

Music 190r: Music and Subjectivity in Asia

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Frequently implicit in commentary on “Asia,” vast and varied though it is, is a complex of notions involving mysticism, introspection, self-realization, emotional control, and what it means to know and to love. Many of these notions share a concern with what makes the “self” or “subject” and how that self acquires and verifies certain kinds of awareness. In short, many of the attributes that have, rightly or wrongly, come to typify Asia concern “subjectivity.” Musical experience is similarly entwined with issues of subjectivity: feeling part of a single social body, or isolated from it; feeling as if one’s mind is linked or in synch with a performer, composer, or listener; finding music a kind of meditation. Singers and instrumentalists and listeners interact intersubjectively, which reminds us that selves and consciousnesses are always being created in relation to others in a manner that changes from moment to moment.

While it is obvious that the study of subjectivity may be approached from many disciplinary perspectives, and range from the theoretical to the historical and ethnographic, the purpose of this class is to consider a selection of book-length writings on music through the lens of “subjectivity” and connected, very loosely, by the land mass of Asia. The genres of writing and research are diverse, including fiction, biography, ethnography, and lab science.

Weekly assignments will include two pages of writing (described below), musical examples associated with each book (where relevant), and preparation for discussion. Each week, one student will take the role of discussion leader and another will take the role of respondent (see below). Two longer writing assignments of approximately five and ten pages will involve tying together the themes of multiple reading assignments. Grades will be based on the quality of writing and the degree of engagement in the weekly discussions. There is no final examination.

Grading:

Class participation, discussion leading/responding, and attendance: 40%

Weekly writing assignments: 30%

Paper 1 (5 pages): 10%

Paper 2 (8-10 pages) and the oral version: 20%

Guidelines for weekly writing:

“Weekly Writing Assignment” should consist of two parts, one page each (double spaced, 12 point).

Part I should be a précis of the book or major reading assignment for the week. A précis represents, in miniature, the main content of a work in the order it is presented. Please avoid, to the extent possible, reference to the author (“the author writes. . .”) and do not include quotations. Present the argument or narrative in your own voice. This section should show that you’ve read the entire book (or assigned section) and can communicate it to the reader. It should not involve opinions or arguments of your own.

Part II should be a critical discussion of one or two points. Please be explicit in tying your discussion to some aspect of “subjectivity.” Such aspects might include, self-other relations; experiences of consciousness/loss thereof; transformations of self over time; emotionality; relations of persons to landscapes; and issues in perception.

Length: Please adhere strictly to the length guidelines. You may, however, wish to write (or outline) a longer piece for your own use. This may help you contribute more richly in class as well as prepare you for writing one of the more substantial papers later in the semester.

Structure of Weekly Discussions and Student Roles

Discussion leader. At least one day before class, the discussion leader shall post to the course website a list of the book's strong and weak points, keeping in mind the author's presumed intentions. The discussion leader will open the class with a presentation of these points for 10-15 minutes.

The respondent will then address the discussion leader's questions and criticisms for 5-10 minutes. He or she will speak in the first person, voicing what he/she feels were the author's intentions.

The discussion leader's role will then be to engage fellow students in critical conversation. This conversation may involve *debate* (bringing out something problematic), *comparison* (between ethnography or ideas in one or more texts), *reflection* (on personal experiences that are similar to or different from what is described), and *illustration* (playing a musical example or presenting examples from the text that relate to a particular point).

Guidelines for longer writing assignments

The five- and ten-page papers ("Paper 1 and Paper 2") are meant to synthesize the kinds of discussions in Part II of your weekly papers. However, you are meant not merely to weave your existing discussions together into a new paper, but rather to go back to your notes (and possibly the longer pieces you prepared for this purpose), and look for new pathways that connect the ideas in these books. The five-page paper should involve at least three books and the ten-page one at least five books. There can be some overlap in the books discussed, but new areas should be explored in the second paper.

Final Presentation

During the last class students will present a ten-minute version of their final papers. It will be acceptable to read a text or work from an outline. The grade for the oral presentation will be combined with that for the written assignment.

Books and Readings Access

All books are currently available for purchase at the Coop and are on reserve at the Music Library. You are responsible for accessing the readings, whether you choose to purchase a book or not. Shorter readings will also be available as pdfs via a link on the website.

Policies

All assignments must be submitted in hard copy (even if uploaded or emailed as well). Late assignments will be graded down one letter grade per day. Please arrange for planned absences well in advance. Please see Professor Wolf about unavoidable absences owing to illness or family emergencies.

Schedule

Week 1 (Jan 24): Discuss excerpt from “Jamila,” by Chingiz Aitmatov.

Week 2 (Jan 31): Levin, *Where rivers and mountains sing*, pp 1-72.

“Introduction.” In Biehl et al, eds., *Subjectivity: Ethnographic investigations*, pp 1-17 (focus on the conceptualizations of subjectivity in general rather than the concerns of the specific chapters introduced)

Note on weekly writing assignment 1: précis should consider only the first portion of Levin; part II may involve Levin, the Introduction, and/or the Jamila excerpt

Week 3 (Feb 7): Levin, continued, 73-225; Commentary on Ricoeur and Ricoeur’s “Personal identity and narrative identity,” in Atkins, ed. *Self and subjectivity*.

Note on weekly writing assignment 2: précis should focus on this week’s portion of Levin; part II may involve Levin, the Introduction, Jamila, and/or the Ricoeur reading, provided you do not cover the same ground as last week

Week 4 (Feb 14) Amit Chaudhuri’s *The Immortals*

Weekly writing assignment 3 due (hereafter each assignment concerns only the book of the week and is due at the time of class)

Holiday, President’s day (Feb 21)

Week 5 (Feb 28) Vikram Sampath’s “*My Name is Gauhar Jaan*” The life and times of a musician.

Week 6 (March 7) Park, *Voices from the Straw Mat*

Visit by Korean musicians

Spring Break

Week 7 (March 21) Reese, *Lives in Chinese Music*
Paper 1 due

Week 8 (March 28) Norton, *Songs for the Spirits: Music and mediums in modern Vietnam*

Week 9 (April 4) During, *The Spirit of Sounds: The Unique art of Ostad Elahi*

Week 10 (April 11) Wolf, *The black cow’s footprint*

Week 11 (April 18) Becker, *Deep listeners*

Week 12 (April 25): Student presentations (10 minutes each, drawing together 3-5 books)
Paper 2 due

Short Bibliography

(includes a few references beyond the required reading)

- Aitmatov, Chingiz. 1989. Jamila. In *Mother earth and other stories*, 105-149. tr. James Riordan. Boston: Faber and Faber.
- Atkins, Kim, ed. with commentary. *Self and subjectivity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Biehl, João, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman, eds. 2007. *Subjectivity: ethnographic investigations*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Chaudhuri, Amit. 2009. *The immortals*. New York: Alfred A Knopf
- During, Jean. 2003. *The spirit of sounds: The unique art of ostad Elahi*. Cranbury, NY: Cornwall Books.
- Levin, Theodore with Valentina Süzükei. 2006. *Where rivers and mountains sing: Sound, music, and nomadism in Tuva and beyond*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Norton, Barley. 2009. *Songs for the spirits: Music and mediums in modern Vietnam*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Park, Chan E. 2003. *Voices from the straw mat: Toward an ethnography of Korean story singing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press and Center for Korean Studies.
- Reese, Helen, ed. 2009. *Lives in Chinese Music*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sampath, Vikram. 2010. "My Name is Gauhar Jaan" *The life and times of a musician*. New Delhi: Rupa.
- Schutz, Alfred. 1977. Making music together: A study in social relationship. In *Symbolic anthropology: A reader in the study of symbols and meanings*, 106-19, ed. J. Dolgin, D. Kemnitzer, and D. Schneider. New York: Columbia University Press. (Google books version available)
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wolf, Richard K. 2006. *The black cow's footprint: Time, space and music in the lives of the Kotas of south India*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Becker, Judith. 2004. *Deep listeners: Music, emotion, and trancing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.