

Session 3

Generic Communication and Cultural Capital

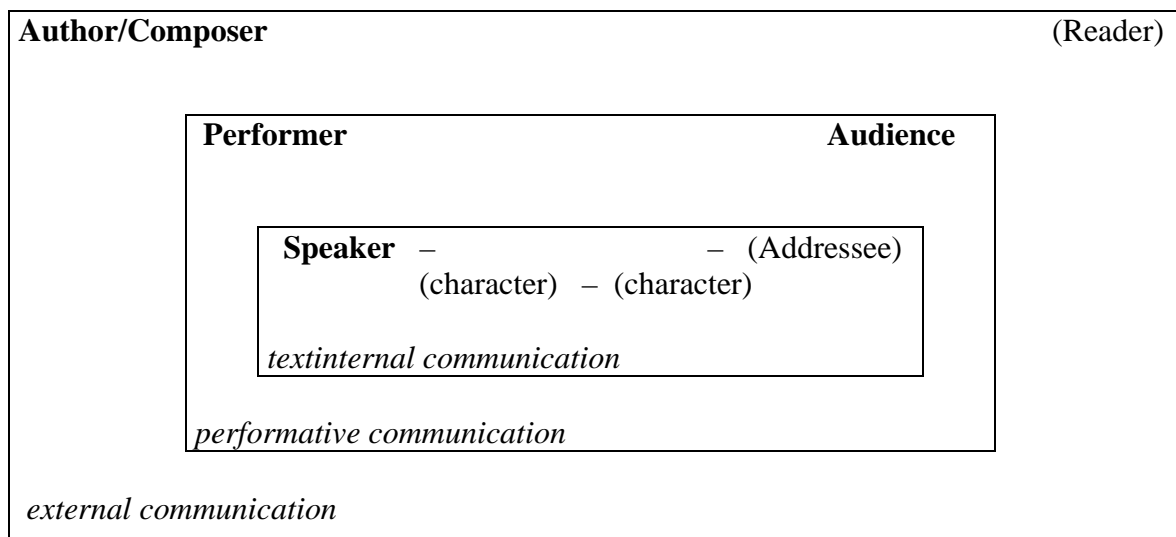
1. ASPECTS OF GENRE CONVENTION

Conventions of Song Genre (roughly based on Franco Fabbri 1981):

- formal and technical (sound organisation) → see next week
- communicative
- social and ideological
- economic, juridical and institutional

A) Communicative Conventions

“Consider, for example, how different genres (opera, folk, rock, punk) read singers: as protagonists of their song? As revealing themselves? Rules, here, in other words, concern musical expressivity and emotion; they determine the significance of the lyrics – different genres, for instance, having quite different conventions of lyrical realism: soul versus country, the singer/songwriter versus the disco diva. Rules here also concern issues of intertextuality (to what extent does the music refer to other music?) and the ways in which a genre presents itself as ‘aesthetic,’ ‘emotional,’ or ‘physical.’ “(Frith 1998, 91)



Edward T. Cone (1974), ‘legitimate’ vs. ‘illegitimate’ interpretation:

In ‘legitimate’ interpretations (of art music)

“the two aspects of person and persona fuse. The physical presence and the vitality of the singer turn the persona of the poetic-musical text into an actual, immediate, living being: the *person* of the singer invests the *persona* of the song with *personality*. If the impersonation is successful, if the illusion is complete, we hear this embodied persona as ‘composing’ his part – as living through the experience of the song. The vocal persona may be of various kinds – protagonist, character, etc., but [...] the persona is never identical with the singer.” (ibid., 62, emphases in the original)

In ‘illegitimate’ performances (of art music),

“not the vocal persona but the singer – Mr. X or Miss Y there on the stage – becomes the “composer,” the experiencing subject of the song. [...] This misappropriation can occur when a singer performs songs of his own composition, if – as is often the case with pop singers – the emphasis is entirely on immediate performance. I do not mean to imply that there is anything morally, or even esthetically, wrong about this practice. I merely insist that what one is listening to in such cases – as in many virtuoso performances of “serious” music – is not the piece being performed, but the performance itself.” (ibid., 62-63)

B) Social and Ideological Conventions

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (1984)

Music as a tool to accumulate ‘cultural capital’ and to ‘distinguish’ oneself

- **popular taste (limited choice)**
- **middle brow taste (cultural docility)**
- **legitimate taste (‘playful seriousness’ of choices)**

Bourdieu argues against e.g. Kant that aesthetic preferences are exclusively *social* in nature:

“Explicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate. [...] Thus the song [chanson], as a cultural property which [...] is almost universally accessible and genuinely common [...], calls for particular vigilance from those who intend to mark their difference. The intellectuals, artists and higher-education teachers seem to hesitate between systematic refusal of what can only be, at best, a middle-brow art, and a selective acceptance which manifests the universality of their culture and their artistic disposition. For their part, the employers and professionals, who have little interest in the ‘intellectual’ song, indicate their distance from ordinary songs by rejecting with disgust the most popular and most ‘vulgar’ singers, such as [...] Mireille Mathieu [...], and making an exception for the oldest and most consecrated singers (like Edith Piaf or Charles Trénet) or the closest to operetta and bel canto. But it is the middle classes who find in song [...] an opportunity to manifest their artistic pretension by refusing the favourite singers of the working classes, such as Mireille Mathieu, Adamo, Charles Aznavour or Toni Rossi, and declaring their preference for the singers who endeavour to dignify this ‘minor’ genre” (Bourdieu 1984, 60)

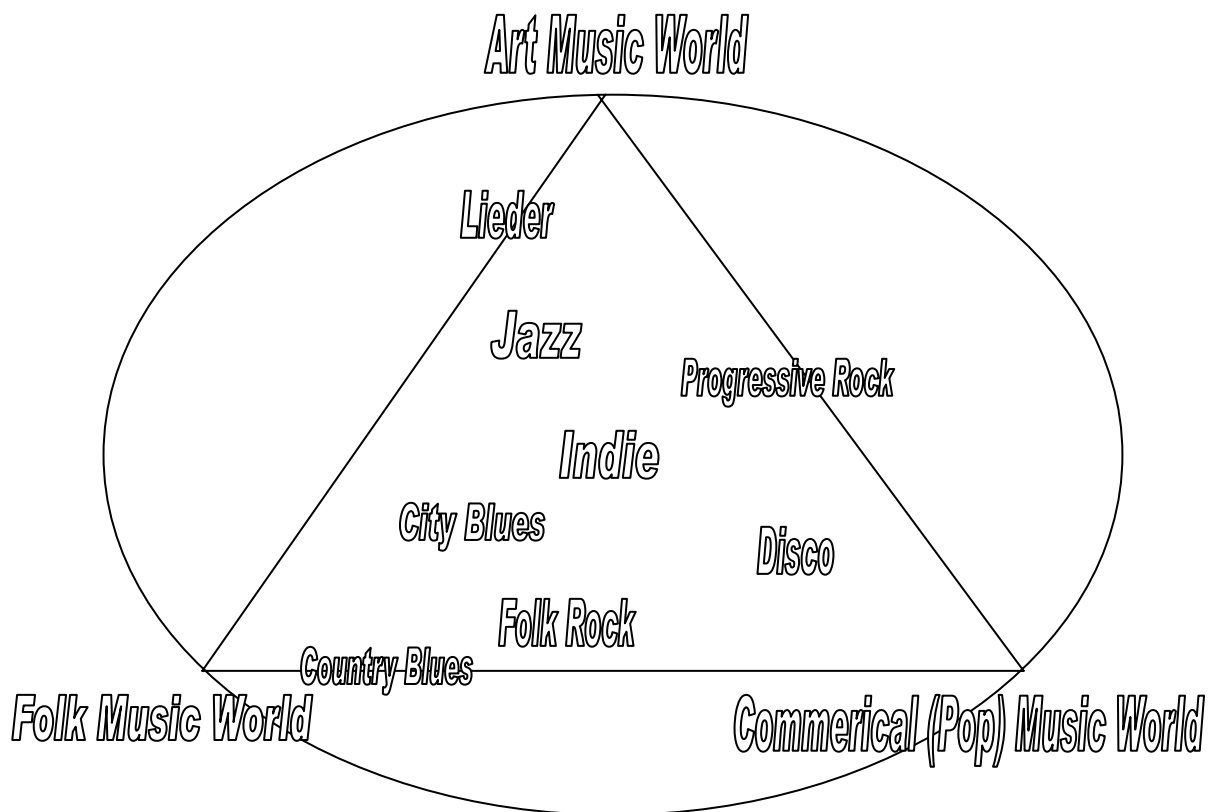
complex intersections of class (economic capital) and lifestyle (cultural capital)

C) Economic, Juridical and Institutional Conventions

- copyright regulation
- record label politics
- marketing regimes
- supporting organisations
- official cultural politics etc.

2. MUSIC WORLDS BETWEEN ART, FOLK AND POP

Based on Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (1998, 35-42)



A) The Art Music World

- **Origins** in the late 18th and the 19th century which saw a “divorce between classical and popular styles” (Van der Merwe 1989, 18). “From around 1790, the classical tradition gradually pulled away from a mass of middle- and lowbrow music” (ibid., 17)
- “‘classical’ music [...] was rapidly becoming predominantly the music of the past” (Van der Merwe 1989, 20)
- Between 1817 and 1827, the ratio of works by living and dead composers performed by the Philharmonic Society of London was 56% to 43%, in the period between 1856 and 1862, it was 30% to 70% (cf. Weber 1994).

Communicative conventions (cf. Small 1987 and 1998):

- separation from the outside world
- concert hall as ‘sanctuary’ with set codes of dress and behaviour
- ‘disinterested’ quiet and motionless listening for **pleasure**
- strict separation of audience and performers

the goal is to “depersonalise the performers and to emphasize the universality and timelessness of the proceedings” (Small 1987, 11)

“There is a clear distinction, that is, between the composer of a work and its performers, between the performers and their audiences; and the central bourgeois music event, the concert, offers (in its ideal) a transcendent experience, something special, something apart from the everyday world” (Frith 1998, 39).

B) The Commercial Music World

- **Origins** in the 19th century (Middleton 1985 and 1990)
 - o **‘Bourgeois revolution’ (ca. 1800-1840)** “marked by complex and overt class struggle within cultural fields, by the permeation of the market system through almost all musical activities, and by the development and eventual predominance of new musical types associated with the ruling class” (Middleton 1985, 10)
 - o **arrival of mass culture (ca. 1900-1930) from the US**
 - o **moment of pop culture (after 1945)** – development of new media (TV, Tape, video etc.) and the discovery of teenage audiences as a crucial market segment

Definition of pop by Simon Frith:

“Pop is not driven by any significant ambition except profit and commercial reward. Its history is a history of serial or standardised production and, in musical terms, it is essentially conservative. Pop is about giving people what they already know they want rather than pushing up against technological constraints or aesthetic conventions. [...] Pop is music provided from on high (by record companies, radio programmers and concert promoters) rather than being made from below. [...] Pop is not an art but a craft.” (Frith 2001, 96)

Communicative Conventions:

- relatively strict separation of audience and performers
- dancing and interaction between performers and audience, physical **gratification**

“The pop performer draws attention to performance itself, to the *relationship* between performer and work. [...] pop songs clearly ‘belong’ to their singers, not their writers. Interpretation in this context does not mean realizing what the composer (or, rather the music) meant, but using the music to show what interpretation means” (Frith 1998, 200-01).

- pop singers tend not to write their own material
- ‘pseudo-intimacy’ since the arrival of the star system, pop stars as projection foils for fantasies and desires, effects of sound processing (microphone technique, crooning)
- split between ‘(post)modern’ production and ‘romantic’ reception habits

pop lyrics and pop songs are “to a large extent carefully calculated postmodern simulations of the romantic authenticity which the market demands” (Eckstein 2009)

C) The Folk Music World (see session 2)

- Origins in the Romanticism of the early 19th century
- Preservation of musical ‘truths’ and tradition
- Quest for ‘authenticity’
- Ordinarity, staging of ‘everyday’ performance contexts
- No separation between performer and audiences
- Singer ‘enacts’ the persona of the song, singer as storyteller etc.

3. SCARBOROUGH FAIR: GENERIC TRANSFORMATIONS

Artists inspired by Martin Carthy’s version of ‘Scarborough Fair’:

Bob Dylan, “Girl from the North Country”, on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963):

“Well, if you’re travelin’ in the north country fair,
Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline,
Remember me to one who lives there.
She once was a true love of mine.”

Marianne Faithfull, “Scarborough Fair” on *North Country Maid* (1966)

Folk goes pop:

- Vocal processing, pseudo-intimacy
- Slight change of lyrics:

“Have you been to Scarborough Fair?
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
Remember me to one that lives there
For once she was a true lover of mine

Tell her to make me new cambric shirt [...]

From 3rd stanza onwards:

“**Ah, can you** find me an acre of land
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
Between the salt sea and the sea sand
Or never be a true lover of mine.

[...].”

Move from the ironic distance of folk-storytelling (triangular constellation speaker – traveller – beloved) to the intimacy and erotic privacy of pop (speaker = performer – beloved).

Simon and Garfunkel, “Scarborough Fair/Canticle” on *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (1966)

Folk goes Rock:

Definition of Rock:

“[p]op is understood as popular music that isn’t (or doesn’t have to be, or can’t possibly be) ‘taken seriously’. Rock, in contrast, is mainstream music that is (or ought to be, or must be) taken seriously” (Keightley 2001, 128).

Two ways of ‘authenticating’ pop into rock (see Kightley 2001, 137):

Romantic ‘authenticity’	Modernist ‘authenticity’
Tradition and continuity with the past	Experimentation and progress
Roots	Avant gardes
Sense of community	Status of the artist
Populism	Elitism
Gradual stylistic changes	Radical or sudden stylistic change
Sincerity, directness	Irony, sarcasm, obliqueness
‘liveness’	‘recordedness’
Hiding musical technology	Celebrating technology
(toward the folk music world)	(toward the art music world)

Simon and Garfunkel’s vesion -

References to the folk music world:

- use of Carthy’s basic folk guitar arrangement
- choice of the ballad as such

References to the art music world:

- additional instrumentation (sythesised harpsichord, cymbals)
- addition of countermelody and contrapuntal singing/harmonising

‘Canticle’ counter-verse:

On the side of a hill in the deep forest green,
 Tracing of sparrow on snowcrested brown.
 Blankets and bed-clothes, the child of the mountain,
 Sleeps unaware of the clarion call.

On the side of a hill there’s a sprinkling of leaves,
 Washes the grave with silvery tears.
 A soldier cleans and polishes a gun.

War bellows blazing in scarlet battalions,
 Generals order their soldiers to kill,
 And to fight for a cause they’ve long ago forgotten.

(Dominant) References to the pop music world:

- intense vocal processing and multiple overdubbing
- ‘effeminate’ Everly Brothers-style close singing
- deliberate creation of pop pseudo-intimacy

The ‘love affair’ in Scarborough Fair’ as

- public and political (folk)
- or pure and transcendent (classical)
- or sexual and private (pop) ??

Paul Simon and the legal and economic conventions of the pop music world:

“There is a story that Simon copyrighted the arrangement the day after Martin wrote it down for him. Whether it is true or not, what incenses me is that Simon and Garfunkel took the credit for a traditional song featuring Martin’s arrangement [...] It still makes my blood boil after all these years.” (McTell, qtd. in Cooper 2004)

Works Cited

Music:

Dylan, Bob (1963). *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*. Reissued Columbia 2003.

Faithfull, Marianne (1966). *North Country Maid*. Reissued Decca 1990.

Simon and Garfunkel (1966). *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*. Reissued Sbc 2001.

Literature:

Bourdieu, Pierre (1984 [1979]). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Tr. Richard Nice. London: Routledge.

Cone, Edward T. (1974). *Music: A View from Delft. Selected Essays*. Ed. Robert P. Morgan. Chicago: The U of Chicago P.

Cooper, Tim (2004). “Paul Simon, a ‘Stolen Song’ and how British Folk Star Finally Forgave.” *Evening Standard* (London) (16 July).

- Eckstein, Lars (2009). "Torpedoing the Authorship of Popular Music: A Reading of Gorillaz' 'Feel Good Inc.'" *Popular Music* 28.1, forthcoming.
- Fabbri, Franco (1981). "A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications." David Horn and Philip Tagg, eds. *Popular Music Perspectives*. Göteborg and Exeter: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 52-81.
- Frith, Simon (1998 [1996]). *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP.
- Frith, Simon (2001). "Pop Music." Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 93-108.
- Keightley, Keir (2001). "Reconsidering Rock." Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 109-42.
- Middleton, Richard (1985). "Articulating Musical Meaning/Re-Construction Musical History/Locating the 'Popular'." *Continuity and Change*. Issue of *Popular Music* 5, 5-43.
- Middleton, Richard (1990). *Studying Popular Music*. Buckingham: Open UP.
- Small, Christopher (1987). "Performance as Ritual: Sketch for an Enquiry into the true Nature of a Symphony Concert." Avron Levine White, ed. *Lost in Music: Culture, Style and the Musical Event*. Sociological Review Monograph. London and New York: Routledge, 6-32.
- Small, Christopher (1998). *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CN: Wesleyan UP.
- Van der Merwe, Peter (1989). *The Origins of the Popular Style: The Origins of Twentieth-Century Popular Music*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Weber, William (1994). "Mass Culture and the Reshaping of European Musical Taste, 1770-1870." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 25.1-2 (June-Dec), 175-90.