

TEACHING DOSSIER

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Labour Studies 2M03

***Creating and Connecting:
Popular Culture, Social Media, and Labour***

Summer 2016

Tuesdays and Thursdays @ 11:30am in KTH 109

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The simultaneous rise of the knowledge/creative economy and neoliberal economic policies in the 1970s decisively ruptured the postwar Keynesian social contract and its associated images of class and work. This course examines how social movements, technological change, economic restructuring, and media-ecosystems reshape our experiences and perceptions of class and work. The course is divided into three sections that explore, in turn: (1) historical and more recent representations of class and workers in popular culture (i.e. music, TV, film, online); (2) the knowledge/creative economy, the role of social media in it, and related transformations in class and work; and, (3) a closer look at the actual labour underpinning cultural production and new media technologies, including recent efforts to organize workers in these fields. Significantly, the course brings an intersectional lens to bear on these issues by drawing attention to the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and ability also frame popular understandings of class.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The assigned readings are drawn from a variety of sources (including playlists, films, videos, podcasts, etc). While the majority of texts will be accessible online, a number of key readings are in the course-pack (CP) designed for this course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

LSQ or Participation (Lecture #2 – Lecture #12)	- 20%
Film Review (Lecture #6)	- 15%
Research paper proposal (Lecture #8)	- 5%
Major Research Paper (Lecture # 11)	- 30%
Final Exam (August 4)	- 30%

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

COURSE CALENDAR AND REQUIRED READINGS

LECTURE 1 COURSE INTRO

This week will provide a general introduction to the course, key terms and concepts that will be used throughout, and an outline of expectations/assignments. We will also watch a segment from the documentary *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class*.

PART I CLASS AND WORK IN POPULAR MUSIC AND VISUAL CULTURE

LECTURE 2 SOUNDING OUT THE WORKPLACE:

FROM THE DEPRESSION ERA TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT (1930s – 1960s)

LSQ 1: With reference to the readings and the weekly playlist, does the music from this period speak in any way to our lives today? Why do you believe it does or doesn't?

This week explores the explosion of class and socially conscious popular music across North America from the 1930s to the 1960s. This was music that reflected critically on themes of work, class, and racial inequality. Musicians in this period were often intimately involved with significant social movements, including the labour and civil rights movements.

Required Readings

- “Foreword” (John Steinbeck, pg. 8-9) and “Introduction” (Woody Guthrie, pg. 15-20) from *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (Oak Publications, 1967). [CP]
- “This Machine Kills Fascists: The Life and Music of Woody Guthrie” (US History Scene).
- “Lead Belly, Folk-Music Giant, Has a Smithsonian Moment” (New York Times, 22 February 2015).
- “Birth of a Freedom Anthem” (New York Times, 14 March 2015).
- **Playlist 1** is on *Avenue to Learn* – this playlist includes some of the songs referenced in this week’s readings and lecture. Try to listen to the playlist while doing the readings.

LECTURE 3 PICTURING WORK:

VISUAL CULTURE AND FILM IN THE MID-20th CENTURY

LSQ 2: According to Puette, how did early Hollywood productions ‘frame’ the labour movement? Do you agree with this portrayal of unions? Why do you agree/disagree?

This week explores early visual representations of work, including those in the ‘social realist’ tradition. Particular focus is placed on the evolution of the nascent film industry in the early to mid-twentieth century, the contested representation of workers, and how work was re-imagined for the silver screen until the 1960s. Particular attention is placed on the ways in which workers and unions are represented, as well as an overview of attempts to build alternative imaginaries of working-class life on the silver-screen.

Required Readings

- “The Movies: Labour Framed” in *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labour* (Cornell University 1992), pp. 12-31. [CP]

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

- “Salt of the Earth: Made of labour, by labour, for labour” (The Guardian, 10 March 2014).
- **Film List 1** is on *Avenue to Learn*. These are some of the films mentioned in the readings and lecture for this week. You are encouraged to watch at least one before the lecture.

LECTURE 4

POSTINDUSTRIAL MUSIC-SCAPES:

MUSIC AND WORKING CLASS REALITY FROM THE 1970s TO THE 2010s

LSQ 3: According to this week’s readings/podcast, how are the social realities of the post-industrial era reflected in pop music? What artists do you believe are currently producing some of the most socially conscious music?

As globalization, neoliberalism, and new technologies unsettled the old certainties of the postwar social order, an explosion of new music emerged accompanying the transformed landscape of the postindustrial era. This week we explore the evolution of popular music from the 1970s to the present, including the working-class dimensions of country, disco, funk, rock, punk, R&B, and hip hop.

Required Readings

- “Dead Man’s Town” in *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (The New Press 2010), pp. 357-369. [CP]
- “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (The Free Press, 1994), pp. 183-209, 223-226. [CP]
- Podcast: “We need New Dylans. New Public Enemy’s. New Simones. New De La Rochas” (*The Brian Lehrer Show*, 9 December 2015).
- **Playlist 2** is on *Avenue to Learn* – this playlist includes some of the songs referenced in this week’s readings and lecture. Try to listen to the playlist while doing your weekly readings.

LECTURE 5

THE POSTINDUSTRIAL WORKING-CLASS ON FILM AND TV (1970s – 2010s)

LSQ 4: According to the readings, what are some of the dominant ways that the working class is represented in popular media since the 1970s? What recent shows or films do you believe accurately represent the reality of working class life in North America?

This week explores postindustrial representations of work in visual media (film, TV, online). We examine the period that begins with the return of social realist portrayals to Hollywood and network TV in the 1970s, to more recent portrayals of work that reflect growing precarity. In this period, the inaccurate image of a North American ‘working-class’ dominated by white, male, industrial/manual-workers was importantly disrupted.

Required Readings

- “The Important Sound of Things Falling Apart” in *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (The New Press, 2010), pp. 313-337, 348-352. [CP]
- “How Labor Gets Framed” in *Framed! Labor and the Corporate Media* (Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 1-20. [CP]
- “Where are all the blue-collar sitcoms?” (AV Club, 2 October 2012).
- **Film List 2** is on *Avenue to Learn*. These are films that are mentioned in the readings and lecture for this week. You are encouraged to watch at least one of these films before class.

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

PART II

UNDERSTANDING THE CREATIVE/KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WORKPLACE

LECTURE 6

UNDERSTANDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE, LABOUR, AND LOGISTICS BEHIND THE CREATIVE/KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

Before exploring the creative/knowledge economy, it's important to pause and consider the underlying physical infrastructure, human labour, and logistics that make it possible. This week we explore the material foundations underpinning our virtual worlds, examining the global supply chains that enable the digital technologies that pervade our lives to emerge.

Required Readings

- Two pieces on the raw-materials used in the production of digital technologies:
 - (1) “Where Apple Gets the Tantalum for Your iPhone” (Newsweek, 4 February 2015).
 - (2) “Conflict Minerals 101” (ENOUGHproject, 18 November 2009).
- Watch/read the following videos and articles dealing with the different types of labour embedded in Apple's supply chain, from design and manufacturing to retail:
 - (1) “Motion Graphic: The iPhone Economy” (New York Times, 21 January 2012).
 - (2) “Video: Made in China” (New York Times, 26 January 2012).
 - (3) “Apple's Retail Army, Long on Loyalty but Short on Pay” (New York Times, 23 June 2012).
- A number of academics and artists have also recently begun to explore the physical infrastructures underpinning the internet. Briefly take a look at their work:
 - (1) “Bundled, Buried & Behind Closed Doors” (Ben Mendelson, Vimeo).
 - (2) “Internet Machine” (Timo Arnall's website).
 - (3) “Where the internet lives: the artist who snooped on Google's data farm” (The Guardian, 4 February 2015).
- These two pieces explore what happens to the world's electronic waste and the workers who deal with it:
 - (1) “Making and Unmaking the Digital World” (New York Times, 5 June 2015).
 - (2) “E-waste Republic” (Al Jazeera, 2015).

LECTURE 7

IMAGINING POSTINDUSTRIAL ECONOMIES: THEORY AND REALITY

LSQ 5: According to this week's readings, what are the main ways in which labour is being transformed by new technologies?

This week explores some of the leading theories that promise a ‘new’ postindustrial economy, including those addressing the increasing role of knowledge, innovation, and creativity in the 21st century workplace. While the mainstream literatures that address these issues are often couched in optimistic language, the underlying realities of expanding low-wage and precarious service work tell a different story. Along these lines, the emerging app-based ‘gig-economy’ – Uber, TaskRabbit, AskForTask, Fiver, Mechanical Turk, etc. - is becoming an important site of new labour market controversies.

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

Required Readings

- Three pieces on the post-industrial labour force:
 - (1) “A New Historical Subject: The Non-Class of Post-Industrial Proletarians” in *Farewell to the Working Class* (Pluto Press 1982), pp. 66-74. [CP]
 - (2) “On the phenomenon of ‘bullsh*t jobs’” (Strike Magazine, 17 August 2013).
 - (3) “On ‘bullsh*t jobs’” (The Economist, 21 August 2013).
- Two articles on Richard Florida’s concept of the ‘creative class’:
 - (1) “The Rise of the Creative Class” (Washington Monthly, May 2002).
 - (2) “Fallacy of the creative class: Why Richard Florida’s ‘urban renaissance’ won’t save U.S. cities” (Grist, 11 February 2013).
- A number of articles on the app-based gig economy:
 - (1) “In the Sharing Economy, Workers Find Both Freedom and Uncertainty” (New York Times, 16 August 2014).
 - (2) “Against Sharing” (Jacobin, 19 September 2014).
 - (3) “The Amazonization of Everything” (Jacobin, 8 March 2015).
 - (4) “As Boom Lures App Creators, Tough Part Is Making a Living” (New York Times, 17 November 2012).
 - (5) “Coffices, hoffices, coworking and the gig economy” (Yonge Street Media).

LECTURE 8

DIGITAL DYSTOPIAS:

LABOUR IN AN AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

LSQ 6: According to this week’s readings how are new technologies constraining the choices of workers in the emerging digital economy?

Are new technologies disempowering workers? This week looks at everything from new digital surveillance technologies in the workplace, the use of algorithms to guide managerial decisions, as well as new forms of low-wage work in the knowledge/creative economy.

Required Readings

- “Chapter 1: Proletariat” in *Cyber Proletariat: Global Labor in the Digital Vortex* (Pluto Press 2015), pp. 1-18.
- “Justice for ‘Data Janitors’” (Public Books, 15 January 2015).
- Three articles that explore the effects of new technologies in shaping the workplace environments of employees:
 - (1) “Unblinking Eyes Track Employees: Workplace Surveillance Sees Good and Bad” (New York Times, 21 June 2014).
 - (2) “Working Anything but 9 to 5: Scheduling Technology Leaves Low-Income Parents With Hours of Chaos” (New York Times, 13 August 2014).
 - (3) “Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising Workplace” (New York Times, 15 August 2015).

LECTURE 9

SOCIAL MEDIA AS TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

NEW MODELS OF LABOUR ORGANIZING

LSQ 7: Based on this week’s readings, what are some of the possibilities and limitations of using social media to affect social change?

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

This week explores some of the basic building blocks that labour unions use to build-up successful social media campaigns. It also explores some of the deeper social movement organizing skills necessary to move beyond ‘clicktivism’ or hashtag-activism in the service of sustainable social change. The readings for this week point directly to both the possibilities and limitations of using social media for positive social change.

Required Readings

- Briefly visit and have a look at the websites of the following labour campaigns that use social media to get their message across: (1) #FightFor15 (website) | (2) OURWalmart (website) | (3) Workers’ Action Centre (WAC – Toronto) (website) | (3) Living Wage Hamilton (website).
- Quickly scan the contents of these social media guides and training modules prepared by unions for their members: (1) IATSE’s training guide for members on “Netiquette” (website) and its “Social Media Guide” (website) | (2) Take a look at one of the following Training Modules and Resources on using social media released by the AFL-CIO (website).
- Two articles that explore the use of social media in recent labour campaigns:
 - (1) “Social media and labor: a perfect, and necessary, match” (People’s World, 10 September 2013).
 - (2) Social media acts as megaphone and sword in CTU strike (The BEZ, 14 September 2015).
- The following five articles focus on the difference between social-media mobilization and the harder (but equally important) work of grassroots organizing and social change:
 - (1) “Having the Hard Conversations: Jane McAlevey on Fight for 15, labor’s crisis of strategy, and the difference between organizing and mobilizing” (Jacobin, 10 April 2015).
 - (2) “Uncommon CORE” (Jacobin, 3 June 2014).
 - (3) “A United Front: A strong alliance between Fight for 15 and Black Lives Matter would propel both movements forward” (Jacobin, 9 February 2015).
 - (4) “Movement to Increase McDonald’s Minimum Wage Broadens Its Tactics” (New York Times, 30 March 2015).
 - (5) “How the Fight for 15 is Uniting Latinos, Blacks, and Whites in a Movement the Nation Should Pay Attention To” (Fusion, 11 November 2015).

PART III

ORGANIZING CULTURAL PRODUCERS

LECTURE 10

ORGANIZING LABOUR IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

LSQ 8: According to the readings, what are some of the major challenges that musicians have faced historically? What are some emerging challenges confronting musicians today?

Struggles for control over output and the distribution of profits between musicians and the major recording labels have been a feature of the industry since its beginnings. Patterns of exploitation have tended to match those in the labour market more broadly, with racialized musicians and women more likely to be undervalued and short-changed for their contributions. As technology develops and business models in the music industry shift, new opportunities and challenges are emerging for cultural producers. We will also examine the role of behind the scenes workers who are equally crucial to the music industry.

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

Required Readings

- Three articles on the history of early labour organizing by musicians in the USA and Canada:
 - (1) “The Silence That Sparked New Sounds” (Wall Street Journal, 26 December 2012).
 - (2) “Timeline of the American Federation of Musicians” (AFM website).
 - (3) Musicians Unions (Canadian Encyclopedia).
- On some of the current challenges faced by musicians in light of the growing popularity of digital streaming services:
 - (1) “Revenge Of The Record Labels: How The Majors Renewed Their Grip On Music” (Forbes, 15 April 2015).
 - (2) “This Is How Many Streams a Musician Needs to Make Minimum Wage in America” (Music.Mic, 15 April 2015).
 - (3) “Music Artists Take On the Business, Calling for Change” (New York Times, 31 July 2015).
 - (4) “Fair Music: Transparency and Payment Flows in the Music Industry” read Executive Summary only: pages 2-4 (BerkleeICE, 2015).
- Two articles highlighting the precarity facing Canadian musicians:
 - (1) Service Canada’s Review of Musicians and Singers labour market prospects in Canada (website).
 - (2) “The average Canadian indie artist earns a whopping \$7,228 a year playing music, plus some other industry stats” (National Post, 5 March 2013).

LECTURE 11

ORGANIZING LABOUR IN THE FILM AND TV INDUSTRIES

LSQ 9: According to the readings, why did Hollywood become and why did it remain ‘a union town’? What are some of the emerging challenges facing film and TV workers?

This week explores the long history of labour organizing in film and TV, including some of the most important strikes by actors/actresses, screenwriters, production crews, etc. in recent decades. It also looks at how more recent shifts in the way film/TV content is produced, marketed and distributed – not to mention how we acquire, consume, and watch our favorite movies and shows – is influencing new rounds of labour struggle.

Required Readings

- Two articles on some of Hollywood’s early union organizing history:
 - (1) “Hollywood Is a Union Town” (The Nation, 2 April 1938).
 - (2) “The Disney Strike of 1941: How It Changed Animation & Comics” (Animation World Network, 19 July 2005).
- More recent perspectives on Hollywood as a union town:
 - (1) “Who Won the Writers Strike?” (New York Times, 12 February 2008).
 - (2) “Hollywood - America's Last Union Town” (Daily Kos, 14 August 2012).
 - (3) A guide to Hollywood Unions (website).
- Some emerging challenges in organizing TV workers:
 - (1) “Guilds Struggle to Organize Reality TV Labor” (Media Industries Project, 2011).
 - (2) “The Real World of Reality TV: Worker Exploitation” (In These Times, October 2014).

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

LECTURE 12

ORGANIZING SOCIAL MEDIA AND APP-ECONOMY WORKERS

LSQ 10: According to the readings, what are some of the new possibilities emerging for organizing workers directly involved in social media content generation and in the app-economy? What alternative visions exist for the digital economy?

We end with a consideration of nascent efforts to organize workers directly involved in social media content generation, as well as those who are increasingly resorting to the app-based gig-economy for employment. Recent organizing drives at popular social media outlets and websites speak to an emerging terrain of struggle. We also explore the possibility of alternative digital economies that wouldn't be based on worker exploitation.

Required Readings

- Two articles on recent moves to unionize online content generators at some of the world's largest online publications:
 - (1) "At Gawker Media, New Economy Workers Strive to Form a New Kind of Union" (New York Times, 14 June 2015).
 - (2) "Why HuffPo and other 'new' media journalists are choosing unions" (The Conversation).
- Three articles exploring attempts to organize the digital labour force:
 - (1) "Tech's low-wage workers disrupt the disruptors" (Al Jazeera, 18 October 2015).
 - (2) "Can Seattle Launch a Movement for a New Kind of Workers' Union?" (The Stranger, 11 November 2015).
 - (3) "Labr? An App For Organizing Workers Is Coming" (BuzzFeed).
- Two articles examining alternative ways of organizing the digital economy:
 - (1) Platform Cooperativism vs. the Sharing Economy (The Medium, 5 December 2014).
 - (2) "Worker-owned tech cooperatives find a niche near Silicon Valley" (Al Jazeera, 26 May 2015).

TEACHING DOSSIER

Konstantin Kilibarda

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

LECTURE STUDY QUESTION (LSQ) OR PARTICIPATION (20%) – EVERY WEEK

Students have a choice between writing a lecture study question for 10 lectures in the course or being graded on their participation. You must choose how you will earn this 20% by the second lecture. Those electing the **LSQ** are to answer a question in 300 (min) to 500 words (max) drawing on the required readings, videos, or playlists for that specific lecture. Students will be graded for their demonstrated knowledge of the assigned weekly materials and their ability to integrate these into a concise answer to the weekly question. Consider this a useful study tool helping you prepare for the final exam. All weekly summaries are to be handed in at the beginning of the relevant lecture. Those electing **participation** are expected to attend all lectures and actively take part in classroom discussions and activities. You will be graded for your ability to integrate the assigned readings, videos, or playlists for the specific lecture into your classroom activities. The grade will depend on both the frequency and quality of participation.

FILM REVIEW ASSIGNMENT (15%) – LECTURE #6 (July 7)

Students are expected to choose one movie from **Film List 1** (Lecture 3) and one from **Film List 2** (Lecture 5). After watching both films, students should prepare a 1,000-word film review comparing and contrasting representations of class, work, and trade unions (if relevant) in both films. In preparing your review, consider the following questions: What are the main differences in the ways working class lives are portrayed in the two films? What are the most significant shifts in the nature of work in the two eras represented? How do issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, or ability play into the different experiences of characters in both films? All reviews must include a word-count. Late assignments will be penalized 2% per day.

MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER (35%) – LECT. #8 (July 14) + LECT. #11 (July 28).

The major research paper assignment consists of two parts, a paper proposal that includes a brief research question and preliminary thesis as well as an annotated bibliography of five sources (due February 25). Essay topics are to be drawn from the weekly lecture topics and are meant as an exploration of these issues in greater depth. Papers are to be a minimum of 2,000 and a maximum of 2,500 words (8-10 double-spaced pages) and are due on March 24. All papers must include a word-count. Late assignments will be penalized 2% per day.

FINAL EXAM (30%) – IN CLASS (August 4)

The final exam will consist of 5 short-definitions (out of a list of ten key terms) worth 10% each and 2 long-answer questions worth 25% each.