

Communication 3653
Popular Forms of Public Communication:
Popular Music and Popular Culture
Summer 1996 (session C)

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Office Hours: M, W 1-2 pm and by appointment

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 isn't a history course. Any serious attempt to map out all the major 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.

(2) This isn't 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 isn't 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 on the politics of (popular) culture and public (i.e., mediated) communication: 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, however, 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 warning: 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

A coursepack containing all the required reading for the semester can be purchased at Staples (1401 E. Fowler). A copy of this packet will also be placed on reserve in the USF Library.

(2) An e-mail account

Participation in the listserv (POPFORMS-L) that has been set up for this course will require you to have (and use) an e-mail account. For those of you who don't already have an e-mail account, information on how to sign up for one is available on a separate handout.

(3) 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, nine 100-minute audio-cassettes are on reserve in the University Media Center (on the 6th floor of the Library). The goal here is to make sure that everyone 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 of the past 50 years. In fact, many 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 important examples of various artists and styles that even the most ardent music fan among you may be unfamiliar with.

Grading schedule

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| One (1) 3-4 page thought paper | 10% |
| Three (3) 3-4 page response papers | 30% (10% each) |
| Take-home final exam | 40% |
| Listserv participation | 10% |
| Attendance/participation | 10% |

Thought paper

This assignment (3-4 pages, due 20 May) will be *ungraded*. Assuming you turn the paper in, you should receive full credit (10% of your final grade) for doing so. I reserve the right, however, to give partial or even no credit to papers that fail to meet the assignment's requirements. Further details concerning this paper can be found on a separate handout.

Response paper

You will write a 3-4 page paper for three of the five course sections beginning with #4 ("Owning Music"), each of which will be a *critical response* to the material covered in that section. Specific due dates are listed on the syllabus. Further details about this assignment will be made available on a separate handout.

Final exam

The final will be a take-home exam due on **July 22**. It will be cumulative, and will consist of (a) *long essay* questions and (b) the opportunity to rewrite up to two of your response papers.

Listserv participation

The primary purpose of the listserv is to provide an ongoing informal forum for discussion of the issues raised by the assigned readings and our class sessions. Prompts intended to spur on the dialogue will be posted on a semi-regular basis.

Because listservs tend to be somewhat freeform in nature, there is no neat and simple formula for me to use in assessing grades for this aspect of the course. The *minimum* contribution to receive a *passing* grade, however, will be five substantial (i.e., more than a paragraph long) posts addressing material from five different sections of the syllabus.

- To *join* the list, send an e-mail message consisting of **subscribe POPFORMS-L your-firstname your-lastname** to **LISTSERV@nosferatu.cas.usf.edu**
- To *post* to the list, send an e-mail message to **POPFORMS-L@nosferatu.cas.usf.edu**

Additional information about the list and how to use it will be sent to you when you subscribe.

Listserv tips

- (1) If you're new to e-mail, get your account set up right away. This gives you plenty of time to get used to using e-mail early on and still do well on this part of the course.
- (2) Subscribe to the list. If you're not subscribed, you can't post. If you can't post, you can't participate. If you can't participate, you've given up 10% of your final grade. It's that simple.
- (3) Post often. Five posts addressing questions from five different units are worth more than five posts all on the same topic.
- (4) Post in a timely fashion. While it is better to post late on a topic than not at all, it's worth far more to post while an issue is still under active discussion.

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:

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Thought paper | 0% |
| Response papers | 30% |
| Final exam | 40% |
| Listserv participation | 10% |
| Attendance/participation | 5% |
| Pop quiz(zes) | 15% |

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. 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 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 exam.

(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 your papers, your listserv posts, 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 sweeping generalizations. And, perhaps most importantly, anticipate potential counter-arguments 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 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 me during my office hours, or make appointments to meet with me 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 is due 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.

WARNING: The opinions expressed in the readings do not necessarily reflect those of the instructor. Just because a given essay is part of this course does not mean the instructor agrees with it. In other words, THINK about what you're reading, don't just absorb it.

0: Introduction, Overview, and History

- May 13 no readings
- May 15 LECTURE -- no readings
- May 17 LECTURE -- no readings

1: Music, Culture, and Politics

- May 20 LECTURE -- no readings
Thought paper due
- May 22 Katz, "Rock, Rap and Movies Bring You the News"
Pareles, "Meaning Is in the Ears of the Beholder"
McClary, "Same As It Ever Was"
Seigworth, "Sound Affects"
- May 24 NO CLASS
- May 27 NO CLASS
- May 29 Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music"
McClary & Walser, "Start Making Sense"
- May 31 Shuker, "Pushin' Too Hard"

2: Selling Music

- June 3 LECTURE -- no readings
- June 5 Frith, "Video Pop"
- June 7 Newcomb & Palmeri, "What's Not to Love?"
Musician, special section on music business
Negativland, "Shiny, Digital, Plastic and Aluminum"

3: Watching Music

- June 10 LECTURE -- no readings
- June 12 Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator"
Acland, "Look What They're Doing on TV!"
- June 14 Frith, "Making Sense of Video"

4: Owning Music

- June 17 LECTURE -- no readings
- June 19 Goodwin, "Sample and Hold"
Pareles, "In Pop, Whose Song Is It, Anyway?"
Wyman, "The Big Sample"
Negativland, *Fair Use* [selections]
- June 21 Wood, "Who Says a White Band Can't Play Rap?"
Rodman, "A Hero to Most?"

5: Music and Race

- June 24 LECTURE -- no readings
"Owning Music" response paper due
- June 26 Walser, "Clamor and Community"
Rose, "Fear of a Black Planet"
- June 28 hooks, "madonna: plantation mistress or soul sister?"
Wood, "Niggers, Negroes, Blacks, Niggaz, and Africans"
Garon, "White Blues"

6: Music and Gender

- July 1 LECTURE -- no readings
"Music and Race" response paper due
- July 3 Mifflin, "The Fallacy of Feminism in Rock"
Cline, "Little Songs of Misogyny"
Twersky, "Why *Bitch*?"
Johnson-Grau, "Dreams That Poison Sleep"
McNeil, "Sinead"
- July 5 McClary, "Living to Tell"
Henderson, "Justify Our Love"

7: Music and Youth

- July 8 LECTURE -- no readings
 “Music and Gender” response paper due
- July 10 Hebdige, “Hiding in the Light”
 Garratt, “Teenage Dreams”
- July 12 Gore, *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society* [selections]

8: Music and Censorship

- July 15 LECTURE -- no readings
 “Music and Youth” response paper due
- July 17 Marsh, “Perception: Protection -- Reality: Censorship”
 Garofalo, “Setting the Record Straight”
- July 19 Altman, “Let’s Stop Crying Wolf on Censorship”
 Raspberry, “Common Sense Should Win Over Rights When Rappers Spew Filth”
 Dyson, “Gangsta Rap and American Culture”
- July 22 **TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE**
 “Music and Censorship” response paper due

Communication 3653 Census

Summer 1996

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 -- and given that "music stores" is already widely used to describe places where instruments and sheet music are sold,, what should we call them?

Do you own . . .

- . . . 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? _____
- . . . a home computer? _____
- . . . a modem? _____
- . . . a musical instrument? [please specify: _____] _____
- . . . 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?