

21M.380 · MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY
RECORDING TECHNIQUES & AUDIO PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION ANALYSIS 1 (PA1)
IN-CLASS PRESENTATION

DUE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2016, 9:30AM
SUBMIT TO: MIT LEARNING MODULES ▶ ASSIGNMENTS
5% OF TOTAL GRADE

1 Instructions

Do an aural analysis of a commercially available audio production.

- 1. Submit a write-up of your analysis, along with a representative sound example, by Monday, September 19, 2016, 9:30am.
- 2. Discuss the production and your analysis of it in a 5-minute in-class presentation on the date for which your name is listed in table 1.

Date	Presentations
Wed, 9/14	██████
Mon, 9/19	██████
Mon, 9/26	██████████
Mon, 10/3	██████
Wed, 10/5	████
Wed, 10/12	██████
Wed, 10/26	████
Wed, 11/2	██████████
Wed, 11/9	██████
Mon, 11/21	████
Wed, 11/23	██████████
Mon, 12/5	██████
Wed, 12/7	████

TABLE 1. In-class presentations

2 Context

As audio engineers, we constantly seek to improve our skills by aural analysis of existing audio productions. The idea is to get into the habit of listening to and learning to appreciate as many musical works, genres, and recordings as possible. Learn to pay particular attention to aspects of recording and production (in addition to musical aspects such as harmony, melody, counterpoint, rhythm, etc.). Do research on how a producer or engineer achieved or might have achieved a certain effect.

If you practice these skills as part of your everyday exposure to music, you will, over time, learn to distinguish the sound of different instruments, recording environments, microphones, audio effects, recording media, etc. Above all, it will help you develop your personal taste.

3 Guidelines

There is generally something to be learned from both, good and bad recordings. For this assignment, however, I would like you to analyze a piece of music, which you particularly *like* for the quality of its production. You might already have a specific production in mind, without being sure what exactly it is that you like about it. This assignment's purpose is to complement this emotional appreciation by some professional awareness as to how it might have been achieved. Another objective is to communicate such awareness to your peers using the professional language of the trade.

3.1 General guidelines

- Limit your discussion to a single piece of music (e.g., a song, not an album).
- Create a short (30 seconds max.) sound example that contains a representative excerpt from the production of your choice.
- To the best of your ability, focus your discussion on aspects related to recording and production (rather than discussing the piece's harmony, rhythm, lyrics, etc.).

3.2 Background information

Both your writeup and the actual presentation should provide essential background information about the production as a *brief*

introduction:

- When was this recorded?
- By whom? Who were the performing musician(s), producer, and engineer?

3.3 Aural analysis

The focus of your presentation and write-up should be devoted to an aural analysis:

- In how far does the produced sound demonstrate originality by comparison to other productions?
- Which aspect of the production works particularly well and why?
- If you do not know where to start, focus on the first element that attracts your aural attention. Perhaps the room in which the song has been recorded sounds unique? Maybe there is a transition from verse to chorus where the voice suddenly sounds very different? Maybe there is a very short guitar lick added on top of the second chorus that is absent from the other choruses? Focus on stuff that suggests the use of studio production techniques, i.e., things that would be hard to do in a live concert. If you like, you can build your entire presentation around one such small detail.
- “How did they do it?” Do some research on how the successful elements of the production were achieved, for example by choice of unusual equipment or recording locations, through novel recording or editing techniques, etc.
- If available information is sparse, speculate creatively. What *could* the recording space have looked like? How *could* they have achieved that unusual distortion on the vocals? It is not primarily important that you get this 100% right. What *is* important is that you employ and train your aural awareness and imagination.

4 Presentation and submission format

4.1 Submission

Submit your assignment as a single archive submission.zip, which should be structured as follows:¹

¹ Please make sure you stick closely to the requested submission format – not only at this occasion, but also for future assignments. Detailed guidelines can be found in the syllabus.

```

submission.zip
├── writeup.pdf
└── example.[flac|mp3|m4a]

```

- `writeup.pdf` (1 page max.) should contain your write-up. Include a table or diagram that provides an overview of the song's structure, notable events, and the position of the included sound example.
- `example.[flac|mp3|m4a]` should contain your representative sound example (30 seconds max.).

4.2 Presentation

Your in-class presentation should strictly be no longer than 5 minutes, so be sure to be concise! Do *not* prepare any slides for your presentation, but bring along your write-up and a device to play your sound example from (laptop, smartphone, mobile music player). Start your presentation by playing that sound example, but only after pointing out to the class which aspect of the production you would like them to listen for. Use this as a starting point for your discussion.

Especially if you are presenting later in the semester, you will likely find that you are listening to the production through much better informed ears than when you originally wrote your write-up. This does not mean that you have to go back to the drawing-board, however. Instead, use this as a starting point for your discussion in class. What do you now understand about the production that you had not been able to identify by ear when you first worked on this assignment?

5 Assessment criteria

Your assignment will primarily be assessed in terms of the imagination and the attention to detail that you demonstrate in your analysis. Try to verbalize what exactly you like about the production, and be imaginative in your conclusions as to how this might have been achieved. While I want you to exhaust potential research sources (such as interviews with the respective producer, YouTube videos, etc.), a true lack of reliable information is not a problem per se. A thorough analysis *by ear* should be the focus of your efforts.

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Fall 2016

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