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Counterculture Dystopia: A Comparative Study of the Rajneesh-Osho Movement and the Counterculture

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Counterculture Dystopia:
A Comparative Study of the Rajneesh-Osho Movement and the Counterculture

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
Spring 2020

Honors Thesis in Religion

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Abstract

This thesis project investigates the thematic and visual connections between the global Rajneesh-Osho movement and the international counterculture. As a high-profile, controversial New Religious Movement (NRM), the Rajneesh-Osho phenomenon draws ready associations with the rhetorics and aesthetics typical to the counterculture of the 1960s. Their Utopian experiment, the Rajneeshpuram, enacted seemingly countercultural projects on a massive ranch in Central Oregon. As a spiritual enterprise that burst into global prominence from India during the 1970s, the Rajneesh-Osho's movement embodies traits of postmodernism as a way to embrace an increasingly global market dominated by the discourse of profits and materiality.

Contrary to popular beliefs, this thesis states that the Rajneesh-Osho movement only appears to be countercultural. The evidence relies on primary sources and generations of scholarly comments on both the counterculture and the Rajneesh-Osho movement. This project comparatively examines the visual connections and mental pairing to reveal that the Rajneesh-Osho movement is, in fact, a counterfeit of the counterculture with covertly dystopian agendas.

Executive Summary

In 1981, thousands of orange robe-wearing Sannyasins settled on a desert ranch in Central Oregon. Following their Indian spiritual teacher, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the Sannyasins attempted to create a Utopian community. After scandalous crimes and prolonged legal battles, their Utopian experiment collapsed in less than six years. The movement moved back to its base in Pune, India, not far from Bombay. Today, after rebranding everything from Rajneesh into Osho, the Osho International Foundation is still a fully functional global enterprise. The Rajneesh-Osho movement arguably operated one of the largest, most controversial, and commercially successful Utopian experiments in recent U.S. history. Indeed, the Rajneesh-Osho movement had attracted much scholarly attention since the 1980s, caping recently with Hugh Urban's book, *Zorba the Buddha* (2015).

As Urban suggested in his book, understanding the Rajneesh-Osho movement as a postmodern sort of religion can highlight the flexible and deterritorialized processes of capital accumulation in the 1980s. Further, pairing Rajneesh with Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher could showcase a religious overtone in the neo-liberal market fundamentalism, which shaped the mainstream cultural discourse of the same era. The Rajneesh-Osho movement, therefore, came to stand for the culture in the rapidly globalizing 1980s.

The connections that the Rajneesh-Osho movement has with the 1960s counterculture goes undoubted. Major newspapers and media outlets frequently equate the movement in question with the counterculture. This thesis adopts a comparative approach to look at the Rajneesh-Osho movement and the 1960s counterculture. It states that even though the Rajneesh-Osho movement

appears countercultural, it is largely a profit-driven, material-minded, abstractionist, and opportunist business venture which does not sustain meaningful critiques of the culture.

Evidence on the Rajneesh-Osho movement came from a few sources. Though Rajneesh had left an immense volume of work, it is difficult to rely on them as coherent primary sources.

Secondary comments and scholarly analysis, therefore, informed most assertions about the Rajneesh-Osho movement. Reference to the 1960s counterculture relies on previous fieldwork and archives searches, in addition to primary evidence gathered from those involved in the counterculture.

A certain conception of Marxist theories orients the critiques in this essay. In particular, the Rajneesh-Osho movement's appropriation of counterculture forms has intentionally neglected and underplayed class differences on a global scale. To help delineate a process of creating (counter)cultural capitals, the project draws on post-colonial theories of orientalism and ornamentalism. Indeed, it is the observation of this thesis that the historical abstraction of countercultural visuals and sensibility has orientalist roots. In practice, the counterculture asserts the centrality of a problematic culture while pushing for an image of a foreign body subjected to be the other. One proposal of this thesis is to reclaim certain counterculture terms, in order to acknowledge the contingency of social relations and the arbitrary nature of boundary drawing.

Even by the problematic definitions of the 1960s counterculture, the Rajneesh-Osho movement is not countercultural. The project tries to make a case that counterculture descriptors are indeed misnomers that do not capture the operation of the Rajneesh-Osho movement.

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Introduction

Its sheer size, drama, and vitality could sometimes obscure a noble mission— if the Rajneesh-Osho movement ever kept one. The followers of Rajneesh tried to build a Utopia in the 1980s. Their endeavor might speak to what Fredrick Jameson coined as the “utopian impulse” in his book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.¹ That the Rajneesh-Osho movement is a phenomenon of the postmodern, neo-liberal, and transnational 1980s is a theme thoroughly studied by Hugh Urban in his book *Zorba the Buddha*.² When Jameson wrote of the “utopian impulse” in the late 1980s, the various forms of the postmodern had already seeped through the cultural membrane into modes of religiosity and spirituality. As Hugh Urban already reminded us, through his comparative analysis of the Rajneesh-Osho movement, that various forms of the postmodern had already become a fabric of the spiritual and religious tapestry by the late 1980s.³ Remembering Marcuse, Jameson also urged us to constantly keep fresh the necessity and insistence for a reinvention of the Utopia in any contemporary politics.⁴ Jameson implored that this rejuvenating practice is a “legacy of the sixties which must never be abandoned in any reevaluation of that period and of our relationship to it.”⁵ Precisely because this Utopian vision is not sufficiently informed as a politics in our contemporary culture, this essay attempts to spatialize and problematize a line of discourse on the 1960s, its counterculture, and a counterfeit called the Rajneesh-Osho movement.

¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 159. The particular chapter I am referencing “Postmodernism and Utopia” first appeared in Institute of Contemporary Art publication (Boston, 1988), 11-31.

² Hugh B. Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015).

³ Ibid. See in particular, page 13 and Chapter 1.

⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 159.

⁵ Ibid.

Following their spiritual teacher Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the movement operated one of the most massive communal experiments in the history of the United States, during the early 1980s.⁶ The establishment, called Rajneeshpuram, collapsed within five years.⁷ The commune sat on a 64,000-acre converted desert ranch in Central Oregon.⁸ At one point, this commune housed 15,000 residents, which drew Carl Abbott to compare this community with the Mormon settlements in Utah in the 19th century.⁹ According to Urban, by the end of the 1980s, there were reportedly 200,000 disciples in 400 Rajneesh centers around the globe.¹⁰ Formally started in the mid-1960s, the Rajneesh-Osho movement is a recent, zealously enthusiastic religious movement that some scholars might refer to as a New Religious Movement (NRM).¹¹ As a Utopian experiment, the commune constructed a reservoir and an airstrip, in addition to pioneering organic agriculture and irrigation practices.¹² They constructed a largely self-sustaining financial structure, an infrastructure, and transit system of an urban settlement.¹³ Indeed, Rajneeshpuram was legally registered as a city.¹⁴ In addition to being religious, the movement was a political entity that hostilely over-rode a nearby township and tried to out-populate a local county election.¹⁵ According to Urban, during their brief residency in the United States, Rajneesh's

⁶ This assertion is based on Fellowship for Intentional Communities' data base, and Timothy Miller's *The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities*. See: Fellowship for Intentional Communities (2019). *Advanced Search*. Retrieved from <https://www.ic.org/directory/search/>; Timothy Miller, *The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities*. (New York, Richard W. Couper Press, 2013.)

⁷ The commune managed from 1981 to 1985. See the detail of the fall of the commune, see Urban, *Zorba*, Chap. 4.

⁸ Carl Abbott. "Revisiting Rajneeshpuram: Oregon's Largest Utopian Community as Western History", *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 116.4 (2015), 414–447.

⁹ Ibid. Carl Abbott was not the only one who compared the Rajneesh-Osho movement with past religious and spiritual movements. Susan Palmer also compared the movement with the Shakers, the Oneida community, and the Mormons in the 19th century. See "Rajneesh Women: Lovers and Leaders in a Utopian Commune," in *The Rajneesh Papers: Studies in a New Religious Movement*, ed. Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993).

¹⁰ Urban, *Zorba*, 104.

¹¹ Frederick Bird and Rooshikumar Pandya, "Therapeutic Aspects of New Religious Movements," and Susan J. Palmer, "Rajneesh Women" in *The Rajneesh Papers: Studies in a New Religious Movement*, ed. Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993).

¹² Urban, *Zorba*, 105-108; Abbott, *Revisiting Rajneeshpuram*, 103.

¹³ Urban, Ibid.

¹⁴ Urban, *Zorba*, 115.

¹⁵ Urban, *Zorba*, 129.

followers carried out the largest wiretapping conspiracy, bio-terrorist attack, and immigration fraud on the American soil.¹⁶ At each turn of event, Rajneesh and his followers summoned national attention and international spotlight in a climate of paranoia towards cultic activities.¹⁷ By the end of 1985, many Rajneeshpuram leaders, including Rajneesh himself, were charged, trialed, and asked to vacate the United States.¹⁸ The movement did not end with the catastrophic setback in America, however. After relocating to its pre-Oregon headquarter in Pune, India, the movement rebranded itself as Osho—a global enterprise still in full function.¹⁹

The Rajneesh-Osho movement has been one of the most controversial and profitable New Religious Movement in recent global history. The movement's spiritual leader and founder, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, was one of the most enigmatic and self-contradictory public figures in the last century. He was born in 1931 as Chandra Mohan Jain, and early in Chandra's career as a guru, he conferred the name Bhagwan onto himself to mean "the fortunate one, the blessed one."²⁰ ²¹ In the 1970s, Bhagwan adopted the name Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, which eventually became his legal name in the United States.²² For scholars, Rajneesh is also the commonly used name by scholars to refer to him and his movement. In 1989, four years after Rajneesh relocated back to India, he requested a complete rebranding that changed all of his works, meditations, global centers, and himself to be under the title "OSHO."²³

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Palmer, "Rajneesh Women," 103. See also Daniel Hellinger, "Paranoia, Conspiracy, and Hegemony in American Politics," *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, edited by Todd Sanders, (Duke University Press, 2003), 1-7.

¹⁸ Urban, *Zorba*, 131.

¹⁹ Ibid., Chapter 6.

²⁰ Osho, "'Self-appointed' Bhagwan," in the *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic*, ed. Sarito Carol Neiman (NY: New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000), 140-142;

²¹ Ibid.

²² Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma, "Editors Note" in *The Rajneesh Papers*.

²³ "Europe's Highest Court Confirms OSO Trademark/Lovemark!" *Osho Times*, accessed June 14, 2019, <http://yesosho.com/oshotimes/europe%C2%B4s-highest-court-confirms-osho-lovemark>. See, Urban, *Zorba*, Chapter 5.

Consequently, the followers of Rajneesh are called Sannyasins, neo-Sannyasins, or the disciples of Osho in various stages. Since Rajneesh died in 1990, the Osho International Foundation has put OSHO™ under trademark protection, which caused much legal and moral dispute.²⁴ The same foundation also actively licenses at least a dozen meditation techniques, four meditative therapies, and nine mobile apps—in addition to being the management of the Osho-themed five-star resort in Pune, India.²⁵ For this paper to adhere to the expanse of the movement, I predominantly use the term Rajneesh-Osho.

Methodologies and Evidence

The conceptualization of the Rajneesh-Osho movement in this thesis draws on Hugh Urban's recent and comprehensive study of "the life, teachings, and following of the controversial Indian guru"—*Zorba the Buddha*. Within Urban's temporal bracket, what Rajneesh-Osho refers to is the movement in its entire span from the 1950s to the current day. Some internet searches had generated an image of the contemporary Osho movement prolonging its existence in the landscape of digital commerce. The primary evidence relating to the Rajneesh-Osho movement came from Rajneesh-Osho publications in different time periods under different publishing houses. Rajneesh left an immense volume of lecture scripts, writings, and interviews—a theme to which we return below. However, Rajneesh's openly self-contradictory behaviors posed some challenges to regard his published materials as reliable primary evidence.²⁶

Numerous secondary sources provided the demographic date and ethnographic information of the Rajneesh-Osho movement. In particular, Susan Palmer and Arvind Sharma had assembled

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Osho International Foundation, "Trademarks of Osho International Foundation," retrieved from <https://www.osho.com/trademarks>, February 10, 2020.

²⁶ Quite noticeably, he preached non-attachment yet demonstrated an apparent obsessiveness with luxury. Additionally, he also made contradictory statements regarding women, non-heterosexual relationships, and drugs. [See, for instance, in Osho, *Be Still and Know*, first published in 1981, and Rajneesh, *The Goose is Out*, (Antelope, OR: Rajneesh Foundation International, 1982), 75. However, as Urban noted the connection between Rajneesh and the spiritual pedagogy of a fellow controversial mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866-1949), we should be open to the possibility of contradictions being one emancipatory means of spiritual liberation. Indeed, warm-hearted spiritual conundrums are often intended to escape the conceptual, analytical, and judgmental spotlights of the ordinary consciousness.

much timely research and analysis from the 1980s. *The Rajneesh Papers: Studies in a New Religious Movement* (1989), is such a collection of symposium presentations.²⁷ In the initial stages of this project, Lewis Carter supplied valuable insights in his book *Charisma and Control in Rajneeshpuram: The Role of Shared Values in the Creation of a Community* (1990) which took special note of the “product elaboration” and the “vertically integrated ‘new spiritual business’” of Rajneeshism.²⁸

As a comparative project, this thesis examines the connection between the Rajneesh-Osho movement and the counterculture of the 1960s. Upon examination, however, such a connection is a juxtaposition. This juxtaposition reveals a visual logic that hastily equates what appears countercultural to be the counterculture. The evidence here relating to the counterculture uses various primary sources reviewed in a Syracuse University seminar on social and political activism in the 1960s.²⁹ Additionally, the project also consulted Ann Charters’ Penguin Classics, *The Portable Sixties Readers*.³⁰ Some supplementary information on the Utopian communes and Asia-originated spirituality in the United States came from fieldwork and archival research on these topics. One earlier project on an influential Bohemian community that existed in the Bay Area supplied valuable physical and textual evidence for mapping the trajectory of the counterculture. At the same time, two extended projects on American Buddhism and international counterculture arts informed much of the assertions about the 1960s.

Scholars have observed, however, that the counterculture of the 1960s is inherently an unstable creation³¹—this instability adds some difficulty for comparative analysis. Theodore Roszak was

²⁷ Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma, “Editors Note” in *The Rajneesh Papers*.

²⁸ Lewis F. Carter, *Charisma and Control in Rajneeshpuram: The role of shared values in the creation of a community* (The Arnold and Caroline Rode monograph Series of American Sociological Association, published by the press syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1990).

²⁹ Sally Wagner, lectures on the Children’s Liberation and Civil Rights Activism (a course on activism in the 60s, Syracuse University, New York, 2018.)

³⁰ Ann Charters, ed., *The Portable Sixties Reader*, (New York: NY, Penguin Books, 2003).

³¹ Peter L. Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *Movement and Revolution*, (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

chary to define the counterculture he was writing about in the 1960s.³² He saw the counterculture of the 1960s as “a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion.”³³ Nevertheless, the 1960s counterculture has distinctive forms, visual style, and affective gestures, which will serve as the foundation of the analysis in this thesis. Roszak would concur, that the 1960s counterculture is what it sounds like: it is a counterculture. The 1960s counterculture was against a particular culture in a specific time, confronting particular issues. We will discuss in more detail how the Rajneesh-Osho movement abstracted and copied the forms of the counterculture, for evidently cultural agendas.

It is important to note that the counterculture is not exclusively a 1960s category, even though the term is most often associated with the 1960s. “Counterculture” was first widely used in the 1960s and early 70s by scholars such as Roszak, Berger, and Neuhaus to theorize the youthful movements in that time.³⁴ One might contend that counterculture is and should always be a cultural project underway to reveal the dialectical tensions in a society. Perhaps reevaluations of our contemporary relationship with the counterculture could even propel genuine class struggles. In the proceedings of this project, however, the counterculture refers specifically to the counterculture of the 1960s.

This thesis concerns the misuse of certain terms associated with the counterculture. For major media outlets and expert scholars alike, the Rajneesh-Osho movement comes with some problematic associations with the counterculture. Some, such as the *New York Times* or the *Atlantic*, would equate the Rajneesh-Osho movement with the counterculture. In an article titled “Are Hippies the New Goth?” the *New York Times* writer Ruth La Ferla stated, “Creepy variations on this enduring archetype began turning up more than a year ago as the subjects of

³² Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 42.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Peter L. Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *Movement and Revolution*; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*.

‘Wild Wild Country,’ a Netflix documentary series about Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and his flamboyant, often lawless followers. Today hippies lurk in the shadows on the USA Network series...”³⁵ Similarly, the *Atlantic* article introduced the Rajneesh-Osho Movement as “a tale that mines the weirdness of the counterculture in the ’70s and ’80s, the age-old conflict between rural Americans and free love–preaching cityfolk, ...”³⁶ They would presume, first of all, that the historic counterculture still exists in some original fashion. Secondly, they are asserting that the Rajneesh-Osho movement is an embodiment of the counterculture. Even though the Rajneesh-Osho movement certainly appears to be countercultural, given the evidence in this thesis, it is indeed inaccurate to level the movement with “hippies,” or even the “counterculture” in general. In these ways, these articles are factually under-informed about the movement in question.

On the same line, after the release of the Netflix documentary “Wild Wild Country,” one of the show creators, Maclain Way made a chronological association between the Rajneesh-Osho Movement and the counterculture on a NPR radio show.³⁷ Way noted that the movement emerged out at a time “(when) 1960s counterculture coming to an end and we were at the end of the 70s and getting into the early 80s, and you had a lot of Americans doing this kind of Eastern migration toward India [they were] interested in seeking.”³⁸ Urban, similarly described the earlier days of Rajneesh-Osho movement to be “an odd mixture of well-to-do Indian businessmen and long-haired, shabbily dressed Americans and European hippies.”³⁹ While Ma Anand Sheela, one of the movement’s most controversial former leaders, recalled the early days

³⁵ Ruth La Ferla, “Are Hippies the New Goth?” *New York Times*, August 14, 2019.

³⁶ Sophie Gilbert, “Wild Wild Country: The Jaw-Dropping Story of the Cult Next Door,” *The Atlantic*, March 17, 2018.

³⁷ Maclain Way, in Alexi Horowitz-Ghazi’s, “Religion, Libertarian Cults And The American West In 'Wild Wild Country'” Show on NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/24/596723300/religion-libertarian-cults-and-the-american-west-in-wild-wild-country>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Urban, *Zorba*, 42.

(the 1970s) in India as filled with crowds of “hippy and new age group.”⁴⁰ The usage of the “counterculture” and “hippie” is the center of the investigation in this essay.

Thesis Statement

The proposal of this thesis is simple: The Rajneesh-Osho movement only appears to be countercultural. By assuming a carefully crafted countercultural facade, the movement embraced an increasingly hegemonic world order of the neoliberal market in the 1980s. It did not sustain meaningful social critiques, nor did it confront problematic aspects of the mainstream culture. The Rajneesh-Osho movement, therefore, is a cultural movement that adopted the countercultural *forms* of the 1960s.

Thematically, the Rajneesh-Osho movement only appears countercultural. The movement is different from the counterculture in at least three significant ways. 1). Purely on the level of appearance, the Rajneesh-Osho movement resembles the counterculture in their style, fashion, and activities; 2). Whereas the counterculture was largely an unplanned and spontaneous phenomenon, the Rajneesh-Osho movement is a calculated business venture. The movement mirrors the demographic composition and geographic scope of the international counterculture for mostly monetary incentives; 3). The critical and confrontational appearance of the Rajneesh-Osho movement was, in effect, a plumaged performance, which did the opposite of “countering” the culture of the 1980s.

In these regards, this thesis is an intervention to the highly conflated and misleading usage of the term “counterculture.” The mental paring of the counterculture and the Rajneesh-Osho movement is troublesome, especially given how contemporary major newspapers are still performing it. We have to admit, the vivid associations and varying degrees of moral judgments still run through terms such as counterculture, beatniks, hippies, or communes.

Words matter, politics too.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Originally from Urban’s archival research: Ma Anand Sheela, “Glory,” 18 (draft manuscript, October, 11, 1986), Roshani Shay/Rajneesh Collection, University of Oregon Special Collections and University Archives, box 11, fol. 27.

The Look

As the first point, the Rajneesh-Osho movement appears to be countercultural partly because of how they look. That is, the aesthetics of the Rajneesh-Osho movement readily and powerfully summons visual connections with the counterculture. Before knowing the theology, philosophy, and history of the movement, outsiders often called the Rajneesh-followers the “orange people”⁴¹ or the “maroon people”⁴²—precisely because of how they looked.

This reductionist approach of referring to others by how they appear was a common tactic of colonialist objectification and imperialist subjugation. This practice is what might constitute Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism⁴³: “Western European explorers went to a place they called “the Orient” and wrote descriptions of what they found there; Western European readers read these descriptions and understood “the Orient” as something other than their own country and civilization.”⁴⁴ In studying the construction of Asiatic femininity, Anne Anlin Cheng further demonstrated how exoticized bodies are abstract and synthetic, rather than organically animated, pushing forward the term Ornamentalism.⁴⁵ Complex cultural phenomena are reduced and abstracted to appearances that resemble the other, exotic and foreign. One problem being that these conceptions and descriptions about the others are often not what the others conceive of or call as themselves.

⁴¹ Though it is more accurate to say saffron-colored, see Urban, *Zorba*, 61; see also Shobha Kilachand, “The Saffron Superstar,” *Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 5, 1981, 20-24.

⁴² See Carter, *Charisma*, 47. For more contemporary accounts see Amy Waldman, “Pune journal: Old Rajneesh Commune Lightens up in Afterlife,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*. Dec 10 2002:1. Available on <https://search-proquest-com/docview/92217071?accountid=14214>.

⁴³ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. (New York: Random House, 1979) United States: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014) Chapter 1, 31-33.

⁴⁴ Though these are not Said’s own words, I find this to summarize chapter 1 well: “Orientalism.” In *Key Terms in Literary Theory*, by Mary Klage. Continuum, 2012. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/contlt/orientalism/0?institutionId=499>.

⁴⁵ Anne Anlin Cheng, “Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman.” *Critical Inquiry* 44, no. 3 (2018) 415-446.

It is important to note that a similar tactic of othering runs in the initial construction of the counterculture.⁴⁶ Words such as “hippies,” “beatniks,” or even “counterculture” were not the welcomed creation of the communities which they describe. Many initial “beatniks,”⁴⁷ “hippies,”⁴⁸ and “counterculture”⁴⁹ people firmly rejected these terms. For many who were involved in the counterculture, these words sounded pejorative— these names tended to be too contrived or distorted to describe who they were or what they were doing.⁵⁰

Indeed, just as gazing at the “orient” presumes a centrality of the “West,” the invention of the “counterculture” presumes inevitable supremacy of the “culture.” At the time when Roszak and others theorized countercultural phenomena, what was meant by the culture refers to a predominately white, liberal, democratic, and industrialized post-war society. In the same period, however, the “Red Block” had drastically different social conditions compared to the counterculture West.⁵¹ It would be a mistake to minimize and exclude the impact of social and political upsurges in non-Western countries. (Take the Cultural Revolution in China for example, which was a counterculture in its own measures.)⁵² The “culture,” moreover, in the counterculture works as a logical warrant that leaves the “culture” unexplained. Consequentially,

⁴⁶ According to many sources, “counter-culture” was a term first coined by American sociologist Talcott Parsons in the 1950s and later popularized by Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969). To see more about how “counterculture” has been used, please refer to Andrew Kirk *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (University Press of Kansas, 2007.)

⁴⁷ Junjie Ren, “The Beat Museum Exhibition” (Research notes taken from a visit to the Beat Museum in San Francisco at 540 Broadway, San Francisco, CA 94133, April, 2019)

⁴⁸ Alan W. Watts, Untitled Lecture Recording on the counterculture, could be found https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT0s8Oys_s4 (April, 2019); Gidlow, *Elsa*, 303, 335. Based on the fieldwork and archival work on an abandoned commune in the Bay Area, I have argued previously that Watts, Gidlow, (and Snyder, Ginsberg) to come were defining cultural figures in the 1960s American countercultural scenes. See Junjie Ren, “Cloud Hidden, Whereabout Unknown: An Environmental History of a Counterculture Commune,” seminar research paper presented at “Urban Environmental History and Political Ecology under Robert Wilson, Syracuse University, 2019).

⁴⁹ Elsa Gidlow, *Elsa, I Come with My Songs: the autobiography of Elsa Gidlow* (San Francisco, CA: Booklegger Press, 1986) 303, 350-351, 355.

⁵⁰ Watts, Untitled.

⁵¹ Take China as an example: Jisheng Liang, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, Translated by Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian, Edited by Edward Friedman, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012). This culturally defining happening had virtually no acknowledgement or reporting from the West until recently. See also, Arthur Waldron. “Starving in China” Vol. 31 *New Criterion*, 2013).

⁵² Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962—1976*, (Bloomsbury Press, 2016)

assumptions of how things are or should be, or what the culture is and should look like could obscure the contingency of social relations.⁵³ It could further undermine the urgency of any constructive efforts to imaginatively amend and improve, to be Utopian and prospectively hopeful—“because this is how things are.” The progression of time had rendered the contingencies of the 1960s “culture” quite obvious. Therefore, it is my contention that counterculture descriptors deserve a reclamation.



Left: Figure 1. “Gary Snyder in Monk’s travel outfit near Dai-Tokuji Temple in Japan.” July, 1963, (originally with Allen Ginsberg’s caption), photo c. Allen Ginsberg Estate; Right: Figure 2. Ram Dass with Beads. Former Harvard psychology professor Richard Alpert went to study with Maharaj-ji in India and became Ram Dass.

The counterculture had a clearly defined affinity towards Asian cultures. The aesthetics of the counterculture, however, has a problematically orientalist root. As Helen Tworikov observed, only a segment of sophisticated middle and upper-middle class in New England had enjoyed the

⁵³ On contingencies of social relations: Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Edition, (New York, London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 247 (in B. Society and the Individual). Selections from *The Grundrisse*,: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy’, by Karl Marx, translated by Martin Nicolaus. Copyright 1913 by Martin Nicolaus. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc. and Penguin Books.

oriental aesthetic through the Boston-based East India Trade industry.⁵⁴ A broad-scale appreciation for Asian-originated decorative styles and artifacts was not picked up by the public until after WWII in America. As Kashima noted, the Acts of Subjugation, the Oriental Exclusion Act, and the Alien Land Laws restricted the circulation of Asiatic persons, cultures, and artifacts in America as a whole.⁵⁵ After WWII, the Beat and counterculture fascination with Asian philosophy, art, and literature encouraged an eastward shift of aesthetic aspirations in America.⁵⁶ Influential literati of the counterculture, such as Gary Snyder (fig. 1),⁵⁷ Allen Ginsberg⁵⁸, W.S. Merwin,⁵⁹ and Richard Alpert — Ram Dass (fig. 2)⁶⁰ would be so inspired to journey to the East. The Beatles, along with their friends in the Beach Boys, also took a high-profile trip to India to visit the Maharishi Yogi in 1968 (fig. 3).⁶¹ Reporters have noticed that, after the trip ended, the Beatles also brought with them the fashion of wearing brightly colored Kurtas and musical instruments such as the Sitar.⁶² The counterculture, in terms of its appropriation, is not without problem. Scholars such as Richard King⁶³ and Judith Snodgrass⁶⁴ have theorized the orientalist root in the occidental encounter with “Eastern” religions and ways of life. Nevertheless, during

⁵⁴ Helen Tworckov, *Zen in America*, (NY: Kodansha America, 1994) Chapter 1.

⁵⁵ Kashima, T., *Buddhism in America*, Chapter 1, (Westport: Conn, Greenwood Press, 1977), 13.

⁵⁶ See also, Deborah Baker, *A Blue Hand: the Beats in India*, (New York : Penguin Press, 2008). See for instance on Gary Snyder, out of whom Jack Kerouac cast the Japhy Ryder character in the culture culture classic *The Dharma Bum* (1958): Timothy Gary, “Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating Countercultural Community” (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press. 2006) xi.

⁵⁷ Alan Watts, *In my own way; an autobiography, 1915-1965*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1972), 267.

⁵⁸ Suranjan Ganguly,(1993). "Allen Ginsberg in India: An Interview" *Ariel* (0004-1327), 24 (4), p. 21.

⁵⁹ See about United States Poet Laureate W.S. Merwin’s journey, *Even Though the Whole World Is Burning* (documentary film), dir. Stefan Schaeffe (Cicala Filmworks and WNET, PBS, 2014).

⁶⁰ See another counterculture classic which partially describes Richard Alpert’s journey: Ram Dass, Rameshwar Das, *Be love now: The Path of the Heart*, (New York : HarperOne, 2010).

⁶¹ Kai Schultz, “Rebuilding on the Beatles, an Ashram in India Hopes for Revival” *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 2018.

⁶² Leigh Spencer, “The Beatles in India: Recollections at the Opening of a Liverpool Exhibition,” London: Independent Digital News & Media, 2018. Also Ibid.

⁶³ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East.”* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁴ Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West : Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

the counterculture era, bands of white male had no doubt popularized and normalized a westerner's appropriation into cultures which they did not come from.



Figure 3. “The Beatles with their entourage and the Maharishi. Photo from Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Unlike the counterculture, however, the abstraction for the Rajneesh-Osho movement was a deliberate attempt of its leaders to maintain an engineered façade. Elaborate processes were in place to cultivate an exteriorized identity which aspires to look Eastern and countercultural. Many followers of Rajneesh observed Bohemian grooming practices (by rarely doing it) and kept long hair. Recounting the movement in 1970s, Sheela stated, “The westerners dressed in ... India Kurtas and Lunghis, not very neat with long unkempt hair.”⁶⁵ At the Pune commune, the Rajneeshpuram, and various Rajneesh centers, the movement members collectively wore orange robes and garments (Fig. 4). Later, the Rajneesh wardrobe added maroon and white-colored

⁶⁵ From Urban, *Zorba*, 42. Originally from Ibid. Originally from Urban's archival research: Ma Anand Sheela, “Glory,” 18 (draft manuscript, October, 11, 1986), Roshani Shay/Rajneesh Collection, University of Oregon Special Collections and University Archives, box 11, fol. 27.

robes as well.⁶⁶ Some followed the countercultural style of body appreciation and preferred to be half or fully naked.⁶⁷ As a part of the official initiation into the movement (or what is internally called “taking Sannyas”), new initiates would acquire ornaments such as beads and malas, along with new, and Eastern-sounding names as different from their lay names.⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, Ma Anand Sheela (aka Sheela Silverman), published *The Orange Book* at the height of the Rajneeshpuram in 1983.⁶⁹ While the book describes and publicizes the lifestyle and various meditation techniques of Rajneesh, the movement most certainly embraced and expertly maintained the exotic forms of the counterculture.

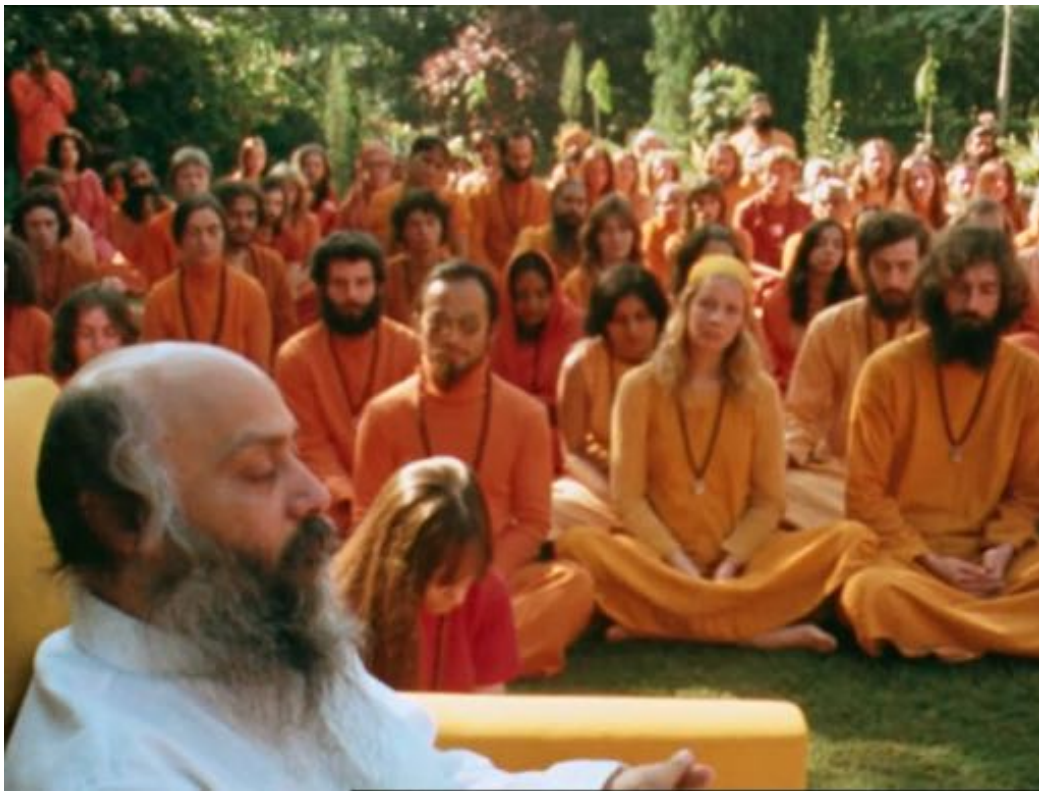


Figure 4. “Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and sannyasin devotees in a still from Wild Wild Country.”
Photograph: Netflix. Photo from an article in the *Guardian* article by Sam Wallaston, 24 April, 2018.

⁶⁶ Carter, *Charisma*, 47.

⁶⁷ See more about this counterculture observance: Chuck Oldenburg, “Druid Heights,” posted January, 2012 to Mill Valley Historical Society. <https://www.mvhistory.org/history-of/history-of-homestead-valley/druid-heights/>.

⁶⁸ Urban, *Zorba*, 70-72.

⁶⁹ Rajneesh, *The Orange Book: the Meditation Techniques of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh*, (Rajneeshpuram: OR: Rajneesh Foundation International, 1983).

As one can eventually do mail-orders to take Sannyas, the similarities with the counterculture occurred on the level of material replication.⁷⁰ Indeed, the Rajneesh-Osho movement looked countercultural. However, the robes, malas, and new names mark a scaled-up, systematic operation to convert an imagination of the "Eastern way of life" for Western curiosity. The Rajneesh-Osho movement's countercultural appearance is very literally a branded product in the supply and demand of counterculture artifacts. Novel aesthetic preferences of the counterculture opened doors for novel ways of consumer appreciation. On the site of already discursively mapped and colonized bodies, the Rajneesh-Osho movement appears to be countercultural in deliberately visual ways.

The People

As the second point of this essay, the Rajneesh-Osho movement appears to be countercultural because the followers seemed to fit in with the demographic profiles of the "hippies." Since Theodore Roszak, scholars have noted that the counterculture was mainly composed of Western youth.⁷¹ Rajneesh followers, as well as the commune and ashram dwellers (workers and residents) were young and mostly under 40 years of age.⁷² People who were involved in the counterculture were often from middle to upper-middle-class. Comparatively, the Rajneesh-Osho movement attracted and retained the similar demographic makeup in the 1970s and 80s. Many Rajneesh followers were highly educated and professional.⁷³ Ted Mann had pointed out that the exact degree of affluence of the follower is highly contended subject, average followers of Rajneesh were noticeably well-off.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Susan Harfoucheu, "Memoirs of an Ex-Sannyasin" *The New Republic*, April 12, 2018.

⁷¹ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor, 1969).

⁷² Ted Mann, "The Crazyies—Who Follows Rajneesh and Why" in the *Rajneesh Papers*, ed. Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993) 22. Mann's analysis came from a research done originally in German: Klaus Peter-Horn, "Rebellion Gegan Den Verstand? Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchung Uber deutsche Neo-sannyasins in Poona." (Ph.S. Thesis, Preien Unversitat, Berlin, 1982). The statistics quoted in this paragraph are from Mann's essay.

⁷³ Urban, *Zorba*, 108.

⁷⁴ Mann, "The Crazyies." 29-32.

This similarity was a result of another careful planning. According to Urban, when Rajneesh first presumed the role as a guru, his audiences drew mostly from the upward moving, entrepreneurial business class in a newly independent India—only a few came from the West.⁷⁵ In the early days of the movement, Rajneesh delivered talks in Hindi out of a Bombay apartment.⁷⁶ Not long after, a group of devotees in the business world secured a location in the residential region of Poona (later Pune).⁷⁷ A Rajneesh ashram was built in 1974.⁷⁸ Quickly thereafter, Western seekers flocked the Pune (Poona) community to patron Rajneesh’s ashram. By 1977, the Pune ashram volumed 1,000-2,000 in traffic every week.⁷⁹ A 1982 doctoral thesis by Klaus Peter Horn and Ted Mann’s analysis captured the Western influx of Rajneesh-Osho Movement: Among the visitors and long-term residents, North Americans and Western Europeans made up the majority at the Pune commune. In contrast, the native Indian population—which was the overwhelming majority at the beginning of the Rajneesh movement—only accounted for 13% in the longtime residents.⁸⁰ With this development, the demographic composition of the Rajneesh movement was irretrievably altered, from Indian-dominant to Western-dominant. The programs and offerings at the ashram reflected this demographic change. For instance, Rajneesh stopped lecturing in Hindi and switched entirely to English.⁸¹ In this sense, Rajneesh did intentionally cater (if not target) towards a particular group of audiences.⁸² The selective tendency is far from being an egalitarian mission. but a calculated profit-driven approach.

The profit-driven incentive is further evident in the initial recruitment processes of the movement. At first, people learned about Rajneesh through simple means: ads, flyers, and word

⁷⁵ Urban, *Zorba*, 52-53; Cater, *Charisma*, 47.

⁷⁶ Urban, *Zorba*, 65.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See Osho, *autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 238.

⁸⁰ Mann, “The Crazyies” 29-32.

⁸¹ Urban, *Zorba*, 70; this information originally came from the firsthand account in Tim Guest, *My Life in Orange: Growing Up with the Guru*, (UK: Granta Books, 2004), 185.

⁸² Urban also mentions this in Urban, *Zorba*, 70.

of mouth.⁸³ Rajneesh's global audience came into contact with the India-based movement from different avenues, through published books, talks, tape recordings, or stumbling upon a meditation center.⁸⁴ The initial recruitment was based either in India or abroad and looks somewhat like a pyramid scheme: It often started with Rajneesh dispatching disciples to selected locations to spread the gospel.⁸⁵ Followers established centers in these locations to teach Rajneesh's Dynamic Mediations by playing recorded videos brought from the base in India.⁸⁶ This targeted approach reached a desired population of followers, who would, in turn, become the potential consumers of the merchandise, resorts experiences, meditation workshops of the Rajneesh-Osho various Rajneesh establishment.

Where did Rajneesh dispatch the followers? In 1979, many distribution centers for Rajneesh publications were meditation centers or communes in their own rights, emerged in twenty-two countries on four continents.⁸⁷ In 1982, Rajneesh communes and meditation centers existed in Canada, England, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Holland, Sweden, West Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Greece, Australia, New Zealand Japan, South Africa, and Brazil.⁸⁸ By the year 1989, the Rajneesh publishers had already released some 150 items in English (not to mention the works translated into Japanese, Dutch, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages.)⁸⁹

⁸³ Carter, *Charisma*, 49-51; Urban, *Zorba*, 65-68.

⁸⁴ See, for instance recounts in Tim Guest, *My Life in Orange*; and Palmer, *Rajneesh Papers*, Introduction, xiii.

⁸⁵ Carter, *Charisma*, 49-51.

⁸⁶ Carter, *Charisma*, 48-51.

⁸⁷ Bhagwan Sheer Rajneesh, *The Buddha Disease: A Darshan Diary*, (Poona, India: Rajneesh Foundation Limited, March, 1979), end advertisement pages.

⁸⁸ Rajneesh, *The Goose is Out*, end advertisement pages.

⁸⁹ Osho Rajneesh, *The Zen Manifesto: Freedom from Oneself*, ed. Ma Dhyana Sagar (Cologne, West Germany: Rebel Publishing House, 1989), end advertisement pages.

The geographic selection of the Rajneesh-Osho movement mirrors that of the counterculture, to an uncanny degree.⁹⁰ By and large, the counterculture was a movement that traversed many national boundaries. It is worth reminding that the counterculture was not exclusively a social phenomenon in the United States. During the 1960s, identifiably countercultural movements emerged in regions such as the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan,⁹¹ and a few countries in Latin America.⁹² These regions traded a counterculture styles and circulated countercultural objects (e.g., underground magazines and psychedelic posters) through mail orders, head shops,⁹³ and other means⁹⁴. It is worth mentioning that these countries tended to be industrialized and comparatively affluent in a global sense, post-colonially. Indeed, the demographic for both the counterculture and the Rajneesh-Osho movement might signify what Yuval Noah Harari summarized as WEIRD: western, educated, industrialized, rich, and

⁹⁰ The Rajneesh-Osho movement reminds me of the uncanny as “the familiar returning as unfamiliar.” This is a concept I picked up: Danae Faulk, lecture on the Uncanny and American Poetics (course on Cults and Conspiracies in America, Syracuse University, New York, March 1, 2020). See also Susan Lepselter *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny* (University of Michigan Press, 2016) “Vulnerabilities.” “The uncanny narratives here acquire affect, intensity, and meaning through their resonance and dissonance with other more familiar cultural narratives” on page 4.

⁹¹ Japan is a special case, because arguably Japan is non-Western. The scope of Japanese counterculture is limited however—“communes on small islands, a return to farming.” This nonetheless fostered a productive film-making community, as documented by Ridgely: Steven C. Ridgely, *Japanese Counterculture: The Antiestablishment Art of Terayama Sh ji*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 175. Though unfamiliar with the scholarship literatures, I suspect one could argue one could argue for a uniquely “Western” characteristic in the Japanese culture after the Meiji Restoration (明治維新) in the nineteenth century.

⁹² For a general account about the aforementioned regions, see Kevin M. Moist “Introduction—Global Psychedelia and Counterculture” *Rock Music Studies*, 5:3, (2018), 197-204. For a connection of Europe and Australian counterculture art scene, see “Confrontational continuum: modernism and the psychedelic art of Martin Sharp” *The Sixties*, 11:2 (2018); Michael J. Kramer “Infinity goes up on trial: the questioning of psychedelic art at the Whitney Museum” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 1:1 (June 2008). For Brazil please refer to Christopher Dunn, “‘Experimentar o Experimental’: Avant-Garde, Cultura Marginal, and Counterculture in Brazil, 1968-72”, (*Luso-Brazilian review* .Vol. 50, No. 1, Special Issue: Brazilian Slavery and its Legacies, 2013), 229-252; On Argentina see for instance: Valeria Manzano, *The age of youth in Argentina: culture, politics, and sexuality from Peron to Videla*, (Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina Press. 2014).

⁹³ John Campbell McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters : The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); referenced in Michael Organ “Confrontational continuum: modernism and the psychedelic art of Martin Sharp,” (*The Sixties*, 11:2, 2018,) 156-182.

⁹⁴ One could argue that various forms of gift economy, for instance, could have been prominent in various forms of counterculture dwellings.

democratic.⁹⁵ Perhaps, quite literally, as Ted Mann argued in “The Crazyies—Who Follows Rajneesh and Why,” many of Rajneesh’s affluent followers were the well-educated loners who *would* “fitted in.”⁹⁶

The Rajneesh-Osho movement has been observed as a widely international phenomenon, especially by Urban in *Zorba*, where he argued Rajneesh was the first truly global guru. However, rather than being a spontaneous emergence, the germination of the Rajneesh centers around the globe was a highly coordinated business venture, scheduled to cash in on the co-optation of the counterculture.⁹⁷ Aside from organizations such as the Underground Press Syndicate, which circulated countercultural prints and magazines,⁹⁸ the counterculture of the 1960s was largely an unplanned, un-orchestrated international phenomenon. The global Rajneesh-Osho movement followed almost the exact footprints of the un-orchestrated counterculture. This tactic suggests a favoritism towards countries that are predominately western, capitalistic, and well-off. Of course, the counterculture of the 1960s was still a problematic social movement with its intrinsic negation of class issues on a global scale.⁹⁹ The Rajneesh-Osho movement, however, preferentially amplified an intention to prioritize the WEIRD locations and demographics. It follows the flow of the capital like bees attracted to

⁹⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2016), 412-413, 418-419.

⁹⁶ Mann, “The Crazyies,” 17, 45.

⁹⁷ Here “co-optation” follows John Kotter and Leonard Schlesinger’s idea that it’s a form of manipulation in management. See John P. Kotter and Leonard Schlesinger, “Choosing Strategies for Change,” (Change Management, *Harvard Business Review*, July-August Issue, 2018).

⁹⁸ AnnMarie Brennan, “An Architecture for the Mind: OZ Magazine and the Technologies of the Counterculture” *Design and Culture*, 9:3 (2017): 324.

⁹⁹ John Clarke, for instance, provides a Marxist analysis on this issue: “Subcultures, Cultures and Class” in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, edited by Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, (London: Hutchinson, 1976). My conception of a thoroughly responsive counterculture is international in the Marx’s terms: it is “the international counter organisation of labour against the cosmopolitan conspiracy of capital,” (in Marx, *Reader*, 651).

nectar. Rajneesh was not concerned about the lower class—neither in India nor in the world-- as he repeatedly emphasized that he was the “Rich Man’s Guru”¹⁰⁰

The Style

As the third point of this essay, the Rajneesh-Osho movement seems to be countercultural because it appears to be critical, confrontational, and oppositional—much like the style of the 1960s. Thematically, the Rajneesh-Osho movement took issues with governments, institutions, and religious orthodoxies. Stylistically, the movement performed a confrontational (and sometimes violent) gesture that was associated with the counterculture. By the 1980s, needless to say, the social conditions in which the Rajneesh-Osho movement existed in was not the same as the 1960s. The Rajneesh-Osho movement, therefore, appears to be clinging on to a phantasmic culture as object of its criticality, without much applicability to the culture in which it inhabits.

To look at the critical attitudes of the Rajneesh-Osho Movement, we should perhaps start with the oppositional trajectory of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Rajneesh is no stranger to criticality. According to Urban, when in school, Rajneesh excelled in debates.¹⁰¹ While a student in philosophy, he was excused three times from three separate institutions for his defiant character and disruptive behaviors.¹⁰² Before Rajneesh became a guru, he was a longtime critic of Mahatma Gandhi’s policy and philosophy.¹⁰³ Rajneesh, therefore, most certainly had a career in being disagreeable and critical. He was against institutional orthodoxy, by repeatedly criticizing

¹⁰⁰ Osho, *Autobiography*, 147; Urban, *Zorba*, I, 49, 72-73. See Urban’s discussion of how Rajneesh jabbed at Marx and Engels’s idea that “mankind must first of all eat” *Zorba*, 72-73.

¹⁰¹ Urban, *Zorba*, 32-33.

¹⁰² Urban, *Zorba*, 33-34.

¹⁰³ Urban, *Zorba*, 49.

the lack of liberty, the hypocrisy, and the unnecessary suppression of sexual urges in institutional religions.¹⁰⁴ Aside from his high-profile stance in Rajneesh's early days speaking against Gandhian politics, Rajneesh also earned himself prolonged media exposure for scandalizing and provoking other public figures. To list a few one-liners which the spiritual teacher uttered during a talk-show interview: Pope Paul should "be behind bars," and it is time for Mother Teresa to "jump into a lake."¹⁰⁵ As he put it, "The new consciousness is going to be counter to all orthodoxies. Any kind of orthodoxy, Catholic or communist, Hindu or Jain... is a kind of paralysis of the mind."¹⁰⁶

While in Rajneeshpuram, the movement followers maintained its own openly armed "Peace Force."¹⁰⁷ Such heavy armory and oppositional assertion of political boundaries might, at first sight, remind us of the Black Panthers in the 1960s who preached for a "revolutionary war," in utter defiance of the American government.¹⁰⁸ Politically, Rajneesh members also hastily registered homeless people across the country to increase political headcount while busing commune members to sway local county election.¹⁰⁹ However, this seemingly egalitarian gesture to include the homeless population was widely understood as an utilitarian and Machiavellian move of the commune leaders.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Examples are numerous. See for instance, Rajneesh, *The Goose is Out*, 74.

¹⁰⁵ Osho, "Absolutely Free to Be Funny" interview with Jeff McMullen of Australia's "60 Minutes," video recording, 0:41, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otGQqO2TYMI>, retrieved August 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Rajneesh, quoted in Urban, *Zorba*, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Guest, *My Life in Orange*, 207, quoted in Urban, *Zorba*, 125.

¹⁰⁸ C N Trueman "The Black Panthers," The History Learning Site, 27 Mar 2015, historylearningsite.co.uk.

¹⁰⁹ Guest, *My Life in Orange*, 207, quoted in Urban, *Zorba*, 128.

¹¹⁰ Urban's interview with Foster (2014): *Zorba*, 128.

It might be useful at this point to review the 1960s' specific set of social conditions that brought about the counterculture. As many scholars have reminded us, the counterculture happened at a ceaselessly critical juncture that harbored many disaffections. In the wake of WWII, a conservative swing in politics dominated the discourse in Western(ized) societies.¹¹¹ The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 and the eventual wars in Vietnam put governmental credibility near bankruptcy.¹¹² The starting of the war was factually unjustified.¹¹³ The sheer scale of drafting and casualties had no moral plausibility: Americans mourned for the loss of 58,220 soldiers.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, investigative reports from Vietnam brought home the monstrosity of the American army.¹¹⁵ At the same time, the second Red Scare in the U.S. maintained an atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia by villainizing and persecuting alternative ideologies associated with the Communist Block.¹¹⁶ Nuclear annihilation was a common fear of the time.¹¹⁷ Racial riots erupted across major cities, revealing on a massive scale the institutional discriminations and mistreatments embedded into the social fabric.¹¹⁸ Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) exposed the ecological ramifications of DDT, previously thought of as virtually harmless. Consequently, an erosion of governmental credibility resulted in a sense of disorientation and distrust towards

¹¹¹ Anthea Gunn, "A-changing' times: the art of Martin Sharp in the 1960s" *Journal of Australian Studies* 34:2, (June 2010), 180.

¹¹² See Susan Sontag, "What's Happening in America," 1966, and Robert Bly, "The Teeth Mother Naked at last." An excerpt from "The Teeth Mother" goes: "The Minsters lie, the professors lie, the television lies, the priests lie.... These lies mean that the country wants to die. Lie after lie starts out into the prairie grass, like enormous caravans of Conestoga wagons." From the *Portable Sixties Reader*, edited by Ann Charters, (NY, Penguin Books, 2003.)

¹¹³ Thomas Merton, "Original Child Bomb," From the *Portable Sixties Reader*, edited by Ann Charters, (NY, Penguin Books, 2003.)

¹¹⁴ "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics," The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics>.

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, Michael Herr, "From Dispatches," originally published for the *Esquire* magazine, in he *Portable Sixties Reader*. See also, the "Winter Soldier Investigation," a Vietnam Veterans Against the War event, which was released as a documentary: *Winter Soldier* (Winterfilm, Inc, 1972.)

¹¹⁶ Sally Wagner, lectures on the Second Red Scare (course on Activism in the 60s, Syracuse University, New York, October, 2018.)

¹¹⁷ Robert Wilson, lecture on HBO's historical drama Chernobyl, (course on urban environmental history and political ecology, Syracuse University, New York, October, 2019.)

¹¹⁸ Charter, *Sixties*, xvii.

established mores and values, as Tworkov had already argued.¹¹⁹ It would be safe to say, before the 1960s, the American government and major cultural institutions had a firmer grip over the values of the public. However, that grip came to be questionable in the 1960s.

This disaffection was expressed as a social criticism-- through a broadly gestured discontent towards what Alan Watts called the “military- industrial-police-labor-union-Mafia complex known as the establishment.”¹²⁰ Indeed, there were ample reasons why the counterculture youth were critical and confrontational. The 1960s counterculture was a social response to an immensely unstable time.

Needless to say 1980s was a different time compared to the 1960s. The cultural distinctiveness of the 1980s is a widely theorized phenomenon. Politically, the West witnessed the election of Ronald Reagan as U.S. president and Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. prime minister. Neo-liberal, free-trade, and market fundamentalism became the operating principles of a visible global market after the world-wars.¹²¹ As Susan Douglas and Andrea McDonnell put it:

“... But in the wake of the various economic problems of the 1970s—“stagflation” (high inflation plus high unemployment), the OPEC oil embargo that limited oil and gas imports into the United States, soaring interest rates—and the election of Reagan here and Thatcher in England, market fundamentalism became the new gospel. This religion [market fundamentalism] consists of the following core tenets: a brief in what was called “trickle down” economics (cutting taxes on corporations and the wealthy will alleged prompt them to produce more jobs, so that benefits “trickle down” to everyone) and

¹¹⁹ Helen Tworkov, *Zen in America*, (NY: Kodansha America 1994,) Chapter 1.

¹²⁰ Alan Watts, *Cloud-hidden, Whereabouts Unknown: a Mountain Journal*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), 35.

¹²¹ Yoshihisa Kashima, "Culture." In *Encyclopedia of Identity*, edited by Ronald L. Jackson, II. Sage Publications, 2010.

efforts to limit or eliminate the government's role in redistributing wealth, which rests on cutting taxes ,especially for the wealthy.¹²²

The end of the Cold War seemed to have settled some global ideological disputes after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. As Yoshihisa Kashima stated, globalization, or the rapid formation of sociopolitical, cultural, economic, and informational connections, was an indisputable reality in the 1980s.¹²³ If the 1960s was characterized as the instability of the establishment in certain regions of the world, the 1980s would be a time of tightened reach of the establishment across the planet.¹²⁴ While many systematic issues which the 1960s had tackled persisted through the 1980s, the culture which a counter-culture of the 1980s should have confronted, is a globalizing, neo-liberal world order increasingly under the spell of a market economy. The Rajneesh-Osho Movement, however, did not reject the culture of the 1980s. Instead, it embraced it, by using a material-minded spirituality.

Even though Rajneesh's teachings were the opposite of the Christian-Protestant virtues of temperance and humility, they were still far from being countercultural. As Nadya Zimmerman observed, the counterculture possessed a defining trend of being anti-commercialist. However, Zimmerman also stated that "To refuse allegiance to materialist values and refuse participation in mass society did not automatically imply a rejection of consumer capitalism."¹²⁵ Rajneesh aligned himself with materialist values and embraced consumer capitalism. In his spiritual toolkit for emancipation, we see Rolls-Royces, diamond watches, and private airplanes.¹²⁶ Rajneesh was

¹²² Susan J Douglas and Andrea M McDonnell, *Celebrity: A History of Fame*, (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 39.

¹²³ Kashima, "Culture."

¹²⁴ Though the author don't agree with Fukuyama entirely, his book is worth consulting: Frances Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (New York: NY, Free Press, 2006), chapter 19.

¹²⁵ Nadya Zimmerman, "The Natural Persona: Freedom, the Grateful Dead, and an Anticommercial Counterculture," in *Counterculture Kaleidoscope, Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*.

¹²⁶ See Urban, chapter 3&4.

not hesitant to invite an interview host to visit his bathroom, which he claims to be the most luxurious in the world.¹²⁷

Instead of being critical toward the culture of 1980s, the Rajneesh-Osho movement operated a consumer-oriented market economy in the spiritual realm. In 1977, the Pune ashram enlisted their own publishing house, press office, boutique store, carpentry shop, and art studios of various kinds.¹²⁸ By 1983, at Rajneeshpuram, the newly established commune-city in Oregon was already offering a line of holistic health products, from quitting smoking to “dehypnotherapy.”¹²⁹ If one is more physically inclined, there are also “enjoyments from horseback and aircraft rides, boating and swimming, to river rafting.”¹³⁰ The counterculture fluidity in seeking alternatives serves unequivocally monetary gains in the Rajneesh communities. In terms of investing in the physical realms, the Rajneesh organizations’ assets covered education, real estate, publishing, food-services, manufacturing, retail, and recreation business.¹³¹ Before the relocation to Oregon, the Rajneesh Foundation was reported to have 1.2 million assets in 4 separate banks, having already spent 5.75 million to purchase the 64,229-acre ranch that became the Rajneeshpuram.¹³² Urban also noted, as a charitable, tax-exempt organization, the Rajneeshpuram community amassed vast sums of money— around \$80 million in the estimate, which raised suspicions from local charity commissioners and taxation officials who were questioning the charitable status of the commune.¹³³

¹²⁷ See Rajneesh’s Interview with Mike Wolfe, “OSHO: I Wonder If This Could Be Love?” excerpts from an Interview from KBND Radio, Bend, Oregon. Osho International, June 12, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v3OeszaxE>: “You have just to see my bathroom; perhaps it is the best in the whole world.”

¹²⁸ Bhagwan Sheer Rajneesh, *The Buddha Disease*.

¹²⁹ Mann, “The Crazyes,” 36-41.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Urban, *Zorba*, 72.

¹³² Shobha Kilachand, “The Saffron Superstar,” *Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 5, 1981, 20-24, quoted in Urban, *Zorba*, 105.

¹³³ Urban, *Zorba*, 104.

The product and service development of the Rajneesh-Osho enterprise reached many possible routes to generate revenue, and so it is reflected in the product offerings in the metaphysical sense. Diversification is evident in the broad topics covered by Rajneesh's works, through which he energetically synthesized ideas of meditations, Buddhism, Vedanta philosophy, mysticism, esotericism, psychotherapy, Sufism, Taoism, The Upanishads, Zen, Yoga, Mantra, and more.¹³⁴ Is it not evident that the Rajneesh-Osho Movement tries to reach as broad a consumer base as possible? This diversified portfolio might reflect David Harvey's observation on postmodernism: flexible accumulation of capital.¹³⁵ The format stretches from transcribed Q&A sessions and interviews with Rajneesh, compilations of essays attributed to Rajneesh, darshan diaries (testimonial records of the followers) to photobiographies.¹³⁶ We can discern the business principle of "try before you buy" hidden beneath possibilities so exhaustive that it is almost impossible to escape. In short, you have to find something you like in the land of Osho.

As Hugh Urban noted, while Rajneesh took issues with Ronald Reagan politically, the guru was actually an ideal embodiment (or even a prophet) of Reaganian politics.¹³⁷ Indeed, the Rajneesh-Osho movement, instead of being countercultural, performed ineffective countercultural drills of being critical and confrontational. The movement was essentially *cultural*.

¹³⁴ Osho Rajneesh, *The Zen Manifesto: Freedom from Oneself*, ed. Ma Dhyana Sagar (Cologne, West Germany: Rebel Publishing House, 1989), end advertisement pages.

¹³⁵ See Urban, *Zorba*, 11, David Harvey, "Flexible accumulation through urbanization: reflections on "postmodernism" in the American city", *Antipode* 19: 279.

¹³⁶ Osho Rajneesh, *The Zen Manifesto*.

¹³⁷ Urban, *Zorba*, 57, 103.

Conclusion

The Rajneesh-Osho movement is expansive in terms of its size of operation. To the author's best efforts, generalizations and speculations would have occurred. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence that counterculture descriptors do not suit the Rajneesh-Osho movement. Words such as "hippy" could mis-signify what the Rajneesh-Osho movement stood for. As the chief proposal of this thesis, the Rajneesh-Osho movement was not a countercultural movement.

Even by the problematic standards of the 1960s "counterculture," the Rajneesh-Osho Movement in the United States or around the globe was not oppositional to the narratives of the cultures which it came to inhabit. The oriental roots affecting the countercultural ways of fashioning one's body left something more attentive to be desired. Terms such as "hippy" still carry pejorative stereotypes harmful for the contemporary Utopian imaginations. The popular visual logic of being countercultural (or being critical) is indeed stagnant, leaving a sense of urgency in a reclamation of counterculture in contemporary politics.

Yet the counterculture had long been swept into the bucket of endless commoditization—of spirituality, religion, anti-establishment and even anti-commercialization ethos. One could argue that counterculture did not just create temporary fashion in dressing and grooming, but also in taste— it inspired a discernment for consumer products, lifestyles, as well as spirituality. In the mean time, the counterculture meaningfully influenced systems of values through different channels of political movements. In regards to its priorities, we certainly cannot take the Rajneesh-Osho Movement solely as a spiritual movement, nor can we call it countercultural. It is a new type of religion, a form of religion that have systematically converted visuals of a Utopia from its nearest memory, into capital.

The Rajneesh-Osho movement was never truly critical, never fully international, and certainly did not offer any sustainable alternatives to the culture. Calling it countercultural could reduce the countercultural potential of social movements following the 1960s. The countercultural experience for the Rajneesh-Osho Movement is mediated by money, but not by a counterculture.

It is international, only in select locations—profitable ones. As we have seen, it was undoubtedly not counter to the globalizing neoliberal world order the movement came to represent.

In these regards, the Rajneesh-Osho movement stands for the mainstream of the 1980s. Though the Rajneesh-Osho Movement mostly adhered to the format of the counterculture, to the degree of replication, it did not counter the widely defined “culture” in the 1960s imagination. The word “counterculture” therefore is a misnomer that fails to capture the politics of the Rajneesh-Osho movement. The Rajneesh-Osho movement enacted a simulacrum, a facsimile. The Rajneesh-Osho movement is a counterfeit counterculture that trades images of Utopia for access to the global capital.