
JR official website: [https://www.jr-art.net/](https://www.jr-art.net/)
Inside Out Project website: [http://www.insideoutproject.net/en](http://www.insideoutproject.net/en)
Banksy official website: [http://www.banksy.co.uk/](http://www.banksy.co.uk/)
Benedikt Feiten, “Answering Back! Banksy’s Street Art and the Power Relations of Public Space”
Childish Gambino and Huro Murai, dir., This Is America
Doreen St. Félix, “The Carnage and Chaos of Childish Gambino’s ‘This Is America’”

Tue 11/19
*Critical Conversation Assignment 4 Due*
Bakhtin, from Rabelais and His World
Parvulescu, from Laughter: Notes on a Passion

Fri 11/22
Carol Ann Duffy, “The Laughter at Stafford Girls’ High”
Peter Jones, “Anarchy in the UK: 70s Punk Culture as Bakhtinian Carnival”

Tue 11/26
Adbusters website: https://www.adbusters.org/
Adbusters #133
Resistance is Female Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/resistanceisfemale/

*Fri 11/29: no classes in observance of Thanksgiving*

Experimental Art / Experimental Community
Tue 12/3: Portfolio Workshop
*Portfolio Outline Due*
We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985: A Sourcebook, selections

Fri 12/6: Portfolio Workshop
The Midnight Run website: http://www.themnr.com/
Bread and Puppet Theater website: https://breadandpuppet.org/
ABC No Rio website: http://www.abcnorio.org/
Project Row Houses website: https://projectrowhouses.org/about/about-prh

Tue 12/10: Portfolio Workshop

*Final exam date: Final Portfolio Due. Portfolio Presentations and Celebration*