

Handout: “ ‘Now Let’s Play It Backwards’: *Musique Concrète* and the Psychedelic as Topical Field in the Beatles’ Mid-1960s Songs

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List of Compositional Techniques from Musique Concrète Used by the Beatles

- *Speed Manipulation*: Deliberately recording a vocal or instrumental part slower or faster than the song’s intended tempo, and then correcting the tape speed to intended tempo in the final recording mix. Aural effects: Depends on the type of manipulation (increasing tempo vs. decreasing). Often combined with other manipulations.
 - Examples: “When I’m Sixty-Four” (1967, speed increase), “I’m Only Sleeping” (1966, speed decrease), “Strawberry Fields Forever” (1967, includes both speed increase and decrease)
- *Reversal*: Playing an instrumental or vocal part in reverse. The Beatles use two types of reversal: threading the taped part in reverse onto the recorder; and “double reversal,” or writing out a part, recording it end to beginning, and then threading the tape backwards. Aural effects: Gibberish sounds (first type), transformed timbre (first or second type). Often combined with speed manipulation and loops.
 - Examples: “Rain” (1966, first type), “I’m Only Sleeping” (1966, second type)
- *Tape Loops*: Segments of tape whose ends have been attached to their beginnings, resulting in a repeating sound. Aural effects: Consistent repetition, cyclical/swirling feel to the sound. Often combined with speed manipulation and reversal.
 - Examples: “Tomorrow Never Knows” (1966)
- *Splicing*: Cutting a larger piece of tape into smaller segments, and then reattaching them in the composer’s desired order. In the context of this project, refers to tape segments that do not loop. Aural effects: Depends on generating sound and/or other manipulations present, but generally results in a “wash” of sounds.
 - Examples: “Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!” (1967), “Good Morning, Good Morning” (1967)
- *Unaltered/Unedited Real-World Sounds*: Environmental sounds (train whistles, street traffic, crowd chatter, screams, animal noises, rattling chains, etc.) that are still recognizable and matchable to their generating source. Aural effects: Depends on type of generating sound, but often give a humorous effect or highlight elements of the song’s narrative or setting. Occasionally combined with other manipulations, but not to the extent that the sounds are unrecognizable.
 - Examples: “Yellow Submarine” (1966), “Lovely Rita” (1967), “Revolution 9” (1968)

Table: Chronological (by release date) view of Beatles songs with musique concrète compositional techniques. Bolded names indicate the primary songwriter.

<i>Song</i>	<i>Composer</i>	<i>Album</i>	<i>Speed Manipulation?</i>	<i>Reversal?</i>	<i>Splicing?</i>	<i>Loops?</i>	<i>Unaltered Real-World Sound?</i>
“Rain”	John Lennon / Paul McCartney	Single, B side to “Paperback Writer” (1966)	X	X			
“I’m Only Sleeping”	Lennon / McCartney	<i>Revolver</i> (1966)	X	X			
“Yellow Submarine”	Lennon / McCartney	<i>Revolver</i>	X		X		X
“Tomorrow Never Knows”	Lennon / McCartney	<i>Revolver</i>	X	X		X	
“Strawberry Fields Forever”	Lennon / McCartney	Single, double A side with “Penny Lane” (1967)	X	X			
“Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!”	Lennon / McCartney	<i>Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band</i> (1967)	X	X	X		
“Lovely Rita”	Lennon/ McCartney	<i>Sgt. Pepper</i>	X				X
“Good Morning, Good Morning”	Lennon / McCartney	<i>Sgt. Pepper</i>		X	X		X
“Flying”	Harrison/ Lennon/ McCartney/ Starr	<i>Magical Mystery Tour</i> (1967)		X		X	
“Revolution 9”	Lennon / McCartney	<i>The Beatles</i> (1968)	X	X	X	X	X

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