



INTERNATIONAL
TRUMPET RESEARCH
CENTER

International Trumpet Research Journal

Volume 1, Issue 1
November 2024

The “Metamodern” Trumpet: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Performance and Multimedia

Geoffrey McKay

Spokane Community College and University of Idaho

The “Metamodern” Trumpet: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Performance and Multimedia

Geoffrey McKay

Spokane Community College and University of Idaho

Abstract

This essay proposes an interdisciplinary approach in performing/creating multimedia to present a thesis, commentary, or subversion—using trumpet sound in combination with critical theory. Aesthetics and philosophies from postmodernism and metamodernism serve as the main theoretical bases for the approach, as unpacked in the essay. Historical contexts of the trumpet’s development and symbolic associations are also analyzed for expressive context. Furthermore, an example of the proposed interdisciplinary approach is provided/analyzed to demonstrate one possible way in which it may be applied.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Metamodernism, Trumpet, Interdisciplinary, Performance, Critical Theory, Multimedia.

Introduction

The term *metamodern*—or *metamodernism*—may understandably be met with skepticism, as there is still some fluctuation in what exactly the term refers to. Critical theories that attempt to define and interpret expansive arrays of art, literature, philosophy, and culture shift frequently as the cultural landscape continuously develops. Within the body of literature, one can observe different interpretations among theorists as to when/where certain movements begin, end, originate, or overlap. Regardless of these fluctuations, the field of critical theory represents a rich body of scholarship to draw from, especially when seeking expressive techniques to accomplish aesthetic/philosophical goals in a performance setting. Critical theorists Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, Jean-François Lyotard, Robin Van Den Akker, Allison Gibbons, Timotheus Vermeulen, and Brendan Graham Dempsey have published scholarship examining postmodernism and/or metamodernism. In their work, they draw from many different artforms, texts, and philosophies to demonstrate the characteristics present in each of these theories. Through their interpretations, they are able to draw larger connections across artistic and social trends. It is within these analyses—as well as the art analyzed within them—that a trumpeter can find an aesthetic and philosophical toolkit from which unique juxtapositions, subversions, and representations can be derived.

Arguably, music as an expressive medium is situated awkwardly within these styles of critical analyses—as much of what is interpreted in these analyses is visual, textual, or narrative based. This is not to say that scholarship has not interpreted music through these lenses, however. Theodor Adorno, according to critical theorist Linda Hutcheon (2006), “...opened the floodgates for the interdisciplinarity [of music] early on. The only Frankfurt school theorist to take music as his primary ground for theorizing...” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 802).

Some examples of critical theory applied to music—centered on the topic of postmodernism specifically—are Kenneth Gloag’s *Postmodernism in Music*, Judy Lochhead and Joseph Aurner’s *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, and Neil Nehring’s *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism: Anger is Easy*. Many of the essays within these publications center or contextualize various styles of music within larger trends of representation, social themes, or philosophies.

In other words—the music came first. Theorists were then able to interpret the music (and its social context) through diverse lenses that incorporated methodologies from feminist theory, gender theory, intersectional analyses, and many others. An example of this is the incredible work of Susan McClary found in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. There is great cultural value in this practice, as it can assist in situating how music interacts within both culture and theory.

Yet, even within the scholarly practice of applying critical theory to the analysis of art/music, there is opportunity to utilize these processes for *creation* as well—not just interpretation after music has been created. A trumpeter can gain creative access to such expressive techniques through employing an interdisciplinary approach in performance. Through the incorporation of these critical theories as an expressive foundation, a trumpeter can design a program that has larger theoretical implications—like informed social commentary, a thesis, or a hypothesis. In particular, the use of film, theatrics, and written text create avenues for greater intricacy in the contextualization of trumpet sound within a program of music/multimedia. This approach can assist in the creation of live/recorded performances that go far beyond aesthetic experimentation.

This essay seeks to demonstrate how the utilization of aesthetics and philosophical techniques from both postmodernism and metamodernism can be used to subvert/recontextualize traditional meanings of trumpet sound. In order to do this, the essay will first propose some traditional meanings/contexts of trumpet sound as derived from texts by Edward Tarr, John Wallace, and Alexander McGrattan—as well as an example from film scholarship. Following this, a discussion of some aesthetic and philosophical qualities of postmodernism and metamodernism will be provided, drawing from scholarship and the art analyzed within it. Finally, I will present a direct application of this theoretically informed interdisciplinary approach to subvert/recontextualize the earlier proposed meanings of trumpet sound. To demonstrate this in practice, I will provide examples from my multimedia recital film titled *An Interview from Twilight Indigo*.

Section 1: A Proposed Meaning of Trumpet Sound

In doing something as ambitious as establishing a possible “meaning” of trumpet sound, one must first acknowledge that the trumpet (or any instrument, voice, sound, etc.) can be performed in such a way as to evoke nearly any social meaning. Christopher Small (1998) states: “If we widen the circle of our attention to take in the entire set of relationships that constitute a performance, we shall see that music’s primary meanings are not individual at all but social” (Small, 1998, p.8). Sound as an abstract concept can be contextualized any number of ways, especially when combined with elements of visual/textual media. This can have a profound effect on a sound’s social connotation. The proposed meaning of trumpet sound in this section does not claim to be the only universal meaning—instead, this proposal will draw from historical and media contexts to establish some common symbolic/narrative themes that trumpet sound has

been paired with. To further describe the methodological scope, this section will draw primarily from western music traditions and history, as well as an example of scholarship interpreting the use of brass in the music of John Williams.

In order to construct a program, recital, or piece of media that draws from the critical theory bases of postmodernism and metamodernism, it is advisable (if not entirely necessary) to establish a context within which the performed music will function. An established context will allow for a clear application of postmodern/metamodern theory in the designing of the program—both aesthetically and philosophically.

As chronicled in Edward Tarr’s *The Trumpet*, some of the earliest representations of trumpet sound were associated with war and/or religious ceremony. The first chapter of the text contains subheadings labeled “The Egyptians,” “The Assyrians,” “The Israelites,” “The Greeks,” “The Etruscans,” “The Romans,” “The Teutonic Tribes,” and “The Celts.” Each of these sections describe the trumpet functioning in these ways within each of these cultures (Tarr, 1988, pgs. 19-29). In a similar fashion, John Wallace and Alexander McGrattan’s 2011 publication—also titled *The Trumpet*—states the following:

The trumpet’s identity often transcended its utilitarian function by serving as a marker of status and power in belief systems and their consequent ceremony. As Don Smithers remarked in his

seminal study on the baroque trumpet, 'the trumpet is more than a musical instrument: it is an idea, a concept, with deeper allegorical associations.' The symbolism of the trumpet was central to its introduction into art music and has remained a significant determinant of its idiom. (p. 1)

This quote introduces another context that is pervasive in the history of trumpet: an association with status and royalty. In addition to this association, it is notable to see Don Smithers'

contention that the trumpet functions not only in sound, but as an allegorical symbol. In a sense, Smithers' contention provides a legitimacy to defining the sonic symbolism within the history of the trumpet and establishing what these prominent symbols were/are—as well as how they are expressed/perceived in modern settings. Somewhat humorously, Tarr notes at the end of his introduction the following:

The trumpet of prehistoric times and of antiquity served only as a signaling instrument, and certainly not to produce music in the modern sense. The sound of these instruments was described as terrible, that is, producing terror, and was compared to the braying of an ass. (p. 29)

This quote contains another theme to be subverted: terror. Given the trumpet's association with militaristic themes, it is unsurprising that the instrument's sound evoked fear from many who heard it in these contexts. This is not to say that this connotation remains as strong as it was in what Tarr refers to as prehistoric times—certainly not. However, these historical associations of military, religion, and at times terror, were prominent for a long period of history.

Wallace and McGrattan's *The Trumpet* continues to explore further sonic associations of the instrument. In the third chapter, they state: "After 1100, longer trumpets come into the frame and the instrument begins to assume its role in the service of noble and civic establishments as a symbol of high status" (Wallace & McGrattan, 2011, p. 65). In this, the word "civic" is grouped into the description, which connects the sound of a trumpet to larger systems of government. Critical theory often critiques systems such as these, so this connotation lends itself well to expressive tactics within postmodern and metamodern approaches.

One may correctly point out that these descriptions, while much in alignment, are exclusively early on in the instrument's development. It would be inaccurate and incomplete to establish a historical sonic connotation based entirely upon descriptions such as these, especially

before the invention of the valve. Both Tarr and Wallace/McGrattan's texts unpack the influence composers like Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Gustav Mahler had on what the trumpet was used to express orchestral contexts. These new demands placed upon trumpeters created difficulty, and many were initially apprehensive to embrace them (Wallace & McGrattan, 2011, p. 201). Some of this higher technical demand was due to the fact these composers were writing music that "...used [the trumpet] lyrically and outside its normal context...it was capable of extraordinary melancholy, as Haydn had demonstrated in the second movement of his concerto..." (Wallace & McGrattan, 2011, p. 200). At this point of history, it was surprising to see the trumpet involved in an expressive context outside of the established symbolic associations from earlier in the instrument's development. However, even with these new demands presented, these composers still often referenced the historical context of what the trumpet had been used for in non-musical contexts. Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* drew from the militaristic connotation of trumpet—particularly in the fourth movement—signaling calls to battle and representing the hero (Owen, 1960, p. 44). Mahler's fifth symphony evokes a solemn, foreboding atmosphere by opening with its famous solo fanfare—not to mention the numerous other solos from the work, both lyrical and martial in quality. In these examples, one can observe an early trend of how the sound of the trumpet was used in association with its symbolism, as well as the difficulty that was brought from presenting trumpet sound in different/new expressive contexts.

Wagner's technique of leitmotifs created thematic representations that influenced countless composers that came after him. Wallace, McGrattan, and Tarr all acknowledge the contributions that Wagner made in the representation of trumpet sound, drawing from *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Parsifal* (among others) to demonstrate how his uses of the trumpet's range, dynamics, and thematic association casted the trumpet in a new light (Wallace & McGrattan, 201, pgs. 195-201; Tarr, 1988, pgs. 163-167). In linking these traditions to something more recent, the techniques observed in Wagner's music greatly influenced film scoring. One example stands out in this regard: John Williams. Williams has written some of the most recognizable musical themes of all time, and there exist comparative analyses linking his musical approaches to Wagnerian techniques. In "Williams versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics," written by musicologist Irena Paulus (2000), the author writes:

It is not just points of view - there are great similarities in practice. Both Wagner and Williams simply adore the wind section, especially the brass. Whatever they need to express drama, here comes the brass; when tension has to be expressed, there is the brass again; when the music needs to sound softer and warmer (because the context requires it), the woodwind is called up, not, as in many another composer, the strings. The strings have almost exclusively the role of filling in the emptiness and of jumping in when the wind lyrical instruments have already been used. And there are many instruments in the orchestra, because both composers like experimenting with sound. (p. 178)

It is here one can observe a recent manifestation of a historical trumpet thematic association—drama and tension, possibly recalling Tarr’s prior mentioned association of the trumpet and terror. Even after so much development in the context of trumpet sound occurred during the romantic era and early twentieth century, there is continued perpetuation of these themes in some of the most widely consumed media of our time. Film scholarship speaks to film’s ability to “affect attitudes” toward social or political topics (Atkins & Castle, 2014, p. 1231). Given film’s ability to do this, the amount of consumption of Williams’ music by way of film has almost certainly influenced the perception of trumpet sound among general audiences. Paulus goes on to state:

When Star Wars appeared in the movie houses, the orchestra came back again to the screen. It might be said to be John Williams's achievement to have brought about a Renaissance of symphonic music in the film, and this might be compared with the revolutionariness of the operatic reform of Richard Wagner. (p. 178)

It was the aim of this section to present some historical connotations based upon the history of the instrument’s use in militaristic and ceremonial fashions, as well as how those connotations have been previously experimented with among prominent canonical composers. In an effort to stay within the scope of this essay, many potential examples needed to be omitted—but these established contexts present further opportunities for creative subversion.

Section 2: Examples of Postmodern and Metamodern Aesthetics/Philosophies

In a 1997 interview with American author David Foster Wallace, television host Charlie Rose asked him what the term “postmodernism” meant. Wallace reluctantly responded the following:

...oh...no, no, no. “After modernism” is what it means. It’s a very useful catch-all term because you say it and we all nod soberly as if we know what we are talking about when, in fact, we don’t. When I mean “postmodern,” I am talking about, maybe, the black humorists who came along in the 1960s, the post-Nabakovians...the biggest thing that was interesting to me about postmodernism is that it was the first text that was highly self-conscious...self-conscious of the writer as persona, self-conscious about the effects that narrative had on readers...it was the first generation of readers that had read a lot of criticism. (Manufacturing Intellect, 21:20-21:24).

This hesitant statement from Wallace is an example of how difficult it can be to fully encapsulate terms such as these. For application purposes, however, this section seeks to offer some context, examples, and working definitions for the terms postmodernism and metamodernism.

In searching to provide a working context/definition for postmodernism, Rachel K. Fischer provides some valuable context: “The term was first coined in the 1950s but did not become a well-known philosophical term in France until the 1970s...” (Fischer, 2014, p. 29). Fischer goes on to say:

In relation to art and literary theory, Jean-François Lyotard stated in The Postmodern Condition, “The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.” With this quotation, one can see that postmodernism is tied strongly to cultural theory. (p. 29)

The last sentence of the quote linking postmodernism with cultural theory presents one of its values in using it to design a program or piece of media with philosophical intent. Drawing

from the aesthetics/theory from under its wide umbrella grants a trumpeter access to very effective expressive tactics.

One characteristic of postmodern thought and artistic expression is the destruction of universal narratives—or metanarratives—which is particularly useful in expressive goals like the recontextualization or decentralization of sound. Theorist Fredric Jameson speaks to this destruction of narrative/history in his publication *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) by observing the following:

But this unforeseeable return of narrative as the narrative of the end of narratives, this return of history in the midst of the prognosis of the demise of historical telos, suggests a second feature of postmodernism theory which requires attention, namely, the way in which virtually any observation about the present can be mobilized in the very search for the present itself and pressed into service as a symptom and an index of the deeper logic of the postmodern, which imperceptibly turns into its own theory and the theory of itself. (p. xii)

In seeking to subvert historical connotations of trumpet sound, this concept (although Jameson ultimately criticized it) is directly applicable to a trumpeter searching to accomplish this goal.

There are several aesthetic approaches associated with postmodern art, but for the scope of this essay, the work of John Cage functioned as inspiration for some of the approaches exemplified in the following section. In a 2019 article by Marcin Rychter titled “Postmodern Music and its Future,” the author discusses several composers in how they expressed a “postavant-garde” (or postmodern by his interpretation) approach to musical composition. Whereas Rychter centers techniques like Arnold Schoenberg’s serialism as modernist, Rychter highlights how John Cage further broke away from some of these approaches to deconstruct the barriers “between life and art” (Rychter, 2019, p. 48). Using *4’33* as an example of this, Rychter states the following:

The idea of an aesthetically autonomous music detached from the concerns of the world gives way to the idea of the world, as such, being an object that we should apprehend with an aesthetic appreciation: everything we hear may be considered music. The avant-garde ambition of extending the scope of perception has been pushed to the limits here, or rather reduced to absurdity (p. 48).

While critical of the 4'33's presentation, the noting of how Cage's "silent piece," as Cage himself referred to it, pushed boundaries using sound (or silence) highlights a very useful thing for a trumpeter employing postmodern techniques to their musical design: music can resist meanings/traditions, pose questions, and exist in a philosophical space. One could argue that 4'33 was less a piece of music and more a type of performance art, but nonetheless the piece uses silence, a sonic concept, as its primary expressive tool—therefore resembling music theoretically in its design. This grey area between the mediums of music and performance art (or perhaps theatre) could be a source of critique—however, it also presents a particular strength in expressive effect. John Cage (1961) expressed the following in *Silences*, a compilation of his essays and lectures:

But this fearlessness only follows if at the parting of the ways, where it is realized that sounds occur whether intended or not, one turns in the direction of those he does not intend. This turning is psychological and seems at first to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity—for a musician, the giving up of music. This psychological turning leads to the world of nature, where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate are in this world together; that nothing was lost when everything was given away. In fact, everything is gained. In musical terms, any sounds may occur in any combination and in any continuity (p. 8).

Also important for consideration, Cage claims the following:

A sound does not view itself as thought, as ought, as needing another sound for its elucidation, as etc.; it has no time for any considerations—it is occupied with the performance of its characteristics: before it has died away, it must have made perfectly exact its frequency, its loudness, its length, its overtone structure, the precise morphology of these and of itself (p. 14).

In particular, the phrase "a sound does not view itself as thought, as ought..." speaks to an opening for further contextualization of sound as provided by text, image, theatrics, etc. While a trumpet sound may have connotations associated with it as discussed in the first section of this essay, it may also in performance be heard as purely objective aesthetic—a sound in relation to an organization of time. Therefore, in a sense, one can assist a sound to "speak for itself" by aiding it with any number of approaches to grant it meaning, whether traditional in representation or not.

It is precisely here that we encounter a paradox: sound can both signal something inherently through association and also, objectively, not have the ability to do that. Whichever the

interpretation of the trumpeter, it presents an equally strong argument that using interdisciplinary tactics within postmodernism can grant a sound context, whether it inherently carries one or not. In considering John Cage's music, one can observe various compositional approaches—from techniques of chance/randomization to unique notations, flexible instrumentations, and textual directions. These approaches—especially those that involve the use of aleatoric sounds—are incredibly useful in drawing from when preparing a program in an interdisciplinary fashion. As Cage stated, “everything is gained” when considering the expressive use of sound in this way.

In the above brief overview of postmodernism as explored through some of Cage's words and musical techniques, a common theme emerges: deconstruction. Cage does propose answers to the element of deconstruction, such as the idea that everything we experience is music in some way, but not all postmodern art/philosophies do this. In contrast, metamodern concepts are, according to *Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*, “...characterized by an oscillating in-betweenness or, rather, a dialectal movement that identifies with and negates—and hence, overcomes and undermines conflicting positions...” (Van Den Akker et al, 2017, p. 10). This allows a trumpeter considering these tactics to draw from postmodernism while also departing from some of its larger tendencies. For example, Jameson contended an anxiety that “...the main casualties of all these postmodern ‘senses of the end’ might have very well been History and the historical imagination (Van Den Akker et al, 2017, p. 2). As this interdisciplinary method draws from history as one of its primary resources, the media's design situates itself in a metamodern sensibility. However, in drawing from postmodern aesthetic approaches like recontextualization, subversion, fragmentation (recall the fiction of William S. Burroughs or Kathy Acker), a trumpeter may still perform a theoretically informed thesis of sound while not destroying meaning outright. As a matter of fact, the earlier proposed meanings of trumpet can be used/satirized with great effectiveness when this history is referenced, as the next section of this essay aims to demonstrate. To provide further context on current discourse surrounding metamodernism, Brendan Graham Dempsey's publication *Metamodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Cultural Logics* (2023) explains, “In this way, deconstructive moves which in postmodernism signaled exhaustions and cynicism are appropriated and redeployed towards *reconstructive* aims... (Dempsey, 2023, p. 47). This last summation, while still acknowledging what came before it from postmodernism, is the basis for the examples provided in the following section of this essay.

Section 3: An Example of Interdisciplinary Application

Given the complexity of the theory one navigates to eventually apply it to a performance/piece of media, it is the aim of this final section to provide an example of how a trumpeter could do so. The following example, a multimedia recital film titled *An Interview from Twilight Indigo*, is a project in which I applied theory from both postmodernism and metamodernism to subvert historical connotations of trumpet sound (as proposed in section one). The multimedia recital film premiered at the University of North Carolina Greensboro on April 17, 2023. A lecture outlining the intent of the work was given prior to the film's screening. The program featured music from composers Frédéric Chopin, Dr. Marissa Youngs, Akira Yamaoka, Erik Satie, and some of my own compositions/arrangements. In addition to compositions, the program relied heavily on sequences of free improvisation, prose/poetry, theatrics, and film techniques.

To provide a structural/narrative outline of the film, it functions as follows: a title screen appears accompanied by Chopin's Prelude Op. 28 No. 4 in E-minor with a trumpet descant. This sequence is followed by two interview segments from Kathy Acker and Angela Davis on postmodernism and revolution (real archival footage). An unnamed character then performs a piano arrangement of *White Noiz*, composed by Akira Yamaoka, and a free improvisation on trumpet responds to it. This is followed by a performance of *Eclipse*. In *Eclipse*, two characters (I play them both) perform the work in a conversational manner, as accomplished through video/audio editing. The unnamed character is then revealed to be named [REDACTED], and they give a monologue as if they are being interviewed. This is followed by several performances, including arrangements of Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie* No. 1 (arr. Hickman), Frédéric Chopin's Prelude Op. 28 No. 4 in E-minor (arr. McKay), and a conversational improvisation from myself and another different trumpeter. The Satie, Chopin, and improvisation sequences are not in character, but as myself. A second interview with [REDACTED] is then shown, where they outline their creative intent behind a piece titled *Wake Up!* A performance of the piece—presented as fictitious archival footage—is then shown, revealing the overarching social/musical thesis of the film. It is portrayed as [REDACTED] performing the piece alongside a percussionist. This performance is followed by real interview footage from musician Frank Zappa discussing

American consumerism. A performance of Yamaoka's *Laura's Theme* and a reprise of *White Noiz* (arr. McKay) close out the film.

In applying the postmodern/metamodern theory, I first chose to establish a context in which the trumpet would work to function as a subversive entity. The first elements of context to outline are narrative and setting, which is established through the title screen of the film and the character named [REDACTED]. Examples of both can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1: Still captured from An Interview from Twilight Indigo (McKay, 2023)



Figure 2: Still captured from An Interview from Twilight Indigo (McKay, 2023)

[REDACTED], pictured in Figure 2, functions as a narrator and main character in the film, and through their interview monologues one establishes a setting: a fictitious city named Downtown. As shown through two disjointed interviews, [REDACTED] reveals the topic of discussion is their journey of moving to Downtown, as well as how they performed political art in protest against a politician referred to as Governor Klick. Governor Klick, while not elaborated on much in the film, is intended to be a satirical representation of a fascistic governor ruling over Downtown. This centers [REDACTED] as a resister, thusly associating their various artistic expressions with this theme—most importantly, their use of the trumpet. As a direct subversion, this character uses trumpet sound to react against status quo rather than uphold/honor “civics,” or herald a politician/aristocrat. This kind of subversive expression is very prominent in postmodern literature, especially in novels that incorporate feminist/intersectional theories as their base.

In the narrative of *An Interview from Twilight Indigo*, the piece that gained [REDACTED] infamy is titled *Wake Up!* It is portrayed/performed in the film as “archival footage.” Prior to the piece’s presentation, [REDACTED] presents the intended interpretation of the work as a monologue. This kind of oscillation between reality, fiction, and various layers of temporal space is purposefully fractured to communicate a feeling of disorientation—yet another tactic from postmodern approaches. *Wake Up!* is comprised of five sections of dramatic readings, four of

which were written by me, and one written by Kathy Acker. Through the direct reading and referencing of Acker, one loops in an expressive connection to postmodern feminism. In Martina Sciolino's article titled "Kathy Acker and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism," Sciolino states Acker "...by using performative prose to launch political and aesthetic diatribes, Kathy Acker's narrative methods are exemplary for postmodern feminism" (Sciolino, 2001, p. 1). Acker and her incredible novels had a major theoretical and aesthetic influence on the film—*Wake Up!* is the most direct emulation in this way. In paying of homage, [REDACTED] performs a reading of the following excerpt from one of her essays:

We are now, in the United States and in England, living in a world in which ownership is becoming more and more set. The rich stay rich, the poor stay dead. Death in life. The only social mobility left occurs in terms of appearance. Things no longer change hands. But fashion is not purely ornamental, it is political. All signs nowadays point to the haves, or to the homeless Chicanos on the LA downtown streets. There is no more right wing versus working class, there is only appearance and disappearance. Those people who appear in the media, and those people who have disappeared from the possibility of any sort of home. In such a society as ours, the only possible chance for change, for mobility, for political, economic, and moral flow, lies in the tactics of guerilla warfare, the use of fictions, of language. Postmodernism then, for the moment, is a useful perspective and tactic... (Acker, 1996).

In addition to her association with feminism, she incorporated elements of class and race into her commentary (as seen above). After this is read, the trumpet and percussion respond to it with free improvisation—thusly connecting the sounds of their instruments to prose of this style and social critique. Given the trumpet's association with class and high status, this is a deeply subversive tactic that satirizes the sound of the trumpet in a way that retranslates it as an instrument to play out against oppression, rather than confirm or announce higher status. To deepen the irony of this expressive tactic, [REDACTED] performs fragmented chunks of melody from "My Country tis of Thee," which is musically resisted by the sound of improvised percussion. Figure 3 shows a still captured during the performance.



Figure 3: Still captured from An Interview from Twilight Indigo (McKay, 2023)

Of course, this is not the first time a trumpet sound has aided an idea of resistance or advocacy. One famous example that comes to mind is Joan Tower's *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*, from 1987. This work operates as a retranslation of Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, using an identical orchestration to Copland's piece—yet the sounds are recontextualized through the title (Grolman, 2014, p. 1). This is an example of an earlier sonic retranslation, notably during the postmodern era, where trumpets lead a fanfare to amplify marginalized voices as a “feminist counterpoint” to the original (Grolman, 2014, p. 1). Drawing inspiration from authors like Kathy Acker and composers like Joan Tower (among many other possibilities), a trumpeter can continue this sonic recontextualization. Great value will come from this practice, both for the artistic and social identity of the trumpet.

In addition to the examples above that highlight satirical representations or sonic retranslations of trumpet sound, the film also draws on music to pair trumpet sound with expressions of melancholy and sentimentality. [REDACTED]'s first interview sequence describes a lonely tale of their journey to Downtown, highlighting elements of the fictional city's infrastructure and art scene. The monologue is intended to characterize [REDACTED] as both

melancholic and hopeful. This is contrasted greatly with the second interview, where [REDACTED] has become politicized by their experiences. However, before this transformation, music from Chopin, Satie, and responsive free improvisation are performed directly after the monologue is finished. Chopin's Prelude Op. 28, No. 4 in E-minor has a long association with expression of melancholy or grief—both in media and in history. Historically, the piece was among the performed works at Chopin's own funeral. Writer Benita Eisler—author of *Chopin's Funeral* (2003)—describes the event as follows:

Shouldering the massive coffin, the six men moved up the nave to the sounds of the organ playing Chopin's Preludes in E Minor and B Minor. Many of those now leaving had heard the composer play these pieces-his favorites-in their own houses, in the salons of friends, or in Pleyel's concert rooms. The familiar notes on the somber instrument spoke of the voice they would never hear again, and they wept. (paragraph 16)

A sentimental irony can be found in the pairing of a prelude and death—a simultaneous beginning and end. In characterizing [REDACTED], the prelude serves as a sonic reinforcement of this theme. It aims to characterize [REDACTED]'s journey to Downtown as a death of an old self, while also embracing a new beginning. This treatment of trumpet sound draws from both postmodern and metamodern constructions, as there is a sentimental retranslation of trumpet sound added to an existing repertoire that carries its own thematic associations. Both the historical context of trumpet sound (descant) and Chopin's Prelude Op. 28 No. 4 come together to represent a character's thematic context in a way that draws from their respective histories, while also recontextualizing them at the same time. It is this oscillation that grants the trumpet's sound a chance to break out of a traditional connotation.

One may point out that the trumpet often plays a descant in sacred music settings—this is absolutely true—but the employing of this concept in a secular piece of repertoire further cements a paradoxical connotation of both tradition and subversion. In this lies an interesting expressive parallel: the historical pairing of prelude and death juxtaposed with tradition and subversion. In this approach, the metamodern concept of oscillating “in-betweenness,” as Van Den Akker et al describe, is on full display in this application of trumpet sound.

Conclusion

This brief essay proposed and demonstrated an interdisciplinary method that allows a trumpeter to contextualize their trumpet sound however they seek to. Although the example program had its own goals, the theories from postmodernism and metamodernism provide a framework of commentary through which incredibly diverse, subversive, and experimental programs can be created. The history of the trumpet is far too rich and expansive to have been captured in the scope of this essay, but it is worth interrogating the contexts—social, sonic, or otherwise—that our instrument occupies. Trumpeters have long known the capabilities of our instrument to convey everything from gentleness to power—from terror to hope. The more we all create, discuss, research, and perform repertoire with contextual aims, the more our instrument will continue to expand in its sonic associations among wider audiences of listeners and performers. Critical theory is one such pathway to accomplish this, and interdisciplinary methods only aid in a trumpeter creating work that is new—even when drawing from tradition.

References

- Acker, K. (1996). *Bodies of work*. Serpent's Tail.
- Adkins, T., & Castle, J. J. (2014). "Moving" pictures? Experimental evidence of cinematic influence on political attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly*, 95(5), 1230–1244. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44072746>
- Brendan Graham Dempsey. (2023). *Metamodernism, or, the cultural logic of cultural logics* (second edition). ARC Press.
- Cage, J. (2011). *Silence : Lectures and writings by John Cage* (50th Anniversary Edition). Wesleyan University Press. (Original work published 1973)
- Eisler, B. (2003, April 20). "Chopin's funeral." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/20/books/chapters/chopins-funeral.html>
- Fischer, R. K., & Graham, A. (2014). Postmodernism. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 54(1), 29–33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/refuserserq.54.1.29>

Geoff McKay Trumpet. (2023). *An Interview from twilight indigo [REDACTED] official*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NS0yQPrMrCc&t=674s>

Gloag, K. (2012). *Postmodernism in music*. Cambridge University Press.

Grolman, E. K. (2014). “*Fanfares for the uncommon woman*”—*Colorado Symphony Orchestra, Marin Alsop, conductor; Joan Tower, composer (1999)*. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/FanfaresForTheUncommonWoman.pdf>

Hutcheon, L. (2006). Interdisciplinary opera studies. *PMLA*, 121(3), 802–810. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25486355>

Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Duke University Press.

Lochhead, J., & Auner, J. (2001). *Postmodern music/postmodern thought*. Routledge.

Manufacturing Intellect. (2018, November 28). *David Foster Wallace interview on Charlie Rose (1997)*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GopJ1x7vK2Q&t=1286s>

McClary, S. (2002). *Feminine endings: Music, gender, and sexuality*. University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1991)

Nehring, N. (1998). *Popular music, gender, and postmodernism: Anger is an energy*. Sage Publications.

Owen, W. (1960). *The use of the trumpet in three symphonic poems by Richard Strauss: Don Juan, Till Eulenspiegel's Lustige Streiche, and Ein Heldenleben* [Thesis]. <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc699624/?q=%22History%22>

Paulus, I. (2000). Williams versus Wagner or an attempt at linking musical epics. *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 31(2), 153. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3108403>

Rychter, M. (2019). Postmodern music and its future. *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, 3(3), 43–56. <https://doi.org/10.14394/eidos.jpc.2019.0030>

Sciolino, M. (1990). Kathy Acker and the postmodern subject of feminism. *College English*, 52(4), 437. <https://doi.org/10.2307/377661>

Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: the Meanings of performing and listening*. Wesleyan University Press.

Tarr, E. H. (1988). *The trumpet*. Amadeus Press.

Van den Akker, R., Gibbons, A., & Vermeulen, T. (2017). *Metamodernism: Historicity, affect, and depth after postmodernism*. Rowman & Littlefield International.

Wallace, J., & McGrattan, A. (2012). *The trumpet*. Yale University Press.