

**Communication 3653**  
**Popular Forms of Public Communication:**  
**Popular Music and Popular Culture**  
**Fall 1995**

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This semester, Communication 3653 will focus on the subject of popular music, including rock 'n' roll, rhythm 'n' blues, soul, disco, punk, rap, grunge, and the like. Perhaps the best way to explain what this course is about, however, is to say a few words about what it *isn't*:

(1) This is not a history course. Any serious attempt to map out all the major trends, artists, genres, and events in the past half century of Anglo-American popular music would require at least a semester, but could accomplish very little else in that time.

(2) This is not a music appreciation course. My goal is not to demonstrate that rock and roll (or rap, or speed metal, etc.) is somehow the aesthetic equal of chamber music, opera, or other types of "classical" music, nor am I interested in "training" you to be a connoisseur of a particular musical style.

(3) This is not a course in music theory. Musicological jargon can be found in the readings, but only on rare occasions, and failing to know the difference between be-bop and a B-flat should not prevent anyone from doing well.

While all three of these concerns -- history, aesthetics, and analysis -- *will* crop up in important ways during the semester, the course's primary focus is the subject of "culture": What is culture? How is it related to *popular* culture? Of what value is popular culture -- and to whom is it valuable? And why should we study this popular culture stuff anyway? Bear in mind, though, that few (if any) of the questions we'll address this semester have easy answers. How well you do in this class will depend, not on your ability to provide the "right" answers, but on your ability to think *critically* about the role of popular music (and, by extension, other forms of popular culture) in contemporary society and your ability to *argue* whatever position(s) you take well.

**Important caveat:** Do not think that because this is a course in popular music (i.e., something commonly regarded as fun) that it will thus be a "party" course you can blow off. While I hope the course will be interesting (and even fun), the fact that so many people can (and do) take pleasure in this music is what makes it important enough for us to take seriously. The bulk of the course is ostensibly concerned with the ways in which popular music is made, distributed, and used, but our study of popular music is *not* an end unto itself; rather it is a means by which we can begin to address broader issues of culture and cultural politics. This course will demand a great deal of reading, writing, and (most importantly) thinking on your part, none of which will go smoothly for you if you assume that you can simply bull your way through because "it's only rock and roll."

## Required course materials:

### (1) Photocopied essays

Because both the textbooks I'd hoped to use for this course have gone out of print, all the reading for the semester will be from photocopied articles and essays. Most of these can be found in a coursepack available from Pro Copy (5209 E. Fowler); the remainder will be placed on reserve in the main USF library.

[N.B.: At the time this syllabus was finalized, permission to reprint roughly half the required articles in the Pro Copy coursepack was still pending. Thus, there may be articles not listed here as being on reserve that, in fact, have wound up there in the end.]

### (2) Music, music, and more music

Because there isn't enough class time to play all the musical examples relevant to the course and still hold fruitful discussions, I will be putting nine 100-minute audio-cassettes on reserve in the University Media Center. The basic idea here is to make sure that everyone in the class is familiar with a certain slice of post-war popular music. These tapes are by no means a definitive anthology of all the important music or artists of the past 50 years. In fact, many of the most influential artists are *under*-represented, as I'm assuming that most of you have been exposed to them at least briefly. Instead, these tapes contain a number of important examples of various artists and styles that even the most ardent music fan among you may be unfamiliar with.

Undoubtedly, some of you will look at the track listings for these tapes and say, "Hey, why isn't there anything by [insert your fave artist's name here]?" You have a chance to make up for such oversights by contributing to a tenth tape that will be put on reserve later this semester, and that will also be *required* listening. If you have a song you want to see included on this tape, you need to provide me with (a) a reasonably clean-sounding copy of it (all tapes/CDs/records provided for this purpose will be returned ASAP) and (b) a brief paragraph explaining why you think the song is important enough to make the whole class listen to it (see the liner notes for tapes 1-9 for examples of such paragraphs). Due to space limitations, no song more than five minutes long will be accepted for this tape.

## Grading schedule:

Name-That-Tune quizzes (3-10 of them, dates <i>not</i> to be announced)	10%
Two (2) 3-4 page response papers	20%
Midterm exam	30%
Final exam	30%
Attendance/participation	10%

## Name-That-Tune quizzes:

There will be 3-10 of these during the course of the semester, with the precise number and dates deliberately *not* announced in advance. (Consider this incentive to (a) keep up on your listening and (b) to show up on time for class regularly.) None of these quizzes will take place earlier than 18 September (thus giving you all a chance to get ahead on your listening), and there will not be more than one quiz in any given week. There will be no make-up Name-That-Tune quizzes. Period.

Each quiz will be given at the start of class and will consist of 10-15 song snippets (each roughly 10-20 seconds long) that you'll be asked to identify by artist and title. Any given quiz will be based on *all* the tapes assigned up to that date *and* on any musical selections played in class to that point. For example, a quiz given on October 16 could include songs from any of tapes 1-5 and/or songs played in class through October 11.

## Response papers:

You will write two 3-4 page papers, each of which will be a *critical response* to one or more of the assigned readings for the course. The due dates here are (somewhat) flexible. The first such paper must be in response to material covered in sections 4-7 (i.e., from September 25 through October 18), while the second must address readings from sections 8-10 (i.e., from November 1 through December 6). In both cases, you *must* turn in your essay *before* we've discussed the reading in question in class.

These essays should *not* be mere summaries of the reading; rather, they should consist of thoughtful, critical responses to the issues at hand. For instance, you may disagree with a given article and want to write a rebuttal to it. Or you may wish to compare two pieces that take opposing sides on an issue and explain why one of them is wrong. Further suggestions about possible approaches to these papers will be made available on a separate handout later in the semester.

Your papers *must* be typed and double-spaced. The page lengths given are based on pica-sized type (10 characters per inch) and one inch margins, and should be seen as estimates of how much you'll need to write to complete the assignments well. I will not automatically penalize shorter papers, but it's unlikely that you will be able to do "A" work if your papers are shorter than 3 pages. Also note that fudging margins and font sizes to make your papers *look* longer will *not* help your grade -- so concentrate on writing *good* papers, not (what appear to be) long ones.

Especially in light of the flexible due dates involved here, late assignments are *heavily* frowned upon and will generally *not* be accepted. In the event that I do agree to accept late work, I reserve the right to reduce the corresponding grade in direct proportion to your paper's tardiness. The *minimum* such penalty, however, will be the equivalent of one letter grade.

## Exams:

The midterm (October 30) and the final (December 13) will consist entirely of *long essay* questions and will be based on both the readings and our in-class discussions and lectures. The final *will* be cumulative. Barring verifiable emergencies of the highest order, make-up exams will *not* be given.

## Attendance/participation/pop quizzes:

This course is geared towards in-class discussions, although there will be days when I lecture extensively. It will thus be more enjoyable for all of us (and you'll do better) if you (1) attend class regularly, (2) do the required reading and (3) be prepared to discuss what we've read in class. Consistently lackluster discussions will force me to take drastic measures (i.e., pop quizzes) to assure me that y'all are doing the required work. In the event quizzes become necessary, final grades will be calculated on a revised schedule:

Name-That-Tune quizzes	5%
Response papers	15%
Midterm exam	30%
Final exam	30%
Attendance/participation	5%
Pop quiz(zes)	15%

Barring the scenario described above, failure to participate in class discussions will not directly hurt your grade (i.e., I will not automatically penalize students who don't speak up in class) . . . but contributing to discussions regularly and thoughtfully *will* help boost your grade. I will take attendance on an irregular basis and points will be awarded to (or subtracted from) your final grade appropriately.

## TEN TIPS ON HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS COURSE

**(1) Read your syllabus and assignment handouts.** Aside from telling you what to read (or listen to) and when you need to do so, these documents contain the basic ground rules by which this course works. And while, under exceptional circumstances (e.g., life and death emergencies), I may be willing to bend some of these rules, ignorance of the rules on your part isn't one of them.

**(2) Read and listen to the required course materials as scheduled.** This should be self-explanatory. But to drive the point home: *everything* you'll do for a grade this semester depends on your having thoughtfully consumed readings and/or music listed on the syllabus.

**(3) Think about what you read and listen to.** None of the material for this course is intended to be consumed passively. If you're *only* reading or listening to absorb "facts" or to be entertained, you will not do well. And while you're certainly allowed (and even encouraged) to learn new facts and have fun, it's more crucial that you approach the assignments in a critical and thoughtful fashion.

**(4) Attend class . . . and show up on time.** Not just because I'll take attendance irregularly, but because our discussions will raise questions about the material at hand that won't always be obvious to you from the readings alone. Our class periods will be spent discussing (and often arguing about) the readings, *not* summarizing them. You can (and should) expect issues raised in class to be on the exams. Moreover, arriving to class late puts you at risk of missing important announcements and any Name-That-Tune quizzes that might be given.

**(5) Come to class prepared to discuss the readings.** Think about what the readings are trying to say and then share those thoughts with the class. Even if you don't understand a given article, feel free to ask questions about it. Not all of these readings are easy: if you're confused, it's likely other people are as well. The more people who participate in our discussions, the more we'll all get out of them.

**(6) Write clearly.** This is not a remedial writing class, so you aren't guaranteed a good grade on either your papers or your exams merely by constructing grammatical sentences made up of properly spelled words. Nevertheless, if your grammar (or spelling or punctuation) interferes with my ability to understand what you're trying to say, your grade *will* be negatively affected.

**(7) Argue your points.** Do not merely assert them. For example, simply saying that you think that Madonna is obscene is far less convincing (and receives far less credit) than explaining *why* you think she's obscene. On a related note, avoid using terms like "obviously," "clearly," and "of course." In most cases, if you have to say something is "obvious," it isn't obvious at all.

**(8) Argue your points well.** Make sure the facts support your case. Avoid overly broad generalizations. And, perhaps most importantly, anticipate potential counter-arguments or alternate explanations to your position -- *especially* if your argument runs contrary to ideas we've already covered in the course. You *don't* have to agree with any of the authors we'll read, but if you take a contrary position to an argument made in the assigned course material, you *do* have to explain *why* you're right and the reading in question is wrong.

**(9) See me (or Janna) as necessary.** If you don't understand why you received a given grade, or if the reading has you baffled, or if you just want to chat about the new Liz Phair album (or some such), come talk to either of us during our office hours, or make appointments to meet at some other time.

**(10) Think ahead.** The chances of my accepting late work without penalizing you improve dramatically with advance notice *and* a reasonable justification for the anticipated delay. Similarly, do *not* wait until the night before the exam to catch up on all the reading. This is not a course where simple rote memorization of names and dates will earn you an acceptable grade. Bear in mind that the semester will go faster than you think and plan accordingly.

N.B.: Unless specifically marked as being on reserve, all readings should be in the Pro Copy packet -- but see the warning on page 2 of the syllabus about possible last-minute changes to this.

0: Introduction and Overview

Aug 28 no readings

1: Defining Our Terms: Popular/Music/Culture

Aug 30 Shuker, "What's Goin' On?" [ON RESERVE]  
Middleton, "What Is Popular Music?"

Sep 4 **LABOR DAY -- NO CLASS**

Sep 6 Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music"  
Grossberg, "Teaching the Popular"

2: Music, Art, and Values

Sep 11 Adorno, "On Popular Music"  
Gendron, "Theodor Adorno Meets the Cadillacs"  
Chester, "Second Thoughts on a Rock Aesthetic"

Sep 13 Bloom, "Music" [ON RESERVE]  
Goldman, "That Old Devil Music"  
Mauer, "Letter of Resignation"

3: Relating History

Sep 18 **listen to tape 1 by this date**  
\*\*\*Ventura, "Hear That Long Snake Moan"

Sep 20 Smucker, "Disco"  
Marcus, "Anarchy in the U.K."  
Light, "Rap and Soul"  
Sinclair, "Up From Underground"

4: Debating History

Sep 25 **listen to tape 2 by this date**

Jarrett, "Concerning the Progress of Rock & Roll"  
Dyer, "In Defense of Disco"  
Mauer, "A Paper About Disco . . ."

Sep 27 Rijven & Straw, "Rock for Ethiopia"

Marcus, "We Are the World?"  
Garofalo, "Understanding Mega-Events"

5: Interpreting Music

Oct 2 **listen to tape 3 by this date**

\*\*\*Shuker, "Pump Up the Volume" [ON RESERVE]

Oct 4 Pareles, "Meaning Is in the Ears of the Beholder"

McClary & Walsler, "Start Making Sense"  
Garratt, "Teenage Dreams"  
Walsler, "Clamor and Community"

6: Selling Music

Oct 9 **listen to tape 4 by this date**

Shuker, "Every 1's a Winner" [ON RESERVE]  
\*\*\*Frith, "Video Pop"

Oct 11 Goodman, "The Marketing Muscle Behind Mariah Carey"

Newcomb & Palmeri, "What's Not to Love?"  
*Musician*, special report on music business

7: Owning Music

Oct 16 **listen to tape 5 by this date**

Shuker, "We Are the World" [ON RESERVE]  
Wallis and Malm, "Patterns of Change"  
Laing, "The Music Industry and the 'Cultural Imperialism' Thesis"  
Venn, "Popular Music and Cultural Imperialism"

Oct 18 Goodwin, "Sample and Hold"

Pareles, "In Pop, Whose Song Is It, Anyway?"  
Wyman, "The Big Sample"

Oct 23 **listen to tape 6 by this date**  
review for midterm

Oct 25 GUEST LECTURER: Rob Drew on Karaoke

Oct 30 **MIDTERM**

8: Watching Music

Nov 1 \*\*\*Shuker, "U Got the Look" [ON RESERVE]

Nov 6 **listen to tape 7 by this date**  
Goodwin, "From Anarchy to Chromakey"  
Savan, "Commercials Go Rock"  
Acland, "Look What They're Doing on TV!"  
Laing, "Music Video: Industrial Product, Cultural Form"

Nov 8 Frith, "Making Sense of Video"  
Farber, "MTV: The Revolution Will Be Televised"  
Hill, "Inside MTV"

9a: Stars: Elvis

Nov 13 **listen to tape 8 by this date**  
Bangs, "Where Were You When Elvis Died?"  
Marcus, "Lies About Elvis, Lies About Us"  
Wise, "Sexing Elvis"  
Taubin, "My Elvis"  
Sandow, "Rhythm and Ooze"  
Wood, "Who Says a White Band Can't Play Rap?"  
Rodman, "A Hero to Most?"

Nov 15 Spigel, "Communicating With the Dead" [ON RESERVE]  
Vikan, "Graceland as *Locus Sanctus*"

9b: Stars: Madonna

Nov 20 **listen to tape 9 by this date**

Sobran, "Single Sex and the Girl"  
Simon, "Immaterial Girl"  
Kelly, "Playgirl of the Western World"  
Williamson, "The Making of a Material Girl"  
McClary, "Living to Tell"

Nov 22 Henderson, "Justify Our Love"

hooks, "madonna: plantation mistress or soul sister?"  
Christgau, "Madonnathinking Madonnabout Madonnamusic"  
Ouellette, "Let's Get `Serious"  
Udovitch, "Body of Evidence"  
Aletti, "Put Your Hands All Over My Body"  
Champaign Public Library and Information Center press releases re: Sex

10: Music and Cultural Politics

Nov 27 **listen to tape 10 by this date**

\*\*\*Shuker, "Pushin' Too Hard" [ON RESERVE]  
Katz, "Rock, Rap and Movies Bring You the News"

Nov 29 \*\*\*Gore, *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society* [selections] [ON RESERVE]

McDonald, "Censoring Rock Lyrics"  
Marsh, "Perception: Protection -- Reality: Censorship"

Dec 4 Raspberry, "Common Sense Should Win . . ." [ON RESERVE]

Jones, "The Signifying Monkeys"  
Rose, "Fear of a Black Planet"

Dec 6 Knipfel, "A Plea for Violence and Death"

Frith, "Euro Pop"  
Marcus, "Notes on Life and Death and the Incandescent Banality of Rock 'n' Roll"  
Grossberg, "Is Anybody Listening? Does Anybody Care?"

Dec 11 review for final

Dec 13 **FINAL (10:30a-12:30p)**



NAME:

AGE:

HOME TOWN:

MAJOR:

What were the *last* three records/tapes/CDs you purchased?

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

What are your *favorite* three records/tapes/CDs of those you've acquired in the past year?

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

What are your three favorite genres of popular music?

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

What are your three *least* favorite genres of popular music?

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

What (if any) are the three main print sources you turn to for news and information on popular music?

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

In order of preference, what local radio station(s) do you listen to?

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

In order of preference, what local retail outlet(s) do you usually shop for music at?

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

In the pre-CD era, they were called "record stores." In the soon-to-be (already here?) post-vinyl age, what should we call them?

Do you own . . .

- . . . a home stereo system? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a portable stereo system [e.g., a "boombox"]? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a "walk-person"? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a record player/turntable? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a cassette player/recorder? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a CD player? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a DAT player? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a mini-disc player? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a television? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . a VCR? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . other? [please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ ] \_\_\_\_\_

On average . . .

- . . . how many records/cassettes/cds do you buy each month? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . how often do you go to concerts/live-music-clubs each month? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . how often do you visit dance clubs each month? \_\_\_\_\_
- . . . how many hours of music videos do you watch each week? \_\_\_\_\_

What *one* song, album, or artist would you use to try to explain your favorite genre of music to a stranger . . . and (this is the tough part, of course) why do you think that particular song, artist, or album captures the essence of the genre in question?

\*\*\*Asterisks indicate long readings that you may want to start an extra day or two in advance.