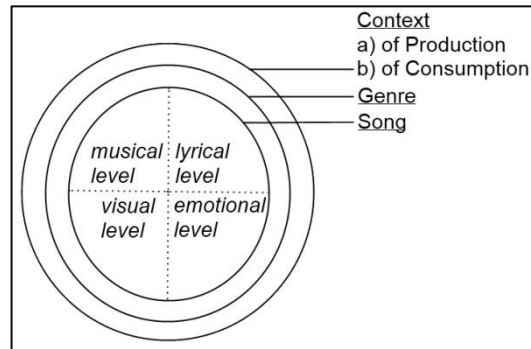


Conceptual Tools for the Analysis of Popular Music

For the analysis of popular music, there are little to no established criteria for a sufficient, holistic scholarly analysis. Those criteria that are used are often, if not always, borrowed from the scholarly analysis of classical music and or literary texts (i.e. poems) In some cases these criteria can be adapted to an analysis of popular music, in other they cannot.

To find a scholarly access to popular music, the following guiding questions might be helpful.



(Adapted from David Machin)

I.) Genre / Style

- Where would the song be placed in a record shop? Under which label?
- How would you describe the relations between genre expectations / conventions and the lyrics, the music, the artist's performance, the consumption, ... of the song?

II.) Context

a) of Production

- In what cultural / historical context was the song produced?
- Does the song address this context?
- On what medium is the song delivered?
(CD, mp3, radio, television, live performance, ...)

b) of Consumption

- How and where is the song consumed?
By whom? In private? With others? For which purpose?

III.) Song

1. Lyrical Level

- What is the song about? What does it deal with?
- What subtexts and intertextual references are used?
- What register is used? (e.g. lyrical ballad vs. explicit content)

2. Visual Level

- How do the artists present themselves and how do they behave?
(Consider e.g. live performances, official PR photos, music videos, record sleeves and CD covers, artist's website, ...)

3. Musical Level

- How is the vocal style of the singer(s) (e.g. soft, aggressive, impassionate, ...)?
- How is the instrumental arrangement (what instruments are used, how many, ...)?
- What rhythm / beat is used (slow, upbeat, offbeat, ...)?
- Are there limited or large pitch ranges?
- Are there rising or descending melodic phrases?

4. Emotional Level (rather subjective)

- What affective offers does the song make to an audience?
- What identity effects can you describe?

Literature:

Machin, David. *Analysing Popular Music: Image, Sound, Text*. London: SAGE, 2010.