

U2'S CREATIVE PROCESS: SKETCHING IN SOUND

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ABSTRACT

K. PAUL HARRIS: U2's Creative Process: Sketching in Sound
(Under the direction of John Covach)

The music of Irish rock band, U2, evinces a compositional process developed by musicians of exceptional inexperience who underwent an equally exceptional insular development, to become one of the most critically acclaimed rock bands of all time. This dissertation uses a variety of resources—principally demos of mature songs from U2's seventh studio album, *Achtung Baby* (1991), recordings of early performances surrounding the recording of their debut album, *Boy* (1980), and video documentary sources chronicling the recording of songs from *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984) and *The Joshua Tree* (1987)—as a comparative basis for an assessment of U2's signature musical style, their aesthetic of song, and their use of the recording studio in the realization and development of that aesthetic.

U2 arose from the post-punk milieu of the late 1970s, that took its lead from the slightly older punks, (the Sex Pistols and the Clash), to forge a style distinct from mainstream pop. The members of U2 had widely divergent musical tastes and abilities (some bordering on no ability at all) which compelled them to begin writing their own music from the outset, typically through interminable rehearsal—a form of live sketching. This musical naiveté was expressed through highly idiomatic instrumental ensemble styles and aesthetics of song. Their conception of song form was broad, accommodating standard forms, but also unusual binary forms where ostensibly

standard verse/chorus songs mutated into substantially new or modified material around a song's midpoint, with no, or limited, return of earlier material. They freely combined discrete realizations of simple harmonic patterns, in essence combining multiple versions of basic material within a single song, often as sections which conventionally should contrast one another. These early acquired habits served them well as their musical sophistication grew. The initial live sketching process, the products of which were committed to vinyl with Steve Lillywhite producing, gradually moved more into the recording studio which became, under the direction of producers Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, U2's primary creative venue, and the situs for their multiple stylistic reinvention

To the memory of Justin Lord Coleman (1976-2003)
U2 enthusiast

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Acknowledgements often read as though the author had just completed the quest for the Holy Grail, enduring unspeakable hardship, deprivation, degradation, and inconvenience. While leafing through those of some of my predecessors, I often rolled my eyes and thought “For God’s sake, get a grip.” However, having now walked in their shoes, I am somewhat more sympathetic.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation was inspired generally by an interest in musicology's response to rock music, and specifically by a paper given in 2001 by a colleague at UNC-Chapel Hill, Tim Striplin, a chant scholar with equal expertise on Irish rock band U2. Striplin's paper addressed U2's change in style in 1991 with their seventh studio album *Achtung Baby*, arguing convincingly that U2's passionate humanistic and political leanings of the 80s were still embedded in their songs despite the calculated adoption of an ironic presentation, both visually and sonically.

To that point, I was a casual listener to U2, owner of a vinyl copy of *The Joshua Tree*, CDs of *The Unforgettable Fire* and *Rattle and Hum*, and had heard a roommate's copy of *Achtung Baby* many times in the early 90s. I had no particular interest in U2, and, like many people in the mid- to late 90s, was somewhat bemused by their newer dance influenced songs like "Lemon" and "Discotheque" (from *Zooropa* and *Pop* respectively) which seemed to contrast so strongly with their work from the 80s. Furthermore, the generally negative reception to U2's "Popmart" tour in 1997-8 (at least in North America) left an impression of a band on a downward trajectory. However, Striplin's paper piqued my curiosity enough to induce me to purchase a copy of 1997's *Pop* from a used CD store. Prior to this, I had heard songs from *Pop* only on the AM radio of my 1977 Ford Pinto—and I usually turned them off after the first few seconds. This was my first headphone exposure to post-1991 U2; the higher fidelity revealed

unexpectedly compelling textures, timbres atypical for contemporary radio, unpredictable formal procedures, yet a consistency of affect across the album that was, of course, unapparent from the play of singles on the radio. Existing scholarly literature revealed little about the band, or about rock in the 80s and 90s generally. This is hardly surprising, however, as there are still relatively few detailed stylistic studies of rock bands in the vein of, for example, Everett's *The Beatles as Musicians*.¹

Objectives

The primary goal of this dissertation is to examine U2's compositional process, with emphasis on their use of the recording studio as a compositional tool. This dissertation may be seen, therefore, as an extended case study following from Albin Zak's work on the creation—or *poesis*—of rock songs as essentially fixed texts.² Using a variety of approaches, I examine U2's use of technology in constructing songs that convey their meaning largely through the carefully-crafted sounds comprising the work, rather than primarily through lyrics, standard song forms, genre-specific arrangement, or other culturally-coded conventions of song. A related objective is to examine how the aesthetic priority of seeking unusual, affective sounds operating primarily at the musical surface influences U2's style at other levels, such as song form, harmonic language, melody, and text writing and setting.

An emergent property of the primary goal is that the study of U2's music also provides a useful case study in how musicians who would eventually be described as

¹ Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and *The Beatles as Musicians: The Quarry Men through Rubber Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

² Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), and his dissertation upon which the preceding is based, "Multitrack Recording as a Compositional Process: The Poetics of Rock Composition" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1997). All further references to Zak are to *The Poetics of Rock*.

“post-punk” learned their craft. It becomes clear that a great measure of U2’s originality during this period was the result of these fledgling musicians having only sketchy knowledge of pop song conventions, and limited abilities to emulate their models, forcing them to develop idiomatic practices. These observations may be extended to other post-punks, whose collective efforts later crystallized into styles that were the precursors to the “alternative” style dominating rock of the late 80s and early 90s.

A final goal of this study is to approach a detailed assessment of U2’s musical style at various defining points in their extended career, and to evaluate the interrelationship between the recording/creative/compositional processes and the development of that style.

Analytic Methodology

Until recently, the majority of scholarly attention paid to rock music was by sociologists more interested in what light the music might shed on youth subcultures which substantially defined themselves through music. Now that rock has become the music of many musicologists’ formative years, it is not surprising that they have turned the tools of the trade toward the music that captivated them as youths and often continues to do so, even if scholars of “serious” or “art” music may at times bemoan the end of the world as we know it. Analytical methodologies for popular music were contested throughout the 80s and 90s as a subset of the broader debate on the “new musicology,” but a plurality of approaches has emerged even if a consensus has not.³

³ Many studies address this issue in detail. For recent considerations see John Covach, “Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology,” in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas John Cook and Mark Everist, 452-470 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jocelyn Neal, “Song Structure Determinants: Poetic Narrative, Phrase, and Hypermeter in the Music of Jimmie Rodgers” (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2002), 18-25; and Lori Burns, “ ‘Close Readings’ of Popular Song: Intersections among Sociocultural, Musical, and Lyrical Meanings,” in *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity, and Popular Music*, Lori Burns and Mélisse Lafrance (New York: Routledge, 2002), 40-3.

An assumption underlying this study is that there is no difference in kind between songs by Josquin, Schubert, and U2, and that western pop music may be treated in the same way as any other body of western music. This is not to suggest that it must be, or even should be, but merely that it *can* be, and that different approaches may work better for different artists.⁴ In the present study, so-called traditional modes of analysis often prove effective in highlighting, or even uncovering, nontraditional or idiomatic practices. Set in the context of U2's biography and their temporal situation at the commencement of the post-punk period, analytic data often assists in reconstructing U2's aesthetic of song and the evolving interaction between that aesthetic and the rapidly changing technology of record production during the 80s.

Chapter One provides an overview of rock in the late 70s and early 80s, and seeks to situate U2 in their time. In addition, the popular and scholarly reception of U2 and the post-punk period is addressed. How to best approach rock as a scholarly subject is, as mentioned above, a question currently at the forefront of musicology, one examined in detail in Chapter Two, which considers current theories of rock aesthetics, emphasizing their application to composition, or, as some might prefer when discussing rock bands, "songwriting." Paradoxically, the most crucial—yet intractable—element of music is its actual sound, yet recorded sound is overwhelmingly the format by which rock music is experienced. Rock aesthetics, therefore, must take into account the primacy of the recorded artifact, while still accommodating that artifact in its more transitory performative mode.

⁴ See John Covach, "Analysis: What is it Good For? We Won't Get Fooled Again—Rock Music and Musical Analysis," *In Theory Only* 13 (1997): 117-142.

Subsequent chapters examine in detail the songs comprising albums representative of U2's various incarnations. The analytic chapters present the albums out of their chronological sequence, beginning with U2's seventh album, *Achtung Baby* (1991, Chapter Three), which is explored first as it is the album for which the most supporting demo material exists. Seven hours of bootleg sketches for several songs, or parts of songs, from *Achtung Baby* and associated singles provide a basis for observing U2's mature compositional procedure in the recording studio, under the guidance of co-producers Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois. The observations derived from *Achtung Baby* and its sketches are applied retrospectively to U2's debut album, *Boy* (1980, Chapter Four). Comparisons with demos and live recordings from 1978-9 provide an accurate picture of U2's earliest aesthetic of song, those elements of style which became part of U2's signature, as well as a basis for examining the role of Steve Lillywhite as the producer of U2's first three albums. Finally, video documentaries chronicling the recording of "Pride (in the Name of Love)" from *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), and several songs from *The Joshua Tree* (1987) provide insight into the initial Eno/Lanois collaborations (Chapter Five), and further autobiographic, anecdotal evidence of U2's creative process. Ideally, the reader will have access to the songs discussed in these three chapters; a recording is worth at least a thousand words.

CHAPTER ONE: U2 in the 80s and 90s

U2: Reputation and Reception

It is convenient for the purposes of labeling and categorizing that U2, a rock band from Dublin, released their debut album in the first year of the 1980s (although they had already played together for three years). How more convenient still that U2 should proclaim on the fourth-last night of the 1980s that it was time to “go away and dream it all up again,” reemerging in 1991 completely reinvented—or so goes the standard journalistic narrative—and being voted “Comeback of the Year” in the *Rolling Stone* Readers’ Poll (to the bemusement of the band, who did not think that their profile had sunk enough to warrant a “comeback”). As arguably the most prominent band to have their career unfold so congruently over these two decades (and, at time of writing, halfway through a third), U2 are better positioned than any other rock artist for an aesthetic assessment of the last decades of the twentieth century, albeit at not much historical remove.

Despite being routinely described as one of the world’s most popular bands on and off for close to twenty years, U2’s reception is difficult to assess. Many sources indulge in hyperbolic discussions regarding the “greatest” bands in the world, but what exactly constitutes “greatness” in music, and, in particular, popular music? Album sales? Longevity? Membership in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame? Critical reception? Influence? Originality? With a history spanning over fifty years, rock has accumulated an

extensive list of potential all-time greats, and 80s artists frequently fail to make the cut, depending upon the compiler's age, tastes, and nationality.

The following discussion presents a snapshot of various criteria that common sense, or industry practice, suggests as potential indices of U2's standing in the history of rock, and are simply intended to give the reader unfamiliar with U2 an overview of their career. In almost every case, it is difficult to say exactly what a criterion represents in isolation, but taken together, they may establish an overall musical/historical footprint from which to proceed. It is difficult to argue that any artists since the 70s have managed to attain the kind of iconic status of Elvis Presley, the Beatles, or the Rolling Stones, raising questions about the relevance and role of post-60s rock as a whole.

Leaving greatness aside, one unfamiliar with U2 might wish to consult some standard reference sources to get a sense of the band. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* is the leading English-language reference source for musicology, and its most recent edition features the introduction of popular music entries.¹ The complete entry for U2, by Allan Moore, is as follows:

Irish rock band. It was formed in Dublin in 1977 by Bono (Paul Hewson; b 10 May 1960; vocals), the Edge (David Evans; b 8 Aug 1961; guitar), Adam Clayton (b 13 Mar 1960; bass guitar) and Larry Mullen Jr. (Lawrence Mullen; b 31 Oct 1960; drums). Having signed to Island Records, their first song to become widely known was "Gloria" (1981; from the album *October*), after which their studio albums *War* (1983; including the hit "Sunday Bloody Sunday"), *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), *The Joshua Tree* (1987), *Rattle and Hum* (1988; which also contained live recordings), *Achtung Baby* (1991) and *Zooropa* (1993) reached number one in the UK or US charts, and in some cases both. As a result they, together with REM, had become the world's best-known stadium-rock attractions by the early 1990s. This position was already assured when U2 were one of the highlights of the Live Aid concert in 1985.

U2's style gradually grew from their new-wave roots and rested on simple harmonic patterns with no extended verse-refrain forms, a driving bass technique developed little from early punk, characteristic busy guitar patterns in a high register which made use of delay effects, and a recitative-like vocal approach. The combination of these elements seemed to reinforce the band's sincerity. The epic, ideologically sound nature of many songs, their evident devotion to their audience and three of the members' reasoned Christian commitment confirm the connotations of

¹ S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 2001), and L. Macy, ed., *Grove Music Online* <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

their style, which has led to favourable comparisons with such luminaries as Bruce Springsteen. The Zoo TV tour, which followed *Achtung Baby*, played with their sense of authenticity and involvement, such that the subsequent *Zooropa* was a more convincing postmodern album than many that are more usually cited, such as those by Bowie or Talking Heads. *Pop!* (1997) was poorly received.²

The *New Grove* has no policy that size matters, but one might reasonably infer that the more important the composer, the larger their *New Grove* entry (recognizing that notions of “importance,” like “greatness,” are difficult to define and remain in flux). For example, Peter Phillips observes: “...the article on Britten is seven times longer than the one on Walton, which hardly reflects their relative standing as composers (though this does not explain why their titles are omitted—peer and knight respectively. Sir Elton John has his).”³ Nonetheless, as one might expect, J. S. Bach has a large entry of seventy-three pages, followed by Mozart and Beethoven at seventy-one and sixty-seven pages respectively.⁴ In comparison, Wagner, whose reputation diminished somewhat in the twentieth century, merits only forty, and Vivaldi only twenty-five.

Given these unsurprising results (without any comment regarding their validity), the same method may be applied to pop artists, generating a biographical index measured, for pop artists, in word count rather than page count.⁵ It is rather simple to predict who might get longer entries. The Beatles (2,031) easily outrank all others, with Bob Dylan (1,646), Elvis Presley (1,168) and the Rolling Stones (869) making very

² Allan Moore, “U2,” *Grove Music Online* <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> (5 November 2005). While the electronic edition of *Grove* permits updates to entries, this entry omits the albums *All That you Can't Leave Behind* (2001) and *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004). The correct birth year for Larry Mullen, the youngest member of the band, is 1961.

³ Review of 2001 *New Grove*, “Better than None,” *Musical Times* 143 (Summer, 2002), 75.

⁴ These figures were obtained from the print edition, and reflect the entire entry, including bibliography and works list, and are rounded off to the nearest page.

⁵ Results were obtained by performing an MS Word word-count on the full, unedited entry as it appears in the *Grove* electronic edition. All biographies were accessed November 6, 2005.

respectable appearances. U2 (298), however, rank impliedly more in the range of Emmylou Harris (287), The Eagles (282), The Supremes (296), Steve Cropper (308), and The Grateful Dead (314). They rank somewhat below Bruce Springsteen (350), Billy Joel (369) and Neil Young (446), and significantly below their contemporaries Madonna (497), Michael Jackson (571), Prince (654), and even their frequent producer Brian Eno (523). They do, however, edge out such luminaries as Deep Purple (269), Nirvana (244), R.E.M. (219), The Doors (208), and Buddy Holly (197).

Many of the *New Grove* biographies were written by a small group of well-known pop scholars, and some, such as Rob Bowman (Steve Cropper, Grateful Dead, Supremes), are inclined towards fuller bibliographies and works lists, whereas others, such as Robert Walser (R.E.M., Nirvana) and John Covach (Eagles, Doors) confine themselves more to biography, maintaining a similar length and tone for all their articles. Yet Dave Laing was able to churn out a Sex Pistols (456) biography almost three times longer than the one he did for the Clash (188) who had a far more extensive musical career and were undeniably much more interesting stylistically and socio-politically. Inexplicably, some controversial artists such as Prince (654), Madonna (497), and Michael Jackson (571) receive substantially more attention than critically acclaimed “indie” artists, like U2 (298) and R.E.M. (219), who one might expect to merit at least equal coverage. Artists whose works tend more toward the strictly musical appear, paradoxically, to merit less attention in the flagship music biographical dictionary than those who embody current hot-topic issues such as media, gender, and race.

Non-academic reference sources are also available, and they tend to paint a different picture. Using the popular *All Music Guide* as a benchmark, the biographical

index for 80s music is almost the reverse of that provided by the *New Grove*.⁶ The Beatles (5,062) still dominate, but bands such as Nirvana (2,194), R.E.M. (2,098), the Clash (1,771), and U2 (1,740) are treated in substantially greater depth than Madonna (1,509), Prince (1,003), and even the Police (1,379). *All Music Guide* devotes far more space to summarizing musical style in sufficient detail for a reader to get some sense of the music, often through comparison to well-known artists. *All Music Guide* may betray a slight pro-American bias, given the size of the Nirvana and R.E.M. biographies compared with, for example, U2 and the Police, and a similar bias toward bands over solo artists, likely reflecting the tastes and priorities of its editors. Nevertheless, the *New Grove* / *All Music* comparison points to an uneven reception of pop artists, particularly those from the 1980s and after, whose legacies to pop are not yet clear, and whose own careers, in some cases, have not yet ended.

U2 are routinely cited in the popular press as unquestionably one of the “greatest” bands of the 80s and 90s.⁷ Starting in 1987 with *The Joshua Tree*, U2 have won twenty-one Grammy Awards, including multiple wins for album or song of the year.⁸ *Rolling Stone* magazine proclaimed them “Our Choice: Band of the ‘80s’ ” on a 1985 cover,

⁶ Results were obtained by performing an MS Word word-count on the biographical entry only. *All Music Guide* also has separate links for each artist’s discography, album personnel, reviews, etc. All biographies < www.allmusic.com > (6 November 2005).

⁷ Typical is LA Times critic Robert Hilburn’s observation: “U2 is what the Rolling Stones ceased being years ago—the greatest rock ‘n’ roll band in the world...” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 1987.

⁸ This is the most Grammys won by any rock band. By comparison, the Beatles have seven, Michael Jackson thirteen, Madonna five, Elton John five, the Rolling Stones two, and R.E.M. three. Sting, however, has sixteen (he was tied with U2 until the 2005 Grammys in which U2 won five more for *How To Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*). The holder of the most Grammy Awards is Sir Georg Solti with thirty-one. See <www.Grammy.com> (28 February 2006). This is not so much a measure of excellence, or innovation, but rather of acceptance by the usually conservative voting members of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. As is notoriously the case for the film industry’s Academy Awards, the voting members of the Recording Academy are subject to lobbying by various music industry interests, including the record companies themselves.

largely on the strength of their Live Aid performance, and *Time* magazine called them “Rock’s Hottest Ticket” on the cover of the April 27, 1987 edition.⁹ *Rolling Stone* magazine’s *The 100 Greatest Albums of the 80s* ranks U2’s *The Joshua Tree* at number three (with *London Calling* by the Clash, and Prince and the New Power Generation’s *Purple Rain*, ranking first and second respectively) although their *500 Greatest Albums of All Time* has *The Joshua Tree* in position twenty-seven.¹⁰ However, perhaps the surest sign that U2 had achieved a certain iconicity was their 1998 animated appearance on an episode of *The Simpsons*, where they engaged in self-parody as supporters of responsible waste management.¹¹

Album sales is a measure of some kind of success, although, like most of the indices considered thus far, exactly what it means likely differs tremendously over time and across genres and styles. Sales do not necessarily speak to quality, but rather to a highly variable blend of quality, marketing and demographics, and chance. Furthermore, there is no reliable way to tabulate global record sales. Estimates for U2’s total sales are in the range of 100 million units, including albums and singles.¹² This places U2 in the

⁹ U2 are the only the fifth rock band to have appeared on the cover of *Time*. The Beatles appeared in caricature in 1967, The Band in 1970, The Who in 1975, and the Rolling Stones 1989. Many solo artists, including Madonna, Michael Jackson, Liza Minelli, Bruce Springsteen, and David Bowie have appeared on *Time* covers. Bono appeared solo on the March 4, 2002 cover, which asked “Can Bono Save the World?” and he made a second appearance in 2005 with Bill and Melinda Gates as “Persons of the Year.” See <www.time.com/time/coversearch> (30 January 2006).

¹⁰ Fred Goodman and Parke Puterbaugh, ed., *The 100 Greatest Albums of the 80s* (New York: St. Martin’s/Rolling Stone, 1990), 18-19. U2’s other entry, *War*, is listed as number 40 (between ZZ Top’s *Eliminator*, and R.E.M.’s *Document*). Joe Levy, ed., *The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time* (New York: Wenner Books, 2005). The Clash’ *London Calling* heads up all 80s albums in position ten. *The Joshua Tree* is U2’s highest ranked album, and the only other album from the 80s to crack the top thirty.

¹¹ *The Simpsons* regularly employs guest artists playing themselves, including such rock luminaries as Paul and Linda McCartney, the Rolling Stones, The Who, the Moody Blues, Elvis Costello, Tom Jones, Elton John, and Peter Dinklage. While occasionally featuring contemporary artists, most would be considered paragons of “classic rock,” and likely reflect the tastes of creator Matt Groening (b. 1954).

upper echelons of record sales for a rock group, as opposed to a “pop” group, although likely still significantly behind the Beatles (over 500 million?), Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, ABBA (350 million?), Garth Brooks, and Nana Mouskouri, amongst many others, with at least equally long careers and mass appeal.

In 2005, U2 were the music industry’s top money makers with total sales of \$255,022,633.35. The Rolling Stones were second at \$152,356,754.50, followed by country artist Kenny Chesney (\$87,731,463.50), former Beatle Sir Paul McCartney (\$84,263,375.10), and Sir Elton John (\$77,150,061.65).¹³

Critical reception has, naturally, varied over twenty five years, but one could safely say that U2 have generally been “critically acclaimed,” at least in the professional rock press. Having risen from the early 80s underground, they were one of the darlings of the college cognoscenti until *Rattle and Hum* in 1988, which led to a somewhat predictable anti-U2 backlash after the hype surrounding *The Joshua Tree* (1987), U2’s commercial breakout album. They reemerged “reinvented” with *Achtung Baby* in 1991, faltered again (at least in North America) with the industrial/Euro-dance influenced *Pop* in 1997, but recovered yet again with *All That You Can’t Leave Behind* (2000) and *How*

¹² There is no central source for such information. In the UK, this information is collected by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI), and in the US by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). However, one great benefit of the internet is that various fanatics all over the world are able to make available the fruits of their painstaking efforts, including one person who has taken it upon himself to report compiled album sales on a weekly basis, using various official sources worldwide. He estimates U2’s total album sales as of 1997 as 66,880,789. This does not include *All That You Can’t Leave Behind* (2000), *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004), and *U2: the Best of 1990-2000* (2002), nor does it take into account singles or videos. See <<http://forum.interference.com/t57204.html>> (19 January 2006).

¹³ “U2 Tops Billboard’s Money Makers Chart,” *Billboard*, 20 January 2006. These figures were compiled from the Nielson Music data and Billboard’s Boxscore figures to create a composite based on album sales, digital sales, and box office receipts. U2 ranked 27th in album sales, ninth in digital sales and No. 1 at the box office. It is noteworthy that most of these artists, who were active from as early as the 1960s and 70s, remain amongst the highest concert draws in addition to having extensive back catalogues. For example, Paul McCartney’s album sales rank would have been below No. 100 were it not for the 1.3 million Beatles units sold in 2005. With Bono’s elevation to the peerage in 2007, nobility is well represented in this list.

to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb (2004), both earning multiple Grammys, and being hailed as a return to the classic U2 sound.

U2 are generally described as a socially conscious, political band capable of reinventing themselves at just the right moment (or slightly afterward). Bono is well known for his humanitarian work to drop Third World debt, and campaigning for AIDS relief in Africa, amongst other activities. U2 were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2005, their first year of eligibility, with Bruce Springsteen delivering the induction speech. This occurred mere days before embarking upon an eighteen-month world tour that was the highest grossing of 2005, comprising 118 sold-out shows before three million fans.¹⁴ This continues their long tradition of heavy touring, dating back to the band's earliest days. Like fellow college rockers R.E.M., U2 built much of their early audience through an almost annual sequence of album release followed by extensive touring in support of the album. Unlike R.E.M., however, U2 received considerable promotional support from their record company, Island Records.

During the ascendancy of *The Joshua Tree*, Edge remarked that even he was getting sick of reading about U2. He was, of course, referring to their near ubiquity in the popular press. However, U2's treatment in the academic press has been far less comprehensive. Applying a similar method to that presented earlier regarding the biographical indexes from various reference sources, one might search the primary musicological search engine, the *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature*, and generate a

¹⁴ Evan Serpick, "U2 Look Back on U.S. Success," *Rolling Stone*, 12 January 2006, < www.rollingstone.com/artists/u2/articles/story/9142769/u2_look_back_on_us_success > (25 March 2006). This article has U2's "Vertigo" tour as the year's "second-biggest" after the Rolling Stones. It is unclear whether "bigness" is determined by attendance or gate receipts, or both. Recall that *Billboard* (see n. 13) had U2 as No. 1 at the "box office," which one would assume is concert receipts. It is not clear whether this includes merchandising.

index of scholarship based on the number of records retrieved through searching an artist's name. Again, as one might expect, the Beatles generate the most records retrieved at 573, whereas U2 generate only seventy-nine.¹⁵ On the whole, it remains difficult to find useful, detailed musicological information on U2. Albin Zak and Allan Moore both provide short summaries of their style, and Susan Fast offers one of few article-length examinations of their style.¹⁶

Assessing U2's legacy to rock is problematic, and not only because their career is still in full swing at time of writing. It is difficult to argue that a distinct U2 style has propagated through the industry, or that they are strongly associated with a well-defined rock subgenre the way that the Sex Pistols and Nirvana are associated with punk and grunge, respectively. They do, however, have a readily identifiable sonic signature. This is based primarily on Bono's distinctive vocal timbre which has remained more or less stable while the typical male vocal sound, especially in the 90s, underwent a substantial shift into darker timbres and mumbled articulation, as heard from lead singers such as Nirvana's Curt Cobain, Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, and the first reasonably well-known purveyor of the style, Alice in Chains' Layne Staley.¹⁷ Similarly, the echo laden sound of Edge's guitar, his arpeggiated, altered-chord voicings, and the idiomatic interplay

¹⁵ This search was completed by simply entering "Beatles" and "U2" respectively into the RILM keyword search box. Of the seventy-nine hits for U2, only approximately one third could be considered scholarly. The majority are short articles in trade magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, *Spin*, etc. Other searches generated hits as follows: Rolling Stones (312), Michael Jackson (104), Bruce Springsteen (114), Grateful Dead (99), Beach Boys (34), and Garth Brooks (18), (12 November 2005).

¹⁶ See Allan Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*, 2d ed. (Aldershot Hants: Ashgate, 2001), 162-4; Zak, *Poetics of Rock*, 67-70; Susan Fast, "Music, Contexts, and Meaning in U2," in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett, 33-57 (New York: Garland, 2000). These are generally excellent summaries, although Fast incorrectly casts "Sunday Bloody Sunday" in A-minor (p. 39) rather than B-minor (tuned down a semi-tone, i.e., sounding in B \flat -minor). See Chapter Four, *supra*, regarding *Boy* for tuning conventions on U2's early albums.

¹⁷ This chronology of the emergence of the vocal component of the so-called Seattle sound was pointed out to me by Ashleigh Delaye.

between the active drums, and the relatively static, punk-influenced bass lines further contribute to U2's unique sonic signature. Thus, while their sound permits almost automatic identification, it did not spawn a "U2 school."¹⁸ Contrast this, again, with Nirvana, whose 1991 debut album *Nevermind* knocked Michael Jackson's *Bad* out of the number one album position—perhaps the pivotal event inspiring innumerable grunge imitators and signaling a stylistic sea change between the end of the 80s and the rise of grunge.¹⁹

In fact, U2's unique sound likely inhibited imitators since bands with very distinctive styles, and particularly those with an easily identified front person like Bono, resist stylistic duplication. Also, the undercurrent of Christianity, their general avoidance of clichéd romantic themes, and their lack of musical training took them sufficiently out of the mainstream so that any duplication would likely be too transparent. The grunge sound, on the other hand, was nonspecific enough that many bands were able to work within the style. U2 and R.E.M., however, do not fit easily into a given category or stylistic genre and, thus, discourage copycats. Also, neither U2 nor R.E.M. can be said to have burst upon the music scene, but rather gradually built up an audience through a cycle of touring and album release such that A&R departments would not have easily identified them as bands who might profitably be copied. Nonetheless, R.E.M. is often cited as extremely influential for reintroducing a folksy, Byrds-inspired sound to 80s rock, to the point that any 80s "alternative" band with even a hint of acoustic

¹⁸ Returning to *Allmusicguide*, it lists approximately fifteen "followers" of U2, of which only the Alarm are reasonably well known.

¹⁹ Nirvana were certainly not the originators of the grunge style, but they were important in making this originally regional style into a worldwide phenomenon.

instrumentation or arcane lyrics was often described in terms of, or compared to, R.E.M. The same, however, seems not to be true of U2.

Rock Music in the 80s

The 1980s endure almost instantaneous associations with big hair, tacky synthesizers, and low-quality, “cheesy” videos. It is also seen as the period where the vitality and angst of the punk “revolution” became softened and commercialized by the New Romantics and the rise of New Wave.²⁰ These are frequently legitimate observations, but the commingled roles of innovation and revival, and their operation amidst the inevitable pop enculturation of persons raised within Anglo-American culture in the 60s and 70s, are often overlooked.²¹

Not only were older styles being revived, older artists were as well. Resurrected stars of the 60s and 70s who enjoyed massive popularity with new material in the 80s include former Genesis member Peter Gabriel, Paul Simon of Simon and Garfunkel, the Band’s Robbie Robertson, the Rolling Stones, Creedence Clearwater Revival’s John Fogerty, Roy Orbison (a Traveling Wilbury along with 60s legends George Harrison and Bob Dylan), and the consistently unpredictable Neil Young, to name but a few. Unlike the experimental epic productions of 70s art rock, the 80s retained radio-friendly three to four minute songs as the main genre. Thus we have the intermingling of new artists, genres, and styles with artists and styles undergoing revival, as well as enduring styles

²⁰ The “New Romantics” comprised a London based movement of musicians concerned with avant-garde fashion, dance club culture, and apoliticism, epitomized by Boy George of Culture Club. Much of the London New Wave scene arose from people originally describing themselves as New Romantics. See Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened: Culture Club and the New Pop* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985) for a detailed description of the New Romantic subculture.

²¹ Covach discusses this with respect to New Wave music in “Pangs of History in Late 1970s New-Wave Rock,” in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan Moore, 173-195 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

such as “hard rock” in the vein of AC/DC and Foreigner (which would crystallize into “heavy metal” with the help of MTV), R&B, adult contemporary pop epitomized by Glenn Frey and Don Henley (formerly of The Eagles), and the emergence of rap and other dance-based genres. Added to this mélange was the influence of so-called world musics, especially reggae, ska, and dub, which were major influences on many of the British punks. It was also during the 80s that the entertainment industry first had to come to grips with rock stars entering their forties, setting the stage for U2’s acceptance well into the 90s and beyond. This also raised fundamental questions about rock as the music of youth and rebellion.

Punk Rock

The late 70s is often portrayed as a period of revolution and innovation in rock. The musical aesthetic of the late 1960s and most of the 1970s, embodied in its most successful artists like the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, Elton John, and in the parallel phenomenon of disco, is often presented as being “overthrown” or “rejected” by the punk rockers. Critics of a sociological bent often highlight the political and social turmoil defining the period, including the defeat of the U.S. in Vietnam in 1975, the onset of the twin conservative administrations of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the Falklands War of 1982, and the reemergence of the fear of nuclear war between east and west. This chain of events may be roughly projected onto the rise of punk around 1975, through to the emergence of New Wave and MTV in the early 80s.

The most obvious rejection of the “hippie aesthetic” in the late 70s and 80s was, in fact, more visual than musical.²² After a decade of long-haired men, moustaches and

²² The “hippie aesthetic” is described by John Covach as a stance arising in the mid- to late 60s whereby “the rock musician is an artist who has a responsibility to produce sophisticated music using whatever

bell bottoms, and multi-layered *Annie Hall* look-alikes, the appearance of punks (of both genders) with short hair, ripped, tight jeans, and an “anti-cool” visual presentation (including elements as diverse as skinny ties and Nazi armbands) gave the impression of something counter-culture (even if the music was often thinly disguised 50s-style rock). This visual incongruity was given an ironic, avant-garde twist by the nascent post-punks, New Romantics, and their followers. Performers like Elvis Costello, who basically looked like Buddy Holly, but who jerked spasmodically, over-pronounced his lyrics, and jumped around with feet apart and knees together, evoked a reaction of curiosity if not outright perplexity.²³ Although all the punks, post-punks, art-punks, New Romantics, New Wavers, College and “underground” rockers were more heavily influenced than they realized by the music they purported to reject, the perception of revolution and innovation served to bury the more overt elements of the 70s hippie aesthetic.²⁴

However, despite the serious political-social upheaval of this time, the punk movement must be seen as heavily rooted in the revival of 1950s rock and roll. It was common for even the crudest punk band to have at least one member possessing substantial familiarity with rock’s short history. In the case of the Sex Pistols, it was original bassist Glenn Matlock who, or so the joke went, was kicked out of the band because he had too much musical training.²⁵ Johnny Rotten, lead singer for the Sex

means are at his or her disposal.” See Covach, *What’s That Sound* (New York: Norton, 2006), 304-7; see also Covach, “Pangs of History,” *passim*.

²³ It is a stretch now to call Elvis Costello a punk rocker, although that was how he was originally presented and perceived. However, he was far too skilled and trained a musician to be satisfied playing in the style of the Sex Pistols or The Damned. It is for artists such as him that the term “post-punk” was conceived.

²⁴ Covach further points out the irony that many new wave musicians actually came very close to looking like typical mid- 60s hippies. See “Pangs of History,” 195.

²⁵ *Classic Albums: Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols*, DVD (Capitol, 2002).

Pistols is reputed to have had an impressive reggae and dub collection.²⁶ Similarly, both Joe Strummer and Mick Jones of the Clash were avid record collectors as teens in the 70s.²⁷ They were anxious to return to the spirit of the early Rolling Stones and other British rockers, who, in turn, took their lead from the original American rock artists such as Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, who, themselves, were connoisseurs of American blues. The same is true of R.E.M.'s guitarist Peter Buck, a dedicated record collector whose musical education came while working in some of the South's finest used record stores.²⁸

New Wave and Post-Punk

Likely the dominant impression of the 80s is that it was the period of New Wave music, understood as a synthesizer-driven style pioneered in the UK, and popularized by the rise of the music video. *All Music Guide* summarizes "New Wave" as follows:

During the late '70s and early '80s, New Wave was a catch-all term for the music that directly followed punk rock; often, the term encompassed punk itself, as well. In retrospect, it became clear that the music following punk could be divided, more or less, into two categories—post-punk and new wave. Where post-punk was arty, difficult, and challenging, new wave was pop music, pure and simple. It retained the fresh vigor and irreverence of punk music, as well as a fascination with electronics, style, and art.²⁹

Post-punk, on the other hand, is defined as: "...a more adventurous and arty form of punk, no less angry or political but often more musically complex and diverse."³⁰

Many punk musicians saw their movement as a return to the roots of rock, a chance to rescue their favorite music from what was perceived as bloated and bombastic

²⁶ See John Lydon, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994).

²⁷ Pat Gilbert, *Passion Is a Fashion: The Real Story of the Clash* (Da Capo, 2004), 9, 20-1.

²⁸ David Buckley, *R.E.M. Fiction: An Alternative Biography* (London: Virgin Books, 2003). See particularly Chapter One, " 'Something Beyond the Flannel Shirt' 1979-80," 3-16.

²⁹ *All Music Guide*, s.v. "New Wave" (5 December 2005).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, s.v. "Post Punk."

corporate rock epitomized by bands like Fleetwood Mac, Journey, and even Pink Floyd.³¹

Many of the post-punks, however, were slightly too young to have encountered early rock, and were themselves emulating the punks without fully appreciating the context of revival. This was certainly the case with U2, as there is little indication that they had had much of a rock education.

Influences on U2

As the preceding discussion suggests, understanding U2 in their time requires considering the musical influences extant when the band formed. In view of their lack of musical skill, it is strange that they decided to be musicians at all.

All members of U2 were born in 1960 or 1961, and would have been approximately sixteen when the punk movement began. This makes them about five years younger than most of the punks, such as the Sex Pistols and the Clash, all of whom were born in the mid- 1950s. This slight difference in age is an important divider between the punks, and the post-punkers immediately following them. With the Sex Pistols and other technically deficient models abounding, it is no surprise that teenagers almost incapable of playing an instrument might not consider that a major impediment to becoming rock musicians.

The question of U2's musical knowledge, and their influences is a difficult one. We are essentially limited to the recollections of the individual members, but memories are unreliable and subject to reinvention, particularly when those making the recollections have their legacy to consider. It is clear, however, that the young boys who

³¹ The adjective "bloated" is used with startling frequency and regularity in rock encyclopedias when referring to AOR ("album oriented rock") music of the mid- 70s. Bands like Yes and Emerson, Lake, and Palmer are often cited, thus "bloatedness" is likely evoked by dense textures, longer songs with complex forms and textural change, and, perhaps, a lack of the speed and intensity so favored by the punks.

came together to form U2 were not (with the possible exception of drummer Larry Mullen Jr.) accomplished, or even competent, musicians. In the case of Bono, it appears his training consisted of being shown a few guitar chords by his brother.³² Adam Clayton, while possessing the right gear and attitude, is recalled as being almost completely unable to play bass:

...punk rock had just happened, so it wasn't really important that you knew how to play so long as you had some equipment [laughs]. I'd simply decided I was going to be a musician, so I got this Ibanez copy of a Gibson EB-3 and a Marshall head, and I guess those crucial ingredients made the others figure I knew a bit more about music. I did know a thing or two about my equipment, but I certainly didn't know anything about playing.³³

Edge was only slightly more proficient on guitar.³⁴ Many guitarists take up the instrument in their teens, often because this is when they become interested in popular music and wish to emulate their new-found heroes, and partly because this is the earliest that a young person can physically handle the instrument. Similarly, bass guitar players often begin in their teens, and are most often converted guitarists. Few aspiring musicians consciously elect to become bassists, as it can be excruciatingly boring to play the instrument by oneself, and its role in a band is one of the least well understood to most casual listeners.

³² Michka Assayas, *Bono: in Conversation with Michka Assayas* (New York: Riverhead, 2005), 14. He describes the Beatles' "Dear Prudence" as the first song he learned to play. Given Bono's very meager guitar skills to the present, it is unlikely that he applied himself very diligently to mastering the instrument.

³³ Adam Clayton, quoted in Gregory Isola, "Reluctant Rock Star: How U2's Adam Clayton Learned to Play—and Conquer the World Onstage," *Bass Player*, 11 November 2000, 55. Bono tells a similar tale in Michka Assayas, *Bono: in Conversation with Michka Assayas* (New York: Riverhead, 2005), 49. The bass lines on the demo recordings, and on the *Boy* album suggest that, after two years of playing, Clayton was still only minimally proficient technically, although his harmonic interaction with Edge's guitar is quite creative at times (see Chapter Four, *supra*).

³⁴ The most reliable biographies of U2's early days are by their contemporaries. See especially Carter Alan *Outside is America: U2 in the U.S.* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992). Ireland's *Hot Press* magazine has numerous articles about the youthful U2 from which aspects of biography can be assembled. At present there are no high quality biographies of U2. Eamon Dunphy's somewhat hyperbolic *Unforgettable Fire: The Definitive Biography of U2* (New York: Warner Books, 1987) was published only four months after the release of *The Joshua Tree* in 1987 and only touches on events after the Live Aid concert in 1985.

For the majority of U2's members, the impetus to begin playing was the simple fact of the formation of the band. In late 1976, Larry Mullen posted a notice on a board at Dublin's Mount Temple Comprehensive School seeking musicians to form a rock band. He was a drummer in the Artane Boy's Band, a well-known local marching band founded in 1872 that performed at many Dublin sporting events, but he was in search of something a little more contemporary.³⁵ Edge, his brother Dick, Clayton, and Bono were amongst those attending the same school who answered the ad. They began by jamming, and eventually stabilized at the four core members who comprise the band to the present (Dick having left to form The Virgin Prunes with other friends). U2 are, therefore, somewhat unique in that their formative musical training was mostly together, and exclusive to the four of them. They were unusually aware of this even at the earliest stages; in 1980, during the recording of their debut album, Bono remarked, "...our main influences in this group are each other. They're not outside. They're very definitely each other."³⁶ Similarly, Edge observed, "It's a very important part of the way we work, this insular type of development we've had where we haven't been exposed in the first nine months to a trendy, cliquy atmosphere that you have in London."³⁷ This relative musical ignorance, both in terms of musicianship and a solid knowledge of the rock canon, as well as their temporal situation at the end of the punk heyday likely contributed to the

³⁵ Mullen had two years of piano lessons before he was ten, but recalls never practicing. He was essentially fired by his teacher. See "The Modern Drummer," *Propaganda*, 1 January 1986, reprinted in *U2: The Best of Propaganda* (New York: Thunder's Mouth, 2003), 40.

³⁶ Bono, quoted in Paulo Hewitt, "Getting Into U2," *Melody Maker*, 30 September 1980, reprinted in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews*, ed. Hank Bodowitz (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2003), 6.

³⁷ Edge, quoted *ibid.*

development of their signature sound and the formal idiosyncrasies that characterize their music.

If pressed, one would most likely describe U2 as emerging from the post-punk scene, but this label is applied retroactively. At some distance, it is clear that they have more in common with other artists who have had that label applied to them, such as Joy Division, the Jam, Echo and the Bunnymen, Elvis Costello, and Talking Heads. However, they have also been lumped into the “College Rock” category with such contemporaries as R.E.M. and Psychedelic Furs. However, early journalistic pieces on U2 frequently commented on the difficulty in characterizing them in terms of the punk or New Wave movements. Bono observed, “We chose the name U2 to be ambiguous, to stay away from categorization.”³⁸ Similarly, responding to the question “Why the name U2?”

Clayton recalled:

What happened was when we were getting the band together, the guy who did all our album sleeves, drew up a list of about ten names. The note to him had been that the name has got to be graphically very strong and it had to imply that we’re a band that is post ‘76, but without being associated with the punk thing. And it also had to be the kind of name that when people heard it, it aroused their interest to find out what it was all about. I think the name largely succeeds at doing that.³⁹

The requirement that the name imply “post-‘76” suggests that the emergent post-punk milieu strongly identified with the punk movement as something distinct from the mainstream (whatever that might be), and something that had a very definite onset.

However, there was a desire to go beyond the goals of punk, hence the name should not be overtly offensive, counter-culture, irreverent, or anti-establishment.

³⁸ Bono, quoted in Tim Sommer, “U2,” *Trouser Press*, 1 July 1981, reprinted in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews*, ed. Hank Bodowitz (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2003), 11.

³⁹ Adam Clayton, quoted in Rich Sutton, “Exclusive Interview: Adam Clayton,” *Hit Parader*, 1 June 1992, 36. The “guy” Clayton refers to is Steve Averill, who U2 initially approached to become their manager, although he declined due to other commitments.

When asked point-blank about their influences, rockers commonly try to demonstrate their taste and knowledge by listing other artists who might reflect positively on them, thus establishing a pedigree—it is more an exercise in name-dropping than a true list of influences. For example, it was common for aspiring heavy metal guitarists in the 80s to cite J. S. Bach as an influence, probably based on their being able to play the ubiquitous Bouree in E minor—but it would be a stretch to suggest that many of them had studied Bach’s music in any detail at all.⁴⁰ Often, it is more instructive to consider how outsiders view the band stylistically. For example, a typical one-line observation regarding U2’s roots is: “U2 achieved worldwide megastardom with their minimalist take on the sonic trance/drone legacy of the Velvet Underground, Television, and Joy Division....”⁴¹ Similarly, Johnny Marr, guitarist for the Smiths observed: “In a sense, Bernard Sumner [of Joy Division, later to become New Order] was one of the most influential guitarists and writers of the ‘80s. There would never have been a U2 or a Cure if it hadn’t been for Joy Division.”⁴² When rock journalist Bill Flanagan suggested to John Lydon of P.I.L. (formerly Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols) that their bass and guitar sound could have been “the prototype for half of U2’s early records,” Lydon remarked:

They’ve hardly been appreciative of the fact. They haven’t been very honest about where their influences have come from, have they? A great deal of U2 has to do with early P.I.L. It’s the Edge all over, isn’t it? That’s fine, that’s not an insult. He liked it and he took it someplace else. Made it his own. Well, good luck to him. It just gets irritating when people tell me ‘Oh, you’re not as good as U2.’ Don’t you know where they came from?⁴³

⁴⁰ From the *First Lute Suite*, BWV 996. This bourre is a simple two-voice piece that has been transcribed in countless guitar magazines and anthologies.

⁴¹ Robert Palmer, *Rock & Roll: an Unruly History* (New York: Harmony, 1995), 285.

⁴² Johnny Marr, quoted in Joe Gore, “Guitar Anti-hero,” *Guitar Player* 24, January 1990, 72.

⁴³ John Lydon, quoted in Bill Flanagan, *U2 at the End of the World* (New York: Delacorte, 1995), 253.

A few commentators other than Lydon have compared Edge's guitar style to that of P.I.L.'s Keith Levene.⁴⁴

Edge himself often points to the guitar style of Tom Verlaine of the American group Television, who were one of the founders of the mid- 70s underground scene centered on CBGBs in New York. While direct comparisons between Edge and Verlaine reveal few similarities, Verlaine's unusual guitar lines, which often avoided typical pentatonic structures, relying more on arpeggiated altered chords, do recall Edge's style. He also cites the playing of Neil Young, whose similar avoidance of typical scale types and guitar idioms resonates in Edge's playing.⁴⁵ Edge has also claimed an interest in the playing of Robert Fripp (originally of King Crimson), Adrian Belew, and Holger Czukay.⁴⁶

Larry Mullen was a fan of the glam rockers such as the Sweet, T. Rex, Roxy Music, and, especially, David Bowie.⁴⁷ This was a fairly typical preference in the 70s, and apparently sufficiently consuming that Mullen never became familiar with other rock styles. Commenting in 1988, Mullen observed: "I like to go to bargain basements and look for old records. I missed a whole generation of music. I missed out on the '60s and

⁴⁴ Jane Garcia, "Levene Dangerously," *New Music Express*, 16 December 1989, 2. Levene was an original member of The Clash, but was "voted" out before any recordings were released. While not well known, he must be considered a seminal figure in developing a post-punk guitar style.

⁴⁵ References to Verlaine and Young in Tom Nolan and Jas Obrecht, "The Edge," *Guitar Player* 19, June 1985, 56.

⁴⁶ Edge, quoted in Bill Graham "This is the Edge," *Hot Press*, 16 November 1984, 14. These three influences are first mentioned in this article, which is post-*The Unforgettable Fire*, so they may come from exposure to Eno, who was certainly friends with Fripp and Belew (the latter appearing on some Talking Heads and David Bowie albums produced by Eno), and Czukay, an avant-garde German bassist who studied with Stockhausen, and was a founding member of the "Kraut-Rock" band Can in 1969, was likely brought to Edge's attention by Eno. Edge again mentions Verlaine in this article.

⁴⁷ Michka Assayas, *Bono: in Conversation*, 45, 48. Bowie's influence becomes more overt once Brian Eno enters the picture; he produced three albums by Bowie around the time U2 were formed.

the early '70s—Creedence Clearwater [Revival], the Velvet Underground and Bob Dylan.”⁴⁸ Bono and Clayton have not commented as directly on what they listened to while growing up, although we know Bono had some familiarity with the Beatles (see n. 32), as would almost anyone born in 1960.

Attempting to recall wider influences on the band as a whole, Edge stated:

Early on it was probably the Fall, [Echo and] the Bunnymen, Magazine.⁴⁹ All those influences are there at the back of your mind when you're working on something, and you kind of jump off those influences. But we've never put anything out because it reminded us of somebody. In the end it's got to be something unique.... I thought “Out of Control” [from *Boy*] sounded too much like The Skids.⁵⁰

It is noteworthy that all the bands mentioned by Edge in this 2005 interview were formed in 1977 and had their initial releases between 1978 and 1980. Frequent comparisons to Joy Division (also formed in 1977) are further borne out by Bono, who claimed to *Sounds* magazine that “A Day Without Me” from U2’s debut album *Boy* was about the May, 1980 suicide of Joy Division’s front man Ian Curtis.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Larry Mullen, quoted in Brad Balfour, “Mullen it Over” *Star Hits*, 1 January 1988, < www.atu2.com/news/article.src?ID=1245&Key=Mullen&Year=&Cat=5 > (29 March 2006). “atu2.com” is one of the better unofficial fan sites, and they are very assiduous in reproducing published materials regarding U2 that are otherwise difficult to acquire. There are many other similar sites.

⁴⁹ The Fall are a British punk/post-punk band formed in 1977, and still active to the present, although with numerous personnel changes. Echo and the Bunnymen, also active to the present, are often described as the prototypical post-punk band, and progenitors of the 90s “shoe-gazer” bands (so called for their penchant for standing motionless on stage, heads down, faces obscured by their stringy hair. However, to connoisseurs of the style, “shoe gazers” were a sub-genre of experimental indie bands who were actually “gazing” at the array of effects pedals at their feet). Magazine was another punk/post-punk group with fluid membership, and part of the Buzzcocks/Siouxsie and the Banshees milieu, an artier offshoot of the Sex Pistols’ scene.

⁵⁰ Edge, quoted in Mark Ellen, “The Edge: My Crazy Life in U2,” *The Independent*, 11 November 2005, 12. The Skids were a Scottish punk or “art-punk” band who, like U2, formed around 1977 and released their first recordings in 1979. They were not successful in North America. Their guitarist, Stuart Adamson, later formed the internationally successful Big Country, whose hit “In a Big Country,” was produced by Steve Lillywhite, whom we shall encounter as the producer of several U2 albums, and a mixer for several U2 songs by other producers. In September, 2006, U2 and California neo-punk band Green Day convened at Abbey Road Studios to record a cover of the Skids’ “The Saints are Coming.”

⁵¹ Bono, quoted in *Sounds*, September 1980, reprinted in George Gimarc, *Post Punk Diary: 1980-1982* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 77. See Chapter Four for a discussion of “A Day Without Me.”

Thus, U2 were part of a large emerging scene that was literally post-punk, and comprised overwhelmingly of social peers. They appear to have been much more heavily influenced by this contemporary scene than by the classic rockers heard on the radio in their formative years, although the references to the Who and Neil Young indicate a definite awareness of these icons. Walter Everett has painstakingly compiled an enormous list of over 300 cover tunes that the Beatles learned during their early Hamburg period, but it appears that the early post-punks almost completely avoided covers, most likely because they were too hard to play. In 1982, Edge observed: “Much earlier on we tried to do cover versions of things, but to be honest we were so bad at working out stuff that we just had to give it up and write our own songs.”⁵² In any event, since the Beatles, it was simply the norm that a band should write its own material.⁵³

Stage performances in rock are highly ritualized, with time-honored, or time-worn, postures and poses often communicating as much as the music. It does not appear that the members of U2 were particularly avid concert-goers, but they do recall seeing several concerts in the late 70s including shows by Irish punks Stiff Little Fingers and reggae star Bob Marley.⁵⁴ There was, however, not much of a punk bar scene in Dublin at the time. Critics, even the jaded London press, frequently reported that U2’s early live performances were riveting, with massive energy and vitality coming off the stage. A 1980 review in London’s *New Music Express* gushed:

⁵² Edge, quoted in Tom Nolan, “On the Edge of Success,” *U2 Magazine*, 1 May 1982, reprinted in *Best of Propaganda*, 12-3.

⁵³ Little information is available regarding U2’s pre-*Boy* set lists. However, in recounting the story of Paul McGuinness seeing U2 for the first time, there is a reference to “a couple of songs by Television....” See Dunphy, *Unforgettable Fire*, 119.

⁵⁴ Edge, “My Crazy Life,” 14.

Only a blind man and the dead could ignore the passion and charisma generated by singer Bono. The very essence which underpins the performance is an electric vibrancy between the stage and the dancefloor. It's something loads of groups try for but only a few can achieve.⁵⁵

Four months later, Paul Du Noyer, writing for the same paper described U2 as:

...a blur of shirts and haircuts, pouring out music that's at once simple and rich, a massive, monumental sound, but one that draws its grandeur from pure emotion and excitement rather than the old hard rock posture and bombast...It's hard to recall an atmosphere so charged as tonight's.⁵⁶

However, a reviewer from *Sounds* found the same show “uninspired and overwrought.”⁵⁷

The business environment of U2's early years was also somewhat out of the ordinary. After relatively few performances, they were introduced by Bill Graham, a critic at Ireland's *Hot Press* magazine, to Paul McGuinness, a thirty year old dabbler in the film and music industries who, in May, 1978, agreed to manage the band (taking over from the smooth-talking Clayton who had taken the role on himself). McGuinness has remained their only manager. He agreed with earlier advice from Steve Averill (the person who had first suggested the name “U2,” but declined the role of manager) that the band should split all income equally, with manager Paul McGuinness cut in as an equal member.⁵⁸ All songs are described as “Music: U2; Lyrics: Bono,” thus preventing many of the economic inequities experienced in bands where songwriting and publishing income goes to specific band members, and recognizing from an early stage the functional reality that all band members were equal in molding the music—a central condition to the compositional model presented throughout this dissertation.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Gavin Martin, unnamed concert review from *New Music Express*, November 1980, reproduced in part in *Post Punk Diary*, 107.

⁵⁶ Paul du Noyer, unnamed concert review from *New Music Express*, February 1981, reproduced in part, *ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁷ Author unnamed, reported in *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Dunphy, *Unforgettable Fire*, 118.

U2 provide a rare example of an extremely commercially successful rock band that has been relatively untouched by the music industry. From the earliest days, they were given essentially complete artistic control by Chris Blackwell's Island Records. It is well recognized that the standard recording contract is likely the most unbalanced commercial agreement in the western business world, but U2 were subjected to as little outside interference, or influence, as is likely possible. They were also able to regain publishing rights to their own music when they renegotiated their contract with Island in 1984.⁶⁰ R.E.M. was another group to achieve great commercial success with relatively little input from their record company, perhaps reflecting the independent spirit pervading the music industry in the early 80s. Both U2 and R.E.M. achieved success by gradually rising from the underground to become, and substantially define, the mainstream.

The remainder of this dissertation will consider the style of U2 as both one of the most representative groups of the 80s and 90s, but also as one of the most unique and aesthetically engaging. The focus is on their use of emerging recording technology as a primary compositional tool, one that enabled them to develop a distinct musical style despite only rudimentary musical abilities—at least initially. Before turning to a focused consideration of specific albums, however, it will be useful to explore the evolving aesthetics of rock. The next chapter establishes a philosophical orientation that will ground our subsequent examination of U2's compositional procedure in the recording studio. It also introduces the music-analytical methods and approaches that will be employed in subsequent chapters.

⁵⁹ There are a few exceptions. See particularly Chapter Five.

⁶⁰ See U2 and Neil McCormick, *U2 by U2* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 155-6.

CHAPTER TWO: Rock Music and the Aesthetics of Composition

The Value of Pop

Early Popular Music Aesthetics

Since the 1980s, there has been rapid development in an aesthetics specifically of rock music, although most writing at least touching on rock aesthetics comes from music critics in the commercial press. Rock writing that engaged aesthetics can be traced back to the earliest days of rock journalism. As early as the 1960s, for instance, publications like *Rolling Stone* and *The Village Voice* regularly featured critical writing on rock music, with the emphasis fixed on lyrics, and the “meaning” of songs, often with thinly veiled implications regarding the artist’s authenticity, integrity, and honesty—ideologically loaded terms most contemporary scholars sidestep. Recently, however, the field has expanded beyond the poetics, meaning, and relevance of lyrics, and artist reception to include more strictly musical aspects such as genre, style, and even attempts to grapple with that most intractable of musical materials—its actual sound, and the notion that much of a song’s meaning is embedded in those sounds. Yet popular music attracted critical attention well before the beginnings of rock, with many of the earliest critical stances and associated assumptions still permeating present attitudes.

This chapter briefly sketches the most significant developments in rock aesthetics, arguing in favor of the idea that rock is best approached from a perspective acknowledging those aspects most unique to it. Specifically, I argue that rock music is

consumed and, particularly since the mid 1960s, created primarily as an artifact of recording technology, thus an effective aesthetics of rock must accommodate the centrality of the recorded text. For a band like U2, whose mature creative process unfolds primarily in the studio, this approach essentially becomes an aesthetics of composition.

Adorno and pop

One of the most provocative essays to provide a critique of popular music (but not yet rock music) was Theodore Adorno's notorious "On Popular Music," published in 1941.¹ Approximately half his voluminous writings concerned music, particularly the status of music as art and the role of art in society. "On Popular Music" is the most important of his several essays concerning popular music, which he equated largely with jazz.² Adorno believed that music reflected the society in which it was created, and for which it was intended. He states that "the present study is concerned with the actual function of popular music in its present status," and then discusses how pop music is an artistic and social failure.³

The single greatest failing of pop music, when viewed against the backdrop of "serious music," is its "fundamental character [of] standardization,...extending from the

¹ Theodore Adorno, with George Simpson, "On Popular Music," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9 (1941): 17-48, reprinted in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), 301-314. Adam Krims humorously notes that Adorno's "...presence in popular music scholarship is once more faithfully recorded as something of a scene of trauma, infinitely relived and denied, while never losing its status as some sort of awful and exaggerated truth." See "What Does it Mean to Analyze Popular Music," *Music Analysis* 22 (2003): 187.

² See particularly Theodore Gracyk, "Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music," *Musical Quarterly* 76 (1992): 526-542; and J. Bradford Robinson, "The Jazz Essays of Theodore Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany," *Popular Music* 13 (1994): 1-25.

³ Adorno, "On Popular Music," 301.

most general features to the most specific ones.”⁴ He claims that surface details are ultimately of no consequence for they are merely ornamental rather than developmental. Furthermore, the details themselves are no less standardized than the overall form. The primary consequence of this is an art form devoid of any developmental character unlike the great works, Adorno’s examples of which are Beethoven’s *Appassionata* piano sonata and Seventh Symphony, where musical details unfold in an essential sequence rendering the whole intelligible. Context in serious music is, therefore, absent in pop:

It would not affect the musical sense if any detail were taken out of the context; the listener can supply the “framework” automatically, since it is a mere musical automatism itself...every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in a machine.⁵

Popular music, therefore, is predigested so that a listener finds the details of a piece intelligible in the context of the anticipated structural framework. Adorno believed that these standards became “frozen” as a result of their coming under the control of an entertainment industry “cartel” whose function is to strictly enforce these standards.

The interaction proposed by Adorno between the pop music consumer and the culture industry is complex, deriving from his conviction that art mirrors the society which produces it. The advent of technological society provided laborers with unprecedented amounts of free time. These persons sought to fill that time with distractions, one the most ubiquitous being popular music. However, the laborers, dulled by the meaninglessness of their existence, sought equally meaningless distraction for they were simply not up to anything else: “They seek novelty, but the strain and boredom associated with actual work leads to avoidance of effort in that leisure time which offers

⁴ Ibid., 302.

⁵ Ibid., 303

the only chance for really new experience.”⁶ The entertainment industry therefore devised a strategy of “pseudo-individualization” where concentration on the marketing of artificial “newness,” such as new personalities and bands, created the “halo of free choice” whereby the consumer could enjoy the illusion of “differentiating between the actually undifferentiated.”⁷

Adorno closes his argument with the idea that pop music is a “social cement.”⁸ He concludes that listeners “do not understand music as a language in itself” for, if they did, there would be no way of explaining how they could “tolerate the incessant supply of largely undifferentiated material.” Pop music, therefore, must obviously perform some other function. He suggests that two types of personalities find common ground in pop. His suggestion that emotional persons experience a catharsis in clichéd sentimental music seems reasonable enough when contrasted with his second category of listener, culled from “the so-called radio generation....They are most susceptible to a process of masochistic adjustment to authoritarian collectivism.” The fascination with the incessant, regular beat of pop underscores an innate desire to obey:

However, as the standardized meter of dance music and of marching suggests the coordinated battalions of a mechanical collectivity, obedience to this rhythm by overcoming the responding individuals leads them to conceive of themselves as agglutinated with the untold millions of the meek who must be similarly overcome. Thus do the obedient inherit the earth.⁹

Response to Adorno varies enormously. He is generally acknowledged as a pioneer of music criticism who provided many insights into new approaches for musical

⁶ Ibid., 311.

⁷ Ibid., 308-309.

⁸ Ibid., 311-312.

⁹ Ibid., 312.

analysis, particularly the melding of sociological and musicological perspectives. However, one jazz historian credits Adorno with “some of the stupidest pages ever written about jazz.”¹⁰ Walser, on the other hand, argues that Adorno’s damning critique of popular music has caused critics favorable toward pop to try and distance it from Adorno, rather than recognize that his methods might still be applied to pop from a position of reportorial knowledge equaling that possessed by Adorno and his ilk with respect to the repertory of their time.¹¹ Yet other Adorno scholars see his early articles on pop music as little more than very preliminary steps in the formulation of a sociology of music that would not crystallize until the mid 1950s.¹² When Adorno wrote this article, the Nazis were in control of most of Europe and still threatening Britain, thus his concerns with mass obedience and his fear that marching instincts are but one step removed from the enjoyment of beat oriented music are understandable. Also, he was apparently dismayed that the Allied nations displayed some unsettling similarities to Nazi Germany in the ubiquity of music as propaganda.

Most of Adorno’s writings on pop music dealt with jazz, but his view of American jazz was largely based on hearsay and upon its interpretation in Weimar Germany. It was only a considerable time after emigrating to the United States that Adorno realized that many of his assumptions regarding the sociological/ historical aspects of jazz were seriously flawed; he therefore renounced his earlier views but

¹⁰ A. Hobsbawm, quoted in J. Bradford Robinson, “The Jazz Essays of Theodore Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany,” *Popular Music* 13 (1994): 1.

¹¹ Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: Wesleyan, 1993), 35.

¹² Robinson, “Jazz Essays,” 1.

without offering any further clarification.¹³ Afterward, he tended to concentrate more on general arguments that the culture industry had undermined the social role of art, particularly by continuing to hold onto tonality, a vestige of an earlier time, regardless of whether it was manifested in neoclassicism or pop. The result was art which failed to confront its own times and was, therefore, irrelevant.

Two major problems exist with Adorno's theories as espoused in this article. Firstly, the characterization of dulled laborers craving undifferentiated entertainment is simply a fanciful, pseudo-psychological construct, not to mention shockingly elitist. Secondly, and arguably worse, Adorno had virtually no knowledge of pop repertoire, only his preconceptions toward it, likely reinforced through interaction with his own cultural/social milieu of like-minded people. This is an unenviable, but common, trait amongst critics who dismiss pop music as simplistic. However, as more musicologists rise through the ranks possessed of roughly equal knowledge of Beethoven and the Beatles, we may eventually develop more useful and illuminating ways of comparing apples and oranges, assuming for the moment that that is what we are doing.

Many critics of Adorno point out that his comparison of pop and serious music was a failure to practice what he preached insofar as he was unable to engage pop as a product of its time. He was unable to divest himself of the absolute reliance upon scores, which, like tonality, was a vestige of the past, and largely an artifact of pre-twentieth

¹³ Robinson suggests that Adorno, in the preface to vol. 17 of his *Gesammelte Schriften*, "clearly distances himself from his early jazz writings, referring to his ignorance of the specifically American features of jazz, his dependence on the German-Hungarian pedagogue Mátyás Seiber in matters of jazz technique, and his willingness to draw hasty psycho-sociological conclusions without clear knowledge of the institutions of the commercial music industry." See "Jazz Essays of Theodore Adorno," 1-2.

century technology.¹⁴ Before the mid- twentieth century, the score *was* the technology. Actual performances of a given piece were somewhat rare. Pop music, by contrast, is almost always preserved as a recording, and if one owns a copy, it is available all the time: it does not *need* to be scored. Nor should the absence of a score be considered a shortcoming. Even rock musicians who can score rarely do so for it is unnecessary—sketching is usually done on tape.

One wonders how Adorno might have responded to the longevity of rock, which, at present, has persisted for approximately fifty years. Significantly, Adorno specifically exempts “youngsters” from the phenomenon of seeking mindless distraction as decoration for their spare time.¹⁵ Since rock often appeals to, and is often created by, “youngsters,” Adorno created a loophole through which some rock musicians might escape into the realm of social/artistic relevance. While it may be true that even the most radical and progressive rock movements are eventually subsumed and smoothed out by the culture industry, perhaps the creative impulses underlying some of rock’s major movements were ones of which Adorno might have approved, namely reflections of the artists’ times and their reaction to those times. He often intimated that the disturbing sounds of Schönberg, especially the freely expressionistic *Erwartung*, were entirely consistent with the disturbing timbre of the times. This being the case, perhaps Adorno might have admired some of U2’s more emotionally charged moments, such as the live version of “Sunday, Bloody Sunday” performed in Denver the day of the Inniskillen bombing in 1986, or live versions of “Bullet the Blue Sky” where Bono raps about

¹⁴ Theodore Gracyk, observes: “The ‘technology’ of early classical music left us a body of scored compositions, and Adorno was of a generation that thought of all music in those terms.” See “Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 76 (1992): 535.

¹⁵ Adorno, “On Popular Music,” 314, note 3.

anything from greedy T.V evangelists, to statistical projections of American deaths by handgun.

Contemporary Rock Aesthetics

Adorno, of course, never discussed rock, but music scholars and aestheticians have recently begun formulating an aesthetics that relates directly to rock, and addresses issues unique to it. Even though rock is being approached more on its own terms, some scholars are still determined to derive an aesthetic code that is somehow distinct from that applied to classical music, possibly a product of having to rescue pop from Adorno's harsh critique. Bruce Baugh's provocatively titled "Prolegomena to Any Aesthetics of Rock" sparked a prolonged debate by arguing that rock music needs to be assessed by standards quite different from classical music, mainly because "knowledgeable performers and listeners" implicitly observe these different standards thus giving rock its distinctiveness.¹⁶

Baugh describes six systemic differences between rock and classical music, although he recognizes that these distinctions are loose, and subject to numerous exceptions. Nonetheless, he argues that these factors, taken together, help to distinguish rock from classical music: "...traditional musical aesthetics is concerned with form and composition, whereas rock is concerned with the *matter* of music,...[i.e.,]...the way music feels to the listener, or the way it affects the listener's body" (emphasis in the original).¹⁷ Baugh's six criteria are summarized as follows: 1) the aesthetic interest of a classical work lies primarily in its formal properties, a rock piece in its content and

¹⁶ Bruce Baugh, "Prolegomena to Any Aesthetics of Rock," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 23.

¹⁷ Ibid.

emotional expressiveness; 2) an individual note in rock can be important (particularly timbrally) whereas in classical, it is the relationship between the notes that is important; 3) classical music requires fidelity to the score, rock music does not; 4) rock music is fundamentally tied to dancing insofar as it affects the body more; 5) there is a different approach to dynamics, rock often requiring high volumes to achieve its sound; and 6) rock and classical have different accounts of virtuosity, with the rock player concentrating on expression while the classical player is more concerned with technical mastery and execution.

Critics of Baugh have suggested that these distinctions crumble under even cursory scrutiny, and can apply equally to both classical and rock music.¹⁸ Baugh ties his first criterion, regarding the primacy of form in classical music aesthetics, to the formalist writings of Kant, Hanslick, and Adorno, rehashing the argument that music is incapable of expressing anything other than its form. However, given the sheer number of music connoisseurs (or mere consumers) who believe, rightly or wrongly, that music is expressive, it is odd to suggest that rock reception relies more on emotional expressivity. Classical music is often regarded as quintessentially emotional. The funereal second movement of Beethoven's Third Symphony can enthrall formalists for a lifetime, but many listeners find it profoundly moving as a palpable expression of grief even without any knowledge of its formal and technical brilliance. A typically encultured Western

¹⁸ James Young, "Between a Rock and a Harp Place," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995): 80; Stephen Davies, "Rock versus Classical Music," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 193-203.

listener might say “What sad music,” regardless of academic admonitions about music having the capacity for “being sad.”¹⁹

Baugh’s second distinction is essentially that rock is more concerned with timbre, citing Eric Clapton’s desire “to play a single note with such feeling and intensity that it would cause listeners to weep.”²⁰ Classical music, on the other hand, is alleged to be more concerned with how the notes relate to one another, essentially a restatement of his belief that formal properties hold the main interest in a classical work. It may be true that J. S. Bach, for example, was occasionally less concerned with specific instrumental timbres as he freely adapted works across several performance media, but, Beethoven’s withholding of the trombones until the final movement of his Fifth Symphony is but one famous example of a classical era composer exploiting specific instrumental timbres. On the other hand, heaps of rock songs are arranged so as to be virtually indistinguishable from one another timbrally in order to qualify for radio airplay within a given genre. Nonetheless, Baugh is on the right track to suggest that timbre can be a crucial element in rock, perhaps in a different way than in classical music, as shall be discussed in greater detail later.

Baugh develops at length the idea that rock, being historically tied to dance through folk and blues, operates primarily through its rhythmic effect on the body. Again, he acknowledges numerous exceptions, but the criterion of “effect on the body” can hardly be said to apply to rock more than any other kind of music, although the

¹⁹ Peter Kivy examines this notion in considerable detail. See in particular *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), passim.

²⁰ This recalls a moment in the rock spoof *This is Spinal Tap*, where English air-headed rocker Nigel Tufnel holds forth on the properties of the key of D-minor, the saddest of all keys, causing people “to weep instantly.”

nature of the bodily gestures might differ across genres. Still, it is absurd to suggest that Sir Paul McCartney's acoustic ballad "Blackbird" is inherently more physical than Berlioz' "March to the Scaffold" from the *Symphonie Fantastique*. One could come up with thousands of examples.²¹

Baugh's fifth criterion is rock's reliance on volume. This may be true to an extent, particularly in dance clubs and large concert venues, but volume is relevant to this study only insofar as it creates certain timbres unattainable at lower volumes. However, once committed to recordings, rock songs are no louder than recorded classical music. Most music undergrads have had the experience of a music professor who plays a CD of music by Palestrina or Mendelssohn far louder than it could ever be rendered live. Furthermore, one has the impression that Baugh has never stood in front of an orchestra, or amongst a group of brass players. Conversely, rock music often consists of as little as a singer and an acoustic guitar.²²

Baugh's final criterion is that virtuosity in rock is geared toward expressiveness whereas in classical music, it is emblematic of technical mastery. Rather than offer further exceptions, Baugh's critics reject this argument outright, suggesting that Baugh must not know very many classical performers, for whom technical prowess is a means to expressivity. Young, betraying his own bias, further argues that trained vocalists actually have a larger palette of expressive tools in that they have the option of abandoning technique to evoke rusticity.²³ This, however, implies that rock musicians do not have the

²¹ Davies makes similar arguments, "Rock vs. Classical," 196-7.

²² Bjork, who would be considered a rock performer by most critics, released *Medúlla* (Elektra, 2004), which is almost entirely vocal. On some tracks, however, the vocal texture includes samples and is extremely dense.

²³ Young, "Between a Rock and a Harp Place," 81.

same option, presumably because they have no specialized technique to begin with.²⁴

This, of course, raises the question of what constitutes technique, how it is acquired, implemented, and who evaluates and validates it.²⁵ Bono and Luciano Pavarotti sing together on “Miss Sarajevo,” but both wisely stay within their genre styles.

In concluding his response to Baugh, Young uses curiously imperative and telling language:

Baugh has not identified standards of performance which apply uniquely to rock music. This is not to say that no difference exists between rock and classical music. For better or worse, however, rock music has to be judged by the standards that have always been used to judge music.²⁶

Young refers always to “performance,” (as does Baugh in his rebuttal) giving the impression that he conceives of rock primarily as something experienced in live performance. It is not clear whether either author considers a recording to constitute a performance, or even an assemblage of performances. It is also quite a leap to suggest that Baugh’s perceived failure necessarily sends us back to the standards “that have always been used to judge music.” One wonders how far back “always” goes. Davies, in his assessment of the Baugh/Young debate, also notes that too great emphasis is placed on performance, adopting Gracyk’s observation that the primary vehicle of pop is not live performances, but recordings.²⁷

²⁴ Baugh raises a similar counter-argument in his answer to Young, “Music for the Young at Heart,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995): 81-2.

²⁵ There are, of course, intermediate or hybrid cases, such as classically trained Freddy Mercury of Queen, who often performed parodies of the classical style, the best-known being “Bohemian Rhapsody.” Similarly, Tori Amos was a “classically trained” pianist, and Elvis Costello and Paul McCartney absorbed much of their knowledge of pop conventions from their fathers, both of whom were band leaders.

²⁶ Young, “Rock and a Harp Place,” 81.

²⁷ Davies, “Rock vs. Classical,” 200.

As the preceding discussion illustrates, formulating an aesthetics of rock that is predicated upon distinguishing it from classical music is highly problematic, particularly given the enormous range of styles that can still be paradigmatic examples of one or the other. Other critics have weighed in on the debate variously concluding that these are questions that do not really matter, or that they miss the mark to some extent. Gracyk believes the Baugh/Young debate to be “largely beside the point” since it does not matter whether rock “shares the specific values of any sort of traditional art;” he would prefer to see rock evaluated on its own terms, with reference to its own traditions.²⁸ Brian Hendrix, however, believes the debate is important in that it underscores that when we compare evaluative standards, it is crucial that we agree on the “object of evaluation itself,” which is particularly difficult in music, as the object exists abstractly in time as sound—recorded or otherwise—and people hear music differently since they attend to details and their interrelationships differently.²⁹ This is true not only between listeners, but between different listenings by a individual. As an object of evaluation, music is subject to countless interpretations based on the experience and proclivities of the listener.

Returning to Adorno, we are certainly left with a clear impression of his disdain for pop music as an “object of evaluation.” Recall him criticizing consumers of pop music for tolerating “the incessant supply of largely undifferentiated material.” This is likely the crux of any aesthetics of rock, especially because the “undifferentiated material” is especially so when experienced repeatedly as a recording. So, how can

²⁸ Theodore Gracyk, “Valuing and Evaluating Popular Music,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 210; n. 34, 220. Ironically, this is precisely what Baugh was suggesting; it was his methodology that provoked so much negative response.

²⁹ Brian Hendrix, “Tchaikovsky Versus The Western Canon,” *Philosophy and Literature* 24 (2000): 468.

knowledgeable musicians, or fans of rock, listen to the same rock record over and over again?³⁰

Leaving aside the contentious question of whether we are, in fact, dealing with “undifferentiated material,” it seems unlikely, at first blush, that rock listeners would be primarily captivated by elements of structure or rhythm. Rock songs are conceived within a stylistic paradigm of strophic forms, with high degrees of repetition over short durations. There are myriad ways of combining verses, choruses, bridges (sometimes the “middle eight”), pre-choruses, intros, etc., but most rock musicians would not seriously consider stepping outside these boundaries.³¹ Through-composition is almost unheard of, and record company executives would doubtless be confused and distressed by songs stepping too far outside a familiar form. Rhythm, which is so often cited as the most compelling aspect of rock and pop, particularly by critics such as Adorno and Bloom (and, ironically, Baugh who considers rhythmic aspects of rock to be vital to its effect on the body) who see it variably from social regimentation to sexual metaphor, is more or less regular in virtually all western music, classical or otherwise, in units essentially of three or four, so there is hardly anything unique there.³²

Peter Kivy suggests somewhat cryptically that repetition in music is not only tolerable, but satisfying according to the “wallpaper model” of musical perception. Exact repetition reveals symmetries, like a wallpaper pattern, that can be perceived and engaged

³⁰ Of course, if this question can be answered for rock recordings, it goes some way toward answering the same question for those who consume classical music via recordings.

³¹ The greatest exceptions occurred during the 70s. Commercial pop heavily discourages anything other than standard song forms.

³² Gracyk argues this point at length in *Rhythm and Noise*, Chapter Five, “Jungle Rhythm and the Big Beat.”

in an inherently satisfying way.³³ However, like many theorists educated within the classical/structuralist paradigm, scrutiny remains fixed on structure.

Related to the perception of extreme formal limitation is the common perception that rock is performed within an overwhelmingly conservative instrumental paradigm of electric guitars, bass guitar, drum kit, possibly keyboards, and occasional accompaniment by traditional orchestral instruments, such as string sections for sentimental songs, or horn sections for blues or jazz inflected songs. Thus music that is structurally almost identical is executed on virtually the same instrumental—and, therefore, timbral—array, essentially forestalling any potential for subtle, affective artistic expression.

Most striking about the preceding discussions is how rarely it is suggested that the recorded sounds might be enjoyable and sought out for their own sake, or, even more importantly, that the meaning of the song might be substantially conveyed in sound.³⁴

One might compare a song and a painting—both are combinations of colors and shapes in a pleasing, arresting, or disturbing form. The development of recording technology in the 80s gave songwriters a nearly infinite palette of colors with which to construct songs.

Persons such as the original members of Depeche Mode, who were able to program a synthesizer, but who had no musical training—formal or otherwise—were now able to compose, execute, and record music. One benefit of this was that people with almost no

³³ Peter Kivy, “The Fine Art of Repetition,” in *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music*, 327-359 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 349-353.

³⁴ Dave Headlam observes: “Writers on rock music need to define a systematic yet manageable basis for describing the properties, both technical and aesthetic, of the sounds themselves.” See “Blues Transformations in the Music of Cream,” 88. Similarly, Susan Fast, addressing U2 specifically, suggests that musicians take it for granted that “sounds signify—a notion worrisome to many academics—and that these significations determine the appropriate contexts in which the sounds should be received. The direction of influence—from music to context—is interesting.” See “Music, Contexts, and Meaning in U2,” 33.

knowledge of musical idioms were able to follow their muse, occasionally with interesting results.

Gracyk refers to psychological studies showing that humans have very poor recall of timbres removed from their context. If this is the case, then regardless how well one recalls a song, or imagines the sound, this experience utterly pales against reliving the sound by “playing it again.” Even though we know the lyrics and form inside-out, backward-forward, the local qualities always promise “the thrill of the unexpected: you never know exactly what you will hear.”³⁵ Hearing a favorite passage is like seeing a photograph again rather than merely recalling it. One wonders whether Adorno was unable to understand how someone could stand to have the same painting hanging on a wall for more than, say, a few minutes, let alone years.³⁶

It is debatable when the pure sonic potential of recording became a priority, but the work of the Beatles and the Beach Boys in the mid- 60s is a watershed period in the evolution of the recording/composing aesthetic. When the Beatles recorded the *Revolver* album in 1966, they manipulated tape on almost every track specifically to create new sounds. Guitar tracks were slowed down to darken and thicken the timbres to ones not replicable in real time (“Rain” [a single recorded during the *Revolver* sessions]); they ran all the vocals through rotating Leslie speakers to achieve a phasing sound; they ran taped guitar solos backward, then learned to emulate the backward solo, which was itself recorded and run backward yielding a forward moving solo with all the timbral oddities of backward tape (“I’m Only Sleeping”); all in the name of unusual sounds—sounds that

³⁵ Diana Raffman, *Language, Music, and Mind* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1993), quoted in Gracyk *Rhythm and Noise*, 61.

³⁶ Gracyk raises a similar point in “Play it Again Sam: Response to Niblock,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 369.

could not be reproduced live, and which did not emanate from a contiguous live performance.

An Aesthetic of the Sensuous

A notable recent development in rock aesthetics is a shift in emphasis from the perspective of those who *consume* music to those who *produce* it, a crucial distinction underpinning the present study. Baugh's prolegomena, and the responses to it, showed the difficulty in arriving at an aesthetics of rock based on distinguishing it from other styles and periods of music, especially when considering the genre of song. Although Baugh's six criteria were not well received, he gets too little credit for quite reasonably focusing on the perceptions of, as he describes them, "knowledgeable performers and listeners." Although Baugh did not stress this himself, many of his criteria distinguishing rock and classical music had, at their root, a basis in sound. More recent scholarship has moved toward describing those elements of rock music which seem to be most important to those who enjoy this music, or, more importantly, those who create this music. For many, sound is the key element in rock music, but it is this very parameter, as mentioned earlier, that has proven the most challenging for musicology.

Allan Moore was one of the first scholars to address at monograph length what perhaps should be obvious (even if the significance of the observation is problematic), namely that the primary text of a rock song is its recorded version, which functions as a phenomenon of sound, whereas for a classical piece, the primary text is the score.³⁷ There does not exist, in sound, an "Ur" version of a scored classical work. Moore laments that the mountain of analytical work on rock music very rarely gets around to discussing

³⁷ Allan Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1993); 2d ed. (Aldershot Hants: Ashgate, 2001).

sound at all. Theodore Gracyk also places primary emphasis on the recorded artifact, but he devotes more discussion toward analyzing the implications of this, not just for the listener, but for the creator of rock music, one to whom questions of sound are often most important: “Treating rock as a musical art, I assume that we have little chance of understanding what is going on unless we take account of the thinking of those who produce it.”³⁸ Most recently, Albin Zak’s study of the recording studio as a compositional tool takes for granted that the recording is the primary text of rock, as does, by implication, Virgil Moorefield’s study of the role of record producers as composers.³⁹

Rock musicians are frequently able to have successful careers in the absence of live performing. The Beatles were among the first to decide to give up touring in favor of becoming recording artists exclusively, partly because they had wearied of the grind of the recording/touring cycle, and partly because their new songs were impossible to perform live with the technology of 1966. Similarly, some deceased artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley, and a host of others, sold more music after their deaths than while they were alive, all through the continued dissemination of their recorded works.

Recording artists create their works in the context of other works they have heard, and those are almost exclusively recorded works.⁴⁰ Rock critics may observe that someone is a good songwriter, but they are often referring to the lyrics, with reviews

³⁸ Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, xiv.

³⁹ Zak, *Poetics*, passim. Zak provides a summary of writers who have pointed out the primacy of recording in rock, two of the earliest being Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); and Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970); see Zak, 12-3. Virgil Moorefield, *The Producer as Composer: Shaping the Sounds of Popular Music* (Cambridge, Mass., London: M.I.T. Press, 2005).

⁴⁰ Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 13-4. Covach explores the implications of this with respect to new wave and 70s “corporate rock,” in “Pangs of History.”

often reading more like literary than musical criticism, or they stray into ideological discussions of integrity, honesty, and authenticity. However, when rock musicians talk about their own music, or about the sound of their predecessors they are much more likely to talk about musicianship and the sound of the recording.⁴¹

Since the late 60s, the production value of recordings has become paramount. The “wall of sound” technique pioneered by Phil Spector in the early 1960s—achieved by saturating tape with sound—began to set a standard focusing more on production than performance. The two most important developments in production were the increase in recording fidelity as technology improved, but even more crucial was the continual expansion of the number of tracks available from the typical two-track recordings of the early 60s, to standard twenty-four and thirty-two track recordings by the 70s. The hallmark of 70s production compared to that of the 60s was the extraordinary fidelity of studio recordings, epitomized by such albums as Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973), or the Eagles’ self-titled debut (1972). Digital technology of the 80s offered, in theory, an infinite number of tracks, and it was ever easier to create sound sculptures of great density. It must be borne in mind that the creation is achieved, often as not, not though performance per se, but through the editing of numerous performances into an entity existing exclusively as a recording.⁴²

When a band I was in made rock recordings in the late 80s (using analog tape technology, specifically for a retro 60s sound), we were dissatisfied with the final outcome, mostly because they did not have the sound quality of other recorded works on

⁴¹ Zak echoes this point, *Poetics*, 22-3. This is difficult to quantify, but is consistent with recording artists I have met who are generally very fond of recounting studio “war stories.”

⁴² See Zak, *Poetics*, particularly Chapters Two (“Tracks”) and Five (“Tracking and Mixing”).

the radio.⁴³ The most noticeable problem was quite obvious to us—the drum sound was too thin. Drums are notoriously difficult to record satisfactorily, so prerecorded sounds are now used regularly. The studio engineer used the acoustic drum tracks to trigger synthetic drum sounds which were recorded onto empty tracks.⁴⁴ In no way was the performance or the structure of the composition altered, only the sound was changed. When the new drum tracks were mixed down to a master tape, the individual parameters of sound, such as volume, echo, and the individual bass, mid-range, and treble frequencies were all subject to much greater manipulation than for acoustically recorded drums. Most casual listeners are surprised to learn that drums have a sound at all other than a generic “whap.” However, when the two versions are played side by side, the difference is striking.

Occasionally, the recording process begins before a song is even composed. For artists such as Peter Gabriel, composition often begins with a lone drum track which is the inspiration for experimentation with additional layers until the “sound-canvas” is deemed complete.⁴⁵ The Beatles often only had a vague impression of a given song before they began recording, or were able to make substantial changes over the course of

⁴³ These unreleased demos were produced by 60s icon Billy Cowsill (d. 2006), selected precisely for his skill in obtaining a 60s sound.

⁴⁴ The sounds were previewed from a massive catalogue of drum sounds. Rather than looking at color swatches of carpet, we were listening to color swatches of sound, and percussive sound at that. We ended up using drum sounds sampled from a well-known artist, who, for all anyone knows, also may have acquired the sound from a prior recording. In the late 80s, the legal/ethical issues of sampling had not fully come to the fore.

⁴⁵ I heard this account of Gabriel’s compositional process on a radio interview years ago. Many artists work this way, and Zak provides an excellent summary in *Poetics*, Chapter Three, “Sound as Form,” *passim*. We will see shortly that U2 most often start with blank tape (or digital file) as well.

recording a particular song.⁴⁶ Multiple takes and experiments determined where the piece might go. The use of the recording studio as a compositional tool is often stated to have emerged in the mid- 60s with the recording of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. However, it is clear that as early as the mid 50s, artists recognized that the recorded work was not necessarily simply the preservation of a single live performance.⁴⁷

Songs constructed this way are projects in sculpted sound, not merely performances that happened to be recorded. This is an ontological difference. Rock as a performance style is "ontologically thin" in that it is subject to substantial variation while still being recognizable as a given version of a given song.⁴⁸ Classical performances, on the other hand, are ontologically considerably thicker as the performer is given a certain leeway in execution, but is generally not considered to be at liberty to make changes.⁴⁹ Recordings, however, are ontologically very thick in that every audible detail is preserved and faithfully reproduced every time (subject to the quality of the playback gear). Ontological thickness is required to pass a work on, and rock fans know their canon through recordings, not from the study of scores, or from live performance by the original artist, or from playing covers of the music themselves. When a rock fan learns to play a piece, either from a chart, fake book, or from copying the record, there is no question that

⁴⁶ The release of the Beatles *Anthology* in 1996 reveals much regarding their composing directly to tape. This is a luxury largely lost in the 70s and 80s due to the expense of recording, but regained somewhat in the 90s with digital recording technology. Particularly telling examples are "No Reply," "Baby's in Black," and "I'll Be Back," all of which undergo substantial revisions.

⁴⁷ Zak, *Poetics*, 10-1; and Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 17-20, provide examples from the 1950s focusing on Les Paul and Mary Ford, and Elvis Presley respectively.

⁴⁸ Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 18-21. Gracyk develops the notion of relative ontological thickness as derived from Davies.

⁴⁹ The omission of the repeat of a sonata exposition, for example, can prove quite irksome to purists.

what they are playing is in any way the “original.” Bands who perform their recorded works live are given variable degrees of freedom in interpreting their own recorded works, but they are still often held to the standard of whether they sound as good as the record.⁵⁰

U2’s Compositional Procedure

The preceding discussion suggests that compositional process in popular music operates along a continuum. At one end are pop songs that are conceived before they are recorded, in which case, recording can be seen as essentially a process of orchestration or arrangement. Of course, if a song has a performance history prior to its being recorded, then the recording can come close to simply preserving a given rendition. At the other extreme—and we will see that this is how U2 typically work—songs may come gradually into existence through experimenting with different sounds, “grooves,” and combinations of recorded fragments, or sketches, that gradually coalesce into a final product.

Obviously, many artists work at different points along this continuum.

Fortunately, U2’s typical mature compositional process has been outlined by themselves, and by observers, in several sources.⁵¹ Many of their songs are conceived through jamming, both in the studio and during pre-concert soundchecks. Virtually

⁵⁰ This depends somewhat on the reputation of the musician, the sophistication of the audience, the genre of music, etc. Music aimed at adolescents, for example, is often performed to replicate the recorded versions as closely as possible, often with the aid of pre-recorded material. U2, on the other hand, are known by their audience to depart considerably from the studio versions on occasion.

⁵¹ See especially Flanagan, *End of the World*. Flanagan is a respected pop journalist, and former editor of *Musician* magazine, who was present for some of the recording of U2’s *Achtung Baby* and *Zooropa* albums, and for their associated tours. It is difficult to determine when Flanagan was actually present, and what he has reconstructed from interviews. Some quotations by band members are presented as though Flanagan was present at the time, but are also reproduced in articles published in *Musician* magazine which give the impression of being related to Flanagan after the fact. Compare, for example, “The View from the Edge,” *Musician*, 1 March 1992, 56-64, with Chapter One of *End of the World*.

everything they do is recorded as potential material for further development. British musician, and U2 co-producer, Brian Eno, describes the studio process as follows:

A couple of weeks of recording throws up dozens of promising beginnings. A big list goes up on the blackboard, songs with strange names that no one can remember.... These are wheeled out, looked at, replayed, worked on, sung to, put away, boot-legged and wheeled out again, until they start to either consolidate into something, or fall away into oblivion. The list on the blackboard begins to thin down, although Bono, the Mother Teresa of abandoned songs, compassionately continues arguing the case for every single idea that has ever experienced even the most transitory existence.⁵²

Thus, songs are formed through the gradual accretion of recorded sketches. A given jam, or any number of tracks from one, might be sectioned, recombined, or manipulated in myriad ways to yield a particular version. The band then returns to the studio and essentially does a “cover” of that new version which, in turn, is recorded. Often, the editing into a potential structure is done by the producers who then present the new track to the band for evaluation and, possibly, further development. U2 typically generate from thirty to eighty fairly advanced song sketches for each album, of which twelve, or so, are ultimately selected.

An important aspect of this approach to songwriting is that nascent songs are generally not “about” anything. In the U2 camp there is a variation on a famous musical joke: “What do you call a guy who hangs out with musicians?...A singer.” This underscores a crucial feature—text is usually added last. Bono’s primary compositional responsibility is to scat along to progressions derived by the other musicians (occasionally including producers playing synthesizer or guitar) and to slowly forge lyrics consistent with an affect suggested by the musical tracks. Words tend to follow

⁵² Brian Eno, “Bringing Up Baby” in *U2: The Ultimate Compendium of Interviews, Articles, Facts, and Opinions from the Files of Rolling Stone* (New York, London: Hyperion, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1994), 88.

music, but once text begins to develop, this can establish a mutual feedback process that may take the song in any number of directions.⁵³

This mode of operation necessitates numerous team meetings. Bill Flanagan describes one such gathering during the *Zooropa* sessions where the band members, co-producers Eno and Flood, and engineer Robbie Adams sit together in the control room, armed with pads and pencils, listening to edited jams in order to rank their potential for further development.⁵⁴ The process is more or less democratic, but there is much negotiation. The minutiae of arrangement often occurs in such meetings. Flanagan recounts Eno complaining of a jam where the guitar attack on beat three creates too much of a reggae feel, so he suggests changing the rhythm section so that the bass has its strongest accent on beat one, but Clayton complains that he tried very hard to avoid the one.⁵⁵ The solution is for the band (minus Bono) to return to the studio to jam some more while Bono is sent off to write more lyrics, and the producers continue editing other more advanced jams.⁵⁶

Although there are few accounts regarding U2's early compositional procedure, the method during the earliest stages of the band's existence appears to have been similar,

⁵³ Examples of this process are presented in subsequent chapters.

⁵⁴ Flanagan, *End of the World*, 194-5. Flood (real name Mark Ellis) will appear at several stages in the role of engineer and producer.

⁵⁵ The song "Numb" from *Zooropa*, one of Edge's few vocal solos, features a litany of "do's and don't's," one of which is "don't miss the one beat." Perhaps it is an in-joke stemming from the meeting described by Flanagan, or more generally from Clayton's post-80s tendency to seek greater syncopation.

⁵⁶ Meetings of this kind are described in several sources as occurring very frequently. A thirty minute documentary entitled *Unforgettable Fire* (included in *U2: the Unforgettable Fire Collection*, VHS, director Barry Devlin [Island Visual Arts, VHS, 1991], re-released as part of *U2 Go Home: Live at Slane Castle*, DVD [Interscope/Island, 2003]) has several excerpts showing this kind of discussion taking place during the recording of "Pride (in the Name of Love)," see Chapter Five, *infra*.

except that there were no producers to assist when the band first started meeting in Larry Mullen's parent's kitchen. In 1982, Edge observed:

...we were so bad at working out stuff that we just had to give it up and write our own songs, so by the time we came to realize there were other bands doing new things it was too late, because we already had our own style of writing. We just played together and things came out. We always try to do things differently, we never accept the normal, so it was mainly trial and error.⁵⁷

Similarly, in 1983, Edge stated: "Our way of writing is always so much a part of experimenting, and a feeling at the time. It's not a conscious thing."⁵⁸ Thus it appears that jamming was always the primary vehicle of songwriting for U2, rather than individual members pre-writing songs and presenting them to the band for arrangement.⁵⁹

It is rather comical that U2's combined musical ignorance appears to have been the main impetus for writing their own material early on, simply because they were not good enough musicians to do competent cover versions of other artist's songs. Bono (somewhat disingenuously) laments:

U2 are the world's worst wedding band...we were always jealous of the fact that we never knew anyone else's songs. That started a lot of B sides where we did cover versions and tried to get into the structure of songwriting vicariously and then apply it. This is a band that is one of the biggest acts in the world, and we know fuck-all in terms of what most musicians would consider to be important. 'Cause all these bands, including this new crop, have all played in bar bands, they're all well versed in rock & roll structure—which is also why they're also well-versed in rock & roll clichés.⁶⁰

Most bands, even those with the intention of performing all original material, usually need to include many cover songs just to have enough material to get through a night of playing (and to learn to play together through the platform of mutually known

⁵⁷ Edge, quoted in Tom Nolan, "On the Edge of Success," 5; *Best of Propaganda*, 13.

⁵⁸ Edge, quoted in Scott Isler, "Operation Uplift," *Trouser Press* (July 1, 1983), reprinted in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews*, ed. Hank Bodowitz (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2003), 19.

⁵⁹ Analytic support for this is provided in Chapter Four.

⁶⁰ Bono, quoted in Flanagan, *End of the World*, 26. By "this new crop," Bono would likely have been referring to the proliferation of "grunge" bands in the early 90s.

material). Original songs are added only gradually, especially if the band members are novice songwriters. U2, however, appear to have preferred poor originals to quality covers, as there are references to early original songs that never made it to tape for their first studio album, *Boy* (1980). On the other hand, several early originals were in the set list for almost two years before being recorded for *Boy* (see Chapter Four).

Discussions regarding a band's style often fail to adequately acknowledge the role of the producers and engineers in the recording process. Zak observes that the delineations between the various studio roles can become severely blurred, thus he lumps together all participants under the title "recordist."⁶¹ U2, like most bands, are very careful about selecting producers, maintaining a high degree of consistency amongst a relatively small group of recordists. Their first three albums were produced by Briton Steve Lillywhite (b. 1955), one of the most prominent producers of the New Wave period, including work with Ultravox, Peter Gabriel, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and XTC. The team of Briton Brian Eno (b. 1948), formally of glam band Roxy Music as well as a pioneer of the so-called ambient style, and Canadian Daniel Lanois (b. 1951) co-produced the bulk of U2's most critically acclaimed albums, including *The Joshua Tree*, *Achtung Baby*, and *All that You Can't Leave Behind*.⁶² Flood (Mark Ellis, b. 1960), who was an engineer for *The Joshua Tree*, gradually assumed a more prominent role, co-producing *Zooropa* with Eno and Edge, and producing *Pop* in 1997, where his electronic prowess, honed producing Depeche Mode, Smashing Pumpkins, and proto-industrial

⁶¹ Zak, *Poetics*, xii.

⁶² For a biographical/musicological examination of Eno as a musician, producer, and philosopher, see Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (New York: Da Capo, 1995). Daniel Lanois is a well-respected musician in his own right, and the producer of many noteworthy albums, including Peter Gabriel's *So* (1986), Robbie Robertson's self-titled solo debut (1986), Emmylou Harris' *Wrecking Ball* (1995), and Bob Dylan's "comeback album" *Time Out of Mind* (1997).

Nine Inch Nails, heavily informed U2's late 90s sound. *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004) had several producers, but Steve Lillywhite was brought in to give the sessions greater focus. This core of recordists, each presiding over and contributing to U2's various reinventions, lends a consistency of technique within a prevailing aesthetic of experimentation and "going with the moment." U2's producers may essentially be considered band members for the purposes of studio composition. Paul McGuinness, U2's manager, also appears to have considerable weight in matters where aesthetics and business may overlap, such as deeming a song finished, or suitable for inclusion on an album, although he is not a recordist per se.⁶³

Final production decisions appear to be democratic, with yet more team meetings. However, Mark Howard, an engineer who had worked with R.E.M. in the early 90s, and with U2 on *All That you Can't Leave Behind* in 2000, describes Bono as perhaps being more equal than the others:

With R.E.M. there was an equal balance between all of them when it came to their songs and ideas. It wasn't like that when I worked with U2. Bono was the leader. Bono pushes the song. With R.E.M. it was kind of like an open group and everyone discusses it. In an R.E.M. session it's easy-going. With U2 it is down to earth, but it's full of tension. You're flying by the seat of your pants. Bono has a million ideas and he's got to try them all. You'd finish a track and then suddenly Bono would want to take the drums from the end and put them at the beginning, or redo a part, or whatever. He's always moving on.⁶⁴

This account accords well with Eno's description a decade earlier of Bono as the "Mother Teresa of the Abandoned Song," but most sources portray the process as ultimately

⁶³ The *Unforgettable Fire* documentary (see n. 56) shows McGuinness counseling the band not to be concerned with the radio-unfriendly length of the then current draft of "Pride (in the Name of Love)." However, this draft was eventually abandoned, and recording was begun again at Windmill Lane Studios. Later, after a stronger version is recorded, Bono tells Lanois and Eno that "Paul (McGuinness) says it's the best thing we've done." Contrast this with the famous incident of Brian Epstein, manager of the Beatles, offering musical advice during a recording session, only to be advised by John Lennon to "stick to [his] numbers" and leave matters of music to the band.

⁶⁴ David Buckley, *R.E.M. Fiction: An Alternative Biography* (London: Virgin Books, 2003), 249-50.

democratic. While U2 do not abdicate aesthetic control to their producers, they do not take it completely upon themselves.⁶⁵

The vast majority of U2's recording is carried out at Windmill Lane Studios in the Dublin docks area. However, they have occasionally sought a change of venue to correspond with an intended change of direction. For *Unforgettable Fire*, the first album with Eno and Lanois, the band set up a mobile unit in Slane Castle in order to take advantage of the castle's natural ambience, and for a change of scene from Windmill Lane. For *Achtung Baby*, they went to Berlin to find inspiration at Hansa Ton studios, where Eno had produced David Bowie's Berlin Trilogy (and to immerse themselves in the euphoria following the fall of the Berlin Wall). In both cases, however, technical and practical limitations of the remote venues compelled the band to polish the albums in the familiar territory of Windmill Lane.

Analytic Conventions

Analysis can be an evidentiary inroad to compositional procedure. In some cases, analytic observations invite speculation regarding compositional choices; why is there an extra measure here? why the slight change in progression? why do the verses have different vocal melodies? Ideally, analyses will align well with what is known regarding the aesthetics of a band and its producers. Instances of analytic ambiguity—perhaps because of textural density, metric complexity, or formal inconsistency—can occasionally be clarified through resort to live performances. The decision to favor one

⁶⁵ Sometimes producers are hired specifically to take charge, and young bands are more prone to defer to producers. One can see the progression of the Beatles from novices doing as they are told to the point of essentially becoming co-producers by the mid- 60s. There are few detailed accounts of U2's early relationship with Steve Lillywhite, but I suggest in Chapter Four that he was likely very important in shaping U2's conception of song, and their appreciation of the potential of the studio as a composing venue.

interpretation over another, or a given methodology over another is made song-by-song based on the material available, but, in all cases, the evidence by which such ambiguities are mediated will be made clear.

Notation

Pitches are represented in standard western notation. Tuning and temperament are based on the guitar tunings, such that the chord shapes and hand positions employed by Edge and Clayton are deemed representative of key regardless of whether the band has tuned down a semitone from standard pitch, as they did on several albums, and as they almost always do in live performance. This avoids the unnecessary confusion, for example, of notating a piece in a profoundly guitar-unfriendly key such as F# major when, from Edge's perspective, the key is the much more convivial G major.

Bono's vocal melodies are only approximated, both with respect to rhythm and pitch, as he typically engages in a type of *Sprechstimme*, rarely repeating himself melodically, and applying almost continuous *rubato*. The reader is referred to *U2: The Complete Songs* for notated versions of the vocal melodies.⁶⁶

Conventional letter designations are used to indicate song sections, such as the well-known AABA form so typical of pop to the mid- 1960s. Lower case letters indicate instrumental solos so that AAaBA would indicate two texted verse/chorus or verse/refrain complexes followed by, for example, a guitar solo played over the same progression. If the solo were only over part of the A section, we might have a diagram like VC VC vC B CC which indicates two texted verse chorus complexes, an

⁶⁶ Derek Jones and Jack Long, *U2: The Complete Songs* (London and New York: Wise Publications, 1999). The arrangements are primarily vocal melody, although they do transcribe the occasional prominent instrumental part. Generally, only one verse or chorus is transcribed, and rarely with greater precision than eighth notes.

instrumental solo based on the verse progression, a sung chorus, a texted bridge and a two concluding texted choruses.

Beats are indicated with Arabic numerals with a “+” sign indicating an eighth beat, such that “2+” would indicate the offbeat between beats 2 and 3.

Rock Harmony

Like most rock musicians, U2 conceive of their songs homophonically, so chord progressions are represented with roman numerals, although generally without overt tonal implications. This permits easier comparison of harmonic language, and, again, eliminates cumbersome issues of different tuning systems between albums, and between live and studio performances. As with most guitar-based bands, the guitar and bass tend overwhelmingly toward hypermetric structures based on simple chord changes and, in the case of U2, a remarkably limited harmonic vocabulary based overwhelmingly on **I**, **IV**, and **VII**. In many instances, U2’s textures do not resolve well into triadic sonorities, but it is often still possible to indicate the chord they perceived as existing, based on, for example, other iterations of the passage, or live versions. Altered chords are mostly absent, other than as transitory entities arising through the verticalities of the pitch carrying components. Major chords are indicated in upper case, minor chords in lower case.

The chord built on the diatonic lowered seventh degree is designated “**VII**” rather than “**♭VII**” on the basis that it is by far the more common sonority in the rock harmonic system.⁶⁷ This implies that the normative scales for rock musicians are the mixolydian

⁶⁷ See Allan Moore, “The So-Called ‘Flattened Seventh’ in Rock,” *Popular Music* 14 (1995): 185-201. While far from universal, this practice is becoming more widespread in pop scholarship.

and dorian modes.⁶⁸ In the case of many post-punk musicians, it is unlikely that they would even be aware of diminished-seventh chords, or the different harmonizations of major and minor scales.

Form in Rock Music

As we proceed to analysis, it becomes clear that U2's conception of song form is one of their most distinctive characteristics. Their idiosyncratic song forms often represent traces of the processes and aesthetics guiding composition, and their evolution over twenty-five years, providing the most consistently revealing ingress to their compositional aesthetics.⁶⁹ Evidence is presented that U2 often become quite obsessed with—and occasionally bogged down by—questions of form, although the nature of their difficulties changed over the course of their career, as their experiential and aesthetic points of reference evolved. Answering the seemingly simple question “what song forms do U2 favor?” requires so many song-by-song solutions that new ways of visually and descriptively representing form prove useful. In many cases, standard formal designations are misleading, or inadequate to describe the form in which a song is cast.

There is surprisingly little work regarding normative song form during the 80s, or for rock music in general.⁷⁰ This may be because it is considered a question of such

⁶⁸ In the analytic chapters, songs are described simply as being major or minor, rather than distinguishing between mixolydian and ionian, or dorian and aeolian.

⁶⁹ Allan Moore discusses form as one element that can help delineate genres of rock, suggesting that generic practices are reflected in song form. See *Rock: The Primary Text*, particularly Chapter Four “A Profusion of Styles.” William Echard discusses the value of form analysis in developing spatial and energetic metaphors, see *Neil Young and the Poetics of Energy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 150-1.

⁷⁰ This observation is echoed in Mark Spicer, “(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music,” *Twentieth-Century Music* 1 (2004): 29; and Walt Everett, “Confessions From Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can be a Sticky Substance,” in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, ed. Walt Everett (New York: Garland 2000): 272.

simplicity that it hardly merits close consideration.⁷¹ In fact, the notion of form in rock music is far more problematic than one might think. A wide-ranging analysis of 80s rock songs suggests that departures from the most common short-format song forms of the 50s, 60s, and 70s were central in giving rock music of the 80s its distinctive, somewhat unusual character. A combination of experimentation, ignorance of traditional practice, and the technological and aesthetic enabling of amateurs all likely contributed to this.⁷²

Rock musicians internalize the idea of form from their listening experiences while growing up. Thus the young Beatles favored the AABA form practiced by the professional songwriters of the 1940s and 50s before experimenting more with verse/chorus forms in their later years, perhaps influenced by the greater use of this form in folk musics which became popular in the mid- 60s.⁷³ Similarly, the punks and post-punks of the late 70s and 80s brought highly variable experiences, preconceptions, and predilections to their songwriting. As mentioned earlier, punks with a solid knowledge of rock, like Joe Strummer of the Clash, might be expected to reference earlier styles, either transparently, or through subtler allusion, whereas the members of U2 approached songwriting from a stance of much greater naiveté.

⁷¹ Returning to Baugh, he observes: “When this preoccupation with form and composition is brought to bear on rock, the chief result is confusion. Usually, rock music is dismissed as insignificant on account of the simplicity of its forms, a simplicity which is real, and not a misperception by those unfamiliar with the genre. Alternatively, more “liberal” critics will try to find significant form where there is very little form at all, and at the expense of neglecting what is really at stake in rock music. This liberal tolerance is a worse mistake than conservative intolerance. In the first place, it is highly condescending to suppose that rock music has value only when it approximates the compositional forms of baroque or romantic music.” See “Prolegomena,” 25.

⁷² I only offer my own anecdotal evidence for this. A course I designed on rock in the 80s uncovered more variations on typical song forms than from any other period I have examined (excluding, again, the art rock genre of the late 60s and 70s). Rock of the 90s appears to have evened out many of the irregularities that permeate 80s music. The role of the record companies in this process is likely significant, but it is a question that would benefit from more systematic study.

⁷³ See John Covach, “Form in Rock Music: A Primer,” in *Engaging Music: Essays in Musical Analysis*, ed. Deborah Stein, 65-76 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Normative song components

There are no settled definitions for what constitutes, and thus distinguishes, verses, choruses, bridges, and the infinitely variable interludes acting as spacers between the main structural components. Nor is it clear whether verse/chorus forms containing bridges are better conceived as a type of AABA form, or if the two forms have conflated into a distinct form. What seems clear, however, is that few rock musicians agonize over such niceties. Basically, they replicate what they have unconsciously absorbed during a lifetime of listening to, and playing, music. This is likely why it rarely even occurs to rock artists to write through-composed songs; such a thing would be so irregular as to be unrecognizable except, perhaps, to some of the 70s art-rock bands.⁷⁴

Some song components are more ubiquitous and, therefore, more easily described and recognized than others. Verses, choruses, and bridges are the main structural components of rock songs, and virtually all rock performers and listeners bring some kind of personal understanding of these elements to their experience.⁷⁵ However, we need to examine the structural and cultural signs that musicians are unconsciously decoding when they appear to assign a formal role to a particular section of music. This will also provide the framework for the formal designations in the analyses.

Several recent sources describe normative rock song forms in some detail.⁷⁶ Below, I summarize the most salient features emerging from these authors, while also

⁷⁴ Jefferson Starship's "White Rabbit" (*Surrealistic Pillow*, RCA, 1967) is one well-known example that has elements of through composition in a short work. Its form is AABC, or AABCD. Significantly, it is a song about psychedelic drugs, and the gradually unfolding form reflects a drug-altered state.

⁷⁵ Everett points out that "Rock musicians use the terms 'verse,' 'chorus,' 'refrain,' and 'bridge' differently from those who work within the traditional pre-1950s popular song." *Beatles as Musicians* (2001), xii. I adhere to the rock usages, as does Everett.

discussing the question of form in ways that reflect changes in practice in the early 80s, by which time the Tin Pan Alley conventions were largely out of vogue, or were referenced obliquely or ironically by artists such as Elvis Costello, who was well-versed in traditional practices.

The most widely recognized song sections, and their *most* normative form, are as follows:

1) **Verses** are recurring sections with the same music, but different text.⁷⁷ They are equivalent to poetic stanzas;

2) **Choruses**, in contrast, are recurring sections with the same music and text. They are usually the most memorable part of the song—the “hook.” The music often contrasts that of the verses, although it can be the same, or very similar, in which case, its role as a chorus is usually signaled by a denser vocal texture (hence the term “chorus”), or only becomes apparent through repetition.⁷⁸ Often, there is no chorus, but rather a refrain most often consisting of a single repeated line of text appearing typically at the end of verses, although a “refrain gesture” uses similar, rather than identical, text.⁷⁹

Choruses and refrains usually contain the song title;

⁷⁶ Walt Everett’s usages in *The Beatles as Musicians* (1999), 313-15, and (2000), 272-3, have been widely adopted by leading rock scholars including John Covach “Form in Rock Music;” Lori Burns and Mélisse Lafrance, *Disruptive Divas*; and Timothy S. Hughes, “Groove and Flow: Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder” (Ph.D. diss, University of Washington, 2003). See also Ken Stephenson, *What to Listen For in Rock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), Chapter Six, “Form,” for workable definitions of the major song sections.

⁷⁷ This is a crude, but common, construction. Most rockers understand the term “the music” to mean the instrumental backing and the melody. Thus, having the “same music” implies two sections with the same harmonic progression and melody, although instrumentation and texture might vary.

⁷⁸ For example, Peter Gabriel’s “Big Time” (*So*, Geffen, 1986) begins with a chorus, but this is not really apparent until it first repeats near the half-way point.

⁷⁹ For example, “The Wanderer” from *Zooropa* (1993). A refrain gesture might use antonyms, or developmental ideas that require the exchange of only one word. Another example is Harry Chapin’s

3) **Bridges** in the 80s usually occur once (rather than twice, which was common in the 60s) and contain text and music not occurring elsewhere in the song. Normally, there is substantial contrast with the other song sections. They are also known as the “middle eight,” terminology derived from Tin Pan Alley practice representing the B section in a thirty-two bar AABA form. Rock musicians (and we will see that this is true of U2) often refer to bridge gestures as middle eights regardless of their length. Instrumental solos are often experienced by listeners as contrasting sections, but they may be based on any of the sections discussed thus far;

4) **Introductions** and **codas** are sections, usually instrumental, that begin and close a song, respectively, most often with material that also appears in the verses or choruses. Codas often restate the introduction, or are slightly modified material from the verses or choruses. It is also common to fade out on a repeated chorus.

5) **Pre-choruses** are becoming more common in the post 70s decades. These are sections that are transitional from verses to choruses, but do not function clearly as one or the other. While the term is in the lexicon of most pop musicians, it is difficult to find the term defined.⁸⁰ However, based on the works under consideration here, and on others from the period, the following observations may be made. Pre-choruses are usually

“Cat’s in the Cradle” where the refrain progresses from the boy pledging that he is “gonna be just like you” to the father recognizing that the boy, as an adult, had “grown up just like me.”

⁸⁰ The Berklee College has proffered “transitional bridge,” “coined because no adequate name existed for this section of a song.” See Jack Perricone, *Melody in Songwriting* (Boston: Berklee Press, 2000), 87; and see Pat Pattison, *Managing Lyric Structure* (Boston: Berklee Press, 1991): 61-2. Both authors note that pre-chorus, pre-hook, ramp, climb, and lift are also used. Calling it a “transitional bridge” in order to distinguish it from the “primary bridge” seems overly cumbersome when the term “bridge” is already widely used. More recently, Michael Zager uses the term “pre-chorus,” but suggests that “build” is also used, see *Music Production: A Manual for Producers, Composers, Arrangers, and Students* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 41. In 2006, the Society for Music Theory Pop Interest Group listserve had a short discussion regarding the validity of “pre-chorus,” with the majority indicating that they considered it a common term in the industry. That has been my experience as well.

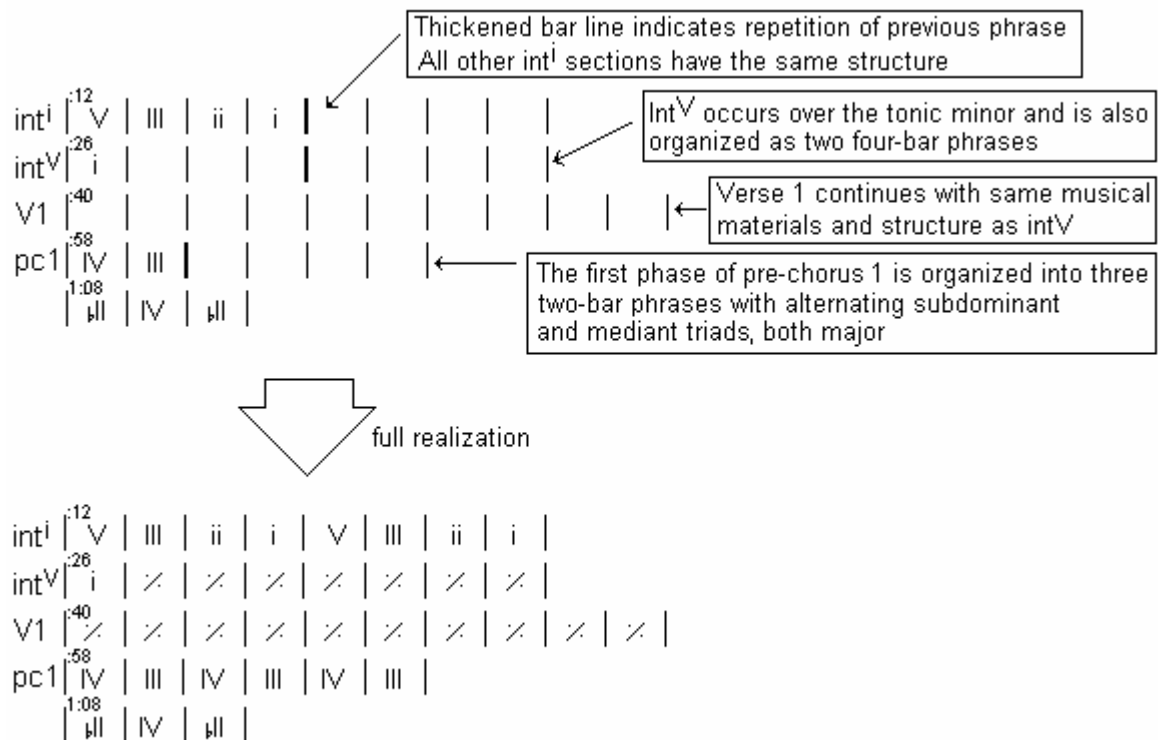
harmonically unstable, often beginning on a sonority other than the tonic, and often ending on the subdominant, or dominant, leading into the tonic of the chorus. They often repeat (or nearly repeat) text, which is characteristic of a chorus, but they lack the clear lift, or hook, of the chorus which follows, thus they create a kind of compound verse (although the very term “pre-chorus” implies a compound chorus).⁸¹ Pre-choruses often appear in songs with a developing narrative, and, occasionally, the text changes slightly in the pre-chorus in order to illustrate the progression of the narrative. U2 do not rely overly on pre-choruses (see Chapters Three through Five, *infra*).

To these main sections, I add the general designation **interlude**, representing the various musical spacers that may exist between the main sections. While interludes are often just several measures of intro material, as in Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Sweet Home Alabama,” in much of the music of the 80s, particularly amongst post-punk artists such as U2, Talking Heads, Peter Gabriel, R.E.M., and Elvis Costello, it is useful to have a simple, consistent designation for these kinds of sections, especially as they assume greater structural variety and formal function.⁸² Since interludes may be derived from various sources, a superscript is used to indicate the source, for example, an interlude based on introductory material is designated intⁱ, while one consisting of verse material would be called int^v. An interlude based on unique material is called int¹, and a second based on material distinct from any other is called int² and so forth.

⁸¹ A well-known example is the Beatles’ “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” (*Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Capitol, 1967) where the sections beginning “Cellophanes flowers...,” and “Newspaper taxis...” are pre-choruses with different texts. Another is Van Halen’s “Jump” (1984, Warner, 1984), where the pre-chorus begins with “Oh can’t you see me standing here, I’ve got my back against the record machine....”

⁸² Again referring to Peter Gabriel’s “Big Time,” the opening chorus is followed by a unique eight measure interlude (featuring a descending line of vocables) leading to the first verse.

Formal diagrams are provided for each song and are designed to convey as much information as possible at a glance. The sample below provides a key to the diagrammatic conventions. By indicating the main progressions only once, minor changes or new material are easily noticed. The song analyses work best when the recorded work is available, and the diagrams are intended as listening guides. Whenever a track timing is referred to in the text, the reader is referred to the accompanying formal diagram.



Typical Song forms

In the 60s, the predominant rock song forms were simple verse/chorus songs, and AABA songs derived from Tin Pan Alley. The Beatles provide well-known examples of

both forms.⁸³ AABA forms with partial reprises were common, and featured forms such as the very common AABA(BA), or, less often, AABA(ABA).⁸⁴

While the Beatles tended to predominantly use the AABA form early in their career, verse/chorus forms became more common in the post-1967 period. In addition, some more experimental songs had unusual forms, such as the sectional form of “A Day in the Life,” which consists of verse/refrain complexes by John Lennon framing a completely unrelated contrasting middle section that was originally intended to be a self-contained song by Paul McCartney. The McCartney/Lennon sections are separated by lengthy interludes, including the famous orchestral crescendo preceding the McCartney section and closing the piece. However, by the 1970s, many rock songs had a verse/chorus structure as well a contrasting bridge section. This is compound verse/chorus form, essentially a hybrid of verse/chorus and AABA form, where the A sections are verse/chorus complexes, and the B sections are bridges.⁸⁵

These forms persisted into the 80s and beyond, and almost every hit song can be rather easily cast into one of these forms. However, styles that would eventually become known as “alternative” asserted themselves throughout the late 70s and 80s. The

⁸³ Two early examples are the Beatles’ “She Loves You,” which is a verse/chorus song (although it has the formal anomaly of beginning with the chorus), while “Please Please Me” is a textbook AABA.

⁸⁴ Again, the Beatles provide well-known examples, with “I Want to Hold Your Hand” and “Ticket to Ride” in AABA(BA) form.

⁸⁵ The “compound” terminology was developed by John Covach and is adopted here. A superb example, complete with a modulatory bridge beginning in a remote key and resolving a tone higher than the initial tonic, is Elvis Costello’s “Oliver’s Army” (*Armed Forces*, Rykodisc, 1979). Costello uses these traditional techniques satirically, as the song concerns expendable, lower class youths as fodder for the British army. Another contemporary example is R.E.M.’s first single, “Radio Free Europe” (Hib Tone, 1981; *Murmur*, I.R.S., 1983).

Sheila Davis diagrams various verse/chorus and AABA permutations, but provides only one verse/chorus form with a bridge, her own “She Knows.” However, the bridge is included to accommodate a textual narrative requirement, and is in the section titled “Variations on a Form,” see *The Craft of Lyric Writing* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest, 1985):54-8. Later, she diagrams the Police’ “Every Breath You Take,” with a VVB1VB2vB1V form, under the heading “The AABA Expands,” 72-3.

overriding aesthetic of experimentation, often compounded by an ignorance of normative practice, resulted in more unusual styles reaching the mainstream than is probably the case for any previous time in the history of rock. This is not to suggest that the 80s was the golden age of experimental rock, but simply that there was a rate of stylistic turnover and hybridization that may have been greater than in most other periods, and that the styles once designated as “underground” rose more quickly to the surface to become, however briefly, the dominant styles. U2 and R.E.M., for example, were prototypical underground college rock bands in the early 80s yet, by the late 80s, had arguably become the top two acts in rock.

Atypical Song Forms

Some songs are difficult to fit within the paradigmatic forms. In most cases, this is because there are sections which do not conform to one of the well-established formal sections, or sections appear to duplicate the formal role of one another, such as where there seems to be two or more appropriate candidates for the designation verse, or bridge. Such songs are often best considered as having a “sectional” form. In such a case, sections might be distinguishable from one another on the basis of melody, texture, harmony, meter, tempo, or any number of parameters, but the placement within the song, or the style may make it difficult to say whether the given section is most like a verse, chorus, or bridge. An example is the Talking Heads’ “With Our Love” from the album *More Songs about Buildings and Food* (1978). There are five distinct sections of varying length, the first four of which could be described as some kind of verse, or pre-chorus. None really sounds much like a bridge or a chorus. The longest section sounds most like a pre-chorus but leads directly to a kind of refrain consisting of three iterations of the title

over a greatly reduced texture—which is not particularly chorus-like. The entire form then repeats (undermining any sense of through composition), with the first section approximately three times longer than in its first iteration.⁸⁶

A second atypical procedure is one that compares well with the Renaissance technique of strophic variation, where harmonically identical instrumental accompaniment is set under melodies that differ between strophes. In other words, music that is clearly functioning as a verse may support two completely different vocal melodies. The degree of difference regulates the extent to which we might consider such a procedure to be developmental. Slight variations, such as an embellished closing verse, or a verse where the vocal harmony trades places with the vocal melody from previous verses (such as in the final verse of the Kinks' "Lola"), but where the text could be sung equally with either melody, is not as developmental as a new melody setting substantially different text rhythms. While this may not appear to be a great creative leap, very few pop songs actually use this technique. If there are two potential melodic settings for any given section, the tendency, acquired through the weight of pop music enculturation, seems to be that the recording team chooses one or the other in order to maintain normative structural coherence.

Another sub-type of sectional form that proves useful in dealing with the music of U2 is what I call verse/chorus binary form, or verse/refrain binary form. Verse/chorus binary forms normally begin with two or more verse/chorus or verse/refrain complexes before giving way to what sounds like a typical contrasting bridge. To this point, the listener perceives a normative pop song. However, the bridge may continue beyond the typical dimensions for a "middle eight." The normative procedure is for the bridge to

⁸⁶ This song was produced by Brian Eno, whom we shall encounter as a producer for U2.

return to either verse or chorus materials, often with a full reprise of at least one verse/chorus complex. The hallmark of the binary form is that the earlier materials do not return in full, or in their original guise, or—in extreme cases—at all. Most often, a developmental middle section concludes with a chorus-based coda. Bridges in these forms may be on the order of twenty-five to forty percent of the song, considerably longer than usual for a post-70s bridge section.⁸⁷

This chapter has explored aspects of rock aesthetics and suggested that approaching U2's music from a perspective that privileges the role of recording in the compositional process may provide crucial insight. This chapter has also suggested that musical analysis can help reveal aspects of the compositional practice. The next chapter examines in detail the songs from *Achtung Baby*, providing an intimate glimpse into U2's mature compositional process. The study of this album is aided by an abundance of recorded demos which permit comparison between the album versions of several songs and earlier, fragmentary sketches, and thus provides us with perhaps the clearest glimpse into the band's musical workshop. Such comparisons and analyses do not allow for a reliable step-by-step explication of the process; but by dovetailing this material with accounts of the various recordists, it is possible to construct a workable model of U2's aesthetic of song and studio-enabled composition.

⁸⁷ This form is common in the 90s and 00s, as it is becoming rare to hear a full verse/chorus complex after the bridge, possibly because chorus/pre-chorus sections are becoming longer, and because much music from this period seems to exist primarily to present a heavily produced chorus as often as possible. Again, this is an area requiring further investigation. Michael Zager describes an ABABCB form, which is described as verse/chorus verse/chorus bridge chorus (fade), implying that he does not consider a full verse/chorus complex after a bridge to be normative; *Music Production*, 41. However, Zager only briefly considers questions of form, and does not purport to survey the field.

CHAPTER THREE: *Achtung Baby* (1991)

Released in November, 1991, *Achtung Baby* was the first U2 album in three years, and the first since the band's ominous proclamation at a series of Dublin New Year's Eve concerts in 1989 that it was time to "go away and dream it all up again."¹ The band were stung by the negative critical reaction to the *Rattle and Hum* album and concert documentary—particularly after the phenomenal success and pop press idolatry following *The Joshua Tree*—and were set upon redefining their public persona.² U2 believed that the popular press had hijacked their image, and that they had been reduced to caricatures of serious, humorless, excessively earnest poseurs longing for status equaling the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and Elvis Presley.

There were numerous insinuations that U2 had impliedly inducted themselves into this august company with indecorous, over-familiar reference to, and association with, rock icons.³ Ironically, U2 had been absorbing and overtly expressing American

¹ The remark, made December 27 at the Point Depot, a former warehouse converted to a concert hall (and site of the interviews in the *Rattle and Hum* film), was interpreted by many fans and some of the Irish Press as an announcement of U2's impending dissolution. See *U2 Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Point Depot." Bono and Edge imply that Bono's remark occurred on New Year's Eve see *U2 by U2*, 213.

² Fred Johnson, "U2, Mythology, and Mass-Mediated Survival," *Popular Music and Society* 27 (2004): 79-99, discusses how U2 became "simulacral mediaphemes," or one-dimensionally defined entities able to propagate efficiently through the media until they cease being interesting. Johnson suggests that U2 were able to change their identity with *Achtung Baby* likely just before reaching the stage of becoming uninteresting as a mediaphemes.

³ The Beatles were evoked explicitly in the first few seconds of both the film and record versions of *Rattle and Hum* when Bono introduced their opening cover of the Beatles' "Helter Skelter" with "Here's a song Charles Manson stole from the Beatles. We're stealing it back." They also evoke the Beatles' rooftop concert from *Let it Be* by staging their own rooftop concert in downtown Los Angeles (complete with annoyed policemen) for the video of their cover of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" (or, perhaps, their cover of Jimi Hendrix' famous cover of the same song). John Lennon is evoked in "God, Pt. 2," in

influences at least since the *War* tour in 1983-4, culminating in the *Unforgettable Fire* and *The Joshua Tree* albums, but it was against *Rattle and Hum* that the media vented its indignation, most likely as a manifestation of the physical and critical phenomenon that what goes up must come down.⁴ *Achtung Baby* was released with relatively little fanfare, and U2 initially avoided interviews, preferring to let the music speak for itself (and, presumably, to gauge the early reception).

U2 had last engineered a change in style in 1984 by seeking a new recording environment for *Unforgettable Fire* (see Chapter Five), so they decided to try the same tactic by traveling to Berlin to record at Hansa Ton studios, made famous as the venue where Brian Eno produced David Bowie's *Low* (1977), *Heroes* (1977), and *Lodger* (1979) trilogy. U2 were attracted to Hansa to capture not only the mood of the Bowie trilogy, but the actual sound as well, which they believed was largely a function of the recording space itself, and its somewhat antiquated recording gear.⁵

which Bono recites a litany of things in which he does not believe, as did Lennon in "God" from *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* (1970). Dylan also appears as a co-writer of "Love Rescue Me" on the *Rattle and Hum* record. U2 are shown in the *Rattle and Hum* film recording several songs at Sun Studios in Memphis under the guidance of one of Presley's earliest engineers, "Cowboy" Jack Clements, and their "pilgrimage" to Presley's memorial mansion, Graceland, is covered, complete with Larry Mullen astride Presley's Harley motorcycle (this pilgrimage unintentionally recalls the cinematic portrayal of an earlier one (1984) by the fictional band Spinal Tap from the rock satire film *This is Spinal Tap*). Finally, U2 allegedly "exploit" black artists such as the New Voice of Freedom Choir, who sing backup on a live version of *The Joshua Tree*'s "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," and by performing "When Love Comes to Town" with bluesman B. B. King.

⁴ *Rattle and Hum* enjoyed commercial success similar to that of *The Joshua Tree*, with eventual sales of fourteen million, compared to the latter's sixteen million. See *U2 Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Rattle and Hum (album)."

⁵ This was the same impulse that led them to record at Sun Studios for the *Rattle and Hum* sessions. According to then-owner, Gary Hardy, they wanted to get the same slap-back echo heard on the early Elvis Presley recordings, reputedly created by the natural reverb of the small recording space and its floor. See *U2 Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Sun Recording Studios." Ultimately, Hansa was a little *too* antiquated, so U2 relocated to more familiar territory. They did, however, retain Hansa employee Shannon Strong (a.k.a. Bambi Lee Savage) who is cited in the *Achtung Baby* liner notes as a recording assistant.

The recording took place primarily between November, 1990 and March, 1991, initially with Daniel Lanois producing. These sessions were unusually tense as the band groped forward, trying, mostly under the influence of Bono and Edge, to find a new direction, while Clayton, Mullen, and Lanois wished to proceed in a more conventional U2 style.⁶ While the time off permitted the band to lay as low as they wished, Edge and Bono became involved in composing incidental music for the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, an experience that might have predisposed them toward the darkness permeating *Achtung Baby*.⁷

Adding to the pressure was the gloomy mood in Berlin, a combination of damp weather and the growing pessimism following the initial euphoria of Germany's reunification. Brian Eno was asked to join the sessions once they began to founder.

Eno's strategy was to appear only for a few days every few weeks:

I would deliberately not listen to the stuff in between visits, so I could go in cold, as it were, and just listen through the material....I would say 'Well, this one sounds fine, I don't think there's any reason for me to pay attention to this. This one has become a complete mess, and I suggest we spend half a day on it and decide from that half a day whether to just chuck it out or do something radically different with it. This one sounds radically confused, and last time I heard it, it sounded much more direct and clear'—those kinds of comments. Every visit gave the band the chance to marshal their resources and see where they were, assess the situation, and then when I left they'd go back to their dithering ways.⁸

After six weeks of difficult work, U2 decided in the spring to relocate to a rented seaside house on the outskirts of Dublin where they installed a mobile studio dubbed "Dogtown" by the band.

⁶ No comprehensive studies or biographies cover this period. However, numerous interviews with the U2 entourage paint a very consistent picture of the mood of the sessions, and the aesthetic inclinations and preferences of the factions that developed. See especially Flanagan *End of the World*, Chapter One, passim; Tom Doyle, "10 Years of Turmoil Inside U2," *Q*, 11 October 2002, 80-88; and *U2 by U2*, 216-34.

⁷ Bono hints at this, and Edge suggests that some ideas from this project were ultimately set aside for U2. Edge was seeking inspiration through listening to very technologically based "industrial" music. See *U2 by U2*, 215.

⁸ Brian Eno, quoted in Jim DeRogatis, *Milk It* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo, 2003), 194.

Achtung Baby represents a departure for U2 on two major, interrelated grounds—sound and image. Gone were the overalls, cowboy hats, and wistful gazes into the distance; in their place, stone-faced, glaring rock stars in shades and sequined jeans. Gone were the wide open soundscapes of *The Joshua Tree*, the protest songs, and the obvious stadium anthems; in their place was a startling, bewildering collage of technology, and Bono in the guise of a cynical, seedy, over-the-top rock star.⁹ This new style blending rock, hip-hop, and European/Asian techno was intended to directly challenge the oft observed “authenticity” of *The Joshua Tree*, an authenticity that almost immediately afterward degenerated into perceived posing after the release of *Rattle and Hum*. Albin Zak describes *Achtung Baby* as follows:

The sonic allusion is to a futuristic, machine-ruled world—an image quite at odds with the passionate humanism that U2 had been known for. Before any words are sung, the sounds alone alert the listener that the band has moved into new expressive territory.¹⁰

Some years after the album’s release, Edge observed:

When it came to the 90's work, we were being more experimental and we got more interested in the abuse of technology—seeing what happens when you push something to the point where it's almost about to break. There's a certain texture to the sound, particularly of *Achtung Baby*, which is very much about technology on the verge of breakdown.¹¹

By “breakdown,” Edge is likely referring to both the extreme processing that often makes the source instrument, be it drum, electric guitar, or synthesizer, unidentifiable, as well as the sheer textural density of particular tracks, anticipating the even denser textures of *Pop* (1997).

⁹ Susan Fast refers to a “foregrounding of technology” throughout *Achtung Baby*. See “Music, Contexts, and Meaning in U2,” 46.

¹⁰ Albin Zak, *Poetics*, 68.

¹¹ Edge, quoted in Olaf Tyaransen, “Closer to the Edge,” *Hot Press Magazine*, December 2002, <www.hotpress.com/archive/2626881.html> (25 March 2006).

Critics often describe *Achtung Baby* as a very personal album, yet Bono adopts various personae which break down the connection many fans perceived to exist between band and listener. Most of the songs deal with what appear on the surface to be adult relationships (as opposed to youth relationships which form the staple material for pop music), making this U2's "love" album, and while there is occasional warmth, there is little indulgence in sentimentality.¹² In fact, *Achtung Baby* leaves very little potential for sappiness by exploring the darker, more interior, yet commonplace elements of human interaction. It has often been mentioned that the final breakdown of Edge's marriage in 1990 informed *Achtung Baby* to some extent, but it appears that the influence was perhaps greater than previously acknowledged.¹³

Achtung Baby received a Grammy nomination for "Album of the Year" in 1992, losing to Eric Clapton's *Unplugged*. It did, however, win the oddly named "Best Rock Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal," with Lanois and Eno tying for "Producer of the Year (non classical)" with Babyface and L. A. Reid.¹⁴

Any examination of *Achtung Baby* must also consider its accompanying tour, the mammoth exercise in sensory overload dubbed "ZooTV". Similarly, the subsequent album, *Zooropa* (1993), is best seen as a companion piece to *Achtung Baby* as it was recorded between stages of the "ZooTV" tour and eventually incorporated into the later

¹² This observation is best made by Elizabeth Wurtzel, "...it may seem odd that this is U2's 'love' album, but it is precisely the harsh sound that keeps the romantic urges expressed here from degenerating into sappiness. And the love that is sung about on *Achtung Baby* is tough, coarse, and complex." "Me2," *New Yorker*, 17 February 1992, 45.

¹³ See *U2 by U2*, 216.

¹⁴ The Grammy Awards for 1992 were presented February 25, 1993. Some sources mistakenly refer to these as the 1993 Grammy Awards. Although *Achtung Baby* was released in October 1991, eligibility for the 1992 awards ran from October 1, 1991 to September 30, 1992.

stages.¹⁵ The songs on *Achtung Baby* come more sharply into focus when considered in context with the visual elements of music videos, the tour, and *Zooropa*.

Sketches of songs on *Achtung Baby*

Achtung Baby affords a rare analytic opportunity to understand U2's compositional procedures in the recording studio, since there exist almost seven hours of recording session outtakes.¹⁶ These recordings are most widely known as the *Salomé* bootleg due to the large number of versions of a song that would eventually bear that name. While not released as part of *Achtung Baby*, "Salomé" was the "B-side" on the "Even Better Than The Real Thing" single in June, 1992.¹⁷ These are clearly early demos, often little more than the band jamming over a series of chord changes while Bono scats and mumbles text, occasionally shouting out suggestions, jokes, or instructions, such as moving to a particular song section. The songs vary enormously in their relative degree of development; some seem very new with numerous mistakes and confusion reigning, while others are fully arranged with fairly dense production. Almost four hours of the outtakes are little more than extended tracks of solo drum kit. On the whole, however, there is usually very little sound processing other than some texture-thickening reverb or a particular guitar effect lasting the duration of the jam, suggesting that the band may have been experimenting with certain sounds as a background wash.

¹⁵ Bill Flanagan's *U2 at the End of the World* is an interesting synopsis of the internal workings of U2 during the recording of *Achtung Baby*, *Zooropa* and the subsequent tours. Flanagan does not provide a biography, as such, but as a professional music writer, he manages to provide better insights into musical matters than most contemporary sources.

¹⁶ The source of these recordings has always been murky. However, Edge revealed that the sessions were actually from STS Studios in Dublin where the band did some pre-production work before going to Berlin. This accords well with other accounts in that all of the songs on *Achtung Baby* with recognizable fragments from the demos have been described in other sources as songs that were amongst the first worked on in Berlin. See *U2 by U2*, 225; and *infra*.

¹⁷ There are numerous different versions of this single depending upon the country in question, and not all include "Salomé." See the discography in *U2 Encyclopedia*, 264-5.

Yet, if *Achtung Baby* was to be, in Bono's words, the sound of "four men chopping down *The Joshua Tree*," it is not immediately apparent from the *Salomé* demos. The overall style is not atypical for U2, except that Edge's guitar is less frequently processed through a delay effect, a sound that had virtually defined Edge to that point. In spite of proceeding normally, the goal for *Achtung Baby*, according to Brian Eno, was to negate everything they had done before, to take their instincts and do the opposite:

Buzzwords on this record were *trashy, throwaway, dark, sexy* and *industrial* (all good) and *earnest, polite, sweet, righteous, rockist* and *linear* (all bad). It was good if a song took you on a journey or made you think your hifi was broken, bad if it reminded you of recording studios or U2.¹⁸

Given that Eno's "buzzwords" represent phenomena expressed substantially at the surface and through text, it is not surprising that very few of the *Salomé* sketches can be considered early versions of songs from *Achtung Baby*. In some cases, short passages from the sketches are recognizable as parts of songs on the album. However, two songs from the album, "Even Better Than the Real Thing" and "Acrobat," (which will be discussed later in their running order on *Achtung Baby*), and one single, "Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)," closely resemble sketches from the *Salomé* recordings. Comparison of these demos to the final versions permits a more concrete appraisal of U2's mature compositional style and provides a framework for assessing the compositional procedures of songs from other albums, but for which no demos exist.

¹⁸ Brian Eno, quoted in "Bringing Up Baby," *Rolling Stone U2*, 87.

“Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)”

This song ultimately became the B-side to the single release of “One,”¹⁹ continuing U2’s practice, originating with their third album *War* (1983), of releasing non-album tracks that had reached an advanced stage of composition as additional songs on singles. This, however, was the first B-side to so obviously share material with an album track. The sketch for “Lady With the Spinning Head” was heavily mined for materials appearing in several songs on *Achtung Baby*, namely “The Fly,” “Ultra Violet,” and “Zoo Station.” While it might be unusual to situate clearly related songs together on an album, U2 obviously had no problem releasing “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)” on a single associated with the album; in fact, the designation “UV1” stands for “Ultra Violet 1,” implying that it was the first version of “Ultra Violet,” the tenth track on *Achtung Baby*. However, “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)” is essentially identical to the sketch while hardly resembling “Ultra Violet” at all, making the designation “UV1” more of an acknowledgement of U2’s self-borrowing than a genuine suggestion that this is the first version of “Ultra Violet.” While “Ultra Violet” must have gone through many more drafts to reach its final form, this was still the first time that U2 essentially exposed their compositional process.²⁰

¹⁹ The single was released in February, 1992. “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)” appeared on both the vinyl and CD versions of the single. Covers of Lou Reed’s “Satellite of Love,” and Cole Porter’s “Night and Day” were additional tracks on the CD single. These would have been known as “B-sides” in the days of 45rpm vinyl singles, but CD singles often have as many as five other songs, some of which may be remixes of the single’s title track.

²⁰ It is possible that the release of the *Salomé* bootleg had, in their minds, made their process of raiding sketches obvious, so there was nothing to lose by essentially doing the same thing commercially. It also solved the problem of not being able to release related tracks that were both deemed of high quality, but too similar to warrant inclusion on the same album.

“Take You Down”

Before discussing “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1),” it is helpful to examine the sketch of this song, usually referred to as “Take You Down” (Fig. 3.1).²¹ The song

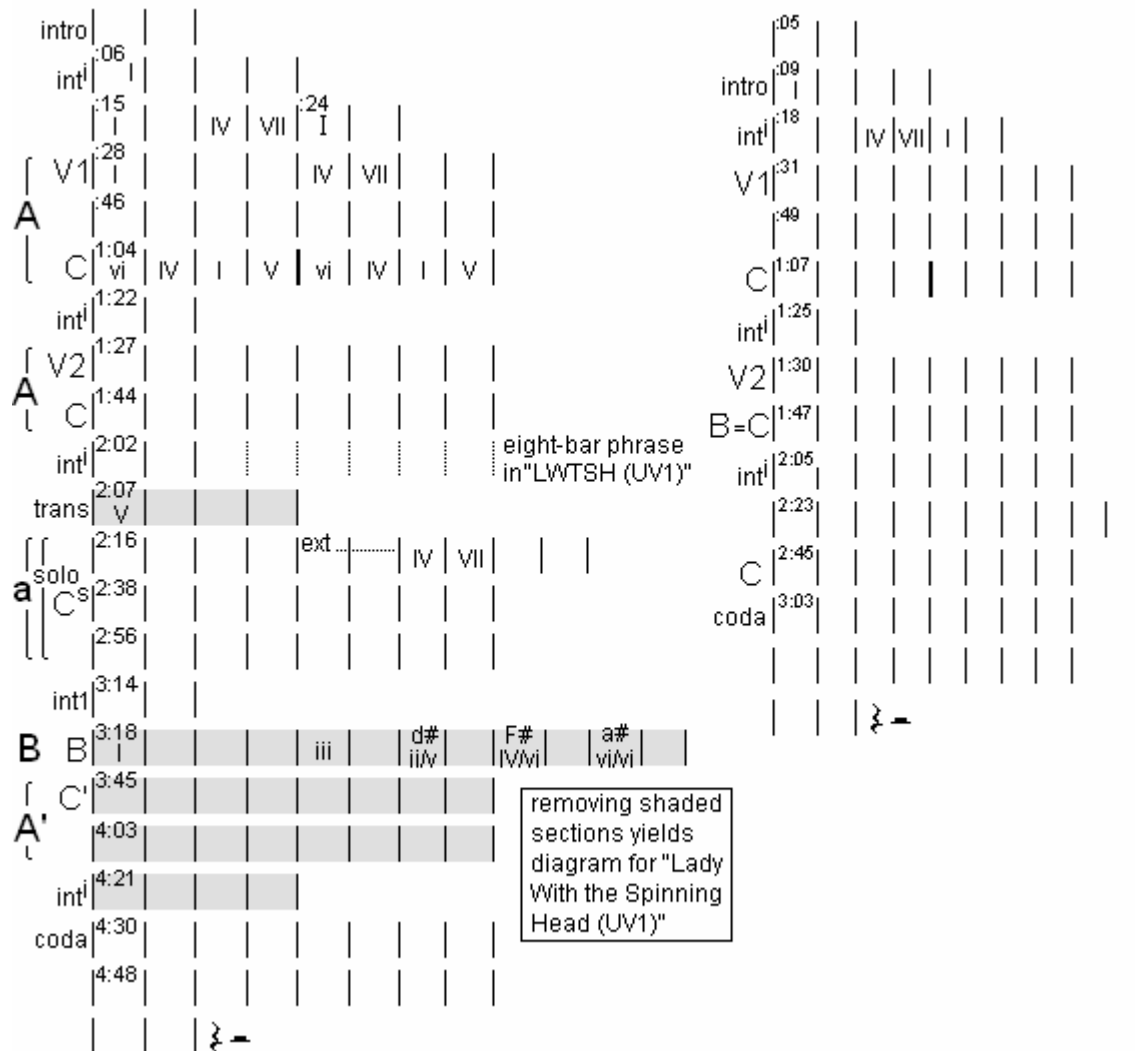


Fig. 3.1: Formal diagrams for the sketch “Take You Down” [left] and “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)” [right]

begins with two measures of drum kit establishing a busy groove, after which the remainder of the basic rock combo enters at two-measure intervals in the following order: distorted rhythm guitar, bass, and an echoic, palm-muted, chugging guitar, likely a

²¹ All discussion of formal characteristics and track timings refer the reader to the formal diagram accompanying every song under discussion.

texture-thickening overdub by Edge (unless the distorted rhythm guitar is being played by Bono).²² The last part to enter (:24) is an overdub by Edge of a high-pitched, moderately processed, undistorted lead guitar using mostly “wet” effects such as chorus, tone phasing, and wah-wah for the solo. This provides a total of five instrumental parts, three of which are most likely recorded by the band playing live in the studio, with Edge overdubbing the additional rhythm and lead tracks afterward.

The sketch has an atypical compound AAaBA' form where the A-sections are verse/chorus complexes, although no two A-sections are identical; verse 1 is twice the length of subsequent verses, and the third verse/chorus complex provides the harmonic foundation for the guitar solo.²³ After the three verse/chorus complexes, there follows a texturally and harmonically contrasting bridge (B-section) of twelve measures (3:18). The bridge is followed by two untexted choruses (A'), and the song closes with an extended coda of guitar solo exclusively over **I**. This form is, therefore, compound contrasting verse/chorus, but with minor elements of verse/chorus binary form, as there is no return of verse material after the bridge, and, in fact, no harmonically complete verse material at all after approximately the midpoint of the song.

²² Bono had become a reasonably competent rhythm guitarist by this point, and occasionally played guitar in concert to thicken the live textures. However, video sources reveal that Bono's contribution is low enough in the mix that he can drop in and out without much impact on the overall sound. Also, internet discussion boards occasionally engage in debates on whether Bono actually plays, again underscoring the minimal role that his parts play in the live sound. In some cases, such as the “ZOOTV” and “PopMart” tours, Bono and Edge perform duets on a smaller stage where Bono clearly takes an accompaniment role on acoustic guitar. The *U2 Elevation Live in Boston* (2001) DVD shows Bono playing some important lines, particularly on “Walk On” where he plays the high ostinato riff, although Edge plays this part on the *U2 Go Home: Live from Slane Castle* (2003) video (recorded only three months after the Boston concert), and throughout the “Vertigo” tour of 2005-6.

²³ We will see similar forms for “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses” and “So Cruel,” which also have three consecutive verse/chorus complexes before a contrasting section. This form appears as early as *Boy*, for example, on “Out of Control” and “I Will Follow” (see Chapter Four).

A revealing aspect of this sketch is that the first two A-sections retain two different versions of improvised lead vocals occurring simultaneously but strongly panned onto the left and right channels, providing two quite different possibilities for how the song might ultimately be realized. As usual, Bono is mostly mumbling and obviously trying out numerous ideas for text and melody. Certain phrases come through clearly and are repeated, such as the potential lyrical hook “take you down” or “take you up,” a dichotomous construction with which he was experimenting, but which does not appear in any subsequent version or derivative. On one chorus (1:44), he even tries the text “Wake up, wake up, wake up, dead man,” but the rhythm on “dead man” is forced and unnatural. This text, however, appears six years later in the song “Wake Up Dead Man,” the final track on *Pop*—striking substantiation of Eno’s description of Bono as the “Mother Teresa of the Abandoned Song.”²⁴

Bono provides rare insight into his conception and terminology of song form at the end of the third interlude (3:16), where he says, “I’m singing the middle eight here,” which leads into the reduced-texture, contrasting B-section. It is noteworthy that Bono uses the somewhat more traditional terminology “middle eight” rather than “bridge,” a generic term for a contrasting section somewhere in the middle of a song. It is also strange that Bono announces that he is in the middle eight, as the sketch seems to be in at least an intermediate stage of development, as there are no obvious mistakes or sections where players seem unsure about what to do. It is not clear for whose benefit Bono is providing an oral roadmap.²⁵

²⁴ This text also appears on another quite unrelated sketch titled “She’s Gonna Blow Your House Down,” suggesting that Bono was very interested in the theodicy at this time.

²⁵ The vocal may be from a earlier stage of recording than the backing tracks.

The most notable feature about this “middle eight” is its extremely unusual chord progression, as U2 tend overwhelmingly toward standard rock progressions. It begins in the primary key of E-major, but briefly tonicizes F \sharp -major as it moves through the harmonies **I** (E-major) - **iii** (G \sharp -minor) - **vi/II** (D \sharp -minor) - **II** (F \sharp -major) - **iii/II** (A \sharp -minor), with the A \sharp -minor resolving to **vi** (C \sharp -minor) of the chorus. The “**II**” (F \sharp -major) chord might more typically be described as **V/V**, but its resolution to C \sharp -minor, via A \sharp -minor, undermines the secondary function, particularly as there is no resolution, delayed or otherwise, to a B (**V**) sonority.²⁶

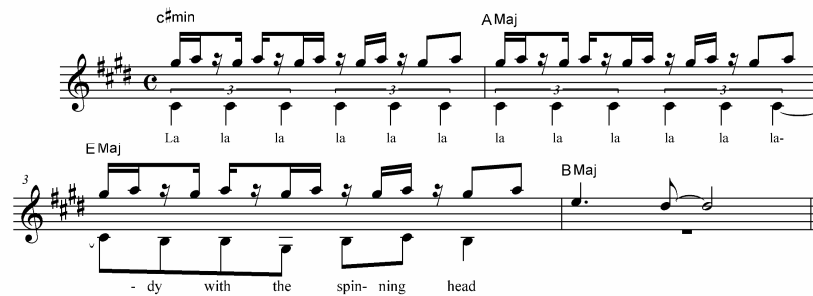
For the single version of “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1),” there were several departures from the sketch. Most significantly, the aforementioned bridge was eliminated, thereby relegating one of U2’s more interesting and perplexing chord progressions temporarily to the archives.²⁷ They also eliminated the four-measure transition gesture on **V** preceding the guitar solo, although it reappears unaltered in “The Fly” (discussed *infra*).

In order to provide variety in the sections that remained, U2 resorted to another procedure directly resulting from their sketching process, namely pressing some sections into double-duty. In this case, the section at 1:07 is a chorus with the triplet quarter vocal “la’s” interacting polyrhythmically with the syncopated sixteenth-note guitar riff, giving the song its irresistible rhythmic drive (Ex. 3.1). However these instrumental and

²⁶ Roman numeral analysis is highly problematic in pop music, especially with musicians who are essentially self taught. There is really no suggestion of secondary function in this passage, so the designations “vi/II” or even “vii” would be reasonable treatments of D \sharp -minor. Transformational analysis (after Cohn) tends to work better: D \sharp F \sharp A \sharp →F \sharp A \sharp C \sharp →A \sharp C \sharp E \sharp →C \sharp EG \sharp . See Guy Capuzzo, “Neo-Riemannian Theory and the Analysis of Pop-Rock Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 26 (2004): 177-199.

²⁷ The bridge is resurrected in the extended mix of “Lady With the Spinning Head,” and for the introduction to “Ultra Violet” (discussed *infra*).

backing vocal tracks also provide the bed tracks for what is equally clearly a bridge gesture during what would normally be the second chorus (1:47); Bono slips into a lower



Ex. 3.1: guitar and vocal polyrhythm in chorus of “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)”

vocal register and a completely different text rhythm, and the vocal backing track for the chorus (the triplet quarter note “la-la-la-la-la-la,” and the title hook) is retained, but placed lower in the mix. This, combined with the new text and Bono’s solo lead vocal, negates all sense of chorus for this section.²⁸ The idea for this likely came from the sketch itself where the function of this section is never clearly defined; Bono scats so many different melodies and texts that there were plenty of possibilities for this section, and rather than choose one to the exclusion of all others, two distinct functions for this section were retained within a single song. This section also does double duty in the extended dance mix, although its appearance as a bridge section, yet again, features different text and melody than any other version.

The sketch is 150 measures long, whereas “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)” is pared down to 101 measures. However, the 162-measure extended dance mix of “Lady With the Spinning Head” is even more closely related to the sketch, most significantly preserving the “middle eight” Bono refers to during the sketch although, unlike in the

²⁸ This strategy is also used on “Crumbs From Your Table” from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004).

demo, there is no text.²⁹ Instead, the band opts for a reduced texture occupied largely by a synthesizer generating downbeat punctuations and pseudo-string lines more reminiscent of an 80s James Bond soundtrack than a rock song. The extended mix also adds an untexted verse as an extended introduction, as well as synthesized sound effects also appearing on “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1).”³⁰ These sounds establish a light-hearted, frivolous mood (or a demented carnival atmosphere) inconsistent with the more somber affect pervading *Achtung Baby*. This certainly fulfils Eno’s “trashy, throwaway” aesthetic, but perhaps too much, even for *Achtung Baby*.

It is possible that the sketch bed tracks remained in the final mixes, as there are peculiarities in the metric partitioning of the introduction (Fig. 3.2). “Take You Down” has a drum fill and cymbal crash sounding like a phrase marker (0:15) except that it

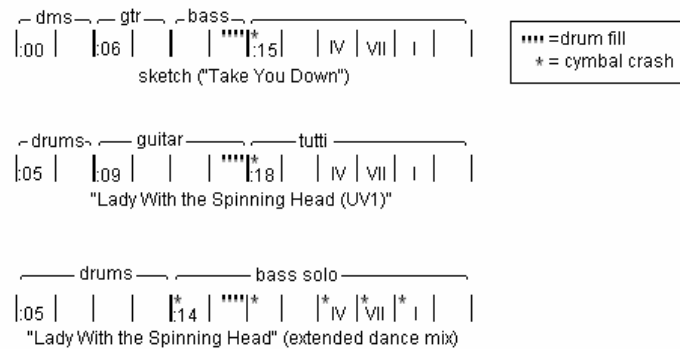


Fig. 3.2: Metric partitioning in intros of the sketch, single, and extended dance mix of “Lady With the Spinning Head”

occurs in the third measure of what harmonically aligns with subsequent verse phrases as an eight-measure phrase, resulting in a six-measure phrase with the **IV - VII** change

²⁹ Released in 2002 on *U2: The Best 1990-2000 & B-Sides*. The extended dance mix was produced by Paul Barrett, recorded by Ian Bryan, and remixed by Alan Moulder, 1992.

³⁰ These synthesized electronic sounds, reminiscent of those in the novelty hit “Popcorn” from 1972, occur at the beginning and at 0:49. Edge reports that these are actually guitar sounds manipulated by himself and Lanois, *U2 by U2*, 225.

coming two measures “early” (although initially unapparent, as this is the first time the progression is heard). This misplacement occurs in the same place in “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1).” On all three songs, the fill and crash occur seven measures after the drums begin, but only for the extended dance mix do the producers feel it is important to align the hypermeasures so that the **IV - VII** change occurs in its standard position; and they do this by adding additional (likely digitally sampled) cymbal crashes, helping to cover the anomaly of a drum fill in the middle of the phrase. This suggests that original bed tracks were used, and that the various productions were made post-recording, otherwise it would have been simple to re-record, or digitally manipulate the drum tracks to provide the metric regularity underlying much of U2’s work.

While there may be common beds between the various tracks, virtually none of them have exactly the same tempo. Even between the two mixes of “Lady With the Spinning Head,” it sounds as though the same vocal track is used where possible, but, when played simultaneously, the tracks begin to phase with one another after only a few seconds. This is possible with digital recording, as opposed to analog tape, where any change in tape speed affects the pitch of the recorded sound. Digital tracks have some leeway in their playback tempos, so it is possible to vary the speed of a track slightly without the pitch being affected. Only “Lady With the Spinning Head (UV1)” and “Ultra Violet” have exactly the same tempo, such that it is possible to play them simultaneously without any phasing.³¹

The recording of “Lady With the Spinning Head” gave U2 a lot of difficulty.³² Having lavished much time on it, and clearly sensing potential, it is not surprising that the

³¹ I created composite mixes of these two songs to verify this (with technical assistance from Ralph Maier).

³² Edge describes this as a song that “we were really struggling with.” See *U2 by U2*, 225.

solution was to take parts of it and use them as jumping-off points for other songs.

Analyses of songs from the album, informed where possible by anecdotes from the various recordists, show how this process worked, often inviting speculation about studio compositional strategies and decisions even in the absence of directly corroborating accounts.

Songs From the Album

Track 1: “Zoo Station” (A-Major)

The Joshua Tree gets chopped down immediately.³³ This song resulted from an industrial treatment of the sketch that became “Lady With the Spinning Head.”³⁴ The verses for “Zoo Station” and “Lady With the Spinning Head” share the common double-plagal **I - VII - IV - I** progression, and the chorus progression for “Zoo Station” is simply the second phrase of the verse repeated, although the two songs barely resemble one another in any other respect.

The full texture of “Zoo Station” is exposed gradually over thirty seconds. A heavily distorted guitar is panned hard left, playing a descending octave glissando on the sixth-string A (frets seventeen through five) via the lower $\hat{7}$. This riff engages heavily processed drums, panned slightly to the right, in a call and response texture, all over a peculiar buzzing, oscillating electronic sound with a predominant pitch of E. The “drums” are actually explosive bursts of noise phrased like a snare shot followed by three bass drum or tom-tom hits. Whether these are heavily processed drums, or sounds

³³ Both Fast and Zak discuss the opening of this song in some detail.

³⁴ This has been long suspected in the U2 fan community, but is confirmed by Edge, *U2 by U2*, 225. “Industrial” music is a broad style designation referring to the fusion of rock and abrasive, avant-garde electronic dance music that emerged in the late 1980s. *Achtung Baby* engineer, Flood (real name Mark Ellis, see Chapter Two) was well-versed in industrial recording practices, and is also credited as the mixer of “Zoo Station.”

derived from another source is difficult to tell, but a listener will likely interpret them initially as drums; but each drum report is abruptly cut off before it can decay naturally, rendering the sound ambiguous. The entrance of a recognizable snare drum (although sounding somewhat like a Jamaican steel drum) further muddies one's perception of what sound is created by which instrument. Additional layers of noise, including electronic beeps (pitched on A), a high triangle-like sound (something sounding like wood blocks) and various other percussion sounds gradually enter unpredictably until the texture is full and complex. Finally the tutti texture is attained (0:30) as a cymbal crash signals the entry of a relatively normal sounding drum kit and bass guitar.

This texture persists for sixteen measures until the throbbing bass is released in a descending walking pattern over the first clear chord changes to **VII** and **IV** (0:45).³⁵ Bono also enters with a high vocable line, taking us out of the unfamiliar and into a more recognizable U2 sound.³⁶ Retrospectively, this section is recognizable as an instrumental, introductory version of the chorus. The first verse (1:00), however, throws us back into unfamiliar territory, with Bono's heavily processed voice telling us that he is ready for "the laughing gas," and "to let go of the steering wheel."

All these sounds are scattered at different positions and virtual distances from the listener, creating an artificial, three-dimensional realm of sound, corresponding to nothing in everyday experience. Unlike U2's earlier albums, it is difficult to positively identify any of the instruments, or to say with any certainty how many instrumental parts are unfolding. The mix is arranged so that some parts sound very close while others

³⁵ This is the reverse of the **IV**- **VII** progressions in "Lady With the Spinning Head," so in addition to taking the sketch in an industrial direction, they also made simple changes to the progression.

³⁶ See Zak, 68-9, and Fast, 47.

seem relatively distant, and most coexist in a manner impossible in real space. There is a sense of explosive sounds in an acoustically dead, confined space, yet other sounds seem to be above, and well behind the listener. In addition, there are two distinct versions of Bono; a compressed, electronically mediated Bono singing solo in the verses, and a more ambient Bono in the choruses wailing vocables above and behind the listener while electronic Bono re-enters with mumbled metaphors of travel and movement, with the refrain “Zoo Station” occasionally cutting through the morass.

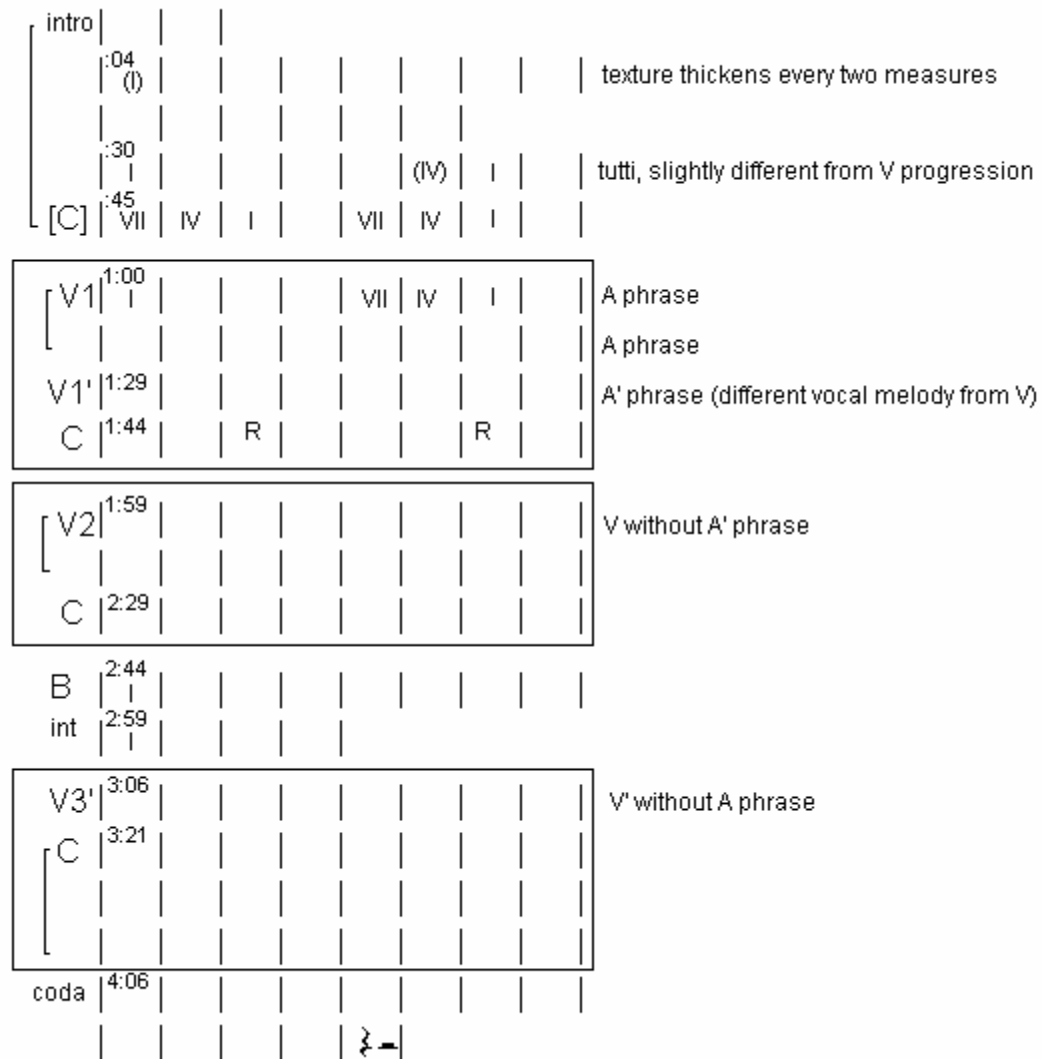


Fig. 3.3: Formal diagram for “Zoo Station”

Formal analysis reveals a strong likelihood of a cut-and-paste procedure to yield the three distinct verses. “Zoo Station” is essentially a verse/chorus form, although there are several anomalies that make the assignment of mere verse/chorus too facile. At first blush, after a lengthy introduction, the song appears to proceed in typical contrasting verse/chorus form, confirmed by the appearance of the second verse, sounding almost identical to the first (except, as usual, for text). However, whereas the first verse has three phrases in an AAA’ structure—with the A’ vocal melody very different from that of the A phrases—the second verse consists of only two A-phrases. This absence of an A’-phrase in verse 2 thus changes the proportions, and the sound between verses 1 and 2. Nonetheless, a second chorus virtually identical to the first reaffirms the perception of verse/chorus complexes. The compound nature of the form becomes apparent at a texturally reduced “break” on the tonic (2:44) over which Bono scats the ostensible throw-away text “Hey Baby, hey Baby, it’s all right, it’s all right.” One perceives, perhaps, a weak bridge gesture, but, after eight measures, a clear four-measure interlude (2:59) leads to the next verse. However, this third verse is a single A’-phrase preceding the repeated chorus that leads to the coda. Thus, the three verses are all of different lengths, and apportion A and A’ material differently between them.

It is tempting to imagine that the sketches comprised only two verses, the second of which had its A’-phrase lopped off to stand as verse 3 after the insertion of a newly composed bridge, generating the final form. The bridge is somewhat static, remaining on the tonic (although the synthesizer melody hints at **VII**), and has the character of a time-killing section rather than one that is strongly contrasting or developmental.³⁷ This

³⁷ We will see in the next chapter that this technique dates back to U2’s earliest songs.

suggests that the A and A' versions of the verse may have been two different melodic sketches, both of which were selected for the final version. Nothing in the texts of the second and third verse suggest they are connected, the first referring to images of driving, the second to trains and train stations. However, the A and A' texts of verse 1 are not related by topic or rhyme scheme either.³⁸

The overall proportions of “Zoo Station” are asymmetrical, but they resolve precisely into units of eight. The introduction functions through the gradual asymmetric accretion of textural elements, although, by 0:18, new elements enter more regularly every two measures. The “noise explosions” quickly lose their metric predictability, while the snare shows a few timbral inconsistencies, and a single double hit (m. 12/4+). The various syncopated synthesized sounds are also not completely regular, nor do they continue throughout the song. Yet within all this chaos and apparent randomness, the first half of the introduction is precisely sixteen measures long. The second half, also sixteen measures, is essentially an instrumental verse/chorus complex, yielding an intro of thirty-two measures, exactly the length of the first sung verse/chorus complex. The second verse/chorus-complex, and the short bridge are also thirty-two measures, but the symmetry is disrupted by a four-measure interlude preceding the truncated third verse. However, the closing repeated chorus is four measures “too long,” which yields, when combined with the four measure interlude, a total of eighteen eight-measure units.

Furthermore, if the putative bridge, interlude, and last four measures of the coda are

³⁸ The lyrics are reproduced in the *Achtung Baby* CD liner notes. Both A'-phrases are separated from all other sections. The second chorus is not reproduced, even though its text is somewhat different from the first, indicating that the editors of the liner notes consider those sections to be sufficiently similar to warrant exclusion the second time. The *U2 Complete Songs* reproduces all song texts separately near the front of the book. For “Zoo Station,” the A and A' texts of V1 are also separated, but the A' text is joined to the first chorus (perhaps as a pre-chorus?). The A' text of V3, however, is entirely separate from any other text, so it is unclear how the editors view these sections (see p. 103). The scored version sheds no further light on how the editors would parse these sections (p. 481-4).

excised, then the remainder is a hypermetrically balanced structure of sixteen phrases of eight measures, which may well have been the organization of the original bed tracks before the sectioning of the second verse, and the insertion of a bridge gesture.

Track 2: “Even Better than the Real Thing” (A-Major)

This was the fourth single from *Achtung Baby*.³⁹ Versions of this song date back approximately two years to the *Rattle and Hum* sessions. The multi-track of this sketch was taken to Berlin, its working title of “Real Thing” appearing on the blackboard of works in progress, but it appears to have been finished in the later Dublin sessions.⁴⁰ The eventual augmentation of the title to “Even Better Than the Real Thing” reflects the cynicism and preoccupation with consumerism and media that gradually emerge as themes of the “ZooTV” Tour. As one of the more conventional, up-tempo rock songs on the album, numerous dance remixes of this song were also released, some of which charted higher in the UK than the single itself. This song is the first example of a procedure where U2 would develop a simpler, repetitious sketch, yet, somewhat paradoxically, utilize a small fragment of the sketch to provide greater variety for the final version.

This song begins with all appearances of a conventional contrasting verse/chorus structure. There are two identical iterations of verse and chorus, separated by a four measure intⁱ (1:11), which includes the same guitar riff as the tutti intro. The first anomaly appears in int^c (2:04) where the bass stays on its chorus figure rather than

³⁹ The video, directed by former 10cc member Kevin Godley, was voted the 1992 MTV Video of the Year. It featured a special camera that rotated around the band members, often on an axis bisecting them vertically. This created the illusion of U2 tumbling through space, with projected images rushing past in the background, resulting in a sensory overload mirroring the entire “ZooTV” undertaking.

⁴⁰ Flanagan, *End of the World*, 8; Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 97.

returning to the verse figure, as heard in intⁱ. The texture thins as the guitar drops out as well. The bass continues with this figure throughout the subsequent sixteen-measure guitar solo. The **I - VII - IV** harmony of the choruses is not apparent in this solo other

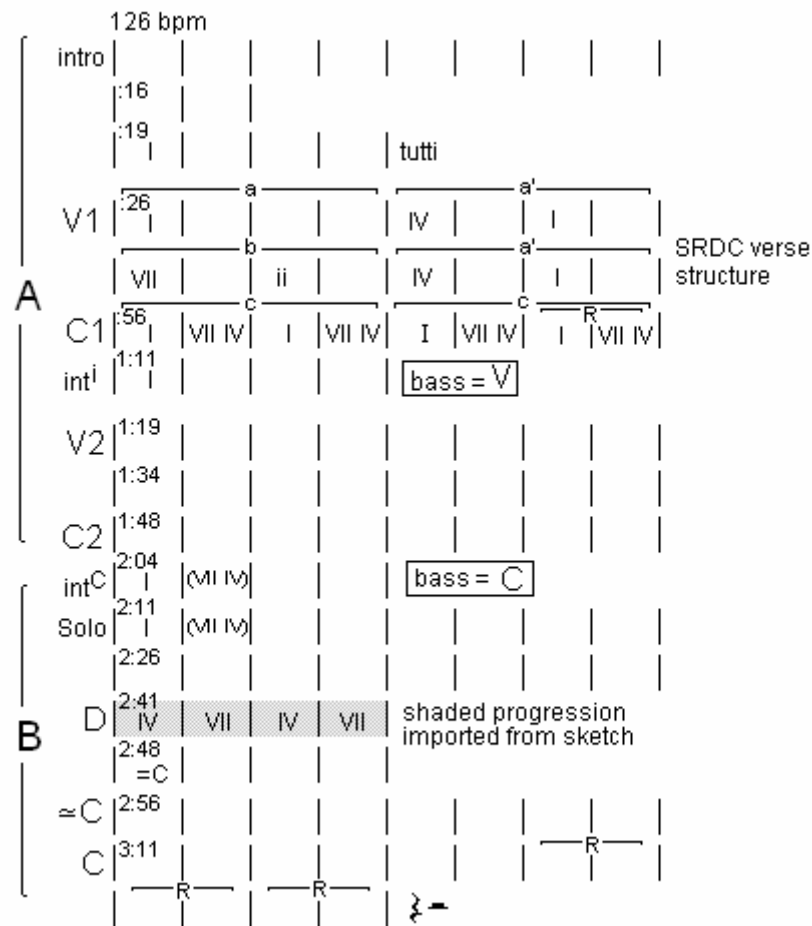


Fig. 3.4: Formal diagram for "Even Better than the Real Thing"

than through the implied harmony of the bass. After the solo, new harmonic and melodic material appears (2:41) but for a mere four measures before returning to non-texted chorus material (2:48).⁴¹ Normal chorus music supports the new ad-lib-style text, "Take me higher" (2:56), for eight measures before a final full chorus and repeated refrain

⁴¹ We will see a similar insertion of four measures of unique material in "The Fly," (track seven of *Achtung Baby*), and "Acrobat," (track eleven).

closes the song. Thus, after the first two verse/chorus complexes, verse material never returns, and typical chorus material does not return until the final twelve measures. From 2:04 on, the bass essentially stays on the chorus figure, with the exception of the four measures starting at 2:41, which sound initially like an attempt at a bridge, providing the only relief in what would otherwise be over two minutes of uninterrupted chorus material. The song is, essentially, divided in half, mirroring the binary tendencies permeating U2's formal conception.

The four measures inserted at 2:41 originally appear as the D-phrase of the SRDC verses of the sketch.⁴² Clayton abandons the syncopated chorus figure for a root position “punk-chug” style (i.e., eighth notes, usually played entirely with down-strokes and a pick) under a riff by Edge that is nearly identical in both versions. The sketch has no vocal, but the instrumental tracks are relatively advanced, featuring significant multi-tracking and a slide guitar sound with riffs very similar to those appearing on the album version, particularly during the chorus, which is almost identical to the album version. The tempos of the two versions are almost identically 126 bpm, although they do phase slightly. More significantly they are recorded a semitone apart, with the sketch sounding in A \flat -major and the album version in A-major, thus it is doubtful that any of the demo tracks were retained for the studio version.

The form of the sketch is impossible to fix in the absence of a vocal, but it is clear from the pattern of sectional repetition that a contrasting verse/chorus structure is envisaged (see fig. 3.5). The instrumental consists of jamming over the chorus bass (as in the album version), but it gives way to the only double iteration of the verse D-phrase,

⁴² SRDC stands for “statement, restatement, departure, conclusion” and represents a type of aaba, or aabc text structure. Everett argues that it reflects function rather than just structure. See Everett, *Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through Anthology*, 318.

with the extension likely intended to encompass the musical climax preceding the final choruses and coda. The much greater length of the sketch (4:52 versus 3:41) is mostly the result of extensive chorus-based closing material that would most likely have been edited down.

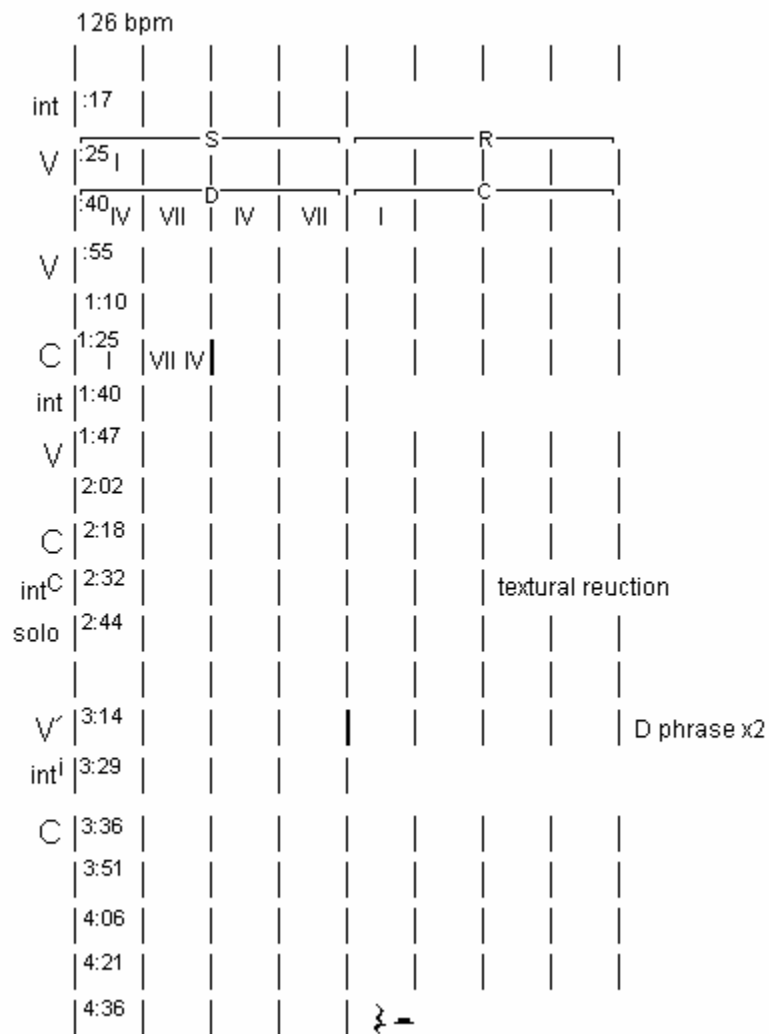


Fig. 3.5: Formal diagram for sketch entitled “Real Thing,” (the sketch for “Even Better than the Real Thing”)

The album version retains the SRDC structure of the sketch verses, but they display greater harmonic and phrase subtlety.⁴³ The album version employs an a/a' structure with a distinct move to the subdominant, mirroring the first eight bars (or two phrases) of a twelve-bar blues form. The b-phrase moves through **VII** to **ii**, resolving to **I** via **IV** in another a'-phrase rather than merely alternating between **VII** and **I** then remaining on the tonic as in the D- and C-phrases of the sketch. The harmonic rhythm is slowed compared to the D-phrase of the sketch, yet with greater harmonic variety, resulting in a more interesting and directed verse structure.

As in many U2 sketches (and in some of their earlier songs, as we shall see in the next chapter), the second half of the song is basically variations over chorus material, so one aspect of the sketch retained in the album version is the movement to D-phrase material after the solo. As this phrase had not yet appeared in the album version, welcome contrast and novelty is provided in what otherwise would be a relatively uninteresting conclusion. Thus, while the chorus-heavy ending gave the sketch some binary element, the binary nature is more pronounced in the album version, likely a resonance from their initial, adolescent forays into songwriting. Even the more traditional songwriting explored during the *Joshua Tree* and *Rattle and Hum* albums could not supplant U2's earlier acquired habits.

The sketch was a very typical rock song. Clayton recalls "We demoed that the year previously but it sounded deeply traditional, with a Stonsey groove. Then Edge got a new whammy pedal which created a kind of double octave sweep, and it really turned

⁴³ Although the verses of the album version are also in SRDC structure, I label them a/a'/b/a' to better reflect the harmonic properties (and to permit easier comparison between the sketch and album diagrams).

the track around.”⁴⁴ This effect can be heard immediately at the beginning, but dies out as the lead vocal enters. It is complemented later by Edge playing a more traditional slide guitar solo (2:09) (hence the reference to the Rolling Stones), but the timbral similarity to the “whammy pedal” in the intro annihilates the retro reference. A second sonic signature on this song is the pairing throughout of Bono’s low voice with a heavily ambient high falsetto—essentially a form of double tracking, creating a detached lead vocal that is intimate in the lower register, yet oddly removed.⁴⁵ In a crucial line of text, Bono whispers “Give me one last dance, we’ll slide down the surface of things (1:40);” apropos for a basic rock song emoting largely at the surface with its dance groove, Edge’s whammy pedal, and Bono’s breathy vocal, but benefiting less obviously from subtle formal development.

Track 3: “One” (A-Minor)

U2 have called this the breakthrough song of the *Achtung Baby* sessions. After several weeks of nearly fruitless jamming, and growing tension in the sterile Hansa Studios, “One” came about through the combination of two separate sketches. While working on the track “Ultra Violet,” Edge decided that it needed another section. After coming up with two possibilities at the piano, he presented them to Lanois and Bono on acoustic guitar. They suggested that he combine the sections. After the band started jamming on these new sections, Bono began scatting lyrics that quickly became the text to “One,” and, within a day, the song was completed. The sense of relief amongst band

⁴⁴ Clayton, *U2 by U2*, 225.

⁴⁵ Fast notes that this technique is used at several points on *Achtung Baby*, and suggests that the low voice often represents the new “cool” Bono, while the high voice represents the earnest original Bono, and that their simultaneous presentation is the essence of irony. See “Meaning in U2,” 47, 50.

and producers was palpable; they were still able to quickly find the chemistry to produce a strong song.⁴⁶

This is another ambiguous form, in that three nearly identical sixteen-measure verses, each in aabR structure, behave partly like verse/refrain complexes in a binary structure. The first 2:20 sounds like a typical verse/refrain form, with three formally identical iterations of aa material, but the form becomes ambiguous after this point. From 2:20 on, which is almost exactly the mid-point of the 4:32 total, there is no return of aa material or the original key of A-minor.

The bR phrases have substantial chorus character as well. They modulate from A-minor to C-major via a G-major pivot chord, providing a sense of lift typical for a chorus. The first bR phrase sets out further decoys: it contains the title word, “one,” four times, always falling on beat 2, and set at the pitch E, higher than all but the single E pitch in the preceding aa phrase (Ex 3.2). However, the second bR phrase has entirely different text, with various homonyms of “two” now falling mostly on beat 2. Whether

Ex. 3.2: Comparison of text and text rhythms in bR phrases of “One:” V1 (top), V2 (middle), V3 (bottom)

this is a deliberate play on “one” from the previous bR phrase is impossible to say. The third bR phrase has a different text style again, with the rate of declamation increasing,

⁴⁶ Flanagan, *U2 End of the World*, 10-12. Edge recounts this in greater detail to Flanagan in “The View from the Edge” *Musician*, 1 March 1992, 62. Edge tells a similar story in the 2006 biography, but does not identify the song for which he was writing a bridge, see *U2 by U2*, 221.

and each line of text beginning on 1+. Thus the bR phrases are clearly not choruses, despite their initial presentation holding out that possibility. Similarly, the refrains vary substantially in text, with V2, V3, and the V3 extension all containing a “we’re one, but we’re not the same” construction absent from V1, thus even the classification of “refrain” is problematic.

The third bR phrase signals the onset of developmental procedure with a vocal melody, declamatory rhythm, and narrative structure distinct from the first two, operating more like a mode of continuation from verse 3, rather than having the sense of conclusion as in the previous iterations. This third bR phrase (2:20) is followed by a unique nine measure extension (2:40) which includes two measures of the dominant G, followed by two measures of the subdominant F. This is the only appearance of the dominant (excluding the possibility of G functioning as “**VII** becoming **V**” at the end of the aa phrases of each verse), and the only time that any chord is held for more than one measure within a phrase, thus creating the metric anomaly of a nine measure extension and a tangible shift in the harmonic rhythm.⁴⁷ The resolution from **IV** to **I** to begin the final bR phrase (3:04) is also the only time that the bR tonic is approached from **IV**. These minor anomalies give the extension considerable weight, making it jump out of the form by denying the previously established expectations. The heightened emotion at this point is manifested in shorter phrase structures, the harmonic novelty occurring only at that point, Bono’s switch to his high vocal register, and the addition of a synthesized string section thickening the texture.

⁴⁷ One-measure cadential extensions, a very common gesture in pop music, are virtually absent in the music of U2.

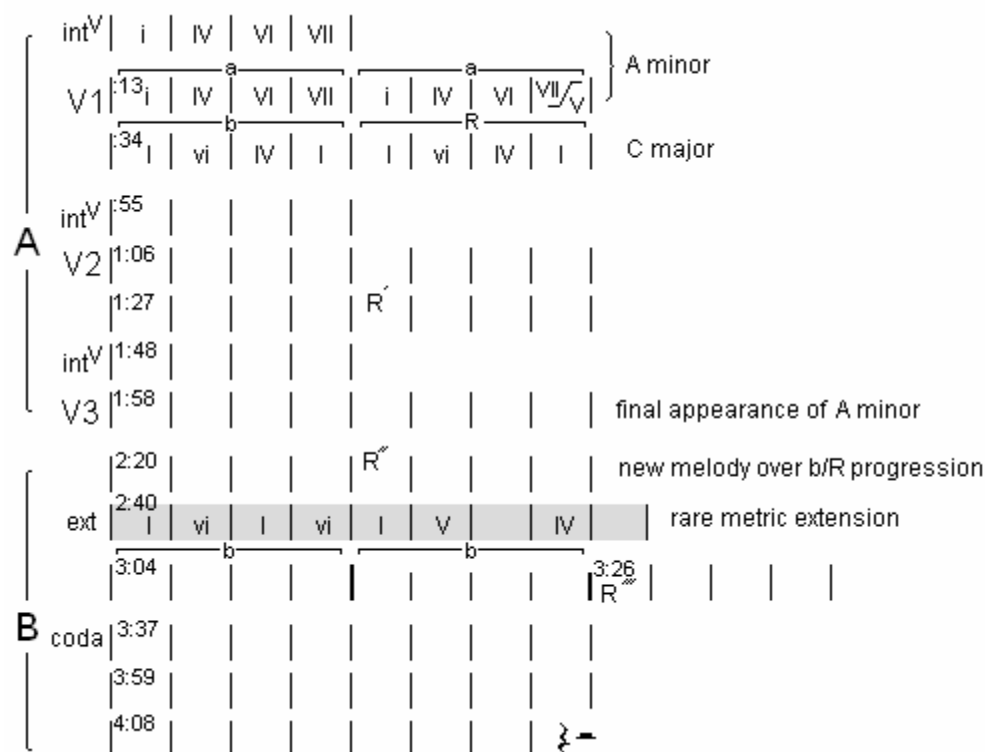


Fig. 3.6: Formal diagram for “One”

The extension at 2:40 is positioned similarly to a typical bridge, but harmonically, texturally, and textually, it is a further extension of the third verse as a whole, lacking the contrast one might expect from a bridge. However, like many bridges, it leads into repetitions of a section with chorus-like properties, namely the repeated bR phrases. The fact that the bR phrases are separable and repeatable solidifies their quasi-chorus status, further illustrating that only the aa phrases clearly possess the qualities of the song sections to which they best correspond.

Edge has commented that the coda to *The Joshua Tree*’s “With or Without You” was very satisfying for him because of its anti-guitar-hero simplicity, and the coda of “One” is very similar, with a simple, repeated, three-note melody that works over all four chords. Live versions of this song are often longer, with Edge performing variations on

this figure, and Bono adding an eight-measure ad-lib along the lines of “Hear us calling Lord, we’re knocking at Your door.”

Brian Eno found the early takes too melancholy, and talked the band into removing the acoustic guitar backing, which may have made it sound too traditionally ballad-like. “Hence those kinds of crying guitar parts that have an aggression to them. Great songs tend to have some kind of tension at the heart of them, the bitter and the sweet balanced perfectly. “One” is not about oneness, it’s about difference.”⁴⁸

Track 4: “Until the End of the World” (E-Major or B-Minor)

This song portrays a conversation between Jesus and Judas, with the perspective shifting between characters, yet remains sufficiently cryptic to accommodate almost any interpretation of a complex relationship. Bono was unable to find a suitable high/low melody like that from “Even Better Than the Real Thing,” so he sings lower than usual in his range, resulting in a more conversational, prose-style text.⁴⁹

It is one of U2’s more harmonically intriguing songs, featuring ambiguity of key, mode mixture, and change of mode between sections. It is organized around a riff, originally discovered by Bono during the pre-production sessions at STS studios, appearing in two very different contexts in the *Salomé* sketches.⁵⁰

After an unusual opening resembling Bono wailing electronically masked, unintelligible words, (a sample of which always announces live versions), the opening E sonority is established with the bass playing a one-bar ostinato, joined in four-bar

⁴⁸ Bono, *U2 by U2*, 224.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 225.

⁵⁰ Edge, *ibid.*

intervals by the drums (0:17) and tutti (0:26) respectively.⁵¹ The song initially appears to be in E-major with Edge playing the hook riff, a syncopated E-major chord with alternating upper-4th suspensions, presumably based on the riff developed by Bono at STS (Ex. 3.3). The riff, however, walks down unexpectedly to B-minor for the beginning



Ex. 3.3: Guitar and bass riff from “Until the End of the World”

of the verse (0:36). The listener now likely perceives B-minor as the tonic and the verse harmony unfolds consistent with B-minor. The verses have an SRDC structure (labeled aabR), and there is a modulation to the relative major, D, in the DC-phrases, which unfold harmonically consistent with D-major. In the b-phrase, the **III** - **VII** progression moves to **iv** (E-minor), but the R-phrase is truncated by half at that point, eliding instead with the E-major hook riff. Thus while the return to the E-major chord is somewhat unexpected, the **III** – **VII** – **IV** progression to the E-major is partially set up by the **III** – **VII** – **iv** progression of the b-phrase, which the R-phrase therefore subtly mirrors and inflects rhythmically through foreshortening, and harmonically through mode mixture.

The guitar solo is a bridge (2:00), harmonically and melodically contrasting with the remainder of the song, although sharing with the verses both a truncated SRDC structure (labeled ccdd'), as well as resolution to the E-major riff, although from a D-major rather than an A-major, as in the A-sections. Thus E-major does acquire some sense of being the primary sonority of resolution despite the difficulty of casting this song

⁵¹ Most commentators seem not to recognize the opening sound as a human voice, variously describing it as a heavily processed electric guitar, or harmonica. To my ears, the timbre is that of Bono's voice.

in E-major. However, even within an apparent AABA form, there is a slight formal anomaly. The third A-section appears to begin with an ad lib vocal over aa phrases (2:43, labeled int^V), but only after this does a typical A-section begin. While the musical material is clearly that of the verses, this section functions more like another phase of the

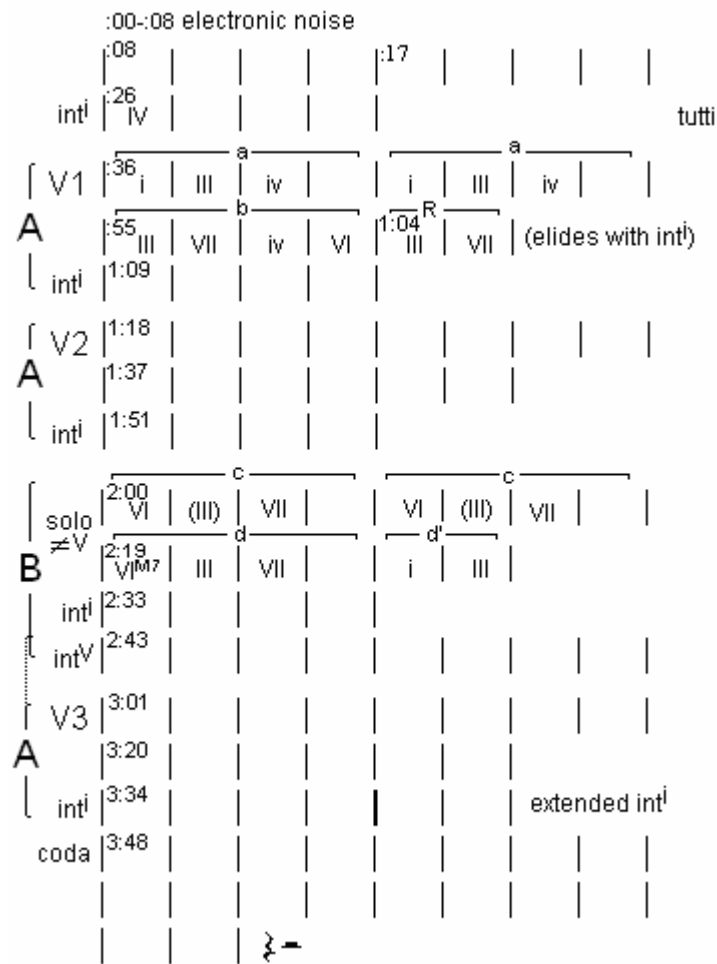


Fig. 3.7: Formal diagram for "Until the End of the World"

bridge, delaying the onset of the final stanza. There is also an emotional intensity to this section; while the instrumental tracks drop in register and dynamic to their accompanimental roles, Bono jumps an octave, singing either a "la" vocable, or simply repeating the word "love" while outlining the B-minor chord, falling from the high F# to the B a fifth lower, and then from F# to A over the D-major chord, and E to B over the E-

minor. As he often does, Bono reserves his high register for largely untexted, primal utterances.⁵² Regardless whether int^V is interpreted as bridge, or a novel pre-verse, it is consistent with U2 rarely presenting a song in discrete, repeated sections.

In spite of the formal irregularities of this song, it is one of few times on *Achtung Baby* where an A-section is restated so literally after the bridge. Perhaps the relative harmonic complexity of “Until the End of the World” dictates that the A-sections be identical, as it would be difficult to modify them as seamlessly as verses that are more harmonically static, and whose melodies are, therefore, less constrained by the underlying progression. Also, Bono described his “low voice” songs as more prose oriented, and, therefore, more likely to result in a narrative, strophic structure.

The *Salomé* sketches reveal that the E-major hook riff was an idea that U2 were determined to use. It appears in two very different sketches, in two different keys. One, called “Chances Away,” does not resemble “Until the End of the World” at all, except for the distinctive riff.⁵³ The sketch is in A-major, with the riff played on an F# triad, functioning as part of the conclusion to the verses and as an interlude between them. Bono scats over the sections he identifies as verses, but not over the riff, an arrangement that is preserved in the album version. The other, called “I Feel Free,” is cast in E-major, with the riff functioning as the main accompaniment figure. There is a direct modulation to G-major for a bridge gesture which also appears in the “Chances Away” sketch. It follows the same **II-IV|I-V|VIIiii|VI(riff)|** progression, but since the **VI** in G is E-major the bridge achieves modulation back to the principal key. In neither case is the riff

⁵² Another example is the vocable climax to “With or Without You,” see Chapter Five.

⁵³ Bono reports that one of these tracks had the working title “Fat Boy” during the STS sessions, but it is difficult to say which version might have gone by this title. Perhaps both did. See *U2 by U2*, 225, 227.

approached, nor does it function modally as it does in “Until the End of the World,” suggesting that these sketches were still to undergo extensive reworking before the unusual progression and minor mode of the final version was conceived. However, the sketches do make clear that the band was experimenting with unusual direct modulations, and were freely mixing mode, particularly in the album version where E-major and minor operate alongside one another in the verses and interludes.

The variable contexts in which the riff exists, and their lack of resemblance to the final version support band recollections that this was a particularly labor-intensive work. The final mix is remarkably dense, with multiple layers of guitar weaving in and out, as well as significant added percussion, particularly audible in the introduction. Clayton credits Flood with creating an unusual guitar effect which pans between speakers, again acknowledging the role of the entire recording team in creating a “seductive rock tune...it has such great atmosphere and drama.”⁵⁴

Track 5: “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses” (G-Major)

Metric ambiguity and noise characterize this verse-chorus binary form. As with several songs on *Achtung Baby*, it begins with ametric electronic sounds, this time resembling telephone dial pulses. At 0:06, a single, strummed G-major chord drenched in distortion and reverb barges into the texture, then decays cacophonously. Over this, tambourine taps play on beats two and four (based on the entry of the distorted guitar), accompanied by a synthesized, cello-like, lyrical melody in the right background. These opening sounds create a very open, expansive, yet chaotic soundscape where contemplative melodies compete with trebly electronic noise. Tranquility and chaos co-

⁵⁴ Clayton, *U2 by U2*, 227. This effect is likely the phasing sound best heard immediately after the guitar solo. It does not seem to pan in the final mix, although there is a sense of it moving through the background via a faux-doppler effect typical of phasing treatments.

exist, the overall effect of which is unsettling. There are many moments like this on *Achtung Baby*, where the familiar, the soaring, and the open juxtapose the alien, the restrained, the confined.

The tambourine punctuations of beats two and four clearly mark the meter (and continue uninterrupted for the entire track), but Bono comes in off the beat for the first phrase, such that the tambourine beats now seem to have moved to an off-beat. The drums also enter at 0:31, but Mullen's unusual pattern, which has kick drum on beats 2 and 3+, and a single snare shot on 4+, creates a lurching effect further destabilized by Bono being off the beat. The downbeat is all but lost until Bono phases back on (\approx 0:50), and at this point, the drum rhythm (which, like the tambourine, continues unaltered for the entire track) is more clearly perceived, though still atypical. The guitar punctuation continues as well, and it, too, competes with Bono for the establishment of a downbeat for nearly the first minute. The entry of the bass playing the typical punk chug (1:36) finally cements the rhythm. Whether this rhythmic displacement is deliberate, a recording accident that appealed to their own sense of displacement in Berlin, or the function of painstakingly assembling different versions of the song that do not fit well together is not known, nor are there many accounts of the recording of this song. The *Salomé* sketches show that parts of this song were labored over extensively, particularly the sections that would become the bridge; however, the drum patterns on the demos are typical rock beat.⁵⁵ The rhythmic difficulty of this song in its final form may explain why

⁵⁵ Clayton says the demo was very rough, but that they were never able to improve upon it, so they kept returning to the original demo: "It's a great torch song, with melody and emotion but I don't think we captured it again, and we have never really been able to play the song live. Sometimes you get songs like that. They have so much promise, but it's as if you can't open the tin, you can't get in at them." *U2 by U2*, 228.

it is rarely played live (it disappeared from the set list in 1993 after songs from *Zooropa* were integrated into the set), and why it is one of very few U2 songs not to appear in more detailed intabulation at the many U2 internet sites.⁵⁶

The form appears at first glance to be compound simple verse/pre-chorus/chorus. The verses and choruses have essentially the same progression, alternating between tonic and subdominant in two-measure units. The choruses vary only slightly in that the chord in the second measure of each four-measure section is in a conspicuous **I⁶** inversion. The first chorus/pre-chorus complex does not move to the chorus, while subsequent ones do—a fairly common formal strategy in pop (although not for U2, as we shall see). However, the mere sequence of three verse/chorus complexes before a contrasting section is somewhat atypical, departing from the more normative AABA form to provide an AAABA'. The obvious bridge commences (3:17) with the first appearance of **ii** and **vi**, and **V** moving to **I** rather than **IV**, as in the pre-choruses. The first part of the bridge ends with a diatonic descent in the bass from **IV** to **VII** followed by a two-measure dominant extension resolving to the tonic and the second part of the bridge. However, this second part consists of the musical beds of the verse/pc complex, but with a vocal melody that is so unlike that of previous verse/pc complexes that it sounds like yet another section, functioning as a retransition to the final chorus (4:33). The repeated text “Don’t turn around, don’t turn around again” beginning at 3:57 appears numerous times on the *Salomé* demos, and seems to be one of the first ideas that Bono hit upon for this

⁵⁶ It could also be because everyone but Bono seems to dislike this song. Flanagan describes the other members of U2 as “hating” the song. The album mix was done by Steve Lillywhite (who is also listed as a producer, along with Lanois and Eno), presumably because Lanois and Eno could not stand it any more. Lillywhite claims to have spent about a month on the remix, but believes it is still not as realized as he would like.

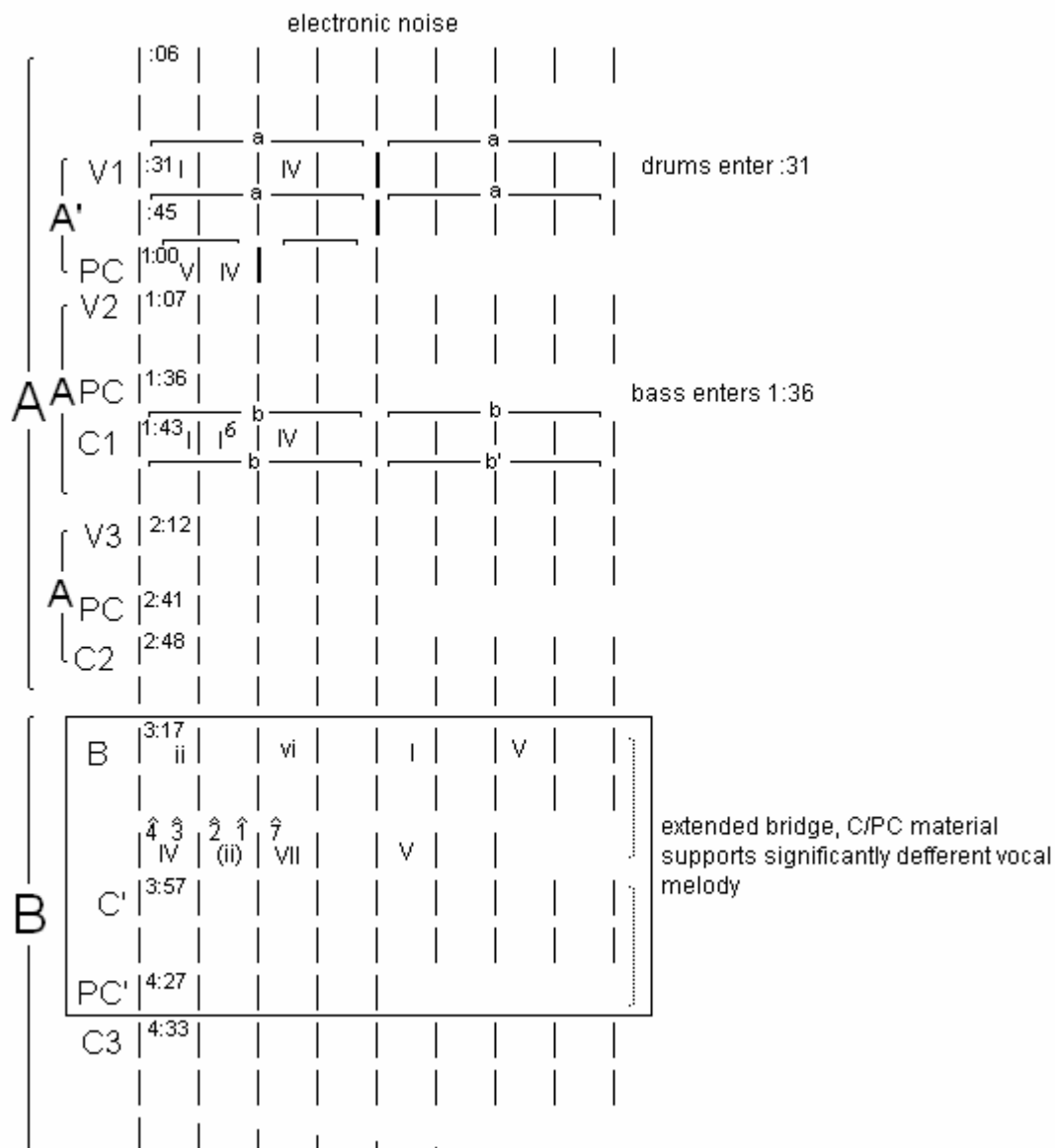


Fig. 3.8: Formal diagram for "Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses"

progression.⁵⁷ He returns to it repeatedly after scattin many other potential texts, none of which appear in the album versions, thus this retransition section was likely the first part of "Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses" to be composed, and variations on it

⁵⁷ It may form the harmonic basis of the verses on "Ultra Violet (Light My Way)," see the discussion for "Ultra Violet," *infra*.

eventually gave rise to what would become the verses and pre-choruses.⁵⁸ The progression for the bridge appears on these sketches as well, but the text was almost nonexistent, and the duration and number of these sections was still undecided on the *Salomé* demos.

The final form of this song reflects again how alternate versions of musical materials ultimately end up co-existing in the final version. Because the bridge is developmental and does not lead to a return of typical verse material, the form is best described as verse/chorus binary form. The section from 3:17 to 4:32—almost one and a half minutes—is essentially a long, multi-sectional bridge using strophic variation (3:57) to create new sections based on the same beds as previous ones, but featuring completely different melodies and text phrase structures.

Track 6: “So Cruel” (A-Major)

The opening two-bar phrase provides the material over which the majority of the song unfolds. The opening tonic chord is played on a piano, accompanied by a subtle, synthesized percussion track “bubbling” on sixteenth notes emphasizing 2 and 2+, and 4 and 4+. The kit enters for the first verse (0:10), but the texture remains quite thin, with Bono’s voice and the kit far forward in the mix, and the piano slightly behind. The texture builds gradually, with high synthesized strings entering at the first interlude (:52), a high distorted guitar fading in three-quarters through the first phrase of verse 2 (≈1:12), and the bass entering at the first refrain (2:05).⁵⁹ This gradual accretion of timbres is a

⁵⁸ Flanagan describes “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses” as a song to which Bono frequently returned, while the others would have preferred to drop it; Flanagan, *U2 End of the World*, 8.

⁵⁹ There are root bass pitches on the downbeat of every hypermeasure of verses 1 and 2, but it is difficult to tell whether these are played by the piano, the bass, or a synthesizer.

technique used often by U2 in songs that have a substantial quality of stasis, in this case, in the nearly invariant verse harmony, and monotone vocal melody.⁶⁰

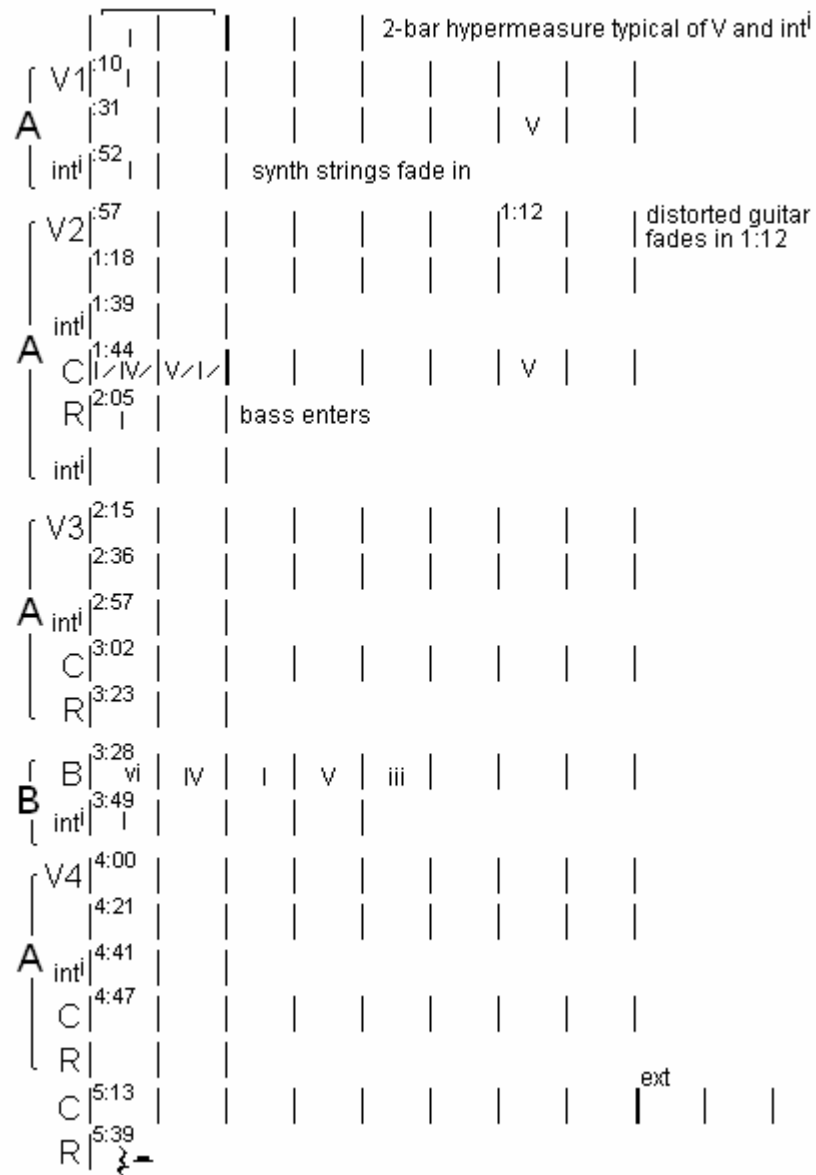


Fig. 3.9: Formal diagram for "So Cruel"

This is one of the most formally transparent songs on *Achtung Baby*. It is a clear compound AABA, although whether there is sufficient contrast between verse and chorus

⁶⁰ See Mark Spicer, "(Ac)cumulative Form," for an examination of this technique throughout the pop-rock repertoire.

to constitute a contrasting form is more subjective. The chorus is really just a harmonic elaboration of the verse, and even this elaboration does not become unambiguous until chorus 2, by which time the bass has entered providing roots for the **IV** and **V** chords that are only implied in chorus 1. The bridge, however, is clearly contrasting as it shifts from the tonic major to **vi**—one of the classic middle-eight key areas.⁶¹ There is but a single measure of **vi** in the entire song (3:28), with the second half of the bridge comprised solely of **iii** acting as the transitional sonority back to the tonic, yielding the progression: **vi | IV | I | V | iii | | |**. A four measure interlude on the tonic returns to a verse, one of few instances in *Achtung Baby* where a full reprise of verse and chorus material follows a bridge (the other being “Until the End of the World”), varied only in text, and textural thickening.

In spite of the formal predictability built into this piece by the unusually large number of verses (four) and choruses (three, ignoring the repeated chorus, which is a closing gesture), there are slight rhythmic irregularities that keep the overall proportions off balance. Most of the interludes, which occur between every section, are comprised of two measures of intro material, whereas the *int*ⁱ after the bridge is four-measures. Similarly, the refrain and *int*ⁱ section after chorus 1 are four measures in combination, whereas all other choruses omit the *int*ⁱ section. Thus, extended interludes are reserved for those two structural points where new sections have been introduced (chorus 1 and bridge, respectively), while, in all other cases, Bono rushes back into the vocal, reflecting the relentlessness of the betrayed lover.

⁶¹ See Jon Fitzgerald, “Lennon-McCartney and the Middle Eight,” *Popular Music and Society* 20 (1996): 41-52.

This song was apparently composed almost in its entirety during relatively few sessions after U2 had returned to Dublin in the spring of 1991. Some time in late March, a writer for the U2 fan publication, *Propaganda*, was present for the second day of work on the track that would become “So Cruel.” Bono told the reporter, “This song didn't exist twenty-four hours ago, it just arrived from nowhere at ten o'clock last night.”⁶² Lanois, after playing back the preliminary mix of the new song from the previous night observed: “...it's got this great sort of bolero-ish feel reminiscent of an early Sixties American big ballad, a bit Everly Brothers with a very strict, tight rhythm section and some lush strings.”⁶³ This suggests that the synthesized strings, which figure so prominently in the final version were present almost from the outset, but the groove was likely much more in the rhythm and blues vein.

The original jam started with Bono on an acoustic guitar, joined by Edge and Clayton on acoustic instruments, and Mullen on a bodhran, a traditional Irish hand drum. However, Flood recalls making alterations to the rhythm track:

...I think the way we shifted around the rhythm was very important. It was put down as a very straight-feeling backing track. The bass is played, but in the studio we doctored it to change the emphasis of where the bass line lay. That turned it into something that had more of a unique feel about it, meshed against the song. That was one track where the technology available to us was crucial to the end product.⁶⁴

The bass in the album version has an odd throbbing quality, lacking the typical articulation expected of the bass, a result of Flood treating the bass to key off Mullen's bodhran part. The overall rhythmic effect is difficult to discern, as the treated bass,

⁶² Bono, quoted in “A Little More Larry,” *Propaganda* 14, June 1991, archived at < www.atu2.com/news/article.src?ID=2362&Key=A%20Little%20More%20Larry&Year=1991&Cat=>.

⁶³ Lanois, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Flood, quoted in Stokes, *U2: Into the Heart*, 101. Clayton recalls that the treatment by Flood was done overnight, “utterly transform[ing]” the track: *U2 by U2*, 228. Flood's treatment was likely done subsequent to the version described by Lanois above.

synthesized percussion, and active kit create an extremely complex rhythmic underpinning. The difficulty in reproducing this groove live may be one reason the song is rarely performed in concert.

There is an obsessive quality to this song. Most of the verse melody is on $\hat{3}$ with upper suspensions, and the R&B-style, high electric guitar part uses a voicing placing $\hat{3}$ in the top voice, creating a persistent, pleading effect. The high guitar is quite distorted and unusually isolated in the left channel. There is also little disruption to, or embellishment of, the rhythm track, with virtually no fills on the kit, and the multiple string synthesizer lines interweave throughout. In combination, the vocal and rhythm guitar create a rhythmic/melodic figure very similar to the guitar riff in “Until the End of the World” raising the possibility that “So Cruel” was another outcome of the apparent extensive jamming on this riff.

“So Cruel” and “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses” close Side One of the vinyl version of the album, forming a stylistic dyad.⁶⁵ Both juxtapose the sentimental, ballad vocal style with the electronic harshness or rawness of many of the backing sounds. Both songs are among very few in U2’s works to avoid the chorus after the first verse, to feature authentic cadences (at 3:57 in “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses), and to have the unusual feature, both from the standpoint of U2’s style and normative song form, of an overall AAABA form rather than the typical AABA song form. Further harkening back to earlier song styles, “So Cruel” repeats the chorus as a closing gesture, and has a rare, traditional dominant extension in the final cadence.

⁶⁵ “Acrobat” and “Love is Blindness” form another stylistic dyad to close Side Two, see *infra*.

Track 7: “The Fly” (E-Major)

Having reached the pinnacle of rock fame and fortune, and battling the backlash from *Rattle and Hum*, U2 were uncomfortable writing songs that might be perceived as preachy—or worse—hypocritical. Immersed in the rock and roll lifestyle, the best way of dealing with the excess of fame, and the superficiality of the mass media was to comment from within. Bono hit upon the idea of creating a rock alter-ego in a skin-tight, black leather outfit, with bulging, black sunglasses, a persona dubbed the “Fly:”

I thought it was a fascinating character. I thought I’d really get a chance to do something with him, especially live, because there had been rumors of megalomania circulating and I thought—well, let’s give them a megalomaniac!⁶⁶

Seen against the buckskin-clad, messianic Bono of *Rattle and Hum*, exhorting audiences to sing for Martin Luther King Jr., to support sanctions against South Africa, and feed the hungry in Africa, The Fly was the anti-Bono, thus was decided to release this song as the first single from *Achtung Baby* in order to establish the new anti-U2.⁶⁷ “The Fly” was released in November, 1991,⁶⁸ and while only reaching number sixty-one in the U.S., it peaked at number one in Britain, reflecting the British penchant for satire.⁶⁹ This song

⁶⁶ Bono, quoted in Stokes, *U2 Into the Heart*, 102.

⁶⁷ Although it was the first single released, it was not recorded until after returning to Dublin. U2’s wardrobe coordinator, Fintan FitzGerald, was responsible for finding the “seventies superfly... blaxploitation sunglasses” that Bono used for comic relief, but which eventually inspired the song and became the visual centerpiece for “ZooTV”. See *U2 by U2*, 224.

⁶⁸ Stokes and *U2 Encyclopedia* provide release dates of “October, 1991.” Jackson gives the date November 2, 1991, *Bono*, 109; U2.com, the official U2 website simply says “November, 1991.”

⁶⁹ Ian McDonald makes a similar observation regarding the Beatles. He believes that North American audiences take the avant garde too seriously, often failing to see the humor in the unexpected. He suggests that UK audiences are “cheerfully inured to failure and decline...delight in gloom...[with] a fascination with fakes and frauds...which baffle the more sensible American mind.” See Ian MacDonald, *Preface to Revolution in the Head* (London: Pimlico, 1997): xv.

was the main inspiration for Bono's oft quoted remark about *Achtung Baby* being the "sound of four men chopping down *The Joshua Tree*."⁷⁰

A second alter-ego also emerges for the first time in "The Fly," namely the "Fat Lady," a falsetto, gospel style voice used by Bono as a back up singer, complete with a fluttering vibrato at phrase endings very unlike Bono himself.⁷¹ There are hints of the Fat Lady on track six, "So Cruel," but "The Fly" is the first time on the album that the "Fat Lady" gets "her" own lines, as discussed further below.

The style of "The Fly" is another distorted rocker, and like "Ultra Violet" and "Zoo Station," was derived from sketches for "Lady With the Spinning Head" (see *supra*). The form is a truncated twelve bar blues, and the style is decidedly more blues than any other song on the album. It is ironic that the song chosen to represent the anti-U2 is, in form and style, closest to the genre of roots music that resulted in *Rattle and Hum* being castigated as an inauthentic, arrogant attempt by U2 to essentially add themselves via association to the American pop canon.

As in "Zoo Station," the opening guitar riff is comprised of scale steps $\hat{1}$ and $(b)\hat{7}$,



Ex. 3.4: Octave riffs from "Zoo Station" (left) and "The Fly" (right)

with syncopated octave leaps on $\hat{1}$ providing the main rhythmic character (Ex. 3.4). Four measures of **I** are followed in typical blues fashion by a move to **IV**, but instead of the

⁷⁰ This quote has been reproduced in numerous sources, and was a favorite one of Bono's to repeat, thus it is difficult to identify the first use: Edge recounts the quote in "Shooting the Fly" *Propaganda* 15, 1 December 1991, archived at <www.atu2.com/news/article.src?ID=2761&Key=Shooting%20the%20Fly&Year=1991&Cat=>>. See also *Best of Propaganda*, 146-7; and Mullen, *U2 by U2*, 221.

⁷¹ This voice is never described in any *Achtung Baby* materials as the "Fat Lady," but the CD liner notes for *Zooropa* attribute the accompanying high voice in the song "Numb" to "The Fat Lady." Bono refers to his falsetto voice as "The Fat Lady" in 2006, describing it as a "kind of Jaggeresque, campy falsetto." See *U2 by U2*, 225.

normative two bars of **IV**, a bar of **VII** acts as a passing harmony back to two measures of **I**. The expected last four measures of the typical twelve bar blues form are omitted, and the verses reveal themselves as eight measure phrases.⁷² Unlike a blues form, minor mode choruses follow the verses. Each chorus is two statements of a **vi – I – IV – IV** progression, the first supporting Bono’s “Fat Lady” falsetto vocal (designated “Gospel Voice” in the liner notes), while in the second phrase, the Fly (called the “Low Voice” in the liner notes) re-enters with the refrain. This chorus provides the same sense of lift and relief as the one from “Zoo Station,” discussed earlier, with the soaring tones of the Fat Lady, above and behind the listener, and the much more electronically attenuated Fly in the foreground. The heavily distorted guitar drops out leaving a synthesized string line to both brighten and lighten the texture as the Fat Lady sings of love shining like a burning star.⁷³ As the Fly reenters, we realize that much of the electronic haze on the track comes not from the Fly, but from the multiple guitar tracks with constantly changing levels and types of effects. In fact, much of the Fly is cacophonous because of the prominent placement of the guitars in the mix foreground and the swirl of phasing and wah effects.⁷⁴

Within this blues style, there are elements of verse/chorus binary form, a typical result for a song derived from studio sketches of other songs. After fourteen measures of intro material lasting thirty seconds, there are two verse/chorus complexes in multiples of eight measures, each separated by a four-measure interlude on **I**, with a syncopated,

⁷² This form is similar to the instrumental interludes in “God, Part II” from *Rattle and Hum* (the verses adhere to normative 12 bar blues).

⁷³ Clayton describes it as follows: “The whole track is a high energy sonic barrage but with an angelic chorus. It’s a classic example of U2 and Eno interfacing.” See *U2 by U2*, 224. Presumably, the “classic interface” is the juxtaposition of styles to create a disjunction mirroring that of *Achtung Baby* as a whole.

⁷⁴ The use of the wah wah effect in a blues context almost seems to reference Jimi Hendrix. Again, the abundant roots references on this track create a potential irony with respect to *Rattle and Hum* that the pop press appears to have missed.

descending bass line, and distorted guitar fills sounding much like E^{7#9} chords, a typical blues chord.⁷⁵ Verse 2 is truncated by half, giving way to chorus 2 after only eight measures, so even the first two verse/chorus complexes fail to establish a norm. The next new material is the transitional interlude (int^t, 2:18) after chorus 2, consisting of four measures of **V** with a repeated, distorted guitar figure in each measure. This static, contrasting transitional gesture clearly announces a new section—in this case the guitar solo (2:26).

The solo initially sounds like an instrumental verse, but there are significant departures from the eight measure units that comprise the first two verses. There is a two-measure extension of tonic before the **IV – VII – I** progression resumes. More interestingly, the second eight-measure phase, which commences on **vi** and creates an expectation that the solo will continue over the chorus progression, alters the progression to **vi – IV – I – V**, before resuming the usual chorus progression of **vi – I – IV – IV**. Together with transitional int^t, these are the only appearances of **V** in the song. At 3:06, the third eight-measure phase of the guitar solo continues over typical chorus material, this time joined by the Fat Lady singing her part from the chorus. The functions of chorus and solo, therefore, become mixed at this point, for the Fly does not yet resume his part. The duet between the solo guitar and the Fat Lady continues until the Fly finally renters (3:32), at which time, the character of the chorus is fully asserted. Thus, the guitar solo, comprising twenty-six measures and lasting about fifty-eight seconds, is similar to a verse/chorus complex, but contains significant alterations in proportions and harmony occurring nowhere else in the song, thus generating the overall binary character.

⁷⁵ A well-known use of this chord is Jimi Hendrix' "Purple Haze" in the interludes directly preceding each verse, strengthening the Hendrix reference. We will see further Hendrix references in Chapter Five regarding the *Joshua Tree* album.

Furthermore, clear formal divisions between what is solo and chorus are absent until around 3:32, highlighting the sectional ambiguity typifying verse/chorus binary forms, a

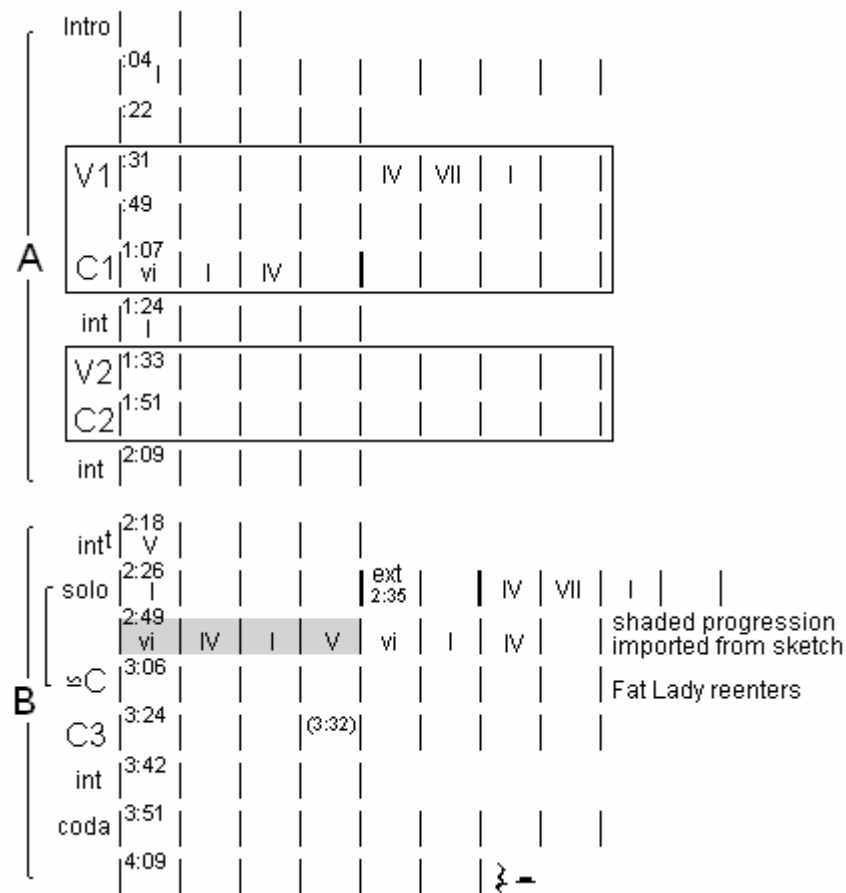


Fig. 3.10: Formal diagram for "The Fly"

trace of the material being worked in multiple potential formats. This is not as strong a binary form as others discussed to this point, such as "One," "Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses" (and others from earlier in their career), but the alterations to the solo do indicate minor developmental procedures similar to songs like "Even Better Than the Real Thing."

It is rarely possible to analytically address why small changes might be made to one part of a song that otherwise adheres closely to the progressions established earlier in that song. However, the four measures of altered harmony from the solo are clearly

derived from the sketches that eventually became “Lady With the Spinning Head” (and the choruses of “Ultra Violet,” see *infra*).⁷⁶ The antecedent-consequent riff opening the guitar solo also comes from the sketch, however, in the sketch, the antecedent is played twice without the downward inflection of the consequent phrase. The two measure extension to the first phase of the solo (2:35) is a stretto procedure, fragmenting the two measure antecedent before continuing with the solo at 2:40.⁷⁷ After that, the solo unfolds over the standard progression, except for the four measures of harmony flown in from “Lady With the Spinning Head.”

“The Fly” was reportedly a laborious project.⁷⁸ It came to be one of the cornerstones of *Achtung Baby*, first for establishing the alter-ego character that was the lynchpin of the subsequent tour,⁷⁹ and second, because of its status as the first single from the album—a clear statement from U2 that they intended to wrest control of their image from the popular press, not through projecting a new, consistent image, but by making themselves more of a “moving target.”⁸⁰ Oddly, when U2 released their second compilation CD of hits in 2001, “The Fly” was left off. Edge observed: “I’m not sure

⁷⁶ We have seen this already in “Even Better than the Real Thing,” and shall see it again in the guitar solo from “Acrobat.”

⁷⁷ The two measure extension also appears in the *Salomé* “Take You Down” version.

⁷⁸ Even the final mix had moments of high drama. Unhappy with the existing mix, Edge and Lanois transferred it to a two-inch multi-track tape and added further vocals and guitars, doing the final mix together in real time—a technique that died with the 60s (a good example of which is the Beatles’ “Tomorrow Never Knows” from *Revolver*). Edge points to the opening guitar sound as a happy accident resulting from adding a second guitar part over an existing part, creating “a really crazy natural phasing effect.” *U2 by U2*, 232.

⁷⁹ Edge describes the “ZooTV” stage concept as having been derived from the video for “The Fly.” See “Closer to the Edge.”

⁸⁰ See Fred Johnson, “U2, Mythology,” and Robyn Brothers, “Time to Heal, ‘Desire’ Time: The Cyberprophesy of U2’s ‘Zoo World Order,’” in *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics*, ed. Kevin J.H. Dettmar and William Richey, 237-267 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

whether it's really stood the test of time.”⁸¹ However, “The Fly” was resurrected and featured prominently in the 2000-01 “Elevation” tour and the 2005-6 “Vertigo” tour (with Edge singing the part of the Fat Lady). This attitude is typical of the ambivalence that U2 have recently shown toward “The Fly,” perhaps as a result of its long, and painful birth, as opposed to “One,” which, as discussed earlier, came rather easily and unexpectedly.

Track 8: “Mysterious Ways” (B[b]-Major)

Accounts of the recording of this song indicate that it was one of the earliest songs in the *Achtung Baby* sessions, and versions date to the STS pre-production sessions in Dublin.⁸² According to Flanagan, the chorus hook “It’s all right, it’s all right” was an idea that Bono and Edge developed during the period when the creative process was stalled, and tensions were high.⁸³ Flood recalls that “a load of different ideas were tried.”⁸⁴ Stokes suggests that they “accidentally side-tracked into ‘One,’” although it is not clear whether he is recounting Flood’s recollection of events or basing this on his own research.⁸⁵ Recall, however, that Edge remembers “One” being derived from potential bridges to “Ultra Violet.” Memories are fallible, leaving one wondering whether “One” was one of the “load of different ideas” tried to finish “Mysterious Ways.”

This is another song dealing with relationships between men and women, and containing the familiar potential double-meaning where the unidentified “she” of the

⁸¹ “Closer to the Edge,” <www.hotpress.com/archive/2626881.html>.

⁸² Bono, quoted in *U2 by U2*, 216.

⁸³ Flanagan, *End of the World*, 8.

⁸⁴ Stokes, *U2 Into the Heart*, 104.

⁸⁵ Stokes was the founder in 1977 of Ireland’s premier music magazine, *Hot Press*, and is a close enough acquaintance of U2 that they refer to him by his first name in various sources.

song can also be a spiritual entity or a reference to spirituality generally, particularly as the title is derived from a Christian catch phrase. Bono has occasionally referred to El Shadi, the third, and least used, name for God in the Bible, which means “the breasted one,” remarking that, “I’ve always believed that the spirit is a feminine being.”⁸⁶

This song is best described as tending toward verse/chorus binary form, although it has strong elements of compound contrasting AABA, depending on how developmental one considers the bridge to be. There are two verse/pre-chorus/chorus complexes preceding a harmonically and texturally contrasting bridge, which begins with new material, but then develops chorus material before returning to a short restatement of the chorus. Verse and pre-chorus materials never return, hence the binary aspect of the form, although there is the conventional repeated chorus as coda. The bridge is only forty-six seconds (nineteen measures arranged somewhat unevenly as 5 + 6 + 8)—short compared to some of the other binary forms seen thus far (for example, “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses”)—so it could simply be considered a longer-than-usual bridge in a standard compound form as well.

The verses have a clear periodic, antecedent/consequent structure based on two **I – IV – I – V** progressions, with the consequent phrase restructured to provide an authentic cadence. Bono reports that, of the many melodic ideas tried, Edge preferred the nursery-rhyme text pattern ultimately appearing on the album.⁸⁷ The verses are cast in a reduced texture of percussion and a droning organ sound (that may actually be sustained, distorted guitar with the attack edited out) which, together with the vocal, suggests the

⁸⁶ Bono, quoted in Stokes, *U2 into the Heart*, 104. U2’s business organization is somewhat unusual in the rock world in that almost all the management staff are women.

⁸⁷ According to Bono, *U2 by U2*, 227.

six measures, at which point a funk-style guitar solo begins (2:24). The developmental twist begins at 2:39 when the vocal re-enters and the progression shifts to $i^7 - IV - \flat III - VII$, which is the standard chorus progression with the exception of the minor tonic seventh, followed by four measures of the standard chorus progression. The melody for this section is unique, and the sense is that of transition from the minor mode of the instrumental bridge, gradually back to major in order to set up the return of the chorus. Thus, again, material that has been firmly established in one role—here, the chorus—reappears only slightly altered, but with such significant stylistic changes in melody and instrumentation as to sound like a distinct section.

The funk style guitar solo reflects the birth of the song as a funk jam, started by Clayton playing a groove over a beat box, and joined by Edge and Mullen. They experimented with materials that would work over a harmonically invariant bass, and likely derived the progressions for the pre-chorus, chorus, and transitional section of the bridge in the process.⁸⁹ It does not necessarily follow that these sections represent the earliest parts of the song, as they could be solutions to the bass groove that were derived at any point during the composition of the song. We have seen several cases where U2 pluck a section from a sketch for insertion somewhere after the solo or bridge to achieve variety, thus it would be consistent with this practice if the last part of the bridge (2:39) had been derived from another stage of the sketching process.

Track 9: “Trying to Throw Your Arms Around the World” (A-Major)

This was another song that had apparently been sketched out fairly early in the *Achtung Baby* sessions.⁹⁰ In spite of the time that it was in circulation, it has the least

⁸⁹ Ibid.; Stokes, *Heart*, 104.

textural, harmonic, and rhythmic variety on *Achtung Baby*. The harmony alternates between **I** and **IV** throughout, except for all but four measures of the bridge, and even that is only a slight elaboration of the verse harmony, adding the **V** (2:24). An R&B flavored syncopation is used throughout, with the harmony always changing on beat 2+. The only variety is the first half of the bridge, where the bass changes from its ascending walking pattern to a syncopated figure mirroring the **I – V – IV – I** harmony. The bridge is untexted other than for a return of the Fat Lady ad-libbing, again in a Motown style. The background sounds are a swirl of synthesizer over guitar punctuations.

The form is compound simple AABA, since every section is almost identical. The verses are organized into two four-measure units, both ending with a variable refrain, such as “he was trying to throw his arms around the world,” or “...around a girl.” The choruses have similar organization with a four-measure antecedent answered by a four-measure consequent phrase with identical text. This is by far the simplest form on *Achtung Baby* (although slightly unusual in its AAABA organization) and one song whose stylistic debt is most clearly owed to the slow soul grooves first explored in *Rattle and Hum*. It contrasts so strongly with the rest of *Achtung Baby* that it was used to break the momentum of the “ZooTV” tour.⁹¹ U2 took the risky step of opening the live show with eight consecutive songs from *Achtung Baby*. After the sensory overload of the “ZooTV” stage, Bono would amble down to the “B” stage, connected to the main stage

⁹⁰ Flanagan, *End of the World*, 8.

⁹¹ Edge gives it the same role on the album: “[it] is light relief in the middle of a very dark piece of work. It is a nice mood to have on the album because the sound of *Achtung Baby* is desperation and all sorts of worrying tones in between.” *U2 by U2*, 228.

by a narrow walkway, and perform “Trying to Throw Your Arms Around the World” in a more intimate setting, befitting its relatively conventional form, style, and sound.

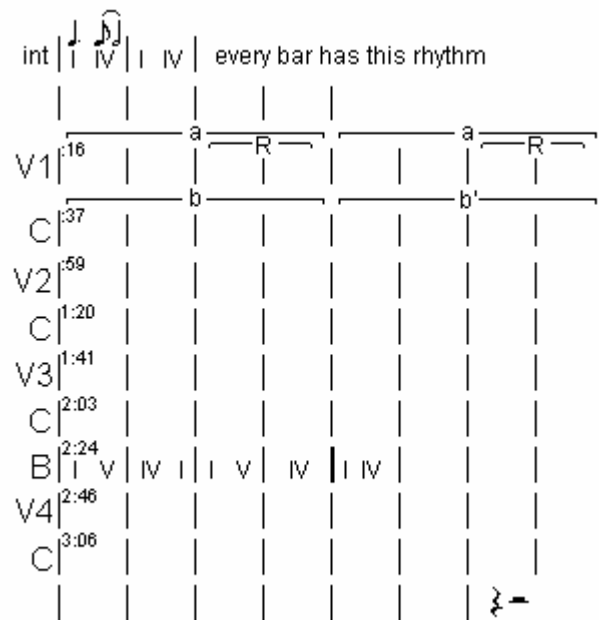


Fig. 3.12: Formal diagram for “Trying to Throw Your Arms Around the World”

Track 10: “Ultra Violet (Light My Way)” (E-Major)

Well, we've got a really great soul song, in the tradition of Sly and the Family Stone, called ‘Sick Puppy’...I'm not sure that'll be the title when we make the record. Another one is a full-frontal attack from the Edge called ‘Ultraviolet.’⁹²

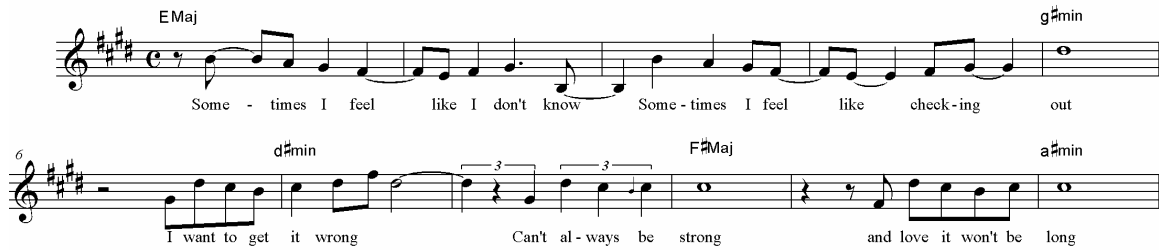
This rather early quotation suggests that some aspect of “Ultra Violet” existed before the band decamped to Berlin in October, 1990. However, recall that “Lady With the Spinning Head” has the subtitle “UV1,” meaning “Ultra Violet - 1,” so it is possible that Bono was referring to a sketch that became, “Lady With the Spinning Head.”

Regardless, something clearly survived to become the album track, if only the title, and a few persistent musical materials.

⁹² Bono, quoted in “Songwriting By Accident,” *Propaganda* 13, 1 October 1990, reprinted in *Best of Propaganda*, 136-141. Perhaps “Sick Puppy” became “Mysterious Ways,” a song that existed early in the sessions, and was the only song on the album with any hint of a funk groove.

One of the most advanced *Salomé* sketches, “Take You Down” (discussed *supra*), makes two appearances in this song. While the groove from “Take You Down” showed up on “Zoo Station” and “The Fly,” and parts of the guitar solo appeared in “The Fly,” the section which did double-duty as the chorus and bridge for “Lady With the Spinning Head” appears in a similar dual role in “Ultra Violet.”

The bridge is audibly derived from the *Salomé* sketch, and has the same syncopated 16th-note signature guitar line that is heard on the sketch (Ex. 3.1), and both versions of “Lady With the Spinning Head.” However, instead of adhering to the **vi – IV – I – V** progression, the harmony is shifted by two measures to yield a **I – V – vi – IV** progression, over which the repeated guitar figure naturally works as well as it does in its original guise. While the section may have been re-recorded, it would also have been very easy to digitally rearrange the track in the studio by excising the first two measures and pasting them onto the end of the remaining six measures. While the 16th-note guitar line is retained, the triplet quarter “la-las” are gone, and the lively interplay of these rhythms is missing, giving “Ultra Violet” a more reserved, less rhythmically energized feel. In addition, the apparently ametric, wandering vocal line that introduces “Ultra Violet” (0:00-0:48) was derived from the “middle eight” of the sketch, but the backing harmonic progression has been removed, creating the impression that Bono is simply improvising an odd melody prior to the start of the song proper; in fact, the amorphous vocal intro superimposes perfectly over the sketch’s middle eight when the two are played simultaneously (Ex. 3.5). The “Ultra Violet” introduction and the sketch middle



Ex. 3.5: Superimposition of vocal intro to “Ultra Violet” over bridge from “Lady With the Spinning Head”

eight have different texts, but they feature similar phraseology and concluding rhymes: the sketch includes “get it wrong,” “get it on,” “can’t take it any more,” versus “checking out,” “get it wrong,” “be strong,” and “won’t be long,” on “Ultra Violet,” typical of Bono’s technique of scatting numerous related ideas, some of which outlast others to appear in the final studio versions. The slight differences in text and melody further suggest that the sketch version of the middle eight is likely only one of many.

The tempo for “Ultra Violet” is 107 bpm, almost identical to that of both versions of “Lady With the Spinning Head” and the sketch from *Salomé*, so in addition to the obvious structural relationship amongst these songs, the near identical tempos suggest that some of the actual bed tracks from the sketch may have been used as beds for the final versions of each song.⁹³

The form is AABA(BA), where the A-sections are verse/pre-chorus/chorus complexes (although there are irregularities in the lengths of some sections), and the B-sections are bridges. The assignment of the category “verse” is straightforward, but the putative chorus has an element of refrain to it, including the text “Light my way,” which was chosen as the song’s subtitle. However, the texture does not thicken noticeably, and the harmony is unstable, beginning on **vi** and left hanging on **IV**. The bridges also behave atypically: they begin on the tonic, the first bridge concludes with an authentic

⁹³ The *U2 Scores* (p. 446) provides a tempo of 98 bpm for “Ultra Violet” that is clearly mistaken.

cadence, and the text is almost exclusively “Ultra Violet,” the song title—all of which are more characteristic of choruses than bridges. However, the relative positions of the A- and B-sections give them the character of chorus and bridge respectively. The least typical aspect of this song, from the perspective of U2’s normative procedure, is the repetition of the bridge, a trait more often associated with early songs of the Beatles and their contemporaries. More typical of U2 is the sectional ambiguity which carries over from the sketch.

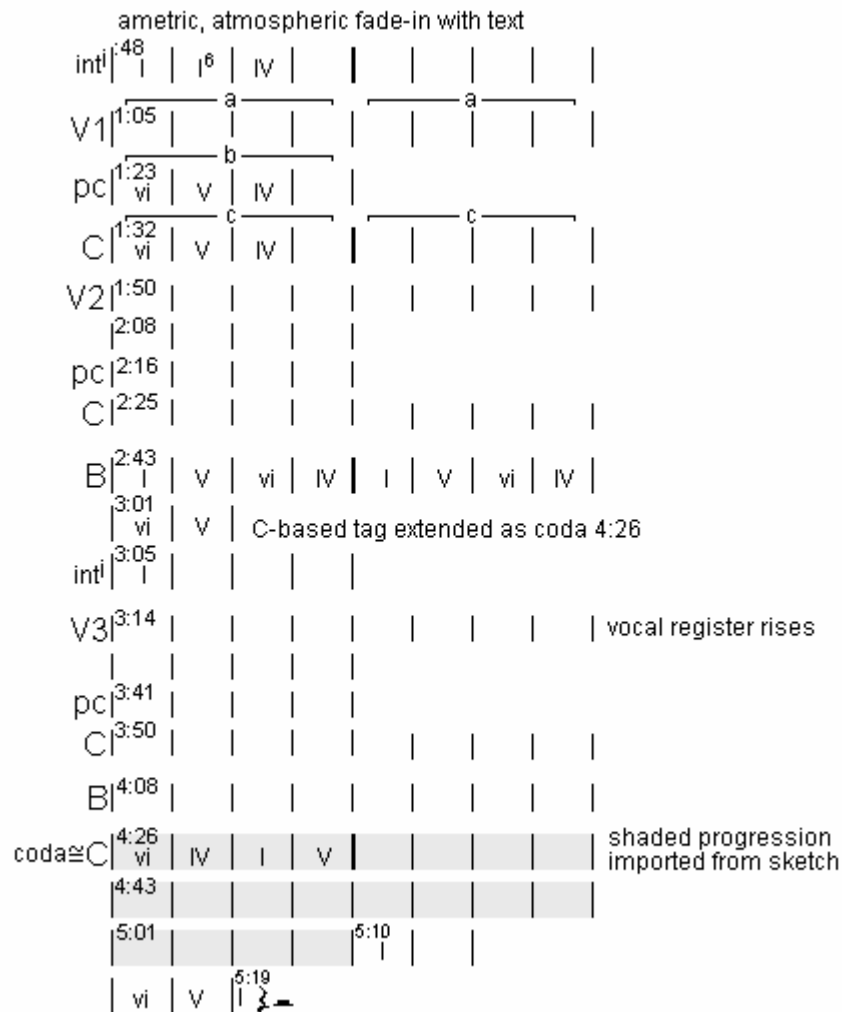


Fig. 3.13: Formal diagram for “Ultra Violet (Light my Way)”

The harmonic language is simple, consisting of several combinations of **I**, **IV**, **V**, and **vi**. The first verse is actually the shortest, consisting of only two four-measure phrases followed by the four-measure pre-chorus, and then a full eight-measure chorus, again consisting of two four-measure phrases. The two remaining verses each have an additional four-measure phrase, a kind of formal inconsistency that is another hallmark of U2's music. It is noteworthy that the verses have exactly the same **I-I⁶-IV-IV** progression seen in the retransition gesture and verses of "Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses," another song that was sketched extensively.⁹⁴

The first bridge (2:43) is largely the musical payoff of the song, and, as mentioned, contains the text selected as the track's title. The bridge concludes with a two-measure tag derived from the chorus followed by a four-measure interlude based on verse material, resulting again, in a somewhat irregular section, this time a total of six measures. The reprise of a full A-section (3:14) after the bridge is atypical for U2, but necessary, in this case, because the bridge is unusually short for them, and not developmental. The concluding bridge (4:08) is identical to the first, but rather than closing with the tag section, goes into a long coda (twenty-five measures) based on chorus text, but with the bridge guitar hook now very low in the mix. The harmony is also changed from the typical chorus progression of **vi – V – IV – IV** to **vi – IV – I – V** with the text now arranged in two-measure antecedent/consequent phrases, making this clearly a closing gesture. This altered progression is derived directly from the sketch, so, once again, U2 inserts material from a sketch somewhere after the midpoint to provide a slight change in harmonic color and melodic contour.

⁹⁴ Recall that Bono worked this section substantially in several of the *Salomé* demos.

There is an almost complete lack of interior closure in this song. Nearly every phrase, regardless of the song section, ends on **IV**, and the beginning of the next section on **I** does not provide any sense of cadence, but rather the mere resumption of the song. There are, however, three prominent authentic cadences (3:05, 5:10, 5:19) which occur after the bridges and coda, and conclude their respective sections very strongly, with both the harmony and the vocal melody arriving on the tonic. The second occurrence is reached only after the long chorus-derived coda following the second bridge, where four phrases have **V-vi** cadences to prolong the coda before finally resolving **V - I** (5:10), a gesture then repeated (5:19) to conclude the song.

Considering the sheer variety of texts and melodies tried against the various fragments of the sketch, Bono's selection of the most clichéd text possible—three “Baby”s—raised a few eyebrows, and provoked much mirth at the singer's expense.⁹⁵ The ostensible “throw away” chorus text contrasts the much darker and sophisticated verse texts which describe the discomfort and alienation that can creep into long-term relationships, a recurring theme of *Achtung Baby*. “Ultra Violet” thus sets up the introspective, pessimistic mood pervading these last three songs.

Track 11: “Acrobat” (A-Minor)

Just as the last two songs on Side 1 formed a stylistic dyad, so too do the last two songs on the album. Both are in compound meter and minor keys, and were two of the first songs to reach advanced stages early in the *Achtung Baby* sessions.⁹⁶ There is a

⁹⁵ Flood, quoted in Stokes, *Heart*, 107. Bono remarks that the word “baby” had never before appeared on a U2 record, but appears twenty-seven times on *Achtung Baby*. Again, this fulfills Eno's quest for the trashy and throw-away. Bono attributes its entry into his lexicon to the arrival of his first baby. See *U2 by U2*, 216.

sketch of “Acrobat” from the *Salomé* bootleg that more closely resembles its final version than on any other song on *Achtung Baby*, although the sketch is in major mode, has significantly different harmonic progressions, and almost completely different text—but the signature elements, such as refrains, and transitions between sections, are already in place. Edge recalls that the music for “Acrobat” was developed during a soundcheck in Auckland, New Zealand in 1989.⁹⁷ Similarly, “Love is Blindness,” written during the *Rattle and Hum* period, predates the *Achtung Baby* sessions by two years.⁹⁸

The verses of “Acrobat” are based on a **i - VII - VI - v** descending tetrachord, with the **v** chord supported by scale step $\hat{4}$ in the bass, which is technically a third inversion minor seventh chord, but there is no sense of a minor seventh at all. In fact, this sonority is never as well defined as the others, and the designation “**v**” is based mostly on the melody pitches played by the guitar and vocal, which are more often consistent with E-minor (**v**) than D-minor (**iv**), either of which works as a progression played “camp-fire style” on an acoustic guitar. However, neither progression really sounds correct, underscoring the genuine harmonic ambiguity at this point.⁹⁹

As was the case for “One,” the form, by conventional definition based on text repetition, should be AABA. However, the six-measure sections concluding the verses have significant chorus character despite the inconsistency in text repetition. There is

⁹⁶ Flanagan, *End of the World*, 8. This would have been during the so-called “Lovetown” Tour that promoted *Rattle and Hum*, but which was largely the final phase of the almost continuous *Joshua Tree* tour cycle.

⁹⁷ Flanagan, *End of the World*, 444.

⁹⁸ Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 109.

⁹⁹ The *U2 Complete Songs* analyzes the progression the same way and provides the chord “Em/D,” 124-6. In popular music scores, this is called a “slash chord” and is understood to mean “E -minor with a D pitch in the bass.” This is an unsatisfying chord for a “campfire” arrangement, as the lowest D note is the open 4th string, firmly in the guitar’s midrange.

clearly a refrain after all verses on the text “Don’t let the bastards drag you down,” but choruses two and three contrast the ideas “You must be an acrobat” and “I must be an acrobat,” while the first putative chorus makes no such reference. The chorus nature is reasserted after the guitar solo in that it is detachable from the descending tetrachord section of the verses, which never return after the second iteration, once again providing

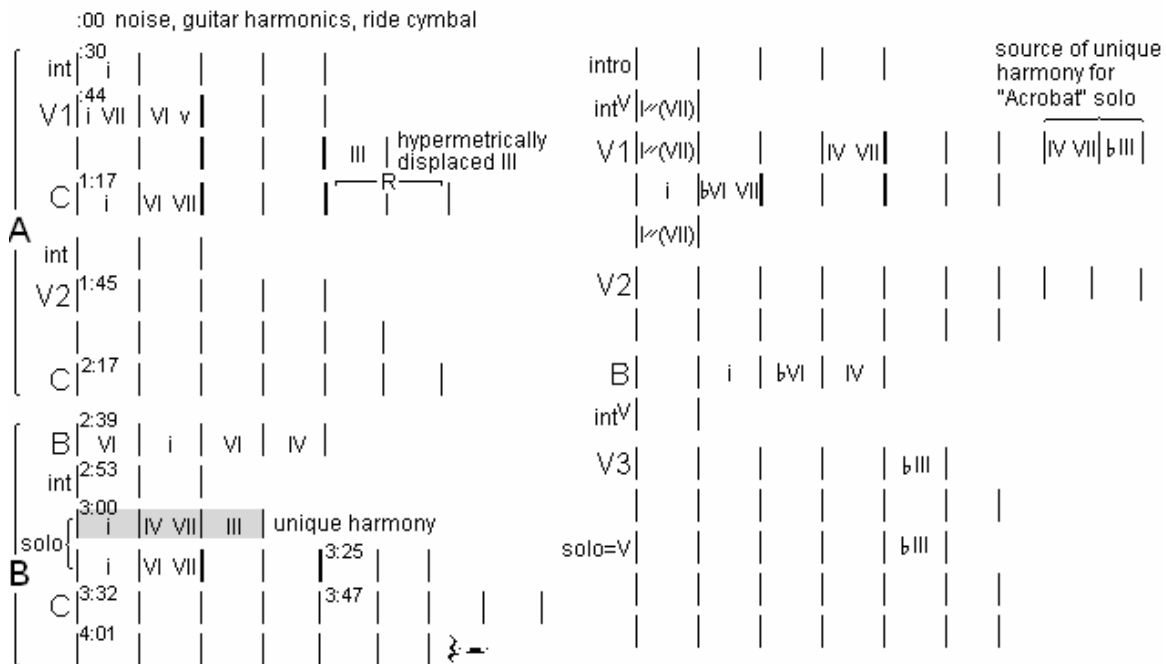


Fig. 3.14: Formal diagrams for “Acrobat” (left) and its sketch (right)

an overall binary form similar to “One.” The sketch, in contrast, follows the reduced texture interlude (B) with a full A-section, giving the sketch a more unambiguous AABA architecture. Again, subtle development of the second half of the song takes it out of the normative form.

Edge employs an arsenal of related techniques to supply the variable lead guitar lines which frequently clash with the implied harmony. The verses feature identically fingered A-C and E-G double stops on the top two strings. Edge slides down and up a

fourth between these two positions as the tetrachord unfolds, although he varies the timing between verses 1 and 2 so that the G bass supports both dyads. This is typical of

The image displays two systems of musical notation, each for a different verse of the song "Acrobat". Each system consists of a guitar part (top staff, treble clef) and a bass guitar part (bottom staff, bass clef). The time signature is 12/8. In both systems, the guitar part features four chords, each marked with a double bar line and a colon, indicating they are sustained or "planned". The bass guitar part consists of a continuous descending line of eighth notes. The first system (top) represents verse 1, and the second system (bottom) represents verse 2. The bass line in both verses is identical, starting on a high C and descending to a G.

Ex. 3.6: Planing double stops over descending tetrachord in “Acrobat,” verse 1 (top), verse 2 (bottom)

Edge, who often planes shapes against bass patterns, letting the dissonances fall where they may. In the second verse, the G bass supports Edge’s E-G dyad while Bono sings a G, a sonority more consistent with first inversion E-minor than G, but the momentum of the descending tetrachord, and the previous appearances of the G cement its identity as a G sonority regardless of the pitches passing over it. Similarly, the bass D pitch supports a variety of potential sonorities, yet the E-minor sonority manages to assert itself, often without an E pitch anywhere in the texture. Both Edge and Bono predominantly outline the interval of a descending fourth from C to G, and it may partly be the sense of descending fourth that suggests the tetrachord descending a fourth from A-minor to E-minor, rather than the fifth to D-minor.

The fourth is also prominent in the choruses. Edge plays a series of syncopated double stops beginning on a G-C interval—the same pitches forming the respective highest pitches of the sliding double stops—but re-fingered so that the first finger plays both pitches simultaneously on the 2nd and 1st strings at the 8th fret. With the third finger,

he adds A and D pitches, altering the interval to a minor third and perfect fifth in a varying pattern from chorus to chorus, again letting the dissonances fall where they may.

The guitar is soaked in delay and distortion, and the phasing of dissonance and

Ex. 3.7: Lead guitar and bass for chorus 1 of “Acrobat”¹⁰⁰

consonance is inconsistent and unpredictable, accentuating the unease of the vocalist in a technically simple, but highly effective way. In the closing chorus, Edge abandons the melancholy suspended seconds and fourths implied by the figures just discussed, raising the ante in the conclusion by imposing a highly dissonant melody of F#-G-A over alternating A-minor and F-major chords (3:48).

The transition to the chorus is via a hypermetrically displaced **III**, occupying a ninth measure at the end of both verses. The choruses are essentially retrogrades of the verse harmony (minus the **v**) in three two-measure phrases. After the two verse/chorus complexes, there is a contrasting bridge section of four measures (2:39) in a reduced texture signaled by a deceptive progression from the end of the refrain to a **VI** chord. This transitional section marks time with a **VI - i - VI - IV** progression, with the first appearance of the subdominant (and in major rather than the more typical minor in tonal practice) signaling the return to the tonic and the beginning of the guitar solo. The solo is based on the chorus progression, but has an internal one measure extension on **III**. The

¹⁰⁰ The bass is primarily “punk chug,” but Clayton adds the odd fill, or sixteenth embellishment. Often, in recordings of this density, the bass is difficult to hear clearly, and is more felt than heard.

solo guitar plays the pitches A - C - D - E, which fit perfectly over **i**, but the bass plays pitch **3̂** (C) at the bottom of the texture, creating the strong sense of **III**, rather than **i**⁶. It is this extra measure that makes the guitar solo hypermetrically unique, while recalling the transition from verses to choruses via **III**, discussed above. The solo is harmonically unique as well with a **i** - **IV** - **VII** - **III** progression for the first three measures, this being the only other appearance of **IV** in the song and the only place where these particular chords appear in this sequence. As has been the case throughout *Achtung Baby*, the short segment of unique harmony was taken directly from the generative sketch; the **IV** - **VII** progression concluded each phrase of the sketch verses.

The solo may be perceived as a chorus and its transition preceded by two measures of unique harmony. This is an odd partitioning, and rendered ambiguous by the phrasing of the guitar solo which is consistent for the first seven measures, employing rapid sixteenth picking on a dotted quarter melody, but then enters a contrasting syncopated phase (3:25) lasting only two measures before the closing chorus vocal reenters. The solo, therefore, may be partitioned 3 + 6 harmonically or [3+2+2] + 2 thematically.

The form is, again, tending toward verse/chorus binary, but not particularly strongly. While the solo is similar to a chorus, it does have harmonic elements appearing nowhere else in the song, thus making it slightly developmental. The concluding chorus is extended through four two-measure units creating a clear closing gesture, thus there is never a return to verse material or to unmodified chorus material, again suggesting elements of binary form. However, the putative B-section is not as contrasting or

developmental as others seen thus far, so this could be considered a compound contrasting AABA form as well.

Track 12: “Love is Blindness” (A[♯]-Minor)

This was a rare case where the lyric preceded the music, a more traditional method of rock composition in which U2 had acquired some interest during the *Rattle and Hum* period.¹⁰¹ This accords well with recollections that this song preceded the *Achtung Baby* sessions by around three years, and is another example of Bono taking a long time to develop a song, and refusing to give up on something promising.

The key, meter, descending tetrachord progression, and lyrical pessimism make this a clear complement to “Acrobat.”¹⁰² Furthermore, the melody of the organ intro to “Love is Blindness” is virtually identical to Bono’s vocal melody in the verses of “Acrobat.” However, the French torch-song feel contrasts strongly with “Acrobat’s” industrial aesthetic, suggesting that these could be polar interpretations of the same original material. If these two songs do indeed date from the *Rattle and Hum* period, then it is possible that the soundcheck which generated the music for “Acrobat” may have started as a jam over “Love is Blindness,” or vice versa. What is odd—if not provocative—is that two songs so closely resembling one another, and which are so atypical of U2, are placed side by side, to conclude the album. On *Achtung Baby*, and its associated singles, U2 are almost reveling in revealing the flexibility of the material.

¹⁰¹ Edge says: “Actually, that was one that Bono did write the lyric for first. It started out just on piano.” See “Closer to the Edge.”

¹⁰² The key on the album is B_♭-minor, but it is performed live in A-minor. It is possible that the bed tracks were recorded in A-minor and then sped up, raising the key, although it is possible that the instruments were tuned up.

The progression is an unambiguous **i - VII - VI - iv** with a **i - V - i** tag. The strong authentic cadence harkens back to more traditional European song roots. The form is compound simple AABA, and it is one of the most formally conventional songs on the album (another sign of roots in the *Rattle and Hum* period). The bridge provides some harmonic contrast by beginning on a very European Phrygian deflection to **bII**, but the texture and mood remain the same. The guitar solos are instrumental verses, and represent the only real contrast in the song, despite having the same progression as the

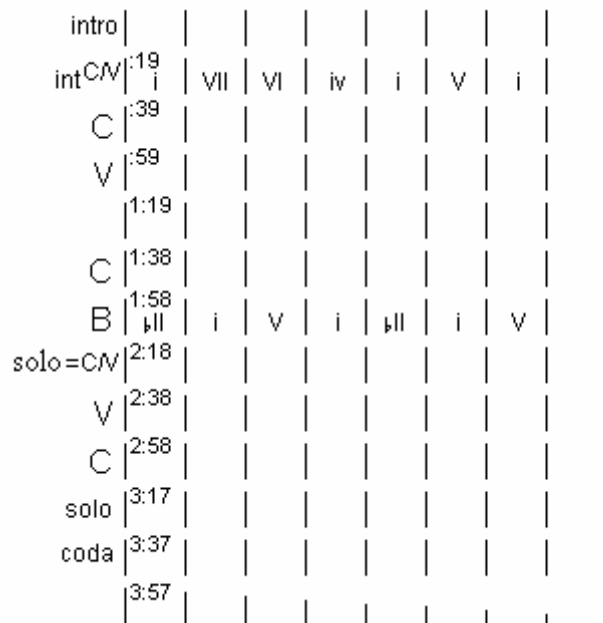


Fig. 3.15: Formal diagram for “Love is Blindness”

verse/chorus complexes. The guitar is heavily distorted and concentrated in rather muddy mid-range tones. The first solo follows the bridge and is largely amelodic, much in the style of Neil Young, whose equally dark “comeback” album, *Freedom*, was still in the charts.¹⁰³ The execution is halting and sporadic, reflecting the frustration and inarticulateness of the blinded lover, a theme permeating *Achtung Baby*. Another verse

¹⁰³ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the influence of Neil Young on Edge’s guitar style.

and chorus unfold before a second, more melodic, guitar solo using sequences leads into the coda.

In spite of the formal clarity and lack of variety, there are some atypical features. The song begins with the chorus, although this only becomes apparent when it is repeated as the fourth and seventh iterations of the main progression. Two guitar solos is also uncommon for U2 (and for most music of the 80s).

Bono closes the song with a descending, non-texted melody of hopeless cries in the finest torch-song tradition—the parallel to the Baroque lament is unavoidable. Thus the album presented as U2's most ironic, most tongue-in-cheek, and most satirical—a conscious step away from the “all-too-serious” U2 of *The Joshua Tree*—actually concludes as gloomily and traditionally as possible.

The last three songs of the album cement the darkness that defines *Achtung Baby*. That these three songs were all from the earliest sessions, if not from the period preceding the recording of the album, suggests that this mood was prevalent in the organization in the post-*Joshua Tree*/*Rattle and Hum* period, and may well have been a reaction to their having vaulted to a hyperbolic level of fame, with the intense pressure that must accompany such a profound change of personal situation. U2 had briefly considered titling the album *Man*, in contrast to their debut album *Boy*—a clear indication that adolescence was long gone, and naiveté replaced with a certain world-weariness.

Conclusion

Achtung Baby provides a rare glimpse into the sketching process of a band in transition. While there are bootleg recordings for several seminal albums such as the Beatles' *Revolver* and The Rolling Stones' *Beggars Banquet*, few are as extensive as the

Salomé bootleg. Most striking, however, is how little of demo material makes an obvious appearance on *Achtung Baby*, or any of its B-sides. Equally striking is that those materials that do appear on the album were often demoed in significantly different contexts, confirming the oral descriptions of U2's compositional process wherein materials are occasionally developed very slowly, and can go off in an entirely different direction. Yet a pivotal song such as "One" could arrive very quickly, ironically while trying to compose bridges for a more problematic song. The key to success is that innumerable options are on the table at all times, equally facilitating speed and inspiration, as well as pure slogging.

It must be borne in mind that the *Salomé* demos were all from the Berlin sessions, or earlier (such as the advanced sketch for "Even Better than the Real Thing," which dated back to the *Rattle and Hum* sessions in 1988), and that the bulk of the album was finished in the "Dogtown" and Windmill Lane studios back in Ireland, thus it is difficult to generalize that the sketches are advanced or primitive insofar as U2 appear able to move quickly onto a new idea, or, alternatively, to beat one to death, ultimately abandoning it. In fact, several demos from the *Salomé* bootleg are quite advanced, appearing in multiple, almost identical versions, but were never released. Similarly, it is not known how complete a picture the *Salomé* bootleg provides; there are undoubtedly hours of alternate takes, overdubs, and home demos spanning the entire creative period of *Achtung Baby* that are unavailable.

The only songs to closely resemble their demos are "Even Better than the Real Thing" and "Acrobat"—which both date back to *Rattle and Hum*—and "Lady With the Spinning Head (UVI)," itself released only as a single, and much more significant as the

source for parts of “The Fly,” “Zoo Station,” and “Ultra Violet.” “Acrobat” is typical of the kinds of manipulations made between demo and album version; it was recast in minor mode and the verse progressions were altered significantly from a static tonic progression to a descending tetrachord. However, some of the most distinguishing characteristics of the demo—the use of (b) **III** as a harmonic pivot and metric extension, the vocal urgency, and Mullen’s tom-heavy drum patterns—were retained. Similarly, “Even Better than the Real Thing” was rendered far more interesting by making harmonic alterations to the verse progressions. The most effective change, however, was the retention of a four-measure section of the sketch inserted at the three-quarter point of the song, providing crucial harmonic, and hypermetric variety. An identical procedure was seen in “The Fly” and “Acrobat” where the sketches were raided again for three or four-measure novel inserts. In each case, an overall binary form results, with the second half of the song omitting verse material, other than as the backing for an instrumental solo.

The developmental procedures used by U2 are a good candidate for the root of the formal ambiguity permeating the album. Songs like “One” and “Acrobat” tread a middle ground between classic AABA and compound AABA, in that they behave largely as verse/chorus forms, despite the putative choruses lacking the expected textual identity. This is, itself, likely a result of various song sections not having a strong formal identity during the sketching process, which is clearly seen throughout the sketches, and strikingly apparent even in the released version of “Lady With the Spinning Head (UVI),” where chorus and bridge are identical, except for Bono’s melody and text; formal anathema for sections which conventionally should be contrasting.

This tendency for song sections to exhibit formal double-duty is marked in *Achtung Baby*. For example, the choruses in “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses” have beds identical to the second half of the bridge, simply because it was possible to sketch them with either character. The *Salomé* bootleg contains the section that became the bridge, complete with the “Don’t turn around” text, but the chorus text and character is not on the demos. Similarly, “Zoo Station” featured two distinct melodies over the verse progression that were ultimately sectioned to create two verses from one, possibly with a static, time-killing bridge inserted to flesh out the form. Again, the sketches show how easily Bono was able to scat very different melodies over a given progression, and his desire to keep and develop almost everything is reflected in the final versions of the songs.

At odds with the formal variety characterizing their work is U2’s remarkably limited harmonic vocabulary on *Achtung Baby*. The tonic and mixolydian/dorian seventh are the primary chords for three songs (“Zoo Station,” “Even Better Than the Real Thing,” and “The Fly”), with two more featuring them as part of a descending tetrachord (“Acrobat” and “Love is Blindness”). The **VII** chord also appears prominently in four other songs (“One,” “Until the End of the World,” “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses,” and “Mysterious Ways”). Three songs are based on **I-IV-V** progressions (“Trying to Throw Your Arms Around the World,” “Mysterious Ways,” “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses,” and “You’re So Cruel”), although the last two make use of the very familiar **ii**, **vi**, and **iii** minor sonorities in their bridges to provide contrast. The most exotic harmonies are the rather tame **bIII** in “Mysterious Ways” and its major-mode counterpart in “Acrobat,” and the Phrygian **bII** in “Love is Blindness,” the latter being a

rare stylistic quotation outside of the blues or rock traditions. Despite this conservative chordal vocabulary, there are numerous instances of ambiguous harmony, mostly resulting from the guitar and bass lines operating somewhat independently of one another thereby creating arresting, transient verticalities. Clearly, clever functional chord progressions, such as one might find in the music of Elvis Costello, or bizarre combinations of unrelated chords heard, for example, on some Talking Heads albums, play a small role in U2's music where interest is maintained more at the surface through the affective content of the recorded sounds, the idiomatic instrumental styles, and the lead vocals.

The next chapter looks at U2's 1980 debut album *Boy*, with the emphasis on a comparison of U2's mature compositional process, illuminated as it was by considerable sketch material, with that of their earliest years, for which the same amount of sketch and demo material is not available. While *Achtung Baby* is often viewed as a departure for the band, a perspective informed by our study thus far will reveal that this earlier album contains many of the distinctive stylistic features prevalent on *Achtung Baby*, and that these features were part of U2's earliest aesthetic of song. This suggests that the change of style associated with the latter album was substantially a surface phenomenon

CHAPTER FOUR: *Boy* (1980)

Boy was U2's debut studio album. The title *Boy* reflects the thematic content of most of the songs, chronicling the passage from boyhood to adulthood—not exactly a staple of post-punk, but an issue very much in the minds of the members of the band and their cohort as they approached the end of their formal schooling. Bono was a participant in an imaginary community called Lypton Village, a loose aggregation of friends celebrating the counter-culture, and questioning the mainstream aspirations and goals set before them, particularly family and occupation. It was from this group that Bono and Edge (the latter not strictly a member) acquired their nicknames. Neither Clayton (too much his own man) nor Mullen (too grounded in reality) were involved, although they did socialize with members of the “Village.”¹

Boy was recorded in Dublin at Windmill Lane Studios, which would remain U2's main base for recording into the twenty-first century.² Their first choice for producer was Martin Hannett, whose work on Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures* was admired by the band. To test the relationship, Hannett produced their third single, “11 O’Clock Tick Tock,” released in May, 1980.³ However, the May suicide of Joy Division's lead singer

¹ Several members of Lypton Village, including Edge's brother, Dick (rechristened “Dik” by the Village) formed the Virgin Prunes, a much more avant garde group than U2, verging on performance art.

² Part of the decision to record at Windmill was simply logistical in that the band members all still lived with their parents, and there was simply no budget to relocate to a more prestigious studio, despite the Island Records advance, which was small (band members were drawing around £25 per week). See *U2 by U2*, 96. Windmill Lane Studios changed location in 1993.

³ *U2 Encyclopedia*, s.v. Hannett.

Ian Curtis, forced them to cancel their American tour, for which Hannett was slated to perform the live mix. Too devastated by the aftermath of Curtis' death to work on the U2 album, Hannett declined production duties.⁴ Unable to secure their first choice, U2 approached Steve Lillywhite, a pioneer of the early post-punk and new wave sounds, who had already produced albums for the likes of Ultravox, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and XTC. As work on *Boy* was beginning, he was involved with Peter Gabriel *III* (often called *Melt* because of the cover art which has the left side of Gabriel's face dripping down the cover), thus Lillywhite was certainly favorably disposed toward experimental approaches to recording.

The twelve songs on the album were culled from approximately forty that comprised the live set.⁵ While there are no available sketches for the songs from *Boy* in the sense that they exist for *Achtung Baby*, several song demos were recorded as limited release singles that were later re-recorded for inclusion on *Boy*. There are also several live bootlegs from the period just prior to, and shortly following, the recording of the album. Comparisons between these different versions (with the demos presumably being close to how the band played live) offer revealing glimpses into U2's early aesthetics, particularly their conception of song, and their ability to realize that conception. The most important of these early demos were recorded for CBS Ireland by Chas de Whalley, a former rock journalist working as a talent scout for CBS Ireland. In August, 1979, U2 went into Windmill Lane Studios for the first time, recording three songs with de

⁴ Hannett himself eventually succumbed to his vices and addictions in 1991, aged only forty-two.

⁵ Gavin Martin, "Kings of the Celtic Fringe," *New Music Express*, 14 February 1981, 26. This is one of few references to U2's earliest set lists. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the ratio of covers to originals, nor any titles. *U2 by U2*, 75, reproduces a pair of early set lists, but, consistent with its coffee-table format, does not provide any archival data, and lays them out one beneath the other such that the bottom one is largely obscured.

Whalley; “Out of Control,” “Stories For Boys” (both of which were re-recorded for *Boy*), and “Boy/Girl” (which is not on *Boy*). These were released exclusively in Ireland in September, 1979, on an EP titled *U2-3*. Later, in December, U2 played some shows in London and, with de Whalley producing again, recorded a single called “Another Day.” “Twilight,” another song destined to be re-recorded for *Boy*, had been recorded in a self-produced demo in February, 1979, and was resurrected to become the B-side for “Another Day.” Paradoxically, “Another Day” was ultimately deemed too weak for *Boy*. Comparisons of the Lillywhite versions of “Twilight,” “Stories For Boys,” and “Out of Control” with the various demos suggest that Lillywhite may have played a pivotal role in transforming U2 from an ironic, lightweight, post-punk band into something, perhaps, not so much “heavier” as “denser,” and somewhat more serious.

Boy represents the opposite pole on the continuum of compositional process from *Achtung Baby*, as it is comprised mostly of finished songs brought into the studio for recording. In several cases, the songs had a performance history of as much as two years. The prior demo versions of several songs on *Boy* mean that several of the Lillywhite versions represent second-generation recordings—in stark contrast to most of *Achtung Baby* where almost none of the songs were in anything even approaching final form. As we will see, however, there are some interesting similarities between these two albums.

The entire album is recorded with the instruments tuned a semitone below A440, as would be the case on *Zooropa* thirteen years later. This mirrors U2’s live practice. The lowered pitch allows Edge to play in the positions of guitar-friendly keys like E, A, and D, while giving Bono an extra semitone of vocal headroom. Perhaps as a result, Bono is near the top of his range for much of the album. Tuning down also darkens and

thickens the timbre of the guitars, which power trios often find helpful in live performance. One well-known instance of this is Stevie Ray Vaughan, whose distinctive sound came partly from tuning down as well as using abnormally thick strings—both of which substantially lower the timbre of the guitar. For the purposes of analysis, *Boy* will be treated as though it were recorded at concert pitch since the instrumentalists execute their parts as though they were in these keys.⁶

Track 1: “I Will Follow” (E[\flat]-Major)

Many characteristics recurring throughout U2’s recording career are seen in their opening album track. There is a live, under-produced feel, consistent with the punk aesthetic that sought to distance itself sonically from the lush, grandiose productions of older contemporaries like the Eagles, Boston, Foreigner, and Fleetwood Mac. The chugging eighth-note attack on both the guitar and bass denote the stylistic debt to punk, although, as discussed in Chapter One, U2 were apprehensive about being too closely identified with the punk scene, which they believed to have become musically too formulaic, and the fandom correspondingly too dogmatic.⁷

Despite sounding much like a live band of average competence, there are subtle aspects of production evident from the outset. On several tracks from *Boy*, the high ringing sound of a glockenspiel is apparent. It is likely that Lillywhite suggested this instrument to create more of an aural signature, and to help highlight the higher frequencies, which tend to be absent in the rock combo texture. Referring specifically to “I Will Follow,” Edge observed:

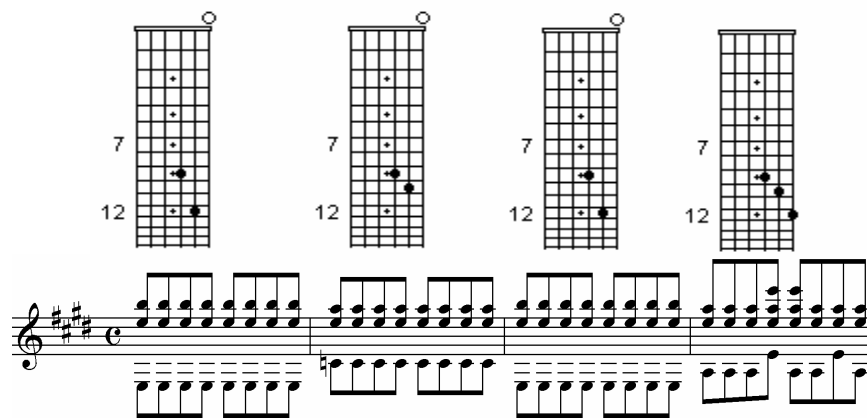
⁶ The *U2 Complete Songs* transcribes these songs at concert pitch with the standard indication to “Tune guitar down a semitone.”

⁷ See particularly Edge, *U2 by U2*, 92. See also the discussion in chapter 1, *supra*.

The glockenspiel—this beautiful high-frequency chiming—was just a mad idea. We each had one take: ‘OK, Edge, here’s the glockenspiel—go!’ I went in and did some real ordered part. Then Bono went in, and his take was this frantic flailing, which is the one we featured.⁸

Zak discusses the use of the glockenspiel by Bruce Springsteen in “Born to Run” (1975), citing it as an example of the rhetorical function of timbre, in that Phil Spector often used it in his “wall of sound” productions, thereby connecting Springsteen to that earlier sound and style.⁹ Lillywhite was doubtless aware of these references, and may have been important in introducing U2 to some of the aural traditions of rock well before *The Joshua Tree* and *Rattle and Hum* period of the late 80s, when U2 was taken to task for appropriating American styles in a cynical, calculating way.

The first sound on the album, almost indiscernible, is someone counting in the beat, followed by the opening solo guitar riff. The rationale behind Edge often being described as a “minimalist” is apparent from the opening guitar riff on which nearly the entire song is based, consisting of a doubled E4 drone anchoring alternation between B4 and A4 (Ex. 4.1).¹⁰ The distinctive timbre of the riff results from being able to play the



Ex. 4.1: Edge’s guitar fingerings (top); reduction of typical guitar and bass intro parts to “I Will Follow” (bottom).

⁸ Edge, quoted by Anthony De Curtis in “U2 Look Back,” *Rolling Stone* 801, December 1998, 97.

⁹ Zak, *Poetics*, 67.

¹⁰ The term “minimalist” is used frequently in the punk and post-punk literature, and simply refers to small instrumental forces (standard rock combo) playing technically simple material. It bears no relation to contemporary Western Art Music minimalism.

same pitch at different places on the guitar. The E4 pitch sounds on both the third string at the ninth fret, and the open first string, thereby doubling the note on strings of quite different timbres. Also, there is the difference between a note that is fretted far up the neck, which has a higher tension and faster decay, and an open string which continues to vibrate between plucks. The alternating B4 and A4 pitches are played on the second string at the twelfth and tenth frets respectively, and, therefore, also have very high timbres and quick decays. The high E5 note that Edge occasionally adds is played at the twelfth fret of the first string, interrupting the droning open E4. These combinations of high fretted notes and open notes are atypical positions for guitar, but more common among trios where a single guitarist must fill as much sonic space as possible. This was a particular challenge for Edge, who was not a technically proficient player at this point, and had to find ways of filling space that did not rely on virtuosity.

There is clearly an E sonority, often called an E⁵, implied by the fifth between E4 and B4, but the harmony implied by the A4 is ambiguous.¹¹ The higher pitch in the E⁵ is the B4, which drops a tone to A4, creating an aural “lower neighbor” impression, which suggests that the chord itself has also dropped a tone, perhaps to a D⁵ over a droning E4 pedal. This creates a vague impression of a **I - VII** progression, even though the only pitch belonging to a D chord is the A. However, the fourth between E and A analytically implies an inverted **IV** (without the third, C#). Thus far, none of the possible harmonies are definitively major or minor. Not until the entry of the bass (0:15) is there some clarification of the harmony, although even here, there is ambiguity. The opening E - B fifth on the guitar is supported by an E in the bass, confirming an E tonality. However, the

¹¹ Typically, the designation “E⁵” implies a “power chord,” or open fifth chord played on the open sixth string and the second fret of the fifth string, or an octave higher at the seventh fret of the fifth string and ninth fret of the fourth string.

E - A fourth on the guitar is first supported by a C \sharp in the bass—technically an A-minor in first inversion—while the second E - A fourth is supported by an A, implying **IV** (A⁵), in spite of the absence of a clear major third. The verses and choruses, however, have the bass alternating between E and A, creating a clear **I - IV** harmony. This results in two distinct four-measure phrases, one for the interludes, and another for the verses and choruses. The harmonic rhythm matches that implied by the introduction, namely one chord per measure.

In spite of sounding like a clear **I - IV** progression, the verses still include a lower neighbor figure in the guitar, which often plays a B - E - E figure on the highest strings, in alternation with an identically fingered A - D - E figure two frets lower—a planing of

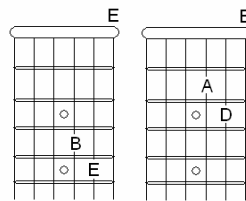


Fig. 4.1: Planing of chord shapes

chord shapes often employed by Edge (Fig 4.1). Again, this creates an E drone on the high E string, while the A - D - E chord functions as an A^{sus4}, but also has a D^{add9} character as well, once again creating some ambiguity as to whether this is a **I - IV** or **I - VII** progression. This harmonic ambiguity has always intrigued Edge:

I came up with chord voicings where there was no third...with maybe some other intervals in there. It worked quite well because it kept the canvas completely open. And when we came to recording, the ambiguity gave me the ability to play around with overdubs. You could really change things a lot because you weren't setting down the chords in a very clear fashion.¹²

Mirroring the minimalist nature of the bass and guitar is the modified compound simple AABA (A'AABA'') form. It is arguable that the verses, choruses, and interludes are all substantially the same in that a lower neighbor figure is almost always discernable

¹² Edge, *U2 by U2*, 72.

somewhere in the texture, even though there are slight differences in the harmony. The only real contrast comes from the bridge (2:06) which features a reduced texture, putting the spotlight on the bass, which has a more active line than in the other sections (Ex. 4.2). The bass plays two different two-bar phrases against identical four-bar phrases in the guitar, which plays open harmonics on every downbeat at the twelfth, seventh, and fifth frets respectively. This implies a $\text{i} - \text{v} - \text{i} - \text{v} / \text{i} - \text{III}^{\text{M7}} - \text{i} - \text{III}^{\text{M7}}$ progression. Bono's melody is confined to the pitches G, F#, E, and B, also creating a distinct E-minor tonic for the bridge, as opposed to the E⁵ tonic of the verse/choruses.

The musical score for the bridge of "I Will Follow" (beginning at 2:06) is presented in three staves. The top staff is for Guitar, the middle for Bass Guitar, and the bottom for Bono's vocals. The key signature is E minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 4/4. The guitar part consists of open harmonics on the twelfth, seventh, and fifth frets, playing a four-bar phrase. The bass guitar part plays a more active line, consisting of two different two-bar phrases against the guitar's four-bar phrase. Bono's vocal melody is confined to the pitches G, F#, E, and B. The lyrics are: "eyes make a cir-cle I see you when I go in there".

Ex. 4.2: Bridge from "I Will Follow" (beginning at 2:06)

The harmony in "I Will Follow" is more complex than for most of the songs we will see, but this is more a function of the variable alignment of the distinct bass and guitar lines than it is of the band striving for harmonic subtlety. It is likely that Clayton, either alone, or prodded by Lillywhite, sought to vary the bass line, and the results were deemed acceptable by ear. In fact, the minor dissonances were probably quite pleasing and seen as emblematic of the counterculture.

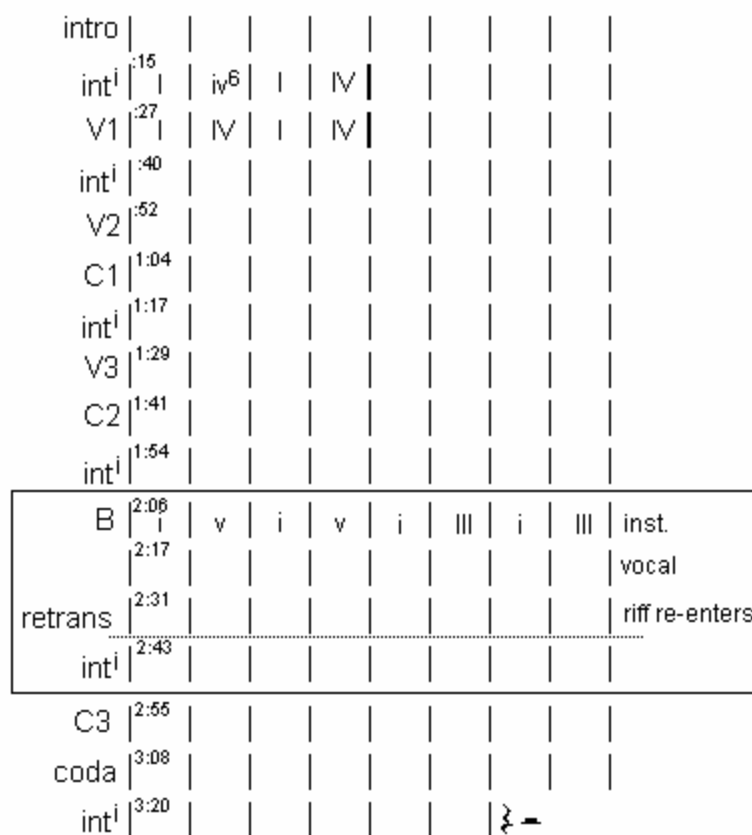


Fig. 4.2: Formal diagram for “I Will Follow”

The pitch content of the verse/chorus vocal melody consists exclusively of descending lines of E, C#, B, and A. Most of the vocal melody is an E reciting tone descending the minor third to C# at the end of phrases, with the other pitches decorating this interval. Many of the “decorating” pitches are difficult to clearly discern, as they may be half spoken and mostly amelodic, such as the “If you...” pick-up to the choruses. Rhythmically, Bono applies a vocal rubato that often anticipates the downbeat slightly, and lets the pulse of the text fall inconsistently over the pulse of the instruments, as do most solo vocalists, regardless of genre.¹³

¹³ The *U2 Complete Songs* notates Bono’s rhythms quite accurately, but rarely with greater precision than eighth notes. Since Bono’s delivery is inconsistent between verses, precise rhythmic notation would require separate score for every line of text, and would be unnecessarily cumbersome.

An interesting feature of this song is the front-loading of the verses, all three of which are heard before the halfway point of the song. Like many rock songs, the verse/chorus complexes are presented in a V VC VC pattern, with no chorus following the first verse. The chorus following verse 3 sits astride the midpoint of the song, after which there is a rather lengthy bridge. The bridge proper consists of two eight-measure phrases, the first of which is instrumental. The third eight-measure phrase is a retransitional gesture, with the intro riff sneaking back in while Bono ad libs on the first two words of the bridge and the bass continues the bridge figure. By the fourth phrase, a full intⁱ texture has resumed, although Bono is still ad libbing bridge text. Thus the bridge, to some extent, is just “killing time” with a gradual return to earlier material presented as a long crescendo. It is easy to see how such a strategy might work well live; the band could continue in the reduced texture while Bono delivers a soliloquy, or ad libs further until the signal for the concluding chorus. Discussing songs from *Boy*, Edge observed:

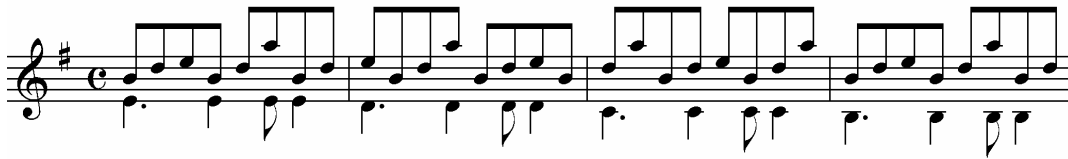
I guess we replaced virtuosity and songwriting chops with a very good sense of dynamics, being able to create quite different textures in a very simple way. That was one of our secrets; many of our songs featured breaks and sections where the musical landscape would change completely. In the live context our ideas really came into focus. Many of the breaks were improvised live and after you’d used a certain idea a few times it would enter the repertoire for that song and kind of get written in.¹⁴

This front-loading of verses (already observed several times in *Achtung Baby*) is a stylistic signature of U2, but, in later works, the second half of the song often shows either development of earlier materials, or the appearance of new material.

¹⁴ Edge, *U2 by U2*, 74-5.

Track 2: “Twilight” (E \flat -Minor)

U2 takes an early stab at metric ambiguity in the introduction to the second song on the album, one first recorded almost eighteen months earlier as a self-produced demo, with few structural changes. A paired-triplet guitar arpeggio opens the song suggesting $\frac{6}{8}$ time (Ex. 4.3). However, the entry of the bass (0:05) indicates a 3:2 polyrhythm, which the kick drum entry confirms (0:19). The fundamental meter is clearly duple once the snare drum establishes the backbeat (0:26).



Ex. 4.3: Reduction of bass and guitar lines from intro to “Twilight” (0:19)

As with “I Will Follow,” there is an economy of musical materials, again resulting in a modified compound simple AABA form (A'ABA'[B]). A **i** - **VII** - **VI** - **V** descending tetrachord based on the E aeolian mode provides the harmonic skeleton both for verses and choruses as well as most interludes. The harmonic rhythm, again, is one chord per measure, creating four-measure phrases. The bridge is harmonically contrasting, alternating between **IV** (borrowed from the major mode) and **III** for four two-measure phrases, preceding three two-measure phrases, all on **i**⁹ with an alternating E - G, E - F \sharp figure in the guitar.¹⁵

There are several unconventional elements in the organization of the song, particularly the occurrence of a second bridge so late in the form, the relatively large number of distinct interludes, and the several false indicators of coda material. The sequence of events begins quite predictably with verse 1, and a four measure interlude of

¹⁵ The 9th is created by Edge sustaining an F \sharp pitch on the word “man.”

intro tutti (intⁱ) followed by verse 2, then a chorus and bridge. Having presented all song elements in a typical sequence, one might expect a near repetition. However, the int^b following the bridge is truncated at six measures by the return of the verse/chorus harmonic progression (1:55) and the vague suggestion of a guitar solo over the verse/chorus descending tetrachord (int²), although this interlude has the character of

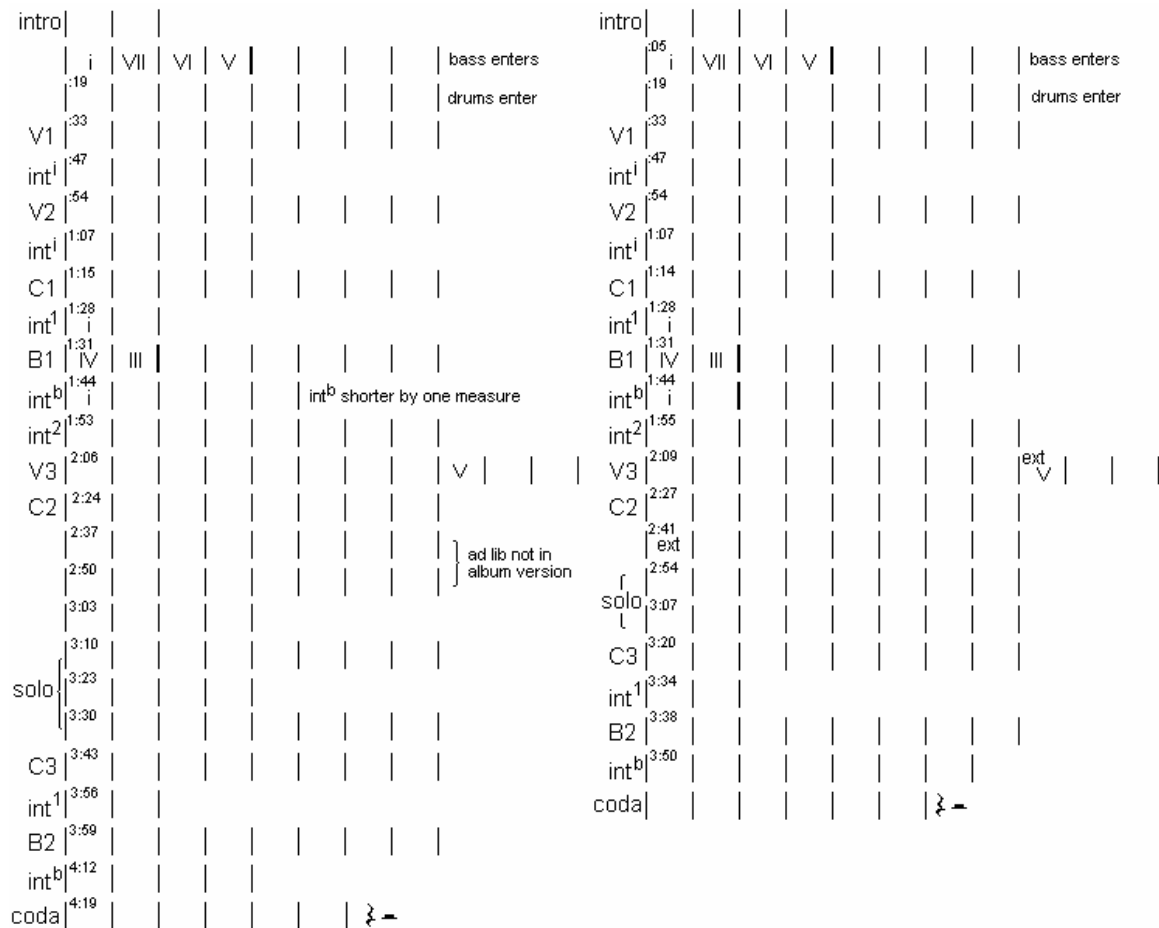


Fig. 4.3: Formal diagrams for demo (left) and album versions of "Twilight"

neither section. The entrance of verse 3, however, suggests resumption of normative form, but the accompanimental guitar figure changes with Edge planing second inversion major triads against the descending bass to create strong dissonances with the established harmony and vocal melody (Ex. 4.4). Bono accentuates the dissonances by singing

Ex. 4.4: Verse 3 of Twilight with dissonant, planing triads¹⁶

slightly out of tune, and by sliding between pitches, creating numerous transient cross relations between vocal, bass, and guitar. The verse concludes with a three measure dominant extension—the longest in U2’s catalogue—leading predictably into a chorus. The chorus music is repeated while Bono ad libs on the final line of text, creating an expectation that this is the end of the song, and that it will likely fade out as the ad lib chorus continues to repeat. However, a guitar solo begins on what would have been the third iteration of the chorus (2:54), and goes through four phrases before another full chorus/bridge complex unexpectedly begins (3:20).

The partitioning at the end of the song is also unusual, as the intro guitar arpeggio re-enters on what should be the eighth measure of int^b. This sounds like a closing gesture and continues for seven measures, with the downbeat of the seventh measure corresponding with the beginning of the triplet arpeggio and permitting all instruments to conclude on the tonic, and at their respective metric downbeats. This, however, results in an odd 7 + 7 partitioning of the int^b/coda, or an 8 + 6 partitioning, both of which result in the song concluding on a weak part of the hypermeasure. Again, in distinction to most of the songs from *Achtung Baby*, it is likely that the songs on *Boy* mirror live practice and

¹⁶ Bono’s vocal is almost unintelligible. This is the text published in the liner notes to the North American edition of the CD.

do not feature the symmetry that the more mature sketching process likely imposed on the final forms as a result of symmetrical bed tracks.

As mentioned earlier, this song was first recorded as a self-produced demo in February, 1979, and was added as the B-side for the Ireland-only single “Another Day,” produced almost one year later by Chas de Whalley (producer of *U2-3*). There are revealing stylistic differences between the B-side and album versions of “Twilight” that disclose a subtle change in presentation manifesting itself at the level of genre.

Not surprisingly, the B-side version is sparser, and Bono recalls recording it very quickly—an impression corroborated by the poor execution and occasional confusion.¹⁷ “Twilight” was performed originally as an instrumental, with Bono adding text much later.¹⁸ Remarkably, the timings for both versions are virtually identical until they diverge formally, this despite neither version apparently being regulated by a click track, as both appear to wander between 138 and 143 bpm.¹⁹

The most noticeable difference between the B-side and album versions is Bono’s typical over-pronounced post-punk vocal style, proclaiming “Twilight” such that both vowels are drawn out to sound like the diphthong in “I eat,” whereas the vowels are more conventional long “i’s” on the album cut, making the delivery less sardonic. Similarly, during the B-side bridge, Edge echoes Bono’s “In the shadows” with an affected, boyish

¹⁷ Stokes recounts: “Legend has it that it was recorded in just five minutes and suffered as a consequence.” *Into the Heart*, 10. Similarly, the *U2 Encyclopedia* quotes Bono as claiming that the recording “took four minutes,” s.v. “Twilight.” It sounds like a single take, so this may well be true.

¹⁸ According to Scott Isler, “Operation Uplift,” 19. The significant textual differences between the *Boy* and *U2-3* versions of “Twilight” confirms that the lyrics are very fluid. Edge also remarks that even in the early days, Bono was often undecided about lyrics until the last possible moment. See *U2 by U2*, 99.

¹⁹ Hannett complained that the rhythm section experienced inordinate difficulty playing in time together, making it almost impossible to get a basic rhythm track. The band as a whole also had a tendency to speed up. See *U2 by U2*, 92-3.

“sha-dœws” (the final diphthong almost begging for an umlaut) while again singing the standard long vowel in the album version. Bono also employs some unusual affectations on the B-side version. For the opening line “I look into your eyes,” he makes his voice break in a falsetto squeak on “your,” a gesture he repeats at the same metric point in subsequent verses. In the chorus, he does the same falsetto break on the “twi-” syllable of “twilight.” Bono’s lead vocal is single tracked in both versions, but is dry on the B-side, while processed with substantial reverb, and echo on the syllable “-light,” on the album version.

As one might expect, the production value on the album cut is much higher, with numerous overdubbed guitars and vocals. Lillywhite’s production achieves a wider sonic palette, but strives for greater formal concision as well, taking U2 far more in the direction of “rock” than “post-punk.” Lillywhite erects a wall-of-sound, resulting in a more mature sounding track, with far greater intensity than the somewhat fey, prancing B-side. Bono’s first utterance of “Twilight” in the chorus (1:14) has no hint of irony, and echoes ametrically over a dramatically thickened texture, whereas the chorus in the single is actually more subdued than the verses. Similarly, the demo bridge almost evokes the sense of shadows through a reduced texture and dynamic, whereas Lillywhite, again, thickens the texture, particularly by multi-tracking Edge’s background vocals.

The unusual form of the album version is presaged by that of the demo, which is even less formally coherent. The main difference is the length of the int^b sections. In both versions, there appears to be some confusion regarding the transition from int^b to int² and coda respectively. On the B-side, the first int^b is only five measures, whereas it is six measures on the album version, at least preserving the hypermeter. Int^b is

harmonically static, but Edge and Clayton need to coordinate the start of int², as it resumes the descending tetrachord. If the B-side version was, in fact, recorded live, then Edge and Clayton may have started int² on a visual cue (although one measure early), likely mirroring their practice on stage. Under Lillywhite's direction, this asymmetry would likely have "felt wrong," thus the album version's first int^b is six measures.²⁰ However, the int^b after B2 is actually more symmetrical on the single version, and partitioned quite asymmetrically on the studio version. Again, since int^b is harmonically static, hypermeter is the only impetus to commence the coda guitar triplet arpeggio, so it is difficult to understand why the album version is so hypermetrically weak at the end.²¹

This song, demoed nineteen months before the recording of *Boy*, provides a glimpse into U2's earliest forays into songwriting. Contrasting the stylistic changes between the demo and album versions is the overall similarity in structure, which suggests that some of these early songs were deemed as strong as anything they had done up to the time *Boy* was recorded.

Track 3: "An Cat Dubh/Into the Heart" (D[_b]-Major / C[_b]-Major)

The title of this song is Irish Gaelic for "The Black Cat." It refers cryptically to a fleeting encounter between Bono and a temporary girlfriend during a brief separation from long-time girlfriend, Alison Stewart, whom he would marry shortly afterward. The image is one of a cat who toys with, then kills, its prey, and then sleeps beside it.²²

²⁰ An eight measure int^b would have worked just as well.

²¹ The E-G, E-F# guitar figure that appears in both int^b sections of the album version is absent in the demo. Thus the album version does have a hypermetric melodic component, but it, too, is disrupted by the entrance of the intro guitar figure in the coda.

²² Stokes *Into the Heart*, 12; Bono, *U2 by U2*, 101.

This song would be a typical contrasting verse/refrain form were it not for the long transition (4:38 to 6:15) into the next song, “Into the Heart.” However, further evidence that the album reflects live practice is offered in a recollection that this sequence worked well in performance before the album was recorded, so it likely made sense to do it that way on the album.²³ The result is an overall sectional form and a total time of 8:13, much longer than any other song from the early albums, and running counter to the 80s norm of concise, formally discrete songs.

As one might expect, this third track contrasts somewhat with the two opening songs. The guitar is higher in the mix than in “I Will Follow” or “Twilight” and is processed with considerably more ambience than the previous two songs. The tempo of 112 bpm is much slower than “I Will Follow” (155 bpm) or “Twilight” (138 bpm). However, like “Twilight,” the song begins with an arpeggiated guitar riff, but the mood is eerie and ominous, evoking the supernatural associations of the black cat. The arpeggio is quite dissonant, left hanging on a reverb soaked tritone (Ex. 4.5), and mixed primarily



Ex. 4.5: Reduction of intro riff to “An Cat Dubh” (lead guitar and rhythm overdub) at 0:09

in the left channel, with atonal, echoic wails on the right, likely created with a guitar and tremolo bar. After four two-measure phrases, the bass settles into a D pedal with octave

²³ Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 13. Bono notes: “Many of the songs were from the set we had been building over a couple of years and they are played very confidently. The sequence that blows my mind is ‘An Cat Dubh,’ the black cat, to ‘Into the Heart,’” *U2 by U2*, 101.

leaps over which Edge plays a three-note figure on open-string harmonics at the seventh fret (A - D - F \sharp) that precedes verses throughout the song (0:18).²⁴

The verses consist of two six-measure a-phrases in 2 + 4 configuration for a combined twelve measures. The refrain is also twelve measures, but consists of three four-measure b-phrases (b b b'), the final of which contains the refrain text, "Yes, and I know the truth about you," and the concluding vocable sounding like a stage-whispered "sh-KA," which is the text "She cat." The verse/refrain complexes are separated by int^V material arranged 4 + 2, with the guitar-harmonics figure from 0:18 comprising the concluding two measures. The interlude between the second verse/refrain complex (2:16) and the extended, repeated refrain is also mostly int^V material, this time arranged 4 + 4 + 2. After this, one might expect the third verse/refrain complex, but the int^V material continues (2:37) with some vocal and guitar embellishment for another twelve measures before an extended final refrain (b b b b') begins at 3:02. The song concludes with six additional measures of int^V material, but halfway through the second phrase (3:47), the bass abandons the octave leap, playing a D pedal on eighth notes—a figure that defines the transition to "Into the Heart." The next phase of interlude (3:51) is an instrumental extension featuring additive guitar embellishment in four-measure sections until everything except bass, drums, and glockenspiel drop out (4:22) for the expected conclusion. However, after the same guitar-harmonics riff from the intro, Edge shifts the harmonics figure down two frets to the fifth fret—the next nearest position for open-string harmonics—playing the pitches D - G - B (an inverted G, or **IV**), and in the next measure (4:30), the bass drops from a D to a C pedal, signaling the next phase of the

²⁴ The bass figure is retained throughout the verses, therefore interludes with this figure are designated int^V regardless of the presence of the intro guitar arpeggio.

transition to “Into the Heart.” The next 1:18 remains on the C pedal and features repeated descending riffs by Edge that gradually recur more rapidly in a stretto style. The

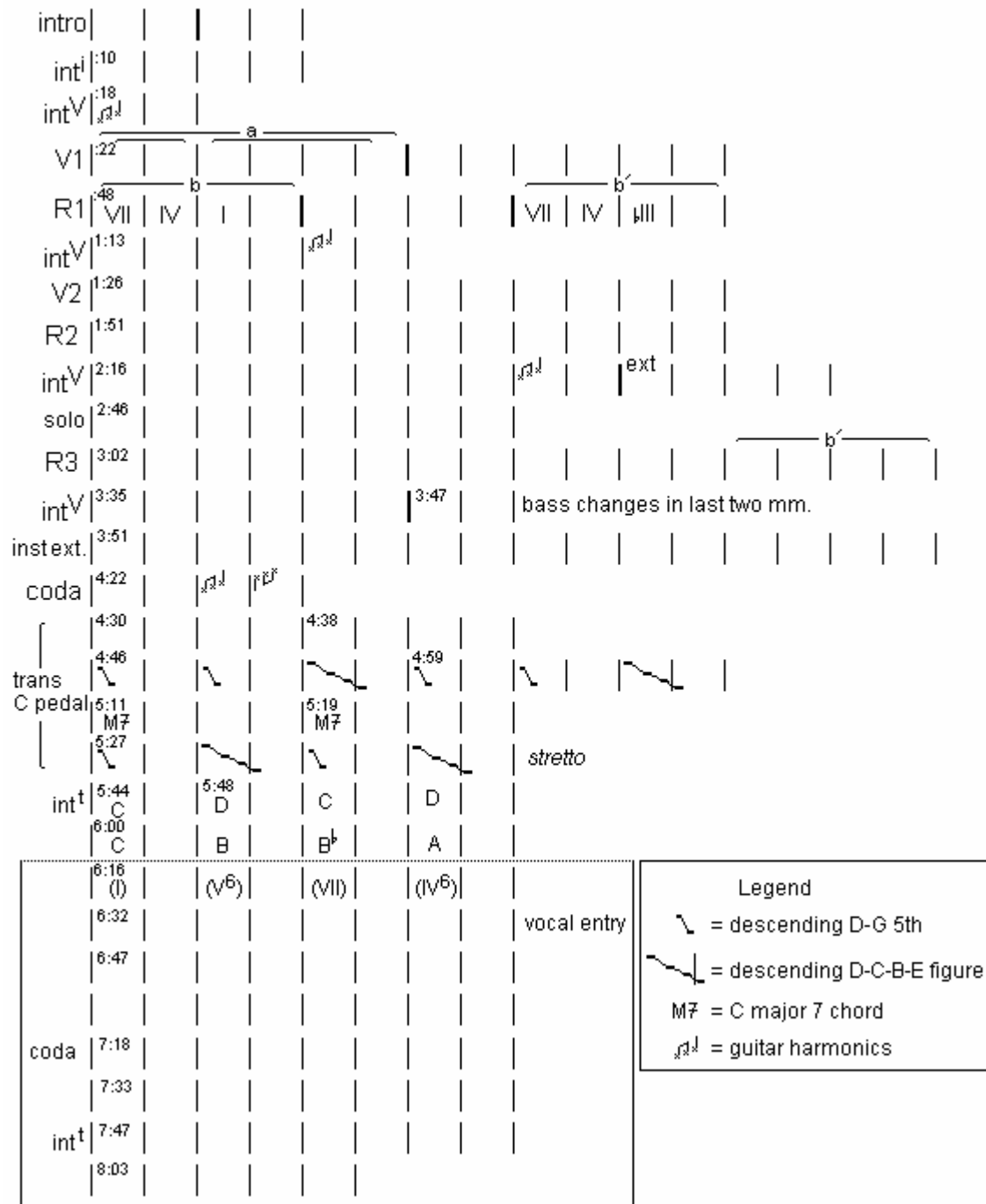


Fig. 4.4: Formal diagram for “An Cat Dubh” and “Into the Heart”

transition from D to C via G is the same double-plagal **I - IV - VII** move common in rock, and used often by U2.

The bass pedal starts to alternate between D and C every two-measures (int^t, 5:44) before finally descending chromatically through the pitches C - B - B \flat - A, which becomes the bass figure for “Into the Heart.” The implied chord sequence over this chromatic bass is C - G/B - B \flat - F/A, or **I - V⁶ - VII - IV⁶**, which is paired descending fourths one tone apart (the same progression appears in “Dirty Day” on 1997’s *Pop*).²⁵

“Into the Heart” does not clearly emerge as a different piece until the vocal enters (6:32) over the third iteration of the chromatic bass progression. The text is an eight-measure phrase repeated three times. The vocal drops out (7:18), and a reverb-drenched piano begins to punctuate every second downbeat. The piano, however, fades in the mix, and it plays chords progressively higher on the keyboard creating a sense of fading away overhead, and signaling the coda, an impression strengthened by the bass syncopation and re-entry of the glockenspiel for the next eight-measure phrase at 7:33. “Into the Heart” ultimately sounds like a song fragment, particularly with the repetition of the single line of text.

As was the case with “I Will Follow,” the verses in “An Cat Dubh” are heavily front-loaded, in that the first two verse/refrain complexes are completed by 2:15, followed by two and a half minutes of interlude and refrain without a recurrence of verse material. Note that the second int^v (after the second verse/refrain complex) is followed by a tonic extension of twelve measures—the same length as a verse that might have once existed there before the final, extended refrain. U2 could have had a third verse

²⁵ The *U2 Complete Songs* has an Am⁷ (**vi**) chord diagram rather than F/A as the final chord in the progression, but correctly scores Edge’s guitar part on the staff as an F triad.

here, but chose to fill the space with non-developmental material. While the front-loaded verses are something we see often, given U2's binary approach to song form, this is the only case where the second half of the song develops into a different song.

Track 4: "Out of Control" (D[b] Major)

The chugging D eighth-notes of "Into the Heart" gradually slow to a stop, but are followed immediately by the next song, "Out of Control," which also begins with chugging D eighth-notes in the bass (with the kick drum playing quarters). The only indication of a new song (as opposed to a reprise of "Into the Heart") is the noticeable increase in tempo (from 124 to 150 bpm) and a slight difference in bass tone.²⁶

As in "Twilight," Bono's enunciation on the *U2-3* version is laden with ironic post-punk "ew's" and "oo's" that are entirely eliminated for the *Boy* version. Aside from this, the two versions are structurally and textually identical.²⁷ A phone-in radio survey in August, 1979, determined that "Out of Control" would be the first single from the *U2-3* (beating out "Stories For Boys" and "Boy/Girl"). It is likely no coincidence that the form for this song falls much closer to the normative compound contrasting AABA.²⁸ In addition, the harmony in the verses is divided equally between **I** and **V** while the choruses consist of **IV** and **V**—there is little unexpected or contrived in clearly the most conventional rocker on *Boy*.

²⁶ "Out of Control" might be played with a pick, whereas "Into the Heart" has the more consistent attack of finger plucking.

²⁷ A bootleg live recording of a show at the Cork Opera House (5 October 1979) matches both versions as well, indicating that the form and text of "Out of Control" remained exceptionally fixed by U2 standards.

²⁸ John Covach has pointed out that almost all the earliest Beatles' singles had highly normative forms, whereas the B-sides tended toward more idiomatic forms, the supposition being that symmetry and formal transparency are more attractive to listeners. See "From Craft to Art: Formal Structure in the Music of the Beatles," in *Reading the Beatles*, Kenneth Womack and Todd F. Davis, ed, 54-75 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

The majority of the song consists of two four-measure phrases, an a-phrase on **I**, and a b-phrase on **V**. This material constitutes the intro, verses, guitar solo, and the single long intⁱ occurring just before the song's midpoint, a total of 99 measures out of 159 (sixty-two per cent). The chorus has similar proportions, with a four-measure c-phrase on **IV** and a four-measure d-phrase moving from **IV** to **V**. The half cadence concluding the chorus usually resolves to the tonic of the verses, but chorus 3 moves in retrograde to **IV** for the bridge. This single **V** - **IV** progression operates with the drastically reduced texture and spoken ad lib lyrics to arrest the momentum of the song. The bridge is unusually long at twenty-eight measures, and alternates two-measure phrases of **IV** and **I**. Like many of the songs on *Boy*, this contrasting middle section seems only to be suspending time, providing physical separation between the main structural elements, and introducing an modicum of contrast.²⁹ The conclusion of the bridge on **I**, which moves straight into the tonic of verse 3, is a rather weak harmonic transition, so they compensate with a four-measure crescendo (3:11). This is the first song on *Boy* with a verse so late in the form (3:17), hence the overall AAaBA (or, more precisely, VC VC vC B VC) architecture. In fact, the concluding verse/chorus complex is the last gesture, save the short seven-measure coda (3:53) which, like most of the song, is based on intro material.

²⁹ U2 resurrected "Out of Control" during the "Elevation" tour in 2001. Bono would do a soliloquy during the bridge that the other musicians could extend indefinitely while Bono told his story.

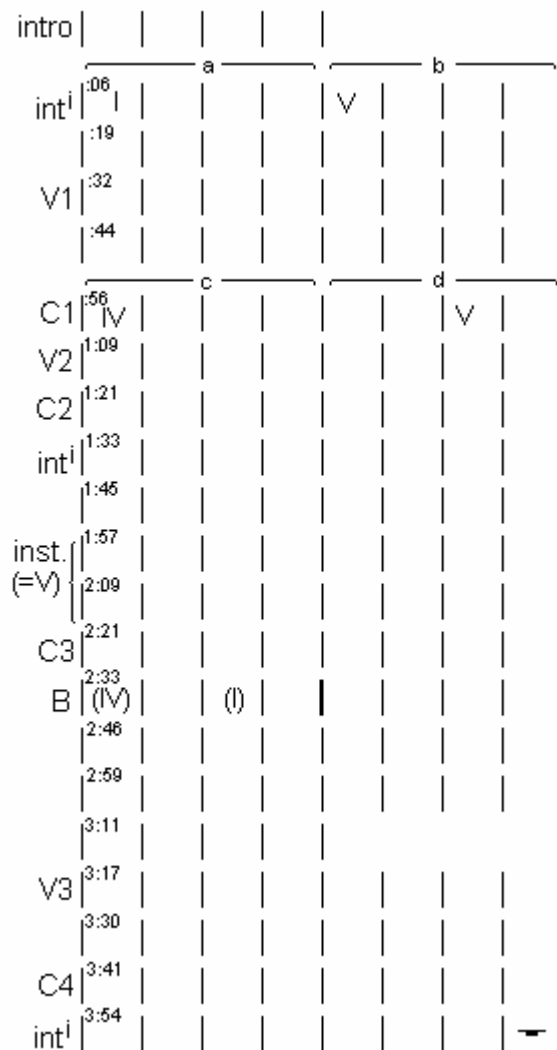


Fig. 4.5: Formal diagram for “Out of Control”

This song has very little spacer material, proceeding directly from one major structural unit to the next. The first two verse/chorus complexes are continuous without any interlude material. Even the combined forty-eight measures of intⁱ and guitar solo are simply instrumental verses (note that the solo is followed by a texted chorus), again without any spacer material separating them. This rapid succession of major sections creates relentless forward motion, and the song’s concision may have contributed to it

becoming a fan favorite in early live performances, and to its selection by fans as the first single.

One structural anomaly is that verse 2 is half the length of verses 1 and 3. While this is the first song from *Boy* to have song components vary proportionately between iterations (ignoring the three-measure extension to verse 3 of “Twilight”), it is a technique seen often in U2’s music (as already noted with regard to *Achtung Baby*).

The most compelling feature of this song is the opening guitar riff, a typical Edge creation with movement framed by high, ringing drones (Ex. 4.6). The riff combines a $\hat{1}$, $\hat{2}$, $\hat{3}$ ascending line with Bono’s opening D - A - F# melody. Played at the fifth fret, Edge

Ex. 4.6: Intro riff from “Out of Control”

essentially jams on a D chord with a droning D’s (open fourth string and third string at the seventh fret) under a high A drone. For the b-phrase, he simply plays the open B and E strings which, combined with the A played by the bass, creates an Asus2. The B - E fourth between the second and first strings matches the open twelfth-fret harmonics of the second and first strings, which, given Edge’s predilection for open-string harmonics, were likely the inspiration for the unusual A^{sus2} voicing.

In several respects, “Out of Control” marks a departure from the tendencies revealed by the first three tracks from *Boy*. Its form is conventional, and it is the first song on *Boy* not to use the glockenspiel, relying strictly on the standard rock combo. It is likely that “Out of Control” was recorded to most closely recreate not only the form, but the sound of live performance.

Track 5: “Stories For Boys” (E[\flat]-Minor)

This song first appeared on the *U2-3* EP, along with “Out of Control,” whose conventional form is mirrored in the AABA form of “Stories For Boys.” Again, the bridge is just a textural variation of earlier material and, therefore, only minimally contrasting. “Stories For Boys” was the first song on Side Two of the LP, so any similarities with “Out of Control” are not as clear-cut as on CD versions of *Boy*, where the songs are adjacent.

Formally, the EP version is virtually identical to the *Boy* version, except that the intro is two measures shorter, and the coda one measure shorter. Like many early U2 songs, the intro is a guitar arpeggio, this time based on a four-note motive. The verses are all the same length and consist of two four-measure a-phrases, all on the tonic, and a seven-measure b-phrase moving primarily through **VII** and **VI**. The refrain is four two-measure phrases alternating between **i** and **VII**, with text consisting solely of title repetitions. There are two kinds of interludes; one based on the intro (intⁱ), and another featuring a two-measure phrase with a bass solo (int¹). The bridge is based on int¹ with added backup vocals and syncopated snare shots, and is preceded by four additional phrases of int¹ embellished only with more of Edge’s open harmonics. Splitting these sixteen measures into equal halves of “int¹” and “bridge” is somewhat forced in that it is

another time-suspending section, but two features differentiate the int¹ and bridge sections. First, the doubling of the int¹ section compared to its first appearance before

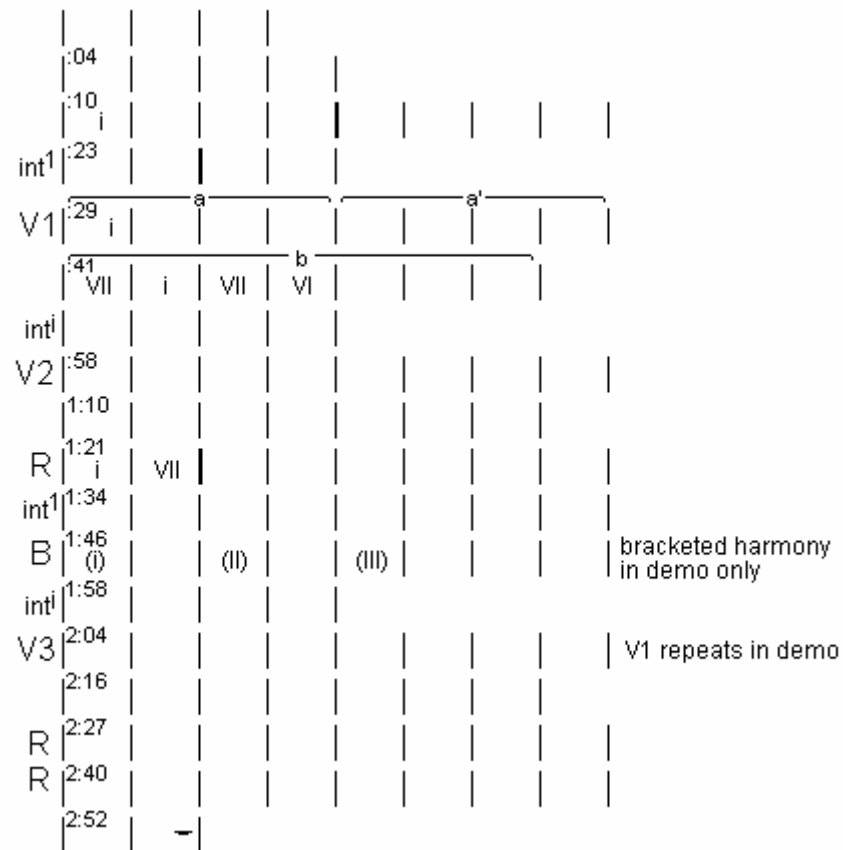


Fig. 4.6: Formal diagram for "Stories For Boys"

verse 1 makes it sound transitional; and second, it does give way to a texturally thickened section giving the impression of potentially leading elsewhere. However, the arrival at a typical int¹ section (1:58) reveals the mere suspensory function of the entire sixteen-measure section that almost evenly straddles the midpoint of the song. The appearance of a third verse/refrain complex (2:04) reveals the overall normative AABA pop structure, with the partial repetition of verse 1 text, and the typical pop closing gesture of repeating the refrain (2:40) further referencing traditional practice.³⁰

³⁰ Recall that "Twilight" also has a doubled chorus, but then unexpectedly presents another bridge.

While formally almost identical, the *Boy* and *U2-3* versions of this song vary significantly in their delivery and, therefore, in their affective content, arguably to an extent that renders them stylistically distinct. Bono uses the same affected mispronunciation of the various diphthong vowels already mentioned on the “Twilight” demo. For the opening line “There’s a place I go,” he pronounces “go” as “gěow.” Similarly, at the end of the first phrase, Bono concludes the “...hello, hello” b-phrase with a descending “ěo” vocable. These kinds of affectations were heard frequently from artists straddling the line between post-punk and new wave, where the intention was to project a certain detached “coolness.” Both affectations are eliminated in the album version, giving a much more serious deportment. The tempo is also slowed substantially (from 165 to 156 bpm), once again imparting a certain gravity lacking in the more manic demo. Finally, Lillywhite employs much more ambience in the *Boy* version creating an ill-defined, expansive, shimmering soundscape quite at odds with the claustrophobic dryness of the demo.

There are slight alterations to the text between both versions, most notably with the demo repeating verse 1 verbatim as verse 3. The *Boy* version features a verse 3 with the same first line as verse 1, but different text for the last three lines, preserving the allusion to media (in this case radio rather than television) but changing the conditional “can grow” to “will grow,” thus providing minor narrative progression. Again, it is difficult to know whether Lillywhite pushed Bono for more variable text, whether this was one of many versions that Bono already had at his disposal, or if it was improvised on the spot and retained.

The structural similarities between “Stories For Boys” and “Twilight,” and the similarities between the demo versions and the stylistic changes apparent on the *Boy* versions provide a solid sense of the evolving aesthetic within the band between August, 1979, when *U2-3* was recorded, and August 1980, when *Boy* was recorded. Whether these changes were wrought by Lillywhite, the band, or some combination is unknown, but they were central in extricating U2 from a style designation that might have slotted them within the subgenre of post-punk. As it turned out, critics in the first two years often commented on how U2 defied categorization.³¹

Track 6: “The Ocean” (E[♭]-Minor)

This, the shortest song on the album, is little more than a fragment. U2 often opened their early live performances with this song, enjoying the sheer audacity of the line “And I felt like a star, I felt the world could go far, if they listened to what I said.”³² Bono refers to another verse that is left off the album, although it is difficult to understand why they felt the need to shorten this song any further.³³

Its incongruity with the rest of the album actually presages U2’s later albums by focusing on atmosphere. The mysterious, diaphanous ambience created by the bass and guitar is reminiscent of sounds achieved in Brian Eno’s solo work, making his selection as producer of many of their later albums a logical choice. This song also displays

³¹ See, for example, articles from Chapter One of *The U2 Reader*, “Among Punks,” by Paulo Hewitt, “Getting Into U2,” *Melody Maker*, 30 September 1980; Tim Sommer, “U2,” *Trouser Press*, 1 July 1981; Scott Isler, “Operation Uplift,” *Trouser Press*, 1 July 1983. See also Paul Morley, “U2 Can Make it in the Music Business,” *New Musical Express*, 22 March 1980, 6-8.

³² See Bill Graham, “U2 Versus the U.S.,” *Hot Press*, 25 April 1981, <www.hotpress.com/archive/549146.html> (24 July 2006).

³³ *Into the Heart*, 16. Stokes claims to be quoting an interview by Bill Graham of *Hot Press* from 1981, but I have been unable to locate the quotations in *Hot Press*.

elements of U2's instrumental style that come more to the fore on the later albums as well.

The song begins with Clayton playing a stack of two fifths, E - B - F \sharp , followed by a variety of double stopped harmonics. As we have seen before, harmony is only implied, with no clear tonality emerging. The harmonics played by Clayton are difficult to distinguish, due to their low frequency, but it sounds like combinations of open strings, with the D string sounding prominently, implying a **i** - **VII** progression in E.³⁴ The same bass pattern is played during the verse, and the impression of a **i** - **VII** progression is reinforced by Bono's vocal, where the E tonality is confirmed by an E reciting tone, and, similarly, the putative **VII** by a drop to D.³⁵

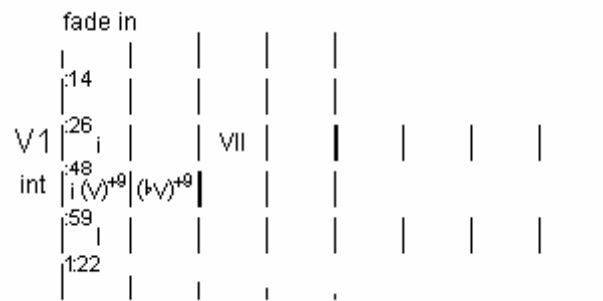


Fig. 4.7: Formal diagram for "The Ocean"

The most unusual part of the song is the interlude after the verse (Ex. 4.7). Taking a page from Edge, Clayton relies on symmetrical, movable chord shapes. He moves the intro chord to the seventh fret, creating a B^{add9} (V^{+9}) sonority, which he alternates with the same shape one fret lower, i.e., B_b^{add9} (bV^{+9}). However, Edge plays a

³⁴ The *Complete Songs* indicates a D-G interval alternating with D-B, the latter being incorrect. There is no open B harmonic on the bass, nor does it sound as though B is present. Another fourth, A-D, played on the open second and third strings sounds closer to Clayton's part. It seems unlikely that Clayton is playing artificial harmonics, as they can be difficult to execute, particularly as a double-stop.

³⁵ A listener familiar with the song would likely project their **I** - **VII** experience of the verse onto the intro.



Ex. 4.7: Interlude from “The Ocean” (0:48)

short, angular E-dorian riff in the intro, which is then presented unchanged in the interlude over Clayton’s changes in bass position, creating peculiar dissonances. This procedure is similar to “I Will Follow,” where Edge and Clayton layer parts that are essentially distinct and unrelated, giving rise to analytically complex harmonies, but ones most likely discovered through jamming, with an ear cocked for the out-of-the-ordinary.

Track 7: “A Day Without Me”³⁶ (D[b]-Major)

This was the first song U2 recorded with Lillywhite, as a demo preceding the *Boy* sessions by a few months. Island Records released it as a single in Ireland in August, 1980, during the recording of the *Boy* album, but it failed to chart. It is, however, somewhat more important historically in that it was one of the first songs written by U2 with Edge using a delay pedal on his guitar:

We had a song we were working on called “A Day Without Me” and Bono kept saying, ‘I hear this echo thing, like the chord repeating.’ He had this thing in his head so I said, ‘I’d better get an echo unit for this single.’ I got one down to rehearsal and played around with it with limited success. I didn’t really like it, I thought it muddled up the sound. Then I bought my own unit, a Memory Man Deluxe made by Electro-Harmonix. I mean, Electro-Harmonix made the cheapest and trashiest guitar things, but they always had great personality. This Memory Man had this certain sound and I really loved it. I just played with it for weeks and weeks, integrating it into some of the songs we’d already written. Out of using it, a whole other set of songs started to come out. It gave me a whole other set of colors to use. It also helped to fill out the sound.³⁷

The delay is clearly heard from the very first chord of the song, and set to match the tempo. Edge plays a single F chord on beat 1, and the echoes are heard, decaying

³⁶ This song was inspired by the suicide of Joy Division’s Ian Curtis in May, 1980.

³⁷ Edge, quoted in “The View from the Edge,” 59.

slightly, on the subsequent beats, accompanied by bass drum. On the downbeat of the next measure, he plays a descending C - F fifth in eighth notes, which also echoes on succeeding beats. The delay is also used to drive the basic rhythm of the song, with Edge sounding a chord (likely a power chord) and the delay generating the triplet eighths that form the guitar backing track. Thus, immediately upon beginning work with Lillywhite, a hallmark of the U2 sound appears.

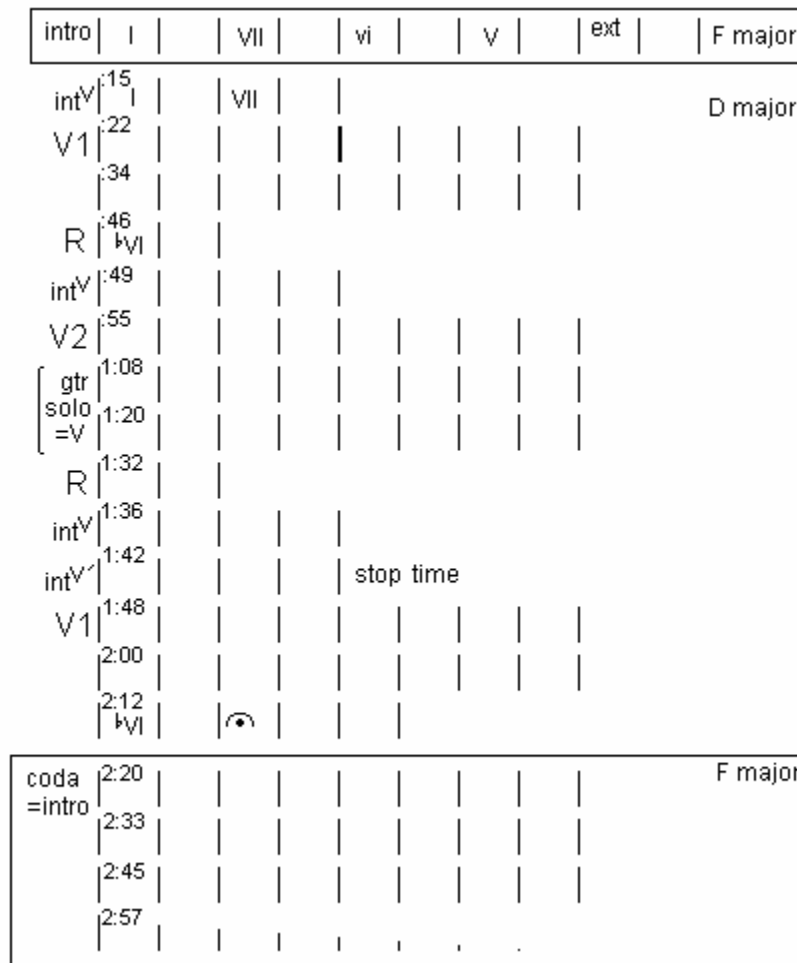


Fig. 4.8: Formal diagram for “A Day Without Me”

Another technique used often by Edge is a melodic figure presented unaltered over chord changes. In this case, the oscillating C - F fifth (sounding somewhat like a

European police siren) is presented over a descending tetrachord progression of F-major - E \flat -major - D-minor - C-major (**I** - **VII** - **vi** - **V**).

The C chord is the pivot into the primary key of D-major, where it functions as **VII**, and the alternation between pairs of measures of **I** and **VII** forms almost the entirety of the main body of the song. The form is verse/refrain, with a descent to two measures of \flat **VI** for the refrain. The verses are composed of variable numbers of pairs of four-measure phrases reflecting a 4 + 4 antecedent/consequent text structure. Verse 2 consists of a single eight-measure texted section followed by two eight-measure sections of guitar solo capped by a texted refrain, confirming the solo's status as an extended instrumental verse.

For a casual listener, the form is not telegraphed very clearly. Verse 1 is slightly off-kilter in that the melody for the first eight measures is paradigmatically 4 + 4, whereas the second eight-bar phrase departs from this structure, and the text seems to dribble out gradually over a slightly reduced texture, giving a sense that perhaps this is a true verse, and the first eight measures were, perhaps, chorus. However, the appearance of refrain 1 (0:46) and the onset of verse 2 (0:55) with a melodic structure identical to the beginning of verse 1 makes the overall structure apparent. The truncation of verse 2 by the guitar solo is a common rock gesture.

Each verse is preceded by a four-measure int^V, although verse 3 (a reprise of verse 1, another formal reference to earlier pop practice, seen already in "Stories For Boys") has an additional int^V in stop time, probably inserted to provide a little contrast by almost functioning as a bridge (giving rise to some sense of AABA form). This final verse reprises only the first half of verse 1, a closing gesture confirmed by its extension through

vocal ad lib. The final refrain (2:12) is extended ametrically for approximately three measures, modulating back to F-major intro material (2:20), apparently by simply speeding up the tape.³⁸ The dearth of verse material, the wandering nature of the verse melody, and the almost gratuitous, contrasting intro and coda—the latter achieved through a rather crude transition—give the impression of a lightweight song that is not particularly well-crafted, and which may have originated as two separate ideas.³⁹

Track 8: “Another Time, Another Place” (E[_b]-Minor)

This song was a staple of live shows from 1978 to 1982, indicating that it, too, was one of U2’s earliest songs to survive to vinyl, existing approximately two years before being recorded by Lillywhite for *Boy*.⁴⁰ Its writing precedes the use of the delay effect by Edge, a practice carried through to the recorded version. Formally, this song has many unusual features that may have resulted from U2’s musical inexperience. First, it resolves into an unusually transparent binary form, and, second, the A and B sections represent quite distinct realizations of the same basic harmonic material; perhaps the clearest—and even more significantly, the earliest—example of two of U2’s most consistent, signature compositional traits.

Like many of the songs on *Boy*, there is a sense of formal disequilibrium resulting from atypical distribution of a limited number of formal sections. Two verses, each preceded by a two-part interlude composed of two eight-measure sections (intⁱ and int^v, respectively), are presented before the first appearance of the chorus (2:15). Delaying

³⁸ Doing this at a fermata permits the band to re-enter a minor third higher, but at the original tempo by simply splicing in a new section.

³⁹ Note that the descending tetrachord in the F-Major sections resembles the one from “Twilight,” a semitone lower.

⁴⁰ *U2 Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Another Time Another Place.”

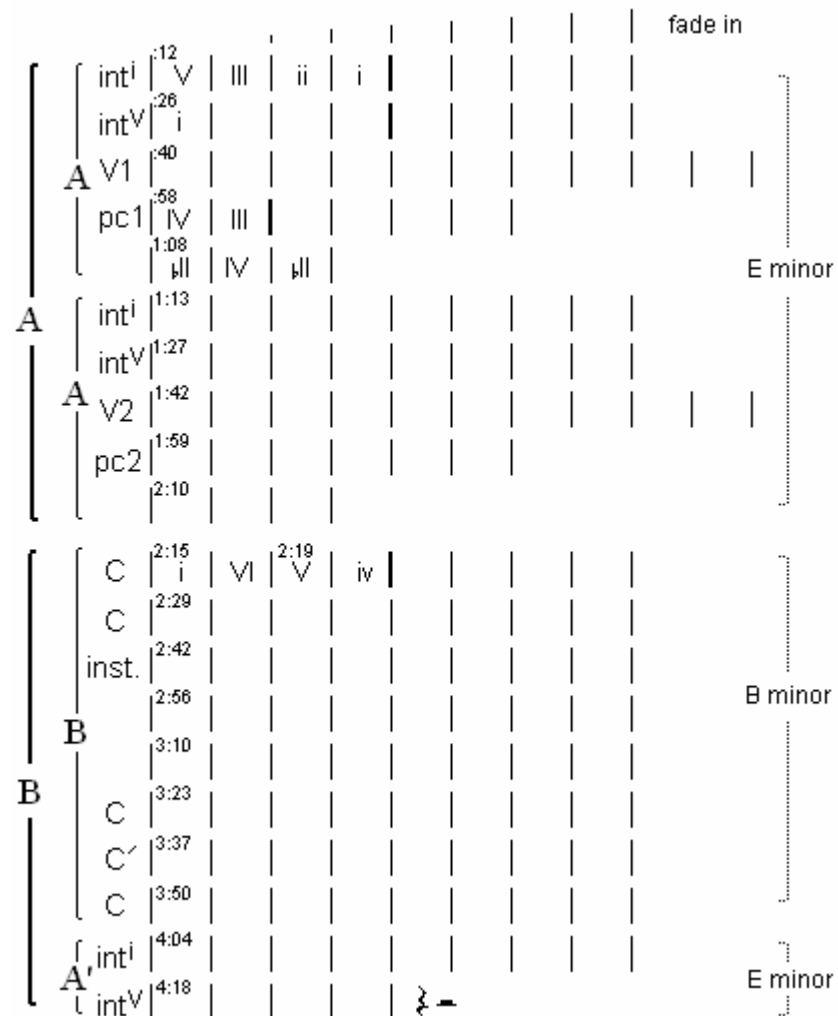


Fig. 4.9: Formal diagram for "Another Time Another Place"

presentation of the chorus until after the second verse is a conventional pop compositional strategy (already seen on "I Will Follow" and "Twilight"), however, it is rare for the chorus to be delayed so long. Even more unusual is the fact that, from this point on, the instrumental track remains primarily that of the chorus, with verse material never returning. Part of the reason for this is the length of the verses themselves. They stagger out in irregular ten-measure phrases, with text seemingly added as a continual afterthought (similar to the verses in "A Day Without Me"). The repeated pre-choruses (:58 and 1:59) have a more coherent structure, but at nine measures each, they comprise

almost as much material as the two verses; taken as a whole, there is not much text. The form is capped by a reprise of both interludes as a coda, with a discrete conclusion on the downbeat of the second phrase of int^V. The division between the verses and choruses occurs almost exactly at the song's midpoint, creating a very clear binary structure, but the overall impression is that of a verse/chorus form. Listeners likely do not notice the absence of verses in the second half of the song unless they look for them.

The binary nature of the song is moderated somewhat through two distinct realizations of the same basic material, a strategy already observed frequently in the previous discussion of *Achtung Baby*. The int^I sections and choruses consist of the bass playing the descending pattern B - G - F# - E in eighth notes, clearly audible on the choruses as the root pitches of a B-minor - G-major- F#-major- E-minor chord progression. However, in the int^I sections, it supports a riff by Edge implying the chord progression B^{sus4} - G⁶ - x - E-minor, where x is a poorly defined sonority with F# in the

The image displays a musical score for a guitar and bass. The guitar part is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four measures. Above the first measure is a chord diagram for B^{sus4}, above the second is G⁶, above the third is 'X', and above the fourth is E^m. The bass part is written in bass clef with the same key signature. It plays a descending eighth-note pattern (B, G, F#, E) in the first two measures, then continues with a similar pattern in the third and fourth measures.

Ex. 4.8: Intro riff for “Another Time Another Place”

bass under either a B-aeolian, or E-dorian, guitar riff (Ex. 4.8). Neither a B-minor nor E-minor/F# “campfire chord” makes the “x” sonority workable, so the best realization of the progression may simply have the F# functioning as a passing bass note from the G-major to E-minor chord, an extremely common guitar gesture (although rarely over an entire measure).

The initial lack of clear definition between A and B sections is further underlined by the first two measures of the first chorus (2:15). Instead of the expected B^{sus4}, we hear a poorly defined B sonority—without any third or fifth—under Bono’s sustained E pitch on the word “lie,” thus preserving the sus4 quality, but failing to present a clear major or minor. At first, this sounds like a sloppy, or tentative return to intⁱ, but the clearly articulated F#-major chord (2:19) supporting a new vocal melody containing the title lyrics makes clear that this is a new section; although only repeated listenings, and foreknowledge of the song’s title make it clear that this is, in fact, the chorus. Again, the occasional sparseness of U2’s textures creates moments of harmonic ambiguity uncommon in post-punk bands of such limited musical means. By simply trying different solutions to, in this case, a simple descending bass line, U2 derive rather unexpected sonorities, and these different solutions manifest themselves on a larger scale as a type of binary structure by partitioning the different solutions quite discretely at the midpoint.

It is difficult to assign a key to this song, but it is best described as E-minor in the verses, and B-minor for the choruses, although intⁱ momentarily suggests B-major.⁴¹ The verses all take place over an E drone with the melody confined to the pitches B, C#, D, and E, which are consistent with both the dorian and mixolydian modes of E. However, the guitar harmonics which are played over the drone contain G#, as does the intⁱ riff, thus negating E-major. The pre-chorus emphasizes the subdominant of E. It has two sections, the first (0:58) alternating A-major and G-major chords, which may be heard in E-dorian as **IV - III**, and the second (1:08) dropping to three measures of F-major - A-major - F-major, or **♭II - IV - ♭II**. The rhythmically elided resolution of the final F chord of pre-

⁴¹ The *Complete Songs* scores the song in E♭-minor throughout, p. 138-40.

chorus 1 to the B^{sus4} of intⁱ (1:13) is by a tritone, as is the similarly elided resolution of the same F at the end of pre-chorus 2 to the B-minor of chorus 1 (2:15). The progressions are clearly modal, so the question of key is less relevant than in songs informed by, or reflecting, more standard tonal practice. One has the impression of U2 trying unusual combinations of power chords, likely with the specific intention of developing atypical chord sequences, a procedure common amongst punk, and post-punk bands. The sheer ease of sliding power chords all over the guitar neck permits even the poorest players to come up with very unusual chord progressions.⁴²

While analytically complex, it is likely that the form and harmonic ambiguity of this song results mostly from U2's near inability to play their instruments at this early stage in their career. Neither the subtle blending of B-major and B-minor between the intⁱ sections and choruses, nor the tritone resolutions likely registered on the players as anything particularly irregular.

Track 9: "The Electric Co." (D[b]-Major)

This song is about a Dublin mental health treatment facility believed by the young members of U2 and their friends to rely overly on a technique called Electro Convulsive Therapy, often better known as shock therapy. This song was in the live set-list until 1985, and Bono often took advantage of the long instrumental section to involve himself with the crowd, or climb stage apparatuses to the mutual peril of himself and the audience.

⁴² In fact, poor players are just as likely to stumble across theoretically unconventional progressions as conventional ones.

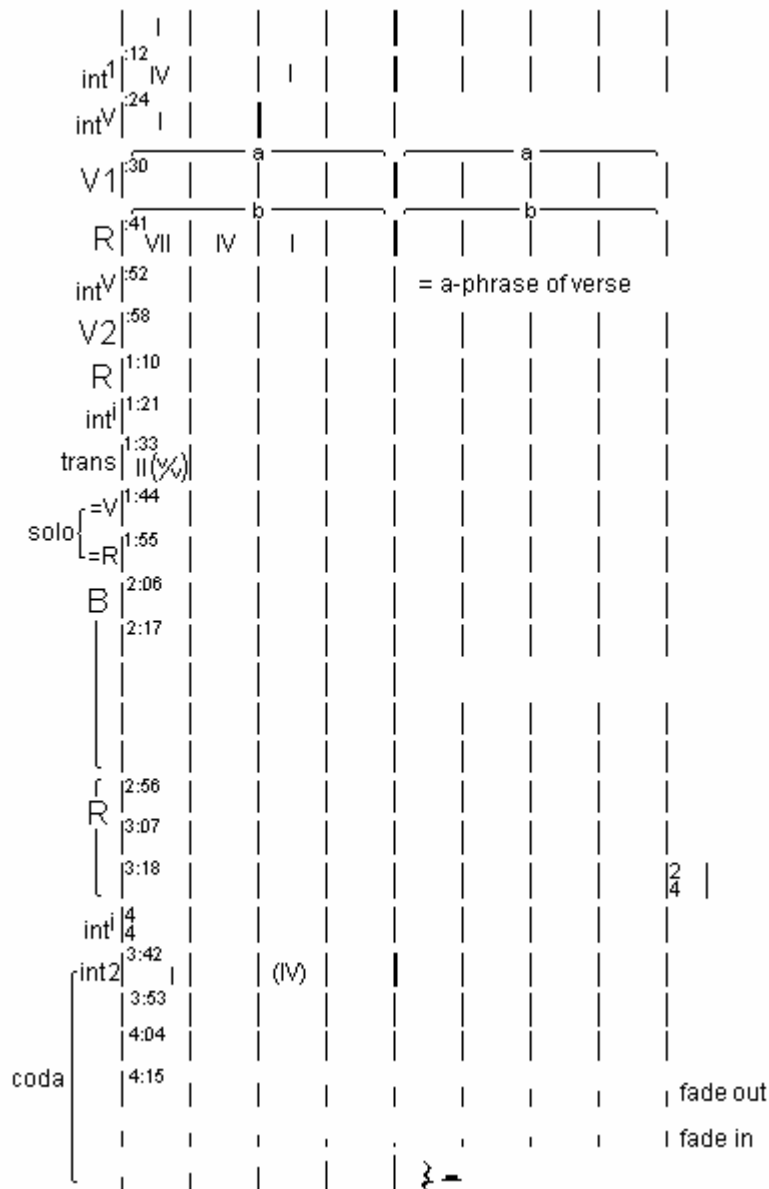


Fig. 4.10: Formal diagram for "Electric Co."

Like its predecessor, it has binary elements, but this time in a verse/refrain format. The verse/refrain complexes have a standard (4+4) + (4+4) structure, with the verse remaining on the tonic, and the refrains falling through a familiar **VII - IV - I** progression. The verse/refrain complexes are particularly front-loaded in this song, with all novel text presented in the first quarter of the song. Other than an eight measure

transitional section (1:33) on E-major (**II**, or V/V), the remainder of the song consists of a single instrumental verse/refrain complex (1:44), a long thirty-six measure, reduced texture bridge all on the tonic (2:06-2:55), three consecutive refrains (2:56), and a lengthy coda that essentially inverts int^1 such that the subdominant, voiced by the guitar as a D^{sus4} , ornaments the tonic D-major. The bridge is yet another reduced texture time-killer, and Bono often extends this section, sometimes quoting other songs, most famously Stephen Sondheim's "Send in the Clowns" on the *U2: Under a Blood Red Sky* live album (for which U2 had not received permission, costing them a substantial out-of-court settlement).⁴³

This song employs rock combo, but great attention was given to varying the timbre and style between the sections to provide greater contrast. Mullen pounds out a military tattoo—a legacy from the Artane Boy's Band—on toms during the verses and bridge, switching to a standard snare backbeat for the refrains. Similarly, the guitar and bass throb statically during the verses, but release in contrary motion for the refrains, with Clayton's ascending line against Edge's descending melody. Clayton also plays bass harmonics during the reduced texture bridge. Perhaps sensing that the coda drags a little, Lillywhite resorts to the double fade, fading out around 4:15, but fading back in around 4:30 for a discrete ending.⁴⁴

In spite of the formal simplicity, the song derives its energy from its elevated tempo of 168 bpm, frequent changes of texture which create the impression of a high level of activity, and a shimmering, ambient timbre from the guitar. The repetition of

⁴³ Carter Alan, *Outside is America* (Winchester, MA.: Faber and Faber, 1992), 80.

⁴⁴ Earlier examples of this technique are the Beatles' "I am the Walrus" and "Helter Skelter."

choruses is often a closing gesture, so the beginning of this only two-thirds through the song, followed by the lengthy coda leaves listeners in anticipation of the end far longer than elsewhere on the album. Bono describes live performances of the song as cathartic,⁴⁵ and that catharsis may have better defined *Boy* had the album ended here.

Track 10: “Shadows and Tall Trees” (G[b]-Major)

This song was first recorded as a demo in November, 1978, making it one of the older songs on the album, although the album version was re-recorded by Lillywhite.⁴⁶ The title comes from a chapter heading of William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, which the members of Lypton Village looked to for inspiration in their quest to remain aloof from adult reality—a theme permeating *Boy*.⁴⁷

The song fades in over the sustained final chords of “The Electric Co.,” with Edge playing the only acoustic guitar track to appear on the album, even if it is heavily processed (likely with flanger and chorus). This, along with Mullen’s militaristic, tom-heavy drumming, takes the song out of the post-punk mold investing most of the album. This song is also quite atypical of *Boy* in that Bono sings almost continuously without any real interludes.

This is a compound, contrasting AABA’ form. There are two verse/pre-chorus/chorus complexes, although the second is interrupted by a bridge. There is also another long coda, perhaps to flesh out the form. The verses have a chord progression identical to Otis Redding’s “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay,” but the mood is so

⁴⁵ Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 20.

⁴⁶ The producer of the demo was Barry Devlin, former bassist for the Irish progressive folk/rock band Horslips. I have been unable to obtain a copy.

⁴⁷ Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 21.

different that it is difficult to imagine that Edge lifted the chords directly. The **I** - **III** - **IV** - **II** progression in G-major uses very easily fingered chords, and Edge may simply have been experimenting with different orderings of chords that, to this point, he had not used together. In addition to a rare use of the **II** chord (difficult to characterize as **V/V** in this context), this song also includes the **V** chord for prolonged half cadences at the end of verses and pre-choruses. The pre-choruses have the simple antiphonal lines “but I know, (oh no)” over alternating **IV** - **V** chords, and function traditionally by preparing the tonic of the chorus (in contrast to the pre-chorus of “Another Time Another Place,” which moves by tri-tone).

The chord voicings used by Edge in the verses emphasize the open E and B strings. It sounds as though Edge is using conventional barre chord fingerings for G, B, and C, but leaving the two top strings open, a voicing he will return to in “Pride” on

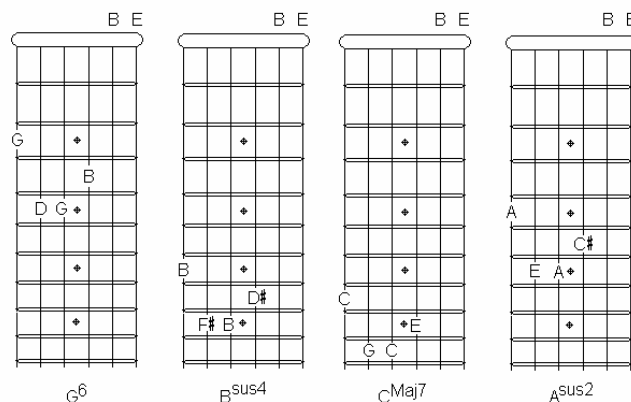


Fig. 4.11: Planing chord shapes based on standard barre chord

The Unforgettable Fire. This makes the progression $G^6 - B^{sus4} - C^{maj7} - A^{sus2}$, with the pair of high open droning strings trading roles as the dissonant pitch within a given chord.

The bridge is another (and particularly egregious) time-killer, typical of this album, relying primarily on reduced texture to create contrast. The bass drops out, and the drums reduce to cymbals while Edge plays two-note chord fragments with a common

pitch on E4, implying a **I - IV - I - VII** harmony (2:01), but the entry of the electric guitar (2:10) clarifies the **I - VII** progression, as does the re-entry of the bass (along with the snare) four measures later (2:19). Bono sings a unique melody (2:10) for the last eight measures of the bridge, but it is slightly lower in the mix, and sounds very much like an ad lib before giving way to a more vocally thickened, emphatic pre-chorus, with the usual two-measure extension operating as another brief interlude.

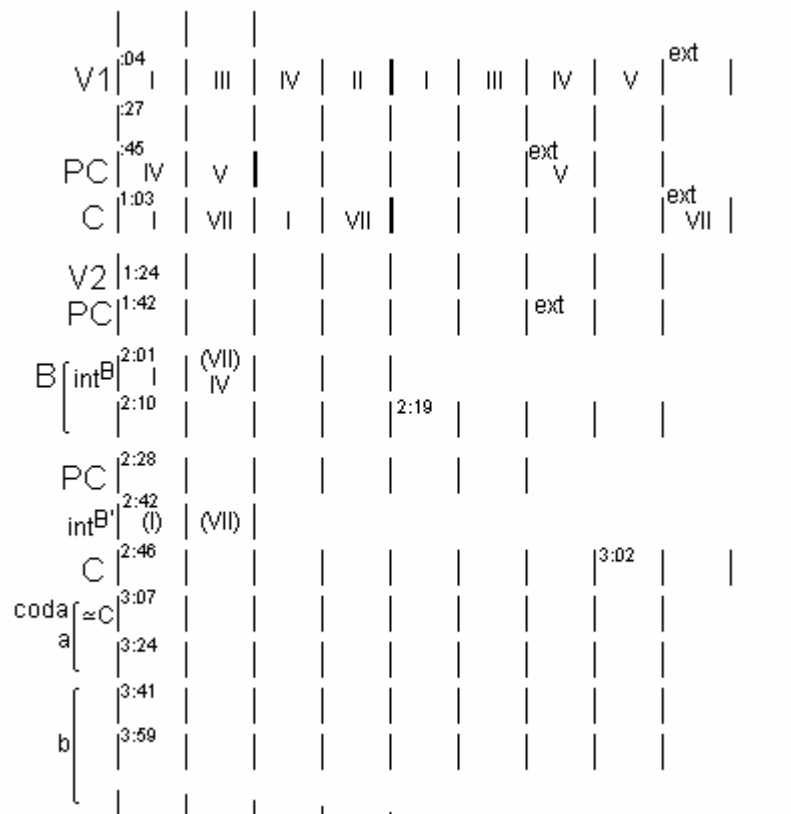


Fig. 4.12: Formal diagram for “Shadows and Tall Trees”

If one extracts the bridge and coda, the song resolves into a mere two verses. The pre-choruses take up a lot of time, and the splitting of the second pre-chorus with the bridge is an unusual strategy. Again, the absence of verse material after the one-third point in the song gives the form an overall binary quality that speaks mostly to a dearth of interesting material.

The final chorus concludes with an electronically mediated “truck-driver modulation” up one semitone to G# for the coda, which continues the **I - VII** progression of the chorus.⁴⁸ The modulation, as was the case on “A Day Without Me,” is achieved by speeding the tape up slightly (3:02). The coda vocals consist of Bono and Edge repeating the word “shadows” on a descending G# - D# fourth. A second phase of coda uses an unusually long fade on another reduced texture (3:41) without vocals, bringing the album to a close. Considering the high energy level characterizing most of the album, U2 choose to conclude on a gentler note, a strategy they will employ on almost every album to follow, although often with a clear spiritual content not apparent here.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Boy serves to illustrate the pole of compositional process opposite that discussed regarding *Achtung Baby*, namely, the recording of songs that are already substantially set structurally and performatively. Examining U2’s earliest recorded artifacts permits an assessment of their nascent aesthetic of song, their instrumental style, aspects of their musical syntax, and the comparison of these parameters to their mature style as represented by *Achtung Baby*.

It might be attractive to suggest that U2’s binary conception of song form arose in their maturity from the opportunity of combining multiple realizations of recorded sketches, but it is clear that some of their strongest binary forms, such as “Another Time Another Place” and “Shadows and Tall Trees,” date from a considerable period before

⁴⁸ The truck-driver modulation is a compositional device that most typically sees a final, repeated chorus raised a whole tone for both dramatic effect, and to lengthen a song. The technique is of questionable aesthetic repute. A fine example is Barry Manilow’s “Mandy.”

⁴⁹ Neil McCormick refers to religious themes appearing subtly in “Shadows and Tall Trees,” see “Autumn Fire,” *Hot Press*, 10 October 1981, <www.hotpress.com/archive/549171.html?page=1> (19 August 2006).

the recording of *Boy*. The former stands out in this regard as its two halves feature different realizations of the same descending bass line, suggesting that U2's tendency to rework and develop material started very early in their association and was their typical way of proceeding. "Twilight," another early song, has elements of binary structure but harkens back to Beatlesque song forms through the somewhat anachronistic reprise of the bridge, although unusually near the end of the song following a prolonged guitar solo. Slightly weaker binary forms, like "I Will Follow" and "Electric Co.," were composed closer to the time that *Boy* was recorded. Thus U2's penchant for unusual song forms may best be understood as having developed out of necessity due to their inexperience in the craft of songwriting, and their inability to emulate more conventional models by their disparate favorite artists, as well as a specific intent to avoid the commonplace while remaining within the purview of accessible rock music. They were clearly aware of their own limitations, and viewed their naiveté as a mixed blessing.

Nonetheless, *Boy* features some prototypical song forms as well, such as their first single "Out of Control," which is a conventional compound contrasting AABA, albeit with an extended bridge. "An Cat Dubh" (excluding the lengthy transition to "Into the Heart"), and "A Day Without Me" (excluding the lengthy interludes appearing at the beginning and end) are fairly typical refrain forms, although embedded within somewhat unusual macro structures.

Perhaps the greatest change in U2's conception of song form between *Boy* and *Achtung Baby* is the predilection for "time-killing" bridges on the former, most often merely prolonged sections in a reduced texture and dynamic, as in "I Will Follow" and

“Out of Control.”⁵⁰ The bridges on *Boy* were often developed from live practice; Bono, with a small hand movement, would direct the band to drop dynamically while he interacted with the crowd—a technique U2 use to the present day. *Achtung Baby*, on the other hand, featured several developmental bridges, often paradoxically achieving variety through the insertion of a less developed sketch idea that subtly inflected the newer version.

Some moments of harmonic ambiguity seen in *Achtung Baby*, such as the undefined sonority concluding the descending tetrachord in “Acrobat,” are apparent on *Boy* as well. On both albums, these moments often arise through the bass and guitar executing independent lines that create transient dissonances, such as those in the intro to “Another Time Another Place,” the verses of “I Will Follow,” and the interlude in “The Ocean.” Edge, in particular, favored chord voicings that were ambiguous because of the flexibility they afforded during overdubbing.

Another noteworthy similarity between the two albums is the conservative harmonic palette, again heavily dominated by **I**, **VII** and **IV** appearing in almost every song. The closest thing to an exotic chord is **III** (or **♭III**) which appears frequently on *Boy*, with **IV** – **III** progressions appearing in “Twilight,” “An Cat Dubh,” and “Another Time Another Place,” operating as transposed **I** – **VII** bridge progressions. There is a relative scarcity of minor sonorities on *Boy*. “Twilight” and “Stories For Boys” are cast in minor, giving them a certain darkness, and urgency, respectively, but the poignancy that can arise through juxtaposing major and minor, such as in “One,” “Until the End of the World,” and “Mysterious Ways” from *Achtung Baby*, is largely absent on *Boy*.

⁵⁰ While less analytically interesting than the somewhat developmental bridge in “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses,” which has not appeared as part of the live set list since the 1990s, these two songs from *Boy* figured prominently in both tours of the 2000s.

Bono's recitational vocal style is revealed from the opening track of *Boy*, and apparent from their earliest demos and pre-*Boy* live bootlegs. Similarly, the rhythm section exhibits considerable stylistic consistency between *Boy* and *Achtung Baby*, with Mullen relying heavily on the toms, and avoiding such standard techniques as the use of the ride cymbal, typical hi-hat patterns, and a relentless snare backbeat. Clayton's bass playing improved immensely over the decade, particularly in his exploration of funk rhythms, and a growing distaste for the downbeat, yet the punk legacy of the "chugging" eighth notes—which permeates *Boy*—appears frequently on *Achtung Baby* as well. Bootleg recordings suggest that Clayton was very high in the live mix (taking a page from Joy Division) and varied his patterns quite freely. As with most U2 albums, there is a virtual absence of quotation or stylistic referencing (with the obvious exception of *Rattle and Hum*, for which "roots" style references were the *raison d'être*) other than some tried and true formal procedures such as extending a refrain as a closing gesture, as on "Stories For Boys."⁵¹

If there is truly a signature sound for U2, it is the pervasive delay effect on Edge's guitar, first appearing on "A Day Without Me," and remaining arguably the dominant textural device through to *Rattle and Hum*. In fact, not only did the use of delay change the character of some existing songs, but it led to the development of an entire body of new songs around the time *Boy* was recorded. However, the delay is conspicuously absent from *Achtung Baby*, (particularly in the sketches), as a result of their determination to avoid typical U2 sounds and techniques. Nevertheless, it is clear that many of the defining musical characteristics comprising U2's musical language, as

⁵¹ European industrial music was sufficiently variegated that it would be difficult to argue that *Achtung Baby*, *Zooropa*, and *Pop* were "quoting" or referencing particular artists.

revealed on *Boy*, are preserved on *Achtung Baby*, primarily as macro-structural manifestations adorned with unusual surface effects. The songs on *Boy* were worked out in rehearsal, through interminable jamming, through experimentation and accidents during live performances, and doubtless in response to demos that were found wanting—no less a sketching process than that for *Achtung Baby*, except that the primary canvas was not a recording medium.

Steve Lillywhite produced the next two U2 albums, *October* (1981) and *War* (1983), leaving the entire team prepared for a change of direction for their fourth studio album. The next chapter examines the role of the new production team, Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, as they, together with the band, engineer what came to be known as U2's first reinvention with the recording of *The Unforgettable Fire* and *The Joshua Tree*. This process was so successful that it spawned the inevitable backlash leading ultimately to the second reinvention, *Achtung Baby*—the point from which our study began. As has been argued for the comparison of *Boy* and *Achtung Baby*, these Eno-Lanois produced albums share important features with other U2 music, suggesting that amidst the changes and reinventions the band experienced (and cultivated), certain core values and practices remained relatively intact.

CHAPTER FIVE: Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois

The Unforgettable Fire (1984)

Steve Lillywhite had already bent his own two-album rule by producing U2's third album, *War*, in 1983, so all parties were prepared to move to a new team of recordists for the next album.¹ Brian Eno was someone well known to U2, who admired his work as a member of Roxy Music, as producer for David Bowie, and as an avant-garde recording artist in his own right. First McGuinness, then Bono, contacted Eno for a meeting, but he informed them that he was presently inclined more toward performance art, and that producing rock bands was in the past.² Ultimately badgered into a meeting by Bono, Eno arrived with a young assistant named Daniel Lanois. It was obvious to U2 that Eno was trying to pass the assignment to Lanois, but Eno was sufficiently intrigued that both were convinced to work on the album together.

Recording took place from May 7 to early June, 1984, at Slane Castle, an hour outside of Dublin, before continuing at Windmill Lane from June 6 to August 5.³ Lanois had recently done some recording in Montreal in a "big ol' library," with good acoustic results. Propitiously, U2 had already considered trying to find a live room to do some

¹ Lillywhite would continue to be involved with U2 throughout their career, occasionally mixing songs, and being brought in as a co-producer on their 2004 album *How to Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*.

² *U2 by U2*, 148-9. Rhett Davies, who had produced some albums for Roxy Music, met with the band, but nothing came of it, see *U2 by U2*, 147. Another name that came up frequently was Jimmy Iovine, who had produced some live tracks for U2 during the *War* tour. He also produced albums for Tom Petty and Stevie Nicks in the early 80s, and would eventually produce the music for *Rattle and Hum*. He had already seen Slane Castle, and had considered it as a possible recording venue. See Neil Storey, "In Conversation with Adam Clayton," *U2 Magazine* 12, 1 October 1984, reproduced in part in *U2: Best of Propaganda*, 30.

³ (Making of) *Unforgettable Fire*, DVD (see Chapter Two, n. 56 for full citation).

recording, so the parties were ad idem on how to record the album. Eno was renowned as a proponent of the so-called ambient style, where lush sonic atmospheres were a higher aesthetic priority than catchy, coherent song structures.⁴ While this collaboration is often considered the start of U2's experimental period, earlier songs, such as "The Ocean," from *Boy*, betray a proclivity toward this kind of sound long before the arrival of Eno and suggest an underlying continuity in the band's music and practices.

Lanois and Eno were truly a team. Lanois was very much a detail person. He developed a strong rapport with the rhythm section, particularly Mullen, as he devoted considerable energy toward achieving fully realized drum parts, whereas Steve Lillywhite had been more interested in the guitar/vocal aspect of the songs. Lanois' influence on Mullen was almost immediate; at the time, Clayton observed:

Larry's playing is amazing—well it always has been, but it's developed even more on this record. I think in a way Edge and I probably do much the same as we've always done, except just better. Bono's singing and structuring of songs has improved, it's more mature.⁵

Eno, on the other hand, was able to maintain and direct the momentum, fostering an ethos of pursuing a musical idea wherever it might take them—a tendency used to full advantage on *Achtung Baby* (if, perhaps, reigned in slightly on *Joshua Tree*).

The Unforgettable Fire is now considered to be a little unbalanced. Some songs are partly improvised as aleatoric exercises, some are instrumental and mostly textural, but two in particular—"Pride (in the Name of Love)" and "Bad"—continue to rank amongst fan favorites. This album was the first to reflect U2's growing interest in America. The album title (shared with track four) was taken from an exhibit at the Chicago Peace Museum about the atomic bombing of Japan. "Pride" and "MLK" refer

⁴ For further information regarding Brian Eno, see: Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (New York: Da Capo, 1995).

⁵ "In Conversation with Adam Clayton," 30.

specifically to civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., while the partly improvised track is cryptically titled “Elvis Presley and America” (despite neither being mentioned).

The title for the opening track, “A Sort of Homecoming,” was taken from the works of poet Paul Celan, who had written that “Poetry is a sort of homecoming.” Journalist Bill Graham of *Hot Press* magazine had given Bono a collection of Celan’s works.⁶ This song featured what would become a trademark U2 procedure from this point forward; almost the entire song oscillates between two sonorities at a rate of one chord per measure.⁷ This song also establishes the new U2 sound, namely the dense, echoic, atmospheric textures that would remain an integral part of U2’s aural identity even after the reinvention of *Achtung Baby*. The multiple layers of heavily treated guitar and synthesizer occupy the high and middle spectrum, while Mullen’s natural sounding drums fill the mid-range over Clayton’s deep, largely untreated bass sounds, which still tend to throb on eighth notes in the “punk chug” style. In a reversal of orthodox rhythm section roles, continued from their earliest days, Clayton’s bass often maintains the groove, while Mullen’s busy drumming activates the texture. The dense, yet diffuse, sounds were difficult to translate to live performance, and the first few concerts for the *Unforgettable Fire* tour went badly, forcing the band to resort to the set list from the previous tour, with the intention of gradually working in songs from the new album.⁸ There was the added difficulty of learning to play live with sequencers, which were

⁶ Reported in Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 51.

⁷ Several songs on *The Unforgettable Fire*, *The Joshua Tree*, and *Rattle and Hum* share this characteristic.

⁸ Dunphy, *Unforgettable Fire*, 239-40; *U2 by U2*, 157.

programmed by Edge to replicate keyboard parts, or at least reductions of synthesizer washes, from the album.⁹

Throughout the recording, a film crew documented the sessions, catching some of the only glimpses into U2's actual recording process.¹⁰ There are full jams, overdub sessions, several studio meetings, and recording-booth huddle rehearsals, and rare insights into the respective roles of the various recordists. The documentary focuses on "Pride," which will be examined here as a case study shedding further light on the band's compositional process. This will be followed by a similar assessment of the *Joshua Tree* album, but in this instance based on a retrospective documentary that provides new information on how that album was recorded and written. As we work our way through some of the music that connects *Boy* to *Achtung Baby* in the band's history, we will again find musical features and compositional practices that lie beneath the stylistic changes that seem to characterize U2's reinvention of their music and sound.

"Pride (in the Name of Love)"

Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., this is U2's best-known early song, and arguably (at least over the long run) their biggest hit, heard often as a staple of classic rock radio well into the 2000s. It was released as a single in September, 1984, reaching number three in the UK, number one in Australia—U2's first number one outside the UK—but failing to reach the American Top Ten, peaking at number thirty-three.¹¹

This song was born, apparently, during a sound-check for the *War* tour in November, 1983. It was the habit of sound engineer Joe O'Herlihy to record all sound-

⁹ *U2 by U2*, 157.

¹⁰ (Making of) *Unforgettable Fire*, DVD.

¹¹ *U2 Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Pride (in the Name of Love)."

checks, since he knew that U2 often used these moments to jam on ideas, or experiment in general. He recalls that Edge had started playing a chord sequence, but after the others joined in, a mistake by someone in the band resulted in material that would become “Pride.”¹²

The documentary indicates that a version of “Pride” was worked on at Slane Castle, but the album cut appears to have been put into final form over several arduous and frustrating days of recording in Windmill Lane.¹³ Two major problems arose, namely arriving at a final form, and getting good bed tracks at a workable tempo. At one point, Edge comes in for a playback session. He leans on the console to Eno’s right. Eno leans back in his swivel chair, fiddling idly with something in his hands while Lanois stands behind with one arm crossed over his body, the other stroking his chin. Bono is seated to Eno’s left. The mood is tense, the body language is uncomfortable, and no one is laughing. The following exchange takes place:

Edge: I didn’t feel like we peaked. Necessarily.
Lanois: Pardon me, Edge
Edge: I’m not sure we have actually peaked.
Bono (sarcastically): No that was only a joke, [inaudible]
Eno (after a pause): Do you want to go out there and peak, then?
Edge (somewhat sheepishly): Mmm.

Presumably, after the band returns to the recording room, Lanois and Eno discuss the situation further:

Lanois: It’s a very delicate situation here, I’ve seen this band play songs to death, when we thought we were actually improving them, and then we’ve gone with number one take after we’ve done, like, six, seven, or eight (shakes head).

¹² Reported in *Into the Heart*, 52.

¹³ The documentary makes no effort to deal with events chronologically, nor is there any narration; it consists exclusively of candid sequences of the band at work, and a few short interviews. A very rough sequence of events is pieced together here, (with clues to chronology based partly on what the various recordists are wearing from scene to scene, and whether the playback tracks sound like the album version).

Eno: That's the thing. I would just like to know that we have got a good take, even if there are one or two things to repair, and then we can go on with some sense of...less sense of desperation into doing some other takes.

Later, during another playback, Bono makes the following assessment:

Well, I don't hear it as fast. But I hear,..., it's funny, it strikes me as structural problems. It's obviously the tempo of the song. You're in the chorus before you're in the verse, you know, you've finished the chorus before you've started it. It's like the song's over before you begin it...I don't know if it's because it's late at night, but it doesn't seem grand, it's just...(trails off)

Eno suggests that they slow the track down a bit, which he does with the pitch control on the console. He makes a slight adjustment, checks the new tempo with a metronome, while someone in the background offers an opinion that the pitch has dropped less than a semitone. Bono scats more text against the new tempo, and Eno announces that the song is now four minutes thirty seconds, a full minute shorter than at the castle, but that was because there was a "spurious section" (and because the end was longer). Given the new structure, Eno suggests that a decision has to be made:

The question now is whether we should do Edge's guitar tonight, which will give us the chance of using this sound, or whether we should go for a new sound. I think we could get a better sound, because slowed down, this is even more murky and less rhythmic than it was before.

The band opts for the next day, as Lanois is tired and wants to make some cassettes of a few other things, likely so he can assess them, and, perhaps, organize them into potential song structures (just as he will do throughout *Achtung Baby*). This meant sacrificing some (or all) of the tracks laid down that night, but they were confident in being able to proceed afresh the next day, and at least seemed relieved that some kind of progress was being made.¹⁴

On a subsequent day (perhaps the next day), in another recording-booth meeting at which everyone but Lanois is present, Eno announces: "I'm going to argue strongly for

¹⁴ It is not clear what Eno meant by being able to use "this sound:" he may have been referring to the track as a whole, or he may have been referring to a particular treatment of Edge's guitar that could not be saved, likely because other clients would be using the studio in the interim.

this new bridge technique.” The engineer plays back the bed tracks for the section that ultimately appears at 1:57 of the finished version. Eno says, “It’s the same entry from the chorus.”¹⁵ Mullen, looking half dead on the couch perks up and suggests: “You need another verse to make that right.” This is significant for confirming how matters of large-scale structure are dealt with democratically, and not just amongst the lyricist Bono, and Edge, the principal melodic player (and the one most inclined toward studio work).

Eventually, the finished version is presented to Paul McGuinness, who opines that it is the best thing they have done. Says McGuinness: “I don’t think anyone should lose their nerve about the length, either. Someone’s bound to say, ‘Can’t you make it three minutes?’ Forget it.” This is typical of McGuinness’ attitude that the band should not record with too much of an eye on whether a song might be suitable for radio based on what was being played at the time. The attitude amongst all five members of U2 seemed to be that radio would eventually come to them.¹⁶

The preceding discussion provides a sense of how tedious the recording process can be, particularly when the object being recorded has not yet crystallized. It also clarifies the democratic nature of the decision making progress, while underscoring the importance of the producers, who are almost co-composers under these conditions. Its protracted, piecemeal construction makes “Pride” a typical mature U2 product, and its sound is highly idiomatic to the band.

This song is one of the most overt examples of the use of the delay effect as a generator of groove. From the opening strains, Edge plays muted strings with the delay

¹⁵ This suggests that the song had still not reached its final form, as this section is preceded by the guitar solo, the single section (other than the intro) that departs from the four-bar phrases constituting the remainder of the song.

¹⁶ In fact, a number one hit was still three years off, see *infra*.

set to produce chugging sixteenth notes so that the guitar functions partly as pitched percussion. The second guitar plays an introduction on open harmonics, a technique used extensively by Edge since *Boy*, before the entry of the main riff.¹⁷

“Pride” demonstrates, in microcosm, many elements of Edge’s style. The strong rhythmic character of the song comes largely from the delay effect on Edge’s guitar. The delay creates a guitar pattern in sixteenths, which it is possible to imitate, to some extent, by simply strumming rapidly in sixteenths. However, the delay creates a very clipped, mechanical quality, the sheer precision of which converts the guitar from a primarily harmonic/melodic instrument into the principle carrier of groove.

Edge plays the main riff exclusively in the ninth position, using double stops in close physical proximity, and requiring very little movement between chord changes (Ex. 5.1).¹⁸ The main melody is an F# ornamented by a lower E over the B and E chords, then

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the main guitar riff of "Pride". Each system consists of a guitar (Gtr.) staff and a bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The guitar part is a continuous stream of sixteenth-note double stops. The bass part consists of a single note (F#) in the first measure of each system, followed by a whole rest in the second measure.

Ex. 5.1: Main guitar riff with bass reduction for “Pride”

an A ornamented with a lower G# over the A-major and f#-minor chords. This creates distinct layers of melody and harmony, with the bass layer moving at twice the rate of the guitar melodic layer. This occurs as well in the second verse (and int^{V2}), where Edge replaces the riff with unusual voicings of the B and A chords, based on the standard six

¹⁷ Edge plays both parts in live performances.

¹⁸ The hand position is identical to that used to play the intro riff to “I Will Follow” (see Ex. 4.1).

note barre chord, but leaving the top two strings open, creating B^{sus4} and A^{sus2} chords.¹⁹ Edge likely stumbled upon these voicings early in his guitar playing career, as they are easier to play than the standard barre chord, they create strong, resonant suspensions, and they juxtapose high fretted notes and open notes—a favorite technique from very early on. Edge permits the arpeggiated B^{sus4} to continue ringing over the change in bass from B to E, and, similarly, lets the A^{sus2} ring quite dissonantly over the bass change from A to F#.

Reinforcing the guitar is Mullen’s sixteenth closed hi-hat pattern, disrupted only for the usual snare hits on beats 2 and 4, and the open hi-hat on beat 4. Much of Mullen’s drumming in the verses is a simple two-measure pattern with a short tom fill on beat 4 of the second measure, creating an unusual lurch on beat 4, a luxury afforded Mullen by the relentless mechanical guitar groove, accentuated by the punk chug of the bass.

In spite of its ubiquity on the radio, and as a standard tour song as recently as the 2006 Vertigo tour, it is an atypical U2 song in its adherence to normative pop song form. The form is simple verse/chorus, or, if the instrumental solo is deemed sufficiently contrasting, perhaps a compound simple verse/chorus form—classic AABA—inviting speculation that its popularity may be partly attributed to its predictable and familiar form.²⁰

¹⁹ These same voicings first appeared in “Shadows and Tall Trees” from *Boy*, four years earlier (see Fig. 4.11).

²⁰ Covach describes it as a compound form, *What’s That Sound*, 461.

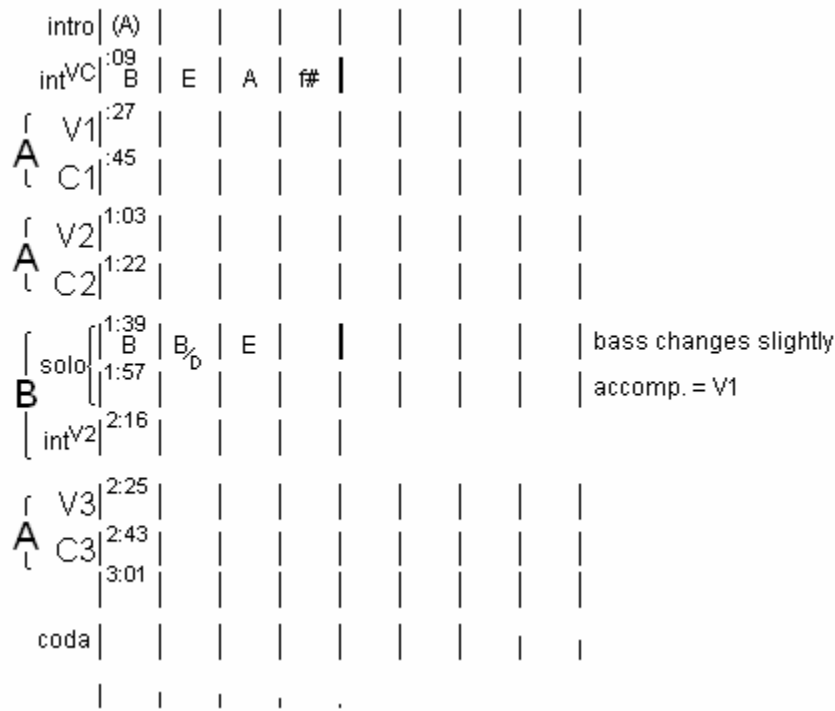


Fig. 5.1: Formal diagram for "Pride (in the Name of Love)"

The simple verse/chorus designation suggests that the verses and the choruses use essentially the same musical materials. This is mostly true with respect to the chord progression, but there are significant textural changes between the various sections which prevent too much literal repetition of material. As discussed above, the guitar accompaniment figure changes substantially between verse 1 and verses 2 and 3. Also, the verse and chorus melodies are substantially different, with the latter set an octave higher, close to the limits of Bono's range, and Edge also joins in with a lower harmony. Mullen's drumming becomes more active as well, which, with the changes in the vocal register, provides the lift typical of a chorus.

In contrast with its unusually clear form, it is difficult to definitively assign a key to this song.²¹ Every four-measure phrase except the intro begins on a B sonority, and the

²¹ *The Complete Songs* casts it in B-major.

vocal melody is almost fifty percent B notes. Analysis in B yields a **I - IV - VII - v** progression which, while not functionally tonal, is typical of the rock harmonic vocabulary, and very consistent with U2's penchant for double plagal progressions using **IV** and **VII**. However, the song opens with four measures of the bass chugging on an A, over which Edge plays doubled-stopped open harmonics. Thus, the initial sonority is an A^{sus2}, followed by A-major and A^{sus4}.²² This creates an expectation of A, and when the song kicks in on a B chord, there is a sense of departure from the tonic. In A-major, the progression would be **V/v - V - I - vi**, and this, in fact, may be the better analysis, as the arrival on A is quite strong on the third beat of the phrase, and confirms the initial sonority.

The opening A^{sus2} is also the sound of virtually every appearance of the A chord, as Bono almost always sings a B note on the downbeat of the A chord.²³ On choruses, he descends to A before passing, via G#, to F# over the f#-minor chord. The descent to the A note occurs on beat 3, and this delayed resolution mirrors the larger-scale delayed resolution to A major on the third beat of each phrase, creating a continual forward motion.

Atypical of U2, but typical of radio singles, is the almost continuous singing on "Pride," as the verse/chorus complexes unfold without interludes (as was the case on U2's first single, "Out of Control"), until the arrival of the guitar solo. The solo is essentially an instrumental verse/chorus complex with a four measure extension based on

²² Edge seems to play the same sequence of harmonics twice, but, on the album version, the first A-D harmonic heavily emphasizes the A pitch, whereas the second time, the D is much louder, leaving the intro hanging on the A^{sus4}.

²³ The only exception is the second phrase of the last verse, where Bono rises climactically to a higher register, and the melody has the pitches G# and F# over the A chord.

the verse 2 guitar texture. However, the bass pattern changes slightly (1:40) for the verse portion of the solo, going through the notes B - D - E - E, while the guitar plays a repeating figure on the pitches D \sharp - E - F \sharp and B (Ex. 5.2). This is clearly a change from



Ex. 5.2: Guitar and bass from guitar solo for “Pride” (1:39)

anything heard previously, although the precise chordal qualities are ambiguous in this section.²⁴ This first section of the solo also seems to shift the tonic temporarily to B. The second half of the solo (1:57), however, is identical to a verse or chorus, and lacks the character of a typical guitar solo, as one could easily sing another chorus over it.²⁵

The birth of “Pride” was obviously slow and difficult, but, by all accounts, not atypical for a U2 song. Similar video materials chronicle the recording of the follow-up album, *The Joshua Tree*, itself largely a reaction to the experience gained from *The Unforgettable Fire*.

***The Joshua Tree* (1987)**

U2’s elevation to the status of rock “greats” was achieved with the release of their fifth studio album, *The Joshua Tree*, in March, 1987. This success of this album landed them on the cover of *Time*, saw them dominate industry magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, and generated so much press that even Edge admitted to being sick of reading about U2.

²⁴ This is “the new bridge technique” that Eno argued in favor of during one of the team meetings for “Pride,” see *supra*.

²⁵ In fact, this part of the solo is rarely (if ever) done live. Instead, they move to int^{v2}, which can be extended as long as necessary, as Bono often speaks, or engages the audience in call and response.

The hype surrounding *The Joshua Tree* virtually guaranteed that anything following it would risk a backlash born of over-exposure, and almost inevitably, U2's next effort, *Rattle and Hum*, was savaged critically (although it was a major commercial success, selling almost as well as *The Joshua Tree*). The irony is that the American seeds of *Rattle and Hum* are already clearly present in *The Joshua Tree*, and even subtly in *The Unforgettable Fire*, informed heavily, as it was, by their American experience.

U2 had acquired a strong interest in American roots music during the *Unforgettable Fire* tour. Whereas Edge had earlier considered himself "inoculated" against roots music, he discovered, via the "miracle of [American] public radio," that the watered-down pop version he heard in Europe failed to do justice to the progenitors of the style. "For the first time, I heard the music of Robert Johnson, Howling Wolf, Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell...I knew it was time to take another look."²⁶ Similarly, Clayton observes: "We were really trying to make energetic new music that was based in early rock 'n' roll. In a sense, it was something of a return to basics, only they weren't our basics."²⁷

The mid 80s was the center of a general roots revival, and a growing interest in traditional musics of all types. In the UK, neo-traditional folk-punk bands like the Pogues, or Irish country/soul groups like Clannad, Hothouse Flowers, and the Waterboys were on the rise, as were similar groups like The Hooters in the US, or country-punk k. d. lang in Canada. In film, the decade was framed by *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and *The Commitments* (1991). U2 were exposed to this revival in Ireland, and Bono was affected

²⁶ *U2 by U2*, 172.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

by his encounters with rock icons, and walking blues/folk encyclopedias, Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, and Keith Richards.²⁸

American themes absorbed during the extended U.S. phase of the *Unforgettable Fire* tour heavily influenced the band in the run up to the *Joshua Tree* sessions. Band members were immersing themselves in the “new journalism” of Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson—writings that evoked a kind of poetry. They sensed a resonance between American poets and folk songwriters, like Woody Guthrie, and Irish artists; there was a “generous spirit” that was more “folk” than the artier, pretentious European poets.²⁹ Bono was coming up with desert metaphors and began talking to Eno about the ability of music to evoke a physical space, an actual location rather than just a mood or emotion.

Pre-production sessions took place in Dublin’s STS Recording Studios.³⁰ “We attempted at the outset to work within the idiom of the song, which is something that we hadn’t really ever thought too much about in the past....the idea that a song was straightforward in arrangement—quite stripped down.”³¹ Similarly, Bono believed it was time to really put some thought into writing words instead of just sketching ideas. Attributing this to reaching the ripe age of twenty-six, he remarked that when he was

²⁸ Bono, *U2 by U2*, 155, 172.

²⁹ Bono, interview by Carter Allen, *The Joshua Tree Interview*, April 7, 1987 (Island Records, 1987). U2 added Curtis Mayfield’s “People Get Ready” to their live set. Bono said that the line about faith being the key to opening the door particularly appealed to his Irishness.

³⁰ This was also the site of the *Achtung Baby* pre-production sessions (see Chapter 3).

³¹ Edge, *Joshua Tree Interview*.

younger, he thought writing real lyrics was old fashioned—“like something from the hippie era (laughs).”³²

While Eno brought a sense of experimentation to *Unforgettable Fire*, there were no worries that he would be unreceptive toward a more traditional songwriting approach (although they probably would not have sold him on the idea in their initial pitch to him). Eno was seen as someone very instinctive; he either loved or hated something, often without being able to clearly articulate why.³³ He was a fan of Hank Williams and gospel music, and Lanois had played in country bands before he got into producing, so both producers were very familiar with idioms characterized by clearer structures and traditional musical elements.³⁴

Both Edge and Clayton remember *Joshua Tree* as a situation straddling the continuum of compositional process, in that approximately half the songs were brought in as somewhat complete ideas, while others arose through the recording process itself.

Edge recalls:

We went into the sessions with some fairly well-developed material, some stuff that was, (grimacing) you know, getting there, but really needed some work, and then we knew that we would end up doing some work where we would all just be in the room playing together, and we’d start getting something, and would work from that beginning, and develop it into a song.³⁵

Recording began August 1, 1986, and was completed in January, 1987. Much of the recording was done at a Georgian country house called Danesmoate. There was a large drawing room with high ceilings that produced a very live sound, similar to that in

³² Bono, *Joshua Tree Interview*. Bono claims that “Sunday Bloody Sunday” (*War*, 1983) was one of the few early U2 songs where they really wrote words, but that that was originally Edge’s idea.

³³ Bono, *Joshua Tree Interview*.

³⁴ Edge, *Joshua Tree Interview*. Lanois has since produced albums for country and folk icons like Emmylou Harris and Bob Dylan respectively.

³⁵ Edge, Chapter 9, *Joshua Tree DVD*. Clayton makes similar observations, Chapter 7.

The Unforgettable Fire. The plan was that the primary bed tracks could be recorded by the band playing together, in the belief (romantically held by most rock musicians) that there is something special, or genuine about musicians all playing together.³⁶

Now widely considered a classic album, members of U2 have remarked on feeling very disconnected from the music scene at the time, and that *The Joshua Tree* sounded unlike anything else in circulation.³⁷ The *Rolling Stone* review for the album supports their claim: “*The Joshua Tree* is U2’s most varied, subtle and accessible album, although it doesn’t contain any sure-fire smash hits.”³⁸ This seems an almost ludicrous observation for an album that spawned six singles, including U2’s first two American number one hits (“With or Without You” and “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For”), but it does underscore how unusual the album was in 1987, amidst other hit albums such as Bon Jovi’s *Slippery When Wet* (1986), Heart’s *Bad Animals*, and major hits by the likes of Billy Vera and the Beaters’ “At This Moment,” and Whitney Houston’s “Didn’t We Almost Have it All.” The punk/new wave movements were long buried, and softer adult contemporary styles were prevalent, along with quasi-metal pop.³⁹ MTV had ceased to be a novelty, and one simply expected new songs to arrive simultaneously on video and radio. Nonetheless, U2 believed that, in comparison with *The Unforgettable Fire*, *The*

³⁶ *U2 by U2*, 178-9. They make this point in the *Joshua Tree Interview* as well. Edge admits that this approach did not succeed for all songs.

³⁷ Clayton, Bono, and Edge, make this point in Chapters 1 and 3, respectively: *Joshua Tree*, DVD.

³⁸ Steve Pond, review of “The Joshua Tree,” *Rolling Stone* 497, 9 April 1987, reprinted in *Rolling Stone U2*, 79-82. Pond does recognize, however, that this “could be the big one” for U2.

³⁹ There was then, as in any period, plenty of “underground,” or “alternative” music, but it was not getting much airplay outside of college radio stations.

Joshua Tree was “...more finished, more in focus.”⁴⁰

Christian themes are more explicit than on any album since *October* (1981).⁴¹ Almost every song has, if not overt spiritual content, at least sufficient lack of thematic specificity to accommodate a spiritual interpretation. Again, American influences are expressed in U2’s adaptation of gospel music on several songs, and even references in “Bullet the Blue Sky” to TV evangelists—a uniquely American phenomenon horrifyingly fascinating to Europeans.

There are few widely available demos of songs related to *Joshua Tree*. However, in 1999, U2 participated in the *Classic Albums* video series, releasing an account of the recording of the *Joshua Tree*.⁴² In this documentary, all the major recordists provide recollections of various aspects of the recording process. In some scenes, Lanois and Bono are seated at a mixing board with the original track sheets, and briefly dissect some of the tracks. Other scenes feature Edge standing at the mixing board with his guitar available to demonstrate riffs and progressions, while Steve Lillywhite, similarly seated at a mixing console, offers his recollections as a remix engineer.⁴³

⁴⁰ Edge, *Joshua Tree Interview*.

⁴¹ *Joshua Tree* is listed as number six in the *The 100 Greatest Albums in Christian Music* (Eugene: Harvest House, 2001), 32-5.

⁴² *U2: The Joshua Tree*, DVD, directed by Philip King and Nuala O’Connor (Chatsworth, CA: Isis Productions, 1999). It is likely that they were all together recording, or preparing to record, *All That You Can’t Leave Behind*. Edge and Clayton are groomed as they were for the Pop Mart tour, which continued until May, 1998. Bono’s hair had made a comeback from the buzz-cut he had in December, 1998, so the documentary was likely filmed no earlier than late 1998. *All That You Can’t Leave Behind* was released in October, 2000, and recorded over a period of two years.

⁴³ There is a clear lack of rehearsal, as they are often surprised by what they find, or are unable to remember what tracks survived to the album. Clayton, Mullen, Eno, and Flood are interviewed away from the studio.

Track 1: “Where the Streets Have No Name” (D-Major)

Brian Eno tells the story of Edge often walking into recording sessions with a bag full of cassette home demos of potential songs, one of which was the model for the album’s opening song.⁴⁴ Edge had worked up a four-track texture consisting of guitars, some keyboards, and a drum machine. Adam Clayton recalls:

He had the beginning and the end, but he didn’t really have the bit in the middle. We would spend interminable hours trying to figure out chord changes to get the two bits to line up, which is why it drove Brian mad.⁴⁵

The beginning and end were in a compound meter, but the “bit in the middle,” at least on the album, was in simple time. Clayton suggests that, at the time, he did not appreciate the thought that went in to figuring that out. The joining of the compound meter $\frac{6}{4}$ intro with the simple meter verses became a significant technical problem, and ultimately took up a great deal of time during the *Joshua Tree* sessions. U2 lore has it that Eno began to despair of getting anywhere on the song and prepared to erase it until physically prevented from doing so by the junior member of the team. Eno, noting that the story has been told many times, proclaims:

Now I shall tell you the truth. That song was recorded, so there was a version of it on tape; that version had quite a lot of problems. What we kept doing was spending hours, and days, and weeks, actually—probably half the time that whole album took was spent on that song—trying to fix up this version on tape. It was a nightmare of screwdriver work. My feeling was: it would just be much better to start again. I’m sure we would get there quicker.... It’s more frightening to start again, because there’s nothing there. So my idea was to stage an accident to erase the tapes so that we would just have to start again. But I never did.⁴⁶

While somewhat amusing, it is consistent with Eno’s preoccupation with making progress, and is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it indicates that the team was inclined to become attached to certain elements of performance that were not easily recreated,

⁴⁴ Chapter 8, *Joshua Tree* DVD.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

such as a particular ensemble moment, or a particular instrumental treatment that would be irretrievably lost (recall that the same problems arose during the recording of “Pride”). Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, it indicates that a willingness to abandon an unfixed idea and start anew was in the team’s conceptual arsenal. Again, “Pride” showed a similar result, as they ultimately abandoned the Slane Castle version, starting over in Windmill Lane.

Eno’s metaphor of a “nightmare of screwdriver work” is difficult to rationalize against the final version of the song, as there is nothing particularly difficult about the transition from compound to simple meter, nor are the harmonies in the least exotic. Unfortunately, Edge’s original four-track version is not available, thus it is not possible to trace the changes from Edge’s original “bit in the middle” to the final version. Presumably, there were problems beyond merely getting from compound to simple time.

The album fades in with the strains of synthesized sounds swirling in the background. Gradually, a church organ sound alternating between **I** and **IV** with typical 4-3 suspensions on the D chord, and a C#-B suspension over the G chord, gently asserts itself through the roiling sonic mist (0:31). The mood is reverent and other-worldly. Finally, an arpeggiated guitar ostinato rapidly fades in (0:41, Ex. 5.3), and one of U2’s



Ex. 5.3: Guitar ostinato from intro to “Where the Streets Have No Name”

most famous songs—a staple of their live shows well into the twenty-first century—continues its solemn opening gesture.⁴⁷ The full tutti texture begins at 1:17, and

⁴⁷ The *Complete Songs* scores the intro in 3/4 time. It indicates five measures of **vi** (0:52) two of **V**, then two measures of 6/8 before the 4/4 tutti at 1:09. I score it in 6/4 (see Fig. 5.2) as this is how Mullen, guided

essentially repeats the progression from the introduction, except for the addition of four measures of **VII**.⁴⁸

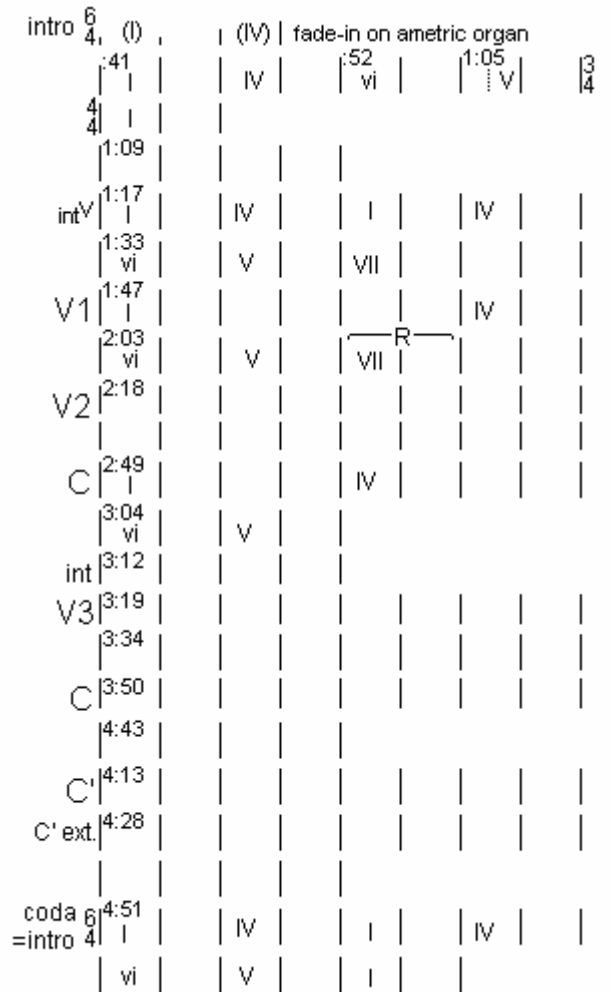


Fig. 5.2: Formal diagram for "Where the Streets Have No Name"

by a click track, counts the intro in live performance, clicking his sticks and closing the high-hat to mark the downbeat. Also, Clayton perceives the intro as being in a compound meter (Chapter 8, *Joshua Tree* DVD). Finally, the compound intro and simple verses are otherwise identical in their harmonic rhythm. There is a slight inconsistency in the two-measure regularity of the intro in that the V at 1:05 is not confirmed by bass movement to $\hat{5}$ until beat 4, thus vi is suspended for the first half of that measure. However, in the coda, there is a synthesized bass note on the downbeat clearly indicating the chords changing every two measures (in 6/4). The *Complete Songs* scores the coda as I do (except, again, in 3/4). It is very likely that the bed tracks are the same between the intro and coda.

⁴⁸ In live performances from 1988 to 2002, the tutti is usually accompanied by a burst of white flood lighting, and is often a high point of the live show.

The form is a minimally contrasting verse/chorus, with a refrain in the verses. The chorus is withheld after the first verse, followed by two full verse/chorus complexes, and considerable extension of the choruses (4:13), including new text. The coda is a reprise of the compound meter intro material.

The simple form is mirrored in the harmonies, being comprised of alternations between **I** and **IV** within four-bar phrases before moving through **vi** – **V** – **VII** to conclude the harmonically open verses. The **VII** is extended over four measures, and is transitional to the chorus, which begins on the tonic. The choruses are essentially truncated verses, moving through the same harmonies, omitting the **VII**, and closing harmonically on the **I**. Compared to most of the songs examined thus far, the form is quite simple, and transparent, reflecting the desire to achieve more coherent songs after the somewhat rambling *Unforgettable Fire* (“Pride” notwithstanding).

Part of the strategy was to embed simple structures within exceedingly dense textures (an issue addressed directly in the next song). Seated at the mixing board, Lillywhite isolates two tracks of synthesizer accompaniment and jokes first about U2 being Depeche Mode, then the Pet Shop Boys, with neither sound appearing to have made it to the final mix.⁴⁹ The most vivid elements of the texture are the almost continuous, delay driven sixteenth-note chugging of Edge’s high rhythm guitar, his similarly treated muted rhythm guitar (strumming muted strings to create a mechanical drive), additional drum tracks including what sounds like a bass drum in eighths, matched by Clayton’s punk chug, all working to belie the formal simplicity.

⁴⁹ Chapter 8, *Joshua Tree* DVD. Both bands would be considered prototypical British new wave bands, with heavy reliance on synthesizers, dance grooves, and overriding pop sensibilities. Flood would actually go on to produce albums by Depeche Mode, starting in 1989.

Track 2: “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” (D[b]-Major)

A left over drum track from a sketch called “The Weather Girls” was the starting point for this song.⁵⁰ Daniel Lanois was very involved in this track, which was built from the drums up, layer-by-layer, the first being an acoustic guitar part fashioned by Edge. Presumably, the gospel aspect did not emerge for some time, but Lanois encouraged Bono to take it in that direction as it seemed a very un-U2 thing to do. Given the key, Bono is near the top of his range for much of the song, which Lanois finds very emotionally compelling, recalling that this was before Bono began using the falsetto so prevalent on *Achtung Baby*.

This is a straight-forward AABA form. The B-section, an eight-measure interlude with the simplest possible guitar embellishment on **I** and **IV**, is essentially a verse and only minimally contrasting, so this may be seen as a contrasting verse/refrain, AAA form as well. The harmonies are also very simple—even more so than on “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For”—with verses based on **I** and **IV**, while the refrains are two iterations of the last four measures of the standard twelve-bar blues, **V - IV - I - I**.⁵¹ Bono’s melodies and text rhythms are also virtually identical across all three sections, which is also unusual for U2, particularly in a song that was constructed in the studio.

It is noteworthy that the first two songs on *Joshua Tree* are cast in very standard forms. This is surely a tangible step on the part of the band and the producers to avoid the incoherence that emerged from parts of *The Unforgettable Fire*. Yet, in search of a

⁵⁰ The following discussion is condensed from Chapter 1, *Joshua Tree*, DVD. Lanois briefly isolates Mullen’s kit, then finds another track of drums, possibly toms or bongos, resulting in a very active, complex percussion track.

⁵¹ Ken Stephenson cites “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” as an example of “the standard blues pattern” being found throughout the rock period, *What to Listen For in Rock*, 110. While not strictly accurate, the section from 0:48 to the end of the first phrase of the refrain is harmonically identical to a prototypical twelve bar blues.

better defined pop style, there is no indication of “over-writing” in the sense of trying to compensate for formal clarity with complexity at another level. The melodies are clear

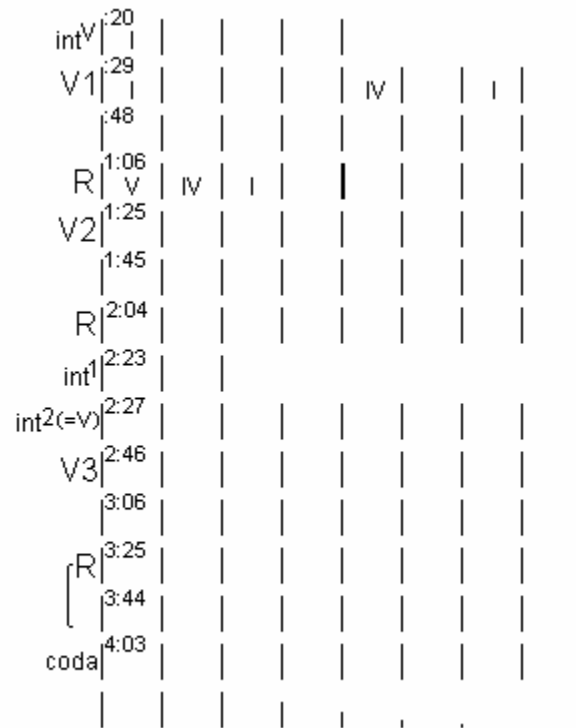


Fig. 5.3: Formal diagram for “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For”

and periodic, and the harmonies exceedingly simple and based on Anglo-American folk progressions. There is an overriding gospel aesthetic, reflecting the influence of American sources. Both songs are in D (in terms of execution), with a similar high ambitus leaving Bono near the top of his range. The textures are dense, and there is heavy use of barely distinguishable treatments fading in and out. For example, at 2:45 of “Where the Streets Have No Name,” there is a sustained synthesizer playing an open fifth on the tonic that stands out for only an instant, but which fills the texture throughout, along with numerous other overdubs, many on heavily processed guitars.⁵² According to

⁵² Chapter 2, *Joshua Tree*, DVD. Again, seated at the mixing board, Lanois hunts around isolating a number of purely textural tracks.

Bono, this process was intended to address the problem of how to bring an old gospel tune into its present context.⁵³ Again, formal transparency may have been one goal, but evoking a particular locale through sound was another, and both of these songs have an almost incendiary, paradisiacal quality created by innumerable high, sustained, or ringing timbres.

Track 3: “With Or Without You” (D-Major)

This was selected as the first single off the album, and was the first U2 song to reach number one in the US, although only reaching number four in the UK.⁵⁴ There are numerous descriptions of this as a “simple” love song. Beneath this simplicity, however, is a departure from the clear song forms of the two opening cuts, as well as an atypical pop sound. In fact, it is difficult to assign a form to this song, or to understand it in the context of other songs from the period.⁵⁵

This was one of the earliest songs from the sessions, a jam subject from the pre-production at STS studios where it was just a “chord sequence that went nowhere.”⁵⁶ Almost the entire song consists of four-measure units of the “chord per bar” progression: **I - V - vi - IV**. For most of the song, the bass guitar plays eighth-note chord roots, creating an invariant, throbbing bed track. The articulation of form through harmonic

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Edge claims that there was much agonizing over the first single, and that “With or Without You” was chosen as it made the smoothest transition from the previous album to this one, *Joshua Tree Interview*.

⁵⁵ Nonetheless, Alan Moore notes that partly because of U2’s open harmonic style, “songs seem almost totally to eschew repetitive ‘hooks’: the clearest exceptions are on ‘With or without you’ with its Ionian I-V-VI-IV....” *Primary Text*, 2d, 162. Whether this repetitive pattern constitutes a “hook” is debatable as it supports almost the entire song. Walt Everett also finds some sense of normalcy here: “Regular harmonically supported Schenkerian Umlinien appear in perhaps unexpected places, including...U2 songs such as “With or Without You...”, see “Confessions from Blueberry Hell,” in *Expression in Pop Rock*, 308.

⁵⁶ Edge, *U2 by U2*, 172.

sectional contrast is therefore impossible. In this case, form is articulated via a long crescendo, a gradual thickening of texture, and changes in Bono's vocal register.⁵⁷

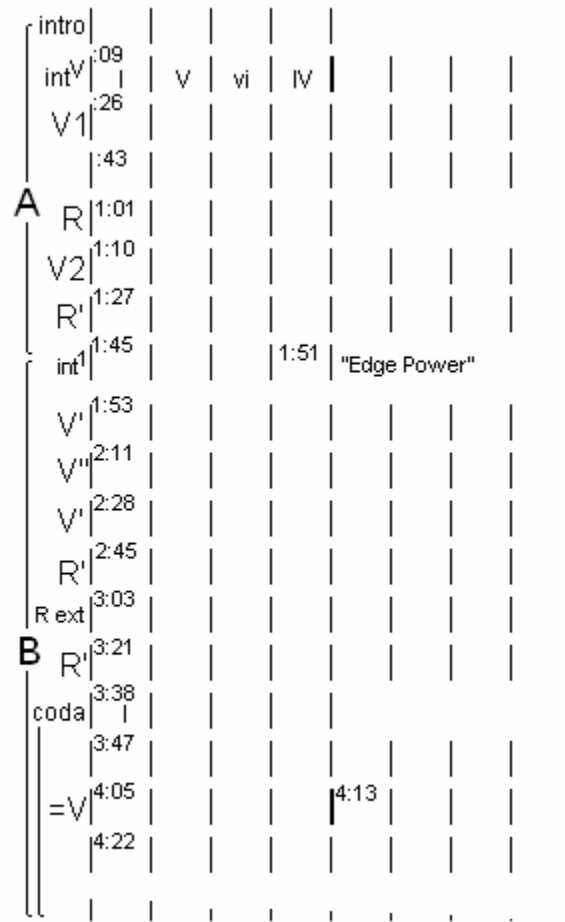


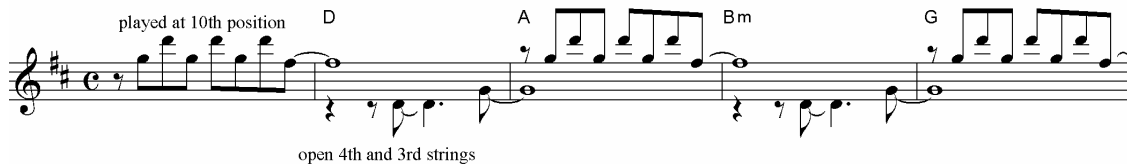
Fig. 5.4: Formal diagram for "With or Without You"

Verses and refrains make up the entire song, each organized in four-measure units that can be assembled as appropriate to accommodate however much text requires setting. No two verses or refrains are the same length. Verse 1 is sixteen bars, while verse 2 is only eight. The next candidate for being a verse (1:53) has twenty-four measures, with the repeated text, "You give yourself away," framing eight measures of

⁵⁷ See Mark Spicer "(Ac)cumulative Form," 61. Spicer suggests "the use of such forms can be seen as perhaps the primary means by which pop-rock composers have been able to transcend the predictable boundaries of simple verse-chorus patterns in their songs."

unique text set to unique melody. Similarly, the first refrain (1:01) is only four measures, while the second, labeled R' (1:27) is eight, and represents a development of the first by adding text, and by Bono switching to his upper register.

If this song is a verse/refrain binary form, it is with the third verse that the binary nature becomes apparent, for the melody and text rhythms of the quasi-narrative verses 1 and 2 never return. This is also the point where the textural build truly begins with the entry of the snare, tom fills, and the echo-laden “Edge Power” guitar (1:51, Ex. 5.4).⁵⁸ After a third refrain, there is a variation of the refrain (R ext, 3:03) with Bono singing a descending “Oo” vocable at what is clearly the emotional climax of the song—despite the absence of text. A final refrain closes this section before the texture drops suddenly to that of the opening sections for an extended coda of thirty-two measures that instrumentally recaps the crescendo before fading out.



Ex. 5.4: “Edge Power” riff from “With or Without You” master tape, as played (but not as heard, as there is heavy treatment with delay (beginning 1:51))

The form is, therefore, articulated primarily through changes in texture, and sections are subtly mutated and ultimately distinguished by changes in Bono’s vocal register, particularly in the refrains. Like most of the songs from *Achtung Baby*, this is a typical U2 product where a very simple scaffold supports multiple realizations, several of which come to reside cheek by jowl in a single piece.

⁵⁸ This is the designation for one of the guitar tracks on the session track list. Lanois and Bono are sitting at the recording console re-familiarizing themselves with the master tape. Lanois wonders aloud what the “Edge Power” track is. As he brings the volume fader up, he and Bono immediately recognize the main guitar hook from this section. This is yet another Edge riff that remains invariant over changing harmony.

Throughout this song, and particularly during the first half, Edge employs a device called the “Infinite Guitar,” a processor that, as the name implies, permits the player to sound a note and keep it sustaining, like a violin, providing the opportunity to further treat, or play other pitches against, the sustained notes.⁵⁹ It is this treatment that led Bono to observe that this was a most unusual song for 1987, one that “whispers into existence.” He suggests that it only sounds “normal” now because most rock listeners have heard it so many times.⁶⁰ The “Edge Power” riff, on the other hand, sounds as though it is played through a more conventional delay processor. This riff is virtually identical in position and fingering to that which emerges from the murk as the opening ostinato of “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” possibly betraying some compositional links between these songs.

Track 4: “Bullet the Blue Sky” (E[♭]-Minor)

The groove for this song was likely one of the earliest elements of *Joshua Tree*, as it was forged in a jam during pre-production at STS. Edge describes an unexpected fusion of misperceptions as follows:

I was playing around on a guitar part, and Adam and Larry started playing along. At first I was thinking ‘What the fuck are they doing?’ It was such a bizarre angle they were taking, I was almost going to stop the jam and get everybody back on track. Eventually we ended the take and I explained that they were playing on the wrong beat, but when we listened back in the control room, it was absolutely brilliant. That was the beginning for ‘Bullet the Blue Sky’ and a perfect example of why bands are such a great creative concept. There is no way any of us would have been able to get to that place on our own.⁶¹

Clayton describes its composition as follows:

⁵⁹ The processor was developed by Michael Brook, a Canadian inventor, composer, and producer. His prototypes ended up in the possession of Lanois, and then Edge. *U2 by U2*, 169, 180-1.

⁶⁰ Chapter 3, *Joshua Tree*, DVD. Edge recounts that they were at an impasse with “With or Without You” until, during a playback, Edge was overheard in another room experimenting with the Infinite Guitar

⁶¹ Edge, *U2 by U2*, 172.

We do write in an unconventional way, I suppose. If we try to arrange a song that's already been worked out on acoustic guitar, it's hard for us. But if we start with a few bits and then work around each other to develop the song, we seem to go to more interesting places. "Bullet the Blue Sky" is a great example; it's really just one musical moment, extended in time. Larry started playing that beat, and I started to play across it—as opposed to with it—while Edge was playing something else entirely. Bono said, "Whatever you guys are doing, don't stop!" So we kept playing, and he improvised that melody.⁶²

Bono's analysis of the situation is that Clayton was playing "in a different key than the guitar, or something. Anyway, it shouldn't have worked, but it did."⁶³

The three accounts differ somewhat as to exactly what the problem was, and the album version seems to make sense tonally and rhythmically, although certainly with a strong identity unlike anything else they had done to that point. The bass and drums coincide strongly on beats 1, 4, and 4+, but are heavily syncopated everywhere else, with the bass avoiding strong beats; this is likely what Clayton meant by playing "across"



Ex. 5.5: Bass and drum pattern for most of "Bullet the Blue Sky"

Mullen rather than with him (Ex. 5.5). The heavy-footed drumming, making good use of the bass drum, and the E octave leaps on the bass guitar (E being the lowest pitch on the bass—the open bottom string) create a menacing drone, with beats 4 and 4+ accenting $\hat{7}$, operating as an ornamental lower neighbor throughout.

⁶² Adam Clayton, quoted in Gregory Isola, "Reluctant Rock Star: How U2's Adam Clayton Learned to Play—and Conquer the World Onstage," *Bass Player*, 11 November 2000, 56.

⁶³ Chapter 7, *Joshua Tree*, DVD.

Bono frequently recounts that his suggestion to Edge was “to put El Salvador through your amp.”⁶⁴ Given U2’s goal of evoking actual places on *Joshua Tree*, it seems unlikely that Edge’s part from the STS sessions would have survived unless the theme of El Salvador emerged immediately. Most of the guitar sounds are made with a slide, enhanced with massive sustain.⁶⁵

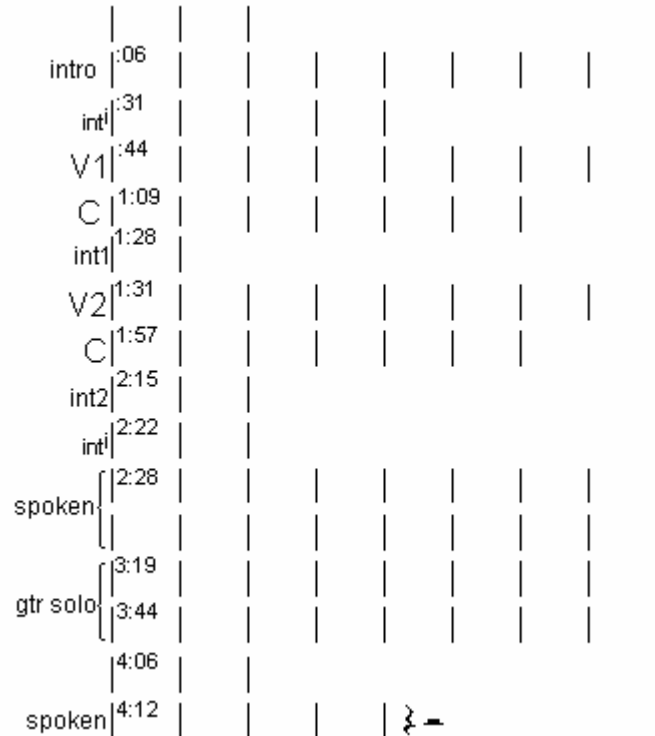


Fig. 5.5: Formal diagram for “Bullet the Blue Sky”

Like “With or Without You,” this is another song whose form is difficult to define. In this case, the “progression” is even simpler, basically a sustained E⁵ chord with **VII** implied as a neighbor on beat 4 of every measure, like a minor mode mirror to the Beatles’ “Tomorrow Never Knows,” the concluding track on *Revolver* (1966). The

⁶⁴ *End of the World*, 52. Bono had visited El Salvador in 1985, and had seen some fairly close combat. This was a central event shaping Bono’s ambivalence toward the U.S., in that the nation could embody both the best and worst human impulses. *U2 by U2*, 177, 184; *Bono in Conversation*, 182.

⁶⁵ A slide is a metal or glass tube slipped over a finger on the left hand, operating like a moveable fret, permitting continuous change of frequency on a string, rather than the discrete changes imposed by frets. The technique is derived from “bottleneck” styles, and strongly associated with Delta blues.

vocal melody in the verses is an E reciting tone with deflections up to G and down to D, the three most characteristic pitches in the E-minor pentatonic scale.

Again, the organization is into simple verse/chorus complexes, but the overall form resolves into another verse/chorus binary with the onset of a spoken section at 2:28. After this, neither verse nor chorus material returns, other than the relentless, repetitive rhythm section. Almost a minute of Bono rapping gives way to an extended guitar solo at 3:19 before another short rap (4:12) concludes the song. In live versions after the *Joshua Tree* tour, additional harmonies were added to the guitar solo, and Edge plays in a Hendrix-esque minor pentatonic style, perhaps to add greater overall contrast. The post-*Joshua Tree* live groove is also often funkier and more punctuated, moving away from the murky, distortion-laden, surreal soundscapes of the *Joshua Tree* version.

This form may have resulted from the final assembly of the song in the studio. Steve Lillywhite recalls (although with some difficulty), that there were two versions of this song that Edge wished to combine. Unfortunately, they were not precisely the same tempo or tuning. While noting that this would now be easy to fix with samplers, in 1986 it was necessary to record one version onto half inch tape, and manually match the tempos. It is possible that one of the versions was actually the STS pre-production version, as both Edge and Bono recall this as one of the songs recorded with the band playing together.⁶⁶

Despite U2's claim to be striving for more coherent structures, the proportions of "Bullet the Blue Sky" are irregular. The verses are consistently eight measure phrases, as determined by the periodic text structure, but the choruses are only six measures each, the

⁶⁶ *Joshua Tree Interview*. While never addressing the question directly, it sounds as though the STS sessions generated ideas rather than usable tracks.

first with a single measure of interlude appended, and the second with two measures added (labeled interludes 1 and 2 respectively).⁶⁷ Interlude 1 is absent in the live version of this song from *Rattle and Hum*, while interlude 2 is extended by two additional measures, thus the proportions of spacer material are, obviously, malleable. The guitar solo is also difficult to parse, as it switches between several moods and textures, ultimately resolving to fifteen measures. This asymmetry does invite speculation that parts of the original STS jam may have been part of one of the two versions ultimately included in the final version.

Track 5: "Running to Stand Still" (D-Major)

Heroin addiction in the poorer areas of Dublin, close to where Bono grew up, was the inspiration for this song. The text "seven towers" refers to a low income housing project consisting of seven towers that Bono could see from his middle-class neighborhood. The musical inspiration apparently came from jams on Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side," and Elton John's "Candle in the Wind," into which U2 would occasionally segue during live versions of "Bad."⁶⁸

The free-time opening evokes rusticity. Guitar strings are plucked, and then brought into tune by turning the pegs, while another fretted instrument is strummed erratically and played with a slide, as though preparing to play something.⁶⁹ Piano chords pulsing on beats 1 and 2+ slowly fade in establishing the slow basic pulse.

⁶⁷ The choruses include an overdub of Edge in the upper left channel singing "sky" on the downbeat. In both choruses, this occurs six times. I have designated int1 and int2 as those measures after which chorus material ends, but before the next well-defined section begins.

⁶⁸ Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 70. Although too long for commercial radio play, "Bad" became a concert highpoint during the *Unforgettable Fire* tour, and at U2's appearance at Live Aid on July 13, 1985.

⁶⁹ This instrument is a very small scale guitar used to create a background rhythm effect of constant strumming, operating more as pitched percussion. Lanois refers to it as "scratch guitar."

This is yet another song based primarily on 2+2 alternations between **I** and **IV** (the legacy from “Bad”), with a refrain at doubled harmonic rhythm alternating **V** and **IV**.

The form is contrasting verse/refrain, but the technique is strophic variation in that the

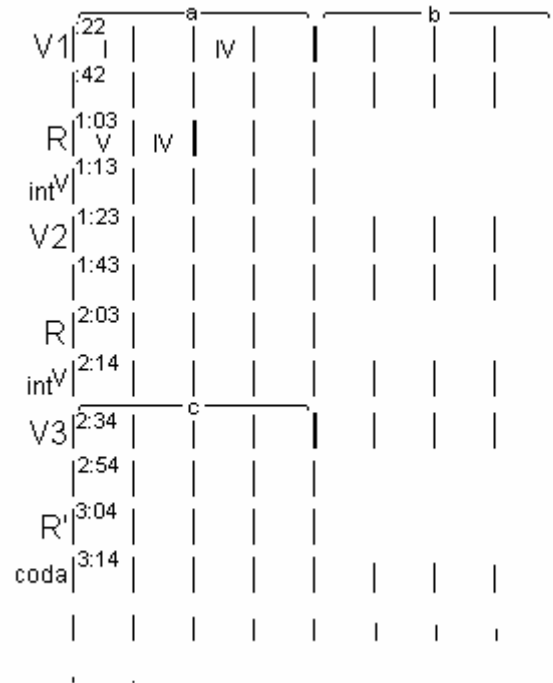


Fig. 5.6: Formal diagram for “Running to Stand Still”

text rhythms change significantly from verse to verse. Verses 1 and 2 are double iterations of an eight-measure unit comprised of a- and b-phrases in 4+4 configuration. Verse 3, however, is quite different, and makes clear the song’s meaning. It is delivered in much shorter, almost breathless segments, primarily on the pitch A, a fifth above the tonic pitches beginning verses 1 and 2. Melodically, it is a triple iteration of a four-measure c-phrase. The accompanying refrain (R', 3:04) abandons the folk-like text “singing: la la la lolly day” of refrains 1 and 2, and delivers the “punchline” text “She suffers the needle chill, she’s running to stand still.” The final verse/refrain complex is also set off from the first two complexes by an eight bar vocal ad-lib verse where the

entry of syncopated drums—mostly toms—thickens the texture for the climactic third complex. Thus, while the form is clear, variable treatment of the text and refrains saves the song from becoming too predictable, yet the reasonably clear form and transparent texture focuses more attention on the lyric than most songs from *Joshua Tree*.

Lanois describes this as one of those “lovely live moments,” where everyone is huddled together.⁷⁰ Edge confirms the song as taking shape very quickly:

I was waiting to do a piano part on another song and started playing some chords to myself. Danny Lanois heard something in it, picked up a guitar and joined in. Pretty soon, Adam, Larry, and Bono were in the room with us. The first improvised version of the tune had almost every musical idea in it, vocal melodies and structure. I think we only played it once or twice more. It had such a strong identity, we just had to get out of its way.⁷¹

This original jam was part of the two-inch master tape, and Bono manages to improvise text to halfway through the second a-phrase on the first take.⁷² He then switches to mostly unintelligible “Bongolese” until the refrain, where the folk-like “la-la-la-lollyday” refrain is also improvised.⁷³

Track 6: “Red Hill Mining Town” (G-Major)

This was another song from the early STS sessions that took a long time to complete.⁷⁴ Mullen’s assessment is that it is one of the “lost songs:” “It was over-

⁷⁰ Chapter 10, *Joshua Tree*, DVD.

⁷¹ Edge, *U2 by U2*, 182.

⁷² Edge plays the master tape, suggesting it was unusual to get that much of a final version in a single, first take. Chapter 10, *Joshua Tree*, DVD.

⁷³ Ibid. “Bongolese” is band slang for the textual content of Bono’s improvised scat singing during rehearsals, jams, improvisations, and when he forgets the words in live performance. This spelling appears in numerous sources. Why it is not “Bonolese” is unknown.

⁷⁴ *U2 by U2*, 172.

produced and underwritten, one of those great ideas that never quite got there.”⁷⁵ Despite Mullen’s lukewarm assessment, there are several unusual features of meriting attention.

The form is essentially contrasting verse/chorus, but there is an introductory section similar to a verse (V’, 0:07), but with unique harmony and melody, and a less well-defined groove than the bulk of the song. The contrast between the verses and choruses is primarily in the vocal register, melody, and a slight rearrangement of the chord progression while the instrumental style remains much the same, particularly the invariant, lurching bass pattern. Another prominent aspect of the texture is the pedal point guitar part on the sixth string which slides down from C to G over the G chord, and D to G over the C chord, although the bass guitar follows the chord changes by playing the respective G and C roots. The transition between sections is achieved through a dramatic pre-chorus highlighted by the entry of a high, ambient guitar arpeggio.

As usual with U2, excessive formal repetition is avoided. There are three iterations of the verse/chorus complex, but variety is achieved by varying the third iteration such that its formal role is not immediately clear. The first eight measures of verse 3 are semi-spoken, and sound initially like a bridge, but the second eight-measure phrase returns to normal verse melody. The pre-chorus, however, has a significant change in that the major **II** chord of the previous two pre-choruses becomes a minor **ii** chord, with a descending synth string line. Also, this final pre-chorus has a different text than the previous two iterations, again making it the “payoff,” just like the unique, final refrain of “Running to Stand Still.” The text at the end of verse 3 and the beginning of the final pre-chorus is also more narratively connected than in the previous iterations. The last four bars of verse 3 have the text: “We wait all day / for night to come,” with the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 184.

word “come” falling on **V** of the pre-chorus. The text continues: “And it comes,” with “comes” on the **ii** chord. Thus the change in harmony highlights the metaphor of night falling giving this pre-chorus a modified function, and additional narrative and musical weight.

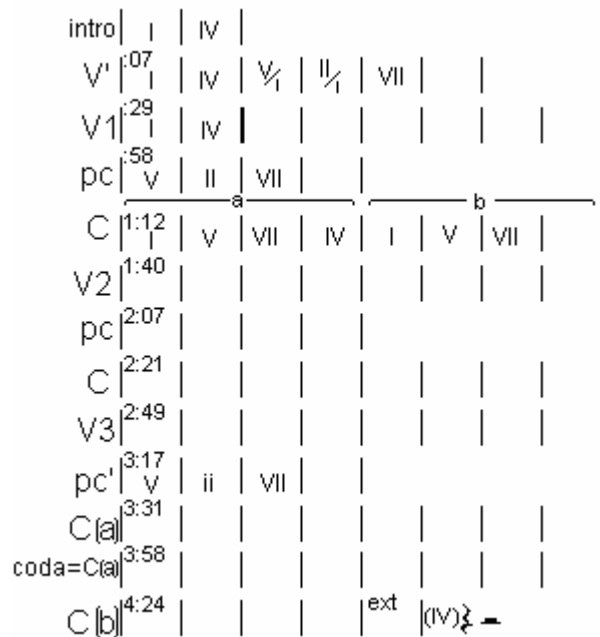


Fig. 5.7: Formal diagram for “Red Hill Mining Town”

The final extended chorus is comprised exclusively of a-phrases with a new melody appearing over an additional eight-measure coda (3:58), which is clearly closing material. The b-phrase of the chorus finally appears at 4:24, and the song is left harmonically open on the subdominant. It is not clear in what sense Mullen considers the song to be “underwritten,” as there is evidence of considerable and subtle craft.

Track 7: “In God’s Country” (D-Major)

This song is in contrasting verse/chorus form, and another of the simpler forms on *Joshua Tree*. It was intended as a fairly straight-ahead rocker, as the album appeared to be heading toward a dearth of such songs. “‘In God’s Country’ was a difficult song to

record, although it's quite a simple throwaway piece.... Making it work and then making it interesting were the two jobs at the time—sometimes we made it work and sometimes we made it interesting.”⁷⁶ Similarly, when Bono was asked which songs on *Joshua Tree* were most fun to record, he recalled: “‘In God’s Country,’ (pauses) no wait, that one was less fun than it sounds.”⁷⁷

It is another song featuring simple alternation of two chords in the verses—this time **I** and **v**. The contrasting first chorus begins on **ii**, in alternation with quick changes from **IV** to **I**. The driving echoic guitar of the verses gives way to more sustained chords, and the bass rhythm changes from a syncopated figure to repeated eighth notes, and Edge adds a high vocal harmony. A short, four-measure intⁱ leads into the second verse/chorus complex, which is a near replication of the first. However, the harmony of chorus 2 is

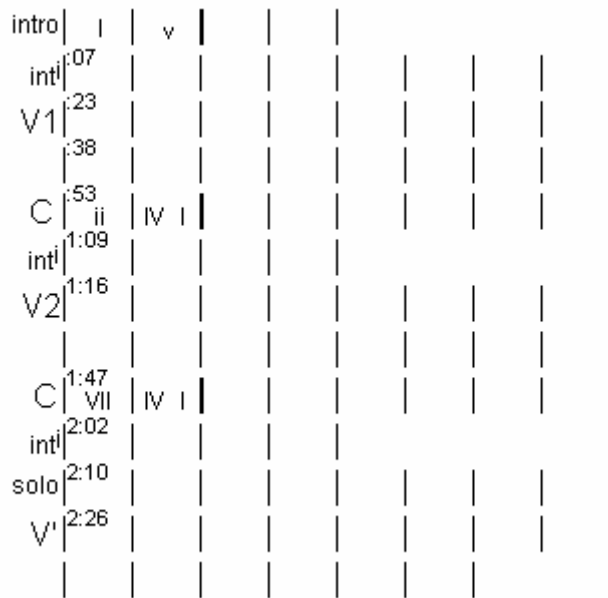


Fig. 5.8: Formal diagram for “In God’s Country”

⁷⁶ Clayton, *U2 by U2*, 182.

⁷⁷ Bono, *Joshua Tree Interview*.

slightly different, with **VII** replacing **ii** throughout. Inattention may keep this change from becoming immediately obvious, and it may reflect two versions of the chorus harmony that were available, and, in typical U2 fashion, rather than select one version over the other, they used both. The choruses also behave in somewhat un-chorus-like fashion by having slightly different texts, but unified by the double iterations of the title as a textual refrain. Nonetheless, the contrast from the verses, and the lift provided by additional vocals and faster harmonic rhythm give these sections the unmistakable function of a chorus. The confusion was apparent to Clayton: “I could never quite figure out why the chords for the two choruses were actually completely different, but there you go. The choruses were different, so I guess that means that they weren’t really choruses.”⁷⁸ Clayton was (most likely) joking, but it does indicate that U2 had certainly absorbed songwriting conventions over the years, as well as an awareness that they tended not to follow them particularly well, likely not as a conscious songwriting strategy, but through sheer force of habit dating to the band’s earliest rehearsal methods.

Track 8: “Trip Through Your Wires” (G-Major)

Yet more premonitions of *Rattle and Hum* are heard in this song, an irregular verse/refrain form. The style is a medium tempo country-blues in compound meter. The song was premiered on a television show in 1986, before the *Joshua Tree* sessions were truly underway, and reflected Bono’s new interest in American blues and country music.⁷⁹ This was a pre-composed song of Bono’s in the style of Bob Dylan, and was brought into the STS sessions for arrangement rather than composition, as would “Silver

⁷⁸ *U2 by U2*, 182.

⁷⁹ Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 73-4; *U2 by U2*, 172.

and Gold,” another attempt by Bono to participate in the tradition of the singer/songwriter.⁸⁰ Edge, who claims to have the most European sensibilities in the group, had difficulty finding his niche on this song until near the end, despite the others being very enthusiastic from the outset.⁸¹

The verse is marked by two distinct textures—solo and duo vocals. The first verse begins with the duo texture consisting of a lead voice and a high, harmony by Edge singing the same text. The melodic rhythms of the solo and duo text are also distinct. Again, the verses unfold over a rather static double-plagal progression of **I - VII - IV**, comprised of two beats of **I** and one beat each of **VII** and **IV** so that the rapidly descending **VII - IV** function as passing harmonies. The refrain is harmonically contrasting, commencing on **IV** and moving via **I** to **♭III**—a chord not yet heard on *Joshua Tree*—and concluding on **IV**, which resolves plagally to **I** in the verse. Both refrains are preceded by a verse duo with the same text, thus these duo sections function similarly to pre-choruses (particularly as the duo texture is thicker). The duos that begin and close the song, however, have unique texts. The irregularity and unpredictability in text length, text repetition, and musical texture lends greater formal variety to an otherwise relatively stylistically derivative song.

⁸⁰ Bono was in New York to participate in the Artists Against Apartheid project when Steve Lillywhite invited him to drop by the studio where he was producing the latest Rolling Stones record. While jamming with Keith Richards and Mick Jagger, Bono was asked what songs he could sing. Embarrassed at realizing that he really only knew U2 songs, he wrote the roots-styled song “Silver and Gold” later that night. He recorded it with several of the Rolling Stones shortly afterward, and did another version with U2 during the *Joshua Tree* tour, releasing it as a B-side to “Where the Streets Have No Name.” A live version also appears on the film and record versions of *Rattle and Hum*. There are many more or less consistent accounts of this story. See Bono’s recollection in *U2 by U2*, 169.

⁸¹ Edge, *Joshua Tree Interview*.

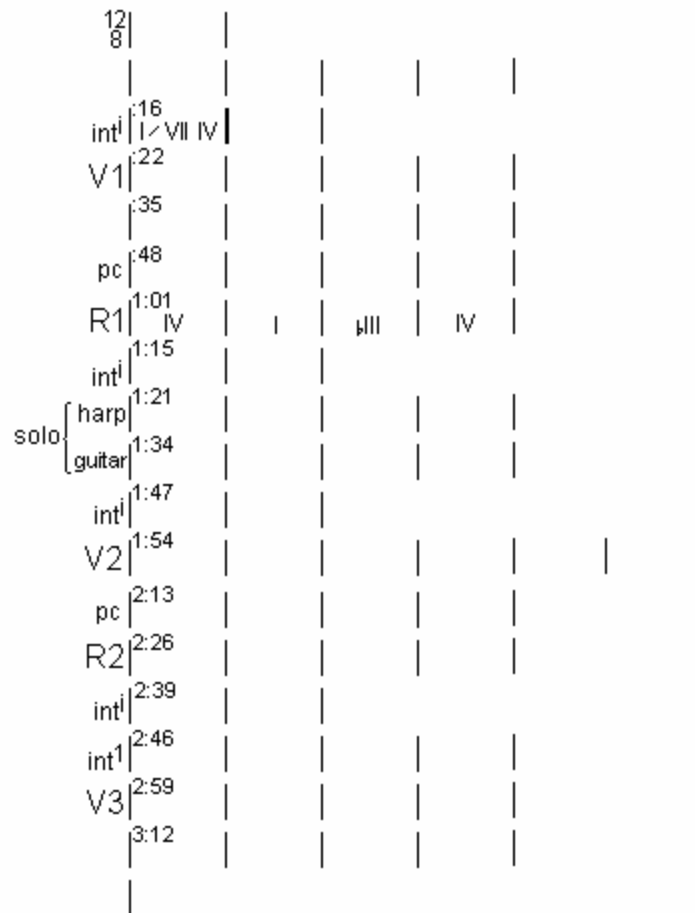


Fig. 5.9: Formal diagram for “Trip Through Your Wires”

Further variety is added by having two instrumental solos, the first by Bono on harmonica (1:21), and the second on electric guitar (1:34). The harmonica solo is a clear link to the style of American blues and folk, and an obvious nod toward Bob Dylan, with whom Bono would co-write “Love Rescue Me” one year later, and included on *Rattle and Hum*.

Track 9: “One Tree Hill” (C-Major)

This song is something of a little-known center-piece for the album, and, in fact, was the first single from the album, although released only in New Zealand. The song was written as a tribute to Greg Carroll (1960-1986), a Maori whom the band met while

on tour in New Zealand in September, 1984,⁸² and who became Bono's personal assistant and close friend during the run-up to recording *The Joshua Tree*. Carroll was tragically killed in Dublin in July, 1986, in a motorcycle accident while on an errand for Bono, an event that shook the band deeply.⁸³ The One-Tree Hill is the highest of five volcanic islands that make up Auckland, New Zealand, and Bono had been taken there by Carroll on his first night in there.

This is yet another song using the double plagal progression, this time in reverse order from that of "Trip Through Your Wires." The form is contrasting verse/chorus. The introduction provides little clue regarding what is to follow. The syncopated melody is distinctly non-Western and, doubtless, intended to evoke Carroll's Maori heritage. Not until the tutti texture at 0:31 do we get the bass guitar entry that clarifies the simple **I - IV** harmony. The verses are organized into eight-measure phrases in a 4+4 a/b configuration, with the progression: **a = I - I - IV - IV**, and **b = VII - IV - I - I**. The choruses are also organized 4+4, but with harmony identical to verse b-phrases. There is a twenty-four measure interlude (2:36) which reproduces the progressions from intⁱ and int^v, although they are texturally reduced. Atmospheric synthesized sounds flesh out this interlude, but it is not of an instrumental solo nature, but rather functions more like a bridge of low contrast; a moment of reflection before the final verse. There are three verse/chorus complexes, with the first verse consisting of three eight-measure units, and the other two of only two units; a front-heavy arrangement seen many times already in the discussions of *Achtung Baby* and *Boy*. Also familiar from other songs, the final chorus has multiple, improvised repeats forming an extended coda. Halfway through the

⁸² Pimm Jal de la Parra, *U2 Live!: A Concert Documentary*, repr. ed. 1997 (London: Omnibus, 1997), 34.

⁸³ The *Joshua Tree* is dedicated to Carroll. This dedication is the final item of text on the album insert.

coda, an improvised guitar solo enters to further thicken the coda texture. An unusual feature is the ametric, gospel styled postscript that fades in after the full close. Bono

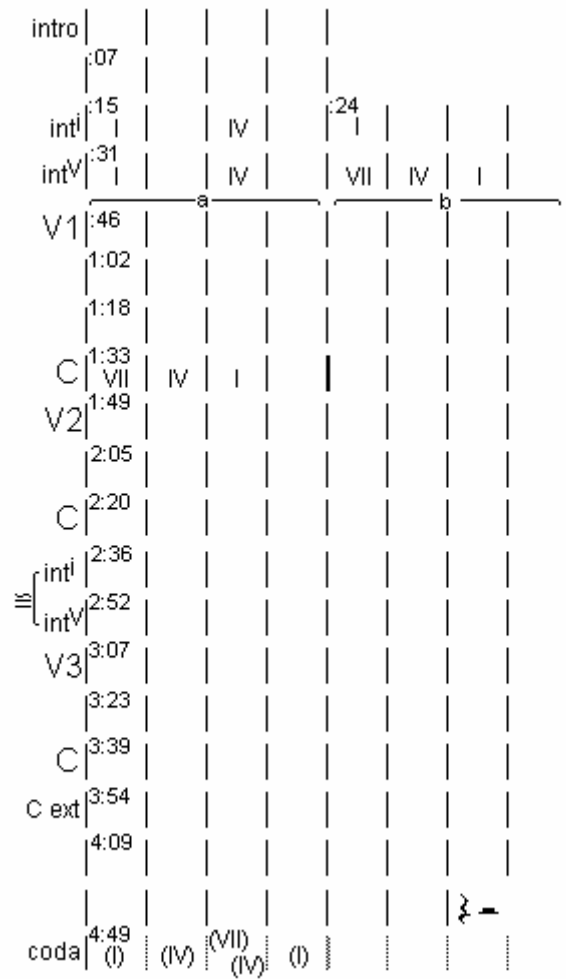


Fig. 5.10: Formal diagram for "One Tree Hill"

sings: "O great ocean, O great sea. Come to the ocean, come to the sea," backed by a small gospel choir. The harmony further evokes a final prayer, utilizing the same chords as the rest of the song, but in a different sequence and closing on a **I - IV** plagal cadence.

Track 10: “Exit” (E-Minor)

Like the Beatles’ “Helter Skelter,” this song inspired a deranged person to stalk and kill a celebrity.⁸⁴ Easily the darkest U2 song written to this point, Bono had reservations about putting it on the album.⁸⁵ This is one of very few U2 songs cast in an unambiguous minor key, and the only one from *The Joshua Tree*.⁸⁶ Once again, the harmony is quite static with a repeating **i - i - VI - III** progression. The song fades in with the bass playing root position eighth notes over atmospheric background sounds.

Daniel Lanois describes a typical U2 recording situation where there are two rooms:

...one quiet and communicative, the other just the loud band room where things get out of control sonically, in a good way—you don’t know what it is anymore, it just takes on a life of its own, and it makes people do things. This track came out of the loud band room. It was like a long jam, and there was this one section of it that had some kind of magic to it and we decided to turn it into something.⁸⁷

The jam itself resulted from an exercise to evoke a mood and a place.⁸⁸ The song was reportedly inspired by Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song*, based on the life of killer Gary Gilmore.⁸⁹ Precisely what aspect of the Gilmore tragedy is evoked in “Exit” is impossible to say, but the affect is certainly U2’s most introspectively menacing (in

⁸⁴ In October, 1991, “a disturbed young man called Robert Bardo told a Los Angeles court that ‘Exit’ had driven him to murder actress Rebecca Schaeffer. A plea of insanity saved him from the death penalty.” See Stephen Dalton, “How the West was Won,” *Uncut*, 8 September 2003, 53.

⁸⁵ *Joshua Tree Interview*.

⁸⁶ “Bullet the Blue Sky” is ambiguous, despite Bono frequently singing the minor third; blues often has the soloist sounding the minor third against the major third of the accompanists.

⁸⁷ Chapter 9, *Joshua Tree*, DVD. Zak discusses the great frequency with which producers use the word “magic” to describe a moment where things come together in the studio; *Poetics*, chapter 1, passim.

⁸⁸ Edge, Chapter 9, *Joshua Tree*, DVD.

⁸⁹ “How the West was Won,” 54.

contrast to the much more extroverted “Bullet the Blue Sky”), and mirrors Mailer’s terse prose depiction of Gilmore becoming ever more disconnected, reckless, and enraged.⁹⁰

As is often the case with U2’s more harmonically static songs, the form is ambiguous. There are elements of simple verse form, as there are four eight-measure iterations of text. The first two are separated by an eight-measure interlude that continues

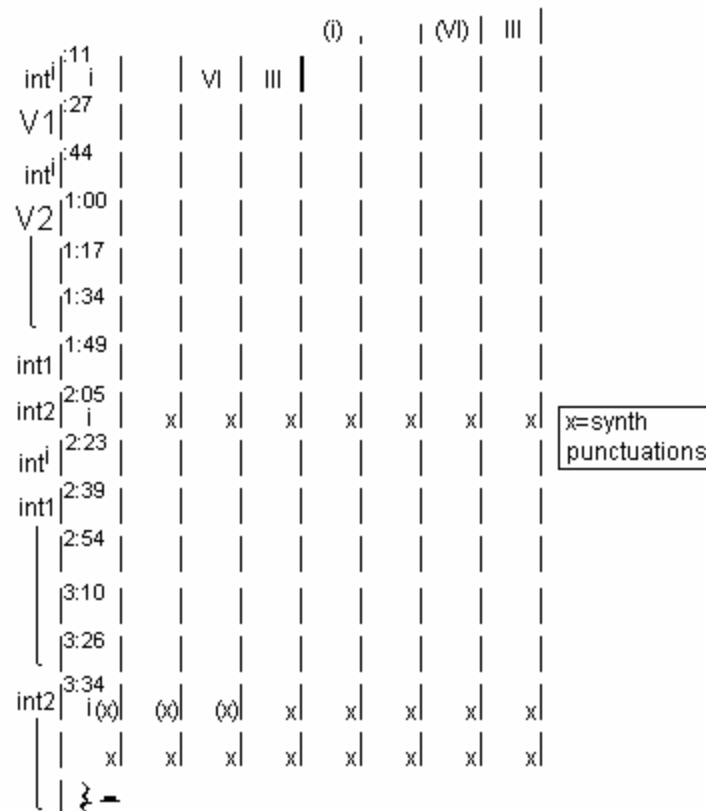


Fig. 5.11: Formal diagram for “Exit”

on the introduction material. The texture gradually thickens as more instruments enter and the vocal register also jumps an octave as the intensity increases. There are elements of binary form as well. A full tutti interlude (int1) commences at 1:49 for eight measures before a sudden return to a reduced texture, but with deep, eerie E synthesizer pulses on beat four of every measure (int2). Another eight measures of intⁱ (2:23) leads into

⁹⁰ See Norman Mailer, *The Executioner’s Song* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1979), chapter 12.

extended reprises of int1 and int2. At no point after the tutti interlude of 1:49 is there a return to the verse style of the first half of the song. The majority of the song is an unpredictable, asymmetric succession of related, but distinct, interludes. As was the case for “With or Without You,” form is articulated largely through two long crescendos, a front-loaded text, and changes in Bono’s vocal dynamic and register.

Lanois’ recollection was that this song was part of a much longer jam. It is easy to imagine Lanois staying late after the session to “bang off a few cassettes,” just as he wished to do after one of the longer days working on “Pride,” and assembling different parts of the jam into a song structure, but one that eschews most structural conventions of popular song in favor of representing a mood, a place, or a state of mind. In the future, if a sketch started tending toward the disturbing, it was common to suggest that it was moving into “Exit” territory.

Track 11: “Mothers of the Disappeared” (A-Major)

The theme of American involvement in Central and South America continues with this song eulogizing the “Disappeared”—citizens of Argentina who vanished during the reign of the army. The song is a lament for the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of the May Square), an organization attempting to shed light on Pinochet’s death squads, and the fate of their victims. The U.S. was complicit in this government and turned a blind eye toward the blatant human rights abuses perpetrated by the regime, further reflecting the dichotomy that America represented to U2.⁹¹ Their involvement with Amnesty International, and specifically with the Conspiracy of Hope tour in 1986

⁹¹ See “The Enduring Chill: Bono and the Two Americas,” *Propaganda* 4, 1 December 1986, reprinted in *U2: Best of Propaganda*, 66-7.

inspired works in this vein. While on tour in Chile in 1998, the Mothers of the May Square were brought on stage during the song.

This is another song where the harmony is implied more than stated. Strange, disturbing scratching sounds fade in, and are joined by a distant, syncopated octave ostinato in a low register, sounding similar to slap bass technique, but which is actually a drum loop created by running the drums through a digital reverb.⁹² Rapid, echoic, ametric snare drum reports evoke gunfire bursts in the distance. The main melody enters with the tutti texture of intⁱ (0:51). The melody is organized into eight measures in a 2+2+4 arrangement. The second half of this melody implies movement to the dominant, but the bass remains on the tonic for the introduction. As the verse enters (1:28), the bass sketches out a rapid **V - vi - IV** figure, mostly in second inversion, at the beginning of the second half of the main melody, but this harmony is never really confirmed by any other instrument, or by the vocal. Its strong diatonic quality is, however, consistent with the clear periodic melody, and with the folk-song style of the vocal.

The form is best described as simple verse. There are two verses in 8+8 configuration, followed by a subdominant extension (int1) of eight measures of 2+2 **IV-I** alternation with Bono singing high “Oos.” This is followed by eight measures of tonic (int2) with a short, pentatonic minor guitar riff, again sounding very distant within the texture. The entire complex then repeats, with the subdominant verse extension repeated two additional times for the coda, before the song fades away as elements drop out, leaving only the ostinato that brought the song in. Like “Exit,” this song consists

⁹² Chapter 6, *Joshua Tree*, DVD. Lanois describes the unit as a (Lexicon) PCM 70, with which Eno had acquired sufficient dexterity to be able to dial up chord changes on the fly.

substantially of a series of interludes, and, as is often the case with the albums of U2's maturity, the second half is composed of less discrete song forms.

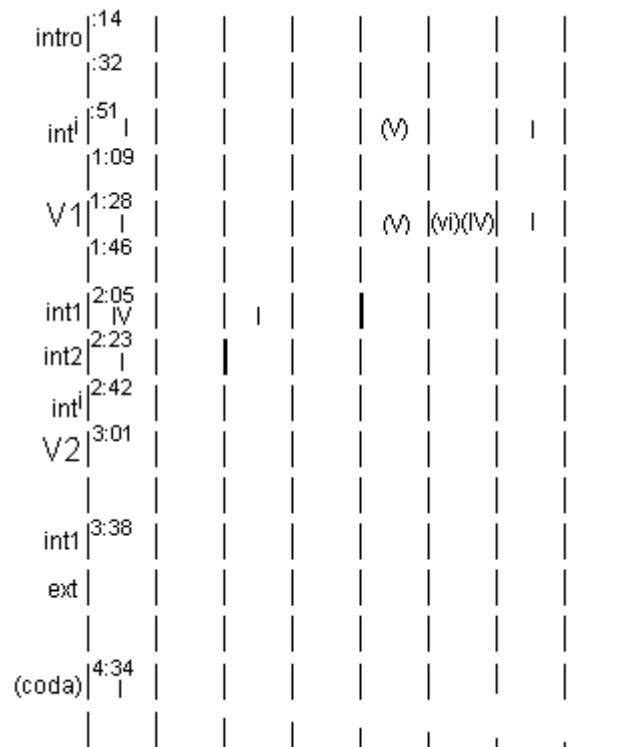


Fig. 5.12: Formal diagram for "Mothers of the Disappeared"

The subdominant extension might be described as an instrumental bridge, but it fails to provide any real contrast with the verses, and the high wail of Bono is consistent with the quality of lament permeating the song. The *Joshua Tree* ends on this sorrowful, unresolved note, dealing with America only tangentially, but perhaps maintaining the desert metaphor in its most familiar sense—desolation, harshness, and permanence.

Conclusion

Retaining Lanois and Eno to produce *The Unforgettable Fire* is often hailed as U2's first change of style, but it is arguable that these producers simply redirected U2 toward procedures and styles that were already latent in their musical inclinations and

abilities. Lanois was pivotal in continuing to push the musical/performative aspect of the band. Eno, on the other hand, was able to indulge (perhaps too much at times) a residual taste for post-punk avant-garde that had otherwise virtually disappeared from the commercial music scene by 1984. This included foregrounding the so-called ambient style, for which Eno was well known, and even using some improvised material on “Elvis Presley and America,” with Bono’s improvised vocal over half-speed beds for “The Unforgettable Fire,” and “4th of July,” which was an instrumental jam between Clayton and Edge amusing themselves with a synthesized treatment originally intended for Bono’s vocal; they were not aware they were being recorded.

Lanois and Eno were, in fact, quite unlike one another, and brought different strengths to the creative process. Bono eloquently sums up their respective roles:

...Brian arrives, looking how you might imagine an architect of the Eighties to look, leather tie, leather jacket, his chrome dome of a head, piercing eyes, and something we didn’t see an awful lot in him, but it was there: humility. And he put himself at our disposal. This great artist and superb strategist went to work for these rather uncouth Irish musicians. He had his friend at his side, Daniel Lanois, who had more music in his little finger than Brian had in every appendage. A truly funk soul brother, the skinny white guy in every funky band, a guy who reeks of music.

The combination was deadly. Larry and Adam, as insecure as they were in the studio, suddenly stated to warm to this Canadian, this Danny Boy, who just brought out the best in them. Myself and Edge, who were more cerebral, were attracted by Brian’s ideas. Every great rock band in the British invasion went to art school. We never did, we went to Brian.... He catalyzed our songwriting, allowed us to get away from the primary colors of rock into another world where we could really describe ourselves in what was going on around us. It was monumental.⁹³

Both producers can be heard all over *The Unforgettable Fire* and *The Joshua Tree* (and on *Achtung Baby*). Most synthesizer treatments, which make up a considerable component of the “sonic mass” of *The Unforgettable Fire*, and which were part of the sheer density of some tracks on *The Joshua Tree*, including the ostensibly “traditional” gospel songs “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” and “Where the Streets Have No Name,” were by Eno. Similarly, many instrumental parts were conceived and

⁹³ *U2 by U2*, 151.

played by Lanois, with each contributing some background vocals. As Zak has chronicled, the modern studio situation severely blurs the role boundaries between the various recordists.

Although *The Joshua Tree* was originally intended to represent an effort to hone U2's art of "the song," following their less focused effort on *The Unforgettable Fire*, it is difficult to argue that they were successful in confining themselves to song idioms. While some songs on the album are exceptionally transparent, others retain the U2 signature compositional style of blending formal functions, and of occasionally negating form altogether. Simplicity on *The Joshua Tree* is most reflected in the preponderance of rock's classic "three chords"; **I**, **IV**, and **V** (with **VII** making frequent appearances). The harmonic palette is even more limited than usual, providing the simplest possible scaffold for the primary signifying layer, namely the dense, shimmering surfaces, intended to evoke actual locations, moods, and states of mind. The jams generating the songs may have been attempts at achieving derivative simplicity, but the greatest interest in *The Joshua Tree*—and the key to its success—resides in the lush, evocative textures, more poetic lyrics, and the usual impassioned delivery.

As an album straddling the continuum of compositional procedure, it is noteworthy that one song composed prior to its committal to tape, namely "Trip Through your Wires," features some of the more "exotic" chord progressions on the album.⁹⁴ Of course, a lone Bono and an acoustic guitar possess a diminished timbral arsenal compared to a state-of-the-art recording studio directed by two technological virtuosi like Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno. Thus, somewhat predictably, Bono's forays into the

⁹⁴ Although the (b)**III** – **IV** progression appeared frequently on *Boy*.

singer/songwriter tradition relied more on traditional songwriting devices, such as harmonic variety, and narrative texts to maintain a level of musical interest.

There were some practical problems attendant to having Eno and Lanois on board. So lush and adorned with overdubs were some of the tracks from *The Unforgettable Fire* that most of the songs were impossible to play live without some technological support (thus U2 entered the era of sequencers and click tracks as a standard part of live performing).

Another potential downside was that the emphasis on spontaneous expression resulted in some songs, such as “Bad” and “Pride,” being left, in Bono’s opinion, substantially unfinished:

The album was really good, but it was uneven. The lyrics weren’t up to much because Brian, Danny, and Edge weren’t very interested in lyrics. They wanted to preserve my ‘Bongolese.’ ... And I, like an idiot, went along with it, and so I never finished great songs like ‘Bad.’ Classics like ‘Pride (in the Name of Love)’ are left as simple sketches.⁹⁵

It is not surprising, then, that *The Joshua Tree* had to be more focused, and that the ethos of experimentation had to be reigned in (although “Running to Stand Still” from *The Joshua Tree* is half improvised). The quest for simplicity was timely, as U2 were in the process of exploring their musical roots in America, although there is an element of irony in that, like many UK and Irish rockers, they looked to American roots music without necessarily acknowledging that European folk musics figured prominently in American folk styles, particularly in terms of melody, harmony, and form.

Despite the change in direction, Steve Lillywhite was still part of the scene during *The Joshua Tree* sessions, occasionally being brought in to lend his pop sensibilities to the mixing of songs that were proving troublesome (a practice continued on *Achtung*

⁹⁵ *U2 by U2*, 151.

Baby). In fact, Lillywhite's wife, Kirsty MacColl,⁹⁶ set the running order for *The Joshua Tree*, apparently just to keep herself busy while everyone else was frantically involved with mixing songs before the deadline.⁹⁷

Some elements of style are evident across all the albums considered. The atypical roles played by the rhythm section, the frequent harmonically ambiguous interactions between independent bass and guitar lines, and the pervasive formal murkiness on songs such as “With or Without You” or “Red Hill Mining Town,” which closely resemble the kinds of forms seen both on *Boy*, and eleven years later on *Achtung Baby*. Within the constant desire for change and growth—whether in pursuit of radio success in 1984, or a almost-too-successful second attempt in 1987, or to simply survive and bypass the hardening of their overly earnest image expressed by a jaded media in 1991—there is considerable stability in U2's aural identity, and the compositional methods that express that identity, acquired through necessity in their earliest days.

⁹⁶ MacColl was a singer/songwriter with significant UK success, and likely best known in North America for her duet with Shane MacGowan of the Pogues, on “Fairytale of New York” from *If I Should Fall From Grace With God* (Island, 1988), produced by Lillywhite.

⁹⁷ *U2 by U2*, 185.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of rock music's history as viewed from the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, it would be difficult to argue that any rock band has been more at the forefront of rock for the last twenty-five years than U2. However, unlike several of their forebears, such as the Elvis Presley, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and the like, U2 do not have the profile, or the catalogue of classics possessed by such groups. Even people who despise "Stairway to Heaven," "Satisfaction," or "Love Me Tender" at least know them—it is even difficult to imagine a casual rock listener not knowing these songs well. Yet, the songs and albums of U2 remain something of a specialty taste. Part of the problem—a problem that likely pleases the band—is that U2 often defy easy classification within the myriad styles encompassing rock and pop.

This dissertation has presented models of U2's developing creative process; a set of practices that originated out of a naïve post-punk aesthetic and was aided by rapidly developing technology. Their signature album of the 1990s, *Achtung Baby*, routinely cited as one of rock's greatest albums, provides concrete examples of U2's oft-described compositional process, where recorded sketches are painstakingly developed and molded into final form. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, this process was not so much a result of studio craft, but rather was further enabled by it. In fact, the earliest songs from *Boy*, written and performed before they were ever recorded, show that U2's idiosyncratic approach to, and understanding of, the entity of the rock song was firmly in

place from their earliest stages, and mostly an amalgam born of their musical inexperience, and inspiration from a cohort of slightly older musicians—the Sex Pistols, the Clash, Joy Division, the Fall, the Skids. Underpinning this approach was the unavoidable influence of classic rock, variably absorbed by the members of U2. Since they were initially not skilled enough to do competent covers, and had somewhat divergent tastes, they wrote their own songs reflecting issues pertinent to their own young lives. However, they were not really “qualified” to write songs in a traditional sense either. That they were able to do so reasonably well points to a certain prodigiousness—a song like “Out of Control” (their first single, although only in Ireland) is an almost textbook AABA form, whereas an even older song like “Another Time, Another Place” has a peculiar binary structure, despite both halves being based on the same descending bass line. This last aspect is one of the most consistently defining characteristics of U2’s aesthetic of song; they are more inclined than most rock artists to combine related material in song sections which should, by definition, or at least in practice, be contrasting. They likely acquired this habit in the creative crucible of the Mullen’s kitchen, and later in the rehearsal space they managed to secure at their “alternative” school. They have often stated that they were collectively able to get results that would never have been achieved on their own, and that their style is the result of an abnormally insular development. When one considers the tens, or hundreds, of thousands, if not millions of garage bands over the last five decades incapable of producing good, or even interesting music, that the odd U2, R.E.M. or Pixies should emerge out of the surrounding detritus is almost inevitable.

U2's music is characterized by a dearth of typical songwriter gestures. For example, harmonic conventions such as the **IV** - **iv** progression, appearing in countless songs (even Aerosmith's "Crazy") is the type of referential harmonic gesture anathema to U2. There are no **I** - **vi** - **IV** - **V** progressions in the U2 catalog (although they covered "Unchained Melody" during the "Zoo TV" tour).¹ There are no Chuck Berry riffs, no Hammond B3 organs. Even Bono's excessive use of the word "Baby" in *Achtung Baby* is mostly ironic (although not completely, as that would make the message too clear).

The exceptions to U2's avoidance of quotation—or even pastiche—are R&B and folk, with the recognition that blues and country share roots with Celtic folk music. Bono often emulates soul singers, but irony inheres in a white (actually ruddy) Irishman transmogrifying into the aural image of a rotund, female soul singer. By the time of *The Joshua Tree*, U2 had learned a lot about song conventions. Bono recounts being shaken by his 1985 encounter with Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (who were recording *Dirty Work* with Steve Lillywhite producing), where he was unable to fulfill their request that he sing some of his favorite songs, which convinced him that some traditional chops would not hurt. He therefore experimented with emulating more conventional pop styles. On at least two occasions, Bono attempted to craft songs in a certain style; one for Frank Sinatra, and another for Roy Orbison. These songs are competent (and, in fact, the song for Orbison is a homage to his style), but less interesting than anything the band has generated.² "Love is Blindness," for example, is a more interesting take on the European

¹ Words by Hy Zaret, music by Alex North.

² The Sinatra song was "One Shot of Happy, Two Shots of Sad," and the Orbison song (co-written with Edge) was "She's a Mystery to Me," released on Orbison's comeback album *Mystery Girl* (1989). Bono recorded a duet with Sinatra and struck up an unlikely friendship, but Sinatra never recorded "One Shot of Happy, Two Shots of Sad."

torch-song tradition, while “The Wanderer” from *Zooropa*, sung by Johnny Cash, is a respectful, surprisingly powerful parody of traditional country.

But, if there is a scarcity of traditional craft, what makes the music compelling? Perhaps the best analogy is that the punks and post-punks achieved a kind of rock Expressionism. In many U2 songs, the text pours out in an almost improvisatory fashion. “One,” for example, constantly flirts with parallel text structures, but there is always an anomaly, creating an overall impression of text being improvised (an observation according well with their recollection that the song came together quickly). Similarly the text structures of many songs on *Boy* are quite irregular (such as the verses and chorus transition on “Another Time Another Place,” or the verses on “A Day Without Me”), and some songs on *The Unforgettable Fire* and *The Joshua Tree* were, in fact, partially improvised.

What would Adorno have made of this? In his opinion, Schönberg’s greatest works were those from his so-called expressionist period, such as *Erwartung*, and, to a lesser extent, *Die glückliche Hand*, works unconstrained by system, and operating independently of the culture industry. Would U2’s developmental methods, their thwarting of formal expectations, their relative remove from the culture industry (despite their best efforts to succeed within it), their youth, and their desire to address emotional and social issues close to their hearts render them less subject to Adorno’s critique of standardization and commodification?

Bono picks up on the ethos of Expressionism. He describes U2’s music as “ecstatic, gauche, un-cool, but with a kind of highness.”³ The epithet “Christian Rock”

³ Bono, Chapter 3, *Joshua Tree*, DVD.

usually evokes a sense of dread in the non-Christian listener, as it so often tends toward unsubtle clichés about being pulled from the depths of despair and wickedness by the simple expedient of seeing the light; there is often an element of having hit absolute rock bottom. U2, on the other hand, tend toward the uplifting. If punk dwelt on what was not possible (“there’s no future for you,” warn the Sex Pistols in “Anarchy in the UK”), U2 were about what was possible (to paraphrase another Bono-byte from the early 80s).

U2 may not have had the skills to emulate other artists, but in the aftermath of punk, they were not overly anxious to do so in any event, and consciously tried to forge a distinctive style. There was a certain freedom in realizing that one no longer had to be a music school graduate to be a rock musician. As a power trio (at least instrumentally), they were defined primarily by high guitar lines, blending open and fretted notes, usually operating two or more octaves over the bass. This opened up a considerable mid-range registral gap.⁴ Edge has suggested that this defining texture was partly from necessity in order to avoid the muddy sound he got on his Gibson Explorer if he strayed too much into open-position chords. While Clayton often holds down chords in root position punk chug, he also ventures high up the neck (see “Twilight,” “The Ocean,” “Pride”), a favored technique amongst the punks and particularly the post-punks such as Peter Hook, bassist for Joy Division. Edge remarks:

Adam was another reason my guitar playing developed the way it did. He was such an unorthodox bass player, and Larry and myself, in an attempt to make it work, developed our mutual styles to accommodate Adam’s approach. In some ways, Larry and I were like the rhythm section and Adam’s really forceful bass playing was almost like the lead, it was very much out in the forefront.⁵

⁴ See Moore, *Primary Text*, 162-4, for a good overview of U2’s style to the end of the 80s.

⁵ Edge, *U2 by U2*, 72. Bootleg recordings of pre-*Boy* live gigs indeed have Clayton’s bass very high in the mix, almost acting as a lead instrument at times.

Clayton makes similar observations:

On the early records, it was really just a case of Edge and Larry struggling to keep the whole thing together. We were all surviving on minimal technique, and the formula in those early days was 4/4 bass over a relatively complex beat from Larry, with Edge doing his arpeggios over the top. But by the time we got to *War*, the songs were more structured, and the bass sound was featured more. Also, I suppose by then I could actually play things in time -- and in tune -- so I was able to be a bit more melodic.⁶

Mullen, as a self-taught drummer, developed an unusual style that is more active than most drummers, making greater use of the toms, with less emphasis on the typical snare backbeat, and infrequent use of the ride cymbal or hi-hat for marking time. The drum mix is generally drier and, therefore, smaller than most 80s drums.⁷ Naturally, one of the most defining aspects of a band's sound is the lead vocalist, and Bono has his own distinctive style as well. He sings mostly in the high tenor range, but in a half spoken recitative with almost continuous rubato (which is why his vocal is almost never double-tracked). His voice is clearly not trained, and while he often circles around a pitch, he does sing well in tune. Edge has a range and timbre very similar to Bono's, so he often sings live those parts that Bono overdubs in the studio, such as the Fat Lady. Mullen and Clayton rarely sing, although Mullen sings the chorus hook "I feel numb" on "Numb" from *Zooropa*.

U2's conception of song form is obviously informed by what they heard growing up, but they treat it less consistently than most rock bands. While song sections recur, they do so often in irregular proportions, and often without any large-scale repetition, so that sections sometimes follow in different orders, have different lengths, or they blend

⁶ "Reluctant Rock Star," 55.

⁷ Compare the U2 drum sound to almost any reverb-soaked power ballad of the 80s. Zak suggests that an important influence on 80s drum production was the "Phil Collins" sound originating in Peter Gabriel's "Intruder" from *Peter Gabriel III* (Collins, a former band mate of Gabriel's from Genesis, was a guest musician). See Zak *Poetics*, 79-80.

functions. This serves to undermine predictability, and, ultimately, the notion of form itself. Yet, they manage to cast some songs in absolutely prototypical form. “Pride,” and “Until the End of the World” are classic AABA forms, and “Ultraviolet” is a rather Beatlesque AABA(BA), but they have a fondness for AAABA forms as well (“Out of Control” (AAaBA), “I Will Follow,” “So Cruel,” and the clearest example, “Tryin’ to Throw Your Arms Around the World”). Both sketches for “Lady with the Spinning Head” and “Even Better Than the Real Thing” were AAABA forms as well, so the relatively large number of such forms may have resulted from a tendency to sketch front-loaded bed tracks. After so much A material, no wonder they may have been inclined to develop B material afterward. And if the last A-section gradually becomes an A-prime, the more “prime” it becomes, the more likely one is to end up with elements of binary structure.

U2 give variable treatments to song sections. In some case the first verse/chorus complex is the longest (“A Day Without Me,” “Out of Control,” “One Tree Hill,” “Take You Down,” “The Fly”) but, less often, it is the shortest (“Ultraviolet”). Occasionally, the first verse/chorus complex skips the chorus (“I Will Follow,” “Twilight,” “Another Time, Another Place,” “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses,” and “So Cruel”). In some of the binaries, the text is front-loaded (“Shadows and Tall Trees,” and “Exit”) suggesting that the songs were rather short to begin with, and that the form was fleshed out afterward with alternate realizations of A-section material, or by raiding an earlier sketch for additional material, thereby generating the binary structure. By the time of *Achtung Baby*, U2 were releasing B-sides that were clearly alternate versions of songs from the album.

U2's tendency to surround themselves with open-minded recordists, and their signing to a non-interventionist record company, have permitted them to work largely as they see fit. They have apparently never been subjected to external pressure to have hits conforming to a given format or style. In fact, as a prototypical "underground" college band in the mid 80s, it is somewhat surprising that they, and R.E.M., were able to become two of the most successful acts of the 90s, particularly as the grunge style rose around them. While remaining outside the mainstream, they were essentially able to become their own genre and a parallel, independent mainstream.

Despite exploiting the possibilities of the recording studio, and unlike the Beatles who quit touring partly because they could no longer reproduce their recorded works live, U2 continued to tour extensively, often making little use of pre-recorded reinforcement.⁸ In a sense, they had to learn to cover themselves before embarking on tour (sometimes with poor results—both the *Unforgettable Fire* and "Popmart" (1997) tours began badly). Returning to questions of aesthetics addressed in Chapter Two, this results in songs becoming ontologically thinner. Even U2 feel free to make significant changes in their interpretations of their own work. The sketching process of U2 suggests that while the *recordings* are ontologically thicker than much rock music, relying so heavily on carefully crafted surface phenomena that different mixes can fundamentally change the nature of the record, the songs themselves are much less so, with the record simply representing one of innumerable potential versions of the song.

Flanagan, while waxing somewhat purple, notes:

What impressed me in watching how U2 write was their willingness to change direction in a moment and follow the music wherever it led them. They could be working on a song for days and

⁸ Although, in some cases—particularly from 1997 on—they used substantial pre-recorded reinforcement.

have it just about done, when suddenly Adam would try a different bass lick, Larry would switch his drum beat around to go with it, Bono would get a new idea for a lyric and—fast as that—they were gone, the almost finished song abandoned while U2 chased down a new one. I have never seen songwriters less worried about nailing a song down and being done with it. They seemed to delight in the creation itself, and not worry much about running out of ideas.⁹

However, recall that it was Flanagan who christened Bono the “Mother Teresa of the Abandoned Song,” and there are plenty of instances where U2 seemed, in fact, determined to nail down a song, such as “Where the Streets Have No Name,” “Pride,” and “Mysterious Ways,” to name but a few. Others, however, such as “One,” “Tryin’ to Throw Your Arms Around the World,” and “Running to Stand Still” came together very quickly—although usually while working on something else, much as Flanagan describes above. Flood, as an engineer on *The Joshua Tree*, was similarly struck by the singular nature of working with U2:

It was the first for so many things. The whole process was totally different. The type of sound that they wanted for the record was very different from anything anybody had sort of asked for, very sort of open, ambient—real sense of space of the environment you were in.¹⁰

Bono has often suggested that making an album is a lot like making sausage; you are probably better off not knowing how it’s done. While he may be right about sausage, the construction, the forging, the molding of the contemporary rock album is a under-appreciated process; one that the uninitiated often find surprising and fascinating—and one that is sometimes naively described as fraudulent, or deceptive.

Music that is carefully constructed, torn down and rebuilt, abandoned and revisited, often fails to have an immediate impact. In the absence of hooks or catchy melodies, repeated listening, informed by live performances, music videos, and

⁹ Bill Flanagan, Introduction, *Complete Songs*, 8.

¹⁰ Chapter 5, *Joshua Tree*, DVD.

biography, is the surest path to revealing the potential, multifaceted meanings buried in the text, implied by the structure, and hiding in plain sight on the aural surface.

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