Music 48
Seminar in Popular Music: Popular Music and Cultural Identity
Amherst College • Spring 2009
Tuesday/Thursday • 2pm-3:20pm • Arms Music Center 102

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 10am-12pm; and by appointment

Course Description:

Music often serves as one of the primary ways that we create and maintain identities. Our social groups--peers, colleagues, acquaintances--are often determined by shared affinities for specific musical styles, artists, and the world views they come to represent. Yet music is also frequently used to catalyze various forms of social and political activism, challenge our relationship to society and structures of power, and initiate change. This seminar explores the nature of popular music and its relationship to culture, politics, and identity. The first part of the course surveys the discourse of popular music studies and the various trends in cultural studies that have prompted new ways of examining the relationship between popular music and social and cultural identities. We will use this theoretical landscape to analyze an array of popular music cultures in and beyond the United States. The second part of the course focuses on developing multifaceted research projects that put these theories to use. Students will be encouraged to combine ethnographic research (interviews, location-based research) with historical and critical analysis to generate a unique, personal project exploring the relationship between music and identity.

Required Text:

Course Reader (fully online):
The course reader is a wide-ranging compilation of articles and chapters from popular music studies and cultural studies. Most of the readings correspond with weekly discussion themes; some of the readings are iconic texts in their fields. These readings are intended to provoke class discussions and should be used as gateways into larger discourses. It is important that you complete the readings listed for each week BEFORE the first class meeting of that week. The course reader is available exclusively on the course website (under E-reserves).

Listening and Video Examples:
We will interpret recorded sound and video as “texts” capable of detailed critical analysis relating to a wide variety of theoretical, social, and cultural issues. Important listening and video examples related to class discussions will be made available online through the E-reserves link on the course website. You are expected to engage the listening and video examples as a form of homework.
Reserve Items and Streaming Videos:
Several additional items have been placed on reserve at Frost Library and the Music Library. The majority of items are at the Music Library. These include books, recordings, and videos related to assignments and course topics. In addition, several course-related films may be viewed through Amherst College’s streaming video service and can be found in the E-reserves listings on the course website.

Attendance and Participation:
Attendance and completion of reading and listening assignments are fundamental aspects of the learning process. It is expected that you come to class prepared to discuss the key ideas of the readings. There will be no make-up allowed for missed deadlines. If you foresee a scheduling issue with assignment due dates, please contact me and we will work things out (in advance). If you miss a class meeting, it is best to come to my office hours to learn about what you missed (rather than requesting information over email).

Course Blog:
A major component of your participation grade is regular engagement of the Course Blog. Each week you are asked to make a post according to specific guidelines and comment on at least two posts by other students. Weekly blog prompts are posted each Monday on the Course Blog. Initial posts (answering the questions) must be submitted no later than 5pm on Friday of that week; responses to other student posts must occur no later than 8pm on Sunday of that week. Details to be discussed in class.

Research Project:
The cornerstone of your experience in this course is a multi-stage, semester-long research project that culminates in a class presentation and written document. There are four components to the project: proposal (due online by 8pm on Thursday March 12), comments on other proposals (due online by 8pm on Thursday April 2), a class presentation (occurring during the weeks of April 27 and May 4), and a written document (due via email no later than 8pm on Monday May 11). The proposal is submitted through the course website and available for peer comments and suggestions. Details and guidelines for all components of the research project will be posted on the Assignments page on the course website. Be creative!

Writing Assignments:
In addition to weekly Course Blog assignments, there are two short writing assignments. The first will be discussed at the first class meeting and is due via email by 5pm on Thursday January 29 (yes, the first Thursday of the class!). Because this course culminates with a substantial writing-based research project, it is essential that we focus on writing skills. Clear written communication is an extremely valuable skill that takes considerable practice and effort. All writing assignments, Course Blog posts, and other written work in the course should be carefully constructed and edited closely. The first writing assignment begins this process. The second writing assignment is due after Spring Recess. All assignment prompts will appear on the Assignments page on the course website.

Submitting Course Work:
All coursework must be submitted electronically. Instructions will accompany each assignment; sometimes you will submit assignments via email, while others will be posted on the Course Blog. Contact me if your submission includes audio, video, or other media/attachments.
Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation 20%
Writing Assignment 1 5%
Writing Assignment 2 5%
Research Project Proposal 10%
Research Project Presentation 20%
Research Project Written Document 40%

Grading Scale:

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Class Schedule:

1/26-2/1   Towards an Understanding of “Culture”

Readings:
• Raymond Williams. The Analysis of Culture.
• Stuart Hall. Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies.
• Stuart Hall. New Ethnicities.
• Paul Bowman. McDeconstruction, the Popular: Deconstructing ‘Deconstructing.’

Writing Assignment 1 due Thursday January 29

2/2-2/8   “Meaning” in Popular Music

Readings:
• Peter Dunbar-Hall: Semiotics as a Method for the Study of Popular Music.
• David Brackett. Introduction to Interpreting Popular Music.

2/9-2/15   Popular Music and Ethnography

Readings:
• Sara Cohen. Ethnography and Popular Music Studies.
• Line Granier and Jocelyn Guilbault. "Authority" Revisited: The "Other" in Anthropology and Popular Music Studies
• Ian Maxwell. The Curse of Fandom: Insiders, Outsiders and Ethnography
• Timothy Cooley, Catherine Meizel, and Nasir Syed. Virtual Fieldwork: Three Case Studies.

Required Office Hours Meeting – Information on Assignments Page on Course Website

2/16-2/22   The Music Industry

Readings:
• Simon Frith. Look! Hear!: The Uneasy Relationship of Music and Television.
• Neal Ullestad. Diverse Rock Rebellions Subvert Mass Media Hegemony.
• Andrew Blake. The Power Circuit.

Videos:
• Money for Nothing
• Merchants of Cool

2/23-3/1   World Beat and the Marketing of the “Local”

Readings:
• Timothy Taylor. Popular Musics and Globalization.
• George Lipsitz. World Cities and World Beat: Low-Wage Labor and Transnational Culture.
3/2-3/8 Genre

Readings:
- Fabian Holt. Introduction to *Genre/In/Popular/Music*.
- Choose a second chapter to read in Holt.****

3/9-3/15 Gender and the Body in Popular Music

Readings:
- Robert Walser. Forging Masculinity: Heavy Metal Sounds and Images of Gender.

**Research Project Proposal Due by 8pm on Thursday March 12**

3/16-3/22 SPRING RECESS

3/23-3/29 Race in Popular Music

Readings:
- Tricia Rose. *A Style Nobody Can Deal With: Politics, Style and the Postindustrial City in Hip Hop*.
- Ballantine. Re-Thinking ‘Whiteness’: Identity, Change and ‘White’ Popular Music in Post Apartheid South Africa.
- bell hooks. Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister?

**Writing Assignment 2 Due Thursday March 24**

3/30-4/5 Nationalism – the Obama Song

Readings:
- Boulton. The Popular Geopol…
- Lawrence Grossberg. Rockin’ With Reagan, or the Mainstreaming of Postmodernity.

**Comments on Other Research Project Proposals Due by 8pm on Thursday April 2**
4/6-4/12  Transnationalism: New Forms of Globalization in Popular Music

Readings:
• Michael Eldrige. There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow.
• Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Lanholt. The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field.

4/13-4/19  Class: Popular Music and Cultural Capital

Readings:
• George Lipsitz. We Know What Time It Is: Race, Class and Youth Culture in the Nineties.
• Theodor Adorno. On Popular Music.
• Pierre Bourdieu. Distinction and the Aristocracy of Culture.

4/20-4/26  Authenticity

Readings:
• Charles Taylor. The Politics of Recognition.
• Mike Alleyne. White Reggae: Cultural Dilution in the Record Industry.
• Allan Moore. Authenticity as Authentication.

4/27-5/3  Catch Up and Research Presentations

Film Screening – Music Inn: A Documentary Film – Monday April 27, 5pm

5/4-5/8  Research Presentations

Research Project Due at 5pm on Monday May 11