

## Meta+Hodos: Applying James Tenney's Gestalt Based Analytical Model In Undergraduate Theory Pedagogy

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### Abstract

To this day, undergraduate theory curriculum is primarily concerned with information related to the form defining elements of functional harmony. Students are taught to analyze harmonic context and pitch relationships almost to the exclusion of all other factors. However, contemporary and modernist compositions frequently rely far less on pitch relationships as primary form creating devices. Other parameters take on greater significance. Even as pitch remains a critical element in serial and set related music, a method of drawing attention to non-pitch or non-functional harmonic structures is crucial to a more complete understanding of the form and comprehension of post-tonal music. As a potential remedy, this article explores the possible utilization and merits of James Tenney's gestalt based analytical model presented in his book *Meta+Hodos*. Within the context of this paper, his insights into gestalt theory will be used as an attempt to clarify and describe perceived aural phenomena from which a more comprehensive interpretation of non-tonal music may follow.

Typically, undergraduate theory classes are primarily concerned with materials related to tonality—the principal governing factor of form and comprehension in the music of the Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods and the music experienced most often by the majority of concert goers. Topics in the average theory class revolve around chord structure, voice-leading, harmonic motion, tonal form and the like. Rhythm gets the occasional nod. Texture, timbre and density usually wait for orchestration class. Certainly more than pitch manipulation accounts for the success of tonal music, but, due in no small part to time restrictions, tonal function is emphasized almost to the exclusion of all other parameters. After several semesters of well-meaning myopic tonal indoctrination, students are left with the impression that pitch is virtually the only element of form worth a mention. Frequency manipulation "is" music.

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