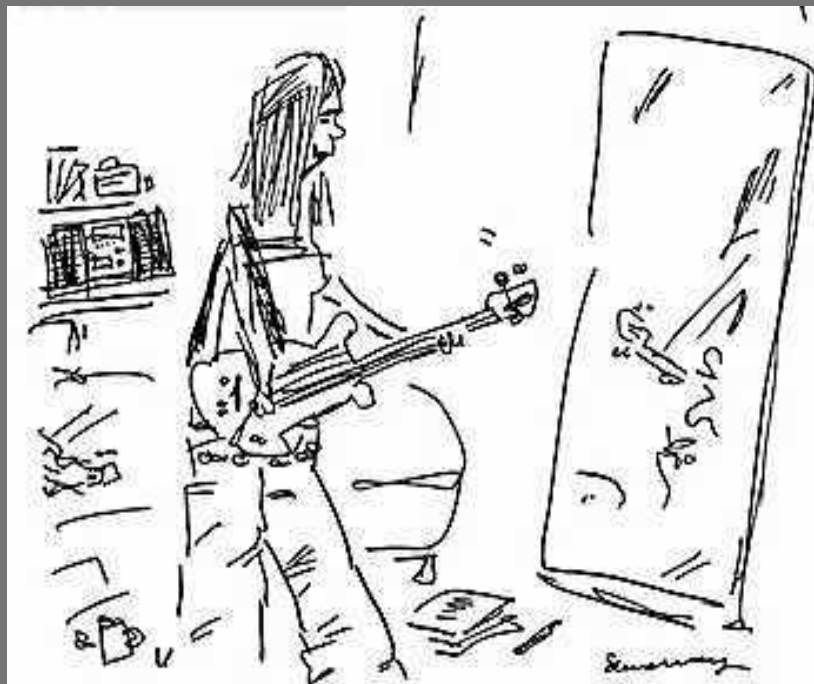


2009/
10

APPROACHES FOR STUDYING POPULAR MUSIC

MODULE HANDBOOK



"This goes out to Dad, who thinks I'm
doing my homework..."



MCAPM1014 Approaches for Studying Popular Music

Module Leader: Dr Simone Krüger
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Level/ Credits: Level 1 (Year 1)/ 12 credits

Pre-requisites: None, just an interest in popular music

Semester/ Year: Winter 2009 – Spring 2010

Day/ Time: Wednesday, 2 – 5pm

Venue: BP G12

School office: MCA-Helpdesk@LJMU.AC.UK



MODULE AIM

This module provides a solid foundation to the popular music studies degree by introducing students to various approaches to understand the social, cultural and political role played by popular music in society. Students will be familiarized with theories and methods from popular music, cultural and media studies that help to analyse popular music as text, and to explore the institutions and audiences involved in the production, propagation and consumption of popular music. Most of the approaches introduced here are methods of analysis and theories of representation, central to which is an understanding of popular music as a reflector and constructor of social and cultural meaning.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this module, students should be able to:

1. Explain 'standard' and newer approaches used for analysing popular music as text;
2. Describe approaches to examine the workings of music and cultural industries;
3. Illustrate approaches to study and understand the fans and audiences of popular music;
4. apply and use specific approaches to the study of political, social and cultural aspects surrounding popular music;
5. Communicate effectively in writing, showing evidence of reading.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The course will be delivered by a combination of lectures, seminars and workshops. **Lectures** will provide students with the underpinning theoretical knowledge and understanding about subject-specific issues and academic skills. **Seminars** will enable students to apply theoretical knowledge that involves problem-solving through tutor-led discussion and debate. **Individual tutorials** will provide opportunities for students to discuss their research/ essay writing with their personal tutor. Students' learning will be supported through using the Virtual Learning Environment Blackboard, which serves as a resource bank for course materials, and as a platform for student-student and student-tutor **online** interaction (with its inbuilt communication tools, including email and discussion board). Students will also engage in **self-directed study** to acquire knowledge and skills independently and autonomously, whilst taking own responsibility for the quantity and quality of their learning.

	Lectures	S/ WS	Tutorial	Fieldwork	Other	TOTAL
Contact hours	10	20	2	N/A	N/A	32
Non-contact hours					88 (self-directed study)	88
Timetable	Wed 2 – 3pm	Wed 3.15pm – 5pm	TBA	Flexible	Flexible	N/A
TOTAL						120

Key literature:

Course Reader [provided during the first session]

SYLLABUS

Week 1: 14 September 09

Induction

There are no formal classes during this week.

Week 2: 21 September 09

Introduction to the module

What is meaning? How is meaning constructed in and through popular music?

This first session will provide an introduction to the module, its content, assignments, teaching schedule, etc. We will also raise some preliminary ideas surrounding the various approaches for understanding the social, cultural and political role played by popular music in society. This includes theories and methods from popular music, cultural and media studies that help to analyse popular music as **text** (block I), and to explore the **institutions** (block II) and **audiences** (block III) involved in the production, propagation and consumption of popular music. Most of the approaches introduced here are methods of analysis and theories of representation, central to which is an understanding of popular music as a reflector and constructor of social and cultural meaning. We will begin by thinking about what popular music is, and how meaning is made through popular music (and the media more generally).

Seminar:

What does music mean to you? In this first seminar, we will consider the ways in which we engage with music on a daily basis, and how different kinds of music and musical technologies shape our ideas about the world in which we live. We will watch the documentary 'Pop! What is it Good For?' (BBC Four documentary), which will be followed by an in-class discussion on the meaning and value of popular music in people's everyday lives.

Week 3: 28 September 09. BLOCK I: Studying pop music as 'text'

Content Analysis

This session is the first in Block I, which is concerned with the study of popular music as 'text'. We will begin by looking at the advantages and disadvantages of using 'texts' as your main object of analysis, and the ways in which you can conduct textual analysis, including content analysis, semiotics and genre studies, all of which have derived from the media studies tradition. The first main method of analysis covered in this session is content analysis, one of the most quantitative methods of analysis. We will look at what kinds of questions content analysis can address and consider the advantages/disadvantages of

content analysis.

Seminar:

In preparation to this class, you are required to read one article included in your course pack. Using these as a starting point, we will discuss how to apply the stages of content analysis you should follow when conducting your own content analysis in popular music. Conduct the following task in small groups:

In-class task:

Content analysis is primarily about 'measuring' amounts of something (e.g. representation of violence in music video) in a representative sample of popular music. In your group, devise a plan (including the stages involved) for conducting content analysis in pop music:

- Decide on a research hypothesis;
- Decide which categories you will use for 'coding' (=labels for describing). Coding can be based on what you see or hear, or on more theoretical questions/themes;
- What is your sample? How representative is your sample? What other sources might you use?
- What problems could you encounter? Are there disadvantages of using content analysis in pop music?

Recommended readings:

*DuRant, Robert H, *et al.* 1997. 'Tobacco and Alcohol Use Behaviors Portrayed in Music Videos: A Content Analysis' in *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 87, no. 7, 1131-1135.

Week 4: 5 October 09. BLOCK I: Studying pop music as 'text'

Semiotics

Semiotics, another method for content analysis, is concerned with the sign systems at play in 'texts'. This session provides a basic insight into 'semiology', the science of signs. Drawing on a range of ideas from semioticians such as Peirce, Saussure and Barthes, you are introduced to the concepts of the 'sign' and 'signifier', and think about the kinds of messages that popular music conveys, and how this is done. Importantly, we think about how signs become 'arbitrary', that is taken for granted, and the role of culture and ideology in achieving this.

Seminar:

Here, we will discuss how to conduct your own semiotic analysis, and consider the advantages and disadvantages of semiotics as a method to investigate the ideological workings of popular music (and the media more generally). In groups, think about how you can use semiotic analysis to make sense of the ideology represented in pop music. Consider the following questions:

- What 'signs' are used to construct a specific image/story?
- What signifiers are at play?
- What influence does our cultural background have on meaning making?
- How does the social context shape meaning?
- How does myth work in pop music?

Recommended readings:

*Chandler, D. 'Semiotics for Beginners' [in course pack]

*Orbe, Mark P. 1998. 'Constructions of Reality on MTV's "The Real World": An Analysis of the Restrictive Coding of Black Masculinity' in *Southern Communication Journal* 64(1), 32-47. [available at http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/701166_751313442_910092638.pdf]

Week 5: 12 October 09. BLOCK I: Studying pop music as 'text'

Do Genres Really Exist?

The lecture will consider the ways in which media texts are organised and maintained as genres, and assess the extent to which genres 'really' exist. 'Genre', a descriptive term of classification and demarcation, can be understood in various ways - as a means for cultural industries to streamline production, as a way for critics to impose some semblance of order on the ceaseless profusion of media and cultural texts, and as a source of pleasure or identification for audiences and consumers. But how and by whom are genres defined? We will address theories of genre, the structuring of narratives into 'types' with modes of expression and reception, and how this perception has and is shaping media and cultural thinking. The genre approach attempts to explain the conventions of a genre or to look at how a particular work fits into a genre tradition.

Seminar:

The first part of the seminar aims at thinking about taxonomies of genres:

In small groups, select a genre in pop music, and list as many genres as possible that could be applied to that text. Think about the following questions:

- Select three genres from your list and discuss what the conventions are for each genre.
- Now list three specific examples (e.g. song titles) for each genre. How does a specific work fit into the genre tradition? How does it fulfil the expectations of the genre? In what ways is a work "responding" to a particular tradition?
- Do your genres belong to a meta-genre or super-genre? Can sub-genres be located?

In the second part, we move away from the classification of media texts, whilst shifting the focus towards the audiences and readers of texts.

After sharing your answers in-class, which (hopefully) revealed disagreements as to what constitutes a particular genre, continue your group discussions on the following questions:

- How and why did your interpretation of a genre differ from the interpretation by other people?
- Whose realities does a genre reflect? Who is it aimed at? What are the demographics of the target audience?
- What ideological assumptions and values seem to be embedded in specific genres?
- What does the genre enable? What does it limit? e.g. what stories can be told within the limits of the genre?
- How do the characteristics of the genre function within the whole?

Recommended literature:

*Toynbee, Jason. 2000. 'Genre-cultures' in *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*. London: Arnold, 102-29.

Week 6: 19 October 09

In-class test

This in-class test will be based on the content of the first block of lectures/seminars. You will receive detailed advice on how to prepare for the in-class test.

Week 7: 26 October 09

Reading week

There will be no class, yet during Reading Week, you are required to read around the topics covered so far, and catch up with any core readings/ lecture notes you might not yet have read.

Week 8: 2 November 09. BLOCK II: Studying music production
The Global Music Industry: Death of Indie?

This block of lectures will focus on some of the ways in which we can investigate the music industries and organisations. This session will open with discussions on the cultural domination of economically powerful Western culture and music industries within the global capitalist market and introduce the concept of cultural/media imperialism. The following discussions will apply these concepts specifically to the global music industry, yet at the same time consider whether the mediation of cultural globalisation has led to the eroding of local cultures and musics (e.g. indie), or whether instead it has led to the emergence of new cultural forms and identities.

Seminar:

During the session, we will watch the documentary *Money for Nothing: Behind the Business of Pop Music* (2001) and discuss the following questions:

1. How has the merging of smaller labels into giant media conglomerates affected the kinds of music we hear on the radio?
2. If the Telecommunications Act was designed expressly to increase competition, why is there so little diversity in the music played on radio?
3. What is the baseline purpose of music videos? What questions does this raise about the overall relationship between media and democracy?
4. How have the major music retail chains affected the kinds of music that are produced and promoted? Why?
5. How does “synergy” work? What are some examples – real or possible?
6. What kind of consumer behaviour, what kind of psychology, does the music industry rely on to sell records? What’s their view of the public?

Readings:

*Burton, Graeme. 2005. ‘Popular Music: Questioning the Popular, Questioning Control, Questioning the Global’ in *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*. Berkshire: Open University Press [chapter 6].

Week 9: 9 November 09. BLOCK II: Studying music production
The Impact of Technology: Death of Institutions?

This session will focus further on discussions of new media with specific emphasis on the internet and online music. We will discuss the controversies surrounding the distribution and consumption of online music, which has emerged as a result of the new technologies that enhanced connectivity but disregarded notions of copyright and intellectual property. Specific focus will be placed on the shifting relationship between the major corporations in the global music industry and the public, whilst discussing the impact of the increased democratisation of musical production and consumption on the music industry.

Seminar:

Think about the impact of the internet on people’s music consumption practices and the impact on the music industry more widely. We have so far established that the music industry functions as a concentrated profit-driven cultural imperialiser that often eschews less-known artists and their musics to be heard. Think about whether the digitisation of musical practices has advantages, and if so, for whom. Think about the disadvantages, and who would be affected by these. In groups, discuss the following:

- Do you use an ipod or iphone? Describe what you can do with the device. Think about how this impacts on a) music producers; b) artists; c) consumers. Are ipod/iphone a threat or an opportunity?

- Do you think it is good that internet music challenges the domination of the handful music industry giants? What does it mean to say that internet music leads to the democratisation of musical production and consumption? Is that good? (You may read the article 'Is MTV scared of Internet Music?' [http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/aug2007/tc20070820_610911.htm] to help with this task.)
- Discuss what solutions might be available to tackle copyright infringement and piracy. (You may explore the articles 'The Music Industry: Facing New Challenges' [http://www.bized.co.uk/current/research/2003_04/011203.htm] and/or 'Music Site Faces Legal Challenge' [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3043749.stm>] to help with your discussions.)

Recommended readings:

*Taylor, G. 2008. 'The Role of Record Labels in the Digital Age'. Speech presented at London Calling. Available at <http://www.ifpi.org/content/library/Geoff-Taylor-speech-London-Calling-2008.pdf>.

**Week 10: 16 November 09. BLOCK III: Studying audiences of pop music
The Media Effects Model: Music, Crime and Violence**

In the next three sessions, we examine some of the ways in which we can analyse pop music audiences. We will begin by thinking about media effects, and the focus on the audience as 'reader'. Known, amongst other things, as the 'hypodermic syringe' or 'silver bullet' model, the idea here is that the media (e.g. popular music) are so powerful that they literally 'inject' ideas into the audience so that they basically do and think what the media tell them to do/think. We will consider the advantages and disadvantages of this model of analysing audiences, and derive a constructive critique as to its limits.

Seminar:

There are basic concerns surrounding the mass media (including pop music) today, including depictions of sex, use of bad language, nudity, representations of ethnic minorities, and violence. In this seminar, we will debate for and against the banning of certain music videos on the basis that they could entice violent behaviour and crime. You will be split into two groups, one debating for, one against bans, whilst preparing a persuasive case. Use the media effects model in setting up your case for/against to demonstrate its use and/or problems with it as a way to understand people's responses to pop music content. We will also watch excerpts from the DVD *Dreamworlds 2: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video*. Think about the following questions in preparing your case:

- What various roles does popular music play in aggravating a social problem as a social problem, e.g. crime, drink-driving, child abuse, racism, unsafe sex, unhealthy lifestyle?
- Does popular music cause violence and crime?
- Are there other factors that need to be considered for an understanding of the effects of popular music on adolescents?

Readings:

*Gauntlett, D. 2005. '10 Things Wrong with the Media Effects Model' in *Moving Experiences: Media Effects and Beyond*. Eastleigh: John Libby Publishing.

*Roberts, Donald F., Peter G. Christenson, and Douglas A. Gentile. 'The Effects of Violent Music on Children and Adolescents'. Available at http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/~dgentile/106027_08.pdf.

**Week 11: 23 November 09. BLOCK III: Studying audiences of pop music
Uses and Gratifications: Music and Taste**

Continuing with our focus on understanding audiences of popular music, this session will introduce some of the ways in which we can actually do research into people's use of popular music. We begin by considering the uses & gratifications model developed by Katz and Blulmer in the 1940s. The main questions to be considered include: What do we use the media for? What do we expect to gain from listening to a particular song or genre of pop music? When and why do our expectations change, and how do producers respond to this?

Seminar:

In small groups, produce a timetable to capture what genres/styles of pop music you use throughout your average day (e.g. listen to, watch). Then consider the following:

- To what extent does your use of pop music create routines?
- How does your mood, social and cultural context influence your choice of pop music?
- What expectations do you have when choosing to listen to or watch a particular song/style/genre of pop music?
- Do the intentions of producers always complement those of the audience? Why/why not?
- What influence does 'hype' have on your expectations?

Recommended readings:

*Roberts, Donald F., Peter G. Christenson, and Douglas A. Gentile. 'The Effects of Violent Music on Children and Adolescents'. Available at http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/~dgentile/106027_08.pdf.

**Week 12: 30 November 09. BLOCK III: Studying audiences of pop music
Encoding/Decoding: Getting the Message 'Right' in Popular Music**

Drawing on a critique of classical mass media communications models, Stuart Hall (from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, closed down in 2002) proposed what he calls the encoding/decoding model of communication. Unlike the linear producer-consumer models of the past, Hall thinks through the rather complex relationship between producer-consumer, and the range of factors that can reinforce/distort/subvert media messages during production—distribution—consumption. He is particularly concerned with consumers and the critical importance of social and cultural constraints to individual interpretations of the media, whilst seeing the audiences as 'active' media consumers. Whilst we will introduce this model at the starting point of the session, we will predominantly focus on the ways in which popular music is 'understood' (or not) by its audiences. To this end we will ask questions about the meanings each of us derive from pop music, whilst examining the ways in which issues of identity have become central to both producers and audiences of pop music.

Seminar:

In this session, we will listen to some example of pop music whilst identifying some musical characteristics of the different genres and styles. We will then think about what the most likely audience for each musical example is, whilst taking into account factors like ethnicity, class, age, gender, clothing, social attitude, etc.

Recommended reading:

*Griffiths, Dai. 2002. 'Cover Versions and the Sound of Identity in Motion' in *Popular Music Studies*, eds. David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus. London: Arnold, 51-64.

Week 13: 7 December 09

Directed study week.

+++++++ Essay deadline on 7 December 2009 ++++++**ASSESSMENT**

The module enables students to demonstrate a range of academic and competency-based skills and subject-specific knowledge, and an ability to use knowledge in applied contexts. In order to complete the module successfully, students must submit a portfolio containing the following pieces of work (please note that only the essay will have to be submitted to the campus centre):

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT	Duration	Timing	% of final mark
Seen In-class test (1)	1 hour	19 October 09	40%
Assignment (2)	1,500 words	7 December 09	60%

1. In-class test:

The seen in-class test will assess your knowledge and understanding of the topics covered in the lectures/seminars in weeks 1 - 5. Further advice, including the seen class test paper, will be provided prior to the class test.

2. Essay:

Select one of the following questions and write an essay of ca. 1,500 words length:

1. To what extent does the globalised ownership of the music industry affect musical output? Discuss with reference to specific musical examples.
2. How have new technologies impacted on the global music industry?
3. Outline and discuss why the media effects model is less useful for understanding the impact of pop music on people's behaviour. Draw on specific musical examples.
4. How and why do audiences listen to or watch pop music? Discuss with reference to specific musical examples.
5. To what extent is Hall's encoding/decoding model relevant to the study of pop music? Draw on specific musical examples in your answer.

Some advice on writing your essay:

Your submitted paper should contain (at the start) your chosen essay question, from which you should develop a clear thesis statement in answer to this question. It is advisable to prepare a rough essay draft that outlines a synopsis of your argument, i.e. the issues addressed to confirm/contradict the thesis statement. Finally, your bibliography should contain *relevant* sources, including scholarly articles, newspaper articles, interviews, websites, images, etc.

FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT

Feedback is a very important part of your learning, as it is our mechanism to let you know whether you are on the right track in your work, and where and how your learning and performance can be improved. The feedback on this module will be provided in the form of

formal feedback on assessment, both formative and summative.

Formative feedback seeks to improve your work in the future, which will be provided as follows:

- **Generic feedback** in-class during lectures and seminars on what you appear to be struggling with, without reference to individual assessments. This feedback will be provided verbally to the whole class.
- **Self assessment** of your own achievement in assessed work (e.g. in-class test) that will be returned to you during the module. The self-assessment is a written exercise and will be completed in-class against a checklist of assessment criteria. Your tutor will then provide individual feedback on your self-assessment via email.
- **Peer feedback** on sample work by peer students. Against clear assessment criteria, you will be asked to mark work by another student and provide full written feedback. Your tutor will comment on your feedback verbally in-class.

Summative feedback will be given to sum up the final judgement of the quality of your work, which will be provided by your tutor **in writing** on each assessment item as follows:

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT	Summative feedback by:
In-class test (1)	30 October 09
Essay (2)	January 2010

MARKING CRITERIA

0-20%: No command of key technological and musicological terminology; lacks ability to communicate effectively; No evidence of reading; an entirely inadequate writing style (poor essay structure, poor use of paragraphs, poor grammar and punctuation).

20-30%: Little command of key technological and musicological terminology; little ability to communicate effectively; Little evidence of reading, and/or an entirely inadequate writing style.

30-39%: Some evidence to use key; Some evidence to articulate knowledge and understanding; yet inadequate use of theoretical and methodological perspectives; very poor writing style.

40-49%: Some attempts evident in using key terminology; adequate writing style; Some attempts evident to use theoretical knowledge; poor grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as poor referencing.

50-59%: A good attempt to apply key terminology. While some evidence of effective communication, the work displays some problems with academic writing conventions; A good attempt to apply theoretical and methodological perspectives. Some problems with grammar, spelling and punctuation. Inadequate referencing within the body of your text can also prevent essays from receiving a mark of more than 59%.

60-69%: A nuanced and sophisticated attempt to apply and evaluate key terminology This is communicated intelligibly. While this is work of good quality, it still lacks in originality and critical conceptualisation. A nuanced and sophisticated attempt to apply and evaluate at least one theoretical perspective or methodological technique. Good referencing.

70%-79% An intelligent critical analysis which shows a thorough apprehension of theoretical and musicological key terminology. Excellent style of communication with no or very few errors in the writing. An immaculately referenced essay. No or very few errors of punctuation, grammar or spelling.

80%+ A highly original and critically rigorous analysis that breaks new ground in the analysis of world music. Excellent written communication.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Cloonan, Martin (2005). 'What is Popular Music Studies? Some Observations' in *British Journal of Music Education* 22(1), pp.77-93.
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- Middleton, Richard (1990). *Studying Popular Music*. Buckingham. [part. pp. 37-60]
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Week 3, Content analysis:

- Baxter, Richard L. *et al.* 1985. 'A Content Analysis of Music Videos' in *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 1550 – 6878, Vol. 29, no. 3, 333-340.
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Week 4, Semiotics:

- Barthes, Roland (1977). *Image, music, text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. London; New York: Fontana.
- Schwarz, David, Anahid Kassabian and Lawrence Siegel eds. (1997). *Keeping score: music, disciplinarity, culture*. Charlottesville : University Press of Virginia..
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Week 5, Genre Studies:

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