

Introduction

Form pedagogy can too easily be supplanted by *forms* pedagogy.

Students can independently examine form by contemplating *texture*, *gesture*, and *location*.

Contemporary musics offer robust opportunities for student-centered form learning.

Form vs. Forms in music

Form: the specific distribution of events in a single musical work

Forms: the variety of common procedures for organizing events in a work (e.g. ternary, sonata, rondo)

Why contemporary musics?

Contemporary musics comprise a highly diverse corpus, featuring a wide variety of musical styles, composer identities, approaches to the use of sound, instrumental combinations, and more.

Music written in the last two decades offers new avenues for engaging students in critical discussions along the lines of Cox's (2016) 5X8 analytical framework for engaging musical detail and affect as well as Lochhead's (2016) Investigating–Mapping–Speculating model. By eschewing (or critically engaging) *forms*, contemporary musics invite students to discern the multiplicity of factors that might contribute to *form*.

Two examples for the aural skills classroom

Robert Glasper, "You and Me" (2016)

Sample prompts for engagement

Texture

- Listen to 0:00–1:37. How many parts play? How many sections occur? How do the playing parts reinforce your interpretation of different sections?

Gesture

- Are there any repeating melodic ideas? Can you sing them? Do they change shape or instrument?
- How do repeating gestures contribute to the organization of the musical sections?

Location

- Where is the voice coming from? How near or far does it sound? Does its location seem to change?

Caroline Shaw, *entr'acte* (2011)

Sample prompts for engagement

Texture

- Listen to 0:00–0:54. Contemplate the social dynamics of the ensemble. Are the parts working together? In dialogue? At odds with each other?

Gesture

- Are there any repeating rhythmic ideas? Can you recreate them with your body?

Location

- How near or far does the ensemble sound? Chart the ensemble's perceived location in time on a spectrum from very near to very far.

From Form to Forms and back

Both of the excerpts above afford ample discussion of texture, gesture, and location from the position of the listener. Engaging these parameters leads students to develop listening strategies for ensemble instrumentation, processes of growth, decay, and climax, retrospective reinterpretations, as well as issues of style and medium.

Both excerpts also directly engage with common *forms*: Glasper employs verse-chorus thinking, while Shaw reimagines the minuet and trio. Thus, these pieces work well as touchpoints for re-engagement multiple times across a curriculum. We might ask students to compare and contrast the formal strategies of these works with their more conventional correlates—what persists in contemporary versions, and what aspects are remade?

Texture, gesture & location

These three (metaphorical) parameters rarely factor into textbook discussions of musical form. Yet, they offer avenues for students to conceptualize musical form as enacted in the listener's interaction with music (Kozak 2019), rather than immanent to the work itself.

Texture is a highly salient attribute, one that typically can be identified visually and aurally.

Gesture offers students a conceptual metaphor with which they can engage discussions about action, agency, tension, and drama (Duguay 2019).

Location can be literal, perceived, metaphorical, or illusory. Where sounds are (or seem to be) influences listening & expectation (Duguay 2019, Cox 2016).

Short Bibliography

- Cox, Arnie. 2016. *Music and Embodied Cognition: Listening, Moving, Feeling, and Thinking*. Indiana University Press.
- Duguay, Michèle. 2019. "Physical Balance, Gravity, and Tension in Contemporary Piano Works." *Theory and Practice* 44: 1–28.
- . 2020. "Gendering Virtual Space: Vocal Placement in Recorded Popular Music." Presented at the virtual Society for Music Theory Conference.
- Kozak, Mariusz. 2019. *Enacting Musical Time: The Bodily Experience of New Music*. Oxford University Press.
- Lochhead, Judy. 2016. *Reconceiving Structure in Contemporary Music: New Tools in Music Theory and Analysis*. Routledge.

Additional resources



Short Anthology of Classroom Examples

Youtube Links

Score Links