

## 0.1 Chapter 5: culture: Leisure

### 0.2 Leisure

## 1 Why Philosophy Should Become More Like Pop Music

When pop music started in a big way in the 1960s, it seemed at times like an especially silly medium, favoured by hormonal school girls and connected up with delinquent and tediously bizarre behaviour.



By contrast, philosophy had a reputation for being deeply serious and impressive the natural home of the big ambition to understand ourselves and transform the world through ideas.



But since the 1960s, philosophy has stalled and pop has conquered the world. It is now the foremost medium for the articulation of ideas on a mass scale. This explains why, if it is to survive, philosophy must study pop; part of its salvation lies in understanding pop's techniques so as to be able to become, in crucial ways, a little more like it.

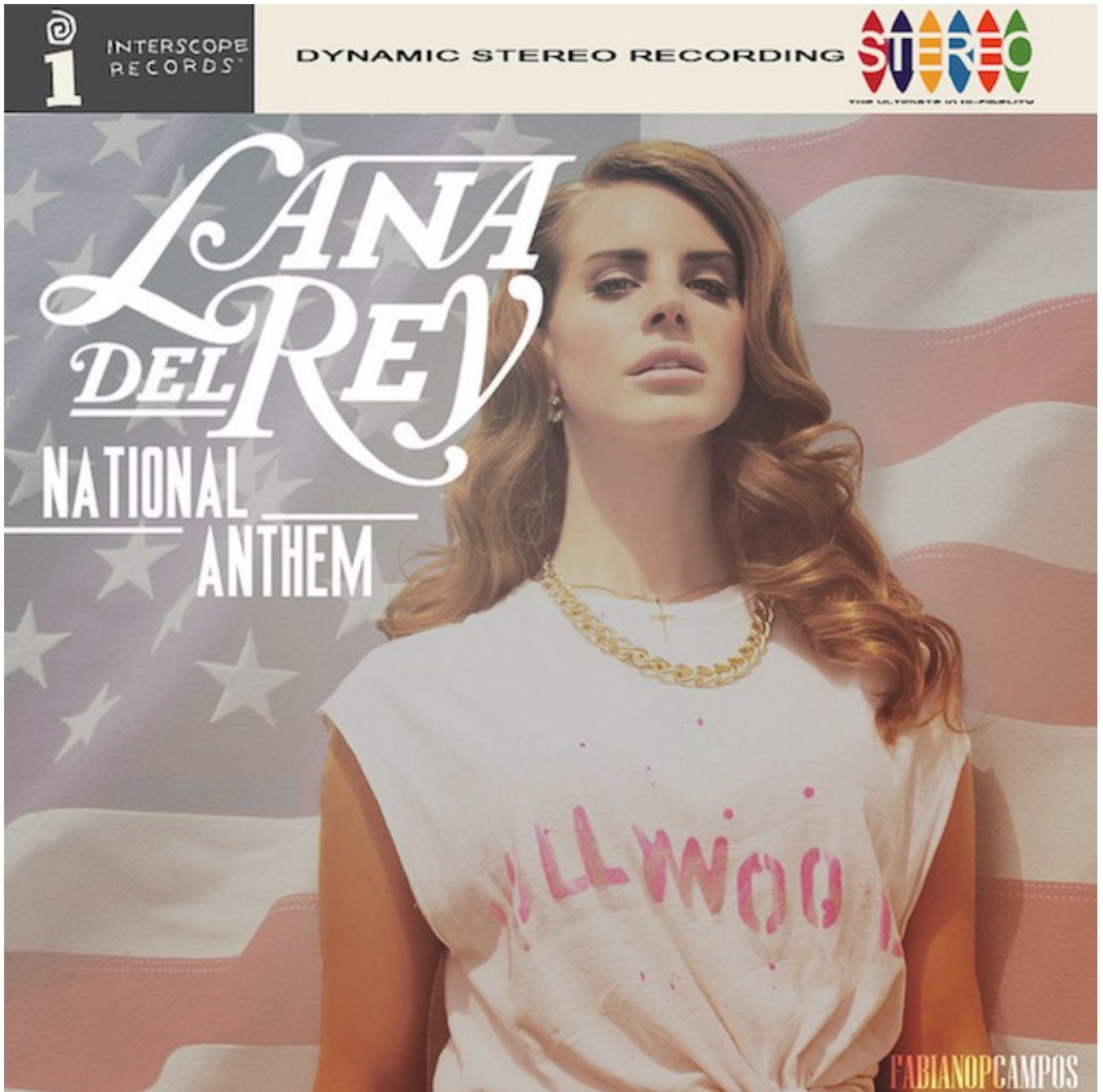
There are a host of critical lessons philosophy can learn from pop. For a start, pop teaches us about charm. The great pop songs are bewitchingly, dazzlingly charming in the manner in which they get their messages across: they know exactly how to wear away our defences and enter our imaginations with easy grace. It's a reminder that it isn't enough for ideas to be correct. For them to become powerful and deliver on their promises, they need to know how to win over an audience. Pop is the most seductive force the world has ever known; it has more and more devoted adherents than all religions put together. It is more deeply loved, more trusted, and a more constant companion in our joys and sorrows than any other art form.



Pop has become powerful in part because it has cleverly understood the division of labour. Those who can sing and hold the crowd may not be the same as those who know how to write music or arrange instruments. Pop is unashamed about uniting talent wherever it finds it, so that the final result can combine the most beautiful face with the finest voice, the best score and the most beguiling instrumental arrangement. Pop has overcome the Romantic hangup about the unique creator, it knows that the most intimate, heartfelt result may be the outcome of large-scale institutional collaboration.

Pop teaches us too about compression. It knows our lives are busy and has an extraordinarily ambitious sense of what could be achieved in under three minutes. Like all other art forms, pop is trying to communicate ideas, but it bypasses the more resistant intellectual parts of the mind. All the usual obstacles to reaching another person are stripped away in the name of visceral intimacy. Pop achieves what Pericles, Lincoln, Dickens and Proust were attempting and spectacularly exceeds all of them. It provides the ultimate demonstration of the 19th-century theorist Walter Pater's tantalising assertion that All art aspires to the condition of music.





Like religion, pop knows that repetition is key. It works its effect through being heard again and again. It would prefer to grab three minutes from you every day, than three hours every two months. Like religious incantation, it is interested in working upon our souls cumulatively.

Pop is intelligent in not being afraid of simplicity; it is too wise to be held back by pedantry or erudition. It knows that our emotional needs are in essence obvious: to be encouraged, to be held, to be jollied, to be reassured when we are alone, to be told something beautiful and uplifting. It doesn't suffer from high arts perverse addiction to subtlety. It accepts that the core of our minds may be astonishingly basic in its structure.



Pop is ultimately the master of collective euphoria. It possesses what churches and politicians would like, but are so rarely able to secure. It has worked out how to generate shared moments of deep emotion about important things. In the stadium, the singer functions as a high priest, for whom the flock might be ready to make major sacrifices; they would, in their benign frenzy, be willing to go anywhere.

\*\*\*

That philosophy needs to learn from pop doesn't preclude that pop needs of course to learn quite a bit from philosophy as well.

Pop currently touches on the big themes but doesn't, as yet, properly take up many of the opportunities that lie its way. It is lacking in ultimate ambitions.



In the future, we need pop musicians to take up the challenge of investigating the deepest truths, of getting behind transformative concepts and of making these into the things we sing about in front of the bathroom mirror with our hairbrushes so that they become the background sounds of our inner lives. The world waits for a redemptive synthesis between philosophy and pop.