EN 876: Seminar in Media Culture (Radical Movements)
Professor Lane Hall
Spring 2019

Course Description
Beginning with the radical Leftist movement, Situationist International, we will explore the relationship between post Dada/Surrealist avant-garde movements and their revolutionary claims. We will look at the esthetic revolution of form regarding art and literature as well as aspirations of more profound social and political influence within a context of the work of Guy Debord highlighting “the spectacle” and Raoul Vaneigem highlighting “the everyday.” From there, we will investigate other often contemporaneous movements and frameworks, such as Fluxus and mail art, that incorporated relational aesthetics, networks, and the trappings of informal bureaucracy, in order for us to get a broader context for potential political formations within cultural production.

We will then move towards a view of more overtly political formations that might include the Black Panthers, AIM, ELF/ALF, the Zapatista movement (to be determined) with a focus on tactics of artful resistance (“occupation,” “embodied resistance,” “tactical performance,” etc) as well as the use of tactical media (electronic and digital interventions, song as protest, pirate networks, etc). We will end the course with a look at speculative fiction as a form of resistant world-making, with a reading of Octavia Butler’s “Parable Series” (Earthseed duology) in order to foster a discussion about the power of narrative, and to circle back to contemporary forms of ephemeral intentional communities, such as the ZAD in France, resistance camps at Standing Rock (among others) and the aspirations and shortfalls of the Occupy movement.

We will be guided by the question, “how does social change happen, and what do the arts have to do with it?” as we end up trying to understand contemporary radical resistance strategies within their larger dominant political frameworks, particularly related to tension between artistic autonomy and political efficacy. As a graduate seminar, we will also be drawing from your own work, and various forms and modes of intellectual production will be encouraged and honored.

(note: I am still working on the specific readings and pathways of this content, as it is an ongoing and complex research project. I have no syllabus yet to offer, but hope that this description will be enough to help you decide whether this course fits your interests and scholarly needs. The readings will be a mix of primary sources, critical theory, and wide array of media, including poetry, fiction, essay, visual art, documentary film, and music.)