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Eyeing the Ear:
Roland Barthes and the Song Lyric

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine Roland Barthes's essays on music in order to explore the relationship between the musical and linguistic elements of the contemporary popular song. I argue that what song lyrics appear to "say" bears no relation to what they "mean." Rather, meaning resides in the act of engaging with the popular song. First, I analyze the four main phases of Barthes's thinking in order to provide a basis on which to explore his work. Second, I provide an in-depth study of his essays on music. I then critique the literary approach to song analysis through an examination of selected writings on Bob Dylan. Finally, I explore U2's song "Numb" and Beck's "High 5 (Rock the Catskills)" in order to illustrate the notion of engagement.

Résumé

Dans cette thèse, j'étudie les écrits de Roland Barthes au sujet de la musique, afin d'examiner les relations entre les deux éléments, musicales et linguistiques, dans la chanson populaire contemporaine. Je soutiens que ce que les paroles de ces chansons "semblent" dire n'a aucun rapport à ce qu'elles "veulent" dire. La signification existe, plutôt, dans l'acte d'engagement avec la chanson. Premièrement, je fais l'analyse des quatre phases principales de la pensée de Barthes, pour fournir la base sur laquelle on peut explorer ses écrits au sujet de la musique. Deuxièmement, j'examine en profondeur ces écrits. Ensuite, je développe une critique de l'approche littéraire envers l'analyse des chansons populaire contemporaine avec une considération de quelques écrits choisis sur Bob Dylan. Finalement, pour mieux illustrer la notion de l'engagement, je termine par l'exploration de deux chansons particulières: "Numb" de U2 et "High 5 (Rock the Catskills)" de Beck.

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I. Introduction

This thesis will explore the nature of the song lyric in light of Roland Barthes's examination of the relationship between musical and linguistic expression within the aural dimension, contained in his seven essays devoted to this subject in the collection entitled The Responsibility of Forms. It will be my contention that Barthes's essays offer the theoretical foundation from which one may begin constructing a framework in which to examine the complex workings of the song lyric. The main thrust of this thesis will be a theoretical analysis of the song lyric, in particular the meanings and contradictions inherent in the interchange between its musical and linguistic elements. One of the goals of this thesis is to arrive at an understanding of what I will call the creative dialogue which arises at the conjuncture of the various signifying practices embodied by the song lyric.

My analysis will be based upon a drawing out of the complexities of Barthes's arguments in relation to the production of aural knowledge within the song form. These arguments will be examined in tandem with theoretical debates by scholars involved in thinking about what Richard Cureton calls the "auditory imagination." Little attention has been paid to Barthes's writings on music, aside from the many references to his notion of the "grain of the voice" within studies on subjects ranging from the singing voice to the literary text. My goal is to provide some critical attention to his thoughts on the relationship between musical and literary forms.

Since the term "song" designates multiple types of lyrical and musical forms within many historical and cultural traditions, I will limit my examination to contemporary sources within the western tradition. In my analysis of these songs, I will pay particular attention to works by artists who are considered to be "wordsmiths," or "genuine auteurs," as Leland Poague puts it. I will examine the way in which this view valorizes "lyrical" and "poetic" songwriters over works by artists who utilize less audible and frequently incoherent verbal expressions. Part of my project in this thesis is to address the problem of how meaningful expressions are both constructed and understood within the song form. I will explore ways

in which one might go about understanding how words, utterances and various vocal expressions work within a musical context. I will debate how and why songwriters who employ distinctly literary devices come to be appraised as wordsmiths, as worthy of critical judgment. One of my central claims will be that there is no firm understanding of what makes a lyrical line within a musical song more deserving of critical praise, than an emotive vocal line which contains no words. I will consider whether the particular nature of songs allows a type of meaning to be conveyed to the listener, irrespective of what the words appear to "say" in a textual context. In other words, I will examine the possibility that words and the meaning they might generate become fragmented in a musical framework.

My examination of contemporary popular songs will centre on those written and performed by Bob Dylan. The reason I will be focusing on Dylan is because he is considered to be one of the first lyricists "credited with the artistic integrity of a genuine *auteur*" (Poague 55). In addition, a vast amount of critical attention has been paid to his work since the start of his career in the early 1960s. My analysis will be based on looking at the ways in which his songs have been examined in the arena of popular music criticism. I will trace the mainly literary arguments that have been made concerning how the nature of Dylan's lyricism qualifies him as an "auteur," and how this sets the precedent for the assessment of other songwriters in the songwriting tradition. I will then take specific examples of songs by the group U2 and Beck (who is known by his first name only) in order to explore other possible critical directions that might be taken towards understanding the ways in which the song form conveys meaning. This will work towards my overall goal of understanding the multiple ways in which the song lyric generates meaning, through the creative dialogue between the musical and lyrical elements.

The song form provides fertile ground for theoretical discussion because of the two independent and competing modes of expression it embodies: the linguistic and the musical. Both modes of expression "signify" in radically different ways, resulting in the complex manner in which meaning is formed within songs. Barthes suggests that "sounds

are not signs (no sound, in itself, has meaning)," therefore music may be considered a "language which has a syntax but no semantics" (Responsibility 311). Any analysis which involves an interpretation of music, no matter how small a role the music plays, must take this special status into account. Despite the fact that music does not signify in the say way as language and therefore cannot be interpreted using the same tools, assumptions concerning the referential powers of music are common. The same interpretive terms used for language are often mistakenly applied to music. In this sense, many critics discuss Dylan's songs through the lyrics alone, interpreting them in a textual manner, assuming they can simply transpose the same discursive tools they employ in literary analyses into the realm of music.[1] Since music arguably expresses meaning differently from language, this discursive transposition is problematic. The question I will address in this thesis, then, is how one might go about examining a form which combines both an opaque system of signifiers (the "empty" signs generated by the music) with a direct series of vocal expressions (the linguistic "signs" complete with referents). Furthermore, how might one go about understanding the various ways in which the musical and linguistic aspects of the song, when combined, produce a further set of meanings? If instrumental music, as Jean-Jacques Nattiez writes, "is not a narrative, but an incitement to make a narrative, to comment, to analyze" (128), how does it then operate when it comes into contact with the more directly expressive linguistic utterances contained in the lyrics?

Music and language hold an interesting relationship, both as intertwining artistic practices, as well as joint subjects of study by a vast array of theoreticians: thinkers from the French school such as Jacques Derrida, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Julia Kristeva and Jean-François Lyotard have each devoted some attention to the problem of musical signification.[2] John Neubauer writes in his study of eighteenth-century aesthetics entitled

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[1] See, for example, the efforts of Bowden (1982), Dowley (1982) and Herdman (1982) to discuss Dylan's music.

[2] See Derrida's "Genesis and Structure of the 'Essay on the Origin of Languages,'" Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1974) 165-255; Lévi-Strauss' "Les paroles et la musique," Regarder, Écouter, Lire (Paris: Pilon, 1993) 87-123; Kristeva's Language — The

The Emancipation of Music from Language that "problems of music engaged the minds of those who have come to epitomize the age. Liebniz, Addison, Batteux, Euler, Diderot, d'Alembert, Rousseau ... and Kant — to name a few" (4). Indeed, although music and language exist at opposite ends of the interpretive spectrum, they hold a more intimate relationship than one might suspect. They share similar etymological backgrounds in several languages: the Greek term *mousike* was used to describe both "music and language, because music was based on the invariable length and pitch of Greek variables" (Neubauer 22). The difference between singing and speaking was therefore a matter of "degree, not kind" (Winn 4). Similarly, the German term for music, *redente Künste*, denotes "one of the talking arts" (Smith 33). In both these instances, the voice is the central link, or one might say metaphor, between the two different narrative processes: in the Greek tradition, vocal melody and song are an integral part of the expression of poetic and dramatic narratives, while the German term creates a parallel between the speaking voice's inherent tunefulness and music's ability to "speak." This etymological proximity is an interesting indication of the importance the two expressive forms have held for each other, historically. Indeed, the separation of language from musical expression, and music from linguistic vocalization, is what Hugh Blumenfeld calls a "temporary aberration" in their joint histories (6). Blumenfeld argues that one of the reasons music and language were so integral to each other is that they were an essential way of communicating and passing down stories and narratives (6). Each form contributed an element which the other did not have to the act of creating and memorizing stories: music provided the rhythmic basis which allowed the narrative to be more easily committed to memory, while the passing on of the narrative through the music allowed all sorts of traditions and stories to be preserved. So the fact that music and language have been held at a distance both critically and theoretically is in fact a reflection of their evolution into different domains. Blumenfeld writes that when printing

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Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics, trans. Anne Menke (New York: Columbia UP, 1989); and Lyotard's "A Few Words to Sing," Toward the Postmodern, ed. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (New Jersey: Humanities P, 1993) 41-59.

technologies and literacy became more widespread, stories no longer needed to be committed to memory with the help of music: "poets committed their lines chiefly to paper and gradually lost the music. For roughly 300 years, most of our poetry has sat on the page" (6). The written form has dominated both the aural and oral modes of passing on information from that point onwards.

Blumenfeld argues that the split between music and language has begun to heal in recent times. He writes, "[n]o North American poet of the page has had the cultural impact of Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, or Joni Mitchell: none has added as many bywords to the language, inspired as much social thought and action, or brought about as much catharsis" (6). What I find interesting about this passage is the implicit notion that lyrics have come to provoke catharsis, that the words as they might be read on the page are charged with a certain energy when sung. That is, the words are somehow *altered*, their meaning is changed, by the music. Blumenfeld then proceeds, within the body of the article, to discuss a record by Andrew Calhoun. In this discussion, he looks for the meaning of Calhoun's songs through their lyrics, contradicting the idea that words become altered when placed in a musical context. That is, he uses literary tools to discuss a form that is not exclusively literary. Songs are therefore analyzed exclusively through their words, when it has been implied that the words come to have an altered meaning when placed into a performative musical context. This contradiction, in which song words are regarded as different from poetry and then analyzed in the same way, is an example of what I will argue is at the heart of many attempts to analyze songs, in which the complexities of the relationship between music and language are both acknowledged and dismissed. An alternative approach is necessary in order to avoid reducing songs to their lyrics, so as to allow songs to be examined in all of their complexity.

The thesis will be divided into three chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of the subject at hand. The first chapter will outline the significant stages of Barthes's thinking in order to provide a theoretical background on which the ideas raised in the subsequent

chapters can be considered. I will examine the notion of displacement in relation to Barthes's work, and how it may be considered as a metaphor for the trajectory of his writings, as well as for one of the philosophical foundations of his thinking. I will look at what Annette Lavers considers to be the four main periods in Barthes's thinking: the examination of cultural myths and the processes of mystification which surround them, his subsequent development of semiology, the move to the notion of the text, and then the more loose and autobiographical style which characterizes his later writings.

The second chapter will provide an in-depth examination of Barthes's seven essays on music. I will look at the basic components of his theory of music and attempt to link them in a more expanded way to the act of creating and performing music, as well as the relationship between the musical elements and the vocal elements in popular song. I will look at how music shifts from being a referent in Barthes's writing, a way of explaining a concept like text, to the transformation of music into a main subject of consideration. I will analyze Barthes's speculations concerning the field of the auditory and the differences between hearing and listening. I will examine what Barthes sees as the "problem of the adjective," being the way in which the adjective tends to make musical meaning as either predicable or ineffable. I will discuss Barthes's notion of music as "muscular," and of the body. I will also look at his notion of the "grain of the voice" and the way in which it fits into his overall approach. The most significant aspect of his writings is in the area of music and signification. I will examine his premise that music does not signify in the way that language does and that it does not contain the same tools as language that allow it to signify. Rather, music provokes an endless drift, a shimmering, of signifiers, in which signification and meaning are prevented from occurring.

The third and last chapter will apply Barthes's musical theories on a practical level in order to understand the ways in which the contemporary popular song comes to have meaning for both listening and performing subjects. I will analyze a selection of songs in relation to the main conclusions Barthes draws in order to formulate an approach to

discussing popular songs. I will begin with an examination of how several songs by Dylan have been analyzed and attempt to bring out their implicit theoretical assumptions about the interaction between the musical and the literary. I will look at Betsy Bowden's attempt to understand songs in both the written and performed sense in Performed Literature. I will propose that meaning does not reside "in" the song itself, but rather, in the process of *engaging* with the song. Since one cannot "read" a song and take meaning from it in a linguistic sense, I will propose that one takes meaning from a song through the process of engaging with it. I will argue that this process occurs through those often unanticipated moments in songs that stay in the listener and performer's minds, that punctuate her experience of the song. I will argue that these moments are comparable to what Barthes calls the "punctum" in Camera Lucida. I will use U2's song "Numb" and Beck's "High 5 (Rock the Catskills)" to explore the processes of understanding and comprehension. The common thread running through the three chapters will be the search for adequate tools with which to understand the workings of language within the context of music.

II. Four Phases of Barthes's Thinking

This chapter will focus upon the examination of Barthes's writings on music, in order to set the foundation for further discussions within this thesis. I will outline the significant stages of Barthes's thinking by examining the various theories he developed. I will start with a discussion of the notion of displacement in Barthes's work, a term used to describe both his writing style as well as the philosophical grounding of his approach. This will function as an introduction to the more detailed exploration of his writings on music that I will pursue in the following chapter.

To begin with, it is important to state that Barthes's writings often follow an elliptical trajectory, one in which meaning lies as much in the periphery as in the text. Barthes's particular style of writing grows out of what Steven Ungar calls his belief in "the force of historical change on the formation of personal identity and self knowledge" (8). One of the implications of this way of thinking is the acknowledgment, indeed the *highlighting*, of the contradictions and discrepancies which underlie the processes involved in setting one's thoughts down on paper, of developing ways of dealing with and discussing issues. Indeed, Barthes comments on these difficulties in Writing Degree Zero when he points out that the writer, when faced with a blank sheet of paper in front of her (and thus the burden of filling it), "at the moment of choosing the words which must frankly signify his place in History ... observes a tragic disparity between what he does and what he sees" (86). Barthes points out the discrepancies inherent in the translation of thought into writing, of experience into language.[3] Indeed, as Roland Champagne writes, Barthes's "preference for the 'fragment' as the formal unit for his discourse demonstrat[es] his leadership away from the logical structure of words and the internal coherence of discourse" (58).

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[3] This discrepancy is one which is mirrored in the relationship between latent and manifest dreams, consciously spoken and unconsciously articulated matter, within the psychoanalytic paradigm. Barthes' interest in psychoanalysis dates quite far back in his work and is exemplified in his steady use of psychoanalytic terminology.

As a further symbol of Barthes's preoccupation with exploring the discontinuities present in the process of expression, François Escal comments that Barthes's writings, especially the essays on music, express themselves in the margins and the parentheses: "[s]a pensée s'exprime voluntiers dans des marges, des incises, des parenthèses: 'en écharpe.' Il n'aime pas développer, 'parce que l'incohérance est préférable à l'ordre qui déforme' et que 'le risque de clausule rhétorique est trop grand'" (57). The locus of his thought lies within a more indirect form of articulation, as opposed to a direct form of rhetoric. As Ungar comments, Barthes's thinking is frequently in a state of flux, a state which is full of contradictions: "what some readers see as his failure to maintain a consistent practice as a literary critic is, in fact, less a failure of method or rigour than a way of asserting the ongoing movement and difference of critical thinking within history" (5). Ungar elaborates on Barthes's opposition to the notion of the unified self, a belief both explicitly stated in his work and implicitly expressed in the often oblique form the work takes on. Barthes "believes in the force of historical change on the formation of personal identity and self-knowledge," and in doing so he rejects the "vision of the individual as an integrated whole" (Ungar 8). Ungar writes that he wishes to accept "the assertion of change and difference against the will to unify" (xii). Indeed, Rick Rylance comments that for Barthes, the "modern self ... is imaged by multiplicity, gaps and hidden dimensions — a network of strings and holes through which language plays" (104).

The conviction that ways of thinking should constantly be re-examined and re-evaluated in order to break down the parameters around which they occur accounts for the constantly evolving positions taken by Barthes in his writing. Stephen Heath describes these positions as prone to a certain "vertige du déplacement," in his book of the same name. Heath defines "vertige" as "ce qui ne finit pas: décroche le sens, le remet à plus tard" (24), as a type of vacillation relating to discontinuities or breaks which may or may not function to bring the arguments at hand to a higher level. Andrew Brown calls this vacillation a "drift" which leads to a paradoxical position which "questions the very

possibility of extracting themes from Barthes's work or defining key notions in it" (13). Nevertheless, Brown argues that "for all the discontinuities in Barthes's work, there is one constant: the attempt to make sense of the world in language, and then to ask how much that sense leaves out" (5). It is in this way that Brown dedicates his first chapter to charting the course of the drifts and breakages in Barthes's writing, in order to locate the places in which one can extract the predominant themes and key notions.

Heath characterizes the notion of "déplacement" as the attempt to displace things from their usual order, to highlight and then explode the boundaries around which we think about issues and ideas. He writes, "déplacer, c'est donc théâtraliser, faire éclater l'intelligibilité de l'habituel — les habitudes de l'intelligible — pour déployer dans ses formes" (Heath 20). The result is that habitual ways of looking at things, when placed within a new context or framework, may be seen in a new and perhaps clearer way. Furthermore, Heath's use of displacement is not only meant to point out the way in which Barthes deals with ideas, but to create a mirror for the way in which these ideas are theorized. That is, displacement becomes a symbol for the philosophical underpinnings of Barthes's writings, as well as operates as an emblem for his often shifting and elliptical writing style.

Annette Lavers argues that Barthes's writing falls roughly into four philosophical phases, each one, as it were, displaced by the next.[4] His thinking shifts from his first "statement of general attitudes" in which he sets out the basic concepts he will tackle, to his interest in structuralism and the "euphoric dream of scientificity," onward to the notion of the text, and concluding with his more prosaic and autobiographical writing (Lavers 26-7). Heath uses the metaphor of journeying, "le voyage," as a way of describing the shifts in Barthes's thinking. He takes the term from Barthes's L'Empire des signes, and defines it as follows: "de se déplacer, de se dé-ranger, de ne pas se tenir en place; de se déployer ...

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[4] I would like to maintain a certain wariness about Lavers' reduction of Barthes' entire career into four phases, but she does use the phases as a very rough indication of the complexity present in the shifts in thinking Barthes underwent, so in this sense one can see it as a suggestion rather than a total argument.

sur un ailleurs qui ouvre des failles" (24). The concrete shifts undergone by Barthes on paper are held in relation to the more metaphorical displacements, or "journeying," witnessed by his thought. It is important to explore the shifts described by Lavers in order to provide a solid foundation on which to study Barthes's writings on music, because they are connected. This particular exploration will be limited, however, because my intention is to focus largely on his essays on music.

Barthes defines myth in his essay entitled "Myth Today" as a system of communication in which messages are transmitted by modes of signification (Mythologies 109). Michael Moriarty writes that Barthes's use of the notion of myth is a creative reconstruction of the Greek word "muthos," which refers to speech and consequently, to a series of messages which may be drawn from speech (19). Moriarty also comments that Barthes plays with myth as it relates to the notion of mystification (19). Barthes attempts, then, to lift the cloak of mystification surrounding cultural mythologies in order to understand the way in which the messages they contain are transmitted, how they come to signify. The starting point for his reflections is a "feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up reality" (Barthes Mythologies, 11). This naturalness is a type of transparency which makes myth appear to be "what goes without saying" (Barthes Mythologies, 11). This hides the complexity of the communicative acts that in fact take place. Barthes in turn attempts to lift this transparency in order to probe more deeply into the way in which the messages operate. As such, Barthes's approach is to break apart the conventional meaning of the various cultural messages in order to understand the ideological presumptions upon which they are seen to rest.

Mythologies is dedicated to looking at all sorts of cultural and social activities which Barthes defines in various ways as myths, from an analysis of soaps and detergents to the sport of wrestling. As Michael Moriarty writes, Barthes examines the "values and attitudes implicit in the variety of messages with which our culture bombards us: advertisements,

newspapers and magazine reports, photographs, and even material objects like cars" (19). An example of Barthes's approach is his treatment of children's toys in Mythologies. He writes that "toys *always mean something*, and this something is always entirely socialized, constituted by the myths or techniques of modern adult life: the Army, Broadcasting, the Post Office" (Mythologies 53). Barthes removes the transparency of the notion of "play" from toys and instead locates their function as preparation for, and in a deeper sense as a replication of, the adult world. In this sense, toys are seen as a form of acculturation, the implicit and hidden way in which society perpetuates itself. Barthes writes, however, that "faced with this world of faithful and complicated objects, the child can only identify himself as owner, as user, never as creator; he does not invent the world, he uses it" (Mythologies 54).

Barthes uses linguistic terms in discussing myth: "[w]e shall therefore take *language, discourse, speech*, etc., to mean any significant unit or synthesis, whether verbal or visual: a photograph will be a kind of speech for us in the same way as a newspaper article" (Barthes Mythologies, 110-11). As Rylance writes, Barthes considers language to be "an appropriate model because individual utterances in any language cannot be made without an enabling structure to give them meaning" (33). The linguistic basis of the study of cultural myths feeds into Barthes's notion of semiology, which is also developed in "Myth Today." Indeed, the vignettes and arguments which make up the main part of the book are often called the prologue to this essay. At the time at which Mythologies was published, semiology did not exist in the sense that Barthes began to develop it, but had been brought into existence by Ferdinand Saussure.[5] In charting the course from Barthes's involvement with exploring cultural myths towards his development of semiology, Moriarty writes that Barthes became tired with simply uncovering the ideological content of myths and wanted to turn towards a more systematic method for examining the transparencies of culture (55). The beginnings of Barthes's development of semiology

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[5] See Moriarty's discussion, p. 73.

therefore takes place within the context of deciphering the myths of culture in Mythologies, which is expanded in greater detail in Elements of Semiology. However, this semiology turned malleable in Barthes's later writings, when the progression from structuralism and semiology was replaced by what Ungar calls "something more intimately bound up with the assertion of personal value" (40). Lavers characterizes this as a more loose, autobiographical style in which Barthes's speaks "no longer as a 'message-sender' but as a 'message-receiver'" in which he himself becomes the reader he had in mind (27). This trajectory takes him away from the thornier issues of aspiring towards a form of scientific objectivity within the humanities, and leads him towards the more relativistic standpoint which permeates his later work. As Moriarty writes, Barthes concluded that "objectivity was a mirage: that the critic was inevitably confronted with a whole range of possible critical languages, and ... his probity consisted in making a conscious choice, rooted in his historical situation, and applying it coherently to the work (105).[6]

There are two crucial reorientations of Saussure's notion of semiology which Barthes creates in "Myth Today." The first realignment occurs at the level of method. Within Saussure's semiological framework, linguistics is merely a section of semiology (Moriarty 73), whereas in Barthes's mind semiology remains only a part of linguistics, which he considers to be the overriding system at play (Ungar 39). It therefore indicates his interest in maintaining linguistics as the central paradigm with which to examine the utterances and expressions present in cultural practices. The second re-orientation occurs in "Myth Today" when Barthes writes that Saussure's premise is to examine language as a first order of signification, in which the "signified is the concept, the signifier the acoustical image (which is mental) and the relation between concept and image is the sign ... which is a concrete entity" (Mythologies 113). Barthes then contrasts this with the model he believes semiology should follow in the analysis of cultural mythologies: "[t]hat which is a sign ...

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[6] The move away from objectivity is, of course, much more complex than is possible to represent in this context; the history of the relationship between philosophical doctrines on objectivity versus subjectivity is long and complicated.

in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second" (Mythologies 114). That is, he takes Saussure's system and reorients it, so that the semiological system becomes a second order of signification. As Barthes writes, "[e]verything happens as if myth shifted the formal system of the first significations sideways" (Mythologies 115). Barthes therefore takes Saussure's system and shifts it so that myth is a "metalanguage," a "second language, *in which* one speaks about the first" (Mythologies 115). In Barthes's development of myth, the linguistic sign is arbitrary, although its signified still has a concrete referent, while the myths he attempts to uncover try to "pass off an arbitrary sign as a natural, analogical one" (Moriarty 24). Semiology therefore plays an integral part in Barthes's analysis of the workings of myth in the cultural context.

The shift in Barthes's thinking towards the development of the notion of the text, occurs at the point at which he tries to move away from the "dream of scientificity" to a theory which aptly captures the more open philosophical basis which infuses his subsequent writings. In defining this shift, Lavers writes that "[w]here structural analysis hoped to extract a universal scheme for narrative ... textual analysis seeks to 'infinitize' a single text by treating each of its elements as the point of departure for an infinite 'drift' of meanings" (176). The notion of the text as the "grain," if you will, from which endless pieces may follow, drift, vacillate into unanticipated openings which may or may not be immediately clear or foreseeable, is the main force at work here. Indeed, Barthes will later draw upon the notion of the text in relation to the "grain of the voice." Text disrupts the conventional ways in which meaning is conveyed, in that it "works on language, precisely with the effect of disturbing the perception of it as communication or expression" (Moriarty 145). In this sense it short-circuits the lines of meaning. Moriarty writes that "the processes of the Text jam the mechanism of communication, and what results is not signification but *signifiance* ... [which] is not a determinate meaning ... but a process of meaning" (145).

The process of signifiance takes place on three levels: production, enunciation and symbolization, which confront "us with language as an open-ended structure ... irreducible

to a functional method of communication between individuals" (Moriarty 145). The productivity of a text belongs to both the reader and author, the latter who creates it and the former who may bring "the workings of the signifier to hitherto unsuspected prominence" (Moriarty 146). The notion of the text's enunciation denotes the "act of uttering as distinct from the resultant utterance (the enounced)," feeding into the endless enunciations which are potentially contained within the text (Moriarty 146). Lastly, symbolization, as Moriarty writes, may be understood in contradistinction to the notion of communication as the impossibility of "identifying a fixed signified or set of signifieds," so that the text "defers the signified indefinitely" (147). The text is a "stereographic space," in which representation as such does not exist, an expanse characterized by an endless process of displacement and ever shifting ground (Moriarty 145). As Lavers remarks, it is best described as the negative of all that is regularly associated with literary studies, from lexicology and grammar to sociology (176). The notion of the text, put in simple terms, is a product of the reader's construction, a "space" in which communication as such does not exist but is replaced by the infinite drift of signifiers. Meaning does not exist as a stable entity, if it exists at all, but rather operates in an endless deferral.

I have thus far charted a rough sketch of the passage from myth and semiology towards the development of a textual analysis in Barthes's thinking as a prologue to my discussion of his writings on music. The shift does not occur in a demarcated manner, but instead the initial two forms of analysis gradually come together and then later go their separate ways, one to be pursued, and the other to be left off (semiology and myth, respectively). The notion of the text and the disruption of the communicative flow infuses many of Barthes's later writings. He shifts, however, away from the examination of cultural texts and instead turns inward to critically examine the ways in which the subject infuses, confuses and re-construes these texts. I will now look briefly at this interior passage, away from the scientifically and textually based theories towards an examination

of the subject and the weaving of what Ungar calls a "critical fiction" drawn from an autobiographical source.

Moriarty writes that masked behind an appearance of simplicity, Barthes's writings in the middle to late 1970s are rich and complex (157). He writes that what distinguishes these writings from the others is that Barthes turns to himself "and his activity of writing as the point of departure for his reflection. He works now in a loose and fluid relationship to systems of thought" (Moriarty 157). Ungar calls this a progression from "a critical discourse on writing toward active figuration," in which Barthes's interest in reaching a scientific level of writing makes way for an interest in the dispersion of objectivity, the exploration of the fragments of the subject (152). Ungar writes that figuration involves "the creation of verbal patterns or structures whose meaning cannot be determined by a direct coordination of signifier and signified such as that described by Saussure as the association of acoustic image and concept (68-9). Figuration therefore involves "a turning, bending, or deflecting of meaning, replacing it with a mobile space or field of action better understood as the sight of metaphoric or metonymic activity" (Ungar 69). As such, slippages of meaning are paramount, not the apparent meaning itself.

Ungar characterizes the inward turn of Barthes's writing as the attempt to seek "self-knowledge by trying to make himself into a kind of text: a body to be observed, analyzed, and ultimately understood" (56). Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes epitomizes this turn, being a biographical work on its own biographer, a reversal in which the author takes his own self as text. Roland Barthes takes the notion of its own autobiographical surface as a problem, acknowledging the "capacity for self-delusion and untruth which is all too often a byproduct of introspection and hyperconsciousness" (Ungar 61). This is achieved, in part, by his use of pronouns, referring to himself in first, second and third person narrations. For example, in discussing his voice, Barthes writes, "I try, little by little, to *render* his voice. I may be an adjectival approach: agile, fragile, youthful, somewhat broken? ... And how about this: clipped? Yes, if I expatiate: he revealed in his

clipped quality not to the torsion (the grimace) of a body controlling and thereby affirming itself but on the contrary the exhausting collapse of the subject without language" (Barthes 67). This creates the circumstances for a conscious and deliberate slippage between various forms of narration. Ungar writes, "[r]ather than attempt the impossible task of self-analysis, Barthes strips his writing of positivistic aspirations and acknowledges his undertaking obliquely as various sets of edges (*bords*) between pleasure and bliss, science and value, criticism and fiction" (61). One can see the shift away from his earlier scientific works as part of the progression away from the artificiality of scientific discourse towards a more real sense of the contradictory and the ambiguous which is reflected in a work like Roland Barthes. In this sense, Barthes stays more "true" to the subject at hand by both embodying and reflecting its inherent discontinuities, rather than constructing a falsely cohesive view.

Barthes's later period is interesting, among other considerations, for its emphasis on, and incorporation of approaches towards, media such as music, photography, visual art. Barthes's writings, of course, always reflected an interest in various cultural phenomena, from fashion in Système de la mode (1967) to La Tour Eiffel (1964), within the semiological context of understanding the ways in which the various mythologies and cultural codes operate. However, his later period is characterized by works like Camera Lucida (1980) and essays such as "The Grain of the Voice" (1972), which reflect not only the desire to move beyond disciplinary boundaries, but also to move towards examining other forms of expression. Barthes's seven essays on music were written in this later period, between 1970 and 1979 and set out the trajectory for an analysis of how music might be regarded as a phenomenon in the cultural as well as theoretical sphere.[7] These essays follow in the vein of the "critical fiction" of his later works, exhibiting the loose, fluid and philosophical approach described in the preceding paragraph. The notion of the

[7] Just to place these essays within a chronological frame that may not be evident from the bibliographical citation, Barthes' essays on music are as follows: "Musica Practica" (1970), "The Grain of the Voice" (1972), "Rasch" (1975), "Listening" (1976), "The Romantic Song" (1976), "Music, Voice, Language" (1977), and "Loving Schumann" (1979).

elliptical in Barthes's work exists throughout, the meaning often located in various circuitous spaces. These spaces feed directly into Barthes's way of dealing with contradictions and discontinuities rather than into a false sense of cohesiveness.

The notion of displacement in Barthes's work stands as a metaphor for both the philosophical grounding of his thinking, as well as the shifting style of his writing. I will now turn to an examination of Barthes's seven essays on music in the hope of delineating their main points, and of paying some much needed critical attention to an aspect of Barthes's work which is often misplaced, or perhaps in an ironic turn *displaced* in much of the theoretical work in this area.

III. An Examination of Barthes's Essays on Music

My project in this thesis is to understand the particular ways in which the musical and linguistic aspects of the popular song operate. My aim in this chapter, then, is to examine Barthes's seven essays on music in order to elucidate his main points, as well as to make sense of the way in which he delineates the workings of the musical and linguistic within music. The essays deal with many fundamental issues relating to both pure instrumental music and music which contains vocals, with discussions ranging from a look at the processes of hearing and listening to the problems inherent in attempts to understand the "images" music communicates. I will attempt to draw out the main ideas and chart their treatment and evolution throughout the essays.

The fact that Barthes dedicates a portion of his thought to music raises an interesting question about the relationship between the ways in which music and language-based expression intersect. How is it that Barthes, who spent so much of his time dealing with issues relating to the various contradictions inherent in the translation of experiences and thoughts into spoken and written language, was fascinated enough by musical expression to write an essay on it, nearly every year, for a decade? What is it about the specificity of musical listening, writing and performance that provokes Barthes to explore the ways in which it operates? What does music represent, if anything, for the study of language? In other words, why does Barthes choose to look at music when his main focus is language, and what place does music hold in his schema?

Far from being a stranger to music, Barthes used musical metaphors in his work, played the piano and even wrote music.[8] It infuses a great many of his writings, often on the periphery, but present nevertheless. The periphery, as was noted above, is often the place in which Barthes expresses his most important ideas, so the way in which music infuses his writings is significant. References to music can be found in many nooks and

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[8] A piece of music Barthes wrote in 1939 is reprinted in Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (57).

crannies of his work. For instance, Barthes discusses the action of fingering while playing the piano, out of the blue, in Roland Barthes: "[a]t the piano, 'fingering' has nothing to do with an assigned value of elegance and delicacy (which we refer to as 'touch') but merely designates a way of numbering fingers which must play this or that note; fingering establishes in a deliberate manner what will become an automatism" (70). Champagne quotes Barthes as saying, in regard to the notion of intertextuality, that "the intertext is not necessarily a field of influences; rather it is a music of figures, metaphors, thought-words" (61). Escal writes that the notion of music frequently intervenes in Barthes's writings, unobtrusively appearing at disparate moments and at crucial junctures: "[q]uelquefois, la musique intervient, non plus à titre de référent, mais de référence: dans Fragments d'un discours amoureux (1977), les mentions d'œvres musicales égrenées an fil des pages sont même recensées à la fin du livre" (57-8). Escal goes on to write that "[a]u fil de l'œvre en effet, les comparaisons avec les formes de la musique se multiplient ... Dans S/Z, pour définir le Texte, il recourt à des analogies répétées avec la musique" (58). As Escal points out, music is both a *referent*, and a *reference*, in Barthes's writings. Thus, Barthes uses the notion of music as a descriptive tool in the description of various processes and as a term to open up areas of exploration.

I will now proceed to an examination of Barthes's writings on music, in the hope of laying the foundation for the exploration of song lyrics later in this thesis. It will be my contention that Barthes's essays provide some fundamental insights into the ways in which music operates, and that these insights serve to illuminate the multifaceted ways in which musical expression conveys meaning. I will not attempt to paint a falsely cohesive picture of the seven essays, and instead look for those moments of "déplacements" which, as discussed above, often provide an entry point into the issues being discussed.

i. The parallel yet distinct relationship between Barthes's theory of the text and his thoughts on music

Escal argues that the point at which music becomes a main concern for Barthes is in conjunction with his development of textuality. Escal writes, "la présence de métaphores musicales d'une part, l'apparition de textes *sur* la musique d'autre part ... sont chronologiquement conjointes à l'élaboration dans les années 70 de la theorie du Texte" (59). She continues, "c'est alors le moment du Texte, de la théorie du Texte, celui où interviennent ses écrits sur la musique" (Escal 60). I would argue that this convergence is not coincidental and that there is an important relationship between Barthes's concern with the dispersion of meaning in the realm of the text, and the problem of meaning in the domain of music. That is not to say, however, that this concern translates into Barthes's application of textual theory to music but rather that he became interested in the parallels between the two forms of expression at about the same time. Although the notion of music would seem to reside outside of the linguistic domain and therefore resist being reduced to categories borrowed from a linguistic framework, there are many works which attempt to interpret music within this very same framework. For example, Donald Ivey's book Song: Anatomy, Imagery and Styles looks at the way in which music transmits "messages," and creates "imagery." Ivey asserts that "it is possible for music to utilize references that are almost universally recognized and these associations can provide a means of precise correlation of imagery" (101). J.O. Urmson takes a slightly more open position when he writes that "some music is representational and some is not" (133). He then contradicts himself by asserting that the least problematic aspect of the debate on music is whether sounds are representational, an argument that he tries to substantiate but which remains in opposition to his initial position (133). Peter Kivy's premise is that although musical representation is a problematic concept, there nevertheless exists a context in which one might draw out the "musical pictures" inherent in a particular piece. For Kivy, there are two types of musical pictures: those that become "visible" with the help of titles or extra information pertaining to the piece, or those pictures that are only acquired as a result of knowing, in advance, that "one is listening to illustrative music" so that one can "identify

the object of the illustration" (33). Kivy's argument, however, rests on the idea that musical pictures are attained from information beyond the actual piece. Musical pictures are not inherent to the music, but rather are made visible from information beyond the piece itself. Kivy's argument is also circular in that he implies that music inherently communicates forms of visual representations, but these representations are really only available from outside sources. Thus, one can say that these arguments pursue the idea that the transmission of "messages" and the use of "imagery" are invariably using *language* as the central metaphor for understanding how these communicative acts operate. When it comes to understanding music, however, the metaphor of language may not be applicable. Music may not contain the same semiological "kernels" that allow it to create and transmit "messages" or "images" in the way that language does. In other words, music may lack the basic elements that allow its various codes to be translated into messages or images, and consequently understood in the same way as language.

Music, then, holds an interesting relationship to Barthes's notion of the text. If the text is a space in which stable meaning does not exist and signification is the object of an infinite drift, music may be the intriguing metaphor for this process. Indeed, as Moriarty writes, the text, "in short, involves a complete breakdown with representation, and in the article 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' Barthes associates it not as tradition would have it, with the representative arts of theatre and cinema but with the non-representative art of music" (148). According to Moriarty, even authors like Diderot, Brecht and Eisenstein pay "tribute to the order of representation," while the text, in contrast, "subverts this order by foregrounding the workings of language as autonomous, and how it thus disturbs the unity of the reader or writer's subjectivity" (148). Music, it would seem, inherently contains the qualities that Barthes strives so hard to instill in the notion of the text: it intrinsically resists being reduced to any type of concretely representative form, and because it does not "speak" using the same semiological tools as language, it does not have a stable referent

enabling its meaning to be pinned down in any way. Music thus embodies what Barthes labours to point out about the operations of texts.

Champagne writes that Barthes "applied the semiotics of music and epistemology into the formerly restricted area of literary history: the history of music (as a practice not as an 'art') is moreover quite similar to *that of the text* ... Thus the musical component of literary history leads us to the interaction of structural linguistics in Roland Barthes's appreciation of the history of texts" (62-3). While it is true that Barthes was a pioneer in his use of ideas drawn from music in his literary theory, I would argue that music holds more of a central position within his thinking than has been acknowledged, not as a sideline to his theory but as a primary practice to be examined on its own. It is important to acknowledge, however, the problematic nature of importing terms from one disciplinary context into the sphere of another, such as is often the case in discussions bridging music and literary studies. In this sense, one might argue that Barthes's use of musical terms in his literary paradigm is problematic. However, I would suggest that although this is plausible, Barthes does begin the task, within his seven essays, of opening up the domain of music and of striking a path outside of the literary paradigm, if that is at all possible. As such, he is not importing terms so much as recreating them in a different context.

The way in which music operates is such a powerful enigma precisely because it does not signify in a fixed way. Rather, its meaning, if it can be said to belong to an order which produces meaningful communication, resides in the complex interweaving of musical sounds and the play of diverse harmonic relationships. Meaning would seem to lie, then, in the activity of *creating* sounds rather than the apparent "meaning" they take on in a linguistic context. Furthermore, when words, taken to be signifying units, are introduced into music, such as is the case for the majority of contemporary popular songs, one is faced with further perplexing problems. How does music interact with words, and vice-versa? How do the two "languages" that compose the popular song "speak" to each other, function, and interrelate? Do words retain their linguistic meaning when placed in a musical

context? What are the inherent problems of discussing music in the *form* of language? A quote by John Blacking in Nattiez' Music and Discourse aptly describes this problem: "'as soon as we analyze music with speech, we run the risk of distorting the true nature of non-verbal communication with both the structural conventions of verbal discourse itself and the analytical categories of grammar'" (152). This distortion is a key problem encountered in the act of writing about music. How does one go about, then, acknowledging this distortion *while* one talks about music? Is there a way to override it? Can one integrate a sense of this distortion into one's discussion of music and therefore at least remain one step removed from it?[9] What is it about music that demands to be explicated?

I would argue that music relates powerfully the listener, in a form of communication that differs from written and oral forms in many respects, and that it is the need to understand *what* music says as well as *how* it goes about saying it, that fuels the desire to discuss it. However, I consider Blacking's comments to be of central importance in the attempt to talk about music, and as such it will be of central importance in my analysis of Barthes's essays. I will pursue the argument that Barthes, in his essays on music, creatively rearticulates the categories of analysis he has previously worked with and acknowledges, in the same sense as Blacking, the idea of distortion in musical discussions.

ii. Barthes's prelude to discussing music: the complexities inherent in hearing and listening

The first idea Barthes deals with lies at the very centre of the issues surrounding music: the field of the auditory. In his essay entitled "Listening," a prelude of sorts to his discussion of music, Barthes makes the distinction between the physiological act of hearing and the psychological act of listening. He separates the sounds that exist in the individual's sonic horizon, from those that she consciously sifts through (Responsibility 245). Barthes

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[9] Elvis Costello's well-worn phrase "Talking about music is like dancing about architecture" is appropriate to mention here, keeping in mind that it is at this point almost a stereotypical phrase used when talking about discussing music. I would like, in the pages that come, to both acknowledge the difficulties presented by such an enterprise, but also to embrace a way of developing the tools one might need to accomplish this task.

distinguishes between three types of listening, which may be enumerated as follows. The first form of listening is what he calls the orientation towards hearing certain *indices* (Barthes, Responsibility 245). This is a type of alert which implies, for both humans and animals, the attitude of listening *for* something. The second form of listening is what Barthes calls *deciphering*. He writes: "what the ear tries to intercept are certain *signs* ... I listen the way I read, i.e., according to certain codes" (Responsibility 245). This second stage involves the apprehension of certain sounds and their differentiation from others. The last mode of listening is referred to by Barthes as an entirely modern phenomenon, being the formation of an *inter-subjective space* between the individual and the world around her, created by the transmission and reception of sounds between individuals (Responsibility 246). Barthes writes that this form of listening focuses on the space created between individuals, not with respect to what is said, but rather "who speaks, who emits: such listening is supposed to develop in an inter-subjective space where 'I am listening' also means 'listen to me'" (Responsibility 246). It is that which "brings two subjects in relation ... The injunction to listen is the total interpolation of one subject by another" (Responsibility 251). Hearing, then, is the "auditive background" in which listening takes place, the more or less unconscious perception of the "degrees of remoteness and of regular returns of phonic stimul[i]" (Barthes, Responsibility 246). It is the "very sense of space and of time" perceived by the individual (Barthes, Responsibility 246). On the other hand, listening is "linked (in a thousand varied, indirect forms) to a hermeneutics: to listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred, or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the 'underside' of meaning (what is experienced, postulated, intentionalized as hidden)" (Barthes, Responsibility 249). Listening involves, then, the selection and deciphering of varying auditory phenomena which places the individual in an inter-subjective space in relation to others.

According to Barthes, one of the most important aspects of listening is that it places the individual into a type of contact with others, through voice and ear, sound and speech.

The act of speaking, for Barthes, involves an affirmation of the interrelationship between the individuals involved in the exchange, involving the idea that "*touch me, know that I exist*" (Barthes, Responsibility 252). In Barthes's paradigm, the speaker is involved in the listener's silence as much as, if not more than, the words she speaks. He writes that "interpolation leads to an interlocution in which the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech: *listening speaks*, one might say" (Barthes, Responsibility 252). The steps he takes here are complex: the notion of listening involves a silent vocalization, one which is expressive without the presence of a voice. The act of listening involves the direct encounter between subjects, an interpolation which places the two subjects into a communicative relationship, affirming both position. The categories of listener and speaker are effusive, seeing as any individual may assume both positions.

The relationship between the listener and the speaker brings up, of course, the psychoanalytic setting involving analyst and patient. It leads directly into the notion of transference as that space into which the patient's vocalizations may meet with the analyst's articulate listening and may be recognized and acknowledged as existing. The analyst's listening *speaks*, it is an "active listening," and the patient's words fall into that space into which the transference may be articulated (Barthes Responsibility 259). Barthes writes that "whereas for centuries listening could be defined as an intentional act of audition ... today it is granted the power ... of playing over unknown spaces: listening includes in its field not only the unconscious in the topical sense of the term, but also, so to speak, its lay forms: the implicit, the indirect, the supplementary, the delayed: listening grants access to all forms of polysemy" (Responsibility 258). The notion of displacement is brought into play again, in this case as the more unorthodox circumstances in which listening occurs. That is, listening is moved away from the notion of intentionality and taken closer to the areas of the unconscious and of the indirect, that which, following the theme of "déplacement," is displaced. The field of the auditory, the space in which sound, music and speech reside, is

therefore opened up to a multiplicity of functions and displacements between the individuals who speak and those who listen.

One might place, for example, the act of musical performance within Barthes's notion of listening. The act of performing involves a complex set of anticipations, retrospections, musical and performative intuitions. It involves the setting up of a space in which, following Barthes's idea, the audience's listening *speaks*, just as the performer's articulations *listen* to the audience and thereby acknowledge its participation in the experience. The implicit idea is that the audience's silence is vocal and that it stands in for speech even though it is indeed voiceless (aside from the various codified noises audience members are allowed to make), therefore allowing a space into which the performer may figuratively "place" her music.

Notions of anticipation and retrospection are brought up by Wolfgang Iser in relation to the philosophy of reader-response. He writes that "[w]e have seen that, during the process of reading, there is an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection, which on a second reading may turn into a kind of advance retrospection" (Iser 57). I would argue that these concepts exist in the notion of performance, but in a manner more indicative of the ways in which music works than the process of reading. Performing involves anticipating what notes will follow in a song that a musician either sings or plays. It also involves a type of retrospective "glance" back at what *has been* performed so that the musician can maintain a sense of continuity between the notes that she makes and the ones that she *will* be making. Similarly, the musical act of retrospective anticipation allows the listener to maintain some form of continuity in her mind between the notes that are played and her perception of these notes. She cannot "see" them but must rely on being able to string the sounds together into a (sometimes) coherent whole. Thus, the notion of performance bears a relationship to the dynamics created by the action of listening as it is defined by Barthes. The main point, then, is that performance highlights, on a "stage," as it

were, the particularities of the notion of listening as it relates to communicative exchange between individuals.

iii. "Muscular" music and the notion of transmigration

Having sketched a broad framework in which to place the complexities of the acts of hearing and listening, Barthes begins his examination of music in the essay entitled "Musica Practica," making some key points which are later expanded on in further essays. Music, being a form of expression which takes place within the auditory domain and embodies (sometimes takes to the point of exaggeration) the dynamics involved in the exchange of hearing and listening, is a natural point for Barthes's to arrive at in relation to these considerations. For Barthes, music represents a site in which all sorts of highly diffuse and openly opaque kinds of signifiers are mixed into a melée of sounds. Barthes divides music into two types: the music one listens to, and the music that one plays (Responsibility 261). Barthes uses a somewhat linguistic model for this division: he implies that *listening* to music is akin in some way to the attitude of listening to speech, while suggesting that music which is *performed* to be held in comparison to the action of speaking. The use of this type of model is difficult to escape, especially when dealing with a form of expression which involves the actions of hearing and listening.

It is perhaps not coincidental that a medium which is so completely different in its mode of expression from the linguistic model contains such similarities on the surface. This type of metaphorical comparison falls directly into Barthes's interest and involvement with notions of language and linguistic models at the time at which he wrote "Musica Practica" (1970). However, through the cracks and fissures that I will be exploring, Barthes in fact begins to subvert the model of language and to search for an alternate theory through which to see it. He uses the term "muscular" to describe music that is played or performed, metaphorically relating it to the body (Barthes Responsibility 261). He makes it clear from this division that studies of music must take into account the music that exists on the page and in performance, as well as the music that is heard on the part of the audience or

listener. Barthes makes sure to emphasize the fact that music does not exist purely on its own, but rather in tandem with the individual on the receiving end: its production is intimately tied in with its reception.

Barthes writes that during the performance of music, it is "as if the body [is] listening ... confronting the keyboard or the music stand, the body proposes, leads, coordinates — the body itself must transcribe what it reads: it fabricates sound and sense: it is the scriptor, not the receiver; the decoder" (Barthes, Responsibility 261). The body "speaks" as much as the music that is produced by the body's actions. Performance involves a complex coordination between body and mind, fingers and thoughts. Brought to a further level, I would argue that performance implies a type of retrospective anticipation discussed earlier. The performer must anticipate the notes that she will play while simultaneously having to reflect back on those she has played. This creates a circumstance in which the performer must look ahead, while at the same time reflecting back, at the song she plays.

Barthes writes that to compose music is, "at least by tendency, to offer for *doing* ... the modern site of music is not the concert hall but the stage, where the musicians transmigrate, in an often dazzling interplay, from one auditive source to another" (Responsibility 265). One has only to think of the pastiche of sounds drawn from musical and other sources blended in the studio by a popular musical artist such as Beck to realize how Barthes was predicting the direction in which making records has evolved in the late 1990s. Indeed, the modern site has indeed shifted away from the concert hall and onto the stage, but it is a stage often complete with large mixing consoles which hearken back to the studio. Through these consoles, engineers and mixers can weave lots of different sounds and effects in and out of the performance. As he writes, "we can imagine that — eventually? — the concert will be exclusively a studio, a workshop, an atelier" (Barthes, Responsibility 265-6). Or, one can look towards technological innovations for instruments such as guitars, including a new type which allows the guitarist to store

thousands of different tunings in its own computer chip, allowing a change in tuning at any time with little trouble. One can see, then, how the setting of the contemporary popular music performances indeed allows musicians to "transmigrate" from one auditive source to another.

An example can be found in the complex studio machinations undergone by the recent U2 album entitled Pop. In an article in the New York Times, Jon Pareles describes visiting the recording sessions and observing how the album was created. Pop was made using highly advanced computerized techniques, enabling the members of U2 and the various producers to literally cut and paste together the songs at will. The result was that once the basic sounds were recorded, each song became a site of endless potential variations. The process of creating the songs, then, was reversed from that which one normally might think it to be: instead of taping a song and then refining it from that point on, U2's production team started out with an infinite variety of found sounds they could potentially use, recorded lots of disparate parts by the members of the band, and then faced the task of assembling the song. This assemblage can occur in any of an infinite amount of ways. Pareles, in describing his visit to the studio towards the end of the album's recording, writes that "the band had nearly two albums' worth of material in various stages of completion ... Flood [one of the producers] and U2 had been re-editing 'Discothèque,' shuffling its sections — which had been assigned names like 'Drugs' and 'Religious' — with a computer" (34). Pareles describes how another producer, Howie B., worked on a song called "If You Wear That Velvet Dress": "[w]hat it lacked was momentum, and Howie B. was trying to find it. Then, in the many arrangements the band had recorded, he did: a nudge from the bass at the end of a verse, a glimmering sample from a contemporary classical album in another, floating bell tones and the pièce de résistance: a hovering Hammond organ chord drifting in and out of the mix" (34). Further on in the recording process, Pareles outlines how another song was put together: at one point the guitarist, The Edge, "ambled into the control room ... [and] started to play along with the rhythm section:

ferocious strummed chords, then choppier ones, then choked semi-funk, track upon track" (34). He then describes how U2's drummer, Larry Mullen Jr., walked into the room and started playing an African hand drum. "When Mullen hit it, the control-room speaker made a squawk of distortion. Flood didn't hear a problem; he heard a noise to be exploited. Quickly, he and an assistant pointed a microphone at the tortured speaker, which emitted a raunchy, rhythmic hoot ... The song had suddenly veered in a new direction, raw and rhythmic" (34).

This example illustrates the way in which recording has become, depending on the circumstances and provided the funds are available to utilize such equipment, a process of endless possibilities, and in a Barthesian sense, of infinite drifts. The notion that a piece of music can exist as an endless series of possibilities and potential variations, in a recorded state, highlights the polysemic character of contemporary popular music. In saying this, however, I do not mean to make an outright comparison between the way in which Barthes characterizes the *reception* of the text, and the mode of *production* involved with certain instances of popular music. This would be a problematic step to take because it would disregard the fundamental differences between the two modes of expression. But if one could isolate, in a theoretical sense, the notion of the song prior to its recording as an endless series of possibilities, in relation to the *approach* Barthes takes to treating texts, then one might be able to associate the two simply on the grounds that they are both open to many possibilities in production, meaning and comprehension. It is this type of association that I would argue exists between Barthes's theories of text and the polysemic character of many contemporary songs.

iv. Music and expression: the grain of the voice

Having discussed the dynamics of hearing and listening, performance and staging, as a type of prolegomena to his examination of music, Barthes moves, in the later five essays, towards the heart of his elaboration of the dilemma of music's mode of expression: its particular way of indicating something without "saying" it in the conventional linguistic

sense. This is especially important for the analysis of the popular song, which I will be exploring in the next chapter, because of its combination of both musical and linguistic elements. If the widespread assumption concerning instrumental music is that it functions as a representation, formed and sealed by the connection between various sounds and the "natural world," then the presumption concerning popular music is that it may be "read" and therefore "understood" entirely through its lyrics. The assumption is that words connect without a shadow of a doubt the "images" the songs try to convey. These two approaches assume that there is an *identifiable mode of signification* at work in both instrumental and popular music. That is, the first approach asserts that sounds in instrumental music may be "read" and therefore assumes that the music signifies. Similarly, the second approach implies that the lyrics of popular songs signify in the same way as language is presumed to signify, treating them in isolation from the music they are intertwined with. What Barthes attempts to do in his examination of music is to understand the way in which one might go about characterizing those fundamental aspect of music in order to arrive at an awareness of what music "says," and the way in which it is spoken about in the realm of discourse.

"The Grain of the Voice" is probably the most oft-cited essay by Barthes in discussions pertaining to music, the notion of the voice, and orality. Most of the time, however, there is only a brief mention, a *reference* to the idea of the grain of the voice, rather than a thorough analysis of it. In what follows, I will take the notion of the grain of the voice as a main component of Barthes's writing and attempt to understand the particular place it occupies in relation to his thoughts on music. At the beginning of his essay "The Grain of the Voice," Barthes writes that "[l]anguage, according to Benveniste, is the only semiotic system capable of *interpreting* another semiotic system" ("Grain" 179). He goes on to ask, "[h]ow then does language manage, when it must interpret music? Alas, badly — very badly, it seems. If we examine the current practice of music criticism (or of conversations 'on' music: often the same thing), we see that the work (or its performance)

is invariably translated into the poorest linguistic category: the adjective" ("Grain" 179). The notion that language invariably falls short when it comes to analyzing music is significant for many reasons. One reason is that it relates to Barthes's turn away from language as an objective form of analysis, and his subsequent retreat into himself as the "message-receiver" of language. Music is difficult to speak about, and does not necessarily allow for an easy cross-disciplinary encounter with language. That is, it may be *presumed* that when fiction meets literary criticism, there is a dissolving of properties between the two forms that allows the latter to "read," evaluate and critique the former. Such is not the case, however, with music and criticism. The notion of music as figuration, as resisting linguistic translation or explanation, feeds directly *against* the presumption that there is a capacity for music to somehow dissolve, transmigrate, into the realm of language in order to be explained and understood.

One might say, at this point, that Barthes's argument is important in that it aptly summarizes the descriptive foundation upon which many critiques of music are made. Many discussions of music focus on the description of the various sounds in the piece, in no systematic order and usually based upon the author's perceptions of those sounds, simply describing the way in which the phrasing and the tempo come across. While description may help the reader to form a mental "image" of the music being discussed, it nevertheless dodges the main issues relating to how the music might in fact *create* these images, and how it might play a role in transmitting meaningful ideas. Barthes writes that "[m]usic is, by natural inclination, what immediately receives an adjective. The adjective is inevitable: this music is *this*, that execution is *that*. No doubt, once we make an art into a subject ... there is nothing left for us to do but 'predicate' it; but in the case of music, this predication inevitably takes the most facile and trivial form" ("Grain" 179). Indeed, the adjective allows for a certain degree of musical explanation, but does not touch upon the larger issues pertinent to discussions of music. Barthes then asks, "[a]re we condemned to the adjective? Are we reduced to the dilemma of either the predicable or the ineffable?"

("Grain" 180). Music as ineffable, as somehow unspeakable, is a prevalent theme in many critical writings, which subsume musical meaning to the realm of impossibility (cf. Raffman 1; Reimer and Wright 24; Neubauer 1; Kramer 2). It is an often convenient way of simply placing the potentially communicative or expressive aspects of music on hold. Barthes argues that discussions relating to music either assume that the complex machinations of musical meaning are reducible to predicable statements, or that these machinations are beyond meaning and belong to the realm of the ineffable, inevitably misplacing the real object at hand.

Susan McClary and Robert Walser write that what is important about music is elusive, but that this "need not force us back to some mystified plea of 'ineffability'" (289). Barthes's question concerning whether we are bound to conceive of music as predicable or ineffable might seem to use these two terms in a contradictory manner on the surface, in that the former asserts a type of description and the latter contends that description is impossible. However, Barthes's use of the terms indicates that, on the one hand, if we are bound to the predicable we will be using terms that inevitably reduce and constrict the music, and on the other hand, if we fall back upon the notion of music's ineffability, we will similarly constrain the music. Both concepts reduce music's scope through their use of descriptive categories.

Barthes's argument for how to discuss music without the problematic use of descriptive adjectives involves the notion, once again, of déplacement, of shifting the boundaries around which one might normally discuss it. As Grisel writes, even though Barthes is dissatisfied with the descriptive terms often employed in discussions of music, he still searches for a way to talk about it, a way that will avoid the pitfalls of the adjective. "Barthes rejette la critique adjective, mais il désire tout de même écrire 'sur' la musique d'une manière qui ne la supprime pas. Comme il ne veut (ne peut?) choisir le prédicable (le déferlement d'adjectifs, la bouffée d'imaginaire) ou l'ineffable, Barthes se trouve confronté à une aporie" (52). This is the entry point for his theorization of the grain of the voice.

Barthes writes that this much can be said about ascertaining whether there are verbal means for talking about music without adjectives:

> it is not by struggling against the adjective (diverting the adjective you find on the tip of the tongue towards some substantive or verbal periphrasis) that one stands a chance of exorcising music commentary and liberating it from the fatality of predication; rather than trying to change directly the language on music, it would be better to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception of intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language ("Grain" 180-1).

This is perhaps one of the most important statements Barthes makes in his essays, yet at the same time it is very puzzling. Barthes does not state clearly how one might attempt to shift the fringe of contact between music and language in order to more accurately portray their interaction within various forms and media. Barthes continues, "it is this displacement that I want to outline, not with regard to the whole of music but simply to a part of vocal music (*lied* or *mélodie*): the very precise space (genre) of *the encounter between a language and a voice*" ("Grain" 181). He goes on to write, "I shall straight-away give a name to this signifier at the level of which, I believe, the temptation of ethos can be liquidated (and thus the adjective banished): the grain, the grain of the voice when the latter is in a dual posture and dual production — of language and of music" ("Grain" 181).

The grain of the voice, when it comes to songs, is Barthes's partial answer to the problem of the adjective in musical criticism. It relates directly to music that incorporates words, the "lied," the mélodie, as well as to the contemporary popular song, as I will argue shortly. Barthes's notion of the grain, backtracking to "Listening," involves "that specific space in which a tongue encounters a voice and permits those who know how to listen to it to hear what we call its 'grain' — the singing voice is not the breath but indeed that materiality of the body emerging from the throat, a site where the phonic metal hardens and

takes shape" (Responsibility 255). The grain is also "the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (Barthes, "Grain" 188). By releasing the grain of the voice from the realm of the voice, Barthes extends its breadth into the gestures and acts which propel creative energy from the body into an object. The grain of the voice is "neither pure *melos* (pure music) nor pure *logos* (the words being sung as the 'signified')" (Brown 209). In this sense, it covers that meeting point between language from which I will be arguing that the study of, among other things popular music might proceed. The grain therefore provides a middle ground between the language used in the song, and the music the song is constructed around. This could become a basis from which a discussion not dependent on the overly determined adjectives of language may be developed.

Barthes writes, "[w]hat I shall attempt to say of the 'grain' will, of course, be only the apparently abstract side, the impossible account of an individual thrill that I constantly experience in listening to singing" ("Grain" 181). One can hear echoes of his ideas concerning the translation of figuration into discourse in this statement, relating to the difficulties of fully describing his thrill at listening to singing, again emphasizing the difficulties inherent in the task of talking about music. How does the notion of the grain make it possible to go about discussing vocal music in such a way as to both avoid links to the predicable and the ineffable? Furthermore, how might one go about incorporating a discussion involving the grain, in the sense that Barthes intends it, without involving overly deterministic adjectives?

Barthes proposes that the grain of the voice be understood through the notions of the pheno-song and the geno-song, terms he adapted from Julia Kristeva (ref. Barthes "Grain" 181). The pheno-song represents mechanical music making which emphasizes correct and incorrect ways of playing or singing as opposed to advocating more of a bodily involvement with the music. The geno-song, on the other hand, is that type of singing or playing which does not depend upon clarity or communication, but rather reveals the fundamentally physical elements which go into it. One can perhaps use the metaphor of the

body to describe these two elements of the grain of the voice: the pheno-song is somewhat akin to the notion of the skeleton, in that it represents the structure and the rules guiding the music, whereas the geno-song is that which covers the skeleton, the body that is determined by, but not visible to, the inner framework guiding it. These two aspects, the pheno-song and the geno-song, represent the double-sided nature of the grain of the voice.

Barthes writes, the pheno-song "covers all the phenomena, all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form ... the composer's idiolect, the style of the interpretation: in short, everything in the performance which is in service of communication, representation, expression, everything which is customarily talked about" ("Grain" 182). The pheno-song, then, represents the recognizably linguistic elements in the song, everything which may be linked to the song's particular mode of expression. The geno-song, on the other hand,

> is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate 'from within language and in its very materiality'; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language — not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters — where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the *diction* of the language" (Barthes, "Grain" 182-3).

The geno-song, then, is that which, in opposition to the pheno-song, does not "communicate". It is the production of the song, but not necessarily its performance. Put another way, the geno-song represents the pure line of music sweeping from vocal expression to auditory sensation. The pheno-song represents the formal aspects of the song itself, the very words and melodic phrases which are sung; the geno-song is the

physiological action which goes into creating the song, the sense of breathing through and creating the words that are sung, instead of the actual fact of the words themselves.

Barthes uses the category of the grain of the voice to create an alternative vocabulary for discussing music, one which, in his estimation, avoids the pitfalls associated with linking music to notions of predictability and overly deterministic models. Since the designations of the pheno-song and geno-song cover the workings of language and music when they come together in the song form, they are potentially of use in the discussion of popular music. Barthes creates a tension between the features which serve as those "communicable" elements of the songs, the features that belong to its particular style and the structure of the language used. Those features are inherently non-communicable, such as the melody, the way in which the breath joins with the voice and shapes the words. The tension between words and melody, mind and matter, breath and voice, is what I would argue exemplifies musical expression.

What happens, however, when the two elements of the song meet? How do the two categories come to describe or represent the notion of the grain of the voice? What is the result of their tension? How do the communicable and non-communicable elements of the song work, relate, interact together? I believe that Barthes leaves these questions deliberately ambiguous so as to allow for the greatest flexibility in trying to answer them. As Ungar writes, there is frequently a sense that in the "place of convergence and harmony, Barthes's writings sketch a musicality of dispersion and breaks" (77). The relationship between the pheno-song and geno-song designations and the grain of the voice illustrates this type of dispersion. On the one hand, the two categories represent the field of interaction between the linguistic and musical elements of the song form; on the other hand, Barthes's premise is that not all songs or singers illustrate his notion of the grain. For him, songs that are representative of the pheno-song lack that fundamental aspect of the body that allows the grain to be revealed. They are tied firmly to mechanics and therefore prevent an illustration of the breath, of the body, in the music. However, songs that are

representative of the geno-song revel in the grain of the voice, the movement of the limb. The grain is brought to prominence in the conjunction between the body and the impetus to create.

Barthes illustrates the opposition between the pheno-song and the geno-song in his discussion of the differences between the singing of Charles Panzéra and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Panzera's singing is an example of what Barthes tries to highlight with the notion of the geno-song, while Fischer-Dieskau, in emphasizing a mechanical form of music, allows only the pheno-song to show through and therefore prevents the grain from being conveyed. Barthes relates Fischer-Dieskau's singing to the aspect of the pheno-song which is "flattened out *into perfection*," taken away from the body that must perform it and played in an almost pre-programmed manner ("Grain" 189). He writes that Fischer-Dieskau's singing is "inordinately expressive (the diction is dramatic, the pauses, the checkings and releasings of breath ...) and hence never exceeds culture: here it is the soul which accompanies the song, not the body" (Barthes, "Grain" 183). Extending this into a critique of the way in which music is taught, Barthes writes that it is "all the more so since the whole of musical pedagogy teaches not the culture of the 'grain' of the voice but the emotive modes of its delivery" ("Grain" 183). Fischer-Dieskau's singing, then, is regarded as representative of the pheno-song in that it relies upon the mechanics and rules of music, as opposed to exploring other ways in which the music itself may be expressed. Panzéra, on the other hand, represents the "grain" of the voice in the way that Barthes intends it: his singing is like the Russian cantor's style, "directly of the cantor's body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages ... as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings ... The 'grain' is that: the materiality of the body" (Barthes, "Grain" 181-2). Panzéra's singing, because it reaches into the inner core of the body to bring forth the sounds of the song, is expressive of Barthes's notion of the geno-song. Thus, Barthes's examples from Panzéra and Fischer-Dieskau illustrate the way in which one may

designate the notion of the grain of the voice: the latter as a case of what is illustrated by the pure structure and frame of the music, the music, the mechanics of singing as well as the communicable elements, and the latter as a representation of what is directly of the body, the non-communicable components, a form of singing which does not mask the musician from the song she sings.

The difference between the two types of singing encompassed by the pheno-song and the geno-song, as Barthes designates in relation to Fischer-Dieskau and Panzéra, is also manifested in the difference between musical articulation and pronunciation, outlined in his essay "Music, Voice, Language." He writes that one must "*pronounce*, never *articulate* ...; for articulation is the negation of legato; it seeks to give each consonant the same phonic intensity, whereas in the musical text a consonant is never the same: each syllable ... music be set (like a precious stone) in the general meaning of a phrase" (282). For Barthes, Fischer-Diskau *articulates* the music, attributing a fixity to each note and phrase which it shouldn't have. Panzéra, however, can be said to *pronounce* the music, thereby setting each note, like a precious stone, into the phrase. For Barthes, articulation functions as a "*pretense of meaning*: claiming to serve meaning, it basically misreads it ... On the contrary, *pronunciation* maintains the perfect coalescence of the line of meaning (the phrase) and of the line of the music (the phrased)" (Responsibility 283). Articulation is therefore aligned with the notion of the pheno-song, while pronounciation is what belongs to the geno-song.

The question I would like to raise is what do the two aspects of the grain of the voice, the one dealing with the rules and structures governing the way in which a piece ought to be played or sung, and the other with the actual creative impulse that goes into re-creating these rules and structures in the production of the musical piece, *do to each other*? Is it possible that the geno-song (representing the non-communicable aspects) in fact potentially disrupts, pulls apart, *fragments*, the pheno-song (representing the communicable elements)? Are the elements of the song, such as the language used and the

structure employed, *interrupted* by the processes of the geno-text, the "materiality of the body" and the breadth of the body's movements in the activity of singing? Since lyrics are most often pointed to as the "communicable" elements of vocal music, can one say that the pheno-song is the site in which interpretation is privileged, whereas the "grain," the geno-song, is not recognized?

The notion of the voice and the processes involved in the musical impetus behind the geno-song are complex: not only do they raise questions about subjectivity and perception, but they point to the interchange between the person listening and the person *voicing*. For Barthes, the voice is "located at the articulation of body and discourse, and it is in this interspace that listening's back-and-forth movement might be made. 'To listen to someone, to hear his voice, requires on the listener's part an attention open to the interspace of body and discourse ... What such listening offers is precisely what the speaking subject does not say" (Barthes, Responsibility 255). The voice can be interpreted as a meeting point within the processes of speaking and listening, of the body and discourse. It can be seen as a product of the way in which the individual internalizes the codifications of society, and the resultant way in which she rearticulates these codifications within her surroundings. That is, the voice represents that space in which internalization meets interpretation, the joining of the ways in which she construes herself to others and how she sees herself in her own eyes. However, as Kaja Silverman writes in The Acoustic Mirror, the voice is difficult to locate: the "double organization of the vocal/auditory system ... permits a speaker to function at the same time as listener, his or her voice returning as sound in the process of utterance. The simultaneity of these two actions makes it difficult to situate the voice, to know whether it is 'outside' or 'inside.' The boundary separating exteriority from interiority is blurred by this aural undecidability" (44).[10] The double

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[10] For more information on the particular nature of the auditory domain and the double functioning of the voice, Silverman looks into Otto Isakower's "On the Exceptional Position of the Auditory Sphere," International Journal of Psychoanalysis 20 (1939): 345; Jacques Lacan's "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," Écrits, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 146-78; and her own book Subject of Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983) 167-78.

organization of the voice creates a situation in which the boundaries between the individual and the world around her are blurred.

Another feature Barthes associates with the voice, in his essay "Listening," is the idea that often "an interlocutor's voice strikes us more than the content of his discourse and we catch ourselves listening to the modulations and harmonics of that voice of that voice without hearing what it is saying to us" (Responsibility 255). This is echoed in Smith's statement that sometimes "it is not the literal word that conveys meaning, as much as the 'tone' in which it is proffered" (21). Understanding does not necessarily have to follow from listening: one can sometimes gather meaning from a voice without in fact understanding what it is expressing. By listening to the pure modulations and movements of the voice, one can draw something from it. It is therefore interesting to note that in many instances, popular singers whose words are difficult to decipher are often held as the greatest pioneers of the song form. For example, many of Michael Stipe's early songs with the band REM are completely incomprehensible to the ear. There is absolutely no way to understand the words he sings. It is impossible to "read" the songs in the literary sense, yet critics regard Stipe as a type of modern poet. On another level, though, the fact that Stipe leaves his lyrics "open" by not forcing his melodies to fit into words relates to Barthes's notion of the geno-song. Stipe does not articulate anything, but rather, through the play of modulations and vocal techniques, *pronounces* sounds.

Barthes, in commenting on the idea that sometimes an interlocutor's voice strikes us more than the discourse involved, proceeds to reflect on the way in which the individual perceives her *own* voice. He writes that "the feeling of strangeness (sometimes of antipathy) which each of us feels on hearing his own voice" is about "reaching us after traversing the masses of cavities of our own anatomy, [affording] us a distorted image of ourselves, as if we were to glimpse our profile in a three-way mirror" (Responsibility 255). With a wink to Jacques Lacan's notion of the mirror-phase, Barthes is pointing out the discrepancy between subjectivity and the perception of that subjectivity, the sounds

produced by the body and the ear's grasp of those sounds from an external source. Indeed, Barthes writes, in his essay "The Romantic Song," that the phenomenon of listening involves, "so to speak, the interior of *my head*: listening to it, I sing [a Schubertian] lied to myself, for myself. I address myself, within myself, to an Image: the image of the beloved in which I lose myself and from which my own image, abandoned, comes back to me. The lied supposes a rigorous interlocution, but one that is imaginary, imprisoned in my deepest intimacy" (Responsibility 290). For Barthes, this echoes the act of recording oneself playing and then listening to it: "I record myself playing the piano; initially, out of curiosity to *hear myself* ... When I listen to myself *having played*, an initial moment of lucidity in which I perceive one by one the mistakes I have made — there occurs a kind of rare coincidence: the past of my playing coincides with the present of my listening, and in this coincidence, commentary is abolished" (Barthes 55-6). Barthes is implying the notion of the mirror phase here as a way of explaining the way in which the subject must orient herself in order to *hear* herself (even though she cannot hear or see herself in the same way as others can), a feat which is impossible at best, and possible only through the intuitive space the retrospective anticipation of singing provides.

Silverman writes that the "voice is the site of perhaps the most radical of all subject divisions — the division between meaning and materiality ... The voice is never completely standardized, forever retaining an individual flavour or texture — what Barthes calls its 'grain.'" (44). The separation of meaning and materiality is what allows the voice, while engaged in the act of singing, to linger over words and syllables in a way that is prohibited by the conventions of speaking. In Performing Rites, Frith comments that "for many singers what they are singing, a word, is valued for its physical possibilities, what it allows the mouth or the throat to do. The singer finds herself driven by the physical logic of the sound of the words rather than by the semantic meaning of the verse" (193). Frith uses the examples of Otis Redding and Elvis Presley to illustrate this: "[t]he most obvious

device here ... is repetition, a syllable being savoured, sung again, sung with different consonants, tossed up against different harmonies" (193).

The voice is also the site of the division between meaning and materiality precisely because it goes beyond the bounds of the visual world. It is one of the aspects defining experience, but because it does not contribute to this experience in a tangible or visible way, it remains slightly beyond grasp, almost elusive. But one could also say that this elusiveness is what provides the pleasurable tension in discussing and experiencing music: although its meaning is beyond grasp, it still leaves enough evidence of some kind of tangible substance that one feels compelled to constantly reexamine it in the hopes of discovering what this substance is. It is in this way that Nietzsche writes that the "cosmic symbolism of music resists any adequate treatment by language ... So it happens that language, the organ and symbol of appearance, can never succeed in bringing the innermost core of music to the surface" (46). Music is one of the most interior arts, in that it proceeds from, and is taken in by, the "auditory imagination," Cureton's interesting term, which is also used by Walter Ong in "Writing is a Technology" (301). At the same time, however, it is an art that most demands exteriorization in the form of playing, performance, taking what is within the auditory imagination and placing it outside, precisely because of its lack of tangibility.[11] However, as the notion of the mirror phase suggest, this exteriorization is prone to many layers of complexity and misrecognition.

Silverman's paradigm proposes that sound is the locus of subjectivity, that "because we hear before we see, the voice is closely tied to the infantile scene" (44). This takes the origin of subjectivity away from a visual source and shifts it to an auditory one. Silverman suggests that the "modulations and harmonics" of the voice is the space in which the basis for identification begins within the child, prior to the advent of language. This is what Grisel calls, on the one hand, "un effondrement de la parole sensée, et d'autre part,

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[11] Witness the enormous lengths to which many musicians, when playing on stage, make use of: all of the various levels of amplification made possible through recording technologies and machinery, all in order to amplify both the sounds they will make on stage as well as their own performance.

un surgissement du corps saisi dans son importance primordiale. Cette écoute offre alors la possibilité fantasmatique d'un retour au monde de l'infans, de l'enfant qui ne parle pas encore" (59). In this sense, it might parallel a type of musical listening, in which the form, the operation, the melody, are brought to the forefront as opposed to the act of deciphering associated with language. The equation is made, however, between sound as belonging to the "inner" world and sight to the "outer" world, of the world of sound stemming from the inside and the world of sight existing on the outside. Smith makes this equation as well when he writes that "most musicians feel the sense of hearing is far more perceptive and inward than that of sight, since sound reaches the very centre of our being" (28). While this equation might be made as a convenient step in discussing these issues, I would point out that sound and sight produce and consume sounds from both inner and outer vantage points. Sounds enter the ear and are emitted by the body, and sights are consumed by the eye and created in the mind. However, Smith makes an interesting suggestion when he comments that in seeking "the full phenomenological spectrum we may have to do more than just *look* into things. We may have to *listen* to things" (28). Indeed, Steven Katz writes that it is "hard for us to imagine a philosophy of language and knowledge based primarily on the sense of hearing rather than sight: a temporal philosophy based immersion in sound rather than detachment by sight; a temporal philosophy based on musical categories of experience such as tone and rhythm rather than visual categories such as spatial form and mechanical force" (xii). Don Ihde's position is similar: in his discussion of the notion of listening and its relationship to the voice, he is looking for ways in which various sounds open up "new ways of listening not previously available" (5). He goes on to write that a "turn to the auditory dimension is thus potentially more than a simple changing of variables. It begins as a deliberate decentering of a dominant tradition in order to discover what may be missing as a result of the traditional double reduction of vision as the main variable and metaphor" (14).

The voice, as potential locus of subjectivity, is further complicated by the division between the "voice" inside the mind and the spoken voice that presents itself to the outside world. The external voice is regarded as a translation of the internal one, capable of transmitting information through language. At the same time, however, the inner voice is also the source of many things that cannot be translated into speech, not so much "thoughts" in the linguistic sense, but the feelings and emotions that dictate inner life. One might place into this inner life, as well, the non-communicable figuration involved in singing and musical production. In Barthes's paradigm, writing is a form of discourse, while music belongs to the figure. However, vocal, popular, and other types of music produce both these forms, discourse and figuration, from the same source. There is thus a kind of fissure involved in the notion of the voice in the way it is ascribed both a logical, communicative function, and the non-articulate function attributed to figuration. On the one hand, the voice is trusted as a transparent form of communication, on the other as a mistrusted type of symbol.

The ambiguity of the voice's functioning lies, at least partly, in the fact that it does not occupy a stable "space" in the same way that words on a page or musical notes on a score are often presumed to. Barthes asks "am I alone in perceiving it? am I hearing voices within the voice? but isn't it the truth of the voice to be hallucinated? isn't the entire space of the voice an infinite one?" ("Grain" 184). In relation to this quotation, Grisel writes: "[d]ans ses écrits sur l'écoute du 'grain' de la voix, mais aussi sur celle des 'coups' pianistiques, Barthes joue sur le rapport entre le psychose et les hallucinations acoustico-verbales" (58). As John Shepherd comments, sound is a perceived phenomenon which is "evanescent. It can only exist as it is going out of existence. It is never static and can only be considered sequential by application of discontinuous analytic thought to its existence. The only way sound can be examined is by repeating it in its entirety if, indeed, the circumstances of its creation allow this" (Shepherd 2). The evanescence of sound therefore makes the notion of understanding within the auditory imagination purely hypothetical.

Since sounds, especially those in songs played in a live context, cannot be duplicated exactly the same way each time they are played, their existence is in fact purely conjectural on the part of the listener. The sounds the performer makes, either on an instrument or through the voice, are similarly hypothetical because the she cannot dwell on one precise note because she must continue onto the next. Indeed, Barthes writes that the piece of music is inherently hypothetical in the musician's mind: "the piece, in the perfection attributed to it but never really attained, functions as a bit of a hallucination: I gladly give myself up to the watchword of a fantasy: '*Immediately,*' even at the cost of a considerable loss of reality" (Barthes 70). The modern forms of sound recording, both digital and analog, circumvent the inability of capturing sounds therefore trick the evanescence of music into an apparent "reality." This reality, however, is still conditioned by the fact that sound is still bound to the constraints of the hallucination. Shepherd writes that sound

> evokes a sense of space very different from that evoked by other phenomena. A person can only look in one direction at a time, and can easily rid himself of an unpleasant sight by closing his eyes or turning away ... avoidance involves the parameter of visual space. The sound of the world, on the other hand, impinges on our ears from all directions and all distances at once, and the ability to totally cut out or ignore sound is severely limited (13).

For no sooner does one reorient oneself in space than one encounters another sound, in a seemingly endless procession of auditory phenomena.

The key aspect here, however, is both Barthes and Shepherd's use of the visual: for Barthes, sound depends on being *hallucinated*, for both it is a *space*. They invoke visual terminology at the same time as they critique the way in which sound is often problematically reduced to a concrete entity. Even though the terms they use do not constrain sound to physical borders, Barthes and Shepherd nevertheless indicate that a

sound covers a finite area in their use of the notions of hallucination and evanescence. It is this specific dependence on the idea of space that implies that sound exists as a physical region, a terrain. There is no doubt that the notion of space allows the discussion of sound and music to proceed, in that it provides a meeting point for the description to be shared and in some way understood. Space is therefore the metaphoric, "hallucinatory" meeting ground for discussions of music. However, this space is still inherently conjectural. Thus, one might ask, in the same sense as one can ask about the predicable/ineffable bind for musical description, whether there is a way to transcend the problems connected with musical space. Is it possible to discuss music without recourse to a visuality which it may not have? Or, conversely, does music inherently communicate "images," not in the sense of concrete manifestations of objects in reality, but perhaps as streams of thought in the mind? Does this type of formulation depend between musical "signifiers," if they exist, and corresponding signifieds? Can there be such a relationship?

v. The "découpage" of words in music: drifting signifiers and image-repertoires

I have raised these questions because they lead directly from the problems raised in "The Grain of the Voice" to Barthes's four subsequent essays on music, all published in the latter phase of his writings: "Rasch" (1975), "The Romantic Song" (1976), "Music, Voice, Language" (1977) and "Loving Schumann" (1979). Barthes asks the penultimate question in "Music, Voice, Language," and suggests one avenue to follow in contemplating an answer: "what is music? Panzéra's art answers: a *quality of language*. But this quality of language in no way derives from the sciences of language (poetics, rhetoric, semiology), for in becoming a quality, what is promoted in language is what it does not say, does not articulate" (Responsibility 284). He goes on to write that within the unspoken "appears pleasure, tenderness, delicacy, fulfillment, all the values of the most delicate image-repertoire. Music is both what is expressed and what is implicit in the text: what is pronounced (submitted to inflections) but is not articulated: what is outside meaning and

non-meaning, fulfilled in that *signifying* [*signifiance*], which the theory of the text today seeks to postulate and situate" (Barthes, Responsibility 284). Thus, for Barthes, music may be equated with the notion of the text *only insofar* as it belongs to that order of meaning which speaks the unspoken of the text. That is, music may be compared to the theory of the text insofar as it represents what language, as conduit of the text, *does not say*. Music lays claim to that which the language of the text cannot convey, being all that it articulates without the use of linguistic utterances: pleasure, emotion (but much more than that as well), and most intriguingly, "image-repertoires." In using this term, Barthes artfully dodges the problem of ascribing concrete "images" to musical sounds, but instead uses it to point outward at the various associative thoughts that music has the capacity to create.

Barthes goes on to write that music "manages to say the implicit without articulating it, to pass over articulation without falling into the censorship of desire or the sublimation of the unspeakable — such a relation can rightly be called *musical*." (Barthes, Responsibility 284-5). In what could be considered a problematic transposition of a linguistic framework into the system of musical functioning, Barthes takes music to represent those aspects of the text that exist outside of language. As was discussed earlier, there is a plausible link between Barthes's notion of the text and the geno-song, because the text works against the communicative elements often presumed to be the case with language. It therefore exists within the more emotive space of the geno-song. Even if the linguistic model is one which Barthes critiques, he is still limiting music to a linguistic framework. That is, even if music does not signify, the term "signify," drawn from linguistics, is still being employed. Barthes's example of how music represents the theory of the text makes it out to be a device with which to *define* the text, as opposed to delineating music itself. He makes the perplexing move of emphasizing what he believes to be purely musical, not what is textual, and therefore the actual focus of what he defines

seems to be slightly obscured. So, music is an apt metaphor for the text, while simultaneously embodying what is out of the text's reach.

Barthes places music into the realm of the non-communicable and emphasizes its power to create "image-repertoires," making it one step removed from language. As Grisel writes, in theory, once the notion of communicability is removed from the process of language, the signifieds are erased and only signifiers remain: "[d]ès lors que la parole n'est plus — ou pas encore — articulée, son signifié s'efface; ce qui reste, ce ne sont que les signifiants d'un 'bruissement de la langue,' laissant entendre 'un immense tissu sonore dans l'appareil sémantique se trouverait irréalisé.' Par ce bruissement de la langue, par cette 'musique de sense,' le language se fait musique. C'est alors que la parole n'est plus linguistique, mais corporelle" (59). As Barthes writes, "what is listened to ... [is] the very dispersion, the *shimmering* of signifiers, which ceaselessly produce new ones without ever arresting their meaning: this phenomenon of shimmering is called *signifying* [*signifiance*] as distinct from signification" (Responsibility 259). Words expressed musically thus circulate as an endless drift of signifiers, they cannot complete the steps needed to become "communicable" in the way that they are assumed to be in language. They become corporeal, of the body, tangible. The "language" expressed in the vocals of the music does not have semiotic value, allowing it to function in a completely different manner from language expressed in discourse. The linguistic signs are prevented from passing towards signification, resulting in music making us re-experience "un monde de fusions imaginaires dans lequel nous n'avons pas encoure besoin de distinguer entre dedans et dehors, avant et après, mots et choses ... ton corps et le mien" (Grisel 59-60).

The main point here is the idea that the music *does something* to the language and that it somehow has the power to alter the way in which language "speaks," through its own mode of expression. Barthes's theory is almost akin to something like a science experiment, in which the various elements are placed together, react, and subsequently divide off into different parts: signifieds on the one side, signifiers on the other. Unlike a

science experiment, of course, one cannot "see" the elements divide and regroup in music, so it remains conjectural by nature. Still, one might ask how this effect is achieved, how Barthes's theory accounts for what it is that music and language do to each other. What is it about the way in which they operate that makes their "chemical reaction" disruptive of both music's mode of expressing and language's mode of signifying?

As Frith comments, the central question about the song as a form of persuasive communication is "[w]hat does it mean to *sing* words? How is their meaning changed from when these same words are spoken?" (172). To sing words, Frith writes, is to elevate them in some way from their usual context, to mark them and give them a new form of intensity (172). He goes on to write that this is "obvious in the use of singing to mark off religious expression from the everyday use of words. But note also our discomfort at hearing banal conversation sung ... Most people are happier to talk in public than to sing; singing (in a seminar, for instance) is a source of embarrassment ... Singing seems to be self-revealing in a way that speaking is not" (Frith 172). The intensity that marks words in song as opposed to words in speech is what interests me here, in terms of how their circumstances, effects, and import differ.[12]

For Barthes, songs reorient language so it comes to function differently from the way it is accepted in other forms of communication, such as discourse. One may extrapolate the idea that music *takes apart* language, by re-arranging, de-contextualizing and re-constructing its pieces. This is reflected in Lyotard's thoughts on music contained in his essay, "'A Few Words to Sing,'" where he writes that "song words allow for a découpage of spoken words or phrases that tears them from the requirements of communicative discourse" (57). However, if this is the case, can one say that music is a "quality of language," meaning all that is implicit in Barthes's notion of the text, all that is connected to

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[12] Words in speech are, of course, the primary way in which ideas of import and intensity are conveyed, in writing, in a dialogue, etc. But it is interesting to note that whenever there is an occasion of some importance, the words are not only the primary conveyance of meaning. They must be placed into a context: by a podium, on a stage, in some form of performative space, which, I might add, is often similar to the space created for musical performances.

language as a quality and not as a science, what language does not articulate? In taking language apart, does music necessarily then express, communicate, what is implicit within the text? If the conjunction of music and language somehow creates the circumstances in which the words of a song, for example, are stripped of their mode of signification and circulate as an endless field of signifiers, how does this relate to the text? One might tentatively answer that the text, being an open-ended and reader-based form, relates to this notion of vocal music because it, as well, does not operate as a one-to-one correspondence between sign and meaning. Signification, for the text, remains open. But is this a different kind of openness than that which is visible in terms of the popular song? Or is the musical "sign" a type of open sign as well? Does this, however, tend to conflate the operation of a linguistic-based form such as the text with a musically-based form such as the song? Are there not still significant differences between the two forms that make this type of conflation problematic? I would argue that the differences indeed outnumber the similarities, in that music and language may share the common element of both being a form of *expression* , but that they differ quite fundamentally in how they *express*. However, I would also argue that the idea of an open sign, an open type of signification and form of meaning-production, lies outside of both of the fields that music and language circulate in, and may therefore be potentially applicable to them. Since an open sign points towards meaning as fluid, unsettled, multi-directional, then whatever signs are produced are not necessarily tied directly to specific forms of signification, so that whatever sign is produced may extend infinitely outwards. This may be somewhat of a naive statement, in that signs are probably necessarily tied to forms of signification, but perhaps on another level it may just be seen as a suggestion for further consideration. So, in effect, it may be possible for a communicative act, whether it is a direct form of address in a language-based discussion, or a more indirect mode of address such as the performance of a song, to contain a more open form of meaning production and potential signification in order to allow the two elements it contains to be looked at in tandem.

This chapter has addressed Barthes's seven essays on music in the attempt to understand the main elements of his theory, as well as to provide an in-depth look at essays which have, for the most part, been looked at in a very minimal way. Music turned from being a referent to a reference in Barthes's writings: from being a metaphor for the workings of the text to an actual focus of study on its own. Music, for Barthes, exists outside of the boundaries of signification around which language is often placed, and instead operates as a shimmer, a drift, of signifiers which never in fact signify. Instead, music creates "image-repertoires" in the mind of the listener which, although not being directly related to the notion of images, are composed of those thoughts, feelings and emotions that are pronounced but not articulated, implied but not signified. Thus, through all of Barthes's explorations into the particular nature of the musical experience, from the notions of hearing and listening, "muscular" music, the pheno-song versus the geno-song, lies the specific idea that music does not communicate in the same way that language does. Indeed, Barthes argues that musical expression disrupts linguistic expression. One cannot "read" vocal music as one might a written text because the words do not signify, but rather drift in an endless circle of signifiers.

IV. An Application of Barthes's Ideas in the Context of Contemporary Popular Music

Barthes's essays on music open up various questions concerning the ways in which music and language operate when they meet on the common ground of the song form. They provide a context, as well, in which one may begin to develop an understanding of the meaning and status of song lyrics as a hybrid of both musical and linguistic utterances. Barthes's primary suggestion is that language operates differently in a musical setting than it does in a linguistic or discursive one. From this suggestion one may extrapolate the idea that song words provoke a different mode of signification than one which might be the case in a discursive context, if indeed the notion of signification is applicable. Thus, song words demand a different treatment and form of analysis than is applicable in a literary context. However, it is precisely this literary context that is often presumed to be at work in songs, since the predominant way "into" a song is through its words and literary qualities. As was mentioned earlier, songs displaying literary or poetic qualities are often held in higher esteem than those lacking these types of characteristics, leading to one particular type of song being privileged over another, without a full understanding of what makes certain qualities more semantically meaningful within a song than others.

My examination of contemporary popular songs will begin, then, with a look at this presumption in the context of critical works written on Bob Dylan, who occupies perhaps the premier position as the penultimate "wordsmith" in the popular domain in the latter half of this century. Thus, I will examine two sets of critical works on Dylan as the starting point for a critique of some of ways in which songs are discussed, and then move towards a consideration of how Barthes's paradigm may be applied to specific instances of other contemporary songs by U2 and Beck, in order to examine Barthes's ideas in a practical examples. I will then, in the latter parts of this chapter, formulate my own hypothesis concerning one possible avenue of approach towards the study of popular music that uses

Barthes's ideas as the theoretical background but incorporates, as well, the practical aspects learned from the examination of specific instances of popular songs.

It is interesting to note that Barthes himself sets the stage for a move towards the analysis of popular music. He writes, in "Musica Practica," that an analysis of music in the modern (western) world must take into account the changing circumstances in which music circulates: music has moved out of the sphere of the aristocratic, leisure class that produced the "legitimate" music made over the last few centuries. Rather, it has moved into the popular domain, and so he writes: "to find a musica practica in our western societies, we must look for it among another public, in another repertoire, an another instrument (young people, songs, the guitar)" (Barthes, Responsibility, 261-2). In looking at Dylan, U2 and Beck, I do not mean to privilege popular over other types of music, or any particular age group. I would like to emphasize that all people making all types of music offer valuable insights into music as a form of expression. I am simply focusing on popular music because of the expansive and amplified way in which it is disseminated at this point in time, the constancy with which it exists in the cultural landscape, and the particular way in which it defies the rules and conventions of classical music.

Frith writes that most "contemporary popular music takes the form of song ... and most people if asked what a song 'means' refer to the words" (158). He continues, "much of the argument that starts from lyrical content analysis assumes that the 'content' (or 'meaning') of songs as revealed by the analyst is the same as their content (or meaning) for other listeners ... I would put the argument this way: song words are not about their ideas ("content") but about their expression" (164). Frith backs this up with the example of Bruce Springsteen's song "Born in the USA." He writes that lyrically, this is a protest song which is "about growing up working class, being shipped off to fight in Vietnam and coming back to nothing — a standard scenario in American popular film and song, a populist formula" (165). This song, then, lays claim to a certain amount of what Frith calls political realism. However, Frith goes on to comment that the song is formally organized

around the chorus line of "Born in the USA!", such that, in its texture and musical beat, it becomes not bitter but triumphant" (165). Thus, for Frith, "what comes across from this song is not the intended irony of the chorus line, but its pride and assertiveness" (165). The song's meaning, for Frith, cannot be captured in a "reading" of the lyrics as they appear in written form. Rather, one must look elsewhere at the complexities and discrete qualities brought on by the lyrics' conjunction with the music, and from there work towards an understanding.

In the preface to Cureton's "The Auditory Imagination," Peter Verdonk states that owing to the "predominance of the written word in our present-day culture, the rhythmical units of poetry appear in print as lines so that our thinking about verse movement has developed along visual rather than auditive lines" (68). This predominance has filtered into the domain of song lyrics, in which the lyrics are "read" in isolation from the music, so that what Cureton calls the "auditory imagination" has been shut out in favour of what can be gleaned from the visual touch of the eyes on the page. Cureton writes that "the essential dynamism and transience of sonic experiences makes them less substances than pure happenings — pure fluctuations in our sonic sensibilities that are shaped by an aspect of mind entirely distinct from the objectifying process of vision and its great symbolizing accompanist, language" (70). While this is a general statement, it does highlight the fact that words come to be seen as the only analyzable entities in songs. The analysis of songs therefore finds itself in the middle of a struggle to pin down the fluidity of the sonic realm and to create an artificially solid space in which it may be placed. This middle area may be called what John Thompson, in the introduction to Paul Riceour's Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, calls the "gap between the conceptual meaning of language and the corporeal condition of perception" (33). The problematic, yet inevitable, use of language in the description of the corporeal aspect of perception therefore exists at the heart of the struggle to talk or write about music. It is perhaps the act of taking this gap in stride and in fact highlighting it that some of the problems associated with discussing songs may be

overcome, instead of deliberating over them without acknowledging the problem. It is therefore in harnessing the problem that one may begin the possibility of overcoming it, of displacing the fringe of contact, in Barthes's words, between the various elements.

i. A critique of selected writings on Bob Dylan

Betsy Bowden's study of Dylan's music in Performed Literature is one of the most open-minded approaches towards studying his songs. However, Bowden's examination of Dylan's songs both as written and performed entities still, in the end, regards the lyrics as the focal point of meaning in the songs. Bowden starts off with the premise of exploring, in her discussion of Dylan's songs, "the difficult and promising task of understanding just how the vocal inflections interact with the words and music to create aural meaning" (3). Indeed, Bowden acknowledges the difficulties of the task she has undertaken when she writes that some literary critics "have allowed that some Dylan lyrics on the printed page, as compared with other 'popular songs,' resemble poetry. These lyrics, however, are not poems. They are songs: words and music" (1). She continues, "[l]iterature has been analyzed with an eye to textual ambiguity but never yet from the hypothesis that unresolved binary oppositions on the page allow flexibility in performance ... My analyses show that lyrics malleable in performance tend to include textual ambiguity — often images in clear binary opposition — that a listener can experience as resolved or unresolved because of such performance elements as vocal inflections" (2). However, even in this opening statement, Bowden takes the idea of songs as having a literary basis in the notion of textual ambiguity. Bowden's point though, is still an important one: the meaning of words in written form might express a clear sense of, for example, opposition, between two sets of ideas. Yet, these very same words, when performed and processed through the singing voice, may take on different sets of meaning precisely because of the way in which they are combined with the music.

It is in this way that Bowden discusses Dylan's song "It Ain't Me Babe." Bowden's main point is that the song's words take on various distinct meanings in

different performative settings, mostly through the use of altered sets of repetition and vocal emphases. The apparent textual meaning of the lyrics is made ambiguous through the use of vocal emphases. This is an interesting point, and it confirms Bowden's argument that the textual meaning of song words is altered when performed. The diversity of meanings the song creates also affirms Bowden's assertion that words malleable in performance are often textually ambiguous, so that the same words, in different performative settings, can relate diverse meanings to the listener. Bowden also makes the claim that the song, when performed, may be interpreted in many different ways: it "becomes variously a happy love song, a statement of political protest, a shout of triumph, a ritualistic commonplace, an escapist reassurance, and a devil-may-care denial of responsibility for her hurt" (2). To back this up, she examines six version of the song, two by singers other than Dylan, in relation to the sheet music. She writes that, in the text-based version, the "most notable binary irresolution ... involves syntactic structures that nudge two words into apparent polarity, regardless of their exact discursive meaning; the first such pair is 'want' and 'need'" (112). She goes on to write that "[i]ncremental repetition here shoves 'want' and 'need' into opposition. The sense implied by the polarity ... [is such that] needing suggests weakness and wanting suggests strength. And appropriately, backed by ominous minor chords, the next image in this first stanza forms a double opposition, 'never weak but always strong,' rhymed with the clearly polarized 'right or wrong' (112). When the same notes are played in the 1974 version of the song by Dylan himself, the opposition between "want" and "need" in the text is paralleled by the binary irresolutions of the performance (Bowden 120). That is, the performance shapes the interaction of the instruments and vocals in a different way than is evident from looking at the written text alone: "[i]n the first stanza, organ and voice tend to imitate one another's pitch contours — especially on 'door,' for which both swoop up and then down" (Bowden 122). It is in this way that Bowden argues this version is a "shout of triumph" instead of a love or protest song. The implication, then, is that the harmony created

between the instruments and the voice allows for the "message" contained by the song to be conveyed in a clear and triumphant way. This would be in opposition to, perhaps, a love song that might be accompanied by a slower musical pace, or a protest song that might be associated with a forthright musical background. Bowden writes that the "overall effect of this version is of interlocking and writhing sets of tensions," so that the oppositions, resolved in the performative dynamics, "together create the triumphant feeling of the 1974 performance" (123).

There are several points that can be made about Bowden's discussion of "It Ain't Me Babe," originally found on Another Side of Bob Dylan (1964). The first is that Bowden's interpretation of the 1974 performance of the song (as opposed to the textual version) relies upon a set of interpretive conventions in understanding the overall "meaning" of the song. In this case, the interpretation of the song's jubilant mood is drawn from a conventional notion of jubilation as a "shout of triumph." Bowden's argument for why this version is so triumphant is that it eliminates the tension created by the textual ambiguity it displays in print. It therefore allows the musical accompaniment to flourish in unison with the words and creates a sense of jubilation, of triumph. However, this argument rests upon two assumptions: the first is that the words in the song will be understood by the listener in the same way that they might be when seen in their written form, and secondly that the music communicates the same type of triumph that the words indicate. To rely on the assumption that the words will be understood in song in the same way as language is problematic, as was shown in the previous chapter. Furthermore, Bowden's only basis for asserting that the music communicates in this way is by showing its opposition to the other readings of the song, and then concluding that in its "triumphant" air, it seems to back up the words and therefore give the song a sense of jubilation. However, the notion of triumph would seem to be a metaphoric term for the *feeling* the song conveys (as it is understood by Bowden), rather than a conclusive statement of its

meaning: what stops the song from being exultant rather than triumphant? Or perhaps intoxicated?

My point is that these types of descriptive terms are necessarily conjectural, that songs do not offer one mood, feeling, or meaning. The metaphoric terminology therefore serves to construct a potential area or space in which the song's meaningful properties may be placed and perhaps understood. This understanding, however, remains limited to the metaphor, as opposed to pinning down the exact meaning. One might apply Blacking's argument that whenever music is discussed using language there is a risk that this language will distort the nature of the music through the conventions of grammar (Nattiez 152). Blacking's notion relates to the idea that descriptive terminology not only limits the meaningful scope of a song, but also, in its very description and use of words, necessarily distorts the song's meaning. However, any description of an artistic practice will inevitably place an interpretive framework around it: that is the nature of description, of criticism, of interpretation. This "second order" of signification, as Barthes might put it, is in itself a metalanguage, an object that itself may well be discussed, criticized and interpreted in turn. Once the idea that the metaphors and descriptors used in song analysis are themselves not transparent representations of the meaning of the song, but instead are open to the same distortions Blacking speaks of, then one might have a basis from which to analyze these metaphors as their own form of creative expression.

Another point that can be made about Bowden's analysis is that her example rests on the idea that there is a certain amount of intentionality built into Dylan's construction of the song and his subsequent performance of it, and that his intentions will be somehow understood by the listener. Since the act of listening is so complex, it is difficult to limit one meaning per performance for the listening subject. Bowden's suggestions are interesting and might work within a certain *parameter* of acts of listening. However, she makes the mistake, a point emphasized by Frith in relation to song criticism in general, of assuming that the meaning of the song as she reveals it is the same as the meaning that might be

drawn by other listeners. And it is at this precise moment that the dynamic between the song and the listener, I would argue, is not considered in all of its complexity, so that the variety of possible "readings" or "listenings" is not taken into account. This problem speaks to the need for a way of understanding and interpreting the acts of performance and listening, which incorporates the open and varied ways in which such acts occur.

I would like to highlight, as well, Bowden's use of the notion of imagery in her discussion of "It Ain't Me Babe." In writing that the minor chords of the song reinforce the image created by the opposition between strength and weakness in the line "never weak but always strong," Bowden makes the assumption that the minor chords "speak" in the same way as the song and therefore amplify the "feeling" conveyed by the words. In the midst of making her point about textual ambiguity, Bowden generates an equivalence between how the sounds of music and the words of music work. Bowden does focus on the fact that songs must be considered from a performative angle, but manages to slip past the notion of performance itself, not going into an examination of how music "speaks," but rather simply assuming that it naturally does so. Since music, as was discussed in the previous chapter, does not contain the communicative elements necessary to create real "images" belonging to the visual world, Bowden's assumption that the chords of the song reinforce the image it conveys is flawed. This is an assumption that in fact permeates many critical works. The music is taken to be the least problematic aspect of the song, when in fact it poses a great many theoretical and practical challenges to the act of interpretation and the subsequent understanding that may be reached. Bowden's only concession to the unique way in which music can be said to have meaning is in her assertion that "aural understanding is nonlinear" (112), and that as such, the interaction of music with words must be understood from a nonlinear point of view. However, this does not get fully explored in her book. Bowden's examination of Dylan's songs, then, begins with a sensitivity to the interaction between their musical and linguistic elements, but ends up making some unfounded assumptions concerning the communicative nature of music.

John Herdman's study of Dylan's music in his book Voice Without Restraint takes the problem of the song's incorporation of both musical and linguistic expression as an unsolvable dilemma. As a result, Herdman states outright that instead of dealing with this problem, he will focus mostly on the lyrics (1). Herdman's main reason for omitting a consideration of the music is that he doesn't believe that he has enough expertise in the area of music and therefore lacks the vocabulary necessary to deal with it adequately (2).[13] He does acknowledge right from the start, however, that "Dylan is primarily a songwriter and not a visual poet and his lyrics cannot be dealt with in the same way that one would deal with poetry intended for the eye" (Herdman 2). He quotes Michael Grey: "'it ought to be kept in mind that the selection and organization of Dylan's language is governed by the artistic disciplines of a medium not solely linguistic or literary ... Structurally the words of a song differ necessarily from those of a poem. They are not the sole arbiters of their own intended effects, rhythmically or in less technical ways'" (Herdman 2). He then states that he will "therefore always ask [himself]: what is the *voice* saying, what is the *music* saying?" (Herdman 2). In attempting to understand what the voice and music say, however, Herdman inadvertently dismisses Grey's idea that words in songs are structurally different from words in language, and that they perhaps don't "speak" in the same way. In this sense, Herdman's attempt to understand what the *music says* is problematic from the start because music does not *talk* in the way that the words are seen to. However, Herdman writes that what "Dylan 'means' in a song ... is not always what the words say: the sense may be conveyed through *tensions* between words, expression, and musical mood" (6). This would seem to be a more fitting starting point for analyzing Dylan's songs. Even though it is often hard to pin down what it is that the words *express* in the tension between the differing levels of the song, the complexity of the project at hand is at least

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[13] This raises the question of what kind of background is necessary for studying music. I would argue that musical expertise and vocabulary is *not* essential to discussing music in a thoughtful and interesting way. Rather, I would like to believe that anyone who feels compelled to talk about music will go about it in her own unique way. Research into the field will follow in many instances, whether it entails listening to music in all sorts of ways, or looking into theories on music, and this will, in some way, create a form of expertise.

acknowledged. Herdman also recognizes that Dylan "seeks to leave his meaning open, [and] structures his songs so as to allow each listener to respond according to what is spoken to his or her individual personality" (12). Herdman makes the attempt to implement a reader-based perspective into his theorizing, leaving the potential meanings that may be extracted from the songs open to each individual. This lies somewhat within Barthes's paradigm, in that both insist that songs exist differently for each listener and that any analysis must keep this in mind.

Herdman's discussion of Dylan's songs throughout Voice Without Restraint embraces the lyrics as the primary means through which the songs "communicate," taking them through a literary form of analysis in order to elucidate their meaning. He does make the attempt to interpret the vocal style and musical phrasing of the music, but this remains secondary to his principle concern with the lyrics. For instance, Herdman examines the song entitled "Tomorrow is a Long Time" from More Bob Dylan Greatest Hits (1971) through the "images" conveyed by the verses. He writes that the emotion expressed by the song is grief at being parted by true love (15). He writes that Dylan "indicates a subjective state of mind by means of figurative imagery ... 'I can't see my reflection in the waters, / I can't speak the sounds that show no pain, / I can't hear the echo of my footsteps, / Or can't remember the sounds of my own name" (Herdman 15). He goes on to write that the "authenticity of feeling is indicated in the second line by the singer's inability to achieve the conventional putting-on of a brave face" (Herdman 15). The "imagery" is taken directly from the lyrics of the song, treating them as transparent indicators of what the song might convey. Herdman ends the short discussion of the song with a mention of Dylan's vocal approach, writing that he enunciates the last phrase of the song with an "unexpected hardness in his delivery ... which takes us by surprise just as we are about to give way to a mood of sweetness" (15). This brief mention of the vocal delivery acknowledges the manner in which Dylan sings the song, placing the lyrics in opposition to the sudden change of mood and thereby making a statement about the way in which the song subverts

the listener's expectations. The harshness of Dylan's voice thus indicates a disruption in the song's lyrical process, contradicting, in a sense, the apparent meaning of the words. When Herdman writes that what Dylan means in a song is sometimes conveyed by its tensions and moods, he still relies on the idea that people will be drawn into such feelings by picking up on similar indicators, such as the words and the way in which they are conveyed through different forms of vocal delivery. This type of conviction nevertheless takes the *reception* of the song to be dependent upon its *production*, delivery and the various ways in which it "communicates" to the listener. So it is in the assumption that most people will be lulled into a "mood of sweetness" that Herdman makes his point.

Herdman's discussion of Dylan's songs "Positively 4th Street," also from More Bob Dylan Greatest Hits, and "Visions of Johanna," from Blonde on Blonde (1966), makes similar assumptions, treating the lyrics as the main source of the song's meaning. In these instances, Herdman also makes problematic claims about the "images" transmitted by the songs and their subsequent meaning. He writes that "Positively 4th Street" has its "own prickly integrity. It is an extremely tightly constructed song with an unending, circular musical pattern, each verse formally corresponding to one musical unit ... The jaunty, carefree tune — we can picture Dylan strolling whistling down 4th Street, hands in pockets — ironically offsets the pitiless, clinical exposure of hypocrisy which is the song's unrelenting business" (Herdman 22). In this description, Herdman creates an association between the pattern of words and notes created by the song with an image, in this case of Dylan strolling down 4th Street. Herdman takes the series of sounds and creates a "picture" which "we" can see. He extrapolates the song's meaning from the tension between the carefree "feeling" it expresses and the serious nature of the lyrics. He associates an image, that of Dylan strolling down the street, with the song's jaunty feeling as a way of explaining how it sounds. However, the "image" could be said to be drawn more from the cliché of what carefree *sounds* like than anything directly "within" the music. That is, Herdman implies that the music somehow conveys the image and feeling of the jaunty walk

down 4th Street, but in reality there might not be anything inherent in the song about being carefree except what is implied by the lyrics and the title. Rather than the song *communicating* the intrinsic feeling of being carefree, Herdman associates it with the *conventions* of what sounds carefree. That is not to say that the words are inconsequential in the overall understanding of the song, but rather that there is a more complex relationship between the way in which signification operates within the context of the song's dual mode of expression, the literary and the musical, than is revealed in this type of description.

Herdman discusses the song "Visions of Johanna" in a similar manner. He writes that the "imagery is again strongly visual here: we can see the rusting, corroding bars of the empty cage, representing the sterility of regret in which the singer is imprisoned, and contrasting with the richness and flowing movement of "Madonna's 'cape of the stage;' and we can see the fiddler licking his finger like a schoolboy before scrawling his message in the dirt on the back of the fish truck" (31). I do not mean to argue against the idea that the song might convey such imagery, but I do want to point out that it is problematic to claim that a song delivers the same images to each listener, if indeed "images" is the right term to use here. This sets up a deterministic model between the song's overall sound, the subsequent images that may be "seen" in the listening mind, and by implication the meaning that may be drawn. It is almost as if Herdman implies that if the images can be elucidated, the meaning becomes apparent. However, because the "images" are in fact metaphoric devices used to help discuss songs, they do not actually capture the essence of what the song is about. It is the equivalence between metaphor and reality that Herdman slips into, mistaking the meaning of the song for the metaphor he applies to it.

In the two examples I have used from Herdman's study, lyrics supersede the music, or the combination of the two, as the main basis for understanding the songs. I would like to point out, as well, that Herdman "reads" the imagery in the songs as if it were the action in a film. Herdman "visualizes" the song as if it contains a coherent string of images. Furthermore, the musical elements of the song become what background music is

often presumed to be for film: it sits on the periphery and contributes to the mood of the images, but is not central to understanding the overall meaning. I am using film here, of course, as an example to highlight the way in which Herdman seems to visualize the operation of the song, and the lyrics, as two very different entities, similar to the way in which music in film is often regarded. It is simply meant as an example, however, to illustrate the way in which I "see" Herdman's analysis.

The attempt to analyze Dylan's music, on the part of Bowden and Herdman, reveals a tendency to disregard the musical elements, and indeed the interaction between the various levels of the songs, in attempting to understand their meaning.[14] Both critics openly acknowledge the fact that one must consider the music with both of these elements in mind, but their lyrical bias reveals the great difficulties involved in actually writing about music: how does one *not* find recourse to the lyrics when discussing a song? How does one avoid the pitfalls of examining the lyrics to the exclusion of the other factors going into the song, when the music itself proves "untranslatable," opaque, difficult to define in words let alone on paper? Music itself offers itself on so many levels of experience and interpretation, simply in a practical sense: one or more songwriters writes the piece of music, an act which itself is dependent on a multiple series of anticipative retrospections and other complexities; the music gets recorded by one or more performers, who may or may not be the songwriters, the process of recording being contingent on many levels of input and mediation from the various people involved; the record gets sent through the paces of editing and what may be called "aural construction;" and then after it is distributed to the various retail outlets, the listener listens to the record. This act then brings in its own

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[14] There are, of course, many more writings on Bob Dylan. I have chosen Bowden's and Herdman's to discuss in this context. However, anyone wishing to look at more writings might start with any of the following: Tim Dowley, Bob Dylan: From a Hard Rain to a Slow Train (Tunbridge Wells: Midas, 1982); David K. Dunaway, "No Credit Given: the Underground Literature of Bob Dylan," Virginia Quarterly Review 69:1 (Winter 1993): 149-55; Tony Fluxman, "Bob Dylan and the Dialectic of Enlightenment: Critical Lyricist in the Age of High Capitalism," Theoria 77 (1991): 91-111; Darryl Hattenhauer, "Bob Dylan as Hero: Rhetoric, History, Structuralism, and Psychoanalysis in Folklore as a Communicative Process," Southern Folklore Quarterly 45 (1981): 69-88;

set of complexities, in terms of the various levels of listening that might be involved, as well as of understanding what might be drawn from the song. Furthermore, there is the act of performing the music live, and all of the attendant diagetic relations involved between the audience member, the music, and the performer.[15] "Music" as such is a complex term that is not only defined by the circumference of sound it resides in, but in the innumerable ways that it extends outwards.

Song lyrics, then, are one part of a much larger and complex process in the creation, production, performance and reception of songs. The lyrical bias shown by Bowden and Herdman, while hard to overcome because of the difficult nature of discussing music in the form of language, distorts the potential meaning of the music. Their arguments are cogent in terms of reading certain meanings and intentions in the lyrics, and then examining the moods and feelings brought on by the music. However, as Frith alludes to, this "content" cannot be the same for every person, it remains more of a subjective manifestation of the critic's experience with the song than an actual objective fact. The lyrical bias rests on a literary theoretical background which would not seem to give the complexities at work in songs the attention they deserve.

I would like to propose, then, that Barthes's essays on music, in their sensitivity to the various levels involved — from the dynamics of hearing and listening, the complexities of performance, the "muscular" activity of playing music, the inter-subjective space created by the voice, to the possible ways in which music may be considered in terms of meaning, signification and communication — provide a viable theoretical foundation for the study of popular songs. I would argue that Barthes's essays attempt to convey, as much as possible, the full measure of the musical experience and the wealth of theoretical issues relating to the song form, and as such they provide the key elements from which discussions and analyses of music may proceed. I want to make it clear that I do not mean

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[15] This barely even touches on the multifaceted ways in which music exists in our culture. The list could go on, in terms of songs played on the radio, music videos seen on television, songs as they are covered by other performers, etc.

to negate the vast repertoire of music criticism in any way, but rather to suggest that Barthes's essays provide some key insights that push the boundaries of this criticism a bit further and, in the process, open up new ways of regarding songs in all of their complexity. Since Barthes himself acknowledges the difficulties involved in studying songs, the foundation of his essays is built upon trying to highlight the difficulties of the very task that has been undertaken. Indeed, in "Music, Voice, Language," Barthes writes that "it is very difficult to speak about music. Many writers have spoken well about painting; no one, I think, has spoken well about music, not even Proust. The reason for this is that it is very difficult to unite language ... with music' (Responsibility 279). Even so, as Richard Middleton comments, "if musical gestures lie semiotically beyond the linguistic domain (as Lévi-Strauss, Blacking and Barthes in their different ways all imply), the search for a verbal analogue of their meaning is a forlorn one (even if unavoidable)" (181).

Returning, then, to the question I asked in the last chapter: what is it that music *does* to language in the song form? How can one outline the ways in which language changes its configuration when it is wed to music so as to understand how it "speaks" outside of the linguistic domain? Is the notion of music that "speaks" already imposing a linguistic framework on the discussion of music? Or, caught within the circle of using language to talk about something that defies language (yet uses it), can one acknowledge the fact that talking about how music "speaks" will inevitably distort what one "hears"? One might say, then, that this circular problem *defines* the way in which discussions of music occur, and that perhaps the act of acknowledging the problem provides a way into the discussion itself.

If, as Barthes argues, the signifying units of language contained in song lyrics become dispersed when they come into contact with music, then the notion of "reading" the words of a song in the same way as one might read a literary work becomes difficult. The fundamental aspects of language that enable it to be "read," such as the completion of the

process of signification through the operation of the signs and signifiers, are lacking in the song form, rendering the "reading" of a song different from the "story" the words purport to tell. Music, for Barthes, being a *quality of language* which encompasses all that language "does not say," articulates elements such as emotion, pleasure, and most importantly, the "image-repertoires" that are created in the mind of the listener (Barthes, Responsibility 284). These image-repertoires are scattered within the processes of playing and listening to music (think of the mental images or maps in the performer's mind outlining the music she is about to play, or of the music retained in the mind of the listener as a type of impression), lying beyond the visual but held within the individual's mind as a manifestation, whether visual or not, of the song. I am referring here to a form of picturing which is not necessarily related to words or images, but rather something closer to dreams. I am wary of making a comparison between the "images" seen in songs and the "images" seen in dreams because of the differences involved in the processes belonging to each. I am using the term "image" as a metaphor for the thoughts, feelings and emotions that go into the creation of dreams, and the similar processes of perception that go into the acts of playing or listening to music.

As an interesting aside, I would like to mention the findings of a scientific experiment mentioned in The Economist magazine, which examines the relationship between music and speech in terms of what parts of the human brain deal with each, by looking at through a scanning device to see what parts "light up" in relation to different stimulants.[16] I am using this article metaphorically as an example of the relationship between music and "images." This experiment is, of course, of an empirical nature, and its claims are based on quantitative research into the domain of the psychological, crossing two fields that are very much apart. I do not want to lean on its scientific conclusions, but rather point it out as an interesting consideration in this context. The experiment looked to

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[16] It is interesting that the scientists try to "see" the brain as it reacts to various aural stimulants, attempting to concretize sounds as they enter the brain in a visual way.

see what parts of the brain are "illuminated," using a scanning device that uses radioactive oxygen to display the areas stimulated when the ear hears certain sounds. The scientists, Dr. Robert Zatorre of McGill University and Dr. Diana Deutsch of the University of California at San Diego, played tapes of people talking to the subjects of the study, and found that "the activity is concentrated in a fairly small area on one side of their brains (usually on the left)" (90). The scientists then played simple musical tunes to the subjects, and found that "bright spots of activity appeared more-or-less opposite the language-processing areas of his subject's brains (and also, more mysteriously, near the backs of their brains, in the part that processes visual information)" (90-1).

I am not using this example to prove anything in a quantitative sense. Instead, I would like to highlight the "mysterious" appearance of the musical processing units in the part of the brain that normally processes visuals. I would like to use it as a metaphoric connection between the musical and the visual: not to prove any definite relationship between the two, that music produces mental "pictures," but rather to point out that there is something inherent in music that creates processes *related* to the visual but not necessarily visually-based. Since one cannot show that the images one sees in dreams are in fact of a visual nature in the same way that one might see objects in the surrounding world, one *can* perhaps suggest that there is a relationship between the dreams and the image-repertoires created by music (and the aural domain as well). I would argue that this relationship would have to rely on a non-deterministic connection between the musical sounds and subsequent image-repertoires, because they do not hold a definitive relationship to the visual world. Rather, one might suggest that the mind conceivably processes musical sounds in a non-image based, but perhaps metaphorically visual, way.

The comparison, then, between the "image-repertoires" created by songs and the way in which dreams are "visualized" finds itself at an interesting junction when one considers the difference between latent and manifest dreams — the "reality" or true nature of a dream versus the way in which it is described — and the "reality" or true meaning of a

song and the subsequent way in which *it* is discussed. That is, the way in which music is *talked* about in relation to what it actually might *mean* is comparable to the way in which dreams work in the psychoanalytic paradigm. The notion of the "image-repertoire," however, as a form of picturing which may not be entirely visual but may indeed have its origin in some kind of picturing network in the mind, seems to be a central link between the acts of listening and performing songs and the act of understanding or taking meaning from them. It is in this way that I can understand how music comes to be talked about using visual metaphors. The problems arise, however, when the metaphors are thought to be real "representations" of the sounds, as well as when there is a deterministic relationship set up between certain sounds and the image-repertoires that may follow them. Music therefore involves at least two levels of metaphor: the way in which one speaks of it, and the way in which *it* is said to "speak."

I would argue, then, that since song lyrics are not "readable" in the same way that literary forms of expression are often considered to be, and since songs do not "speak" in a direct or unequivocal fashion, one of the ways into talking about them is through Barthes's notion of the "image-repertoires," those thoughts, feelings and emotions, not necessarily related to the visual realm, that are created by the process of listening to and performing music. It is crucial to add that the image-repertoires are not created by the connections between words and meaning as in language, but rather are generated by the disruption and fragmentation of meaning in the song form. The image-repertoires are a product of this fragmentation and thus the "meaning" they generate represents all of those elements produced by the music that are not apparent, spoken or understandable: ideas, thoughts and feelings that do no rely on one-to-one correspondences between certain words or sounds and particular meanings.

The discussion of songs brings about specific difficulties associated with speaking about music (being the problematic use of visual imagery to describe the song, which creates a deterministic relationship between certain sounds and meanings), as well as the

difficulties associated with elucidating what music "says" (which often makes dubious connections between lyrics and meanings, words and "images"). One way into the discussion of songs which may indeed avoid these problems is through the description of the various ways in which the sonic domain becomes occupied by the sounds of songs as they enter the mind of the listener and the performer. One of the feats of performance is the dual act of playing notes and listening to those notes that have been played, in that hazy area belonging to the image-repertoires, not exactly visual but not necessarily withdrawn from the visual world either. What I mean by this is that one way of discussing songs may very well reside, for the listener, in the image-repertoires that are created by the song in her mind; for the performer, the discussion of songs might stem from the "impressions" that somehow represent the music in her mind, and function as a kind of visual memory of the song she is playing (or allow for the forecasting or picturing of notes in improvisation). These image-repertoires, however, are necessarily subject to how each person, either listening to or playing music, *imagines* them to be. There cannot be a one-to-one relationship between certain sounds in songs and specific elements of the image-repertoire that are "envisioned." The argument rests on the idea that there are an infinite number of ways that a person may hear, interpret and "see" a song, as well as how a person plays, listens to and understands the song she performs.

I am distinguishing, here, between Bowden and Herdman's use of the visual from the more wide-ranging notion of the image-repertoire suggested by Barthes. Bowden and Herdman use the idea of the visual as a tool for describing music that suggests a definitive link between certain sounds and subsequent "images" and meanings, whereas Barthes's notion of the image-repertoire is of the slew of thoughts, feelings and emotions that may follow the act of listening to or playing a song, and the way in which they are represented in the mind. This representation is not necessarily visual because music lacks those fundamental aspects allowing it to signify and therefore potentially create an association between a word and an "image" in the world, but does not inevitably cancel out the mind's

own mental "images." This representation, then, consists of those mental phenomena, the repertoires, created by the acts of listening to and playing songs. As such, the notion of the image-repertoire is potentially of use in talking about songs because it avoids the problems associated with setting up deterministic relationships between sounds and meanings. It remains, however, a subjective model which is based on the idea that each repertoire will be different for each individual. This enters the thorny area of how individuals perceive. Can there be a common ground on which each individual takes similar meanings from the performance of a song, or does every individual have a different subject position and thus perceives things differently, however small the variation? I would hope that there is a middle ground between these two extremes and that there are some things that people share, while still remaining within their own subject positions.

ii. The notion of engagement

I quoted Frith earlier as having written that "lyrical content analysis assumes that the 'content' (or 'meaning') of songs as revealed by the analyst is the same as their content (or meaning) for other listeners ... I would put the argument this way: song words are not about *ideas* ... but about their *expression*" (158). Frith's argument is that meaning is not necessarily drawn from the apparent content of a song or the ideas it conveys (as understood through the words), but rather from how the particular elements of the song, from the vocal expression and delivery to the way in which the words are wrapped around the notes (becoming potentially de-contextualized and therefore removed from their linguistic meaning) contribute to the song's expression. That is, song words are not so much about conveying meaning as they might be in a literary context, but about the meaning that is both put *into* that expression by the performer, and the meaning that is subsequently taken *from* it by the listener. The distinction is therefore between the latent meaning held by the words, and the manifest meaning that might be brought about by the words' expression and by the song's performance.

Song lyrics, then, are not so much about the ideas the words might "say" in a literary context, but rather about the expression of the words, the actual way in which they are placed in the context of the music in the minds of the listener and the performer (and the resultant image-repertoires they create). Frith raises an important and related question when he asks: "[c]an we enjoy a piece of music without knowing what it means? Does such pleasure involve grasping that meaning ... without knowing it?" (103). He continues the question when he asks whether "'interpretation' is necessary for musical enjoyment? What does 'misinterpretation' mean?" (Frith 109). This is an important series of questions, because the idea of grasping meaning without either understanding its origin or in fact knowing what that meaning is, aptly describes the quandary concerning meaning, signification and understanding talked about by Barthes. Frith implies that meaning is not necessarily dependent upon understanding, and so meaning often comes from the way in which the song is *grasped.* What does this mean when it is applied to the act of listening to a song? The communicative exchange is defined by the fact that the performer imparts information of some kind through the song, and the listener grasps this information and may subsequently form an interpretation of it. The form and content of this exchange, however, is not regulated, since music lends itself more to the concept of an "open" or shimmering sign than to a fixed mode of signification. Interpretation cannot be *precisely identified* in the relationship between the information imparted in performance and the interpretation formulated by the listener. The individual can perhaps listen to a song and grasp some form of meaning from it without indeed knowing what this meaning might be: in the endless drift of signifiers circulating within the song form, the individual may pick up on any signifiers and *add to them* her own signifieds, completing the process of signification on her own. I would call this process the creative dialogue which ensues between the listener and the song.

Frith's argument, then, is that song words are not about ideas, but rather about the words' *expression.* I would argue, following up on and adding to Frith's reasoning, that

meaning in the popular song is not contained in the words, but rather in the combination of the words and the music's expression, and the exchange between individuals this expression involves. *Meaning, then, is precisely the act of engaging with a song, either through performing or listening to it.*[17] In this way, meaning is not dependent on the apparent content of a song, the elucidation of which is a problematic process, but rather is dependent on the variables involved in the specific aspects of the song and the multiple ways it can be received. Since one cannot determine the image-repertoires that a song will create in the minds of the performer or listener, I would argue that the *meaning* comes precisely from the act of *engaging* in the process of listening to, thinking about, and playing the song. The distinction, then, is between meaning being the act *of* engaging with a song, and meaning being a *result* of that process of engaging. I am using the term meaning not in the sense of a final result of interactions, but rather to designate the thought processes, feelings and emotions that arise in the act of engaging with music. I am therefore locating the term meaning prior to that which might attend communication in a linguistic context, and placing it into that more intuitive and open realm following either the performance of music, or the act of listening to music. I want to ask *how does it mean* for people performing and listening to music, as opposed to *what does it mean.*

It is in this way that I would argue that the analysis of popular songs ought to begin with an examination of how the act of engaging with the popular song may be characterized and understood, both in its musical performance as well as in the forms of listening that follow its reception. I advocate, then, an analytical starting point that does not take the song lyrics as the primary focus, but rather the act of engaging brought about by performing and listening to those lyrics and the music that surrounds them. Since there is no pre-determined way in which songs signify, and because there is no fixed way in which

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[17] I am using performance in the widest possible sense here, to indicate both recorded and live performances, as well as informal instances of musical expression by the individual. I am using the notion of listening as following from these various forms of musical performance, indicating how it is used in many varied circumstances. I do not want to characterize all forms of listening in a homogenous manner, but rather suggest that listening occurs in varied ways in relation to multiple sources of auditory phenomena instigated by music.

individuals "fill in" the drifting signifiers, the logical starting point for an analysis of songs is the way in which they are engaged with.[18] In a practical sense, then, the analysis of songs starts with the various acts involved in engaging with, listening to, performing and talking about them. One cannot determine with certainty the *results* of the various levels on which the individual engages with the song, as Bowden and Herdman attempt in their own ways. I would put forth the suggestion that one can, alternately, examine the *processes* involved in the acts of performing and listening to music. I would like to point out that this is not, of course, the only way to examine songs and in itself may not be problem-free, and as such there are many other ways of regarding songs. I am suggesting that, drawing on and expanding from Barthes's ideas as well as Frith's, the process of engaging with songs allows one to discuss music without necessarily limiting its meaning or pre-determining the ways in which one might interpret them.

What are the processes, then, involved in the act of engaging with music on the level of what is produced by the individual singing a song (a performance), and on the level of what is received by the individual who takes in this performance (the performance of *listening*)? John Cage has written eloquently about the ways in which one may begin to listen to songs in a new way: he calls for a "new listening ... not an attempt understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds" (12). What I propose to do is *eye the ear*, pay attention to the activity of sounds as they are produced in song and received by the listening subject. I want to see how the act of engaging with music enacts Nattiez's notion of music's ability to incite a narrative, not make a narrative in itself. By the same token, however, I want to acknowledge that studying the processes involved in the act of engaging with music on these various levels does not exhaust the infinite ways in

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[18] I am using the notion of signification in the popular song in a metaphoric sense here, because of course it is impossible to subject the circulation of signifiers to a test, a "chemical experiment," in order to see how each element falls into place. The notion of signification does seem to be, here, a metaphor for describing the process undergone by language, especially because it occurs in Barthes' later writings which had given up on the dream of scientificity and was looking more towards the vacillation and drift of signification.

which music can be thought about. The act of interpretation can exist in a thousand varied ways, and my suggestion is, of course, but one of these potential ways.

iii. An exploration of engagement in the popular song

In the last section of this chapter, then, I will look at examples of songs in order to explore exactly how one might go about discussing the act of engaging with songs and the image-repertoires that may potentially be created by these acts of engaging. It must be stated at the outset that these observations, although based on certain sounds from songs that can be said to exist in a somewhat objective manner, will nevertheless bear the mark of my own individual observations and therefore remain, to some extent, subjective. However, the process of discussing music necessarily begins with the individual's own observations, and so my own discussion will not be any different except for the highlighting of this point.

One song that provides a very interesting basis for discussion is U2's "Numb," from the Zooropa album released in 1993. In this song, The Edge (the guitarist) steps forward and takes over the lead vocals from the singer Bono. Singing in a low, mantra-like manner with a gravely voice, The Edge seems to be listing objects, both real and imaginary, that make him "numb." The words he sings, however, because they are wrapped in the gravely sound of his voice, are not easily accessed or understood without reading the lyrics. The predominant sense of the words comes from the repetition of "don't," which stands out because it is repeated at the beginning of each thought that The Edge expresses in his stream-of-consciousness monotone. Jagged guitar sounds interject at odd and unregulated moments, mixing sometimes with the sounds of a synthesizer. Meanwhile, Bono and Mullen Jr.'s background vocals flutter in a high falsetto above The Edge's singing, weaving in and out of the song. The musical elements of the song are associated, on the one hand, with the conventions of early 1990s dance music, and on the other with what one might call folk-beat singing crossed with industrial sounds. In listening to this song, I would argue that one might begin differentiating between the

"space" occupied in the song by the two voices. One might not only begin to differentiate, but, in a sense, to "picture" the high voice at the "top" of the song, juxtaposed by the low, gravely voice at the "bottom" of the song. In between, one might "place" the various rumblings of the guitar and bass over the drum beats, as they snake through the vocals. The auditory process of listening to this song, in my mind, creates a mental dialogue between the voices and the sounds of the song, differentiating them when possible and integrating them into a "picture" of the various sounds one hears.

I would argue that part of engaging with this song entails *coming to know* it, having it be familiar, not so much through the words but rather in the way in which it structures my anticipation of what comes next in the song. That is, the process of engaging with the song entails the pinpointing of certain specific instances of surprise, in which the musical pattern suddenly varies and subsequently leaves its impression on my memory of the song. An example of this is when the background vocals intervene for the fourth time, in the second set of The Edge's vocals. The voices, all of a sudden, vary from their original pattern and go upwards, straying slightly from the way that were performed earlier. That point of surprise, my recognition of the variation in the song, draws me in and upon subsequent listenings, it is towards that point that I orient myself, whether consciously or not. In engaging with the song, I do not necessarily understand all of the words. Rather, the sonic landscape of the song — the way in which I perceive the sounds to be "placed" in the space the song occupies — provides me with a feeling of having "pictured" it, which perhaps then allows me to feel that I have some relationship to it. The way in which the song combines vocal repetitions with unpredictable instances of guitar and background vocals creates a sense of anticipation which leads me towards attempting to recognize those unpredictable parts each time I listen. I do not mean to imply that each song affords the listener and "entrance" into engaging with it. Rather, the process of engagement occurs under those specific, infinite, and variable circumstances that catch the listener's attention and provide room for her to interact with it.

It is in this way that I would argue that engaging with songs entails the notions of memory and variation. Memory plays a key role in music, since there is no defined "text" that one can hold up to "see" the song. Memory provides the ground on which to build that image of the song, it functions to create that impression of the song in one's mind and create the imaginary space it occupies. Without somehow memorizing something about a song, ranging perhaps from a distinct guitar sound, a specific inflection of the voice, or a drum beat, there is no way that it can become *real* for the listener, that it can become substantial in some way for her. I would argue that this is the same for the person writing a song that she will later perform: it would be difficult to form a distinct enough memory of the song without recording it and listening back to it in order to reproduce it in its entirety. Recording the song and hearing it the way that *others* will hear it is the only real way to "see" it. That is not to say that a song cannot be instantly memorized or contained in the performer's mind without the help of recording, but rather that it is an important component of composing to hear the song as it is heard from the "outside" of her mind, as opposed to what she hears when she plays it. Memory, then, works to create a space in the listener's mind occupied by the song.

Variation, on the other hand, is what creates points of entry in songs. Music is based on creating a pattern and then varying it, as is famously shown in variations written by classical composers in which several compositions are created out of a variation of a theme. In popular songs, variations are often worked around the initial pattern the song sets out, as well as occur in vocal and instrumental modifications. This manifests itself in small ways, such as in the use of rhymes to punctuate various musical phrases through the lyrics, so that a similar sounds follow throughout the song but with a slightly different and varied resonance. The words used in these rhymes, of course, are often constructed around themes the song deals with when "read" on the level of the lyrics. However, my point is that the rhymes also serve to provide slight variations of similar musical phrases in the song, allowing the listener to differentiate between various parts of the song through the

various sounds that are made, and to hear them in different ways. Variation also manifests itself in larger ways in the song when the pattern that has been followed changes, most conventionally in the notion of the "bridge" which conventionally occurs three-quarters into a song and then leads back into the chorus, creating a different sound relating to, and leading back into, the original pattern. But it is in the unexpected, and sometimes unplanned, points of variation — those unanticipated sounds of, perhaps, the performer taking in a breath before singing a high note, or a guitar sound that suddenly comes to the foreground — that I believe engagement lies.

The particular elements of songs that reach out and take the listener by surprise, encouraging the process of engagement to occur, may be compared to Barthes's notion of the "punctum" in Camera Lucida. For Barthes, there are certain elements of photographs that simply jump out at him, register in his mind, and subsequently form a part of the "image" he retains of them. The punctum is derived from the notion of punctuation and is contrasted by the notion of the "studium," which, for Barthes, is an "application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment" (Lucida 26). The punctum, then, is a detail that "will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (Barthes, Lucida 26). The punctum may therefore be compared to that unexpected sound, a sudden variation in the song, that allows the listener to enter the song and engage with it.

In my brief description of "Numb," I was unable to avoid the use of adjectives such as "high," "low," "snaking," "fluttering," and "gravely." These are, one might say, part of the image-repertoire that figures in how I imagine the song to be in my mind. The adjectives inevitably paint some kind of picture relating to my perception of the song. As was noted above, however, there is as wide a difference between the perception of the song in my mind and the interpretation of the song that is bound to the rules of language, put down on paper. There is also a difference between the way in which I have put it down on

paper and the way in which it might be described by someone else. And the song itself is different in its recorded state from the multiple and varied ways it is perceived by the listening subject. However, there is no doubt that *something* about the popular song is shared between various listeners, a type of common ground from which the different perceptions grow.

Where Barthes critiques the use of adjectives which limit the meaning or consequence of music to the predicable or ineffable, I have attempted to use them to convey the way in which the songs have been "impressed" in my mind. This "translation" of what appears in my mind is necessarily problematic in that it cannot even attempt to "represent" the song itself. However, in relating this element of the image-repertoire suggested by the song, I have hopefully indicated something of what entered my mind in terms of the thoughts that were created by the song, and therefore avoided limiting the interpretation of the song to the descriptors that came to mind. Barthes's solution to the problem of the adjective in musical discussions is to bring in the notion of the grain of the voice, which does not constrain the discussion to the linguistic elements of the song, but instead broadens it to the performing limb and the body as it sings. The notion of the grain of the voice includes, then, all of the ways in which the voice and the body express, and as such it includes the ways in which the individual perceives these elements — the voice as it articulates the words, the body as it expresses. That is, the emphasis is on the elements producing the music, as opposed to the music itself. As a consequence, it is related more to the process creating and defining the music rather than the resulting meaning that is produced. Furthermore, the elements of the song and the musical experience that are emphasized by Barthes's notion of the grain of the voice lie within a similar domain as that which is covered by the idea of the *engagement* with music. Therefore, the notion of the grain of the voice and the use of terms that "picture" the movement of the body as it plays music and the voice as it sings may be plausibly linked with the idea that a song's meaning resides, and may be explicated, by the examination of the acts of *engaging* with it.

The meaning of "Numb," then, may potentially have something to do with the way in which the lyrics and the music enter my mind, but may confidently be said to reside in the way in which I have engaged with it, as a listener. The notion of engagement is also, as was stated above, applicable to the situation of the performer. That is, the performer potentially creates a certain "picture" of the music she plays in order to retrospectively anticipate the notes in the music that she performs. Since I cannot take on the subject positions of the individuals who perform the songs I listen to, unless I learn to play them myself (which will result in a slightly different positioning anyway), there is no way to portray or convey the image-repertoires she might experience.[19] For, in playing songs someone else has written I potentially create a completely different "image" of them than the composer originally had. Musical performance is a situation which demands the paradoxical act of having to situate what emanates from the interior of the body from the perspective of the exterior — in an almost unconscious way — in order to hear one's own voice or instrument and make the proper adjustments to make sure it is following the pattern of sounds one wants to make. I would argue that meaning is generated by engaging with the music on the level of performance and of the networks of memory and variation this performance creates, but since I cannot gain access to how this engagement works, I am limited to my own perceptions of how the performer herself envisions the song and performance.

The notion of engagement, and the presence of memory and knowledge of variation in which it originates (the "punctum"), is interesting in relation to Beck's music. Beck has been acclaimed as the Dylan of the 1990s. This claim is based, moreover, on the idea that his lyrics are somehow more literary than others, that he is a "wordsmith" of sorts who brings together new ways of expressing ideas through his unique pastiche of lyrics. The

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[19] A whole potential area of discussion is opened up, however, by the notion of playing another else's music, of inhabiting and taking on the words and sounds another person has made up. This is, of course, more of a common experience than not, from classical orchestras playing music by a composer, to singers performing songs written by other people, to the members of a rock band that plays songs written by one member. It is the act of playing notes someone else has made up, however, that I believe holds the potential for fruitful discussion.

basis for this claim lies within the literary approach to songs that I have tried to critique in this thesis. However, claims aside, there is no doubt that Beck may be called a type of sonic sculptor who weaves interesting and original sounds together in his songs, ranging from "found" sounds such as a donkey bray, to samples from artists such as James Brown. These sounds can be seen as quotations of sorts, which take the original sounds and use them in a different context altogether. I would also argue that Beck turns his own lyrics into a certain type of quotation, in that most words are pronounced in a very distinct, self-reflexive fashion in the folk-rap style with which they are delivered: it is as if each word is said *doubly*, on the one hand as the word itself and on the other for its value as a certain collection of sounds.

Neil Strauss writes that Beck's songs "seem randomly constructed, strummed or sung; in truth, to remove a single lyric or sound from a piece would destroy it. His music appears unwieldy, on the verge of collapse, yet like a spinning top it has a momentum" (40). One of the implications of Strauss' comment, whether he intends it or not, is that there is a right and wrong way to construct a song, that if one removes one sound from Beck's songs they will somehow falter. Strauss implies that Beck somehow *got it right* in his songs, he placed each sound where it belongs. It is interesting that this is envisioned, so to speak, by Strauss, as somehow *fitting*, like pieces in a puzzle, where to leave one out would make it incomplete. Music, however, does not necessarily operate like a puzzle, not the least because it is not a medium based in the visual world. The ways in which it is constructed, in Beck's case by drawing upon many non-instrumental sounds or samples to create the overall sonic landscape, is such that the landscape itself not "visible" until the end of the process. So, to say that removing one piece of the song would make it fall apart makes sense in retrospect once the entire song is heard in completion, but does not seem to be applicable in relation to the process of constructing the song.

Beck's music, I would argue, is ambiguous: on the one hand it provides ample surprises, variations and punctuations that may allow the listener to potentially draw

meaning from it. However, Beck's music also, to a certain extent, remains one step removed from the listener: it provides points of entry, but through his use of what may perhaps be called "instant" self-quotation, or the act of saying each word doubly, makes these entry points seem slightly unreal. It is almost as if Beck's songs invite the listener in quite effortlessly, but then, because of the way in which he re-iterates his own words and music, circumvents the process of taking meaning from the songs. As a result, meaning is turned back on itself. For example, Beck's song "High 5 (Rock the Catskills)" from Odelay (1996), starts with a mixture of sounds generated from scratching records and synthesized sounds, both vocal and instrumental. The vocals in the verses are distorted and barely audible. In the chorus, the vocals abruptly become clear, almost too clear, only to be interrupted by a sudden burst of Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony. This is followed by another distorted verse and chorus, then in the place of the symphony, sounds ranging from a Casio piano to whistles. In all of these musical interruptions, as it were, Beck is simultaneously fulfilling and subverting the listener's expectations. Furthermore, those points of interruption where unexpected sounds appear, as if out of nowhere, can be regarded as entry points into the song, in which it would be difficult for a listener not to take note of the sudden subversion of the framework of the popular song.

Alex Ross comments on this song in the following manner: "[s]omething odd occurs toward the end of 'Odelay' ... As happens with so much music these days, the record weaves together scraps from here and there: rap, rock, funk, jazz, folk, significant traces of Bob Dylan. The second-to-last song on the disk, 'High 5 (Rock the Catskills),' goes a step further: just past the one-minute mark, Beck's edgy white-boy rap abruptly dissolves into a foreign sound that turns out to be, of all things, Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony" (9). He continues, "[d]issonant chords make a strangely natural segue out of the rough rap texture before the Symphony's B-minor theme offers its mournful strain. Bursts of white noise signal a return to the twentieth century, but the ear has been spooked. What does it mean, this classical cameo on the hip youth album of the hour? Consider it a

sign of these unusually turbulent musical times" (9). The song manages to alter Ross' expectations, such as the "burst" of white noise and the segue into Schubert's symphony, and in so doing it catches his attention, stays in his mind, and makes its impression. It also, of course, provides fodder for Ross to discuss what he thinks is the most pertinent issue, being what Beck's music represents in terms of the state of popular music in this day and age. However, Ross' statements reveal those aspects of the song that represent, for him, points of entry. I would argue that, irrespective of the conclusions that Ross may draw from the song itself, the process of having engaged with the song through those points of entry is where the meaning lies for him. That is, those elements of the song that stood out and made him listen more attentively — the punctums — are those points that are meaningful. This meaning lies in opposition to any lyrical interpretation he might make. Beck's unusual pastiche of sounds in "High 5 (Rock the Catskills), then, affords the listener multiple entry points in the song which may build towards the process of engagement. Beck achieves this by setting in place a sonic pattern that not only contains many variations and details which may potentially catch the listener's attention and punctuate the process of listener. Furthermore, this sonic pattern is, in itself, quite different from other songs in the popular arena in this day and age. At the same time, however, he manages to make these points of entry ambiguous in the way in which he sings and constructs the songs, through the way in which his lyrics and music appear like instant self-quotations.

Rylance, in writing about the music of Dylan and the Beatles, makes a comment that may be applicable to Beck. He writes that the Beatles' lyrics "like those of Bob Dylan, made extravagant use of narratives without referential logic and, above all, a density of metaphor which maximized the free play of their signifying potential, as if to follow Barthes's urgings — in an essay on Sollers written in 1965 — to set in motion a programme which will open the subject to unheard-of metaphors" (93). I would argue that this density of metaphor, in both lyrical and musical references, and of disjointed logic, is

what makes many songs by Dylan, Beck and, of course the Beatles, so musically surprising. It is this element of surprise that affords the listener ample room for engaging with the song, irrespective of the apparent "meaning" implied by the lyrics. Strauss writes that "on 'Odelay,' the lyrics are more cryptic than ever, and there are only bursts of lucidity" (40). For Strauss, these are moments that display mostly lyrical "coherence," and it is from this point that he attempts to interpret them. I would argue, however, that these bursts are the points of entry into the song that allow the listener to engage with them, the punctums that draws her in. Furthermore, the bursts are formed through the subversion of the listener's expectations and thus catch her attention, allowing her room to engage with the song in more ways that simply "reading" the lyrics. It must be stated that specific musical instances that take the listener by surprise, the particular variations in the musical pattern that a song follows, vary for each individual. That is, the process of engaging with a song is different for each person, according to how she hears it, the "image-repertoires" she forms of it in that space dominated by memory, and the subsequent points of variation that punctuate her listening. Thus, any description of this engagement process reflects back on the person who is discussing it.

The notion of the musical variation, which takes a pattern and alters it and which allows the listener that point of entry into the song, is therefore a type of *displacement*, going back to the term that Brown and Heath apply to Barthes's thinking. That is, musical variation is a form of displacement which alters the framework of the song while simultaneously staying within the song's boundaries. The process of engaging therefore hinges on the way in which the listener will form an image-repertoire of the song she listens to, and then, through the points of entry sustained by the variations in the pattern that the song follows, can engage with the song. The trick of songwriting, then, is being able to set in place those points of entry for the listener, to simultaneously occupy the listener's position while playing the song and to intuitively predict those points where the listener might identify with the song and subsequently engage with it. However, sometimes

this process occurs purely through making errors and then working with them— in fact, I would argue that those parts of songs that are the most compelling occur out of making an error, going back to it, and utilizing it. The meaning that is derived on the part of the listener while engaging with songs therefore occurs through those points of entry, those variations and displacements, that allow her to suddenly step back and recognize the music, to create its image-repertoire in her mind and to commit it to memory and engage with it upon hearing it again.

Thus, lyrics are just the beginning of the multiple elements present in the popular song that provide access to the vast array of meaningful networks and connections it opens up. The literary approach to the popular song does not even begin to touch on the song's complex mode of expression. Rather, it limits the many ways in which the listener may interpret and draw meaning from her encounter with music by constructing a deterministic framework in which to understand the ways in which songs work. It is in this way that I have argued, in this chapter, that the analysis of popular songs ought to begin with the ways in which the listener and performer engage with the song. That is, I have been concerned with asking *how* songs come to have meaning for people, as opposed to *what* songs mean. Since song words do not signify in the same way that words in a discursive context are considered to, they cannot simply be "read." Rather, I tried to follow Cage's idea that one should lend an ear to the activity of sounds in order to become aware of how they operate, what they might suggest, and how they affect the listener.

I suggested, then, that the process of engagement is bound up with Barthes's notion of the image-repertoire. Songs are not tangible, in the sense that one cannot take a song and look at it, and this presents problems when attempting to develop an idea, a representation, of what it means. The notion of the image-repertoire, being the various associative thoughts that music has the capacity to create in the mind of the listener and performer, is what I argue takes the place of this representation. The image-repertoire is not bound to the notion of the visual, in that it is not limited to conjuring tangible and visible

objects from the world in the mind of the listener. It is not, however, removed from visuality, in that it leaves room for associative thoughts come to mind, be they of a visual nature or not. The main point, however, is that the image-repertoire, being the representation of the music in the mind of the listener, is not bound to, nor removed from the notion of visuality. It operates as a means of making the song more tangible in the listener's mind, while acknowledging that what is at hand is not in fact tangible at all. The image-repertoires represent the bridge between the song and the individual's memory of it, serving to concretize what Shepherd calls the "evanescence" of sound.

In looking at U2's "Numb" and Beck's "High 5 (Rock the Catskills)," I argued that the process of engaging with popular songs originates in what Barthes calls the "punctum" in Camera Lucida: that moment that punctuates the process of listening and leaves its "impression" of the song in the listener's image-repertoire. The punctum assists the listener in creating the image-repertoire of the song, and metaphorically "marking" that point in the listener's mind, leading her there when she listens to the song again. I argued that it was in those unexpected variations in guitar sounds and background vocals that my own engagement with "Numb" occurred. That is, those specific instances that surprised me in the song, being the instances of variation from the main, mantra-like vocals, drew me in. These instances, in turn, come to represent the song in my mind. I then argued that Beck's song, in its radical collage of sounds and distinct form of what seems like instant self-quotation, offers many potential points of engagement. The burst of classical music early in the song provides an interesting example of this potential opening, for in suddenly changing musical directions, in quoting, as it were, from a completely different source, Beck makes as "visible" a mark possible. However, in all that it offers to the listener in terms of possible points of engagement, Beck's songs also have a way of turning back on themselves and making them one step removed from the listener, negating, in a sense, the very engagement they encourage. Thus, Barthes's various ideas have proved fruitful in

analyzing specific instances of popular songs and have provided a way into understanding how the engagement and meaning operate.

V. Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored the nature of the song lyric in relation to Barthes's seven essays on music, in order to elucidate an approach which will take into account the multifaceted ways in which popular songs operate. I have argued that Barthes's essays provide the foundation for the development of an understanding of the unique ways in which the song form comes to have meaning for the listener and performer. I have attempted to critique the literary approach to song analysis and demonstrate that the song form demands a much wider and elaborate approach, one which can deal with its complex way of conveying meaning. The literary approach attempts to "read" song lyrics in the same way as might be done with a literary form such as fiction, neglecting to examine what I have called the "creative dialogue" between the musical and linguistic elements. In a wider sense, this dialogue represents what happens when music and language interact within the same expressive form, and it is within this dialogue that I would locate the unique way in which music expresses.

In asking *what does music do to language*, what results from their conjunction, I tried to develop ways into understanding how the two elements interact. I highlighted Barthes's idea, pointed out by Grisel, that the process of signification which is often presumed to be at work in language is prevented from occurring with music, specifically the linguistic elements contained by the lyrics. The signifieds that are suggested by the linguistic elements are prevented from passing through to signification precisely because of the presence of the music. That is, the music, being a form of expression which represents all that language *does not say*, all that is implicit and not articulated, prevents the process of signification from occurring in the song, leaving the signifiers in a perpetual drift. As a result, the song represents what Barthes calls an endless "shimmering" of signifiers, in which meaning, as such, does not exist. I therefore argued, extending from Barthes's theory, that songs cannot be "read" because they do not convey meaning in the sense that language is presumed to.

Thus, the first chapter dealt with outlining the four major displacements in Barthes's thinking as a background for my discussion of his essays on music in the second chapter. I believe that a brief outline of the major phases in Barthes's thinking is important, in it is necessary to formulate a ground upon which a consideration of his essays on music may proceed. It is in this sense that I looked at what Heath and Lavers each characterize, albeit in slightly different ways, as the four displacements in his thinking: from his general statement of attitudes and his interest in the structuralist "dream of scientificity," toward his development of the notion of the text, and concluding with his decision to take himself as the subject of his writings and move towards the style of an autobiographical "critical fiction."

In the second chapter I examined Barthes's seven essays on music in detail, in order to elucidate the particular way in which he approaches music, as well as the main points that he makes. Barthes's initial attempts to discuss music are in relation to the text, and although this train of thought does remain throughout his essays, I argued that music comes to take on more and more importance. This results in its transformation from being a simple *referent* in the discussion of other issues like the text, to its being a primary *reference* on its own. Barthes argues that the process of signification in music is incomplete. Rather, music incites the creation of image-repertoires in the mind of the listener and performer, which combine all of the associative thoughts, feelings and emotions that it provokes. Words in songs therefore do not signify in the same way that they do in language and instead are part of a more fluid association of thoughts.

In the third and last chapter, I examined two approaches to Dylan's music that, while being quite open-minded, still fell into the trap of "reading" the music through the lyrics, and therefore of neglecting to explore the many powerful and interesting aspects of his music that exist beyond the lyrics. I argued that Bowden and Herdman make two problematic assumptions, firstly that Dylan's lyrics will be understood in the same way by all listeners, and secondly that the music in his songs "speak," that one can "read" it in the

same way as the lyrics, that one can understand what music "says." This lies in direct contrast, of course, to Barthes's idea that music does not necessarily speak, but rather prevents communication from occurring. It is in this sense that I argued that Barthes's essays on music provide a viable theoretical basis for the study of popular music. I examined Frith's notion (which is also similar to Barthes's idea that music is not so much about content than about expression) that song words are not about ideas but rather about the *expression* of the words. I then expanded this idea by making the argument that the meaning of songs is derived from the listener and performer's *engagement* with them. That is, meaning does not originate in the song itself, but rather in the way that the listener and performer engage with the song, a distinction between *how* the song comes to mean, as opposed to *what* it might mean. The notion of engagement begins with the "punctum," that specific point in the song that takes the listener by surprise and thus marks that spot in her image-repertoire of the song, and which she then anticipates hearing when she listens to the song again. This moment of punctuation is, I argued, a result of a variation of some kind within the music, a point which suddenly alters the pattern set in place by the repetitions in the song, whether they be the structures of rhyme in the vocals or a change in the song's musical construction. I looked to U2's "Numb" and Beck's "High 5 (Rock the Catskills)" to explore the way in which engagement works on a practical level. It is in this way that I conclude that the meaning of the song originates in the ways in which the listener and performer come to engage with the various elements of the song. The "creative dialogue" between the musical and linguistic elements of the song creates a space in which signification is prevented from occurring. Meaning becomes less of a *result* of what the song appears to "say," because it cannot "speak," and is located in the *process* of engaging with the song.

Barthes's work is therefore significant because of his attention to those aspects of music that are often neglected. Barthes examines the connection between sounds and meaning and the very particular relationship that they hold in relation in music, as a way of

critiquing the way in which songs are traditionally "read" and understood. The fact that song lyrics are both words and sounds suggests that a new model is needed for the interpretation of songs. I have attempted to create a foundation for this model using Barthes's theory, as well as my own ideas concerning music. The notion of the image-repertoire and the function of memory are crucial aspects of the process of listening to and performing music. They offer a way into discussing songs that does not necessarily create a correlation between sounds and meaning, with the more loose idea of the repertoire accounting for the thoughts, feelings and emotions that are experienced. The creative dialogue between the listener and the song lets the listener to "complete" the endlessly drifting signifiers of the song. This results in the creation of the image-repertoires, which represent all of the factors allow the listener and performing to engage with the song. The meaning and interpretation of songs therefore remains fluid and enables the listener and performer to create their own understanding from them.

Denis Hollier, in his study of Antonin Artaud's work, writes the following:

> Our century, one hears, is wrapping itself up under the sign of visual culture ... However, at the other end of the century, when it was young and future oriented, artists and thinkers, at least an impressive number of them, were adamant that they were moving in the opposite direction, away from the visual. The nineteenth century, they claimed, had been the century of vision; the twentieth century of sound. Man had just discovered that he was given hearing to listen to the future (27).

The idea of eyeing the ear, of turning one's head and listening to the world, is an important, yet often neglected, part of our experience. Like the main character in Wim Wenders' film Lisbon Story, who "sees" Lisbon through the sounds he captures in his tape recorder as he walks through the city with his eyes closed, music offers unique entry points into the notion of perception that may potentially open up new ways of understanding how individuals relate to the cultural landscape they are immersed in. I have attempted, in this

thesis, to examine music with as open an *ear* as possible. I have also tried to develop a way of approaching music in relation to Barthes's essays that gives the individual as much freedom as possible in the creation of the image-repertoires drawn from music. It is in this sense that I have tried not to set any limits on the multiple and varied ways in which the individual may engage with music. Songs are exciting forms of expression which open up new ways of examining language, music and meaning.

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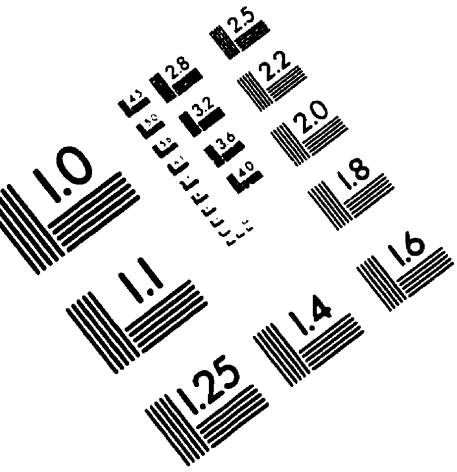

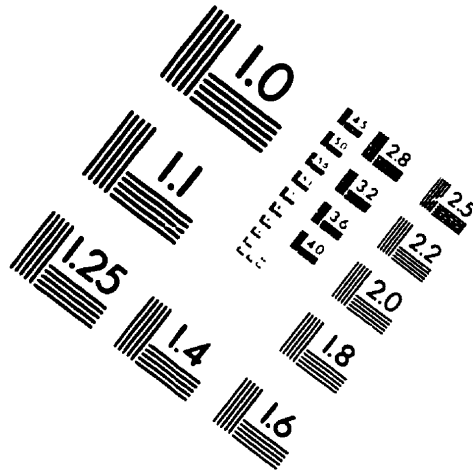

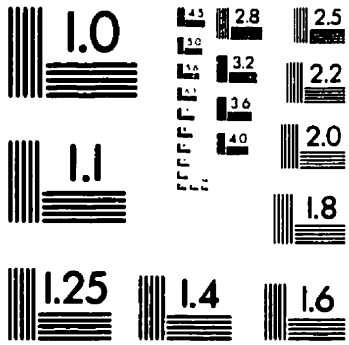

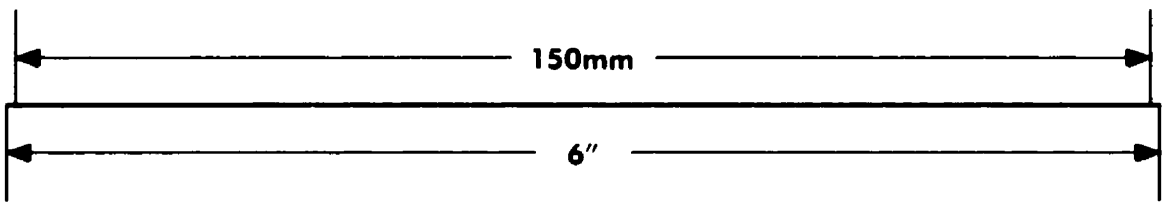

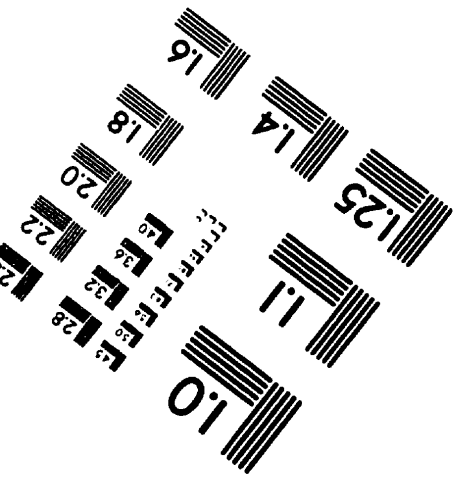

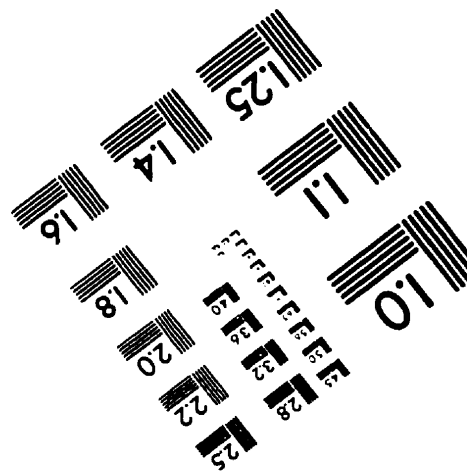

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