

Broken Harmonies: Music and Philosophy in the 20th Century

By: Hazem Massoud

Course Teaser:

How does music and philosophy relate to each other? And what does this relation might mean for us in everyday life? Even if it means something, isn't reading music through philosophy like philosophizing about art and that's it? What if we tried to read philosophy through music? In this course, we will engage critically in learning about philosophical transformations in the 20th century through music and its transformations at the same era and its relation to our state of being where we need to get attuned to its sound.

Course Description:

The course attempts to account for the transformations that occurred in philosophy and music in the 20th century which signaled the disintegration of the metaphysical foundations of modernity both in thought and praxis. The philosophical turn in the 20th century which can be labeled as an "interpretative turn" has posed the questioning of, deconstruction and weakening metaphysical foundations of the philosophical tradition as the task of thinking. This took place through numerous schools of thought and trajectories; from critical phenomenology, to genealogy and poststructuralism, and from Frankfurt School's critical theory to postcolonial studies, even to performance studies, where the universality of a unified principle that used to guide philosophy has been replaced with a multiplicity that ushered a post-foundational era. For music it was no less different, the rise atonal music, jazz, electronic music and the exposure to world music outside the west all helped in decentring the western perception on music and harmony as the guiding principle and opened up new possibilities both for our perception of things and for the new configurations between things, actions and sounds. Building upon the works of Andrew Bowie and Reiner Schurmann who will provide the framework for our course, we will embark on a journey through these transformations while critically engaging with readings in our attempt to read these transformations in philosophy through music.

Course Flow:

1. Introduction
 - What is Philosophy?
 - What is Music?
 - What are we going to do here? And how?

★ Readings:

- Alessandra Tanesini - Doing Philosophy. In Giuseppina D'Oro and Søren Overgaard (eds.) - The Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology. Pp.13 -31
- Andrew Kania - Definition. In Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (eds.) - The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music. Pp.3 - 13

2. What is Harmony?

- The works of Andrew Bowie
- Music and Philosophy
- Romanticism: A precursor to Existentialism

★ Readings:

- Andrew Bowie - Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche. Introduction pp. 1 - 15
- Andrew Bowie - Music, Philosophy and Modernity. Introduction pp. 1 - 14
- Roger Scruton - Rhythm, melody, and harmony. In the Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music. Pp. 24 - 37

3. What is a break?

- The works of Reiner Schurmann
- From Principles to An-Arche
- Hegemonies and Harmonies: How can we approach our topic?

★ Readings:

- Reiner Schurmann - Broken Hegemonies. General Introduction. Pp. 3 - 48

4. 20th Century in Philosophy and Music

- Existentialism and Jazz
- Miles Davis and Melodic Interpretations
- Heidegger and the State of Hermeneutics

★ Readings:

- Lee B. Brown - Jazz. In The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music. Pp. 426 - 436
- Jeff Malpas - Introduction to Hermeneutics and Philosophy. In Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (eds.) - The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics. Pp. 1 - 9

→ Jacques Taminiaux - Philosophy of Existence I: Heidegger. In Richard Kearney (ed.) - Routledge History of Philosophy. Vol. VIII: Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy. Pp. 32 - 60

5. Breaking with Tonality

- Critical Theory and Schoenberg
- Adorno's Dialectics
- Popular Music vs. Classical Music

★ Readings:

- Andrew Bowie - Music, Philosophy and Modernity. Chapter 9. Pp. 309 - 375
- Bryan R. Simms - The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg 1908 - 1923. Pp. 3 - 6
- Arnold Schoenberg - Theory of Harmony. Introduction. Pp. 7 - 12

6. Content and Form

- More on Popular Music
- The debate on Content and Form in Music
- An Open discussion on Music and Philosophy outside the West

★ Readings:

- Yoon Sun lee - Temporalized Invariance: Lukacs and the Work of Form. In Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (eds.) - Georg Lukacs: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence: Aesthetics, Politics, Literature. Pp. 17 - 35
- Jeffrey A. Bell - The Problem of Difference: Phenomenology and Poststructuralism. Introduction. Pp. 3 - 14
- Ruth M. Stone - Exploring African Music. In Ruth M. Stone (ed.) - The Garland Handbook of African Music

7. Attuned to the World

- Tuning Systems and the Problem of Harmony
- Melodies and Interpretation
- Dissonance and Consonance

★ Readings:

- Reiner Schurmann - Broken Hegemonies. Pp. 529 - 552
- Ajay Heble - Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice. Introduction. Pp. 1 - 28

8. Rhythms of Progress/Rhythms of Thought

- Metaphysics and its Critique
- Rhythmic Patterns of Modernity: An Open Discussion
- Notes on Film Scores in the 1960s

★ Readings:

→ Andrew Bowie - Music, Philosophy and Modernity. Chapter 6. Pp. 166 - 209

9. Out of Joint

- Coleman's Free Jazz
- The Ontology of Remnants
- Quick Notes on Psychedelia and Progressive Rock

★ Readings:

→ Santiago Zabala - The Remains of Being: Hermeneutic Ontology after Metaphysics. Introduction. Pp. 1 - 24

→ Santiago Zabala - Why Only Art Can Save Us: Aesthetics and the Absence of Emergency. Pp. 113 - 126

→ Ajay Heble - Landing on the Wrong Note. Chapter 1. Pp. 29 - 62

10. A Revolution in Sound

- What's Progressive about Progressive Rock?
- Being and Improvisation
- Late 1960s' Revival of Romanticism

★ Readings:

→ Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell - Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s. Chapter 5. Pp. 85 - 104

→ Reiner Schurmann - Tomorrow the Manifold: Essays on Foucault, Anarchy, and the Singularization to Come. Pp. 55 - 76

11. Heterotopias of Sound

- Quick Notes on Ambience
- Station to Station: David Bowie and the Tragic
- Dissonant Futures: From Genealogy to Freedom

★ Readings:

→ Andrew Bowie - Aesthetics and Subjectivity. Chapter 8. Pp. 275 - 311

- Michel Foucault - Different Spaces. In Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954 - 1984. Vol. II: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology. Pp. 175 - 185
- Simon Critchley - Bowie.

12. Presentations and Open Discussion.

Audio: Throughout the course we would be listening to various pieces of music and along the way we will listen to more in class, some even might pop up in a discussion we have, but mainly we would listen to the following:

- Ornette Coleman - Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation (1961)
- Miles Davis - Kind of Blue (1959)
- King Crimson - In the Court of the Crimson King (1969)
- Igor Stravinsky - The Firebird Suite
- Igor Stravinsky - The Rite of Spring
- Yes - Tales from Topographic Oceans (1973)
- The Beatles - Revolver (1966)
- Mario Nascimbene - Disorder (1962)
- David Bowie - Station to Station (1976)
- David Bowie - Heroes (1977)
- Henryk Gorecki - 3rd Symphony
- Arvo Part - Spiegel im Spiegel
- John Coltrane - My Favorite Things (1961)
- Dmitri Shostakovich - 5th Symphony Finale
- Dmitri Shostakovich - 7th Symphony, 4th movement
- Arnold Schoenberg - Five Piano Pieces

Personal Bio:

I graduated with a Bsc. in Political Science from the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, in 2015, and hold an MA in Political Philosophy from Pompeu Fabra University in Spain. I'm currently working on my PhD thesis in Humanities at Pompeu Fabra University which focuses on the political ontology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. My research interests include phenomenology, hermeneutics, ontology, film theory, political philosophy, psychology, and music theory. Aside from academia, I'm interested in different aspects of

photography and filmmaking - having worked from time to time on independent small-scale film projects- and a self-taught musician.

Course Image:

Pablo Picasso - Three Musicians (1921)



