

Seminar in Music Theory: Analysis of Post-2000 Popular Music
Spring 2017

W 2:30–5:15
MEH 3244

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Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

The scholarship on analyzing popular music has flourished in recent years, having moved into the mainstream of academic music theory and developed sophisticated tools for understanding a variety of popular styles and practices. A large portion of this scholarship concerns popular music of the second half of the twentieth century, inviting us to consider whether the same analytical techniques can readily or profitably apply to the popular music of the twenty-first century. Since the year 2000, popular music has undergone changes in distribution (the internet offering roughly equal access to both major-label and independent music), listening practices (with the increasing dominance of streaming audio and video), and genre (with some new genres, such as the mashup, emerging from internet-based practices). This course will survey a representative literature on popular form, harmony, melody, timbre, subjectivity, and intertextuality, in order to develop a framework for analyzing post-2000 popular music.

Background Reading

Students are not assumed to have prior experience analyzing popular music. The following resources, primarily concerning mid-20th-century music, are recommended for the background they provide in popular music analysis.

Walter Everett, *The Foundations of Rock: From “Blue Suede Shoes” to “Suite: Judy Blue Eyes”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Allan F. Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

Ken Stephenson, *What to Listen for in Rock: A Stylistic Analysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

Course Requirements

9 response essays (2–3 pages): Write a brief essay in which you respond to some aspect of the reading assigned for that week’s class. There is no set format for the essays, although they should: (1) demonstrate, in some manner, that you have read each of the week’s readings, and preferably, (2) involve some original analysis of music of your choice. Accompanying examples (graphical and musical) are encouraged, although they do not count toward the page length requirement. Essays are due by **10 p.m. Monday**, two days before our class meeting. I will not provide written feedback on the short papers, but I will use them to help shape our class discussion for the week.

Presentation #1 (15 minutes): Analyze a song of your choice, using a theoretical model derived from our class readings. Provide a handout with your analysis, explain what we should listen for, and then play a recording of the song. The presentation should be pedagogical in nature—teach us about the song. I must approve your song choice by February 1. Presentations will take place on **February 8**.

Transcription: Produce a full-score, full-detail transcription of a recorded song of your choice. As the transcription should reflect the song in its specific recorded instantiation, musical elements (rhythms, pitches, etc.) should not be normalized. Include lyrics, timings, formal section labels, and (optionally) other analytical annotations. I must approve your song choice by March 1. The transcription project is due on **March 8**.

Presentation #2 (15 minutes): Share copies of your transcription with the class. Explain the notational choices you made, and provide a brief analytical account of the song. Then play a recording. Presentations will take place on **March 8**, the day on which the transcription project is due.

Final paper: Write a scholarly essay of about 12–20 pages, plus appropriate accompanying examples, bibliography, etc. The topic may be repertoire-based (i.e., a close reading of a song, album, or artist) or theory-driven (i.e., application of a theoretical model to a variety of popular music). A proposal (250–500 words, plus preliminary bibliography and list of recordings) is due on **March 29**. The final paper is due during exam week, on **April 26**.

Presentation #3 (30 minutes): Provide a summary of your final paper-in-progress. Include a handout with analytical examples or transcriptions. The 30-minute length includes the time necessary to play any audio or video recordings. The presentation may be formal (conference-style) or informal in orientation, and a class Q&A will follow. Presentations will take place on **April 12 and 19**.

Incompletes: As a general rule, incompletes will not be granted to students who simply do not submit the final paper on time.

January 11
Toward the 21st Century
No essay due

Walter Everett, "Death Cab for Cutie's 'I Will Follow You Into the Dark' as Exemplar of Conventional Tonal Behaviour in Recent Rock Music," in *Song Interpretation in 21st-Century Pop Music*, ed. Ralf von Appen, André Doehring, Dietrich Helms, and Allan F. Moore (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 9–28.

André Doehring, "Andrés's 'New For U': New for Us. On Analysing Electronic Dance Music," in *Song Interpretation in 21st-Century Pop Music*, ed. Ralf von Appen, André Doehring, Dietrich Helms, and Allan F. Moore (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 133–55.

January 18
Form
Essay #1 due

Mark Spicer, "(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music," *Twentieth-Century Music* 1/1 (2004): 29–64.

Brad Osborn, "Understanding Through-Composition in Post-Rock, Math-Metal, and Other Post-Millennial Genres," *Music Theory Online* 17/3 (2011).

Brad Osborn, "Subverting the Verse–Chorus Paradigm: Terminally Climactic Forms in Recent Rock Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 35/1 (2013): 23–47.

January 25
Harmony
Essay #2 due

Guy Capuzzo, "Neo-Riemannian Theory and the Analysis of Pop-Rock Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 26/2 (2004): 177–99.

Nicole Biamonte, "Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 32/2 (2010): 95–110.

David J. Heetderks, "Hipster Harmony: The Hybrid Syntax of Seventh Chords in Post-Millennial Rock," *Music Theory Online* 21/2 (2015).

February 1

More on the Interaction of Form and Harmony

Essay #3 due

Guy Capuzzo, "Sectional Tonality and Sectional Centricity in Rock Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 31/1 (2009): 157–74.

Victoria Malawey, "Harmonic Stasis and Oscillation in Björk's *Medúlla*," *Music Theory Online* 16/1 (2010).

Scott J. Hanenberg, "Rock Modulation and Narrative," *Music Theory Online* 22/2 (2016).

February 8

Presentation #1

February 15

Melody and Scale

Essay #4 due

David Temperley, "The Melodic-Harmonic 'Divorce' in Rock," *Popular Music* 26/2 (2007): 323–42.

David Temperley, "Scalar Shift in Popular Music," *Music Theory Online* 17/4 (2011).

Drew F. Nobile, "Counterpoint in Rock Music: Unpacking the 'Melodic-Harmonic Divorce,'" *Music Theory Spectrum* 37/2 (2015): 189–203.

February 22

Rhythm and Meter

Essay #5 due

Jonathan Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah," *Music Theory Spectrum* 29/2 (2007): 219–45.

Nathan D. Hesselink, "Radiohead's 'Pyramid Song': Ambiguity, Rhythm, and Participation," *Music Theory Online* 19/1 (2013).

Robin Attas, "Form as Process: The Buildup Introduction in Popular Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 37/2 (2015): 275–96.

March 1

Timbre and Texture

Essay #6 due

Allan F. Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 19–49.

David K. Blake, “Timbre as Differentiation in Indie Music,” *Music Theory Online* 18/2 (2012).

Kate Heidemann, “A System for Describing Vocal Timbre in Popular Song,” *Music Theory Online* 22/1 (2016).

March 8

Presentation #2

Transcription due

March 15

No class (Spring Break)

March 22

Subjectivity and Intertextuality

Essay #7 due

Eric F. Clarke, “Subject-Position and the Specification of Invariants in Music by Frank Zappa and P.J. Harvey,” *Music Analysis* 18/3 (1999): 347–74.

Lori Burns, Marc Lafrance, and Laura Hawley, “Embodied Subjectivities in the Lyrical and Musical Expression of PJ Harvey and Björk,” *Music Theory Online* 14/4 (2008).

Lori Burns, Alyssa Woods, and Marc Lafrance, “The Genealogy of a Song: Lady Gaga’s Musical Intertexts on *The Fame Monster* (2009),” *Twentieth-Century Music* 12/1 (2015): 3–35.

March 29

Mashups

Essay #8 due

Final Paper Proposal due

Kembrew McLeod, "Confessions of an Intellectual (Property): Danger Mouse, Mickey Mouse, Sonny Bono, and My Long and Winding Path as a Copyright Activist-Academic," *Popular Music and Society* 28/1 (2005): 79–93.

Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Paul Harkins, "Contextual Incongruity and Musical Congruity: The Aesthetics and Humour of Mash-ups," *Popular Music* 31/1 (2012): 87–104.

Kyle Adams, "What Did Danger Mouse Do? *The Grey Album* and Musical Composition in Configurable Culture," *Music Theory Spectrum* 37/1 (2015): 7–24.

April 5

Rap

Essay #9 due

Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93–122.

Noriko Manabe, "Globalization and Japanese Creativity: Adaptations of Japanese Language to Rap," *Ethnomusicology* 50/1 (2006): 1–36.

Kyle Adams, "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music," *Music Theory Online* 15/5 (2009).

April 12 & 19

Presentation #3

April 26

Final Paper due