Strategic Intertextuality in Three of John Lennon’s Late Beatles Songs

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Abstract
In a seminal 1985 article, Robert Hatten outlines a theory of musical intertextuality with the potential for a broad range of application. He suggests that intertextuality in music operates on two essential levels: stylistic and strategic. Stylistic intertextuality occurs when a composer adopts distinctive features of an earlier style without reference to any specific work in that style (such as the appropriation of high-Baroque devices in the string-octet accompaniment to Paul McCartney’s “Eleanor Rigby”). Strategic intertextuality is more pointed, occurring only when a composer makes deliberate reference to a particular earlier work or works, and this can involve a variety of techniques such as quotation, structural modeling, variation, or paraphrase. At the risk of oversimplification, we might say then that the goal of an intertextual analysis is to unravel the many ways in which the stylistic and strategic references contribute to the meaning of the new piece. In this article, the author offers close analyses of three of John Lennon’s late Beatles songs—“All You Need is Love,” “Glass Onion,” and “Because”—as a means of demonstrating how strategic intertextuality can work to enrich a pop-rock song’s overall message. This article is part of a special, serialized feature: A Music-Theoretical Matrix: Essays in Honor of Allen Forte (Part I).

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