

**Carleton University
Winter 2016
Department of English**

**ENGL 5609W: Studies in American Literature
U.S. Culture in the Age of Experiment, 1945-1979**

**Tuesday 2:35 p.m. - 5:25 p.m.
Location: Please confirm on Carleton Central**

**Instructor: Franny Nudelman
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Course Description

This course explores the role of experimentation in the culture and politics of Cold War America. During this period, writers, painters, filmmakers, and musicians cultivated an aesthetic of spontaneity, intensity, and interiority identified first with the "beats" and later the "counterculture." We will study innovations in the culture of the period--including abstract expressionism, new journalism, and direct cinema--and consider them in relation to institutional experiments in warfare, social policy, and new media. Scholars argue that the advent of atomic weapons produced a generation of conformists, while live television created a generation of radicals: we will consider and test such assertions in relation to the work of intellectuals, activists, artists, and politicians--among them Jackson Pollock, Martin Luther King, Jimi Hendrix, Sylvia Plath, Charles Mingus, Joan Didion, and Abbie Hoffman.

Our reading, viewing, and research will be based almost exclusively on a wide range of primary sources from the period: these include film, performance, psychiatric studies, journalism, photography, painting, poetry, and music. Our attention will be devoted not only to analyzing and discussing individual texts, but also learning how to read and interpret across diverse media.

Books:

John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (1946)
Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (1968)
Aldous Huxley, *Doors of Perception* (1954)
Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (1965)

Primary and secondary readings marked with a * on the syllabus will be in a course reader. This reader and the books for the course can be purchased at Haven Books. Texts marked with ** will be posted or linked to CULearn.

Films:

John Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962)
John Huston, *Let There Be Light* (1946)
David and Albert Maysles, *Gimme Shelter* (1970)
Haskell Wexler, *Medium Cool* (1969)
Winterfilm Collective, *Winter Soldier* (1972)
William Wyler, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)

Films will be on reserve at the library.

Images:

Jackson Pollock, selected paintings (1943-1948)
Martha Rosler, "House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home" (1967-72)

Images will be posted on CULearn

Listening:

Grateful Dead, "Feedback" from *Live/Dead* (1969)
Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um* (1959)
Gil Scott Heron, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" from *The Revolution Will Not be Televised* (1974)

Music will be posted on CULearn.

Performance

Jimi Hendrix, "The Star Spangled Banner" (1969)
Hans Namuth, "Pollock Painting" (1951)
Yoko Ono, "Cut Piece" (1964)

Performances are available on YouTube, and links will be posted on CULearn

Attendance

Please do not miss class for anything short of an emergency. If you miss more than one class your grade will be lowered one half-grade for each class (in excess of one) that you miss.

ASSIGNMENTS

Journal

You will keep a journal in which you make at least two entries each week—one in response to the week's reading/viewing, and one in response to class discussion. This assignment is meant to give you a chance to work through your ideas, and to

keep a record of our class discussions. In your journal, feel free to write informally, and to explore and test ideas that are not yet fully formed. Please bring your journal with you to class.

Research Essays

This semester, you will each write two short research essays (6-8 pages). These essays will require research into primary sources that will help you to contextualize and analyze particular texts on our syllabus. Your research, texts, and topics for these essays will evolve out of our reading and class discussion, as well as in individual consultations.

Evaluation

Your final grade will be based on class participation (40%); journal (10%); two research essays (50%).

January

12 Introduction

MILITARY EXPERIMENT (TALKING)

- 19 John Hersey, *Hiroshima*
*Harry Truman, "Announcing the Bombing of Hiroshima" (August 6, 1945)
*Dwight Macdonald, "Hersey's Hiroshima" (1946)
*Mary McCarthy, "A Letter to the Editor of *politics*" (1946)
- 26 *John Hersey, "A Short Talk With Erlanger" (1946)
*Roy Grinker and John Spiegel, "Narcosynthesis" (excerpt from *War Neuroses in North Africa*, 1943)
John Huston, *Let There Be Light*
William Wyler, "The Best Years of Our Lives"

February

- 2 John Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate*
*Dwight Eisenhower, "Farewell Address" (1961)
*William Sargant, Introduction to *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing* (1957)
*Tim Melley, "Brain Warfare: The Covert Sphere, Terrorism, and the Legacy of the Cold War," *Grey Room*, volume 45 (2011)

AESTHETIC EXPERIMENT (CUTTING)

- 9 **Jackson Pollock, selected paintings (1943-49)

- **Hans Namuth, "Pollock Painting" (1951)
- **Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um* (1959)
- **Yoko Ono, "Cut Piece" (1964)
- *Dan Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (1998), Introduction, Chs. 1, 10
- *Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (2003), Introduction, Chs. 5, 6

WINTER BREAK

23 **Research Workshop**

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26: FIRST ESSAY (6-8 PAGES) DUE

March

- 1 Sylvia Plath, *Ariel*

EXPERIMENTS IN ACTIVISM (ASSEMBLING)

- 8 *Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream Speech" (1963)
Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*
**Gil Scott Heron, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"
- 15 Haskell Wexler, *Medium Cool*
**Jimi Hendrix, "The Star Spangled Banner"
**Martha Rosler, "Bringing the War Home"

EXPERIMENTS IN CONSCIOUSNESS (TRIPPING)

- 22 Aldous Huxley, *Doors of Perception*
*Tom Wolfe, excerpts from *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968)
**Grateful Dead, "Feedback" (1969)
- 29 Winterfilm Collective, *Winter Soldier* (1972)
*Kathie Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon" (1975)
*Ann Forer, "Thoughts On Consciousness-Raising" (1975)

April

- 5 *Joan Didion, "The White Album" (1979)
Albert and David Maysles, *Gimme Shelter* (1970)

FRIDAY, APRIL 8: SECOND ESSAY (6-8 PAGES) DUE

