The American Counterculture

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Description:

Theodore Roszak coined the term ‘counterculture’ in 1968 to describe the spirit of a generation desperate to believe in themselves as a catalyst for change. For Roszak, counterculture ‘stemmed from a dissenting sensibility as old as the lament that the Romantic poets had once raised against the Dark Satanic Mills’.¹ This was a generation in which left-wing American radicals could identify America itself as Satanic – in its imperialism, its capitalism, its racism and its war in Vietnam – but they could also feel America to be vibrantly alive with the radicalism of the arts. This course explores the literature of mid-twentieth-century countercultural America in relation to its own historical moment and the legacies of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Romanticism. It takes in a diverse range of texts and deliberately exploits the interface between high and low culture and between different forms of art and expression. There is a strong focus on poetry and students will be encouraged to make connections to contemporary music as well as social and political contexts. Please also try to see the forthcoming exhibition at the Tate Modern: Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power (until 22.10.17) and the current exhibition at the Design Museum: Designing Freedom: California (until 15.10.17).

Selected Background Reading:


Outline:

1: Allen Ginsberg: Howl and Other Poems (1956)

2: Robert Duncan: Roots and Branches (1964) and Bending the Bow (1968)


4: Amiri Baraka, Home: Social Essays (1965) and Black Magic (1969)*

5: Gary Snyder: Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems (1965) and Turtle Island (1975)

* volumes are out of print so poems may need to be selected from Kyger, As Ever: Selected Poems and Baraka, S.O.S: Poems 1961-2013.