Chapter 17

Movement Intellectuals in Popular Music: An Alternative Means of Public Education

Robert John Razzante
Arizona State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Institutions of higher education continue to face the pressing values of neoliberalism. As such, colleges and universities seek to produce human capital. Critical media literacy offers one means of education to challenge neoliberal assumptions. However, current research lacks a conceptual understanding of how musical artists can serve as critical pedagogues through their music. The current chapter seeks to understand the role of movement intellectuals in popular music among educators. More specifically, this chapter proposes the following definition of a movement intellectual in popular music: an artist who observes, collects and disseminates warranted counter-narratives through the medium of their music. Ultimately, through exploring germinal and contemporary literature, this chapter attempts to offer a language for talking about critical music literacy as a means to challenge nihilism within the environment of a neoliberal higher education.

INTRODUCTION

With an increasing neoliberal climate, institutions of higher education face the challenge of producing educated students (Harvey, 2005). According to Spring (2011), recent trends in institutions of higher education serve to cultivates students’ human capital rather than developing educated students. That is, rather than developing a personal life philosophy, institutions of higher education seek to produce workers. While each institution is different, one thing remains constant, culture. Students enter college with cultural baggage that can be cultivated within the classroom. However, professors need to develop the skillset to know how to frame culture as a venue for education. As such, critical media literacy offers one way to bring culture into the classroom for educational purposes.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-4059-5.ch017
Kellner and Share (2007) advocate the use of critical media literacy as a means to challenge dominant oppressive narratives while empowering marginalized voices. At the same time, McLaren (1995) calls our attention to rethink media literacy. Currently, research in the realm of critical media literacy largely focuses on media outlets such as video games, film, and music (Kellner & Share, 2005a). However, what about music? More specifically, what is the connection between musical artists and critical pedagogy? Rap music has been studied as one particular venue through which dominant narratives have been challenged in K-12 contexts (Akom, 2009; see also Kelly, 2016). However, how might faculty conceptually talk about musical artists as critical pedagogues in higher education. That is, what language is available to talk about the agentic potency of musical artists in educating a public? This chapter seeks to provide language to use.

From a critical-cultural perspective, this chapter attempts to conceptualize the role of critical media literacy through the exposition of musical artists as movement intellectuals in popular music. A movement intellectual has been described as someone who, “through their medium of communication, share the interests and cognitive identity of social movements. Such individuals may be recognized as ‘intellectuals’ outside the movement context or they may not” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1995, p. 450). Popular musicians are artists who, through their music, communicate to an audience. Movement intellectuals in popular music may be described as musical artists who are able to relate their music to the cognitive identity of a social movement. This concept of an intellectual is of particular interest as a means to addressing West’s (2004) concern of nihilism in the United States.

NIHILISM

West (2004) defines nihilism as “physic depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair” that results from social forces that overwhelm citizens to survive and struggle to make a difference at the same time (p. 26). This nihilism can often be discouraging for those that focus on their daily needs rather than the needs of the country at-large. However, West encourages modern intellectuals to use their voices to raise a sense of urgency for citizens to participate in democratic practices.

West (2004) writes about the use of Socratic questioning at its ability to talk about difficult issues in the United States. He particularly focuses his attention to how Socratic dialogue can be used to fight notions of nihilism that can be found throughout the nation’s history. “The aim of this Socratic questioning is democratic paideia – the cultivation of an active, informed citizenry – in order to preserve and deepen our democratic experiment (West, 2004, p. 40). West turns toward intellectuals in order to encourage citizens to take an active role in their democratic participation. The intellectuals West mentions range from politicians to authors to musicians. This study focuses on musicians as certain intellectuals that have the capability to raise the democratic paideia that West mentions. According to Kellner and Share, “critical media literacy involves cultivating skills in analysing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts” (p. 372). One way to cultivate the informed citizenry West advocates is through music.
Related Content

Adapting Multimedia Streaming to Changing Network Conditions
Dimitris Kanellopoulos (2011). *Streaming Media Architectures, Techniques, and Applications: Recent Advances* (pp. 24-38).
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/adapting-multimedia-streaming-changing-network/47513?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/adapting-multimedia-streaming-changing-network/47513?camid=4v1a)

Discovering News Frames: An Approach for Exploring Text, Content, and Concepts in Online News Sources
[www.igi-global.com/article/discovering-news-frames/170571?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/discovering-news-frames/170571?camid=4v1a)

Reducing Processing Demands for Multi-Rate Video Encoding: Implementation and Evaluation
[www.igi-global.com/article/reducing-processing-demands-multi-rate/69518?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/reducing-processing-demands-multi-rate/69518?camid=4v1a)

Web Design Concept
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/web-design-concept/17583?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/web-design-concept/17583?camid=4v1a)