

Variations on a Theme by K. K. Slider: Memory and Play in the Music of
Animal Crossing: New Horizons

*SMT-V*9.4 (2023)
Society for Music Theory: Videocast Journal

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ISSN 2689-5471 DOI: <http://doi.org/10.30535/smtv.9.4>

Editor: Megan Long
Associate Editor: Jonathan De Souza

This file includes the abstract, keyword list, bibliography, and related material for the video essay, “Variations on a Theme by K. K. Slider: Memory and Play in the Music of Animal Crossing: New Horizons” by Nathaniel Mitchell. This video-essay may be found at

<https://vimeo.com/societymusictheory/smtv094mitchell>

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Abstract for
“Variations on a Theme by K. K. Slider: Memory and Play in the Music of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*”
by Nathaniel Mitchell, *SMT-V9.4*

In *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020), players socialize, build, and explore an infectiously cartoony island community against a backdrop of equally infectious music. This backdrop consists of continuously looping tracks that change every hour, on the hour; producing a daily cycle of 24 compositions bound together through motivic cross-reference. In this video, I analyze the sonic materials of *New Horizons*'s hourly cycle against the compositional ethic of its music team, who “strove to create music that allows the listener’s own emotions and imagination to fill in the space between the sounds” (Ginsberg 2020). Motivic and topical references, I argue, act as triggers for space filling, inviting players to mentally link the sounds they are currently hearing to a network of meaning-laden memories. The musical cycle thereby becomes an open-ended musical sandbox, presenting players with a wealth of sonic materials to build into rich experiences.

Short Keyword List

ludomusicology, variation, motive, topic, meaning, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, music theory

Extensive Keyword List

ludomusicology, variation, motive, topic, musical meaning, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, Nintendo, sandbox, Kazumi Totaka, K. K. Slider, video game, Tom Nook, Isabelle, Able Sisters, villager, Nook Inc., island, association, memory, Roman Ivanovitch, cycle, hour, sequence, bossa nova, salsa, son, guitar, funk, soul, R&B, blues, multimedia, tropical, cognition, music theory, nostalgia, Nelly, Jack Johnson, immersion

About the Author

Nathaniel Mitchell is a lecturer in music theory at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His research explores the cognitive foundations of musical creativity in a variety of genres, including opera, bluegrass, and video games. He received his Ph.D. in Music from Princeton

University, where his dissertation on musical form in eighteenth-century opera was awarded the Holmes / D'Accone dissertation fellowship from the American Musicological Society. His research has appeared in *Music Theory Spectrum*, the *Oxford Handbook of Public Music Theory*, and *SMT-Pod*.

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