

Music and Revolution

Spring 2025



STS-325: 104

CKB G-17A

Thurs 6:00 - 8:50pm

Dr. Adam See

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328 Cullimore (by appointment)

The course explores the nature of music as an instrument for personal, cultural, and political change. We will discuss the power of music to influence political attitudes in liberation movements throughout history and around the world, as well as in fascist regimes and political campaigns. This course also discusses the co-optation of art by capitalism and through modern technology. Genres to be analyzed include indigenous musics, slave songs, the blues, folk, rock and roll, punk, hip hop, jazz, afro-beat, latin music (e.g., nueva canción), and a variety of experimental genres. Course materials are derived from philosophy, history, aesthetics, anthropology, and political theory.

No Required Text (just an .epub app / reader)

GRADE BREAKDOWN

50%	WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
15%	IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION
15%	FINAL CREATIVE PROJECT
10%	SONG-WRITING ASSIGNMENT
10%	QUIZZES

IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION

Students who are never absent and who speak up often with questions and comments will receive a perfect participation grade. I will update participation grades a few times throughout the semester. Phone use during class will lower participation grades.

Missing Class: If you need to miss class for any reason, you must contact the Office of the Dean of Students and request an **excused absence**. Your absence will be validated once I receive an email from the Dean of Students. This is especially important because our class only meets once a week.

QUIZZES

Expect occasional pass/fail pop-quizzes. Each quiz contains only one question, and is designed to be answered in a couple sentences within a 5-7 minute window. **Note:** if you are late and miss the quiz, or skip a class, your grade will be zero.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There are **six** short written exercises spread throughout the semester, worth 10 pts each. These exercises ask students to reflect on revolutionary music under discussion that week in relation to our course content. Each submission should be a minimum of 750 words. Entries will be evaluated on how closely and creatively you utilize our texts.

Citation Format

Every written assignment must be professionally cited. For resources cited in the lesson lecture or reading material, the author name in parentheses is sufficient, with page numbers where appropriate.

How to Engage With Texts

Never just summarize!

I want you to creatively and critically analyze the text and engage with the ideas. For inspiration, here's an idea from Edward J. Gallagher. One can look at works of philosophy and/or science as if one has "four eyes". Each eye reveals a different perspective, and each one taps into a different level of thinking and requires the practice of a different skill. **The "four eyes" are...**

(1) Hypothesize: ask a detailed question and formulate a hypothesis about some element of the reading. Then, hypothesize potential *competing* answers to that question.

(2) Analyze: pick one portion of the text that confuses you and dive deep. What's really going on here? What does this concept really mean? What is the true foundation of this argument?

(3) Synthesize: relate a particular part of this reading to something else we read this semester. Could one idea from somewhere else be *productively* combined with one from this reading?

(4) Criticize: what did you like or not like about a particular part of the reading? Did particular arguments strike you as bad? Why? Create a hypothetical dialogue with a figure from the text.

How to Structure Counter-Argumentation

- 1) Author X defends idea P in the following way...
- 2) I disagree with X; P is a weak argument due to the following reasons...
- 3) The strongest way that author X might *respond to my criticisms* is as follows...
- 4) Author X's counter-argument would be strong/weak because...

OR:

- 1) Author X presents argument P in defense of her ideas
- 2) I find argument P convincing, however it still faces the following issues...
- 3) The best way that author X might *respond to my criticisms* as follows...
- 4) Author X's counter-argument would be strong/weak because...

Essentially, think of counter-argumentation in this class as a **dialogue** where you engage in a concise 'back-and-forth' with the author/philosopher of the reading. The more engaging the dialogue, the higher your grade will likely be. As a rule of thumb: the stronger you present your opponents arguments, the stronger your *own* position will come across. **High scores are given to students whose responses are nuanced**, *i.e.*, partially critical of *all* sides, including of the strength of one's *own* positions. Be humble!

SONG-WRITING ASSIGNMENT

During our unit on experimental music each student will compose, record, and share a song of their own. I am assuming that each student has zero experience in song-writing and recording. Permitted that you own a smartphone and/or laptop, software is free and easy to use. Your piece must be *at least ninety seconds* long and must be accompanied by a ~300 word description of what you set out to accomplish.

No musical background is required. I have intentionally placed this assignment in our unit on experimental music. I will provide a handout and in-class demonstration. You do not need to sing or use your voice if this makes you uncomfortable, but are encouraged to make something bizarre and meaningful that draws from samples (recorded from the real world, or spliced from youtube, text-to-speech software, etc.) and percussive samples of your own creation, e.g., tapping on glasses of water, pieces of wood, scraps of metal—*literally anything*.

CREATIVE PROJECT

Students will have a lot of freedom to create a creative project of their own choosing. If you prefer to write a paper (1,500 word minimum), you can also do that.

Some ideas/examples of possible final projects:

- Create a podcast
- Create a video or short film
- Write a song or a series of songs
- Choreograph a dance
- Paint, draw, or sculpt a work of art or a series of works
- Make a comic book or zine
- Write a fictional short story or series of poems

In addition to your project, you are required to turn in a written component of approximately 500 words, explaining and interpreting the project you created by (1) addressing why you decided to do this project, (2) documenting the process, and (3) explaining how the project connects with the class. Your creative project will be due near the end of our course. I will provide you with a thorough handout, including due dates for various steps

Final grades are calculated on the following scale

- A (90% of total points)
- B+ (87%)
- B (80%)
- C+ (77%)
- C (70%)
- D (50%)
- F (49%)

Grading Policy

Your writing assignments will often be expressions of your own thoughts and beliefs on ethical issues. So I want to be clear that your grade will not depend on whether I agree with you. You are encouraged to think independently and to bring your own values and interests to our discussions. If you disagree with the views being presented or discussed in lecture and readings, you are *encouraged* to respectfully explain why by providing clear reasons and arguments. The grading rubric for this course is designed to be as objective as possible.

Many students struggle with abstract writing assignments, and many students do not have English as their first language. So I also want to be clear that your writing will not be graded on grammar or spelling, unless it makes your writing incomprehensible. The point of this course is not to write the perfect essay or perform extensive high level research. The goal of the course is to introduce you to pressing ethical issues and to provide you with various opportunities for thoughtful philosophical reflection on your *own* prior beliefs.

For this reason, your grade will largely depend on my impression of how seriously you have engaged with the course material in a thoughtful discussion of the issues. Substantive, thoughtful homework will be given more credit than half-baked or last minute homework that are transparent attempts to meet the minimum word count. To do well in class you need to demonstrate that you are thinking critically about the issues, and that you're taking the time to express your thoughts carefully.

Students are expected to attend all lectures, complete all assigned readings, and be active participants in discussions. As this is a philosophy class, much of our time together will be interactive. Missing class weighs *heavily* on your participation grade. Just as regular absences will weigh heavily on a student's final grade, regular and/or provocative contributions to discussion will also be strongly considered as I tally grades at the end of the semester.

Late Policy: Students who fail to hand in an assignment will receive a zero on the assignment. Students who fail to show up for a midterm will fail that exam. **Night-before or day-of excuses are almost never acceptable.** The only excuses that I will accept are those **accompanied by a doctor's note.** Otherwise, late work will be deducted a half-point each day.

Plagiarism Policy: Suspected cases of plagiarism will be given **zero credit** for the assignment and **reported to the Dean** as a violation of the Student Code of Academic Integrity, which carries a maximum penalty of expulsion. Copying and pasting from the web is one form of plagiarism. Failing to provide adequate citations is also a form of plagiarism. Any work you use should be given adequate citation. If you use **any** resource in your research (including dictionaries, encyclopedias, and translation tools!), **even if you don't quote it directly**, provide a citation.

ANY EVIDENCE OF AI WRITTEN WORK (GPT, GRAMMARLY) WILL RECEIVE A ZERO.

In-Class Technology Policy: cell phone and laptop use is prohibited during lectures and will lead to a deduction in In-Class Participation points. If you have special circumstances that require you to have your phone out (children, occupation, family issue, etc.) just let me know.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Identify a wide variety of issues in the philosophy of aesthetics, ethnomusicology, political philosophy, economics, and world history.

Understand the roles of music in liberation movements, past and present.

Utilize and identify various approaches to interpreting music.

Develop critical skills at argumentation and counter-argumentation, particularly with respect to fostering intellectual humility.

Evaluate the cultural, personal, political, and environmental impacts of music and art, particularly in the spirit of DIY (do it yourself) philosophy.

UNIT ONE

Capitalism and Resistance Music

“If it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art.”

- Arnold Schoenberg

“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Lesson One: Music, Politics, and the Emotions

Garrett, *Music and Politics* ([Ch 1](#): 1-11; 18–23)

Nietzsche, [Birth of Tragedy](#) (Sections 1-2 [in-text pgs. 8-11]) (recommended)

Radiolab, [Touch at a Distance](#) (podcast - recommended)

Lesson Two: The Haitian Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, and Carnival

Randall, “Partying for Your Right to Fight” in [Sound System](#) (Ch. 3 [27-35])

Becker, [Contemporary Latin American Revolutions](#) (13-28; 206-221)

Garrett, *Music and Politics* ([Ch 1](#): 11–13 [Section 1.2])

Lesson Three: Reggae

Onyebadi, [“Bob Marley: Communicating Africa's political liberation and unity”](#)

Lynskey, “Max Romeo and the Upsetters / 'War Ina Babylon' / 1976” (Ch. 15 in [Revolutions Per Minute](#))

Macdonald, *Marley* (2012) [documentary](#)

Lesson Four: Hip Hop

Lynskey, [Revolutions per Minute](#), “The Message” and “Fight the Power”

Hip Hop Evolution (Netflix: Ep1: “The Foundation”)

[Style Wars](#) (documentary)

[13th](#) (documentary)

Lesson Five: Protest and Popular Music

Adorno, [On Popular Music](#) (pgs. 200-208)

Randall, [Sound System](#), “Beyoncé & Black Lives Matter” (110-117)

UNIT TWO

Punks, Dadaists, Anarchists, and Fascists

"In our society now, we prefer to see ourselves living than living."

- Guy Debord

Lesson Six: Experimental Music

[The Rise of Experimental Music in the 1960s](#) (documentary)

La Monte Young, ["Lecture 1960"](#)

John Cage, [Silence](#), "Experimental Music" and "Goal: New Music, New Dance"

Lesson Seven: Punk Rock and Situationism

Marcus, [Lipstick Traces](#) (1-12, 25-31, 44-54, 91-103)

Gray, "Everyone Will Live in His Own Cathedral: The Situationists: 1958-1964" from [Leaving the 20th Century](#)

[The Velvet Underground](#) (documentary – recommended)

Lesson Eight: Anarchism and Riot Grrrl

Chomsky, "Notes on Anarchism" in [On Anarchism](#) (118-129)

Maskell, "I Predict a Riot: Riot Grrrls and the Contradictions of Feminism" in [Routledge History of Social Protest in Music](#)

[The Riot Grrrl Collection](#) (selections)

[The Punk Singer](#) (documentary - recommended)

Lesson Nine: Fascism and Censorship

Garrett, *Music and Politics* ([Ch 2](#): 42-52)

Svenonius, "Responsible Use of Rock and Roll" in [Psychic Soviet](#)

[Winds of Change](#) (Ep 3: America's Secret Weapon 0–7:10 / 14:10–22:25)

Randall, "The Beatles, the Kremlin, and the CIA" in [Sound System](#) (16-26, 51-59)

"Musical innovation is full of danger to the State, for when modes of music change, the laws of the State always change with them."

Plato's Republic

UNIT THREE

Black Nationalism and Musical Militancy

Lesson Nine: Jazz as Resistance Music

[Fire Music](#) (documentary)

Neal, "[The Black Arts Movement](#)"

Anderson, "Free Jazz and Black Nationalism" from [This is Our Music](#)

Kofsky, "John Coltrane and the Black Music Revolution" from [Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music](#) (recommended)

Lesson Ten: Nina and Malcolm

What Happened, Ms. Simone? ([Netflix](#) / [Amazon](#) documentary)

Malcolm X, [The Ballot or the Bullet](#)

Lynskey, [Revolutions per Minute](#), "Mississippi Goddamn"

UNIT FOUR

Neoliberalism, Latin America, and the Middle East

Lesson Twelve: Nueva Canción and Tropicalismo

Lynskey, [Revolutions per Minute](#), "Victor Jara / The Killing of a Protest Singer"

Kinzer, "We're Going to Smash Him" from [Overthrow](#)

Schwarz, [Culture and Politics in Brazil \(1964-1969\)](#)

[Tropicalia - Revolution in Sound](#) (Podcast)

Lesson Thirteen: Middle Eastern Protest Music

Randall, [Sound System](#), "Music of the Arab Revolutions"

Byerly, "[What Every Revolutionary Should Know](#)"

Zinn, The Problem is Civil Obedience [[text](#) / [audio](#)]