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# Crossing Over with Brad Mehldau's Cover of Radiohead's "Paranoid Android": The Role of Jazz Improvisation in the Transformation of an Intertext\*

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the intertextual relationships between popular music songs and their jazz adaptations, or "covers." In a jazz adaptation of a pop song, the improvisatory section—wedged between two more or less complete statements of the pop song—forms the crux of the jazz performance. Improvisation affords musicians an opportunity to create something new out of an existing musical work and, as I suggest in this paper, has the potential to transform the expression perceived in the popular song's lyrics and musical structure. Using Brad Mehldau's live solo piano performance of Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" (1997) from his promotional album *Deregulating Jazz* ([1999] 2000) as a case in point, I show how his adaptation both highlights the motivic repetitions in the original rock song and heightens the song's expressions of anxiety and apprehension.

The article unfolds in two sections. The first section provides an overview of Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" as a means to ground my discussion of Mehldau's recording. Here I consider how the rock song's musical content can be heard as the analog of its lyrical content. In the second section, I explore the intertextual relationships that emerge between Mehldau's adaptation and Radiohead's rock song, drawing from my transcriptions and analyses of both musical texts.

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[1.1] Within the last fifteen years, cover songs have provided fertile ground for exploring intertextuality in popular music, and how meaning can differ amongst repetitions of the same musical "text." (1) Lori Burns (1997), for instance, has shown how k.d. lang's live performance (1985) of Joanie Sommer's "Johnny Get Angry" (1962) transforms the teen-heartache love song into one about abuse through physical gestures, rhythmic distortion, and changes in the musical structure, inviting listeners to rethink the power dynamics between men and women. In a similar vein, Mark Butler (2003) has suggested that The Pet Shop Boys' disco cover (1991) of U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name" (1987) critiques the ways in which rock

musicians had constructed authenticity in the 1980s. As Butler proposes, The Pet Shop Boys' effortless vocal delivery, use of synthetic sounds, and subversion of pitch and formal structures function as a foil to musical attributes that served as markers of authenticity, such as laboured vocals, the avoidance of musical loops created through technology, and a clear formal development.

[1.2] One question that has received less attention in studies on intertextuality is how a jazz adaptation of a popular song can affect the song's poetic content. When jazz musicians "cover" a popular song, how might a solo improvisation alter or enhance the pop song's potential meanings, particularly in cases where the poetic text no longer serves as the focus of the performance? (2) As Henry Martin and Keith Waters (2010) confirm, it is not unusual for jazz musicians to crossover to popular music genres:

Numerous jazz artists are experimenting with the song repertory of the early 1960s and later as a means of expanding the traditional jazz focus on the great popular standards of 1920–1950. Artists are experimenting with tunes by numerous rock groups, including the Beatles; the Grateful Dead; Bjork; Nirvana; Radiohead; Sly and the Family Stone; Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; and the Doors. (367)

Elements that distinguish popular music covers from jazz adaptations are not only differences in musical style, but also the addition of one or more improvised solos that take place after the initial presentation of the pop song. Analogous to a "head" in jazz practice, the initial presentation introduces the melody, musical form, and harmonic progressions or "changes" that serve as the basis for the improvised solo section. <sup>(3)</sup> During the solo section, jazz musicians may embellish the pop song's pitch and rhythmic content, compose their own melodic material over the harmonic progressions, or modify the progressions through a number of chord substitutions. <sup>(4)</sup> Following an improvised solo section is a recapitulation of the entire pop song or a portion thereof that rounds off the performance. In a jazz adaptation of a popular music song, then, the improvisatory section—wedged between two more or less complete statements of the pop song—forms the crux of the jazz performance: it affords musicians an opportunity to create something new out of an existing musical work and, as I suggest in this paper, has the potential to alter the expression perceived in the popular song's lyrics and musical structure.

[1.3] Before moving ahead in my discussion, I would like to clarify what I mean by intertext. Whereas Michael Riffaterre defined the term as a "corpus of texts, textual fragments, or textlike segments of the socialect that shares a lexicon and . . . a syntax with the text we are reading (directly or indirectly)" (1984, 142), in an effort to differentiate it from what he deemed it not to be—one or more specific sources that may have influenced a text, or sources that a text imitates—my use of the term throughout this article includes direct quotation and adaptation. <sup>(5)</sup> In this way, I understand intertext to mean a text within a text, the latter of which seeks to actively reshape the former into something new. With respect to cover songs, the term intertext will be used to refer to the quoted musical text that serves as a malleable framework which the cover transforms. Recontextualizing the term for this article, then, not only assimilates music scholarship's appropriation of terms and concepts from French literary criticism as a means to rethink relationships between musical texts; it also supports scholarship's recent affirmation that, for musicians and listeners, the act of covering a song can be motivated by a desire to create, as opposed to merely imitate. <sup>(6)</sup> This is especially the case in jazz adaptations of popular songs, where improvisation, as Bruno Nettl (2013) confirms, is "the principle element of jazz since it offers the possibilities of spontaneity, surprise, experiment and discovery, without which most jazz would be devoid of interest."

[1.4] To explore the role that improvisation can play in intertextual readings of jazz adaptations, I will use Brad Mehldau's live solo piano performance of Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" (1997) from his promotional album *Deregulating Jazz* ([1999] 2000) as a case in point. (7) Since his album debut in 1995, Mehldau has garnered attention not only for revamping jazz standards in unconventional time signatures, such as Richard Rodgers's "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" in and Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are" in 4, but also for his ability to seamlessly fuse together distinct musical genres. (8) His versatility at the keyboard has led to remarkable adaptations of songs written by a wide variety of artists that lie outside of mainstream jazz—from The Beatles' "Blackbird" (1968) and Nick Drake's "River Man" (1969) to Elliott Smith's "Bottle Up and Explode!" (1997)—as well as collaborations with opera singers Renée Fleming and Anne Sofie von Otter. Listeners who are familiar with Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" will hear two striking departures in Mehldau's recording: a re-instrumentation of the rock song for solo piano, and two improvised solos, both of which gradually distort the rock song's

signature motives and harmonic progressions over a repeated musical structure. Using Radiohead's recording as an intertext for Mehldau's performance, I suggest that his arrangement highlights the motivic repetitions in the original rock song and that his two solos heighten the song's themes of anxiety and apprehension.

[1.5] This article unfolds in two sections. The first section provides an overview of Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" as a means to ground my discussion of Mehldau's recording. Here I consider how the rock song's musical content can be heard as the correlate of its lyrical content. In the second section, I explore the intertextual relationships that emerge between Mehldau's adaptation and Radiohead's rock song, drawing from my transcriptions and analyses of both musical texts. Appendix 1 provides a transcription of the beginning of Radiohead's recording from Ok Computer, and Appendix 2 provides a complete transcription of Mehldau's version from *Deregulating Jazz*.

### Analysis of Radiohead's "Paranoid Android"

[2.1] "Paranoid Android" was composed and recorded by the alternative rock band Radiohead and appears on their widely acclaimed album OK Computer (1997). (9) As Radiohead critics and fans point out, the title of the rock song references the fictional character "Marvin the Paranoid Android" from Douglas Adams's 1978 BBC radio comedy series The Hitchbiker's Guide to the Galaxy, which was later adapted into a series of books. Unlike Adams's comedic portrayal of the depressed robot Marvin, however, Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" appears to depict a socially alienated and anxiety-ridden persona surrounded by a society consumed by the trappings of capitalism—one of several themes that the album explores. Power ("When I am king") and materialism ("gucci"; "yuppies") generate self-importance ("Why don't you remember my name") and excess ("piggy"), threatening to consume, impair, and silence ("With your opinions which are of no consequence at all") in the desire for more (Example 1a). The fear and realization that the capitalist machine has participated in the formation of the subject and created, as a condition of possibility, the potential to equate the valuation of material goods with identity and self-worth, provokes a split subject—a "paranoid android" who recognizes that its individual thoughts and ambitions may also be a product of the capitalist machine ("Please could you stop the noise . . . from all the unborn chicken voices in my head"). (10) The plea to be cleansed ("Rain down on me from a great height") from the markers of a capitalist identity proves futile in the song's final section; the potential for grace and intervention is met with a cynicism that God may be passive ("God loves his children, yeah!"), leaving the persona no escape from Pandemonium. That all of the individuals in "Paranoid Android" are condemned to the same fate, regardless of social status or wealth, lends an ironic twist to the song's ending.

[2.2] Nadine Hubbs's description of the lyrics from Radiohead's Ok Computer as "already oblique in their written form . . . often intelligible only in fragments" ([2000] 2008, 226) seems especially fitting for describing those in "Paranoid Android." Not only does the paranoid android convey a split subject position; the presentation of the song's lyrics also embodies a similar aesthetic, engendering antithesis (Example 1b). The lines coalesce into a fragmented dialogue of different speaking voices, which communicate conflicting expressive states—anxiety, domination, capricious rage, apprehension, alienation, blindness, and indifference. While the printed lyrics in the CD booklet demarcate some of the voices with quotation marks, perspective seems blurred when these lyrics are exclusively sung by Radiohead's lead singer Thom Yorke. We might, for instance, interpret the fragmented dialogue as representing different facets of the persona's split subject, and thus more broadly infer that these conflicting expressive states are inherent in all individuals formed by a capitalist society. Antithesis is heightened in the final lyrics, when the persona's plea ("Rain down") sounds in counterpoint with additional dialogue ("That's it sir/you're leaving") and observation. At this point (5:05), the lyrical content recedes from the foreground to the background, revealing a disturbing and grotesque society. Reminiscent of Hieronymous Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights, this final scene juxtaposes infernal images ("the dust and the screaming"; "the crackle of pig skin"; "the panic"; "the vomit") with "the yuppies networking" (underlined in the lyrics)—fate with ignorance—both of which are underscored with a plea for grace. The printed lyrics in the CD booklet add a visual dimension to the overall content, depicting turmoil through an idiosyncratic typography that includes misspelled words and uneven spacing between letters.

[2.3] The music of "Paranoid Android" contributes to the lyrics' expression of fragmentation, antithesis, and anxiety. Written for voice, acoustic and electric guitars, Mellotron, and percussion, the rock song contains several features that prevent it from achieving a state of rest: (1) a through-composed form comprised of three discrete sections—A (0:18), B (1:58), and C (3:34)—that are framed by an introduction (0:00) and a coda (5:39) (see Example 1 again); (11) (2) tonal pairing within each

formal section, where one of two possible tonics prevail at a given time; (12) and (3) shifts in texture, tempi, and meter. Radiohead's bassist Colin Greenwood has acknowledged that "Paranoid Android" fuses together individual compositions (Jabba 1998), and indeed each main section features its own motives, phrase rhythm, and tonal areas. Collectively, the three main sections in the through-composed form might be best described as a musical "triptych" or montage of discrete fragments that resist forming a unified whole. (13)

[2.4] A main feature of both the introduction and the A section is that musical repetitions are either truncated or partially realigned. These varied repetitions can create an unsettling effect in the listening experience because they discourage the initial unit that precedes each repetition from achieving a sense of stability. The introduction, which establishes the groove for the A section, features a twelve-bar unit that can be subdivided into an eight-bar phrase and four-bar extension (**Example 2a**). Here the four-bar extension repeats the harmonic progression from the last four measures of the eight-bar phrase, encouraging us to rehear these last four measures as an initiating unit in the next four-bar group (c.f. measures 5–8 and 9–12). The A section—in verse-chorus form—repeats the introduction's twelve measures at the forefront of its first verse (measures 13–24), now with Yorke's vocal line ("Please could you stop the noise I'm trying to get some rest") added above. The second phrase in the first verse ("from all the unborn chicken voices in my head?") presents a truncated version (measures 25–32), repeating the accompaniment from the first eight bars of the first phrase and omitting the four-bar extension. The grouping structure for the entire first verse can be summarized as | | 8 + 4, 8 | |.

[2.5] An example of realignment occurs in the A section's chorus (measures 33–46), which sounds a variant of the G minor → E half-diminished progression from the intro and first verse (see **Example 2b**). The two phrases that make up the chorus can be expressed both as | | 8 + 6 | | and as | | 6 + 8 | | (see Example 2a again and Appendix 1, measures 33–46, for a full transcription). This dual reading of the chorus' grouping structure is attributed to the overlap between the tail-end of the melody and the repetition of the harmonic progression in measure 40; what sounds like an ending to the vocal line's first eight-bar phrase in the chorus is also the beginning of the repeated harmonic progression. The overlap of the vocal line and repetition of the harmonic progression in measures 39–40 causes a realignment of the hypermetric downbeat within the repeated G minor–D-minor/F–E<sup>7</sup> progression (cf. measures 33–36 and measures 39–42). Both the verse and chorus are repeated once more, albeit with a varied melody and different lyrics in the second verse.

[2.6] The tonal pairing in the A section also contributes to the music's unease. The first two measures of the introduction suggest that the piece will be in C minor, yet the swerve towards G minor in measures 4–5 calls into question the tonal hierarchy: Is C minor the tonic, or does C minor function instead as the subdominant (IV) of G minor? The ambiguity of the song's tonal center continues in the A section, which opens with the same harmonic progression as the introduction. While the tonality appears to gravitate more towards G minor as the A section gets underway, this tonal center is weakened by a reappearing  $E^{\dagger}$  (measures 8 and 12). When we reach  $E^{7}$  at the end of the last chorus, the harmony sides in favor of an A-minor resolution that initiates the beginning of the B section, leaving the tonal ambiguity of C minor and G minor in the intro and A section unresolved.

[2.7] **Example 3** presents a transcription of the bass and harmonic progression at the beginning of the B section (1:58). There is a change in musical texture and mood, beginning with a driving syncopated A-minor riff in \$\frac{1}{4}\$ meter for eight measures, followed by a C-major groove in \$\frac{7}{4}\$ for three measures, and finally two measures in \$\frac{1}{4}\$, the last of which contains a melodic link between C major and A minor via a descending chromatic bass C-B\$\frac{1}{4}\$—B\$ that resolves to A in the repeat of the entire progression. The shift between the duple and triple meter within the \$\frac{7}{4}\$ C-major groove (\$\frac{1}{4}\$ + \$\frac{3}{4}\$) markedly contrasts the steady \$\frac{1}{4}\$ meter established by the A-minor riff, and creates a jittery effect that enhances the apprehensive expression in the lyrics ("Why don't you remember my name I guess he does") aggressively delivered in \$Sprechstimme\$ by Yorke. The three-fold repetition of this entire progression culminates in an electric guitar solo by Jonny Greenwood in the last repetition (3:05), which forms the first of two climactic points in the entire song. Greenwood's solo ends abruptly with the descending chromatic bass-line A-A-flat-G-G-flat that resolves to a low A over an F-major chord.

[2.8] The C section (3:34) opens with a slow eight-bar harmonic progression that functions as a ground bass, with vocal dubbing and electronic vocal patches layered above Yorke's non-syllabic vocal line. As the voice-leading sketch shows (Example 4a), the eight-bar progression features two descents, the first in C minor and the second in D minor. The first

descent, which can be heard as a variant of the descending chromatic bass line that adjoins the double-tonic complex A minor and C major in the B section, resembles a baroque lament bass line. Here its implied descent to G is interrupted via a harmonic reinterpretation of the B-flat and A that support a G-minor chord and an A-major triad, rather than the and chords of a typical lament bass. The second descent in D minor unfolds the interval of a major sixth, which then leads to A major, the dominant of D minor. The three-fold repetition of this entire eight-bar segment leads to an odd resolution of the A-major dominant triad at the boundary point between the end of the progression and its beginning (Example 4b); here the leading-tone strikingly resolves down by half-step rather than up, and the bass ascends a minor third rather than a perfect fourth. During the first and second repetitions of the entire progression (4:04–5:04), Yorke sings the accompanying lyrics ("Rain down") a tenth above the bass. In the third repetition (5:05), a dubbed counter melody ("That's it sir, you're leaving") sounds above Yorke's vocal line. The song concludes with a brash coda (5:36) that features a second guitar solo by Greenwood over the harmonic progression from the B-section, forming the second climactic point in the song.

[2.9] **Example 5a** summarizes the tonal pairing that occurs throughout "Paranoid Android." (16) The intro and A section juxtapose C minor and G minor, the B section—A minor and C minor, the C section—C minor and D minor, and the coda—A minor and C major. The solid arrow indicates a change in scale-step between sections and the dotted arrow, a change of mode. Each section in the through-composed form juxtaposes two competing tonics, creating a sense of tension in the listening experience. The tonic, as a potential state of rest, is constantly stymied, forcing the listener to repeatedly reconfigure the tonal hierarchy throughout the song. The matrix in **Example 5b** clarifies the hierarchical relationships between all four competing tonics, and **Example 5c** maps this matrix of tonal relationships on a tetrahedron, marking the pathway traversed in "Paranoid Android." This tonal pathway—summarized as C-G-A-C-D-A-C—is not unidirectional, but rather fluctuates between tonic pairs within each section.

Walter Everett's (2008) description of popular music that subverts monotonality seems especially fitting for the tonal disposition of "Paranoid Android":

Some songs are structurally diatonic and depend on normal tonal chord progressions, and yet no single overriding tonal center can be appointed conclusively because the song's various formal sections revolve around separate tonics (perhaps in pairs suggesting the double-tonic complex of Bailey 1977) and closure is not provided by any overall directed voice leading. (145)

In "Paranoid Android," a group of adjacent chords on the local level may appear to gravitate towards a single tonic against a diatonic background, allowing one to interpret the tones within these chords as adhering to the principles of strict voice leading. When taken together, however, the groups of chords reveal multiple tonics that project a disjointed tonal structure, obfuscating the possibility that a unified contrapuntal structure governs the unfolding of the rock song's peculiarities. (17)

#### Analysis of Mehldau's Adaptation of "Paranoid Android"

[3.1] While Mehldau's performance of "Paranoid Android" closely adheres to the pitches and rhythms in Radiohead's recording, the change in instrumentation and two improvised solos over the B and C sections' harmonic structure mark extensive points of departure.

## Re-instrumentation for solo piano

[3.2] In his adaptation of "Paranoid Android" for solo piano, Mehldau weaves the pitches and rhythms sounded by the voice, acoustic and electric guitars, and electric bass into a contrapuntal tapestry (Compare Appendix 1 to Appendix 2). The pitch content in the intro (originally played by the acoustic and electric lead guitar) unfolds in four layers or "voices"—tenor, bass, accompaniment, and countermelody—which collectively form a composite rhythm of steady eighth and quarter notes. To differentiate between the first three voices, Mehldau situates the tenor and bass on the registral outskirts of the arpeggiated accompaniment and slightly accentuates both the tenor's syncopated major thirds and the bass line. The fourth voice, or countermelody (measures 6–8) (originally played by Jonny Greenwood on lead guitar) enters above the first three voices in Mehldau's adaptation. At the onset of the A section (measure 13), Mehldau adds a fifth layer, the syncopated melody initially

sung by Yorke. By positioning the vocal melody an octave higher than Radiohead's recording, he distinguishes this layer from the remaining four throughout the A section.

[3.3] Emerging from Mehldau's articulation of this five-tiered pitch and rhythmic structure is a dialogue amongst the voices that underscores the forms of motivic repetition in Radiohead's recording. **Examples 6a** and **6b** trace how two central motives in both the intro and A section—the descending major third and the melodic line G–A–B| —E| —are woven into the contrapuntal texture. The intro opens with a descending major third G–E| in the tenor voice (measure 1) that is transposed down a perfect fourth (D–B|) when the tonal center gravitates towards G-minor (measure 5, Example 6a). The countermelody (measures 6–8) echoes the tenor's D–B| dyad an octave higher, oscillating between these pitches in a quicker rhythm before descending stepwise from B-flat to G. The bass introduces the second motive—the melodic line G–A–B| —E| —in measures 5–7. The motive's first three pitches (G–A–B|) sound in retrograde form (B| A–G) in the countermelody's melodic descent (measures 7–8), which is immediately followed by a repetition of the G–A–B| —E| motive in the bass (measures 9–11). The G–A–B| —E| motive can also be heard in the vocal melody: here the tritone B| —E| is filled in with stepwise descending motion (measures 15–18) at the same time that the G–A–B| —E| motive sounds once more in the bass (measures 17–20). The chorus within the large A section (measure 33ff) preserves the G-dorian sound from the previous measures, and contains a retrograde form of the descending major-third motive (from D–B| to B| —D) in the tenor voice (Example 6b). The upper neighbor-note E| decorates this major-third motive in the tenor voice, forming the basis for the chorus' melody (D–E| —D).

[3.4] Mehldau's arrangement thus makes the relationship between figure and ground, or vocal line and accompaniment, more complex compared to Radiohead's recording. By folding together the pitch and rhythmic material under one solo instrument and by elevating the countermelodies and bass to a more substantial role through articulation and dynamics, the motivic repetitions in the layered dialogue become more prominent within the contrapuntal texture.

#### Solo Sections

[3.5] The repetition of the B and C sections' harmonic structure in Radiohead's recording creates an opportunity for two improvised solos. What is remarkable about both of Mehldau's solos is that he mostly preserves the contrapuntal layers of the individual lines established in the intro and A section, while also using the musical contents from each section as points of departure. Mehldau prefaces each solo with the composed material heard in Radiohead's recording, which functions as a "head" (see Appendix 2, B section (measures 81–106) and C section (measures 162–77)). This musical material introduces the themes and harmonic progressions, and it serves as the scaffolding upon which Mehldau builds his improvisation. As my analysis below suggests, his approach towards developing the musical content in both solo sections follows a similar narrative—from lucidity to disorder. I trace these transformations in each solo and then explore how they transform the intertext upon which they are based.

[3.6] Mehldau begins his first solo over the B section by rhythmically augmenting and composing out motives in different voices at overlapping time intervals. The first phrase of his first "chorus" (measures 107–15) features three motives, labeled a–c in **Example 7a:** (18) (a) C–B –B –G –A, which is based on the chromatic descending line that adjoins the A minor and C major double-tonic complex (see Example 3, measure 93); (b) an ascending perfect fifth A–E, followed by a perfect-fifth descent to A; and (c) the A-minor bass riff—the central melodic motive from the B section in Radiohead's recording (Example 3, measure 81–82). Mehldau presents the descending chromatic motive a in the tenor register in the pickup to the first chorus of his solo (measure 106) and then plays a varied version an octave below in syncopated dotted-quarter notes. He couples this rhythmic expansion of motive a with the perfect-fifth motive b at the onset of the first chorus (measure 107–8), which is repeated (measures 109–10) and then composed-out (measures 111–114) over rhythmically altered repetitions of the A-minor riff (motive c) (Example 7a).

[3.7] After Mehldau layers motivic variants on top of one another in his first chorus, he transposes portions of the A-minor riff (motive c) and places their fragments in different registers within the composite contrapuntal texture in his second and third choruses (**Example 7b**). At the onset of the second chorus (measure 120), he restates the first half of the A-minor riff in the bass and then transfers the second half in the alto register, altering the pitches of the riff (from G#-C-D to

D#-F#-G#). Mehldau then repeats the riff in both the bass and tenor register at a composite interval of a major seventh (measures 122–23), distorting the riff's sound through dissonance. In the third chorus (measure 133), the left hand fragments the A-minor riff in two registers that span a diminished twelfth (G#-D) underneath a plateau of repeated As in the right hand, which function as a pedal point. Here Mehldau disperses the pitches from the A-minor riff amongst the lowest and highest tones (A and G#, and C and D) of the lively arpeggiated eighth notes, generating three separate layers of voices below the A pedal.

[3.8] The trajectory that the motivic development follows in Mehldau's first solo—from overlapping layers of motivic variants to motivic fragmentation via register transfer—reaches its climax in his fourth chorus (measures 147–61). The A-minor riff in this final chorus is no longer recognizable in its complete form; in its place are sparse and abrupt dissonant chords that sporadically punctuate the driving eighth notes in the bass (see Appendix 2).

[3.9] In Mehldau's second solo, which spans seven choruses, he gradually distorts the theme from the C section and alters its harmonic progressions. He begins the section by stating the "head," which unfolds over two statements of the section's harmonic progression (Appendix 2, measures 162–77). Similar to Radiohead's recording, the first statement (measures 162–69; "part 1") in Mehldau's performance features a homophonic texture, wherein the upper voice generally doubles the bass. In the second statement (measures 170–77; "part 2"), Mehldau layers the primary melody (which corresponds to the vocal line "Rain down, rain down" in Radiohead's recording) on top of this homophonic texture, forming parallel tenths with the bass. Notably, he retains the upper voice from part 1 and places it in the alto register, creating 9–8 suspensions with the bass (measures 170 and 172). Mehldau effects a seamless transition between a complete presentation of the head and his first chorus (measures 178–85) by adding a third voice in the soprano register, which sounds a variant of the primary melody. As with this first chorus and the three that follow, the primary melody is diffused amongst the layered voices, placed in different registers in the composite contrapuntal texture. Towards the end of his fourth chorus (measures 207–10) and into his fifth chorus, Mehldau dilutes the layered texture of voices to melody and accompaniment, shifting the listener's focus to the harmonic reinterpretation of the bass line and its effects on the C-section's primary melody.

[3.10] The voice-leading sketch in Example 8 traces Mehldau's modifications to the bass-line progression throughout his solo improvisation. The process begins in his first chorus (measures 178-85), where a G replaces the previous low F in the D-minor bass descent (compare measure 183 with measures 167 and 175) and moves to II (E-major) before reaching the dominant of D minor. By substituting G for F, Mehldau colors the musical surface with a G major-9th chord, changing the F in the melody from a consonance into a dissonance. In his second chorus, he restores the major-sixth descent from D to F in D minor (measures 188–91), but continues this descent to C# via register transfer. The C# of measure 193 proceeds directly to C4 at the onset of his third chorus, yielding an over-arching stepwise descent in the bass that seamlessly connects the D-minor descent (beginning in measure 189) in the second chorus to the C-minor one that opens the third chorus. Mehldau extends this C-minor descent in the third chorus to Ap (measure 196), reharmonizing F in the melody with a foreign D major \$\frac{4}{2}\$ chord before returning to A\$\frac{1}{2}\$. In his fourth chorus (measures 202–29), Mehldau momentarily restores the C-minor and D-minor "branches" of the bass line (which, put together, resemble a hybrid version of the head's two-fold statement of the harmonic progression), only to deviate again from the ground bass in his final three choruses. Mehldau repeats the lower-neighbor motion around A in the fifth and sixth choruses—which darkens the F in the melody (measures 212 and 220) once again with a remote Do major 4 chord. Similar to choruses two and three, he links the D-minor descent in the fifth chorus to the C-minor descent in the sixth chorus by extending the step-wise motion in the bass to an interval of an eleventh (from D to A, measures 212-20, with register transfer). The chromaticism added to the D-minor descent in his fifth chorus tints the melody with dissonant B-minor and D major chords (measure 214), and the C bass suspension on the downbeat of the sixth chorus causes a disjuncture between the outer voices' parallel tenths that have dominated the voiceleading progression in previous C-minor branches. In Mehldau's final chorus (chorus 7, measure 226), he replaces the initial C in the C-minor branch with a Co, reharmonizing the opening Eo in the melody with an Ao minor \( \frac{5}{2} \) chord. Mehldau closes the C section with a return to the composed material from Radiohead's recording over the C-section's harmonic progression ("That's it sir"; labeled "outro" in Example 8), signalling the end of the section.

[3.11] If Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" functions as an intertext for listening to Mehldau's adaptation, how might Mehldau's arrangement and two solo improvisations affect our prior interpretation of the rock song? Mehldau's adaptation

communicates a similar aesthetic of fragmentation and antithesis because it preserves the tripartite form and tonal pairing within each section. Yet the marked differences in instrumentation—an acoustic piano, as opposed to a combination of electronic and acoustic guitars, Mellotron, percussion, and voice—and placement of the instrument(s) in the lateral scoundscape lends Mehldau's recording a more introspective and introverted sound, compared to Radiohead's. Sonic space seems more narrow in Mehldau's recording because the piano's sound is mostly located in the center of the stereo image. Conversely, in Radiohead's recording, the vocal and instrumental lines are situated in different locations within the stereo image, creating the illusion of spatial depth. (19) If the notion of a persona is preserved in Mehldau's recording, this timbral "reduction" may invite listeners to perceive this persona as more reclusive or introverted, or perhaps enable listeners to witness a more private, interior space of the persona.

[3.12] While the absence of lyrics during both solos deprive the improvised pitch and rhythmic material of semantic meaning, the ways in which Mehldau reinscribes the song's motives and harmonic structure within both improvisations appear to heighten the song's expressions of anxiety and apprehension. Whereas Radiohead develops the musical content in the B and C sections mostly through repetitions of central motives (e.g., A-minor riff) or melodies ("Rain down"), as well as through counter melodies that are layered on top of existing ones ("That's it sir"), Mehldau gradually obscures the content in these sections by first presenting the motives and harmonic progressions intact and then by distorting them. In Mehldau's first solo over the B section (measures 107–61), motives are tightly interlaced in overlapping segments within a contrapuntal texture, dispersed by means of register transfers, and then fractured. In his second solo (measures 162–233), melodic lines are moderately layered on top of one another, severed into fragments that appear in different registers, and then distorted through alterations of the ground-bass progression. Unlike Radiohead's B and C sections, the gradual anamorphosis of the motives and harmonic progressions in Mehldau's choruses over these two sections effects a marked perceptual change in expression—from stability to instability, or perhaps from order to chaos—which might be mapped onto the listener's intertextual reading of "Paranoid Android" in any number of ways (as an analogue to either the persona's changing psychological state).

[3.13] The cyclic repetition of each section's musical structure in both solos also plays a role in heightening the song's expression of anxiety. If the unstable repetitions, tonal structure, and abrupt shifts in texture, tempi, and meter prevent the music from achieving a state of rest in Radiohead's recording, the repetition of the musical structure during the gradual deformation of the motives and harmonic progressions in Mehldau's two solos can create a sense of restriction or claustrophobia. Here the tonal pairing in each respective musical structure resists resolution, and the repetition of this musical structure only restates the tonal "problem" amidst further motivic decay in a seemingly endless cycle. That the cycle eventually becomes "warped" itself in the latter half of Mehldau's second solo—where the boundary point between the end of the progression and its beginning gradually deteriorates by means of long stepwise descents that connect the D-minor descent to the C-minor one—alienates the melody from its very surroundings, consequently transforming it into a dissonant, grotesque form.

#### Conclusion

[4.1] In an interview for All About Jazz with columnist Fred Yung (2004), Mehldau questions whether the term "cover" accurately describes a jazz performance of a popular song:

AAJ: You've spawned instrumentalists doing Radiohead covers. Has Radiohead sent you a fruit basket?

**BM:** "Cover" is an unfortunate word—I guess it works pragmatically to describe an interpretation of a tune that hasn't been around long enough to be deemed a "standard." But "cover" also means just playing the tune—like you're a wedding band and the bride says, "Can you guys play 'We've Only Just Begun?" and you cover it for them. You have to do something more with the tune if you want to transcend just doing a "cover" in that narrow definition of the word, and with us it's through the interpretation of the melody and harmony, our rhythmic approach, and most importantly, the collective improvisation that ensues.

Mehldau's response rightly captures the tension between fidelity and creativity—what Julie Sanders (2006) has also described as "the fundamental contradictory impulse towards dependence and liberation implicit in the majority of the adaptations and appropriations" (11). The term's tendency to conceal the complex relationships that can occur between repetitions of the same musical text has led some music scholars to adopt different terms, such as "version" and "base song." (20) These distinctions appear to point towards a larger concern, namely the prescriptive power that certain recordings can have over other recordings or live performances, wherein the recording itself, rather than a notated form of the song, can possess the authority to subordinate other versions to diminutive types: reproductions and copies. (21) The extent to which Radiohead's recording of "Paranoid Android" holds such prescriptive authority over Mehldau's adaptation can be put into question, however, when his improvisation is heard as the focal point of his performance; Radiohead's "original" can function as an intertext that Mehldau's "cover" acts upon, displacing the power relations between constructed hierarchies. As I have suggested in this paper, Mehldau's adaptation has the potential to recontextualize Radiohead's prior musical "utterances" and thus transform or nuance their possible meanings. The rock song's signature motives and musical structures enter into a dialogue with the new, extemporized material that has the ability to change or color the "already-written," encouraging us to rehear and rediscover the original through its cover.

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# Discography

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## **Footnotes**

- \* In preparing this article for publication, I am very grateful to my colleagues at McGill University, Walter Everett, and the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful commentary. I would also like to thank Brad Mehldau for his generous support of this project and for allowing me to publish a transcription of his solo performance of "Paranoid Android." His level of musicality and creativity is inspiring, and this article is a tribute to his craft. Finally, a special thanks goes to Nadine Hubbs for introducing me to the topic of cover songs and for encouraging me to transcribe "Paranoid Android." Return to text
- 1. On intertextuality in popular music, see Burns 1997, Weinstein 1998, Butler 2003, Lacasse 2000, Middleton 2000, Coyle 2002, Plastekes 2005 and 2010, Mosser 2008, and Spicer 2009.

  Return to text

2. The term "cover" has been used to refer not only to popular artists' renditions of recorded songs, but also to jazz arrangements of post-1950s popular music (Shatz 1998; Yung 2004; Pellegrinelli 2009). This latter use of the term may be due to the impression that, as with popular music covers, the recording similarly functions as the prescriptive text for a jazz adaptation. (My thanks go to one of the anonymous reviewers for sharing this point with me and to Walter Everett for offering his perspective on the term in a private correspondence). While my discussion of intertextuality in this article focuses on jazz adaptations of contemporary pop songs, I imagine that a broader study of the intertextual relationships between jazz and popular performances of the same song composed prior to the 1950s is possible. The question of prescriptive authority may be less clear in these cases, however, leading one to discover different kinds of relationships between these performances. I will return to some of these points at the end of the paper.

Return to text

3. The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz defines "head" as "the theme on which a jazz performance is based" (Kernfeld 2013). In this sense, "theme" not only refers to the melody, but also to its supporting harmonic progressions and formal design. See also the New Grove Dictionary of Jazz entry on "Forms."

Return to text

4. On the relationship between composition and improvisation, see Larson 2005.

Return to text

5. See also Riffaterre 1978. Intertextuality as conceived here, then, coincides less with Julia Kristeva's ([1969] 1980) conception of the term and more with Gérald Genette's appropriation of Kristeva's concept. For Genette, intertextuality is one of five different types of transtextual relationships and refers to "the actual presence of one text within another" ([1982] 1997, 2). My thanks go to one of the anonymous reviewers for this reference.

Return to text

6. This distinction between active and passive imitation recalls Harold Bloom's (1973) revisionist theory of influence. Return to text

7. A different solo version of the rock song can be heard on Mehldau's album Live in Tokyo (2004). Mehldau has also recorded "Paranoid Android" for the album Largo (2001) with horns, bass, and percussion.

Return to text

8. Mehldau et al. 1997 and 1999. See also Mehldau's interview with Ted Panken (2008), where he shares his experience about playing in odd time signatures.

Return to text

9. For further discussion of the album, see Hubbs [2000] 2008, and, more recently, Letts 2010 and Adams 2011. Return to text

10. On the relationship between Radiohead's music and capitalism, Marianne Tatom Letts (2010) similarly comments that the subject "may think he is acting of his own accord, but he is actually functioning under the influence of the conditions in which he lives. His actions and his very opinions are shaped and even dictated by market forces. He is told what and how to consume" (3).

Return to text

11. In his monograph *OK Computer*, Dai Griffiths labels the return of the B-section material (5:39) as "Section D" (Griffiths 2004, 36–37 and 48–54), whereas I interpret this section as a coda.

Return to text

12. Tonal pairing, or "double-tonic complex," was first introduced by Robert Bailey (1960). See also Bailey 1985, Kinderman 1980, Lewis 1984, and Krebs 1996, among others. In rock music scholarship, see Everett (1992) and (2008). Return to text

13. In an interview with Mark Sutherland (1997), Radiohead confirms that Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" served as a "reference point" for the song's form. The Beatle's "Happiness is a Warm Gun" also shares a similar form (I would like to thank Walter Everett for sharing this point with me).

Return to text

14. All transcriptions in the article are my own. The first one (Ex. 2a) could be rewritten by halving the current values (whole note = half note), yielding an opening phrase that is four bars instead of eight. Since Brad Mehldau has suggested to me in a personal correspondence that the C-major groove in the B section can be heard in 7/4, I have opted to keep the current metrical values in order to align my transcription with his conception of meter and to avoid an irregular measure with 3 1/2 beats.

Return to text

15. Another plausible reading of the grouping structure in measures 33–46 would be | | 2 + 6 + 6 | | for the vocal line and | | 6 + 8 | | for the harmony.

Return to text

16. While each section's harmonic progression conveys directional tonality (C minor to G minor in the A section, for instance), the repetition of these progressions leads me to interpret the harmonic structure for each section as examples of tonal pairing.

Return to text

17. That "Paranoid Android" resists a single fundamental structure need not deter us from recognizing the value that a Schenkerian perspective can bring to our understanding of the song's harmony and voice leading.

Return to text

18. My use of the term "chorus" in this context refers to a complete statement of the harmonic structure, rather than a refrain in verse-chorus song form.

Return to text

19. I would like to thank my colleague Richard King for his input on this section. For a stereophonic analysis of "Paranoid Android" that uses Moore's (1993) sound-box as a point of departure, see Sears (2011). Sears considers the relationship between the sound box's lateral dimensions and the rock song's musical form.

Return to text

20. See especially Weinstein 1998 and Mosser 2008.

Return to text

21. Richard Crawford, in particular, discusses the role that recordings have played in transforming musical performances into "permanent works" (Crawford 2001, x).

Return to text

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