Between a Rock and a Popular Music Survey Course: Technological Frames and Historical Narratives in Rock Music

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During the summer of 2011, after finishing my first year as an ABD graduate student, I received an email from my department chair notifying me that I would be teaching two courses in the fall semester: Music Appreciation (MUS 101) and Rock Music (MUS 109). I was thrilled to design and teach my own courses, and as a popular music scholar especially excited to instruct a rock course. MUS 109 has a unique history: it is one of the oldest popular music courses offered by a music department, first taught in spring 1971 by Peter Winkler.[1] Though he had developed the course, he had not taught it for over a decade before I was offered the course, allowing me wide latitude in course design.[2] In planning the course, I began to notice that I was pulled in two incongruous directions. The course title and description indicated a specific genre study.[3] Its parallel placement to Music Appreciation within the music curriculum, though, insinuated that I was to teach a popular music survey course.[4] These two purposes were more easily reconciled when the course originated, when "rock" was the dominant referent of the term "popular music." The ascendancy of hip-hop over the past two decades—the entire *lifetimes* of

1. Peter Winkler was unaware of another rock music course offered by an R1 music department prior to 1971 (Peter Winkler, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

2. He had stopped teaching it because he felt too much had changed since he began teaching the course for him to account for student experience.

3. The official course description reads: "A study of rock music, including an investigation of its musical constituents—rhythm, form, pitch structure, instrumental texture, and vocal style—and an historical survey beginning with the roots of rock in earlier folk and popular styles and tracing its development from the end of World War II to the present. Special attention is paid to various syntheses of African and European traditions." Stony Brook University Undergraduate Bulletin, accessed July 20, 2014, http://sb.cc.stonybrook.edu/bulletin/current/courses/mus/.

4. The first three courses in the Stony Brook music curriculum are Introduction to Music (MUS 101), Music Cultures of the World (MUS 105), and Rock Music (MUS 109). The first two imply a survey of a variety of musics within a given cultural area (classical music, world music), leading MUS 109 to uneasily serve both this broader purpose and a focused genre study.

most of my students—have increasingly cleaved apart these two terms. How could I teach rock *in relation to*, not *as*, popular music?

Drawing on four semesters of experience designing and teaching MUS 109, this essay demonstrates how attention to transformations in the technological conditions of music-making in course design can differentiate a rock history course from a popular music history survey. I begin by briefly historicizing how rock became the central genre of popular music pedagogy. The frames and narratives that have been used to pedagogically legitimize rock may run the risk today of dehistoricizing the genre, treating it as the equivalent or central referent of "popular music" rather than a constituent part of a broader body of music. In order to distinguish between rock and popular music history, I draw on Stuart Hall's theories of popular culture to restructure the popular music history survey through technological change. I then discuss how I used these technological changes in designing Rock Music through considering two factors: the relationship of rock and hip-hop; and the parallels between the technological changes of rock's origins and those of the twenty-first century. Through discussing my course design for Rock Music, I argue for two broader strategies in designing both popular music history surveys and rock courses: the disburdening of rock history courses from covering all popular musics; and the decentering of rock from popular music history surveys.

Rock and the Advent of Popular Music Pedagogy

My interest in a technologically oriented rock music pedagogy stems from an article that I have assigned in Rock Music and other undergraduate popular music courses, Richard Peterson's "Why 1955? Explaining the Advent of Rock Music."[5] Peterson argues that rock and roll emerged in the mid-1950s as a result of developments in copyright law and technology that reshaped the music industry between 1945 and 1955. I have stressed Peterson's contention that "Presley and the rest did not cause the rock revolution, but simply took advantage of the opportunities that became available to them."[6] Assigning the article helps counteract popular discourses mythologizing rock stars like Elvis or the Beatles as natural, authentic, and revolutionary figures. These mythologies have arisen, though, because the same innovations that incubated rock also spurred the intellectual criticism of popular culture beginning in the late 1960s.

5. Richard Peterson, "Why 1955? Explaining the Advent of Rock Music," *Popular Music* 9, no. 1 (1990): 97–116. Although a scholarly article may seem advanced for a course oriented toward freshmen non-majors, a focused reading of the essay's comparative historical sections is doable so long as the opening section on production of culture theory is omitted.

6. Peterson, "Why 1955," 97–98.

Bernard Gendron and Devon Powers have shown how critics and figures in the avant-garde began to take rock seriously as a form of popular culture.[7]

Rock thus became not simply a specific genre but also a placeholder for all post-1955 Anglo-American popular music. David Brackett wrote in his introduction to *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader* that "the usage of 'rock' . . . sometimes refers to all popular music after 1955; at other times the term refers to popular music made by (mostly) white, (mostly) male musicians after 1965. Neither 'rock 'n' roll' nor the twin usages of 'rock' do justice to the rich range of genres that have dominated popular music of the past 50 years."[8] Like "classical," "rock" has become both a general term for a musical category and a specific era therein.[9] Though Brackett takes care to disentangle "rock" and "popular music," the development of popular music courses in the wake of the 1960s inevitably established rock as the central teaching object of introductory popular music courses. If the preponderance of rock music course textbooks and readers as compared with other popular music genres (or popular music history more broadly) reflects pedagogical practice, the genre remains the predominant focus of undergraduate popular music history courses.[10]

Not only teaching materials, but the frames through which popular music is perceived as a teaching object and the narratives used for course structure remain largely oriented around rock. Educators stressing popular music as a cultural form generally follow the ideas developed in popular culture courses at the Open University in the early 1980s by teaching rock as a site of resistance along youth, class, gender, and cultural lines. From this perspective,

7. Cf. Bernard Gendron, *From Montmartre to the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 161–227 and Devon Powers, *Writing the Record: The Village Voice and the Birth of Rock Criticism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

8. David Brackett, *The Rock, Pop, and Soul Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xv.

9. The development of rock as a metonym for popular music makes sense; as the modern concept of "art music" had developed in the early Romantic period through the criticism of what we now term Classical composers, so has "popular music" emerged as an academic subject through the intellectual study of rock. Sanna Pederson, "Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995) and Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

10. A sample rock textbook list includes Brackett, *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader*; Michael Campbell and James Brody, *Rock and Roll: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schirmer, 2007); Theo Cateforis, *The Rock History Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012); Katherine Charlton, *Rock Music Styles*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2010); John Covach and Andrew Flory, *What's That Sound? An Introduction to Rock and its History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012); Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the U.S.A.*, 5th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2010); Joseph Schloss, Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *Rock: Music, Culture, and Business* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Joe Steussy and Scott D. Lipscomb, *Rock and Roll: Its History and Stylistic Development*, 7th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2013).

popular music is studied for its transgressiveness, empowerment, and plea-sure.[11] Musicologists and theorists have introduced the study of rock's musical features along with these cultural approaches, augmenting sociocultural con-text with analysis of stylistic development, formal nuance, and compositional innovation. Theo Cateforis has noted that these themes are employed in course design through a few standard narratives: a social and historical perspective stressing rock's development from, and relation to, African-American musical traditions; a textual approach focusing on the genre's compositional innova-tions, constituent styles, and subgenres; and a cultural perspective examining rock's articulation of the social politics of youth culture.[12]

I do not deny that these approaches are useful for teaching rock music and culture, and indeed they have been supported by a rich variety of teaching resources.[13] They have helped teachers assert the importance of popular music as an object of university-level course work for colleagues more skeptical of its academic value. My argument here does not challenge the aesthetic quality or political viability of rock, nor does it engage the discourses that have accrued around charges of curricular "rockism."[14] Rather, I contend that continuing to use rock's frames and narratives as the underlying basis for popular music pedagogy in the wake of emergent genres and technological and social develop-ments can be detrimental to historical accounts of rock specifically and popular

11. Tony Bennett, "Popular Culture: A Teaching Object," *Screen Education* 34 (Spring 1980): 17–30; Iain Chambers, "Pop Music: A Teaching Perspective," *Screen Education* 39 (Summer 1981): 35–46; Bernard Waites, Tony Bennett, and Graham Martin, eds., *Popular Culture: Past and Present* (London: Croom Helm and the Open University Press, 1982); and Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986). The development of popular culture courses at Open University derived from theories on popular culture at the Center of Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. See Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

12. Theo Cateforis, "Sources and Storytelling: Teaching the History of Rock through its Primary Documents," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 21, no. 1 (2009): 32–41.

13. For example, Covach and Flory's *What's that Sound* foregrounds the musical evolution of rock and roll, while Garofalo's *Rockin' Out* stresses rock's cultural politics.

14. Rockism is the use of rock-based ontologies as a barometer for all other popular genres. Kelefa Sanneh writes that "rockism means idolizing the authentic old legend (or underground hero) while mocking the latest pop star; lionizing punk while barely tolerating disco; loving the live show and hating the music video; extolling the growling performer while hating the lip-syncher." Rockists "[reduce] rock 'n' roll to a caricature, then [use] that caricature as a weapon." Kelefa Sanneh, "The Rap Against Rockism," *The New York Times*, October 31, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/31/arts/music/31sann.html. For rockism in pedagogy, see the Roundtable on Rockism and its Discontents panel, International Association for the Study of Popular Music–US Chapter Annual Meeting, Murfreesboro, TN, February 2006; and Anahid Kassabian and David Brackett's contributions to "Roundtable: The Future of Popular Music Studies," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 11, no. 1 (1999): 154–63.

music writ large. Examining issues of youth culture and social critique runs the risk of converting rock's politics into the ideology of popular music-based rebellion *in toto*. While stressing rock's musical value has importantly countered the cultural hierarchies subordinating popular music beneath Western art forms, doing so molds rock's conditions of music making into a barometer for analyzing other popular music genres.

Foregrounding rock's frames and narratives across popular music pedagogy, from either cultural or textual perspectives, therefore risks transforming the genre from a historically delimited musical form into a transcendent one. As Mark Mazullo has argued, the ideology of rock historiography has aligned with a strain of American exceptionalism that has "attempted to appropriate for this narrative nothing less than all of America's mythic past."[15] This can be demonstrated, for example, by the use of "rock" as a verb in popular discourses in many genres instead of, say, "jazz" or "hip-hop." The pedagogical strategies used initially to legitimate rock music are now at risk for imposing rock's ideologies and technological conditions as the value system for the entirety of popular music history. Herein lay the challenge in designing my Rock Music course: teaching it as a *de facto* popular music survey risked reiterating rock's dominance within popular music discourses. If a critical pedagogy should "contest dominant forms of symbolic production," per Henry Giroux, how can popular music pedagogy contest the symbolic dominance of rock—or any other genre?

Breaks and Discontinuities: A Non-Rock Popular Music Survey Course

In planning my course, I therefore asked myself two questions. First, how might a non-rock-centric popular music survey be structured? Second, how might a rock course be conceived as a part of, rather than equivalent to, this broader survey? To answer these questions, I turned, perhaps paradoxically, to the beginnings of popular culture pedagogy, in particular the work of Stuart Hall. In his seminal "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," Hall writes that scholars of popular culture "understand struggle and resistance rather better than we do reform and transformation."[16] Converting his statement from theory to pedagogy, teachers too often foreground the ideological stakes of popular music rather than the transformations changing the material and social conditions of its production. In another essay, "Popular Culture and the State," Hall places these transformations at the heart of the historical study of popular culture:

15. Mark Mazullo, "Fans and Critics: Greil Marcus's 'Mystery Train' as Rock 'n' Roll History," *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 151.

16. Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 443.

> [We] must attend to breaks and discontinuities: the points where a whole set of patterns and relations is drastically reshaped or transformed. We must try to identify the periods of relative 'settlement.' Then we need to identify the turning points, when relations are qualitatively restructured and transformed—the moments of transition. This will produce a historical periodisation which goes beyond the merely descriptive to apprehend the shifts in cultural relations which punctuate the development of popular culture.[17]

The history of popular culture is defined by "breaks and discontinuities," periods of relative stasis followed by moments of concentrated yet systemic change.[18] A critical pedagogy of popular music must therefore attend to these breaks. Given my teaching responsibilities, I immediately noticed the similarity between this concept and the usual structure of music appreciation courses through the chronological examination of large-scale eras. Just as music appreciation textbooks have supplanted an earlier model of stylistic evolution by engaging sociocultural contexts, a frame of periodic transformation in a popular music survey would understand its history as defined by systemic sociocultural ruptures which stabilize for a given period and produce musical genres related to these new social and technological contexts. A popular music survey course must then account for this periodicity *without* imposing a hierarchy or trajectory upon it. This is not to relativize great performers or remove aesthetic interest, but to ensure that, pedagogically, popular music remains at root a *historical* rather than ideological concept. The aim of a critical pedagogy of popular music history must take care to avoid reinscribing the mythologies familiar to our students and instead foreground criticality, materiality, and historical context.

To envisage such a popular music survey, I divided the past century of American popular music into four of Hall's "breaks and discontinuities": the 1920s (electric recording, talking films, radio); the 1950s (Great Migration, growth of middle-class, television, LPs, cars, transistor radios), the 1980s (globalization, digital sampling, the Walkman, CDs), and the past decade (Internet, social media, iPods, MP3s).[19] These periods of "drastic reshaping and

17. Stuart Hall, "Popular Culture and the State," in Bennett, Mercer, and Woollacott, eds., *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, 23. The collection from which this essay comes stems from the development and theorization of popular culture pedagogy as part of the Open University U-Series during the early 1980s.

18. Hall's statement is also reminiscent of Thomas Kuhn's theory of the "paradigm shift." See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

19. This list is neither intended to be prescriptive nor to dismiss popular musics of the nineteenth century. Hall argued that "so many of the characteristic forms of what we now think of as 'traditional' popular culture either emerge from or emerge in their distinctive modern form" between 1880 and 1920. Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," 444. Though Hall discusses British popular culture, his basic point is applicable to America, where changes in

transformation" involve complex sociopolitical changes impossible to reduce to any single determining factor. Yet I was struck by how each break involves a new technological environment that opens up new forms of music-making connected to the development of a musical genre dominant within a given time period (jazz, rock, hip-hop, EDM). As Paul Théberge has written, technology "has become a precondition for popular music culture at its broadest and most fundamental levels."[20] Technology produces and naturalizes popular music practices, and it also initiates new formations. It has also recently become an important topic in teaching materials; J. Peter Burkholder uses it to structure his chapter on twenty-first century music written for the latest edition of *A History of Western Music*.[21]

I therefore decided to foreground the narrative of technological change in my Rock Music course. Stressing technology, though, does not imply a materialist determinism divorced from broader social or cultural contexts. From a cultural perspective, it frames popular music as a contingently defined artistic form whose values and uses relate to the socioeconomics, philosophies, and politics of a given environment. From a musical standpoint, technology examines why material capabilities have enabled and delimited particular sounds, forms of music making, musical geographies, and values of musicianship. In returning to Peterson's argument, stressing technology helps replace an "Elvis Hero" or "Beatles Hero" narrative by understanding how rock's great performers are as much great innovators within emergent technological milieus as great musicians. It positions rock as the result of the transformations of the 1950s and superseded by other genres as a result of later breaks. It changes discussion of contemporary rock from examining its vitality to how it has been navigating new technological milieus that are increasingly different from its original conditions of music making. Attention to technology, therefore, could

technologies of reproduction and distribution, the stratification of American culture into high and low, and the permeation of Arnoldian definitions of culture into music essentially produce the cultural politics of the "popular" in their modern form. See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). Charles Hamm and Derek Scott have argued that popular music emerged in its distinct form earlier in the mid-nineteenth century. Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: Norton, 1979); and Derek Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Morag Shiach traces the genealogy of the word "popular" in relation to "culture" in "A History of Changing Definitions of 'The Popular,'" in *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1989), 19-34.

20. Paul Théberge, "'Plugged In': Technology and Popular Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23.

21. J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 9th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2014).

help structure a rock history course within a broader history of popular music, rather than considering these two ends as essentially the same.

Technology as Frame in MUS 109

The following lesson descriptions come from my Fall 2012 course, the third semester that I taught Rock Music. I used an innovative course design which structured each two-day unit on a single album (I have included the albums on my syllabus in the Appendix). On the first day of each unit, I introduced the broader genre and cultural context from which the album emerged, while the second day focused on individual song analysis and discussion. While only discussing a few artists via the album format per semester can be seen to reify a canon and privilege a particular medium, delving into a few artists can be an effective way of opening up the cultural contexts in which their albums were created.[22] Structuring a course around albums can be enriching so long as the format is understood to be historically delimited. My syllabus began with Elvis's *The Sun Sessions*, a compilation of 45s released in 1976, and the penultimate album, Radiohead's *Kid A*, was originally leaked as individual MP3s on peer-to-peer networks.

The list of albums, though admittedly subjective, was chosen as a means of distinguishing Rock Music from a broader popular music survey. Recalling Brackett's notion of the dual meaning of "rock," I did not want to conscript all post-1950s popular musics into rock music history. In particular, I questioned the inclusion of hip-hop, since uncritically including the genre within a rock course runs two risks. First, it grants recent rock a cultural or technological dominance that marginalized hip-hop's impact on the genre. Second, scholars such as Felicia M. Miyakawa and Richard Mook, Tricia Rose, and Houston Baker have long argued that the study of hip-hop requires a distinct pedagogical toolkit.[23] Such approaches are further necessitated because hip-hop's methods

22. My course design offered a similar approach for rock music to Thomas Forrest Kelly's recent music appreciation textbook *Music Then and Now* (2013). Kelly structures his units around different premieres, expanding his famous "First Nights" course at Harvard to cover eighteen premieres. By focusing on a small group of works, Kelly seeks "to send students away really owning a small number of pieces of music." By using the premiere format, he writes that "the idea is to consider these pieces, not as museum pieces revered for all the ages, but to consider what it was like to be at the first performances . . . it allows for other times, cultures, and attitudes to be considered." Thomas Forrest Kelly, "Music Then and Now," this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 152.

23. Felicia M. Miyakawa and Richard Mook, "Avoiding the 'Culture Vulture' Paradigm: Constructing an Ethical Hip-hop Curriculum," this *Journal* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 41–58, http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/120/231; Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994); and Houston A. Baker, *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy* (Chicago:

of musicianship, composition, and distribution are much more aligned with student cultural experiences and technological exposures than those of rock. From a strictly technological standpoint, hip-hop's devotion to digital production, sampling, and intertextuality is more familiar to our students than the analog world of the rock era.

Most rock textbooks discuss hip-hop because of the genre's central role in the last thirty years of popular music. Yet I decided not to include any hip-hop albums in my course. The closest album to hip-hop on my syllabus is Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, which usefully introduced important hip-hop concepts like breakdancing and remixing and generated discussion on the unsavory racial politics of 1980s rock (and MTV) through an album that predominantly uses a rock-based instrumentation of guitars, drums, and keyboards.[24] Simply omitting hip-hop, though, runs the risk of acceding to rockist students who view hip-hop as inferior. I therefore stressed that hip-hop was cut not because of an assumed lack of musical worth, but because I believe that a rock music course requires different approaches than the classroom instruction of hip-hop.[25] When I reread Peterson's article in preparation for my course, I was struck by its resonance with changes in popular music since the turn of the millennium. Developments in Internet and MP3 technology, new modes of circulation (e.g., torrent sharing, iPods, iPhones, social media, Spotify, and Pandora) and new compositional tools (e.g., Autotune, Ableton, Protools) have recalibrated how popular music is produced, commodified, and consumed. If Peterson stresses that discussing Elvis and the Beatles as if they were Frank Sinatra or the Mills Brothers makes little sense, teaching Outkast or Public Enemy as if they were Nirvana or, worse, Bruce Springsteen is no less ahistorical. I therefore focused my first and last

University of Chicago Press, 1993). See also Loren Kajikawa and Justin Burton's respective contributions to this roundtable.

24. We also read Kobena Mercer's "Notes on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*," which opened up the ambiguous racial politics of the famous music video.

25. Though I do not claim that hip-hop should never be part of a rock course, I would caution instructors who include hip-hop in a rock course to examine the disjunctures between the two genres. For example, in *The Rock History Reader*, Theo Cateforis introduces Greg Tate's "Hip-Hop Nation" by demonstrating how the author "situates hip hop within a long musical lineage stretching from the blues and jazz to funk and fusion. Nowhere, however, does he mention rock music. Which begs the question: exactly how does hip hop relate to rock?" (245). Cateforis leads the teacher to introduce hip-hop by questioning its place within the course, asking students to consider why hip-hop is discussed in a rock course if its musical lineage is outside rock. Joseph Schloss's textbook offers another suggestion by highlighting interconnections between the two genres during the 1980s, including the use of rock breaks by early turntablists, connections between New York City hip-hop and punk scenes, and direct collaborations like Run-DMC and Aerosmith's "Walk This Way." As Schloss writes, "though few would consider hip-hop to be rock music as such, there is a deeper mutual influence between the two styles than many people realize" (Schloss, Starr, and Waterman, *Rock: Music, Culture, Business*, 290).

lessons around the technological "breaks and discontinuities," that have fundamentally shifted rock's relationship to popular music more broadly.

The first unit, based on Elvis's *Sun Sessions*, began with a discussion of Peterson's "Why 1955." One of the strengths of Peterson's article from a pedagogical standpoint is his comparison of the 1940s and 1950s music industry which illuminates the "discontinuities" between the two periods. While students are more familiar with the 1950s industry, they usually have little concept of the pre-rock music industry. (Students are frequently amazed, for example, that recordings were rarely broadcast on radio before the 1950s!) Explaining this earlier context can help understand how rock emerged during this time. In reading "Why 1955," I had students pay particular attention to two of the changes in the music industry discussed in the text: technology and reorganization.[26] We discussed three new technologies: the transistor radio, the LP, and the television, noting how they expanded the potential soundscape of popular music and heralded a shift in its circulation from the studio radio broadcast to the LP. Peterson then demonstrates how these technologies decentralize a previously homogenous music industry: the specialization, rather than vertical integration, of record companies and radio stations (the creation of what Peterson calls "horizontal organization"); the creation of specialized production companies and independent recording studios; the flourishing of heterogeneous radio stations devoted to niche genres, and the development of personality DJs like Alan Freed.

After discussing these broad changes, we examine how they are reflected in the *Sun Sessions* LP. Some of their impacts are immediately apparent: Sun Records was an independent record label in Memphis, Tennessee that catered to the nascent rockabilly niche market; the songs circulated on the durable and portable 45 instead of the delicate 78; the recordings used a small country ensemble rather than a large, expensive studio orchestra; and, though it occurred after the *Sessions*, Elvis garnered national fame through his pelvic gyrations broadcast on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. We also discussed less obvious connections. For example, though Elvis would have been exposed to country, blues, and rockabilly through performances in Tupelo and Memphis, these genres became increasingly circulated via recordings on the numerous niche labels in the area. His blending of country and blues is therefore not completely original, but reflective of a soundscape enabled by new media. The lesson concluded by examining Elvis mythology through his famous quote, "I don't sound like nobody," which is included in the *Sun Sessions* liner notes. While acknowledging how Elvis's uniquely powerful and multifaceted voice lends credence to

26. Peterson opens by discussing legal changes to copyright and patent law, and deregulatory FCC policies. Since undergraduates are much more familiar with technologies than legal history, I introduce these concepts as part of the technological discussion.

his boast, I also use the previous discussion to situate his recordings in their historical and technological context.[27] That way, I reiterate Peterson's contention that Elvis "took advantage of the opportunities that became available to him" rather than singlehandedly ushering in rock 'n' roll.

The final part of the course then turned to the paradigm shifts of technological change over the last decade. I paralleled my discussion of Peterson's article with a comparison of the music industry from 1995 and 2005. While both industry forms are more familiar to students, it must be reiterated that in the vast majority of cases, students' first memories of popular music now date from the early 2000s. As such, they have never experienced a music industry dominated by physical media or, say, music stations broadcasting rock music videos (or, really, *any* music videos) during prime time. They have always been able to relatively easily acquire music for free; to listen to music on a variety of devices including computers, tablets, and MP3 players; and to hold a staggering amount of music in an incredibly small physical space.[28] We then ruminated on how these technological changes produced new forms of music making based on digital production, remixing, and distribution which are more aligned with hip-hop than rock. I then noted that only one rock band, the much-pilloried Nickelback, had ranked among the top ten best-selling artists of the past decade, and that rock's most profitable artists were the Rolling Stones, U2, Bruce Springsteen, Elton John and Bon Jovi, sexta- and septuagenarian performers who are now primarily touring groups.[29] I referenced these facts not to proclaim rock's death, but to distinguish rock's relationship to the twenty-first music industry from that of the late twentieth century.

After this lesson, I completed the unit with a discussion delineating how rock artists have engaged with this new technological milieu and the increased marginalization of the genre. I chose two indie rock albums which reflect the two dominant approaches of recent rock artists: engagement with digital composition; and nostalgia for an earlier era of rock's dominance. We first discussed Radiohead's 2000 album *Kid A*, focusing on the group's usage of hip-hop and

27. While we did not read his book, Alban Zak's *I Don't Sound Like Nobody: Remaking Music in 1950s America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010) crept its way into this discussion in its connection between recording style and authenticity.

28. During this lesson, I traced a 78 record, a 33⅓ LP, a CD, and my laptop computer on the board. I then indicated how much music is on each device: 6 minutes, 42 minutes, 80 minutes, and finally about 30 *days*, or 43,200 minutes. I then ask a student to trace their iPods or iPhones and put approximately how much music they have on their devices. Demonstrating the concomitant shrinking of playback media and the exponential growth of their capacities is quite viscerally effective.

29. Some of this factual material came from an article we read in class, Steven Hyden, "It's Time to Stop Using Rock as a Catch-All Term for Popular Music," *The Onion AV Club*, November 29, 2011, http://www.avclub.com/article/its-time-to-stop-using-rock-as-a-catch-all-term-fo-65740.

electronica and their embrace of MP3 distribution. We analyzed "Everything in its Right Place," a song which uses live sampling to seamlessly transition from live performance to recorded playback, and "Idiotheque," whose throbbing beat combines DJ techniques and a sample from Paul Lansky's *Mild und Liese*. We also discussed how Radiohead embraced Internet distribution methods, leaking *Kid A* to the peer-to-peer website Napster (as opposed to the cease-and-desist lawsuits brought by Metallica and Dr. Dre) and later selling their 2007 album *In Rainbows* online on a pay-what-you-want basis.

In the following lecture, I contrasted Radiohead's approach with Arcade Fire's exploration of rock's nostalgic impulses in their 2011 release *The Suburbs*. We examined themes of alienation, nostalgia, and whiteness in "Suburban War" and "Month of May." Yet we also discussed how the album's anthemic conclusion, "Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)" borrows from *disco*, converting the genre's pulsing beats and minority urban origins into a representation of white suburbia's endless strip malls and four-lane highways (a very familiar image for my students native to my university's suburban location). We briefly discussed the detestation of disco by 1970s rock fans (culminating in the notorious Disco Demolition Night at Comiskey Field), noting the impact of historical distance on the acceptance of disco's musical innovations. Through these lessons, I tried to demonstrate how rock's decentralization has produced compositional approaches that reflective the genre's new technological environment.

Conclusion

In designing my rock music course, MUS 109, I wrestled with the tension arising from its dual, incongruous purposes as a genre-specific class and a broader survey of popular music. I used the frame of technological change to distinguish these purposes. I first imagined a popular music survey structured on "breaks and discontinuities," to invoke Stuart Hall, then bookended my rock course with two of these breaks; that of the 1950s as reflected through Elvis Presley's *Sun Sessions* recordings, and that of the twenty-first century as reflected in Radiohead's *Kid A* and Arcade Fire's *The Suburbs*. This tension between a rock and popular music survey course reflects my institution's specific curricular design, but it also allows scrutiny of both how these aims have been historically elided and how instructors can use course design to differentiate them, a necessity given student experiences with popular music. Drawing on Theo Cateforis, I have shown how popular music courses are frequently centered on narratives developed around the study of rock music, while the slippery definition of "rock" noted by David Brackett can lead popular music pedagogy to render rock synonymous with all post-1955 popular musics. I framed my course

around technological breaks and excluded hip-hop from course repertoire in order to treat rock as a historical popular music genre part of, not equivalent to or dominant within, a broader popular music survey. While my course frames, reportorial choices, and in-class discussions somewhat reflect my particular interests, they point to the need to develop pedagogical strategies for including, rather than ignoring or diminishing, contemporary popular music practices. The technological, social, and cultural contexts of our students must be leveraged to situate rock history courses as part of popular music history while concurrently treating popular music history courses as separate from rock history.

APPENDIX: Albums Used in My Rock Music Course During Fall 2012

Elvis Presley, *The Sun Sessions* (released 1977, originally recorded 1954–56)
Bob Dylan, *Bringing it All Back Home* (1964)
Beatles, *Rubber Soul* (1965)
Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds* (1966)
Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin II* (1969)
Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On* (1971)
Joni Mitchell, *Blue* (1971)
Bruce Springsteen, *Born to Run* (1975)
Sex Pistols, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols* (1977)
Michael Jackson, *Thriller* (1983)
Paul Simon, *Graceland* (1986)
Nirvana, *Nevermind* (1991)
Radiohead, *Kid A* (2000)
Arcade Fire, *The Suburbs* (2011)