Listening to Other Minds. A Phenomenology of Pop Songs

'I *hate* live music'

(Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*)

This paper explores some phenomenological consequences of the ontological affinity between films and pop songs. Given the central place of the recording technology in both films and pop songs, one can wonder whether pop songs can elicit from their listeners the same kind of experience that films elicit from their spectators. Borrowing Kendall Walton's expression, one might wonder whether pop songs encourage us to play a 'game of make-believe' analogous to that we play when we engage with films.[1] The main part of the paper (§§ 1-7) is meant to provide a positive answer to this question. The remaining sections (§§ 8-9) illustrate and test the proposed account by contrasting paradigmatic pop songs with borderline cases.

1. The Dark Side of the Film

According to Theodore Gracyk, works of rock music are sound structures encoded on recordings and properly instantiated through playbacks.[2] The core claim of this ontological conception is summarized by Andrew Kania as follows: 'rock musicians primarily construct tracks', that is, the 'thick' sound structures that are 'the primary focus of critical attention in rock'.[3] Tracks, as thick sound structures, manifest 'very thin structures of melody, harmony, and lyrics', that is, 'pieces of music that may be performed'.[4]

Although I am sympathetic to Gracyk's and Kania's ontological view, I do not follow them in using of the term 'song' to designate the 'thin' pieces of music manifested by the 'thick' works of rock. I prefer to simply call those 'thin' entities 'pieces', thereby reserving the term 'songs' for those 'thick' works of rock in which lyrics play a crucial role. Moreover, I prefer to speak of 'pop songs' instead of

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[1]   Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[2]   Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

[3]   Andrew Kania, 'Making Tracks: The Ontology of Rock Music', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, 4 (2006), 404.

[4]   Kania, 'Making Tracks', 404. According to Kania, this 'makes rock seem a somewhat dichotomous tradition, with one type of activity at its core—the production of rock tracks, nonperformance artworks—and with another type of activity less central, but still important—live performances of songs' ('Making Tracks', 406).

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'rock songs' since the former expression captures better the kind of songs I am interested in, that is, those in which the recording technology plays a central role, whatever their musical style.[5]

Christopher Bartel calls the view advocated by Gracyk and Kania "the recording-centered ontology of rock", and he argues that "By placing track construction at the center of rock, this account overlooks the centrality of songwriting and live performance".[6] Yet, for the aim of my paper, I do not need to endorse the strong ontological claim criticized by Bartel, namely, that track construction is *the* primary object of interest in rock. I just need to assume the weaker claim that track construction is *a* primary object of interest—a *primus inter pares*, as it were—thereby conceding that songwriting and live performance also might play a central role in rock appreciation.

Thus, I shall explore the phenomenology that corresponds to the interest in pop songs as tracks, regardless of whether this interest is *the* primary one or just *a* primary one.[7] Specifically, I shall focus on the fact that, when considered as tracks, pop songs reveal themselves to be similar to films. Just as the latter are *audiovisual* structures encoded on recordings and instantiated through *screenings*, the former can be characterized as *sound* structures encoded on recordings and instantiated through *playbacks*. Drawing on this analogy, one can characterize pop songs as auditory films. Just as a silent film is merely visual, a pop song is merely auditory—it is a sort of "dark film" or "blind film".

2. Pop Songs as Fictions

If one treats pop songs as "blind films", one can wonder which kind of films they are. In the first instance, one might state that pop songs are documentaries about musical performances. Specifically, assuming the view according to which documentaries are constituted by traces of the events they are about,[8] one might treat pop songs as auditory documentaries constituted by traces of musical

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[5]   On the distinction between rock and pop, see Allan F. Moore, 'Rock', in Th. Gracyk and A. Kania (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 416–425. On recording as a key ontological ingredient of pop culture and mass culture, see Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[6]   Christopher Bartel, 'Rock as a Three-Value Tradition', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 75, 2 (2017), 143. Another criticism of Gracyk's recording-based ontology can be found in Franklin Bruno, 'A Case for Song: Against an (Exclusively) Recording-Centered Ontology of Rock', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 71, 1 (2013), 65–74. For variants of Gracyk's ontological view, see John A. Fisher, 'Rock 'n' Recording: The Ontological Complexity of Rock Music', in Ph. Alperson (ed), *Musical Worlds: New Directions in the Philosophy of Music* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 109–123; Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

[7]   In principle, my proposal is also compatible with a fictionalist ontological view according to which pop songs actually are not recordings and yet they can be appreciated as if they were so. Thanks to a referee for leading me to consider this possibility and, more generally, for helping me to acknowledge that the ontological commitments of my phenomenological account were weaker than previously assumed.

[8]   See Gregory Currie. 'Visible Traces: Documentary and the Contents of Photographs', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 285–297.

performances. Yet, according to Gracyk,[9] paradigmatic pop songs are self-standing works of music, which, as Kania puts it, 'do not purport to be records of some other object of primary interest'.[10] Rather, they are meant to make new auditory experiences possible through the recording technology. Borrowing Aaron Edidin's expression, we can call such works 'recording artifacts'.[11] Pop songs, as recording artifacts, are not traces of the auditory events that originated the recording, and thus, according to the trace-centered conception of the documentary, they cannot be documentaries.

Still, if one conceives of documentaries as films that deploy images and sounds to make assertions about their subjects,[12] one can cast pop songs as special documentaries that use sounds to make assertions about musical performances regardless of whether those songs really are traces of performances. Just as documentary films 'offer an audiovisual array that communicates some phenomenological aspect of the subject',[13] pop songs offer an auditory array that communicates some phenomenological aspect of musical performances. Although the Beatles's *For No One* (1966) is a recording artifact, one can listen to it in order to discover how a performance of that song would sound like.

This surely is an interesting way of listening to *For No One*, just as it can be interesting to look at John Schlesinger's *Darling* (1965), the film which arguably inspired that song,[14] in order to pay attention to Julie Christie's performance. Nevertheless, *Darling* is a fiction which invites us to focus not only on Christie's performance but especially on the adventures of the fictional character she plays. This suggests that *For No One* also might invite us to focus on something that goes beyond the Beatles' performance.

If one attends a live performance of a song at a concert, one's primary focus of attention surely is the performance itself. If one listens to the recording of a concert, in which the auditory clues of the performance's material circumstances (e.g. background noises, audience's reactions, performers' speeches) are clearly perceptible, the primary focus of attention arguably remains the performance, even though the performers are no longer visible. One can thus cast the recording of a concert as an

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[9]   Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*.

[10]   Andrew Kania, 'Musical Recordings', *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009): 23.

[11]   Aaron Edidin, 'Three Kinds of Recording and the Metaphysics of Music', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (1999): 24–39.

[12]   See Noël Carroll, 'Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis', in R. Allen and M. Smith (eds), *Film Theory and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): 173–202. Thanks to a referee and to the editors of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* for pushing me to investigate in more depth the relationship between pop songs and documentary films, and to consider accounts of the latter that are not based on the notion of trace.

[13]   Carl Plantinga. 'What a Documentary Is, After All', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63 (2005): 105–117.

[14]   See Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties*, 2nd edition revised (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2005): 205.

auditory documentary about that concert. However, in our cultural practice, pop songs as recording artifacts are not treated as surrogates of recordings of concerts; they are not meant to emulate the experience of live performances. Even if one treats a recording artifact as the outcome of what Stephen Davies calls a "studio performance",[15] that is, as Kania points out, "the set of all the actions—playings, tapings, electronic manipulations, editings, and so forth—that go into the production of a record",[16] this "set" does not seem to be what the audience should primarily focus on.

The point is that pop songs as recording artifacts enable a new kind of experience, which seems to be beyond the reach of performances and their recordings. In particular, by minimizing the auditory clues of the performance's material circumstances, pop songs can favor the shift of the listener's attention from the musical performance, as a representation, to what is represented. In this respect, pop song resemble fiction films, which enable a new kind of experience beyond the reach of theatrical plays (and their recordings) by favoring a phenomenological shift from the staged representation to what it represents, namely, fictional events. Thus, it might be worthwhile to compare our engagement with pop songs to that with fiction films.

For this purpose, a first step consists in treating the singer as a sort of actor playing a character. Just as a fiction film invites us to imagine or 'make-believe' what fictional characters are doing,[17] so does a pop song. But what are fictional characters doing in pop songs? If they are just singing, the proposal looks vapid. From a phenomenological point of view, this does not add anything to the much more straightforward option that consists in experiencing a pop song as a representation of—though not a trace of—the performance of a real singer. Imagining that the actual singer is a fictional singer would be a game of make-believe that is not worth playing.

Another option looks more promising. The idea is that the fictional character is not singing but rather feeling and thinking. To say better, the actual singer sings thereby representing the series of thoughts and feelings that constitutes the fictional character's experience. The musical dimension of the pop song thus affects the representation rather than what is represented. To wit, the audience experiences the pop song as a *musical* representation of fictional mental events rather than as a technological representation of actual *musical* events.[18]

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[15] Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances*, 34.

[16] Kania, 'Making Tracks', 404.

[17] See Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, and Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[18] According to Nina Penner, 'opera characters live in a world fundamentally different from ours, a marvelous place where one's every thought and deed passes to music—and where song rather than speech is the normative mode of communication and expression'. See her 'Opera Singing and Fictional Truth', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 71, 1 (2013): 81. If one extends this account to pop songs, one might treat them as musical representations of

Live performances of songs also can represent thoughts and feelings. Yet, recordings can do something that live performances cannot do, namely, severing sounds from their actual source so to encourage a game of make-believe in which sounds are experienced as if they came from a different source, which is the inner life of a fictional character. In live performances the phenomenological focus is the performance itself, not what it represents; the main object of experience is a singer or a band who musically represents a series of thoughts and feelings; the inner life of a fictional character is just a means to the end of enjoying the actual musical event. On the other hand, when the song is presented as a recording artifact, there can be a shift in phenomenology. Since recordings sever sounds from their actual source, the phenomenological focus can shift to the fictional series of thoughts and feelings that those sounds represent. For instance, listening to a pop song through headphones while lying on a bed in a dark room involves an experience of proximity to a fictional character's mind that one could not enjoy while attending a live performance; the inner life of a fictional character, instead of its musical representation, becomes the main object of experience.[19]

3. The Collapse Phenomenon

In order to figure out the phenomenological shift that characterizes pop songs as recording artifacts, it is helpful to consider the 'collapse phenomenon' highlighted by Robert Hopkins.[20] The idea is that the spectator of a fiction film can experience a photographic representation of fictional events even though she knows that this is a photographic representation of *a staged representation of* fictional events. At the phenomenological level, the staged tier disappears—or, in Hopkins' terms, collapses. It does so in virtue of the recording technology, which severs the photographic images from their actual source, thereby enabling a game of make-believe in which one can experience the photographic images as if they were directly representing fictional events. Assuming that a pop song is a recording of a musical

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musical events which (in the peculiar ontology of the fictional world that Penner describes) encode thoughts and feelings. I acknowledge that this also is a game of make-believe that pop songs would allow us to play but in this paper I shall focus on a slightly different game, in which the fictional world has the same *ontological* features as ours and what is peculiar is rather our *epistemic* capacity to listen, from outside the fictional world, to the mental states of the characters who inhabit it.

[19] In aesthetics as well as in musicology, the fictional character portrayed by works of music is often called a 'persona'. See Aaron Ridley, *Music, Value and the Passions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Jerrold Levinson, 'Musical Expressiveness', in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 90–125; Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); James Young, 'Music and Imagination', in A. Kind (ed), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 192–203. I prefer to use the more general label 'fictional character' in order to stress the analogy between pop songs and fiction films.

[20] Robert Hopkins, 'What Do We See in Film?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66 (2008), 149–159.

performance representing a series of thoughts and feelings,[21] one can compare song experience to film experience.

The 'fictional event', in the case of the song, is a series of thoughts and feelings (instead of a series of actions), while the 'staged representation' is a musical performance (instead of a theatrical performance), and the 'photographic representation' is an auditory recording (instead of an audiovisual recording). This analogy leads to an hypothesis on the collapse phenomenon in pop songs: the listener can enjoy the impression of experiencing a recording of a series of thoughts and feelings, even though she knows that this is a recording of *a performance representing* a series of thoughts and feelings. As the collapse of the theatrical performance in films enables the the impression of directly experiencing events in the outer world of the fiction, so the collapse of the musical performance in songs enables the impression of directly experiencing events in the inner world of a fictional character.

However, there is an important disanalogy between films and songs. The musical performance cannot disappear from song experience in the way in which the theatrical performance can disappear from film experience. That is why the collapse phenomenon can lead a spectator to mistake a fiction film for a recording of actual events (as it happens in the so called mockumentaries) but no listener can be lead to mistake a pop song for a recording of actual thoughts and feelings.

Still, in both cases the recording technology can filter out relevant clues of the performance. The difference is that recording in film can filter out *all* the clues of the performance whereas recording in song can filter out only *some* of them. Recording in film can work as a *total* filter whereas recording in song can only work as a *partial* filter. Nevertheless, a partial filter can be enough to make the musical performance recede in song experience, thereby enabling one to imagine directly listening to the inner life of a fictional character. Just as the recording technology in films encourages a game of make-believe in which the performance is replaced by fictional events as the source of the images, the recording technology in songs can encourage a game of make-believe in which the performance is replaced by a fictional series of thoughts and feelings as the source of the sounds. The collapse phenomenon thus plays a significant role not only in our experience of films but also in that of pop songs.

As pointed out by Saam Trivedi, our experience of music, in general, can be such that 'we *literally hear or perceive musical sounds* unfolding in time and at the same time also *imaginatively*

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[21] The relevant musical performance here is what Stephen Davies (*Musical Works and Performances*, 34) calls a 'studio performance'. See notes 15 and 16 above.

hear mental states in them, as part of the same experience'.[22] In pop songs, the collapse phenomenon can enhance the phenomenological salience of our *imaginative listening to fictional mental states* at the expense of our *literal perception of performed musical sounds*. Although both imaginatively hearing the mind and literally hearing the music remain complementary components of one unitary experience, the collapse phenomenon can lead the former experiential component to overtake the latter. This surely does not mean that the audience stops paying attention to the musical qualities of a pop song, which indeed are fundamental in giving one the impression of access to the fictional character's mental states. Rather, the collapse phenomenon encourages one to imaginatively replace the performance of singers and musicians as the source of those musical qualities. By severing sounds from their actual sources, the recording technology enables a game of make-believe in which voice and music directly come from the mind of fictional characters.

4. Fictions about Real Things

The collapse phenomenon allows us to qualify the claim that pop songs are fictions. What is fictional in our engagement with pop songs is, first of all, our capacity to listen to other minds. There is no such capacity in the actual world, hence the world that pop songs represent—a world inhabited by individuals whose minds we can listen to—should be cast as a fictional world. Even when pop songs are about real events, they should be cast as fictions in virtue of the fictional way in which they make us experience those events.

If this is right, the cinematic correlates of pop songs about real events are not documentaries but rather fiction films about real events, namely, docudramas. While documentaries supply perceptual standpoints on the events represented that correspond to those available in the actual world (namely, the standpoints occupied by the camera), docudramas exploit the collapse phenomenon in order to supply perceptual standpoints on the events represented that were not available in the actual world, even though those films are about real events. Likewise, pop songs about real events exploit the collapse phenomenon in order to supply an auditory access to the minds of the individuals involved in those event that could not be available in the actual world. The collapse phenomenon, indeed, involves a fictional experience of the events represented, and thus the relevance of collapse to pop songs casts

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22 Saam Trivedi, 'Music and Imagination', in Th. Gracyk and A. Kania (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 119 (my emphasis). See also Saam Trivedi, 'Expressiveness as a Property of the Music Itself', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59 (2001): 411–420; Saam Trivedi, 'Imagination, Music, and the Emotions', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4, 238 (2011): 415–435.

them as fictions, just as its relevance to docudramas casts them as fiction films instead of as documentaries.

In Stevie Wonder's *Isn't She Lovely* (1976), the collapse phenomenon supplies an auditory access to the mind of the singer who is listening to the whimper of Aisha, his newborn baby. The music, the voice and the lyrics represent the joyful thoughts and feelings of the father, while the recording of Aisha's actual whimper makes us share his auditory experience. A hypothetical documentary about that birth would make us hear only sounds which one could actually hear in that circumstance, as for example Aisha's whimper. *Isn't She Lovely*, instead, makes us listen also to the father's affective response to that whimper, which is not something that one could actually hear in that circumstance. In this sense, *Isn't She Lovely* is a fiction that represents an actual event of Stevie Wonder's biography, just as a docudrama like Clint Eastwood's *Bird* (1988) is a fiction that represents actual events of Charlie Parker's biography.

Similarly, one can conceive of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* (1975) as a fiction about a real person, which represents the thoughts and feelings of a character who imaginarily addresses the band's former member Syd Barrett.[23] REM's *Man on the Moon* (1992) also can be seen as a representation of the mental states of a character who imaginarily addresses the TV star Andy Kaufman.[24]

All this fits well with the general conception of fiction as a social practice that enables us to share imaginings. Pop songs, from this perspective, allow one to share imaginings whereby one can grasp what one's inner life and that of others have in common.[25] Although paradigmatic fictions, including

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[23] Just as *Isn't She Lovely*, *Wish You Were Here* provides the listener with an experiential perspective that involves not only an inner series of thoughts and feelings but also an auditory glance on the outer world, which here shows up through the sounds of a radio (at the beginning of the song) and those of the wind (at its end).

[24] Interestingly, the REM's song gave its name to, and was featured in, the docudrama *Man on the Moon* (1999), which represents the life of Andy Kaufman through a cinematic fiction just as this song did through a musical fiction. The song is aptly used at the end of the film since it is a sort of elegy in which a character imagines talking to Kaufman after his death. Specifically, the character reflects on Kaufman's provocative challenges to the audience's beliefs and expectations ('If you believe there's nothing up his sleeve, then nothing is cool') and remembering his performances ('Andy are you goofin' on Elvis (hey, baby)?'—note that, when singing 'hey, baby' here, Michael Stipe imitates Kaufman's imitation of Elvis, as if Kaufman's voice were showing up in the experience of the character. Other elegies of this kind are Emmylou Harris's *Boulder to Birmingham* (1975), which fictionally addresses Gram Parsons, and Leonard Cohen's (1974) *Chelsea Hotel No. 2*, which fictionally addresses Janis Joplin.

[25] The idea that fictions are prescriptions or invitations to imagine can be traced back to Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, and to Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). A more recent development can be found in Kathleen Stock, *Only Imagine* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017). The conception of fiction as an imagination-based social practice that I favor is defended in Manuel García-Carpintero, 'On the Nature of Fiction-Making: Austin or Grice?', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 59, 2 (2019), 203–210, and in Catharine Abell, *Fiction: A Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2020). While Walton's notion of fiction surely does not match with the ordinary categorization between fiction and non-fiction, the way in which García-Carpintero and Abell develop this notion seems to be closer to such ordinary categorization. Thanks to a referee and to the editors of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* for leading me to qualify the notion of fiction that underlies my account of pop songs.

many pop songs, invite one to imagine *individuals and events* that do not have their place in one's world, there can be special fictions which invite one to imagine enjoying *experiences* that could not occur in one's world in spite of the fact that the things represented by those experiences have their place in one's world. Songs such as *Isn't She Lovely*, *Wish You Were Here*, and *Man on the Moon*, which are about real things but invite us to imagine listening to other minds, are fictions of the latter kind.

5. Two Dimensions of Engagement with Songs

The collapse phenomenon does not entail that the audience of pop songs exclusively considers the inner life of fictional characters. Appreciating the performance of singers and musicians surely is an indispensable dimension of our engagement with pop songs. Likewise, in our engagement with films, the collapse phenomenon does not exclude the possibility of appreciating the performances of actors, as Hopkins clearly states.[26] Indeed, our engagement with both pop songs and fiction films has two complementary dimensions, namely, the *exploration* of a fictional world and the *appreciation* of the actual artifact that enables and sustains that exploration.[27]

Sophisticated music critics usually favor the appreciation of pop songs as artifacts made of notes, lyrics, instruments, and voices, but this approach risks to overlook the relevance of those very songs as exploration of fictional worlds. Sophisticated film critics also tend to behave in this way by favoring the features of the film as an artifact such as staging, cinematography or editing. Yet, the exploration of fictional worlds is so salient in our engagement with films that it is hard for a critic to completely overlook it. In our engagement with songs, instead, the exploration of fictional worlds seems less important, as one can notice by comparing the experience of listening to a song in a language one does not understand with that of watching a film in that language. Songs, unlike films, usually have aesthetically relevant non-representational features (namely, the features shared with pure music) which allow one to appreciate them even if one cannot grasp what they represent. Nevertheless, when it comes to the *proper* aesthetic appreciation of songs, that is, the way in which listeners are expected to

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[26] Hopkins, 'What Do We See in Film?', 149
[27] The distinction between exploration and appreciation matches a distinction made by John Gibson's as regards poetry; namely, that between the 'naive' experience of a poem's 'surface', which 'is a tried and trued way of forging that crucial initial bond between audience and work', and the cultivated appreciation of 'the poem's complexity', which gives us access to 'its full aesthetic and cultural significance'. In this paper, I am interested in the phenomenology of our 'naive', in Gibson's sense, experience of pop songs. As Gibson himself points out, ''Naive' here is not meant in an entirely derogatory sense. To say that an artwork of any sort can be appreciated naively is to say that attending only to its surface will repay a non-negligible degree of aesthetic interest'. See John Gibson. 'The Place of Poetry in Contemporary Aesthetics', in J. Gibson (ed) *The Philosophy of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6–8.

appreciate and evaluate songs in our cultural practices, the representational role of lyrics should be taken into account.[28]

The exploration of the world represented is relevant also to the appreciation of songs as live performances. Yet, only tracks can enable a game of make-believe in which the exploration of the fictional world becomes the main focus of experience.

In songs as live performances, this phenomenological option is precluded first of all by the visual component, which makes the performance so salient that it cannot recede so to bring the exploration of the world represented to the foreground. Yet, one might object, listeners might wear blindfolds, or musicians might play behind a curtain, so to enable the same sort of listening enabled by recordings. Although this is not the way in which live performances are appreciated in our cultural practice, this mere possibility suggests that there is nothing intrinsic in the recording that favors the phenomenological dominance of the exploration of the world represented.

However, there is another key feature of recordings, namely, iteration, which live performances cannot emulate. One can listen to a track as many times as one wants whereas one can attend a live performance only once. Hence, in order to properly appreciate a live performance one should simultaneously pay attention to both the musical representation and the world represented. A track, on the other hand, allows one to alternate playbacks in which one focuses on the musical representation with playbacks in which one focuses on the world represented. In this way, one can *first* enjoy the exploration of the world represented *and then* appreciate its musical representation, or the other way around, instead of being forced to perform the two aesthetic tasks at the same time.[29]

All this finally helps us to explain the difference between pop songs and classical songs. For example, Johannes Brahms' *Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer* portrays the inner life of a fictional character just as pop songs do.[30] Nevertheless, for the reasons explained above, that song cannot enable the phenomenology of exploration that pop songs enable; there is no room for the collapse phenomenon. In fact, *Immer leiser* could enable such exploratory experience if the appreciator focused

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[28] In Simon Frith's terms, 'Popular music is a song form; words are a reason why people buy records; instrumental hits remain unusual—to paraphrase Marilyn Monroe in *Seven Year Itch*, you can always tell classical music: 'it's got no vocals!''. See Simon Frith, 'Why do songs have words?', *Contemporary Music Review*, 5, 1 (1989), 90. Thanks to a referee for leading me to stress that songs, just like films, *ought to be* appreciated by taking their representational content into account and yet, unlike films, *might be* appreciated without doing so.

[29] Thanks to a referee for leading me to consider both intrinsic and non-intrinsic differences between tracks and live performances.

[30] See Jenefer Robinson's insightful analysis of *Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer* in her *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 313–321. Thanks to a referee for drawing my attention to the case of classical songs and to Robinson's text.

on one recording of it, but this would amount to treat that musical work as a sort of pop song *ante litteram* instead of as the piece for live performance that was meant by Brahms. Classic songs, in this sense, are to pop songs as plays are to fiction films.

6. The Inner Lives of Others

So far I have insisted on the analogies between our experience of pop songs and that of fiction films. But there are also crucial differences. Film experience provides us with a temporal series of perceptual perspectives on the spatiotemporal system in which fictional characters act. Film thus emulate our ordinary perceptual experience, which provides us with a temporal series of perceptual perspectives on the spatiotemporal system in which real individuals like us act.[31] A pop song also provides us with a temporal series of "perspectives" (scare quotes, as I shall explain below), but this is sharply different from those provided by films or by ordinary perception.

While watching films we can directly experience the fictional world as a spatiotemporal system, just as we do in ordinary perception. Conversely, while listening to songs we can experience the fictional world as a spatiotemporal system only through the subjectivity of fictional characters. Films also can deploy point-of-view shots,[32] but only occasionally, whereas in pop songs the "point-of-view shot" (scare quotes again, as I am going to explain) is essential. In song experience, our access to the fictional world is essentially, not just occasionally, mediated by the subjectivity of fictional characters.

Song experience, unlike the typical point-of-*view* shot in film, does not give us access to the *perceptual* dimension of the character's inner life but rather to its affective and cognitive dimension (that is why I put "perspective" and "point-of-view shot" in scare quotes in the passages above). When we listen to a song we certainly do not see what the character sees, and usually we do not even hear what he or she hears. This makes it hard to establish the context in which the character is situated and what is going on in his or her immediate surroundings. Yet, we can have access to something that is beyond the reach of films.[33] Although we cannot experience the fictional world in the perceptual way in

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[31] This is the Kantian conception of experience, which Peter Strawson summarizes as follows: 'No one could be conscious of a temporally extended series of experiences as his unless he could be aware of them as yielding knowledge of a unified objective world, through which the series of experiences in question forms just one subjective or experiential route'. See Peter Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen, 1966), 27.

[32] See Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*; George Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); George Wilson, *Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[33] Walton makes a similar point when he writes: 'in the case of much 'expressive' music, it may be fictional not that one sees or hears or otherwise perceives external things but that one experiences or is aware of (*one's own*) feelings or

which we experience our actual world, we can directly experience thoughts and feelings of a character that lives in that world and perceives it. While films provide us with a series of perceptual perspectives on the world over which minds lean, as it were, pop songs provide us with a series of experiential perspectives on minds that lean over that world.

This phenomenological difference between films and songs allows us to address the case of music videos, which one can characterize as short films whose soundtrack is a song—films sewn on songs, as it were. Typically, music videos combine a depiction of the singer's performance with a fiction inspired by the song's content. For instance, the video of Pulp's song *Disco 2000* (1995) combines images of Jarvis Cocker's performance with a boy-meets-girl story whose protagonist is called Deborah just as the girl the song is about. While the video has a happy ending, the song portrays the stream of consciousness of a character who had been in love with Deborah since his childhood but was never reciprocated. One might say that the video ironically confirms the sadness of the song by depicting Deborah's happy romance with a boy who *is not* the song's protagonist.

This example shows that music videos are better cast as self-standing works of art which draw on songs rather than as artifacts primarily aimed to the appreciation of songs. Although many people surely enjoy songs by watching videos, this does not seem to be the proper way in which songs are to be appreciated and evaluated. The visual features of videos, indeed, can distract the audience's attention from the experience that the song is aimed to elicit. Something important goes lost when one appreciates a song by watching its video, which mandates one to play a game of make-believe of the same kind as the game of exploration of the outer world that one plays while watching films. The interference of this game ultimately prevents one from properly playing the game of exploration of the inner life which would make the song most aesthetically rewarding.[34]

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emotions or sensations or sentiments or moods' (*Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 335-336, my emphasis). Yet, when one listens to a pop song, what one fictionally experiences in the first instance are not *one's own* affective states but rather those of a fictional character. At most, one may be aware of one's empathizing with the character, as Walton points out: 'When I look at a portrait I may contort my face in sympathy with the portrayed character's facial expressions, just as I contort my face in sympathy with a real person. […] When music (vocal music for instance) portrays a more or less definite character, we are likely to have this kind of empathetic response'. See Kendall Walton, 'Listening with Imagination: Is Music Representational?' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 58.

[34] Thanks to a referee and to the editors for leading me to take music videos into account. I think that those are intriguing artistic objects which would deserve more attention in contemporary aesthetics. However, a thorough account of music videos goes beyond the scope of this paper.

7. Discontinuous Experiences

Fiction films have a specificity in comparison with ordinary perception. While the temporal series of perspectives that constitutes ordinary perception is determined by the *continuous* spatiotemporal series of positions of the perceiver's body, the temporal series of perspectives that constitutes film experience is not so determined. As a consequence of this, ordinary perception is continuous in a way film experience is not forced to be.[35] Editing is the technical means whereby films generate discontinuous experiences. The spectator of an edited sequence can enjoy a discontinuous way of perceiving the world that is not available in ordinary perception.

One might wonder whether some experiential discontinuity can also affect song experience. The answer is affirmative. Although most songs seem to represent continuous series of mental states, there are cases in which the experience of inner life that songs offer us surely involves discontinuity. Consider Bob Dylan's *Just like a Woman*. In the section that precedes the song's bridge, the character is in the street and is thinking to his lover but is not with her, as indicated by the use of third person pronoun. In fact, the song's bridge gives us access to the character's experience in a new circumstance, which is clearly temporally discontinuous with that represented previously. The character is now with his lover, and the enjambment that links the second verse to the third ('Ain't it clear / That I just don't fit') signals that he keeps addressing her, as emphasized by the use of second person pronoun in the final occurrence of the chorus. *Just like a Woman*'s bridge is not only a musical bridge but also a temporal bridge which links two temporally discontinuous experiences, as well as editing can link two temporally discontinuous events in a film.[36]

As films, through editing, can link not only temporally discontinuous events but also distinct perspectives on one event, so songs can link not only temporally discontinuous experiences of one character but also experiences of distinct characters. Randy Newman's *Short People* (1977) switches from the perspective of a racist person (in the first occurrence of the chorus and in the first verse), to the perspective of an irenic person (in the bridge); finally, the song goes back to the racist perspective (in the last occurrence of the chorus and in the last verse). As pointed out by Gracyk, the change of

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[35] In Gareth Evans' terms, ordinary experience involves 'a conception of an objective world […] as spatial, with oneself as located within it and tracing a *continuous* path through it'. See Gareth Evans, 'Molyneux's Question', in *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 369 (my emphasis).

[36] David Bowie's *Space Oddity* (1969) and Elton John's *Rocket Man* (1972), which are both about the loneliness of astronauts, also involve temporally discontinuous experiences. The first two verses of *Space Oddity* represents the liftoff of Major Tom's spaceship, but then a temporal jump leads us to share his experience when he goes out of the spaceship. Likewise, *Rocket Man* begins with representing the astronaut's thoughts before the liftoff but then suddenly jumps to representing his experience alone in the sky.

perspective in this song is emphasized by the shift from 'the aggressive staccato lines' to 'a gentle, soaring passage in the 'bridge' section', in which 'Newman's harsh nasal timbre is smoothed with accompanying vocal harmonies'.[37]

Likewise, The Human League's *Don't You Want Me* (1981), which was inspired by the film *A Star Is Born* (1954), switches from the perspective of a stalker (in the first two verses and in the first occurrence of the chorus), to the perspective of the woman he is threatening (in the third verse); finally, the song goes back to the man's perspective (in the last verse and in the last occurrence of the chorus).

While in *Don't You Want Me* the two distinct perspectives are marked by the voices of two singers, in a song such as The Mamas and the Papas's *California Dreamin'* (1965), the voices of the four member of the group contribute to vividly portray the homesickness of one character, as if they were different musical instruments. On the other hand, a song such as *Short People*, as well as Dylan's *All Along the Watchtower* (1968) or Cat Stevens' *Father and Son* (1970), portrays the inner lives of different characters through just one voice.[38]

8. Towards a Pluralistic Picture

In virtue of their focus on the inner life, pop songs are to fiction films as poems are to novels. One might say that songs and poems are lyric compositions which represent the world by representing (or expressing) the inner life of a character who lives in that world.[39] Even when lyric compositions concern actions or events that characters perform or undergo, that is, experiences that not are straightforwardly "private" or "interior" to their minds, those are presented as contents of the character's thoughts. Consider the first two verses of The Band's *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down* (1969): 'Virgil Caine is the name / And I served on the Danville train'. These verses represent fact and events of the character's life, and yet they are presented from the first person perspective, as contents of the character's thoughts.

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[37] Theodore Gracyk, 'Meanings of Songs and Meanings of Song Performances', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 71, 1 (2013): 28.

[38] Thanks to a referee for pushing me to address cases of multiple perspectives and multiple singers. I am aware that much more could be said on those cases, far beyond this basic taxonomy, but that shall be the topic of another paper.

[39] Expression, from this perspective, is a representation of what is going on in one's mind. Of course, if one assumes that only things outside the mind can be represented, then expression is not representation, but this boils down to a lexical disagreement. For a thorough account of this issue, see Walton 'Listening with Imagination', in particular section IV, 'Is Expression Representation?'. It is worth noting that, from this perspective, some modernist novels, as for instance Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, are better cast as lyric compositions that express thoughts and feelings rather than as narrative representations of events in a spatiotemporal system.

Still, songs and films share a sensory specificity that distinguishes them from poems and novels. The latter are linguistic artifacts whereas the former involve specific sense modalities.[40] Films make us *see and hear* the outer life of characters as well as songs make us *listen* to their inner life. While in poetry both thoughts and feelings of characters are expressed linguistically, songs can exploit not only the conceptual resources of language to articulate thoughts but also the auditory features of voice and music to express the feelings that accompany and possibly permeate such thoughts.[41]

The analogy between songs and literature leads us to consider two kinds of pop songs that do not seem to represent a temporal series of thought and feelings. The first is what one might call the *narrative pop song*, that is, the kind of songs which look like short stories, as for instance Dylan's *Hurricane* (1976), the Beatles' *Eleanor Rigby* (1966) or Bruce Springsteen's *Reason to Believe* (1982). Such songs are borderline cases for my conception since their main aim is to describe events that occur in the outer world rather than give us access to the inner life of a character. Yet, I contend, such songs also fulfill the latter task by making us feel what is going on in the mind of the subject who is telling the story. Although *Hurricane* does not give us access to the experience of its main character, the boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, it gives us access to the feelings of indignation felt by the narrator telling Carter's story. Likewise, *Eleanor Rigby* does not make us directly feel loneliness; rather it makes us

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[40] I am assuming here that the standard way in which we experience poems is by reading inscriptions of them. In fact, I am aware that this view is controversial and that one can argue that listening also can play a crucial role in the phenomenology of poetry. See Anna Christina Soy Ribeiro, 'The Spoken and the Written: An Ontology of Poems', in J. Gibson (ed.) *The Philosophy of Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 127–148 . Yet, even if one acknowledges that poems also *can* be heard, the fact remains that pop songs have a sharper auditory specificity since they *must* be heard. See Allan F. Moore, 'The Persona/Environment Relation in Recorded Song', *Music Theory Online* 11 (2005), available at http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.05.11.4/mto.05.11.4.moore.html. As Frith ('Why do songs have words?', 90) puts it, 'In songs, words are the sign of a voice. A song is always a performance and song words are always spoken out, heard in someone's accent. Songs are more like plays than poems; song words work as speech and speech acts, bearing meaning not just semantically, but also as structures of sound that are direct signs of emotion and marks of character. Singers use non-verbal as well as verbal devices to make their points - emphasis, sighs, hesitations, changes of tone; lyrics involve pleas, sneers and commands as well as statements and messages and stories'.

[41] According to Jerrold Levinson (1996a), the vocal line and the accompaniment of a song are connected to its lyrics by a relation of mutual suitability while according to Peter Kivy (1989) the lyrics particularize the general emotions expressed by the music. See Jerrold Levinson, 'Song and Music Drama', in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 42–59; Peter Kivy, *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Philosophers such as Aaron Ridley (2004), David Davies (2013), and Jeanette Bicknell (2015) criticize Levinson's and Kivy's conceptions of the song as a hybrid of music and text, arguing that these elements contribute to the song by strongly affecting each other in a way that prevents the listener from considering them separately. See Aaron Ridley *The Philosophy of Music: Theme and Variations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); David Davies, 'The Dialogue between Words and Music in the Composition and Comprehension of Song', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 71, 1 (2013): 13–22; Jeanette Bicknell, *A Philosophy of Song and Singing: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015). However, for the purpose of my paper, I do not need to take stance on this issue. I am just relying on the insights provided by all those philosophers as regards the relationship between text and music in the song, in order to highlight a specificity of pop songs with respect to poems. At least, with respect to written poems, as explained in the previous note.

feel what is like to tell stories of lonely people. And so does *Reason to Believe* with respect to the sorrow and mourning of people who experience loss of loved ones.

Still, other narrative songs as for instance Harry Chapin's *30,000 Pounds of Bananas* (1974) or Doc Watson's version of *Stagger Lee* (1967) have a more neutral stance towards the events represented. In those songs there is no particular insight about the narrator's experiences.[42] Rather, especially when direct speech is used, we may gain insights of the experiences of fictional characters, just as we do when direct speech is used in novels.

I shall go back to those cases at the end of this section. Before that, let me consider another kind of songs which one might call the *modernist pop song*. John Gibson characterizes modernist poems as those that prevent one from enjoying a 'naive' experience of their representational surface thereby forcing one to directly address their literary depth.[43] Likewise, one might characterize modernist pop songs as those that prevent us from imaginarily listening to characters' thoughts and feelings thereby forcing us to directly address the formal complexity of lyrics and music. Dylan's *Desolation Row* (1965), The Doors' *The End* (1967), the Rolling Stones' *Jig-Saw Puzzle* (1968) are of this kind.

We can accommodate such songs if we situate their specificity in giving us experiential access to puzzling thoughts and feelings which we find it hard to make sense of. The fact the we listen to apparently messy minds, indeed, does not entail that we do not listen to any mind. Although modernist pop songs do not give one access to thoughts and feelings that one can fully understand, we can still enjoy a naive experience of such songs by listening to the inner life of characters in spite of failing to make sense of the puzzling thoughts and feelings that occur in it. Likewise, in looking at surrealist paintings such as Yves Tanguy's or Salvador Dalí's or Joan Miró's we might pretend to see puzzling things that inhabit a certain space in spite of failing to make sense of them.

Still, one might point at other modernist songs that seems to challenge any attempt to cast them as series of thoughts and feelings of fictional characters. Consider for instance Cocteau Twins's *Melonella* (1985), a song whose verses are Latin butterfly names ('Hesperiidae / Papilionidae / Hyblaeoidae...'). A song like this surely uses words just as another audio component, with no fictional character to be imagined by the listener. Thus, any attempt to supplement the song with some fiction (a crazy entomologist?) seems to be irremediably preposterous. Similarly, a song such as Simon & Garfunkel's *7 O'Clock News/Silent Night* (1966), which consists in an experimental juxtaposition of a Christmas

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[42] An interesting exception in this respect the verse of *Stagger Lee* that begins with "All loud in the alley / I heard my bulldog bark". Thanks to a referee for drawing my attention to *Stagger Lee* and, more generally, for pushing me to consider narrative songs in which the narrator has a neutral stance towards the events narrated.

[43] Gibson. 'The Place of Poetry in Contemporary Aesthetics'.

carol with a simulated bulletin, does not represent a fictional character's inner life, and seems to resist a categorization based on the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. All this suggests that the representation of the inner life of fictional characters is not a necessary feature of pop songs but rather a 'standard feature' of them, that is, a feature that they are expected to have—and paradigmatic ones normally have—but some borderline cases might lack.[44]

Narrative songs such as *30,000 Pounds of Bananas* and *Stagger Lee* also can be cast as special cases that do not give us access to the stream of consciousness of fictional characters but rather tells stories in the way novels do. The ultimate result is a pluralistic picture of our engagement with pop songs, which makes room for special cases in addition to paradigm cases. While in this section I have mainly discussed special cases, in the next one I will offer a final illustration of my core proposal by analyzing two paradigmatic pop songs.

9. Two Case Studies

Springsteen's *Hungry Heart* (1980) is a recording artifact in which the singer's voice was slightly sped up. It makes us experience the inner life of a fictional character who gave a turn to his existence. It consists of three verses and a chorus, which is repeated after each verse.

In the first verse, the character remembers what he did ('Got a wife and kids in Baltimore, Jack / I went out for a ride and I never went back') and acknowledges that he has no explanation for that ('Like a river that don't know where it's flowing / I took a wrong turn and I just kept going'). We do not know whether the character is actually talking to another person called Jack or he is just engaging in a soliloquy that involves an imaginary alter ego. In a film we would easily settle this issue but in a song we cannot do so since we only have access to the character's inner life, not to what he is perceiving. Even if the character was actually talking to a real person, the song would only make us experience what is going on in his mind, not in his surroundings.

In the first occurrence of the chorus, the character finds a reason for what he did by considering a general feature of the human condition, namely, the relentless desire for emotional fulfillment. The character makes sense of his situation and seems to be ready to face its consequences. The relentlessly upbeat melody, which is emphasized by keyboard and drums, makes us feel the character's readiness for new experiences. Yet, the second verse introduces a nostalgic dimension, which is marked by the

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[44] For the notion of 'standard feature' in art appreciation, see Kendall Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review* 79, 3 (1970): 334–367; Stacie Friend, 'Fiction as a Genre', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 92 (2012), 179–208.

intervention of the choir. The character is still remembering, just as in the first verse, but now his memory goes back to the first encounter with his wife. While the first verse was about the end of their relationship, the second verse is about its beginning, though this already gestures towards the end ('I met her in a Kingstown bar / We fell in love I knew it had to end'—note that I take 'her', here, to be anaphoric on 'a wife' in the first verse). The character acknowledges the ironic circularity of his destiny, which brought him from loneliness in Kingstown to family life in Baltimore and then back to loneliness in Kingstown ('We took what we had and we ripped it apart / Now here I am down in Kingstown again').

While in the second occurrence of the chorus the character reaffirms his acceptance of the situation and his intention of looking forward, in the third verse he entertains thoughts that contradict this intention ('Everybody needs a place to rest / Everybody wants to have a home / Don't make no difference what nobody says / Ain't nobody like to be alone'). He finally acknowledges that obeying his hungry heart involves a high price to pay in terms of instability, irrelevance and loneliness. The song ends with a third occurrence of the chorus followed by a coda marked by scat singing, which makes us feel the inner conflict that affects the character; homesickness and regret for the past on the one hand, desire for change and openness to the future on the other.

The verse-chorus structure, which *Hungry Heart* brilliantly exemplifies, can be found in most pop songs. This structure fits well with the tendency of the inner life to include in its temporal order not only *new* mental states, whose correlate are the verses, but also *recurring* mental states, whose correlate is the chorus. While the outer life mainly is a relentless series of new events, the inner life is pretty much characterized by repetition. The verse-chorus structure thus enables pop songs to represent the mixture of new and recurring mental states that constitutes the inner life of fictional characters.

The recurring mental states represented by the chorus can involve slight variations. When a thought previously entertained shows up again, it can present itself under a slightly different guise. This happens, for instance, in Janis Joplin's *Me and Bobby McGee* (1971), whose verse-chorus structure is the following: two verses, a first occurrence of the chorus, other two verses, and a final, slightly modified, occurrence of the chorus.[45]

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[45] Janis Joplin's *Me and Bobby McGee* is a cover of Kris Kristofferson's (1970) homonymous song, which was in turn a cover of Roger Miller's (1969) song. According to the ontological perspective endorsed in this paper, pop songs essentially are tracks, and thus the Joplin's and the Kristofferson's (as well as the Miller's), as distinct tracks, are to be considered distinct songs. In particular, the Joplin's and the Kristofferson's, as fictions, make us experience the inner life of two different characters, a woman and a man respectively. This is indicated by the fact that the character of the Joplin's uses the male pronoun to refer to her partner whereas the character of the Kristofferson's uses the female pronoun to refer to his, though in both cases the partner's name is Bobby McGee. Moreover, the two songs are sharply different in style—one is a calm country anthem, the other a raw and brutal blues ballad—and thus they ascribe different

In the first two verses, the character remembers when she and her partner hitchhiked from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, emphasizing their intimacy. Then, in the chorus, the character reflects on how free she was in those days ('Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose') and how good she felt ('You know, feelin' good was good enough for me').

In the third verse, the character keeps remembering her journey and her memories become more overtly romantic. Yet, in the fourth verse, the character finally remembers when her journey and her love affair with Bobby came to an end, thereby feeling regret. What started as a series of sweet memories, with a feeling of peacefulness expressed by the simple arrangement (just voice and acoustic guitar) and by the slow pace and the soft volume, has turned into sorrow and regret, which find expression in the increase of the song's volume and pace, as well as in the increasing weight of electric guitar and organ and in the crescendo of the singing, which culminates in a sort of wailing.

This leads to the second and last occurrence of the chorus, in which the celebration of freedom is strenuously reaffirmed, and yet diminished by a sense of loss that is also suggested by a small but significant change in the lyrics (the line 'Nothin', don't mean nothin' honey if it ain't free' of the first occurrence is now replaced by 'Nothin', that's all that Bobby left me'—and here Janis Joplin's voice is hoarse and painful as never before). The sense of loss becomes even more intense in the the coda, in which the scat singing goes hand in hand with an obsessive repetition of the name of the character's lost love, making us feel her pervasive but ultimately vain desire to have him back.

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feelings to their characters although those are engaged in apparently very similar love affairs. As regards the ontology of cover versions, see Kania 'Making Tracks', 407–409; Franklin Bruno, 'A Case for Song: Against an (Exclusively) Recording-Centered Ontology of Rock', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71.1 (2013): 65–74.

Conclusions

I can see the hand of another person in the same way in which I can see my hand but I cannot feel the sadness on another person in the same way in which I can feel my sadness. The latter is a private item and I have an exclusive experiential access to it, just as another person has an exclusive access to her sadness. In Thomas Nagel's terms,[46] a subject of experience is the only one who can know 'what is like' to feel what he or she is feeling. Pop songs encourage us to play a game of make-believe whereby we can somehow overcome this cognitive limitation. We can discover what is like to experience what another subject is experiencing by listening to his or her mental states. Although songs arguably cannot make us discover what is like to be a bat, as in Nagel's famous example, they can make us discover what is like to be another human being. Many songs concern what is like for someone to be in love, but there are also songs that give us access to other kinds of experiences.[47]

One might finally wonder why songs have such a special capacity of providing access to other minds. Walton suggests that this might depend on the fact that songs are made of sounds which, just like thoughts and feelings, do not exist independently of subjects who experience them.[48] Thus, listening to sounds can give us access to a subjective realm rather than to a mind-independent world. However, if one endorses a conception of sounds as purely temporal entities,[49] there seems to be a deeper reason why sounds are so apt to represent the subjectivity of experience. My explanation is that experience is, in turn, purely temporal, as Colin McGinn points out: 'there is this strange incongruity in the relation between mind and world: the world outside us is essentially spatial and we represent it that way in our every experience, yet our experience is itself essentially nonspatial. [...] The mind thus depends upon the spatial world, in the form of the brain, and it represents a spatial world, yet it itself steadfastly refuses to set foot in space'.[50]

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[46]   Thomas Nagel, 'What Is it like to Be a Bat?', *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 435–450.

[47]   The centrality of unhappy love in pop songs is nicely stressed in this passage of Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity*: 'People worry about kids playing with guns, and teenagers watching violent videos; we are scared that some sort of culture of violence will take them over. Nobody worries about kids listening to thousands—literally thousands—of songs about broken hearts and rejection and pain and misery and loss. The unhappiest people I know, romantically speaking, are the ones who like pop music the most; and I don't know whether pop music has caused this unhappiness, but I do know that they've been listening to the sad songs longer than they've been living the unhappy lives'. See Nick Hornby, *High Fidelity* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995), 26. Still, according to Daniel Levitin, love is just one out of six basic categories songs fit into: the others five are friendship, joy, comfort, religion, and knowledge. See Daniel Levitin, *The World in Six Sings. How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature* (Boston: Dutton, 2008).

[48]   Walton 'Listening with Imagination', 59.

[49]   See Peter Strawson *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959); Roger Scruton, 'Sounds as Secondary Objects and Pure Events', in M. Nudds and C. O'Callaghan (eds) *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50–68.

[50]   Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 111. The idea that the subjective experience is purely temporal can be traced back to Kant's claim that time is the form of 'inner

From this perspective, both sounds and experiences are purely temporal entities, and pop songs exploit this common structure to represent a temporal series of thoughts and feelings through a temporal series of lyrics and musical notes. By severing sounds from their spatial sources, the recording technology helps us to enjoy the purely temporal nature that sounds share with the mind. This technology enriches our aesthetic experience not only by adding new features to musical performances but also by subtracting something cumbersome from them, namely, their connection to space and matter.

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sense' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A22/B37). As regards the analogy between inner life and sounds, in Plato's *Phaedo* the Pythagorean philosopher Simmias already suggests that the (essentially temporal) mind is to the (essentially spatial) body as the (essentially temporal) music is to the (essentially spatial) musical instruments: 'the attunement is something unseen and incorporeal and very lovely and divine in the tuned lyre, while the lyre itself and its strings are corporeal bodies and composite and earthy and akin to the mortal' (86a).