

MUS 559, Topics in Analysis – Timbre Analysis

Instructor: Judith Lochhead | Tuesday, 9:40am – 12:20pm

Timbre has emerged as the predominant organizing feature of much music composed or created since the middle years of the twentieth century in virtually all genres of music. But while timbre has become increasingly important as an organizing and expressive principle of music, a concept of timbre and a productive form of timbral analysis have proved resistant—even in the face of a growing body of research.

The seminar focuses on a broad range of readings that aim toward conceptualizing timbre as an operational concept, considering historical and present attempts to conceptualize and analyze timbre.

During the seminar, we will explore differing approaches to timbre analysis of three recent instances—these will be across genres (contemporary classical, jazz, popular). I will choose three instances, and each seminar participant will bring in musical instances that are of interest to them. Focus will be on music of the Twenty-First Century.

Reading and listening/analysis assignments will be substantial and participants in the seminar will complete weekly writing/analysis projects. As a seminar we will experiment with different analytical approaches to musical timbre and explore what timbre “is” through a variety of listening projects.

Participants will produce a substantial term-end project, including a presentation to the seminar.

Absences: Attendance at seminar meetings is expected. Participants are allowed 1 unexcused absence. Other absences are excused only under extraordinary circumstances. Any unexcused absence will result in an automatic lowering of the semester grade.

This course is primarily intended for MA and PhD students, and it fulfills the Elective Group 3 requirement for students in the MA or PhD Critical Music Studies track. With the permission of the instructor, interested MM or DMA students with training in post-tonal analytical techniques may enroll in the course, which fulfills the Elective Group 2 requirement.

3 credits