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Embodied Subjectivities in the Lyrical
and Musical Expression of PJ Harvey and
Björk ⁽¹⁾

KEYWORDS: Popular Music analysis, subjectivity, embodiment, PJ Harvey, Björk

ABSTRACT: Alternative female artists PJ Harvey and Björk negotiate themes of embodied female subjectivity not only as cultural concepts, but also as musical forms; their lyrical themes are crafted within a comprehensive network of creative textual and musical expression. This music challenges the analyst to explore systematically and describe coherently the links between the lived and embodied experiences developed in the song lyrics and the sonic and expressive elements in the music, in other words to explore the links between social and musical practice. This paper develops a music-analytic method for the interpretation of the dynamic musical processes that are engaged in a socially constituted artistic expression. Our objective is to illuminate embodied dimensions of meaning through the interpretation of the materials and strategies of lyrics and music.

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[1] This paper presents an analytic methodology intended to forge a bridge between the material content and the cultural contexts of popular song. The two artists chosen for study, PJ Harvey and Björk, articulate and develop themes of embodied experience in their lyrics, and fully integrate these meanings into their musical expression. This music challenges the analyst to explore systematically and describe coherently the links between the embodied experiences developed in the song lyrics and the sonic and expressive elements in the music; in other words, to explore the links between the lived body and musical practice.

[2] Tia DeNora has identified the need for social studies of music that “deal with music’s specifically musical materials.”⁽²⁾ She understands music as a social process, and considers how musical structures are created in reference to social activities and relations. This approach to musical interpretation centers on action, as DeNora claims, “it is concerned with musically engaged actors as they constitute and negotiate the constitution of music through performance, through coordination, and through reception.”⁽³⁾ The music-analytic method presented here interprets the dynamic musical processes that are engaged in a socially constituted artistic expression.⁽⁴⁾ PJ Harvey and Björk negotiate themes of embodied female subjectivity not only as cultural concepts, but also as musical forms; their lyrical themes are crafted within a comprehensive network of creative textual and musical expression.⁽⁵⁾

[3] Our analytic objective is to illuminate *embodied* dimensions of musical and lyrical meaning. In using the term “embodied,” we do not wish to limit ourselves to a conception of embodied musical meaning that is contained within the musical content and the expectations created by musical patterns.⁽⁶⁾ Although we wish to explore the “material” aspect of musical content and structure, this material approach is complemented by an overriding concern for the expression of social values and subjective perspectives.

[4] For the purpose of this study, we will understand and define embodiment in the following way:

Embodiment is the expression of *ideas* in *material form*, and the incorporation of these ideas into a *system*.⁽⁷⁾

As we translate the above definition into our proposed analytic model, the *system* comprises not only the *musical materials* and the contexts in which those musical materials and references have circulated in culture, but also the *lyrical materials* and the contexts in which those lyrical themes and references have circulated in culture. In this regard, we are in agreement with Eric Clarke and Nicola Dibben (2000) who understand “musical materials as socially constituted since they are always the product of socialised human behavior, and carry with them their historical situation.”⁽⁸⁾ With respect to the historical situation, Clarke and Dibben explain that musical

materials have a “‘history of use,’ one consequence of which is that sounds are heard as cultural references and associations.”⁽⁹⁾

[5] Returning to the definition of *embodiment* provided above, the *ideas* in the songs that we have chosen for study concern female subjectivities, which are expressed through the material manifestation of the words and music, as well as through the performance and strategic presentation of these expressive materials. The analytic/interpretive method thus gives careful consideration to lyrically and musically constituted subjectivities as they emerge through the materials and strategies that are created, performed and produced in the form of recorded music.

[6] The larger research investigation of which this paper is a part is informed by a more wide-ranging definition of embodiment inspired by contemporary cultural theory. Drawing on the work of theorists such as Butler (1993), Grosz (1994), Weiss (1998) and Young (2005), we outline a theoretical framework for embodied subjectivity that emphasizes three conceptual components: 1) intersubjectivity and intercorporeality (how we forge our own embodied subjectivities in relation to those around us); 2) society, culture and history (how embodied subjectivities are both produced by and productive of the world around us); and 3) time and space (how embodied subjectivities are constituted by and through ever-changing spatial and temporal situations). With this in view, our analytic framework can be said to encompass both the more general definition of embodiment presented earlier and the more particular definition presented here.

[7] Before reviewing the proposed analytic framework, it is important to acknowledge the current analytic methods that circulate in studies of pop and rock. Authors such as Albin Zak have developed analytic methods for identifying the techniques that enhance song structure and communication through recording technologies.⁽¹⁰⁾ Such studies have also established the importance of the timbral and textural qualities that can result as voices and instruments are recorded and mixed in studio contexts. By addressing the timbral and acoustic dimensions of popular music recordings, these new approaches to analysis provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the musical materials that constitute the recorded song. Popular music analysts also

have at their disposal analytic methods for the study of melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and formal content,⁽¹¹⁾ for the study of genre and stylistic differentiation,⁽¹²⁾ and for the expression of social identities.⁽¹³⁾ The musical materials that will be presented in the proposed model will thus include the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic content, the features of genre and style, the timbral and acoustic qualities that are captured through the recording and mixing processes, and the expressive message of the artist through song.

[8] The analytic methodology also responds to an *intensity* of lyrical and musical content and expression in the work of alternative artists PJ Harvey and Björk. These artists produce lyrical material that confronts embodied dimensions of meaning, creating stories about women's lived experience that are then communicated and animated through the expressive elements of the lyrics and music. In order to elucidate the embodied dimensions of meaning, the analytic framework must value the artist's *dynamic* and nuanced modes of expression. This approach allows us to formulate a critical listening response to a "story" that is "voiced" and "mediated" through the musical timbres (voices, instruments), gestures and production strategies. The embodied dimensions of meaning that are evident in the lyrical story are conveyed musically through a dynamic mode of expression that features a nuanced control of gesture, sound quality, intensity, and sonic interactions. It is this dynamic mode of expression that we find significant for the interpretation of embodied subjectivities.

Voice and Story / Music and Meaning

[9] Popular music lyrics communicate immediately to the listener by telling a story or exploring a social theme or issue, by conveying a subject's perspective or emotions in relation to that story, theme or issue, by creating in words a snapshot of that subject's identity and his or her social context. Although the lyrics communicate important content, as Dai Griffiths points out, rock lyrics are not poems, thus are not independent of their musical setting.⁽¹⁴⁾ Cultural critic Simon Frith adopts a similar approach when he asserts that song words do not stand as print texts; they are not so much about the ideas as about the expression. Frith shows that in listening to song, we

hear three things at once: *words* (which appear to give songs an independent source of semantic meaning), *rhetoric* (the use of words in a special musical way which draws attention to the features and problems of speech), and *voices* (the words being sung in human tones which are themselves meaningful insofar as they are signs of persons and personality). We are interested in Frith's formulation of three layers of meaning that are perceived *simultaneously* in song, communicating cultural messages to the listener. We are particularly interested in Frith's concept of rhetoric—the performance of words in a special musical way that draws attention to the features and problems of speech. As Frith explains, “to sing words is to elevate them in some way, to make them special, to give them a new form of intensity.”⁽¹⁵⁾ In other words, for Frith, the lyrics do not stand alone, but let us into songs as stories.⁽¹⁶⁾

[10] The interpretive juncture between music and text creates an excellent site for the reception of both musical and social meanings. The methodology to be presented here owes a debt to recent work on the interpretation of musical and social meanings by authors such as Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Nicola Dibben and Tia DeNora.⁽¹⁷⁾ In particular, Nicholas Cook's approach to the interpretation of the material elements of music as culturally selected *attributes* reminds the analyst to be critical in the assessment and selection of musical values and how they are culturally informed.⁽¹⁸⁾ We are also assisted here by Cook's conception of performance as a *negotiation* of meanings that *emerge* through musical expression. An understanding of emergent and negotiated meanings permits the analyst to interpret musical events and their expression as *dynamic* and nuanced as well as socially driven and motivated. Tia DeNora's preference to describe the links between musical and social *practice* rather than the musical representation of social meanings is also valuable. She encourages the analyst to consider “how music provides constraining and enabling resources for social agents—for the people who perform, listen, compose, or otherwise engage with it.”⁽¹⁹⁾ Here again in DeNora's conceptualization of musical meaning, we see an emphasis on the negotiation of meaning and an active engagement with musical expression. The model that is developed in the current study is meant to be flexible in its accommodation of multiple social themes and is thus not oriented to a single theoretical or ideological perspective.

[11] The proposed analytic model refers not only to “materials” of lyrics and music but also to “strategies” of musical and lyrical texts. The notion of strategy as intentional or dynamic action reflects our interest in the “performative” (active) aspects of musical expression, the conception of the artist as a communicator who uses the resources of word and sound.⁽²⁰⁾ The analytic model for text and music is thus based on a conception of the *dynamic* interaction of lyrical and musical expressive gestures. Such a conception of dynamics includes not only the notion of volume or *intensity* but also the technical definition of the term that brings *movement* and *interaction* into play. Indeed, “Dynamics is the science of moving powers; more particularly of the motion of bodies that mutually act on one another.”⁽²¹⁾ Theo van Leeuwen identifies the dynamic qualities of sound in the following way: “sound is dynamic: it can move towards us, or away from a certain position, it can change our relation to what we hear.”⁽²²⁾

[12] Dynamic musical motion is an important aspect of Eric Clarke’s “ecological” approach to music analysis, which aims to explore our perception of musical effects and meanings.⁽²³⁾ Clarke cites Roger Scruton’s emphasis on motion as central to musical experience: “we *must* hear the movement in music, if we are to hear it as music.”⁽²⁴⁾ Clarke describes an example of musical motion in the following passage from *Ways of Listening*, an analysis of Fat Boy Slim’s “Build it Up, Tear it Down”:

...Over the course of the next half-minute this sound [a bass instrument playing B and E in alternation] continuously evolves as if the cut-off frequency of the low-pass filter is being progressively raised, the higher frequency components becoming more audible, and revealing the sounds of a drum kit and other instruments in the mix. As the filter cut-off rises, resulting in an increasingly bright and clear sound, the same male voice that was heard in the earlier part of the track is added to the mix, reaching a climax of volume, rhythmic density, and timbral brightness until it cuts into another louder and fuller texture...⁽²⁵⁾

Clarke then interprets the passage in the following way:

The perceptual effect of the 34-second section described here is of a continuous movement towards a sound source that is at first occluded but progressively reveals itself. It is not clear whether this specifies self-motion towards a stationary sound source, or a moving sound source

that approaches a stationary listening point—but in either case there is a powerful sense of the source being at first concealed below some kind of acoustic horizon, above which it then progressively rises until it is fully revealed and directly in front of the listener...⁽²⁶⁾

We cite Eric Clarke at length here in order to illustrate his sensitive approach to musical content and strategies. He describes and interprets the frequency, timbre, and intensity of the sounds as well as the dynamic changes and gestures that affect those sounds.

[13] Clarke's conception of sound gestures that change in intensity and that move and interact is a valuable rubric for the analytic interpretation of musical agents within a song texture. It is also a valuable rubric for the consideration of narrative agency within a text, as a means of analyzing the content of a text to discover the dynamic and dramatic interactions as well as shifting perspectives of the subject in question.

Lyrical and Musical Materials and Strategies

[14] To achieve a coherent analysis of embodied subjectivity in song, we have developed a model that allows the analyst to bring into view the elements or component parts of a song in a form that is manageable and accessible. This method offers flexibility and accommodation in the analytic approach and is not limited to any particular style or genre. The analytic categories are not prescriptive, but rather are suggestive for a range of interpretive objectives.

[15] We gather
tangible
analytic data
in the domain
of *Lyrical
Materials and
Strategies* and
in the domain
of *Musical*

Example 1. Lyrical materials and musical materials

Materials and Strategies. As observed in our analytical model in Example 1, the materials are organized according to guiding analytic concepts, listed in the left column of the model. That is, reading from left to right across the table in Example 1, it is possible to identify and explore coherent analytic data from one domain to the next. For instance, the analytic results

Analytic concepts	Lyrical Materials and Strategies	Musical Materials and Strategies
Content	Verbal Content	Sonic Content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elements • context • structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocabulary, symbols • topics, themes • form, phrase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pitch and rhythm • timbre and texture • phrase and form
Settings	Lyrical Settings	Musical Settings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voice • story • address 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subject • story and narrative • delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “voice” (vocal and instrumental timbres, arrangement) • form and gesture • mediation
Dynamic Expression	Dynamic Lyrical Expression	Dynamic Musical Expression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subjectivity • attitude • position • intentionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agency: role, subjectivity • stance: status, perspective • contact: temporality, distance • utterance: action, engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gesture: motion, direction • quality: effects, articulation • interactions: balance, space, texture • intensity: markedness, tension, focus

(click to enlarge)

for the
Content
section in the
lyrics and for
the Content
section in the
music would
be presented
adjacently in
an analytic
table, and
would allow
the interpreter
to reflect on
how the lyrical
and musical
features
intersect. In
the
interpretation
of text/music
relations, this
model thus
encourages the
analyst to
construe
which
characteristics
of the lyrics
are being
mapped onto

the music and
vice versa.
The method
also permits a
flexible
application of
the analytic
terms; for
instance, it is
possible to
gather data
vertically
within one
domain, or to
work
horizontally
across
domains.

There are
discoveries to
be made
within certain
cells of the
table without
necessitating a
comprehensive
study of all
cells. The
analytic model
offers an
approach to

the song as a site of musical and lyrical content and expression and provides many options to the analyst for the exploration of interpreted meanings.

[16] In our consideration of the *Lyrical Materials and Strategies*, we conduct a close reading of the words, the vocabulary and the symbolic devices that are used, the topics and themes that are explored, the phrase design and form. The identification of these features of *Verbal Content* comprises the first step of the text analysis.

[17] The second step in the analysis of text is the interpretation of what we call the *Lyrical Settings* of the song. The Settings are considered at an interpretive level of the analysis. Based on the Content, the analyst is able to identify “who” is speaking, “what” the song is about, and “how” that expression is communicated. In each domain (Lyrics and Music), the Settings comprise a voice who tells a story that is mediated through the artistic dimension. The *voice-story-address* model (the *Settings*) of artistic meaning is a level of interpretation that does not attempt to account for nuanced or dynamic expression, but is rather the point of departure for a more dynamic reading of the artistic expression.

[18] In the Lyrical domain, the Settings comprise the *subject* (who is speaking), the *story* and *narrative* (what the song lyrics are about, when and where they take place), and the *delivery* (how the story is being communicated or mediated from the speaker to the listener). In answering these questions early in the analytic process, the interpreter is then in a better position to consider nuances of meaning and to distinguish subtler aspects of the message.

[19] Once familiar with the *Verbal Content* and the *Lyrical Settings*, the interpretation then turns to the narrative, expressive, and dramatic factors in the text. From the *Lyrical Settings*, we know who is speaking, about what, and how. However, there is much more to know about the song's protagonist and her social situation, about how the story unfolds dramatically, and about the ideologies that exist to frame the address. These questions and others can be asked through the interpretation of the following categories of *Dynamic Lyrical Expression: Agency, Stance, Contact, and Utterance*. These categories are considered to be *dynamic* insofar as they imply agency, movement, action, and interaction.

Agency refers to the role of the subject who is speaking, and of the intricacies of that subject's relation to the other personae in the text.⁽²⁷⁾

Stance suggests the status of the subject who is speaking, his or her perspective, attributes of power, and ideologies or values.⁽²⁸⁾ This stance is established in relation to the others around the subject and their social status and position, and in that regard, the rubric of stance is in keeping with Grosz's theory of embodied subjectivity, discussed earlier.

Contact delimits the timeframe of a story (temporality), the distance between the subject speaking and the other personae. It can also be pertinent to consider the understood distance between the subject and the listener and the forum (public/private).⁽²⁹⁾ Once again, this element can be easily connected to Grosz's theory of embodied subjectivity.

Utterance refers to an expression that originates from a speaker and that captures the intentions of the speaker.⁽³⁰⁾ It also suggests an action, an intense engagement, and is grounded in physical embodiment.

It is important to note that these categories do not refer to concrete, unmediated phenomena, but rather to abstract, mediated phenomena that are deeply embedded in an economy of embodied signs and over-determined by both social and musical processes. It is for this reason that we have developed our terms in a way that emphasizes their interpretive functions.

Materials and Strategies of the Music

[20] As we consider the *Musical Materials and Strategies*, we begin with the identification of the *Sonic Content*. This comprises the analysis of melodic and harmonic materials, rhythm, meter and form. These elements provide a context of pitch frequency (vertical musical space), points in time and directionality (temporal or horizontal musical space). The voice or instrument, in the musical expression of these parameters, can manipulate pitch (intonation), as well as harmonic placement, and can manipulate time values (rhythmic articulation) in ways that are considered to convey musical expression. The field of performance studies identifies these musical articulations as important vehicles for emotional expression in music.⁽³¹⁾ Thus, these elements do not belong solely to the domain of abstract form, for they are brought into the domain of performance interpretation as soon as a work is performed and recorded. In order to consider these elements for analytic purposes, we work with a transcription of the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic content of the song; this transcription has been done to account for subtleties in performance (pitch manipulation), although there are limits to what a transcription can capture on the page.

[21] We will also identify as Sonic Content the timbre and texture as these elements are captured in the recorded sound. The voice and instruments are mediated electronically to create the desired balance and timbral effect. For instance, in order to place the voice within the mix the recording engineer uses techniques or effects that create a sense of physical dimensionality or structural positioning. The splitting of a vocal track to left and right channels creates a physical sense of space that has an impact on the formal interpretation of the music. These elements can be analyzed for the spatial dimensions within the stereophonic field, which accommodates effects that are manipulated through the recording and production control of frequency, intensity, and timbre. We can interpret spatial depth and breadth, as well as intensity and balance. Each of these dimensions is important for communicating musical meaning. Moreover, each is important in providing a musical framework for the voice and the story.

[22] Sonic Content also includes the analysis of the formal structure—the musical phrases and how they are repeated and developed, as well as the sections of the song

form. As the analyst identifies such features, it is possible to begin to explore the ways in which the full complement of musical elements interact and change within a song structure over the course of the song. It is also important to establish that although we are identifying these distinct layers of sonic content, we are fully aware that these layers are interdependent. By focusing on a single element or layer, we do not intend to suggest that the remaining context is to be set aside.

[23] Following the analysis of the Sonic Content, it is helpful to interpret the *Musical Settings* that are established for an individual song. The voice-story-address model that was explained for the lyrics is once again a valuable interpretive tool in the musical domain: just as the lyrics feature a subject who delivers a story through specific modes of address, the music features a voice and instruments that articulate gestures and shape a form which is mediated through the musical recording. The Musical Settings thus comprise the vocal and instrumental timbres of the song (“who” is performing), the form and gestures (“what” the voices and instruments are doing) and the mediation of the voice and instruments (“how” the voice and gestures are framed within a sonic environment). Based on this understanding of the Musical Settings, it is then possible to consider in more detail the nuanced and dynamic aspects of the musical expression.

[24] The third stage of the musical analysis is thus to interpret the *Dynamic Musical Expression*, which is understood here to be a composite of *gesture*, *quality*, *interactions*, and *intensity*. As with the Dynamic Lyrical Expression, the expressive categories chosen for the Dynamic Musical Expression have the potential to suggest agency, movement, and action.⁽³²⁾

Gesture is understood as an expressive movement in time and in musical space.⁽³³⁾ A gesture has both a horizontal (linear articulation and motion) and a vertical (registral depth and spatial) aspect.

Quality is an interpretation of the timbral effects and their mediation. The performer’s inflections can bring out a variety of colors and tones, either in a vocal or instrumental expression.

Interactions in the instrumental/vocal arrangement can be considered to

demonstrate how the musical forces (voices) are balanced, and how they are arranged within the musical texture.

Intensity, which includes the notion of dynamic expression, connotes the use of emphasis or markedness, as well as the performative use of tension, which might be realized through the communication of a focused or intensified expression. Intensity here can be understood to include not only an increase in dynamic level, but also the marking of a musical moment with a new level of expression through timbral change or production emphasis.

[25] The second part of this study will put this analytic model into practice, through the analysis of two songs, “The Letter” by PJ Harvey and “Cocoon” by Björk. The first analysis will be presented with strict attention to the analytic framework in order to illustrate how each of these elements can be applied. The second will run in a more narrative form, where the reliance on the theoretical model is implied but not explained.

PJ Harvey

[26] PJ Harvey’s creative work offers a rich terrain for the interpretation of cultural themes made manifest in the complex juxtaposition of words and music. As an artist who has sustained an active profile in alternative rock, she is renowned for her development of resistant social and innovative sonic strategies.

[27] Celebrated for her gritty, raw, bluesy, disturbingly emotional tracks, PJ Harvey’s career has steadily climbed since her 1992 debut album *Dry*, released on the British indie label Too Pure Records. The single “Dress” went to number 1 on the indie charts, as well as hitting the top ten charts, and the critics loved her, as instanced by *Rolling Stone*’s “Critic’s Pick” of her as best songwriter and best new female singer.³⁴ Her second album, *Rid of Me*, was produced by Steve Albini and Island Records in 1993, and drew the attention of major artists and critics. *To Bring You My Love* followed in 1995 and *Is This Desire* in 1998, both of which sustained the edgy, sensual, and innovative sounds and emotionally turbulent stories. Harvey moved to New York in 1999 and set to work on her next album, *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea*, released in 2000. Taking a dramatic change in stylistic direction, she

shed the dark, disturbing sounds of the previous albums, adopted a more lush and melodic sound, and projected a positive social message. This album won her the prestigious Mercury Music Prize, for the first time awarded to a female artist. In 2001, she told *Q* magazine that the *Stories* album “satisfies a piece of me, but it doesn’t satisfy me in a whole way. I’m still looking for something that covers all areas and I am very, very drawn to music that is uncomfortable, dark, dealing with taboo subject matter. That’s where my heart really lies.”

[28] Her album of 2004, *Uh Huh Her*, explores the complex and often raw themes of gender, desire, and youth, illuminating the paradoxical nature of these at once embodied and social experiences. PJ Harvey exposes, embodies, and enacts these experiences through the development of vocal, instrumental and recording strategies that capture the complexity of her message. She produces gestures and effects that are exceptional not only for their individual properties, their combinations and intersections, but also for the intensity of their expression. Her vocal production, in particular, is manipulated to create very precise, sensual, and nuanced effects that are a vivid realization of her lyrics. Inscribed in the liner notes to the CD are PJ Harvey’s words: “all that matters is my voice and my story.” The *stories* that she tells through her musical *voice* are carefully crafted to explore the power of an expressive gesture and its dynamic development.

[29] We have chosen a track on *Uh Huh Her* that explores a particular aspect of subjectivity that is integral to the album. Throughout the album, she is attempting to come to an understanding of what her sexuality means to her identity and, in particular, how the Other—the object of her desire—is bound up with her own quest for self-realization. In this song, we witness the song’s protagonist reflecting on how to communicate and process her desire. As such, “The Letter” can be seen to explicitly address the theme of expressive communication (see [Lyrics of “The Letter”](#)). The protagonist eroticizes the idea of writing to her lover. Here, then, writing depicts the unfolding of a sexual episode and alludes to an intricate relationship between sexuality and textuality. Our goal with the following analysis is not only to explore the song’s suggestive content, but to demonstrate the analytic

methodology outlined above. The analysis will thus follow in a strict order of presentation that reflects the framework of Example 1. Hence, our analytic text has an instructive intent, as well as an illustrative one.

[30] **Verbal Content.** PJ Harvey's vocabulary describes the actions of the writer and develops the sensual links between the objects of the writing (pen and paper) and her physical body (her scent, and the act of pressing the envelope). The handwriting itself is intended to embody her desire through the contours of the curvaceous G (Verse 2). In Verse 4, the actions of the lover are imagined as she beckons him to pick up a pen and lick the envelope. (Nowhere in the song does she refer to the gender of this Other, however, in the remaining songs on the album, the context is that of a female desiring a male lover, so we will refer to this Other in male terms.) The Chorus reverts from the verbal exploration of writing to a simple "Oh," a pure vocal sound, thus offering a direct contrast between thoughtful meditation and visceral response.

[31] The lines of the lyrics are delivered in very direct, short, and simple statements. She describes her physical actions in immediate terms. For instance, in Verse 1, describing her own actions, she uses active and direct verb commands: "Put the pen / To the paper / Press the envelope / With my scent." In the fourth Verse, when she is calling for a response from him, she uses a comparable expression, now directed at him: "Take the cap / Off your pen / Wet the envelope / Lick and lick it."

[32] The present-tense immediate actions give way to a future-tense expression at the end of Verse 3 ("we *will* be different") and a conditional expression at the end of the last Verse ("I *would* come running"). This turn towards a future contributes to the intensity of her expression of desire. That intensity builds to a peak in the bridge, where she makes the direct statement "I need you" and creates the sense of urgency through the reference to time running out.

[33] **Lyrical Settings.** The Lyrical Settings are intended to describe the main elements of the lyrical communication: who is telling the story, what is the story, and how does the speaking subject address the listener. In "The Letter," we analyze these elements as follows:

Lyrical Settings, "The Letter"

Subject: the female subject is projecting her desire for a distant lover

Story and narrative: the erotic act of writing a letter in order to affirm desire and call for response

Delivery: immediate, personal feelings, intimate despite implied distance

The *subject* of the lyrics is that of a female subject exploring her desire for her lover and considering how her relationship can fulfill that desire. The *story* eroticizes the act of communicating with her lover; she suggests the physical actions of writing and then covets his response. The erotic act of writing a letter is here not just an affirmation of desire, but a playing out of that desire—a metaphorized sexual act. In her *delivery*, the protagonist openly expresses her personal feelings through the immediate and direct description of her actions (pressing the envelope, writing the sensuously formed letters). Although there is an apparent distance between the protagonist and her lover (hence, the need to write the letter), she uses the communication of the letter to create a strong sense of intimacy, thus mediating the distance.

[34] *Dynamic Lyrical Expression.* The subject of these lyrics is a sincere *agent* who is able to express her personal desires. Although her communication is intimate, the object of her desire is not immediately present, but rather is addressed by the form of the letter. There is a resulting intensity of desire for that physical presence and it is this desire that drives the narrative. For instance, the bridge is a marked moment of intensity as the subject declares her need and identifies the urgency (“time is running out”). The effectiveness of the communication is questioned (“Can’t you hear me call?”), which heightens the drive for fulfillment. The *stance* is that of a first person subjective voice (“I”) addressing the Other (“you”). In her stance toward him, he is accorded the power to satisfy her desire or not. The *contact* is apparently direct and private, albeit through the form of a letter. The imagined contact is close (“wet the envelope”), but distance and temporal factors create a barrier. The *utterance* is an appeal for response, a call. Her embodied expressions are intended to induce his

physical response. She wants his response to match her own desire. The lyrics can be interpreted on a level of close reading with these dynamic elements (agency, stance, contact, utterance) in mind.

[35] **Sonic Content.**

Example 2 provides a summary of the musical and lyrical content of “The Letter,” organized in such a way that the CD timings are aligned with the formal sections. This summary will be a valuable reference throughout the discussion of the musical

Example 2. “The Letter,” musical and lyrical content

Formal Section/CD cue	Lyrics (and vocal production emphasis)	Sonic Content	Verbal and Vocal Cont
	<i>/</i> = broken phonation <i>italics</i> = tension (pharyngeal stricture) <i>bolditalics</i> = tension with higher rate of air flow - - - - - = raspy = breathy bold = emphasis on stop consonant ~~~~~~ = head voice		

(click to enlarge and see the rest)

Example 3. Transcription of opening verse, “The Letter”

The image shows a musical transcription for the opening verse of "The Letter". It consists of two staves: "Voice" and "Guit.". The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The voice part begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "Put the pen". The guitar part features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, and includes markings for "Mute with palm" and "Mute".

(click to enlarge and see the rest)

Example 4. Transcription of opening Chorus, “The Letter”

events in relation to the lyrics. The special format of the lyric presentation (with underlining, italics, etc.) will be explained during the discussion of Dynamic Musical Expression. We will describe the Sonic Content summarized in Example 2 beginning with the first Verse.

[36] A transcription of the opening Verse is

The image shows a musical score for a band. It consists of four staves: Voice, Guitar, Bass, and Drums. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The Voice part has two lines of music with lyrics "(longing)" and "Oh". The Guitar part features a complex, rhythmic pattern with many accidentals. The Bass part has a steady, rhythmic line. The Drums part includes a pattern of eighth notes and a section labeled "Crash Cymbal".

(click to enlarge and see the rest)

presented in
Example 3.
The electric
guitar
begins the
track with a
playful
rhythmic
riff that
emphasizes
beats 2 and
4. The B
minor
harmony
implied by
the opening
leap from B
to F \sharp is
immediately
contrasted
with the B
diminished
triad, the F
natural
marking
beat 4. The
voice
responds
with a
simple,
speech-like

melodic
gesture
from E to D,
beginning
on beat 2
and leading
to beat 4,
thus
continuing
with the
offbeat
emphasis.

The guitar
plays the
response
with the
voice, so
that the
guitar signal
is sounding
with the
voice.

However
the signals
are
contrasted
in timbre as
the guitar is
played
through an
over-driven

amplifier to
create a
“crunchy”
distortion
with
enhanced
bass
frequencies
and a
down-tuned
bass string,
while the
voice is
very
centered,
focused and
forward; it
is dry, with
no
reverberatio
n, and has a
straight, flat
tone quality
(not
enhanced).

In her
diction, the
plosives are
dense and
thick
because the

low
frequencies
have not
been rolled
off.

[37] A
transcription
of the
opening of
the Chorus
is presented
in Example
4. As the
second
Verse ends,
at the end of
its closing
word,
“longing,”
our
perception
of the
acoustic
chamber
opens
through the
effect of a
very long
reverb. The
Chorus
offers a

dramatic
shift in
vocal
production:
she sustains
the end of
“longing”
for a full
bar, then
shifts her
vowel
sound to a
pure vocal
“Oh” as she
descends in
a
melismatic
melodic
expression
that features
legato and
sustain; the
voice is
enhanced
with reverb
at a very
long level,
which
expands out
the texture
and timbre.

Underneath
the voice,
the guitar
now plays
rhythmic
chords, the
bass enters,
the crash
cymbal
attacks at
the opening
of each
phrase, and
the
tambourine
attacks on
steady
sixteenths,
interacting
with the
active kit to
create an
interesting
timbre.

[38] *Musical Settings*. The “Musical Settings” of “The Letter” can be interpreted as follows:

Musical Settings, “The Letter”

Voice: the singer’s voice features tension, graininess, sensual weight; it is dry and heavy in the Verse, wet in the Chorus and Bridge; the guitar is a prominent instrumental voice that is enhanced and overdriven

Form and gesture: the Verse features the call-and-response formula; the Chorus is a fuller rock texture; the Bridge develops an increased intensity of call and response

Mediation: an embodied and dynamic interaction between the singer's un-enhanced voice and the over-driven guitar

These aspects of the song communicate to the listener the following critical messages: what musical voice is guiding the musical narrative; what formal patterns and events are featured in such a way that this musical voice can tell its story; and finally, how the communicative message is mediated. "The Letter" features PJ Harvey's voice with a certain degree of tension and graininess. Its central and focused placement and heavy plosives create a questioning, edgy setting, with a feeling of sensual weight. The over-driven electric guitar contributes an engaged and very present voice to the musical texture. The theme of the song, the sending of a letter that functions as a call for her lover to respond to, is brilliantly presented in a call-and-response gesture between the guitar and voice. The un-enhanced quality of the vocal mediation, coupled with the enhancement of the guitar, create two distinct musical voices that convey a sense of embodied interaction. These are distinct musical voices, deliberately distinguished to contribute to the intimacy of the story. There is an interesting twist to this call and response, however, as the guitar is the one who presents the call for her voice to answer, inverting the gesture of the lyrics, which suggest her call for his response. (We will return to that thought later on in the Analytic Summary.)

[39] *Dynamic Musical Expression*. As is already evident in the description of the Sonic Content in Example 2, PJ Harvey uses multiple strategies to develop her story through dynamic musical expression. We have described several factors in the vocal and instrumental texture, but would like to introduce here some aspects of the vocal quality that have not yet been mentioned. We are interested in illuminating these strategies in the visual example of the lyrics in such a way that a listener can verify these gestures as he or she listens to the music. The legend at the top of the lyrics column in Example 2 indicates a variety of vocal strategies that are used in the vocal production of this song.⁽³⁵⁾ All of these strategies are significant for communicating

the meaning and intensity of lyrical expression through vocal production. These dimensions of vocal quality are material resources and strategies of musical expression, which can be tracked in song performance.⁽³⁶⁾

[40] How
does PJ
Harvey

mobilize
and deploy
her vocal
strategies?

The
opening line
of the first
Verse, “put
the pen,” is
delivered
with a
breathiness
that signals
her
anticipation
and
excitement.

The second
line features
broken
phonation
in a place
that is
fitting for
the

Example 5. Transcription of bridge, “The Letter”

The image shows a musical score for the bridge of the song "The Letter" by PJ Harvey. The score is written in 4/4 time and features five staves: Voice, Guit., Bass, Tamb., and Kit Sn. B.D. The lyrics "I need you the" are written under the voice staff. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major) and the tempo is marked with a common time signature (C). The guitar part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes. The bass part has a simple eighth-note accompaniment. The tambourine part has a consistent eighth-note pattern. The drum kit part includes a snare drum and bass drum pattern.

(click to enlarge)

sensually
playful
rhythmic
pattern of
her
response.

The words
“paper,”
“envelope,”
and “scent,”
which close
lines 2, 3,
and 4, are
all produced
with the
tenser, more
“twangy”
vocal
sound. And
also
noticeable
is the raspy
quality of
the last two
words of the
Verse, “my
scent,”
which
addresses
her
physicality.

These strategies of emphasis are in keeping with the eroticization of writing that is being explored in the lyrics. In the fourth Verse, the moment when she asks him to respond with his own letter, a raspy emphasis on the first word (“Take”) adds intensity to her appeal. The third line of the Verse, “Wet the

envelope”
features
tension in
the
production
of sound.
This
continues
into the
fourth line,
but leads to
a
heightening
of the
tension on
the last
word of the
line, “it,”
which leads
into the
Chorus.

[41] In order to illustrate how Harvey exploits her gestures within a dynamic interaction of musical voices, we will focus for a moment on the Bridge section. The Bridge features a significant change in vocal and instrumental expression. The Verse and Chorus have featured the voice within the melodic span of B3 to F#4. Now, in the Bridge, the vocal line moves up into the range from F#4 to C#5. Example 5 transcribes the vocal line and guitar part for the Bridge. In an irregular rhythmic pattern (anticipating beat 3 by arriving early), the voice rises from A through A# and C# to B4. The guitar (and bass) duplicate the movement from A to A#, but keep

steady eighth notes, accenting the off-beat arrival on A \sharp . The guitar and bass move directly to B, the expected resolution of A \sharp , while the voice overshoots it, skipping up to C \sharp , and then resolving to B. The C \sharp is the highest pitch that the voice sings, and is contrapuntally very dissonant, adding to the intensity of the Bridge vocal. As the voice resolves to B and skips down to F \sharp , the guitar then switches to the upper register and repeats an oscillating B–F \sharp pattern in eighth notes. There is an ironic, mocking effect that is created by this dynamic interaction of the two primary “voices” in the song. At the same time that this new vocal/guitar texture develops, the voice also features some strategies of production that increase intensity. For the first time in the song, PJ Harvey changes her vocal quality by moving into a “head voice” tone. Her head voice coincides with the mocking guitar part in the higher register, connoting the desperation of “Can’t you hear me call?” The peak of longing that is reached in the Bridge section falls back to the original point of departure as Verse 5 commences. She returns here to the originating expression, breathy in the first line, with raspiness and tension to illuminate significant words in the subsequent lines. The dynamic has fallen back to a calmer state, and this is reflected by the un-enhanced, dry vocal quality, and the return to the reflection on the writing of a letter.

“The Letter,” Analytic Summary

[42] These analytic comments are intended to stimulate the reader’s thinking about possible interpretations of music and lyrics in this song. PJ Harvey’s musical *voicing* draws us into her *lyrical* stories in compelling, disturbing, and self-revealing ways. The protagonist on *Uh Huh Her* is a split subject and she adopts paradoxical stances on a range of matters relating to her subjectivity. The protagonist’s sexual struggles are developed in several tracks on the album. Two songs that relate strongly to “The Letter” are “The Slow Drug” (track 6, immediately following “The Letter”), and “It’s You” (track 10; this track is linked to “The Letter” through its title, which picks up on the last words of “The Letter”). These two songs explore the theme of female sexuality and coming of age, as the young female subject searches for an

understanding of what her sexual maturity will mean to her. The situations that she invokes place her in the position of feeling the attraction of male sexuality—a force that she recognizes will have power over her life, and will pose certain dangers to her own security and sense of independence. These paradoxical stances do not emerge only through the content of the lyrics but are expressed and communicated through the musical strategies that PJ Harvey adopts, the lyrical and linguistic resources that she exploits and the expressive devices that she performs.

[43] In “The Letter” we witness her longing for intimacy that is not fulfilled due to an enforced distance. Because of this distance, we surmise that her desire is not reciprocated, leaving her in an unsatisfied emotional and physical state. The music, however, creates a sonic embodiment of the desired intimate relationship, and the dynamic artistic expression maps out the experience. The listener perceives the intimacy of this story through the musical effects. For instance, the previously mentioned call-and-response patterning creates an immediate musical embodiment of the relationship, although it is the guitar who calls and she who responds. The message in the lyrics (she is calling on him to respond) is inverted through the musical content (where he calls and she responds), thus allowing an expressive realization of her desire to emerge in the musical relations. The Chorus features a sensuously expressed vocal release, with its melodic “Oh.” The guitar and vocal textures are mutually supportive and in sync throughout this passage. In the Bridge the guitar call conveys a mocking effect and she responds with increased intensity.

[44] The
analytic
method
posited
here allows
the listener
to tease
apart the
discrete

Example 6. Summary of analytic data for “The
Letter”

layers of the lyrical and musical content and expression, and then to reflect upon the links between and among these materials and strategies. Example 6 offers a summary of the analytic data within the framework of the model. With the data presented in this format, it is possible to read across the

Lyrical Materials and Strategies	Musical Materials and Strategies
<p>Verbal Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Vocabulary</i>: concrete materials of writing (pen, paper) combined with sensual actions (press, lick) • <i>Topics, themes</i>: desire expressed across distance through form of a letter • <i>Form, phrase</i>: direct simple statements describing letter in Verse; non-verbal “Oh” in Chorus; statement of appeal in Bridge 	<p>Sonic Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pitch</i>: guitar plays with B minor vs diminished harmonic outline, voice melodic gesture in a narrow range; elaborated descending line in Chorus; rising higher-pitched line in Bridge • <i>Timbre and texture</i>: over-driven guitar distorted in relation to un-enhanced Verse; more enhancement (reverb) and Bridget • <i>Rhythm, phrase, form</i>: playful guitar vocal response in Verse; melodic first voice with supporting guitar in Chorus; mocking call with syncopated vocal in Bridge

(click to enlarge and see the rest)

domains,
from lyrics
to music, to
find links
between the
material
and
expressive
content of
the words
and the
material
and
expressive
content of
the music.
For
instance,
under
Lyrical
Settings,
the subject
is identified
as a female
who is
projecting
her desire
for a distant
male; under
Musical
Settings,

the voice is
identified
as having
tension and
graininess,
while the
guitar is
enhanced
and
over-driven
. The
distinction
of the
individual
elements in
this format
allows the
interpreter
to find the
bridge
between the
subjectivity
of this story
and its
musical
manifestati
on.

[45] The analytic elements that are tracked in this model encourage the listener to reflect on the links between the subjective narrative and the musical content, expression, and effects. These interpretive links are important not only to enhance musical appreciation, but also to permit critical interrogation of the cultural issue that

is the theme of the song: in this case, the power of sexuality, and its manifestation in gendered subjectivities. Without offering a static “opinion” on female-male sexual power relations, PJ Harvey explores in this song an instance of such a relationship, and provides the listener a critical space in which to reflect upon that social construct. One could interpret this as a negative reflection of sexual alienation, or one could see it as a statement of idealized desire. There is no single interpretive response to this song, but rather the social meanings are left open for critique and contestation. The analytic model permits a range of interpretive results to emerge, as the model is designed to identify and map the relationships between and among the lyrical and musical materials and strategies.

Björk

[46] After winning best actress at the Cannes film festival in 2000 for her leading role in the tragic, genre-bending musical, *Dancer in the Dark*, an emotionally drained Björk swore to never act again, retreated under the covers with her laptop, and created *Vespertine*, an album unlike any of the recordings she had released before. Often described as an album of lullabies for adults, the title derives from the word “vespers,” which are evening prayers. As defined by Björk’s official web site, *Vespertine* refers to “things flourishing in the evening.”⁽³⁷⁾ It features lush arrangements for huge ensembles that include strings, harp, and women’s choir. Björk defines her concept for this album as follows: “From the beginning, I knew I wanted this album to be the exact opposite of [my previous album] ‘Homogenic’... That album was so extreme and confrontational. I needed this album to explore what we sound like on the inside—you know, that ecstasy, that euphoric state that happens while whispering.”⁽³⁸⁾

[47] This statement provides the framework for our analysis. We will explore how Björk musically communicates her sense of inner euphoria and ecstasy through contemplation in what we consider to be *Vespertine*’s most unique track, “Cocoon.”⁽³⁹⁾ Although the lyrics of this track are erotic, the musical contexts establish a subtle and nuanced perspective of reflection rather than an explicit reference to eroticized physicality. Björk presents the lyrics as an expression of an embodied state of mind,

rather than as a description of a physical act. The analysis will address how the lyrical and musical materials interact to enact her solitary contemplation within the terms of an embodied experience.⁽⁴⁰⁾

[48] The lyrics of the song are provided here: [Lyrics of “Cocoon”](#)

[49] In the first two lines of the text, Björk establishes the perspective of solitary reflection through her choice of vocabulary. She refers to a “him” in the third person and refers to herself in the first person as “me.” Her use of “him” and “me,” as opposed to, for instance, “you” and “me,” places the emphasis on herself—on her own contemplation, a contemplation that she signals right away with the question “who would have known?”

[50] This question becomes a central aspect of the lyrical communication in the song as it heralds the opening of Verses 1, 2, and 3. She breaks from this pattern in Verse 4, in order to describe the sexual

Example 7. Transcription of opening break,
“Cocoon”

Voice

Phrase 1
Who would have known

Phrase 2
H - oo - oo - ah

Phrase 3
Who Would have Kno - oh-oh - oh - oh -

(click to enlarge)

experience.

Verse 4

leads to the
climax of

Björk's

ecstatic

contemplatio

n as she

lingers over

the lyrical

phrase "who

would have

known,

ahhh, who

would have

known" in

the Bridge, a

formulation

of the

question

which is left

incomplete.

(It is

important to

note that the

Bridge is set

up musically

as a rupture

of the

musical

form. The

instruments
drop out and
we have only
her voice in
the melodic
presentation
that is
transcribed
in Example
7. The
relative
intensity of
this musical
expression is
best
understood
in relation to
the verse
structure.)

[51] The sparseness of the instrumentation in “Cocoon” sets this song apart from the others on the album *Vespertine*. All of the other tracks present a lush combination of harp, women’s choir, full string orchestra, celeste, clavichord, bass, voice, computerized sounds and even music box.⁽⁴¹⁾ “Cocoon” simply features voice, keyboard and “barely-there” computerized beats created from samples of everyday sounds. The stark simplicity of the overall soundscape in “Cocoon” lends this track a sense of solitude and meditation in contrast to the lush orchestrations on many of *Vespertine*’s other tracks.

[52] The “barely-there” beats, known as “found sounds,” play an important role in this track’s impression of intimacy.⁽⁴²⁾ Many of the tracks on *Vespertine* feature found sounds such as cards shuffling and boots crunching in the snow. However, “Cocoon”

uses samples of a much more personal nature; for instance, static created by running fingers through a man's hair.⁽⁴³⁾

[53] These kinds of found sounds that we hear in "Cocoon" come from the kinds of noises one would only be able to detect in a quiet, private setting. They are highly suggestive of physical intimacy and they engage the human senses. Björk uses such effects to draw the listener in to an intimate space. Example 8 transcribes the rhythmic content of the found sounds, which run against a keyboard ostinato. The combined effect of the found sounds and keyboard can be understood to create a sense of "musical levitation" reflective of her expression of euphoria.

[54] The found sounds defy rhythmic predictability in two ways. First, while the more prominent manifestation of the found sounds maintains a steady pulse (m. 3ff. of Example 8), Björk subtly

Example 8. Transcription of found sounds, "Cocoon"

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The top system consists of four staves, with a bracketed section labeled "Random interjection" containing a sequence of notes. The bottom system consists of two staves, with a bracketed section labeled "Steady time-keeping pulses" containing a sequence of notes. The notation includes various rhythmic values and rests.

(click to enlarge and see the rest)

Example 9. Transcription of introduction, verse 1 (mm. 9–17) and verse 2 (mm. 21–29), "Cocoon"

manipulates the individual rhythms from bar to bar, making it impossible for the listener to predict the content of each rhythmic cell as the song progresses. Compare, for instance, the fourth beats of mm. 5 and 6. Second, a variety of rhythmically irregular sounds enter at random against the

Intro

Voice

Keyboard

2-measure keyboard motif

1 2 3 4 1 2 3

A^b7

(click to enlarge and see the rest)

regular
pulse. The
first
occurrence
of this type
of rhythmic
event
appears in
m. 2: a
triplet-like
figure
which is
transcribed
in Example
8 as
seventeen
“sixteenths
” in the
space of
fifteen.
This
figure’s
early
entrance,
before the
regular
time-keepin
g pulse
begins,
subverts
any sense

of pulse the
listener
may have
established
by this
point.

These
irregular
rhythms
appear at
random
throughout
the song.

[55]

Against
these found
sounds, we
have the
constant
presentation
of a
keyboard
ostinato,
transcribed
in Example
9. The first
measure of
this melody
offers a
clear
picture of

the meter
by avoiding
syncopation
and by
articulating
notes on
both the
downbeat
of the
measure as
well as on
beat 3, the
midpoint of
the bar. The
second
measure, on
the other
hand,
obscures
the rhythm
and meter.
The
keyboard
articulates
the same
pitch as
in m. 1, as
though
repeating
the melody
of bar one.

However, it
augments
the rhythm
from
quarter-note
pulses to
dotted
quarters.

Then,
rather than
continuing
the melodic
gesture up
to the G, as
we heard in
m. 1, the
keyboard
stops on the
E \flat on the
second
quarter-note
pulse of
beat 2,
sustaining
the note
through a
decay to the
end of the
measure
without
articulating

beat 3. The effect here is similar to a ritardando; we perceive a trailing off of the rhythmic pulse introduced in m. 1. The irregular rhythm discussed earlier, which is introduced by the found sounds in m. 2, provides an additional layer that adds to the sense of rhythmic ambiguity at this

moment.
Since this
two-measur
e melody
repeats
throughout
much of the
song, there
is a
constant
ebbing and
flowing of
the
rhythmic
motion in
the
keyboard.

[56] The keyboard's low register and slow, reverberant tones add a depth to the overall sound that seems to signal the depth of Björk's profound contemplation. The notes are so softly articulated and so highly reverberant that at times it becomes difficult to discern which notes are actually played, and which notes are present as overtones. The tones lack a distinctive attack, giving the listener the sense that they are merging seamlessly into one another, as though reflecting Björk's thoughts merging from one to the next. Such performance strategies contribute to a soft, fluid, and enveloping sonic context for the song.

[57] Perhaps the strongest signal of intimacy, however, is Björk's vocal production in "Cocoon" and the position of her voice within the mix. Björk's frequent use of a wide variety of vocal gymnastics is well known: often she employs an extreme range of dynamics and unusual expressive vocal effects including (to name a few) growls, yells, shouts, whispers, unusual text declamation or pronunciation and unconventional

glottal attacks. Not only does she push the physical abilities of her voice to extreme boundaries, she frequently heightens the vocal expression through electronic manipulation. However, in “Cocoon” she sings with a breathy, whispery, quiet tone throughout. She takes time to articulate each word of the text carefully and thoughtfully, often spending extra time on a particular consonant. She sings as quietly as possible, as though she is on the verge of whispering. Although she sings very quietly, her close proximity to the microphone and the position of the voice in the mix allow us to hear every movement of her mouth from the articulation of the text to the movement of air when she breathes in. The amplification of these details gives the listener the sense that she or he is right next to Björk’s mouth as she sings, creating the impression that the listener has immediate access to Björk’s private thoughts and once again directing the listener to engage sensuously with the embodied dimensions of the music.

[58] Björk’s extremely flexible, unpredictable phrasing throughout the track *also* greatly contributes to this sense that we are overhearing her thoughts. Her flexible vocal phrasing denies any sense of planned organization or form. This fluid flexibility can be observed right away in the first Verse, transcribed in Example 9 (mm. 9–17). Björk’s voice enters in m. 9 with a first Verse comprising two phrases. Her first phrase lasts approximately four measures, however, it is offset against the instrumental phrasing. She begins on the second quarter note pulse of m. 9 rather than directly on beat 1, and closes on the second quarter note pulse of measure 13, rather than at the end of measure 12. She then continues into her second phrase without a breath, eliding or blurring the division between the end of phrase 1 and the beginning of phrase 2. Her second phrase repeats the melody of phrase 1, now beginning in the middle of the second quarter note pulse. She also stretches the phrase out so that it spans five measures instead of four by lingering longer on the word “who” in m. 13, expanding the rhythm at the beginning of the phrase and, even more so, at the end of the phrase on the words “would stay going nowhere.” This portion of the phrase spans 7 half-note beats, as compared with the end of phrase 1 (m. 12), which spans only 4.5 half-note beats.

[59] It is interesting at this point to consider how Björk's unpredictable rhythmic vocal declamation can be understood to contribute to a sense of embodied ecstasy and euphoria. Over the predictable bass line, Björk freely slides her vocal phrases. She often syncopates her melody, or begins her phrase a sixteenth note before or after the beat. The transcription (Example 9) indicates with an asterisk the stressed beats in the vocal phrasing. In her first phrase, Björk delays each downbeat for one pulse, placing her melodic downbeat on the second quarter note pulse of beat 1 in mm. 9, 10 and 11. Then, in m. 12, she starts her phrase even later on beat 2, as though incorporating a *ritardando* at the end of her phrase against the keyboard and found sounds which progress in tempo.

[60] In her second delivery of this phrase, Björk delays the melodic downbeats more dramatically. She begins later than she began her first phrase—on the last eighth pulse of beat 1 rather than on the second quarter of the beat. She rushes into this phrase without even taking a breath, which suggests a particular effort to begin the phrase before beat 2. In the next bar, however, she delays the melodic downbeat further, to beat 2. In m. 15 her downbeat is even later, arriving in the middle of beat 2, while in m. 16 it arrives later still—on the very end of beat 2. The increasing delay of Björk's downbeats contributes yet another level to the sense of unhurriedness and rhythmic flexibility.

[61] It is in the Bridge that Björk's phrasing is at its *most* flexible, mirroring the release from structure as she utters twice the crux of the lyrics in "Cocoon": "Who would have known?" Her first declamation of this question lasts just over two beats. Then, she loses herself in its reiteration, trailing off halfway through the word "have," restarting the phrase and expanding the word "known" throughout an entire bar with randomly placed quivers in her voice as she sustains the note.

[62] After the Bridge, the material from the first Verse returns, but this time for only 8 measures, truncated from the original 12. This section dissolves into a 10-measure coda. As the coda progresses, all sense of form dissipates as each musical layer drops out. The "found sounds" drop out after 2 measures, and the voice drops out after 5, leaving the keyboard alone, repeating the same melodic figure for 5 measures.

[63] Some final analytic remarks can be made about the role of harmony in “Cocoon’s” expression of euphoria. The keyboard plays the greatest role in articulating the harmonic content of the song. Returning to the transcription of the Introduction (Example 9, mm.1–8), the keyboard’s bass line outlines a I^7 chord alternating with a I chord. As the section progresses, the keyboard cumulatively adds layers to this pattern, starting in m. 9 with a $B\flat$, the ninth of the chord, added to the beginning of every other bar; adding next the open fifth in m. 9 answered by the F-minor triad (vi) in m. 12; a pattern that continues through the rest of the first Verse. The keyboard sets up a static wash of a tonic chord upon which it gradually adds upper chordal extensions that reverberate without resolution. The continuous lack of harmonic motion and resolution removes the sense of harmonic direction, freeing the harmony from any tendency to pull the listener forward through a progression, and therefore reflecting Björk’s experience of embodied euphoria. Moreover, instead of horizontal harmonic motion, the stacked thirds take the music higher, creating a sense of “musical levitation” reflective of her ecstatic state.

[64] The second Verse (mm. 21–29, transcribed in Example 9) contributes further to the effect of harmonic layering. Here, the harmony shifts from I^7 to ii ($B\flat$ minor) with an added 7th articulated in each measure in the right hand. In m. 25, the right hand adds a rising motif consisting of $D\flat-A\flat-C-E\flat-F$ on top of the ii chord in the bass. By the end of the second Verse, the overtone content has become so rich and the accumulated pitches so high that it challenges the listener to distinguish the actual keyboard notes from the resounding overtones, again creating a sense of “musical levitation.”

[65] In a final gesture that both takes the harmonic

Example 10. Transcription of coda, “Cocoon”



motion
upwards
and
liberates
the
harmony
from
traditional
function,
Björk
shifts to a
subdomina
nt harmony
for the
Coda
(transcribe
d in
Example
10). The
keyboard
returns to
the
material of
the A
section,
transposed
up to D \flat .

(click to enlarge and see the rest)

“Cocoon,” Analytic Summary

[66] Throughout this analysis of “Cocoon” we have attempted to illustrate how the musical aspects of the song center on Björk’s inner, embodied experience of euphoria

and ecstasy. The materials and strategies of her unique musical sound-narrative are contrived to pull the listener into this embodied experience. That is, the strategies of lyrical and musical expression make the listening experience an intimate one, such that the listener is encouraged to reflect on the sensuous and embodied aspects of the song.

Lyrical Settings	Musical Settings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Subject</i>: contemplative female subject, experiencing sexual awakening • <i>Story</i>: her euphoric response to a sexual experience • <i>Delivery</i>: self-reflective, the lover is referenced in 3rd person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Voice</i>: breathy, whispery vocal tone, low register, reverberant piano; static sampled sounds • <i>Form and gesture</i>: ostinato keyboard pattern and irregular rhythmic presentation of sampled sounds; fluid vocal melody • <i>Mediation</i>: very close and intimate, close-mic on voice; softly articulated piano, frontal placement of sampled sounds

[67] The Lyrical Settings and Musical Settings are summarized here. These elements suggest a particular interpretation of the subjective experience that is explored in this song; that is, this song is about the subject’s experience and her own exploration of that experience. We do not witness here a struggle between the subject and the lover, but rather our attention is riveted upon her own visceral reflections. The song title, “Cocoon,” suggests an internal transformation that takes place within a safe environment, and thus offers a very positive view of female sexual awakening.

Conclusions

[68] The objectives of the analytic method demonstrated in this paper can be summarized in the following ways: 1) to explore the embodied dimensions of

meaning to be found in the musical and lyrical expression of recorded popular songs; 2) to reveal the ways in which the materials of music and strategies of performance can be understood to create a dynamic and interactive environment of musical expression within the context of recorded music; 3) to illuminate the nuances of performance expression that originate in the performer's (singer's) body, in particular the vocal effects that emerge in the artist's production of lyrical and musical effects; 4) to contextualize those nuances within a context that is the song's framework, with its musical and lyrical "settings" that establish a grounding or point of departure for expressive intensity and development; and 5) to allow the interpretive potential of these meanings to emerge in order to permit listeners to enter into the story of a song as it is negotiated through gestures, interactions, and lyrical points of reference.