Overview

Has the role of popular music and related forms of expressive culture changed in the twenty-first century? What are the implications of music and music-making increasingly being mediated through and realized within global networks of circulation and exchange? Have capitalist interests compromised music’s ability to be a meaningful vehicle for social critique and contestation? Can new technologies and ways of making music empower marginalized communities or are they the new “opiate of the masses”? What happens when popular music is reconceptualized primarily as an economic resource, in theory harnessing the power of capitalism on behalf of the subaltern?

This seminar will explore how different schools of thought and intellectual traditions have sought to grapple with these questions, ultimately evaluating the potential contribution that each can make to the ethnographic study of music and popular culture. We will begin by examining several foundational texts, including works by Marx, Gramsci, Williams, Bourdieu, and the Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools. Attention will then shift to contemporary popular music research in the fields of ethnomusicology, musicology, popular culture studies, anthropology, communications, and folklore. We will place particular emphasis on issues concerning the production and consumption of popular culture, the impact of globalization on local forms of music making, the relationship of popular music to the so-called creative industries, the implications of the emergence of new media technologies, and the commodification of musical forms of knowledge under neoliberalism.

Course Objectives

- To gain an increased understanding of the challenges associated with the study of popular music and culture at the turn of the twenty-first century.
- To introduce students to some of the seminal social theory texts dealing with popular culture and cultural production under late capitalism.
- To analyze the potential usefulness of these texts towards the ethnographic study of music and other forms of expressive culture.
- To improve critical reading and writing skills as well as the ability to synthesize complex ideas both in written and oral forms.
- To learn how to evaluate, adapt and apply some of these theoretical frameworks to case studies related to each student’s intended research area.

Course Website

This course has an Oncourse website. In this site students will find all the readings, assignments, and other supplemental materials needed for the class. The site will also have a forum section where students will post their reactions to the week’s readings in anticipation of the class meeting. Class grades will also be posted in this site.

Attendance

Given the small number of class meetings during the semester and the fact that each one is designed to build onto the next one, class attendance is mandatory. Students who miss more than two classes during the semester will
have their attendance/participation score lowered by half (50%). Students who miss four or more classes will receive a zero for their attendance/participation grade.

Note: If a student cannot attend class it is his or her responsibility to make arrangements so that any assignments due be turned ahead of time.

Reading Assignments and Required Texts

Each week, students are responsible for thoroughly reading all of the scheduled pieces and come to class ready to discuss them.


Pieces not included in the required texts will be available in the Resources section of Oncourse.

Writing Assignments

All written assignments will be submitted electronically via Oncourse. Throughout the semester, there will be three different types of writing assignments:

1. **Position Statements**: In weeks when we will have multiple articles assigned, students will prepare a 250-300 word Position Statement. These statements will be in response to a weekly question that will be posted or issue that will be raised at the end of the previous class. Position Statements will be submitted electronically via Oncourse **the morning before class by 9am**. Position Statements will be graded in a five-point scale. The final Position Statement grade will be the percentage obtained by dividing the total number of points received by the total number of possible points. Guidelines for writing the Position Statements will be posted in the Oncourse site.

2. **Reflection Papers**: In the weeks that we will be reading a single book, students will be asked to write short (3-4 pages) Reflection Papers. These papers should accomplish the following: a) identify and synthesize the central argument of the book; b) assess how well the author’s argument is supported by the data and/or analysis he or she provides; and, c) provide your own critical assessment of how this book contributes to the different types of scholarship, issues and ideas being covered in class. Reflection Papers will be due by **12 noon on the day the book is scheduled to be discussed**. Reflection Papers will be graded on a 100 point scale.

3. **Final Assignment**: Students will be asked to submit a Final Assignment at the end of the semester, choosing from one of the following three options: a) research paper that applies some of the ideas covered in the semester to a particular case study or theoretical issue; b) a literature review which provides an in-depth analysis of 6-8 key works not covered at length during the course; c) an annotated bibliography on a particular issue or topic associated with the course that includes a brief critical analysis of 15-18 sources as well as an introductory overview mapping out particular themes and trends within that particular body of works. Regardless of the option chosen, Final Assignments should be 18-20 pages in length. A three-page proposal that includes a prospective bibliography will at by **12 noon on Wednesday, October 8**. The completed assignment will be due by **12 noon on Thursday, December 18, 2014**.
Grading

The grade for this course will be distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Statements</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Assignment</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Grade 100%

Students are encouraged to keep track of their own performance in the class through the Oncourse site. Failure to turn in written work on time will result in lowering your score by 3 points per day; assignments that are more than a week late will not be accepted.

Discussion/Reading Schedule (Subject to Modification)

Week 1 (Aug 27) – Introduction: Definitions

- Can We Get Rid of the ‘Popular’ in Popular Music? (International Advisory Editors 2005)

Week 2 (Sept. 4) – Marxist Foundations

- Bourgeois and Proletarian (excerpt from The Manifesto of the Communist Party) (Marx and Engels 1978, 133–145)
- Capital, Vol. I (Marx 1990)
  - The Commodity (Pt. I, Ch. 1)
  - The Process of Exchange (Pt. I, Ch. 2)
  - The Labour Process and the Valorization Process (Pt. III, Ch. 7)
  - Productive and Unproductive Labour (Appendix)
- Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State (Gramsci 2009)
- Culture; Hegemony; Ideology; Popular (Williams 1985, 87–93; 144–146; 153–157; 236–238)

Week 3 (Sept. 11) – Theorizing Mass Culture

- Culture Industry Reconsidered (Adorno 2005)
- The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (Benjamin 1988)
- On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening (Adorno 1998)
- Distinction & The Aristocracy of Culture (Bourdieu 2009)
- Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture (Jameson 2005)
- Notes on Deconstructing “The Popular” (Hall 2009)

Week 4 (Sept. 18) – Poststructuralist and Postmodernist Reinterpretations

- What is Enlightenment? (Foucault 1984)
- “Performatve Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (Butler 1988)
- The Precession of Simulacra (Baudrillard 2009)
- Feminism & the Principles of Poststructuralism (Weedon 2009)
- “Postmodernism and ‘The Other Side’” (Hebdige 1986)
- Postmodern Blackness (hooks 2009)
Week 5 (Sept. 25) – Early Theories of Popular Music

- “Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice” (Tagg 1982)
- “A Theoretical Model for the Sociomusical Analysis of Popular Musics” (Shepherd 1982)
- Toward an Aesthetic of Popular Music (Frith 1987)
- Perspectives on the Study of Non-Western Popular Musics (Manuel 1988)
- “Popular Music Analysis and Musicology: Bridging the Gap” (Middleton 1993)
- Talk and Text: Popular Music and Ethnomusicology (Stokes 2003)

Week 6 (Oct. 2) – Music and Culture Industries in the Twenty-First Century

- Marxist Music Analysis without Adorno: Popular Music and Urban Geography (Kirms 2003)
- Introduction: Theory – Some Signposts (Lash and Lury 2007, chap. 1)
- Culture and Creative Industries (Hesmondhalgh 2008)
- “Rethinking the Music Industry” (Williamson and Cloonan 2007)
- “Rampant Reproduction and Digital Democracy: Shifting Landscapes of Music Production and 'Piracy' in Bolivia” (Stobart 2010)
- “The ‘One Man Band’ and Entrepreneurial Selfhood in Neoliberal Culture” (Chapman 2013)

Week 7 (Oct. 9) – Music, Creativity and Neoliberalism

- How Crowdsourcing will Change Music Forever (Westergren 2014)
- BOStunes: Boston City Hall Crowdsourcing Local Music So You Can Jam Out When Put On Hold (DeLuca 2014)
- “User-Generated Content, Free Labour and the Cultural Industries” (Hesmondhalgh 2010)
- “Introduction: Music, Music Making and Neoliberalism” (León 2014)
- “Neoliberal Logics of Voice: Playback Singing and Public Femaleness in South India” (Weidman 2014)
- “Composing on Commission - Entrepreneurship and the Changing Social Basis of Popular Music Collaboration in Postsocialist Tirana, Albania” (Tochka 2014)
- “The Ethics of Success: Paradoxes of the Suffering Neoliberal Self in the Andean Peruvian Music Industry (Butterworth 2014)
- “Refining the Nation's ‘New Gold’: Music, Youth Development and Neoliberalism in South Africa” (Whittaker 2014)

Week 8 (Oct. 16) – Case Study 1

- The Ringtone Dialectic: Economy and Cultural Form (Gopinath 2013)

Week 9 (Oct. 23) – Music, Commodities and the Politics of Style and Race

- Subculture (Hebdige 2005)
- “Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship between Youth, Style and Musical Taste” (Bennett 1999)
- “Living the Punk Lifestyle in Jakarta” (Wallach 2008)
- Race Records and Old-Time Music: The Creation of Two Marketing Categories in the 1920s (Miller 2010, chap. 6)
- Black Folk and Hillbilly Pop: Industry Enforcement of the Musical Color Line (Miller 2010, chap. 7)
- Reimagining Pop Tunes as Folk Songs: The Ascension of the Folklore Paradigm (Miller 2010, 8)

Week 10 (Oct. 30) – Case Study 2

- Thug Life: Race, Gender and the Meaning of Hip-Hop (Jeffries 2010)
Week 11 (Nov. 6) – Gender, Politics and Performativity

- Rock and Sexuality (Frith and McRobbie 1990)
- Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister? (hooks 1992)
- “Gender Politics in Caribbean Popular Music: Consumer Perspectives and Academic Interpretation” (Manuel 1998)
- Tears at the Night Club (Quiroga 2000, chap. 6)
- “Women Who ‘Do Elvis’: Authenticity, Masculinity and Masquerade” (Brittan 2006)
- “Beyond Blood Brothers: Queer Bruce” Springsteen (Fanshel 2013)

Week 12 – NO CLASS (SEM CONFERENCE)

Week 13 (Nov. 20) – Case Study 3

- Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda (Vargas 2012)

Week 14 – NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY)

Week 15 (Dec. 4) – Case Study 4

- The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music (Stokes 2010)

Week 16 (Dec. 11) – Course Wrap-up

References


Williams, Raymond. 1985. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. Rev Sub. Oxford University Press, USA.