Readings in Music Theory
Fall 2018

W 2:00–4:45
MEH 3244

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Course Description

The discipline of music theory has developed considerably over the past few decades. We’ll look at several of the main trends, surveying the influential and cutting-edge writings that have shaped and continue to shape our field. We’ll focus on both content—the original scholarly arguments each reading presents—and form—the way that arguments are situated and supported. Our main goal: this course will give you the background necessary to attend any theory conference, read any theory journal or book, and embark on your own original scholarship in the field.

Readings

You’ll find PDFs of all readings in a Box@UC folder accessible here (requires UC login): https://is.gd/Readings2018

Course Requirements

Readings: Every week, you will take notes on the readings, and you will write a 2-page response essay. Notes are due on Monday at 10 p.m., two days before class. Submit them via email. Response essays are due on Tuesday at 10 p.m., one day before class. Upload them to Blackboard, then read your classmates’ essays. Exception: You do not need to submit notes for any week marked “No essay due.” When no essay is due, no notes are due.

Book review: Select any academic book in the field of music theory. It may be a monograph or an edited collection. It may be a book that we read an excerpt from, it may be another book from the course bibliography, or it may be a book from outside the course bibliography. I must approve your selection. Give a 10-minute presentation on November 7, then submit a written report of 8–10 pages by 10 p.m. that evening.

Scholarship review: Select five articles from the same subfield. They may be listed in the course bibliography, or they may be from outside the course bibliography. I must approve your selections. Give a 10-minute presentation on December 5, then submit a written report of 8–10 pages by 10 p.m. that evening.
**Formatting:** For all assignments, follow the templates outlined further below. For written assignments, please include your name in the document text. (Easy to forget when submitted electronically.) Stated lengths assume double spacing, 12-pt. Times New Roman, and 1-inch margins, or about 300 words per page.

**Policies**

Incompletes will not be assigned in this course, absent extenuating circumstances. Students who have not submitted final papers by Monday, December 17, will receive a final course grade of F. Auditors are not permitted.

**Guidelines for Reading Scholarship**

Each work of scholarship makes an original contribution to the field of music theory, in the form of a new idea or argument. It does not merely apply an existing idea to a new work.

Authors often introduce and develop new ideas using a conventional article format. They state the main argument up front. They situate the argument with respect to the existing literature, explaining how their idea is different. They present a new methodology—that is, a theory and a method of applying it—that will be tested through a case study, usually an analysis of excerpts from one or more works.

*The subject of the paper is not the subject of the paper.* The methodology, and not the case study, is the original contribution. Try to describe the methodology without referring to the work or composer studied. For example, we will read a book chapter on the interaction of rhythm and meter in the music of Robert Schumann. Our goal is to increase our knowledge about rhythm and meter, not Schumann’s music. Of course, we *will* learn more about Schumann’s music, but it will be more relevant to understand why the author chose Schumann’s music for the case study.

Many articles contain the components below. Sometimes they are independent sections; other times they are integrated into the main body. Each component makes a smaller argument that supports the larger argument as a whole. As you read, identify each component and summarize the argument that it makes.

- **Introduction:** Presents and contextualizes the overall argument. The remainder of the article will develop the argument in detail.
- **Background:** Provides information to help the reader understand the article. This may take the form of definitions, axioms, or a sample original analysis based on prior research. This is *not* the author’s original argument.
- **Literature review:** Summarizes prior scholarship on the topic, in order to show that the present article offers a new contribution. This is *not* the author’s original argument.
Methodology: Presents a theoretical idea and a method for testing it. Often illustrated with short analytical examples. This is the crux of the author’s contribution.

Case study: Explores implications of the methodology through extended analytical application. The case study may focus on a single work or composer, or it may deal with several works or composers.

Conclusion: Restates the argument and findings. Occasionally suggests ideas for future work.

Not all articles follow this format. The writings of David Lewin, for instance, tend to follow their own organizational logic. We will also read chapters from books. In scholarly books, the background and literature review may appear in independent chapters, but these may not be the chapters assigned in class.

Template for Note Taking

As a general guideline, when reading an article or book excerpt, stop after every section and summarize what you have just read. Re-read the section first, if necessary. Reflect on the section’s function and the argument it advances. Write one sentence, entirely in your own words, that expresses that argument. Place that sentence under the appropriate category heading below.

Submit notes with the following headings (unless they are not applicable to a given reading):

**Argument:** What is the author’s main argument?

**Background:** What do readers need to know in order to understand the paper? (You can identify this section even if you yourself lack prior background on this topic.)

**Literature Review:** How does the present paper differ from prior scholarship? (You can identify how the paper reacts to prior scholarship even if you yourself have not read that scholarship.)

**Methodology:** How will the author apply and test the main argument? (Try to summarize the methodology without referring to a particular work or composer.)

**Case Study:** Describe the procedure and argument for each main analytical example. (You may not previously be familiar with the repertoire. Listen to the music, study the score and musical examples, and read through the analysis in detail.)

**Commentary:** As you read, write down anything you find particularly interesting, convincing, or problematic. This is the place to go beyond recording what’s in the article. Raise critical questions, point out connections to other scholarship, think about further applications of the methodology. (This can be an independent section of your notes, or the observations can be integrated into the other sections.)
The goal of this template is to help identify the overall argument and understand how it is constructed. Ideally, you will subsequently refer to the template, without re-reading the article, in order to remember its key points and details.

Completing the template will help refine your ability to read scholarship effectively. It is a necessary first step to writing the weekly response essay (that is, synthesizing a body of scholarship) and engaging in class discussion (that is, presenting and considering various perspectives). The template is thus for the benefit of your own scholarly development.

Assessment: You will not be graded on how “good” your notes are, or on how accurately they follow the guidelines. You must simply complete them with good-faith seriousness and submit them by Monday at 10 p.m., two days before class, for full credit.

**Template for Response Essays**

Using your notes as a starting point, write a two-page response essay that critically assesses the readings as a whole. You can repeat ideas that were already presented in the notes. The idea here is to put everything together. Synthesize the readings to comment on the state of the subfield. Your essay should refer at least once to each reading.

Guidelines: Find the common threads. What are the main concerns of this subfield, and how are they being addressed? Make connections to other subfields and other readings, especially those not made explicitly within the readings. What other works or repertoires could the ideas be applied to? Demonstrate this by sketching some original analysis. (Analytical examples do not count toward the two-page minimum length.) Is work in this subfield convincing? Why or why not? What problems need to be addressed?

Assessment: The response essay may take many forms. Essays may exceed the minimum length. Upload your document to Blackboard by Tuesday at 10 p.m., one day before class, for full credit. Read your classmates’ essays before Wednesday’s class meeting.
Template for Book Review

Books have hierarchical structures. The book as a whole makes an overall argument. Each chapter makes an individual argument in service of the overall argument. Try to articulate precisely how each chapter’s argument supports the overall argument.

The core components of scholarly writing—background, literature review, etc.—may take up their own entire chapters, or they may be integrated into individual chapters.

Complete the following questions, and make photocopies for the entire class. This is the handout for your 10-minute presentation.

**Argument:** What is the book’s overall argument?

**Chapters:** In 1–2 sentences (each), describe the argument of each chapter, situating it with respect to the overall argument.

**Literature Review:** How does the book differ from prior scholarship?

**Methodology:** How does the author apply and test the main argument?

**Musical Example:** Choose one example from the book that you will use to demonstrate the book’s overall argument or methodology. It should be representative of the book’s original contribution. In your presentation, you will walk us through the example, thereby describing the book’s overall approach in the context of an original short analysis. Photocopy this example for the class, and distribute it alongside your handout.

**Commentary:** Give us your feedback. What is convincing or problematic about the book (or the chosen example)? Why?

Use the handout template as the basis for your 8–10 page written report. You can repeat the information in the handout, now supported with more detail and information. The audience for the report is a music theorist who has not read the book. You’ll need to explain what’s in the book before you offer praise or criticism.

As much as possible, focus on the big picture, not insignificant details. You might have quibbles with individual examples throughout the book, but unless your criticisms are germane to the overall argument, withhold them from the written report. If you have thoughts about how the book’s ideas can be applied beyond its own examples, feel free to pursue original analysis as part of your report.

Assessment: Reports may exceed the minimum length, but please edit prudently: not every thought needs to be shared. Email me your report by 10 p.m. on November 7 for full credit.
Template for Scholarship Review

Assess the state of your chosen subfield, based on the readings you have selected. Complete the following questions, and make photocopies for the entire class. This is the handout for your 10-minute presentation.

**Issues:** What are the main issues in this subfield, and how are they being addressed?

**Articles:** In one paragraph (each), describe the contribution each article makes to the subfield. What are its main argument and methodology? How successfully does it advance the aims of the subfield?

**Musical Example:** Choose one example from one article only. It should be representative of the work in your chosen subfield. In your presentation, walk us through the example, describing how it contributes to both its article’s argument and the subfield as a whole. Photocopy this example for the class, and distribute it alongside your handout.

**Commentary:** Give us your feedback. What is convincing or problematic about work in this subfield? What should further work in this subfield consist of?

Use the handout template as the basis for your 8–10 page written report. You can repeat the information in the handout, now supported with more detail and information. The audience for the report is a music theorist who is unfamiliar with work in this subfield. You’ll need to explain what’s in the articles before your offer praise or criticism.

Focus on common threads, not the details of each article. We are not looking for five consecutive article reports (although you may discuss the articles one at a time). Place your commentary in the broader context. What is this subfield doing, and how do your chosen articles participate?

Assessment: Reports may exceed the minimum length. Email me your report by 10 p.m. on December 5. I’ll accept it as late as December 17 for full credit.
August 29
The Discipline of Music Theory
No essay due


September 5
Rhythm and Meter
Essay #1 due


September 12
Form
Essay #2 due


**September 19**  
*Schema Theory*  
**Essay #3 due**


**September 26**  
*Transformational Theory*  
**Essay #4 due**


**October 3**  
*Neo-Riemannian Theory*  
**Essay #5 due**


October 10
Voice-Leading Spaces
Essay #6 due


October 17
Embodied Cognition
Essay #7 due


October 24
Literary Theory
Essay #8 due


**October 31**
**Topic Theory**
**Essay #9 due**


**November 7**
**Student Presentations**
**Book Review due**

**November 14**
**Feminist Theory**
**Essay #10 due**


November 21
Pop/Rock Music
Essay #11 due


November 28
Contemporary Music
No essay due


December 5
Student Presentations
Final Paper due
Bibliography

(1) The Discipline of Music Theory
(2) Schenkerian Theory
(3) Form
(4) Rhythm and Meter
(5) Schema Theory and Partimento
(6) Performance Studies
(7) Harmony
(8) Transformational Theory
(9) Klumpenhouwer Networks
(10) Neo-Riemannian Theory
(11) Generalized Voice Leading
(12) Set Theory and Analysis
(13) Fourier Transform
(14) Twelve-Tone and Serial Technique
(15) Contour
(16) Semiotics and Topics
(17) Literary Theory
(18) Embodied Cognition
(19) Music Perception
(20) Feminist Theory
(21) Disability Studies
(22) Russian Music Theory
(23) History of Music Theory
(24) Early Music
(25) Opera
(26) Pop/Rock Music: General
(27) Pop/Rock Music: Harmony and Voice Leading
(28) Pop/Rock Music: Form
(29) Pop/Rock Music: Rhythm and Meter
(30) Pop/Rock Music: Feminist Theory
(31) Rap
(32) Jazz
(33) Film Music
(34) Contemporary Music
The Discipline of Music Theory


Schenkerian Theory


**Form**


**Rhythm and Meter**


**Schema Theory and Partimento**


**Performance Studies**


**Harmony**


**Transformational Theory**


**Klumpenhouwer Networks**


**Neo-Riemannian Theory**


Generalized Voice Leading


Set Theory and Analysis


Fourier Transform

Twelve-Tone and Serial Technique
Contour


Semiotics and Topics


**Literary Theory**


Kriims, Adam P. “Bloom, Post-Structuralism(s), and Music Theory.” *Music Theory Online* 0/11 (1994).


Embodied Cognition


Music Perception


**Feminist Theory**


**Disability Studies**


**Russian Music Theory**


History of Music Theory


Early Music


Opera


**Pop/Rock Music: General**


Pop/Rock Music: Harmony and Voice Leading


**Pop/Rock Music: Form**


**Pop/Rock Music: Rhythm and Meter**


Pop/Rock Music: Feminist Theory

Rap
Jazz


Film Music


Contemporary Music


