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Office hours by appointment
10:50-12:30pm Tuesday
403 Philosophy

Theories and Methods of Popular Music Studies

This class will introduce students to the theories and methodologies that have been used to analyze popular music and society. The goal of the class is to begin to develop a sophisticated interlocking set of methodological approaches by which to interrogate popular music, and to develop a working understanding of contemporary theories for engagement with popular culture that can be applied across many disciplines. In this class we will read texts about popular music from the fields of musicology, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, journalism, literature, and policy studies, and each student will conduct a small semester long inquiry of a specific popular music genre of their choice.

How we will proceed

The course will proceed in two distinct ways. The first will be through instructor led lecture on the critical theories employed in various forms of popular music analysis and class discussion of the theories as they relate to assigned texts. Students are responsible for reading the assigned text(s) for the day of the class.

The second part of class will be ongoing discussion based on students' independently conducted semester long research. Each student in class will pick a genre of popular music with which she is interested, familiar, or annoyed. For each week, in addition to preparing for class discussion, you will be responsible for bringing in examples from your own genre of music that you think would be good for analysis with the theories employed that week. You must have a piece of evidence to support your argument – be it a specific experience or a piece of media. You may email me links for youtube videos and MP3s until 9am on the day of class, but otherwise please bring in a CD or DVD of the media you wish to discuss (www.zamzar.com for Youtube vids).

After the class discussion, each student is responsible for writing one paragraph of analysis on their genre using assignment question, which is drawn from the theoretical model discussed that week. The paragraph will then be due at the beginning of next week's class either as a printed page or as an email submitted PRIOR to the beginning of class.

Colloquium requirements: (at least) 7 paragraphs

Exam requirements: (at least) 7 out of 12 paragraphs plus either a four page end of term paper OR an 8-10 page end of year paper.

Writing guidelines: All writing done for this class should be double spaced, include page numbers, 12pt font with 1" margins, and be set in Times New Roman or equivalent font. British or American spelling acceptable. Please proof read carefully.

(All course materials will be provided to students as PDFs, MP3s or links)

Course Schedule

September 29 – What is “popular” in popular music?

Introduction to the class and syllabus; Answers to the question of “what is popular music.”

ASSIGNMENT (all must do): Pick a genre in which you are interested. Do some preliminary research about this genre. Write a paragraph in which you describe for whom the genre popular and some hypotheses about the circumstances of its rise to popularity.

October 6– The Aesthetics and affect of popular music

Frith, Simon. 1987. "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music." In *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*. Edited by Richard Leppert and Susan McClary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 133-149.

<http://books.google.cz/books?id=bxsUdjSnGZcC&lpg=PA32&ots=5ShM3oOGXB&dq=Towards%20an%20Aesthetic%20of%20Popular%20Music&hl=en&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q=Towards%20an%20Aesthetic%20of%20Popular%20Music&f=false>

ASSIGNMENT: Write two paragraphs. In the first, position your genre’s aesthetic worth using specific criteria. In the second, explain why some groups of people would find your genre distasteful and give specific arguments about why they would do so.

October 13 – Textual analysis: music theory

Bernard, Jonathan. “The Musical World(s?) of Frank Zappa” *Expression in Pop/Rock Music: Criticism and Analytical Essays*. Routledge, 2008.

Frith, Simon. “Why Do Songs Have Words?” In *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Simon Frith. London: Routledge, 2004

ASSIGNMENT: Make a transcription of 30 seconds of a key track/song/movement from your genre. Write a paragraph analysis that describes which aspects of the sound could and could not be represented in the notation system you used.

October 20– Textual analysis: music criticism and literature & Reading music media 9am-12:30 DOUBLE CLASS

Willis, Ellen. “Beginning to See the Light.” *Stranded*, 1977. (starts on 33 of the PDF)

Reynolds, Simon. “War In the Jungle.” In *the Popular Music Studies Reader*. Routledge (New York), 2006.

AMP, Miss. “Kevin Blechdom.” In *Plan B Magazine* 2007.

ASSIGNMENT: Find three reviews or articles about one album or artist in your genre. Try to find three articles that are widely different in their writing approach and opinion. Often you can find reviews on an artist's own webpage but be aware that artists do not often have negative reviews on their pages. Print out the three articles and turn them in (or send links) along with an paragraph that compares the way that the three writers approach the music and musicians

Hanke, Bob. "Yo Quiero Mi MTV" Making Music Television for Latin America.

Shaer, Matthew. 2006. "Die, Pitchfork, Die! The indie music site that everyone loves to hate." slate.com 28 November 2006. Available at <http://www.slate.com/id/2154469/>

ASSIGNMENT: What is the most important medium for the dissemination of discussion about your genre? Look at the most powerful media for this genre and investigate its policies for deciding which artists to support.

October 27/November 3 – no class

**November 10 – Production in the Culture Industries
DOUBLE CLASS**

Frith, Simon. 1987. "The Industrialization of Popular Music." In *Popular Music and Communication*. Edited by James Lull. London: Sage Publications, 53-79.

Auslander, Philip. "Liveness: Performance and the anxiety of simulation." *Popular Music Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2006.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a short analysis of a key player in your genre's music industry and discuss how the institution's decision making affects the musical community.

Re/productions, circulation, and listening

Manuel, Peter. 1993. "The Impact of Cassettes on the International Recording Industry." In *Cassette Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 21-36.

Sterne, Jonathan. 1997. "Sounds Like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space." *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 41, No. 1.

Novak David. 2007. 2.5 by 6 Metres of Space: Japanese Music Coffeehouses and Experimental Practices of Listening. *Popular Music* 27:15-34.

ASSIGNMENT: Discuss the historical moment in which your genre became important in your community and how musical technologies shaped that music's circulation.

November 17–no class

November 24- Cultural ownership and the globalization of "world" popular musics

9am-12:30 DOUBLE CLASS

Malan, Rian. "In The Jungle." Rolling Stone. May 25, 2000.

Jones, Keith. "Punk In Africa" film synopsis. 2009.

Meinjtjes, Louise. "Paul Simon's Graceland: South Africa and the Mediation of Musical Meaning" *Ethnomusicology* 34 (1990): 37-73.

Guest Speaker: Keith Jones, film maker for *Punk In Africa* (forthcoming, 2010), *Durban Poison* (2007) and *Fighter* (2000).

ASSIGNMENT: Discuss the sources of your genre's music and culture. What are the implications of placing this culture into circulation?

Subcultural and resistance theories

Shank, Barry. "Punk Rock at Raul's." *Popular Music Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2006.

McRobbie, Angela and Jenny Garber. "Girls and Subcultures." In *The Subcultures Reader*. Routledge, 1997.

ASSIGNMENT: Discuss the way in which audience members of your genre position themselves relative to political or corporate power structures.

December 1–Music's role in constructing and negotiating ethnicity/race/nationality

Regev, Motti. 2004. "Rock Aesthetics, Israeliness and Globalization," in *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies, Identities, and Challenges*, edited by: Adriana Kemp, Uri Ram, David Newman, and Oren Yiftachel. Sussex University Press, pp.188-200

Rose, Tricia. "Voices From the Margins: Rap Music and Contemporary Cultural Production."

Helbig, Ada. "Hip-Hop, African Migration, and Racialized Class Identities in Ukraine" forthcoming.

ASSIGNMENT: Discuss the way in which fans of the genre you are studying incorporate the musician's performance of identity into their own daily lives.

December 8– Pop as performance: gender and sexuality

Wald, Gale. Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth. *Signs*, Vol. 23, No. 3, *Feminisms and Youth Cultures* (Spring, 1998), pp. 585-610 Published by: The University of Chicago Press.

Carby, Hazel V. "It Just Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues." *Radical America* 20 (1986): 9-22.

ASSIGNMENT: Find three sources that describe the live performance of an artist in your genre and discuss how the authors use ideas about the artist and audience's gender and sexuality to inform their understanding of the event.

December 15 – Strategies for new media analysis

Porcello, Thomas. 1991. "The Ethics of Digital Audio-Sampling: Engineers' Discourse." *Popular Music* 10(1):69-84.

Thompson, Clive. 2007. "Sex, Drugs and Updating Your Blog." *New York Times Magazine*, 13 May 2007.
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/13/magazine/13audience-t.html?_r=1

Marshall, Wayne. "We Use So Many Snares." *Wayneandwax.com* August 4, 2005.
<http://wayneandwax.blogspot.com/2005/08/we-use-so-many-snares.html>

ASSIGNMENT: Write a short analysis of how one of the artists in your genre has changed her musical and business practices because of digital technologies and media circulations.

(December 22- No class, Happy Holidays!)

January 5–Creativity in the Remix era

Viewing and discussion of the documentary "Copyright Criminals: This Is a Sampling Sport"
<http://www.copyrightcriminals.com/>

ASSIGNMENT: Discuss "the archive" from which your genre borrows sounds and structures. Choose one artist in your genre and discuss how she/he uses pre-existing sonic materials as part of his or her musical practice. What are the ethical standards for this use within the musical community? Do the ethics differ than do the laws of the artist's home region?