

OP Jindal Global University
Centre for Writing Studies

Surrealism to Punk: A Psychedelic History of 20th Century

Cross-elective | 4 Credits | 15 weeks

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“In this city no one I see is conscious;
one is worse off than the next, frenzied and insane.
Dear one, come to the tavern of ruin
and experience the pleasures of the soul.
What happiness can there be apart
from this intimate conversation
with the Beloved, the Soul of souls?
...
You belong to the tavern: your income is wine,
and wine is all you ever buy.
Don't give even a second away
to the concerns of the merely sober.
...
Hundreds of intellectuals and wise men
could die from a taste of this yearning.”
Rumi

How are the foundational experiments of modern art, literature, theory and philosophy derived from the deliberate disordering of the senses—through intoxication, ecstasy, delirium, and the ecstatic scream? To what extent can we argue that madness, frenzy, and chaos is at the heart of the modern reason.

This course is not about getting high, but rather about the irreducible role of intoxicated states—in their literal and metaphorical forms—as a deliberate philosophical and artistic weapon against the tyranny of modern Western reason. It was in the Sufi poetry, of Rumi and Hafiz, that a clear link between intoxication and thought was established. But it was in the 20th century when responding to the wreckage of World War I to the alienating landscapes of consumer capitalism, artists and thinkers turned to the irrational as a site of liberation. One side of this story is led by the Surrealists, who shattered the perfect forms of humanist reason into grotesque fragments. To deform the body on canvas was to defy the logic of the master. Who among us has not felt the urge to scream, to smash, to reduce reason to rubble? Through them, we confront the question: Can true freedom be imagined without shattering the wall between the reason and madness; between the conventions and social morality we call reality and our dreamy, irrational but authentic self?

The other side of this battle is led by the Situationists, who saw in intoxication a strategy not of destruction but of drift. Rather than confronting power head-on, is it possible to slip through its cracks, to wander beyond its walls, to simply refuse its terms? What happens if one thinks of the city as a drug, and everyday forms of life as states of intoxication understood as authenticity? This side asks: Is liberation a patient, everyday practice of constructing new territories, new sensations, and new forms of collective life from the ruins of the old?

The course also calls upon Rumi, Hafiz, Ghalib, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, Debord, Guattari, and Patti Smith, among others, to mediate this battle. The ultimate goal is to trace a hidden,

"psychedelic" history of the 20th century—a history not of intoxication for its own sake, but of the relentless pursuit of altered perception as a form of radical critique, a way to see beyond the ruins of reason and imagine the world anew.

The course is open to all undergrad and postgrad students and requires no prior training.

Chapter 1 Sufism and Poetry of Wine

Essential readings

Rumi, Hafiz, Ghalib (Select poetry)

Suggested readings

Baudelaire, *Flowers of the Evil*

Abu Nuwas, *Khimariyaat (Wine Poems)*

Ibn-e-Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*

"In paradise it is true that I shall drink at dawn the pure wine mentioned in the Qur'an, but where in paradise are the long walks with intoxicated friends in the night, or the drunken crowds shouting merrily? Where shall I find there the intoxication of Monsoon clouds?"

— Ghalib

"From a kiss of the lips, my temperament attained a mood of transcendence
From drinking wine (from the cup of lips) I attained the intoxication of opium"

— Ghalib

Revering wine, I washed away my own image

Selfishness cannot be when the self-image is unknown.

— Hafiz

"Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually. Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken."

— Baudelaire, *Poems in Prose*

Chapter 2 Surrealism, Dadaism and Art of Psychedelic Dreams

Essential readings

André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*

Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*

Bataille, The absence of myth: Writings on surrealism

Suggested Readings

Miraji, Caves of Ajanta (*Ajanta ke gaar in Urdu*)

Bataille, *The Accursed Share*

Bataille, *The cruel practice of art*

Walter Benjamin, *Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European Intelligentsia*

"I've dreamt of you so often that you become unreal.

Is there still time to reach this living body and to kiss on its mouth the birth of the voice so dear to me?
I've dreamt of you so often that my arms used to embracing your shadow and only crossing on my own chest might no longer meet your body's shape...
I've dreamt of you so often, walked, spoken, slept so often with your phantom that perhaps all that yet remains for me is to be a phantom among the phantoms and a hundred times more shadow than the shadow which saunters and will saunter so gladly over the sundial of your life.”
— Robert Desnos

Chapter 3 Nietzsche, Beat Generation and Ecstasy of Becoming

Essential readings

Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (Novel)

Suggested Readings

Bukowski, Select poems

Martin Scorsese, *The Last Waltz* (Film)

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*

"The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars." — Kerouac, *On the Road*

“Dear incomprehension, it's thanks to you I'll be myself, in the end.”
— Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

Chapter 4 Situationism, May 68 and Intoxication of the City

Essential reading

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

Suggested Readings

Situationist International, *On the Poverty of Student Life*

Ivan Chtcheglov, *Formulary for a New Urbanism*

Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*

Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Vol 2 (Ch 6 Theory of moments)*

“Down with a world in which the guarantee that we will not die of starvation has been purchased with the guarantee that we will die of boredom.”

— A May 68 graffiti on a wall of Paris

“In a world that has REALLY been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood.”

— Guy Debord

Chapter 5 Punk and Molecular Revolution

Essential readings

Patty Smith, *Horses* (Music album)

Sex Pistols, *Never mind the Bollocks* (Music album)

Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*

Suggested Readings

Hardt and Negri, *Empire, Multitude, and Commonwealth*

Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: The Sex Pistols and Punk Rock*

Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century*

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Amos Poe, *The Blank Generation* (Film)

“A poet makes himself a visionary through a long, boundless, and systematized disorganization of all the senses. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts within himself all poisons, and preserves their quintessences. Unspeakable torment, where he will need the greatest faith; a superhuman strength, where he becomes all men the great invalid; the great criminal, the great accursed--and the Supreme Scientist! For he attains the unknown! Because he has cultivated his soul, already rich, more than anyone! He attains the unknown, and if, demented, he finally loses the understanding of his visions, he will at least have seen them! So what if he is destroyed in his ecstatic flight through things unheard of, unnameable: other horrible workers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the first one has fallen!”

— Arthur Rimbaud

“In art and dream may you proceed with abandon. In life may you proceed with balance and stealth. For nothing is more precious than the life force and may the love of that force guide you as you go.”

— Patti Smith

"I was sayin' / 'Let me out of here' before I was even born—it's such a gamble when you get a face."

— Lyrics from Blank Generation by Richard Hell and Voidoids

"I am Governor Jerry Brown / My aura smiles and never frowns / Soon I will be president... / I will be Führer one day / I will command all of you / Your kids will meditate in school

Zen fascists will control you / Hundred percent natural / You will jog for the master race / And always wear the happy face
 Now it is 1984/Knock-knock at your front door/ It's the suede denim secret police/They have come for your uncool niece/ Die on organic poison gas/Serpent's egg's already hatched/You will croak, you little clown/When you mess with President Brown/ When you mess with President Brown"
 — Lyrics from California Über Alles by Dead Kennedys

Learning Outcomes

| Course Intended Learning Outcomes | Teaching and Learning Activities | Assessments/ Activities |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | |
| Theoretical trends on limits of reason | Lectures and close reading | In class exercises |
| Sub-cultures, art scenes, writing against the grain | Lectures and close reading | Response essay |
| Intoxication and Thought | Lectures and close reading | Term paper/creative project |
| Body, desire and art | Lectures and close reading | Term paper/creative project |

What to expect in the classroom?

The course is structured around six essential readings and one film. Each unit spans four sessions: two dedicated to close-reading excerpts and discussing student responses, and two featuring lectures that expand on the unit's themes through the essential and suggested readings.

Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

Assignment 1: A response essay on one or more readings

1500 words | Due in 6th week | 30 marks

Assignment 2: Attempt one of the following options:

Option 1: A conceptual essay on a real, fictional or imaginary space, or

Option 2: A creative project (sketch/painting/short story/photo-essay/poetry/any other genre) on spaces at the edge of the imagination

1800-3000 words | Due in 13th week | 40 marks

Assignment 3: End-term exam | 30 marks

Grade definitions

| Letter Grade | Percentage of Marks | Grade Value | Grade Definitions |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------|---|
| O | 80% and Above | 8.0 | Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability |

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|----|-----------|-----|--|
| A+ | 75%-79% | 7.5 | Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability |
| A | 70%-74% | 7.0 | Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing materials and originality in thinking and presentation |
| A- | 65%-69% | 6.0 | Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills |
| B+ | 60%-64% | 5.0 | Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills. Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills |
| B | 55%-59% | 4.0 | Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of study and reasonable critical and analytical skills |
| B- | 50%-54% | 3.0 | Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials and, poor critical and analytical skills |
| P1 | 45%-49% | 2.0 | Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter |
| P2 | 40%-44% | 1.0 | Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter. |
| F | Below 40% | 0 | Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course |

Session Plan

| | Class Plan | Approach/pedagogy | Assignments |
|--------|--|-------------------|--|
| Week 1 | Sufism and Poetry of Wine | Lectures | |
| Week 2 | Contd. | Close Reading | |
| Week 3 | Surrealism, Dadaism and Art of Psychedelic Dreams | Lectures | |
| Week 4 | Contd. | Close Reading | |
| Week 5 | Nietzsche, Beat Generation and Ecstasy of Becoming | Lectures | |
| Week 6 | Contd. | Close Reading | A response essay on one or more readings |
| Week 7 | Contd. | Lectures | |
| Week 8 | Situationism, May 68 and Intoxication of the City | Close Reading | |

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|---------|-------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| Week 9 | Contd. | Lectures | |
| Week 10 | Contd. | Close Reading | |
| Week 11 | Punk and Molecular Revolution | Lectures | |
| Week 12 | Contd. | Close Reading | |
| Week 13 | Contd. | Workshop | Conceptual/Critical Response |
| Week 14 | Responses/Reflections | Workshop | |
| Week 15 | Responses/Reflections | Workshop | End Term |