

**POP/MUSIC**

Spring 2016, Sociology 118/Popular Music, Social Practices, and Cultural Politics

Instructor: Joseph Klett ([jklett@ucsc.edu](mailto:jklett@ucsc.edu); always include "SOCY118" in subject line)

Class hours: Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays 2pm–3:10pm in Porter College, room 144

Office hours: Mondays 3:30-5pm & Wednesdays 10:30-12pm in College Eight, room 325

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this course we will venture into social and cultural research on popular music.

And what is popular music? Depending on who you ask, popular music refers to two different sets of things: one group (let's call them the "Pop" people) are most concerned with the particular ways that music gets mass-produced and mass-consumed; another group (we'll call them the "Music" people) are more concerned with the styles, subcultures, and symbols that provide the artistic content of popular music.

Beginning with research into just what qualifies certain music as popular, we will look at economic, legal, and industrial practices that affect the quantity – *and* quality - of popular music. From this "production" perspective, we will learn to recognize the powers of capitalism in the modern industrial practices that shape artistic output. Consider, for example, how only a small selection of singers emerge to be pop stars. The hype says it's because they have the most exceptional voices; the raw talent; maybe, dare we say it, authentic genius? But what is genius? What is authentic? And why does this matter in order for us to like a piece of music? More to the point: the Pop people say genius is mostly a myth used to sell musicians by obscuring all the many people and things that allow that "genius" to exist and operate. Here, we look to the producers and consumers of popular music to better understand how these groups influence the churn of pop music production, what it's worth, and how it's used to gain status in society.

Following this look at the social production of music, we then turn to the music itself. We will consider the symbolic qualities of music, and how symbolism helps fans construct and maintain an identity. Scholars argue that symbolism serves both the powerful interests of the major labels, as well as the local interests of the do-it-yourself (DIY) community. By employing symbols in artistic confrontation, musicians are often found "doing politics by other means:" specifically, these artists buck gender norms, revive suppressed traditions, and reconstruct the aesthetics of popular music; sometimes they do the opposite. And it's not always the majors who do the latter. As we will see, the work of representing an identity is very treacherous: artists navigate storms of critical appraisal, rivalrous competition, and even their own fans as they try to maintain control over their identities and artistic license. But people aren't their only issue. The technology of music's production has designs of its own, and these designs always impress themselves on the products of music. The traces of technology in pop music also include abstract, legal instruments like intellectual property laws which greatly contour the flow of music in the digital age.

In conclusion, we will consider the proposal of a specific field called "music sociology" which treats music as an independent variable in the story of social life. What does it mean for sociological research to put music first, before worrying about how it's made or what it means? How does this new research reflect changes in the production and consumption of popular music? And what does it do to the very meaning of popular music?

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS** (% of final grade; all work submitted after the deadline will receive a 10% deduction per 24 hours)

- A) *Class participation* (15%): This class is question-driven and interactive. You are expected to attend lecture well-read and well-prepared to discuss the readings prior to the start of class. Your undivided attention is expected for the entire class period. Computers may *only* be used for taking notes and sharing work. Do not come to class to sleep. You get two unexcused absences; additional unexcused absences will receive a 2% deduction.
- B) *Banding Together* (40%): You will join a group to research a genre of popular music and its artists. You will present your findings on a regular basis. Each week, your group will complete an assignment. These assignments lend themselves to creative presentation, and you are encouraged to take a creative approach. Each member of the team is expected to contribute equally, to keep responsible to other group members, and to represent the group in class discussions. If you cannot fulfill your duty to your group, you will not be able to pass this class.
- C) *Three essays* (45%): You will submit three essays that relate your Banding Together research to themes from the course material. You will write on the topics of industry (due 4/24), ideology (due 5/15), and identity (due 6/5). Essays are due in your Dropbox by 9pm on the day they are due.

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

You are expected to follow the University guidelines for academic honesty. Violations include cheating and plagiarism, as well as self-plagiarism (submitting your own work from a different assignment). Attribution and proper citations are expected for all ideas that are not your own. If you have any doubts, please speak to me *before* the assignment is due. For more information on penalties for plagiarism, see *The Navigator* (<http://reg.ucsc.edu/navigator/>) and the *UCSC Student Policies and Regulations Handbook* (<http://www2.ucsc.edu/judicial/handbook.shtml>).

### **SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCOMODATIONS**

All students should be able to participate in this course. Please address any special needs you may have with me at the beginning of the quarter, or when a challenge arises. If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me during my office hours, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter or at least two weeks prior to an exam. Contact DRC at 831-459-2089 or by email at [drc@ucsc.edu](mailto:drc@ucsc.edu).

**COURSE OUTLINE** (All readings can be found under ‘Resources’ on the class site at *eCommons*):

Week 1: A Fear of Pop/Music

MON Introduction

WED Theodor Adorno. 1941. “On Popular Music”  
3/28 Mark Dery. 2010. “Aladdin Sane Called”  
A/V: ‘Kings of Glam’ (2006)

FRI Jacques Attali. 1985. “Listening”  
Chris Chafin. 2012. “Frank Ocean is Boring”

**I. POP**

Week 2: The Music Industry

MON Richard Peterson. 1997. “Creating Country Music”  
Nathaniel Rich. 2015. “Hit Charade”

WED Richard Peterson. 1997. “Authenticity”  
4/6 Jennifer Lena. 2012. “Why Hipsters Hate on Lana Del Rey”  
A/V: ‘Hype!’ (1996)

FRI **NO CLASS**

*Banding Together*: Make an infographic about three major labels that produce your genre.

Week 3: The Majors

MON Reebee Garofalo. 1999. “From Music Publishing to MP3”

WED Keith Negus. 2002. “The Work of Cultural Intermediaries”  
4/13 A/V: ‘I Need That Record!’ (2008)

FRI Steve Albini. 1993. “The Problem with Music”  
Michael Azerrad. 2001. “Our Band Could Be Your Life: Black Flag”  
A/V: ‘Sonic Highways: Chicago’ (2014)

*Banding Together*: Write a biography of one major label artist typical to your genre.

Week 4: The Producers

MON Howard Becker. 1982. “Art Worlds and Collective Activity”  
A/V: ‘20 Feet From Stardom’ (2013)

WED Antoine Hennion. 1989. "An Intermediary between Production and Consumption"  
4/20 Andrew Matson. 2013. "This Beat's for You"

FRI Howard Becker. 2006. "The Work Itself"  
Jon Caramanica. 2016. "Kanye West is Fixing His Album in Public"

*Banding Together:* Compile a professional resume for one producer from your genre.

#### Week 5: The Audience

MON Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. "Introduction" (from *Distinction*)  
Kembrew McLeod. 2001. "One and a Half Stars"

WED Richard Peterson. 1997. "Taste as Distinction"  
4/27 A/V: 'The Latin Explosion' (2015)

FRI **NO CLASS**

*Banding Together:* Produce a style guide for fans of your genre.

## II. MUSIC

#### Week 6: Symbols

MON **BONUS SESSION**

WED Stuart Hall. 1980. "Encoding, Decoding"  
5/4 Mavis Bayton. 1997. "Women and the Electric Guitar"  
A/V: 'The Punk Singer' (2013)

FRI Simon Frith. 1996. "Music and Identity"  
Tristan Bridges & CJ Pascoe. 2014. "BroPorn"

*Banding Together:* Write a semiotic analysis of a well-known album cover from your genre.

#### Week 7: Politics

MON Tricia Rose. 1994. "Soul Sonic Forces"  
Brendan O'Connor. 2015. "Why are Rap Lyrics being used as Evidence in Court?"  
A/V: 'Beat This' (1984)

WED Sarah Marcus. 2015. "Noise and Political Desire in Black Power's Intermission"  
5/11 Greil Marcus. 1975. "Sly Stone: The Myth of Stagolee"

FRI Jooyoung Lee. 2009. "Battlin' on the Corner"  
A/V: 'Something from Nothing' (2012)

*Banding Together:* Compare political expressions by three artists from your genre.

Week 8: Representations

MON George Lipsitz. 1996. "Strategic Anti-Essentialism in Popular Music"  
Christopher Weingarten. 2010. "Worst Songs of 2010"  
A/V: 'One Nation Under a Groove' (2005)

WED John Covach. 2003. "Pangs of history in late 1970s new-wave rock"  
5/18 A/V: 'Rebel Beat' (2007)

FRI Aaron Fox. 2004. "White Trash Alchemies of the Object Sublime"

*Banding Together:* Create a twenty-year timeline of representations from your genre.

Week 9: Technics

MON Jonathan Sterne. 2006. "The MP3 as Cultural Artifact"  
Rob Walker. 2009. "The Song Decoders"

WED David Lowery. 2012. "Meet the New Boss, Worse than the Old Boss?"  
5/25 Ben Sisario. 2014. "Taylor Swift's Stand on Royalties"

FRI Kembrew McLeod. 2005. "Confessions of an Intellectual (Property)"  
A/V: 'Rip! A Remix Manifesto' (2009)

*Banding Together:* Locate an album from a major label catalog that *cannot* be legally downloaded.

**III. SOCIOLOGY**

Week 10: Pop/Music Sociology

MON **NO CLASS**

WED Antoine Hennion. 2002. "Music and Mediation"  
6/1 A/V: 'Billy Joel, A Matter of Trust: The Bridge to Russia' (1987)

FRI Tia DeNora. 1999. "Music as a Technology of the Self"  
Ben Ratliff. 2016. "In Praise of Blue Notes"