

Music 207, Winter 2023, Professor Jann Pasler

*Music as Relation: Ethics, Agency, and the Public Sphere*

This course will explore the concept of relation as developed by Georgina Born (2010), articulated by Edouard Glissant (1997), and central to my work on musical practices in colonial contexts. Born's "relational" musicology--the study of "relations between social orders" and disciplines--calls for reconsidering not only "what counts as music to be studied, but also how it should be studied." Glissant, a philosopher-poet from Martinique, suggests that every identity is "extended through a relationship with the Other," thus implicitly calling for study of music's Other as well as musicians' Others. This has led me to think of colonial cultures as two-way "relations" wherein native and settler populations, are mutually, if unequally, transformed. Their musical practices encourage us to consider relationships as more complex than "the dichotomy of superior and subaltern." By its very nature, I argue, music is relational, connecting the individual to the social, the local to the global. Consider not only the collaboration of performer/composer, but also that of Telematics concerts, wherein musicians work in real time across global boundaries with often unplanned, fortuitous connections.

Our questions begin with how a musician's habits, beliefs, desires, values, and experiences inform and influence their creative practice. Digging into Foucault's *Ethics* and Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Other*, we will reflect on relationships between ethics and freedom. Furthermore, can music express ethical dilemmas? Can it help us imagine new modes of relationship, a context for negotiating personal and communal responsibilities, possibly serve as a model for living, as John Cage once suggested? Focus on the agency of musicians and their music is particularly important, as it indisputably emerges in music-making. Acknowledging this agency can counterbalance the perception or experience of domination, from the individual to the social, the local to the global. In the public sphere, we ask, how are both agency and control manifested in music? In what contexts are equalities and inequalities, social and other similarities and differences, manifested, negotiated, bridged, and sometimes overcome there, possibly transformed by it and also transform its listeners?

In this course, we will thus examine the ethics, agency, and public spheres of music-making as relational. Each student will be asked to concentrate on a genre, medium, or a musician's body of works of their choice and examine how diverse musicians or populations of their choice engaged with it over time. The goal is to both share one's research and reflections with the class and confront difficulties that arise in doing this kind of work, hopefully leading to a publishable paper.