



**UNIT 1:
FOOD AND CULTURE**

L.11

CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Note to Teachers

This lesson hints at the discussions to come in the “Power” section of the course, while sticking to the question of cultural identity. In this case, the identity in question here comes from a negative definition—what one rejects. Cultural resistance entails a rejection of the dominant culture, and that resistance could take many forms. Mohandas Gandhi turned the making of khadi, hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, for example, into an act of cultural resistance against British colonizers who had ravaged India’s ancient cotton cloth industry with mass-produced British cottons. Food can also be a site of resistance. Warren Belasco has argued that baking bread was an act of resistance by the counterculture of the 1960s and 70s—resistance against the tide of low-nutrient value, mass-produced foods that characterized mid-century American consumer culture.

The lesson begins with a general conversation about the idea of cultural resistance, and then explores a particular act of cultural resistance—punk cuisine—a phenomenon that will resonate very differently with different students. This lesson uses a difficult text but the spirit of resistance to authority it profiles is likely to resonate with some of your students.

Goals *In this lesson, students will*

- learn that food is a ready symbol, and can reflect both mainstream and minority values.
- learn how carefully considered counter-cultural ideologies can be, and how powerfully food choices and habits can reflect them.

Objectives

- Students will use a series of short writing prompts to define cultural resistance and to consider how food might be a vehicle for cultural resistance
- Students will use excerpts from a reading to analyze how punk cuisine operates as an example of cultural resistance and the values it embodies.

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Please use this margin to notate how to best adapt this curriculum to your students.

Objectives CONT.

- Students will apply the idea of food as cultural resistance to their own lives, and consider whether they might conceive any of their food choices as resistance against mainstream values.

Instructions

1. **FOCUSED FREE WRITE #1:** Today's conversation is based on the idea of cultural resistance, so we should begin by addressing that term. Can you begin to define it?
2. Ask students to share some of their ideas, to get a sense of what they are thinking. Then share the following definition:
 "Cultural resistance is the practice of using meanings and symbols, that is, culture, to contest and combat a dominant power, often constructing a different vision of the world in the process."¹
3. **FFW#2:** On the basis of this definition, can you describe an act of cultural resistance that you know from history, maybe the history of our own country?
4. **FFW#3:** Can you imagine what an act of cultural resistance expressed through food might look like?
5. Ask a handful of students to share from FFWs #2 and #3 to get a sense of their comfort with this definition. The definition has three parts, and it would be useful to ensure that—in sharing—their responses address all three:
 - The idea that resistance uses “meanings and symbols.” Effective resistance tends to focus on an idea or practice that seems emblematic of the whole.
 - The target of cultural resistance is the mainstream, dominant culture.
 - The idea that resistance is not merely a rejection, but often also the creation of new way of acting or living.
6. When students feel comfortable with the larger idea, they are ready to dig into an example!

Punk Cuisine

1. Distribute the accompanying handout and ask a student to read the headnote out loud.

This is a fairly dense reading, but ask students give it their best. Footnotes include definitions of a number of terms, but consider, as you preview this handout, bringing in your own tried-and-true tools for helping students tackle a difficult text.

Reverse outlining is one effective tactic, as it engages both reading comprehension and analysis. It asks a student to summarize the particular claim of each paragraph in the left margin, and to note how that particular paragraph advances the overall argument of the text in the right margin. In doing so, students learn to consistently check their understanding and to place information and ideas in their larger context.²

1) Stephen Duncombe, "Cultural Resistance," *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405124331_chunk_g97814051243319_ss1-179. Accessed 24 September 2017.
 2) See a fuller description and instruction at "Reverse Outlining," Purdue Online Writing Laboratory, <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/689/1/>. Accessed 27 September 2017.



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2. The handout is organized around two questions: how punks understand mainstream cuisine, and how they resist it.

You can approach this handout in a way that is best suited to your students.

You might begin by asking students to read (either aloud or silently) the way the text responds to the first question.

Then you might divide the group into three and assign students one of the short texts that follow. Ask each group of students to consider the form that resistance takes in their short texts and to explore the logic behind it. They will teach their section to the other students.

Delve as deeply as you can into their understanding. Focus first on their understanding of the text (rather than their responses to it); how and why do punks understand these criticisms of the food system as White, male, and elitist?

3. Once students have considered the *content* of the text, turn to their responses to it.

For example, consider asking students: Do any of these practices, or the objections that underlie them resonate with you? Why or why not?

Students may have a difficult time distinguishing between the specific practices (say, dumpster diving) and the logic behind it (anger at food waste) to which they may be very sympathetic. Do your best to help them see the difference.

Wrap Up or Extension

Wrap up this class with the discussion of two questions.

1. If students appreciate the content of the cultural resistance addressed by this article, but not the form, could they imagine a better, more effective form of culture resistance?
2. Is food an appropriate symbol for a cultural tradition they wish to protect and preserve, or to create? Is cultural resistance an appropriate response? If so, what is that culture and what might that resistance look like?

To keep this discussion focused on culture, be sure that students speak clearly from the perspective of a recognized culture or subculture that they wish to preserve and protect, or to create.



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VIETNAMESE SPRING ROLLS

16 students

Equipment List

- 15 cutting boards
- 15 knives
- 1 micro plane
- 1 peeler
- 1 large silver bowl
- 7 medium silver bowls
- 1 small silver bowl
- 2 small spoons for sauce
- 16 plastic placemats
(or some other surfaces to
make spring rolls)
- 1 serving tray (for finished rolls)
- 1 x 1 dry cup measure
- 1 x ½ dry cup measure
- 1 x ¼ dry cup measure
- 1 x 1 tablespoon measure
- 1 x ½ teaspoon measure

Food Items

- 32 6-inch round rice papers
- 16 leaves of lettuce
- 2 cups carrots
- 1 cup of mint leaves
- 1 cup of Thai basil
- 1 cup of carrot tops, chopped
- 16 leaves of Swiss chard
- 8 pearl drop onions
- 3 medium carrots
- 2 small shallots
- 4 tablespoons fresh ginger, finely
grated
- ½ cup rice vinegar
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- ½ teaspoons of sesame oil
- salt and pepper to taste



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VIETNAMESE SPRING ROLLS

YIELD: 32 Rolls

Ingredients

- 32 6-inch round rice papers
- 16 leaves of lettuce, chopped
- 2 cups carrots, grated
- 1 cup of mint leaves, chopped
- 1 cup of Thai basil, chopped
- 1 cup of carrot tops, chopped
- 16 leaves of Swiss chard, chopped
- 8 pearl drop onions, chopped

SEASONAL DIPPING SAUCE

- 3 medium carrots, roughly chopped
- 2 small shallots, roughly chopped
- 4 tablespoons fresh ginger, finely grated
- ½ cup rice vinegar
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- ½ teaspoons of sesame oil
- salt and pepper to taste

Directions

1. Fill a large bowl with warm water. Dip one wrapper into the hot water for 1 second to soften. Lay wrapper flat. In a row across the center, arrange an array of each of your vegetables, leaving about 2 inches uncovered on each side. If you wish, drizzle a bit of your dipping sauce inside. Fold uncovered sides inward, and then tightly roll the wrapper. Repeat with remaining ingredients.
2. Blend your dipping sauce ingredients until very smooth. Taste for seasoning.



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DYLAN CLARK
from
THE RAW AND THE
ROTTEN: PUNK CUISINE

Ethnology 43 (1): 19-31; 2004. Excerpts used with permission.

Creating or revising an identity requires individuals and groups to ask both “Who am I?” and “Who am I not?” When the answers go against the dominant culture, they can form an act of cultural resistance. So, when eaters reject the meat-eating habits of their community or return to the indigenous cuisine of their ancestors, those eaters are deliberately rejecting a common diet and food traditions in favor of one more in line with their ideological or other beliefs. By rejecting food, in other words, eaters reject the culture that created it. The article “The Raw and the Rotten” explores one form of cultural resistance, punk cuisine, and the Black Cat Café in Seattle that promoted it. The author uses the “culinary triangle” of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, where “raw” is a natural state, “rotten” a corrupted natural state, and “cooked” refers to transformation by culture.

What characteristics do punks associate with “cooked” (mainstream) food?

In punk cuisine, the degree to which food is processed, sterilized, brand-named, and fetishized¹ is the degree to which it is corrupted and removed from nature; the degree to which it is corrupted, distanced from nature and “cooked.” Punks describe a world under the assault of homogenized foods and culture, a world of vast monocropped² cornfields and televisions lit with prefabricated corporate “infotainment.” The two ideas are united in the borrowed agricultural word, monoculture, and resisted in many ways, including use of what we might call raw foods. Whereas industrial agriculture is associated with genetic engineering, monocropping, pesticides, cages, chemical fertilizers, and commodification³, raw food tends toward wildness and complexity.

Punks perceive in everyday American food a... destroyer of locality and diversity. The cooking of foods, to which punks so vociferously⁴ object, is an outcome of the industrialization and commercialization of food production.

Punks see industrialized food production not as a convenience they desire, but as one of the hallmarks of monoculture. The anarchist idea of monoculture plays on the “culture” part of the term, thus expanding it to cover not only agriculture, but a near-totality of Mainstream culture. For punks, monoculture encapsulates⁵ the idea that societies around the world are being devoured and homogenized⁶ by consumerism and by multinational corporations; it invokes the idea that humans everywhere increasingly eat, dream, work, are gendered,

1) Fetishized: Unhealthily obsessed with.

2) Monocropping and monoculture refer to the practice of raising only one crop or animal on a tract of farmland. This practice requires significant inputs of chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, and inevitably degrades the quality of soil.

3) Commodification: the practice of transforming all resources into goods for sale.

4) Vociferously: Loudly and assertively.

5) Encapsulates: Captures.

6) Homogenized: Made the same.



- Use the space below to note key ideas, themes, or surprising takeaways from the reading.



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and otherwise live according to a narrow and hegemonic⁷ culture sold to them by global capitalism. Across the globe, punks argue, humans are losing their cultural, ecological, temporal, and regional specificity. Among other things, this means that people are often eating foods grown and flavored elsewhere: people everywhere are increasingly alienated⁸ from that which keeps them alive.

Raw food, which is to say organic, home-grown, bartered⁹ food, was one way punks resisted the spread of monoculture. . . . At the 'Cat people who might be called punks contrasted the synthetic,¹⁰ processed, and destructive diet of the Mainstream with their own, and declared that their bodies and minds were healthier for it, unpolluted by toxic chemicals and culture.

How do punks resist Mainstream “cooked” food?

THE PUNK CHALLENGE OF PATRIARCHY

Indeed, vegetarianism is for many punks at least partly a feminist practice—as such it also reveals ideological fissures¹¹ within punk culture. Meat, with its prestige and caloric content and proximity to physical violence, has been widely used in affiliation with masculinity (Adams 1990; Rifkin 1992). Yet even within the greater punk subculture, which has become critical of both sexism and meat-eating (O’Hara 1999), some punks continue to produce an overtly sexist, masculinist subculture (Nguyen 1999); one that is also more associated with eating meat. In other words, meat, for some punks, is a way to challenge feminism in punk and to reinsert masculine power. . . .

For most punks, however, meat-eating is collaborative with¹² an unjust social order, one punks typically define as a patriarchy. Given that punks oppose social hierarchies, and given that they locate themselves in staunchly patriarchal societies, they generally find the need to subvert male supremacy in everyday life. Vegetarianism, widely stigmatized¹³ as an Oriental and feminine practice, helps to differentiate punks from the Mainstream, neatly corresponds to punk egalitarian values, and offers a direct challenge to the gender relations perceived in meat.

PUNK VEGANISM

At the Black Cat Café, punks said that to eat animal-based products was not only unhealthy, it was to participate in the bondage and murder of animals. Many people in the scene were concerned about the cruel conditions of “factory-farms,” wherein animals were kept in small quarters, pumped with hormones and antibiotics, and “tortured” in various ways. For Cory, meat-eating was a part of the suburban Christian hypocrisy¹⁴ he grew up with:

Mostly it was just their concept of morality. ‘Cause I could see things that they had done that were obviously immoral in my eyes. Like for one thing, eating meat. It says right there in the Bible, it says, ‘Don’t kill.’ You know? It says ‘Don’t kill’, and then when they’re eating meat, they’re full of shit. They go out and hunt, eat slaughtered meat—meat from factory farms.

7) Hegemonic: Dominant.

8) Alienated: Isolated or separated from.

9) Bartered: Traded rather than purchased.

10) Synthetic: Processed from man-made rather than natural materials.

11) Fissures: Divisions.

12) Is collaborative with: Cooperates with.

13) Stigmatized: Defined negatively.

14) Hypocrisy: Violation of one’s expressed moral beliefs.



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THEFT OF YUPPIE AND NATURAL FOODS

Not far from the Black Cat Café, Seattle hosted a variety of “natural foods” retailers, who attracted both the contempt¹⁵ and the stomachs of punks. Such places offered organically grown foods, but marketed these products to an upscale clientele...

[Natural foods were] closer to the raw forms of food that punks preferred: organic, bulk, and whole grain. [But] the high prices and upscale marketing represented the cooking of foods; the heightened state of gastronomic¹⁶ fetishism from which punks felt alienated. If these foods could somehow be cleansed of their commodification, they would be perfectly suited to the punk culinary system.

Thus, many punks, whether as workers or customers, targeted “natural foods” supermarkets for theft (c.f. Himmelstein and Schweser 1998: 18-21, 24). Indeed, the kitchen of the Black Cat Café was routinely stocked with products stolen from chain supermarkets and “natural foods” stores, as were the kitchens of many punk squats and homes. We might, then, declare an axiom¹⁷ of punk culinary geometry: in the act of being stolen heavily cooked food is transformed into a more nutritive, gustable¹⁸ state. Stolen foods are outlaw foods, contaminated or rotten to the Mainstream, a delicacy in punk cuisine.

DUMPSTER DIVING

Each night American supermarkets and restaurants fill their dumpsters with food, and each night punks arrive to claim some of it. Unlike raw foods, dumpstered food tends to be commercialized, non-organic, and highly-processed. Baked goods, donuts, produce, vegetables, pizza, and an array of “junk” food are snatched up by punks, who might otherwise disdain¹⁹ such foods. Yet in the process of passing through a dumpster, such foods are cleansed or rotted, as it were, and made nutritious to the punk being.

Ironically, people are hassled by security guards, store employees, and police merely for taking things out of a dumpster. So, not only did the Mainstream waste food, it protected its garbage with armed guards.

Eating food from dumpsters is, for a generalizable American whole, repulsive. Food in a trashcan becomes spiritually and materially polluted, and it is put there in a rotten state. It goes beyond the pale of Whiteness to eat food from the trash (only untouchables, such as the homeless, eat from trash). So for those punks who were raised White and/or “middle class,” dumpsters and dumpstered food serve to dirty their bodies, to help tarnish their affiliation²⁰ with a White bourgeois power structure. In this sense, the downward descent into a dumpster is literally an act of downward mobility. Moreover, the very act of eating food deemed rotten is, in this sense, a forceful critique of the powers-that-be. On an ecologically strained planet home to two billion hungry people, punks see their reclamation of rotten food as a profoundly radical act.

15) Contempt: Scorn

16) Gastronomic: Food related.

17) Axiom: Principle.

18) Gutable: Edible

19) Disdain: Perceive as unworthy.

20) Affiliation: Association.



