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“Throw Little Things Off”:
Affording Emotional Meanings in Björk’s *Hyperballad*

AND

“I Hope You Stay Soft”
A portfolio of works exploring vulnerability through music & self-authored text

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Part I: “Throw Little Things Off”: Affording Emotional Meanings in Björk’s *Hyperballad*

This dissertation explores ways of affording emotional meaning(s) in popular recorded song through a case study of Björk’s song *Hyperballad* (1995). I argue that emotional meanings in song are a product of craft, of choices that can be analyzed at the level of the song track, even as we acknowledge that music is an inherently cultural and socially-situated act. By being exact in our usage of words like “emotion” and more specific about what attributes of a song track afford various affective responses, we can produce rich interpretations that are fair to all parties involved, restoring agency to the singer-songwriter as a skillful producer of signs and to listeners as interpreters of those signs.

As a jumping-off-point, I address existing research that finds that *Rolling Stone*—an influential popular music institution with near-hegemonic consecrating power—has often tended to construct women artists' songs in terms of “emotional authenticity” even when legitimating them as canonic, glossing the songs’ emotional potency and convincingness as either unexplainable or provable via autobiographical verification. Given this history and popular music scholarship’s relative youth as a discipline, I contend that we need more thoughtful, thorough scholarship analyzing emotion in popular song—in order to better understand emotional meaning in music for its own sake, but also to reflect the value in studying supposedly “feminine” aesthetic traits that have often been marginalized.

I take Björk’s song *Hyperballad* from the 1995 album *Post* as an unusually apt case study for this purpose. I conduct a reception history of *Post* and *Hyperballad*, showing that the song is often received as powerfully emotional by fans and critics, and addressing issues of genre and technology that crucially impact how listeners construct meanings within Björk’s idiosyncratic

style. I also analyze what *Post*'s cover conveys about what we can expect to hear on the album, arguing that Björk's visual choices position the album's persona as communicating directly with us listeners. The cover also suggests that we are in for experiences of intense emotion, in which the dial is "turned up to 11."

My interpretation of *Hyperballad* utilizes the persona-environment (melody-accompaniment) distinction that popular musicologists Philip Tagg and Allan Moore employ, as well as research from music psychology and other disciplines, to address all the sounding layers of the song. Ultimately, I argue that the persona-environment relationship in *Hyperballad* can be understood in terms of changing states of consciousness. By attending to the detail of the song track at any given moment, including sounds' relationships with one another both locally and across the full duration of the form, we can interpret *Hyperballad* as enacting the processes of emotional self-regulation the persona explicitly refers to in the lyrics.

Finally, the dissertation zooms out to consider broader social and moral implications, arguing that songwriting is a form of emotional labor and song listening is a form of emotional play. Both activities are integral to being human, with very real implications for development of empathy, emotional intelligence, and overall mental health.

Part II: "I Hope You Stay Soft": A portfolio of works exploring vulnerability through music & self-authored text

Part II presents and discusses a portfolio of compositions that explore vulnerability through compositions featuring self-authored text. In composing, writing, and at times performing these pieces, I examine various ways in which text and music can interact to address questions about vulnerability, intimacy, and "confession."

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No one achieves anything alone.
–Leslie Knope, *Parks and Recreation*

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INTRODUCTION:

Emotional “Authenticity” and the Woman Singer-Songwriter

In the 2003 film *Love Actually*, a man gives his wife a Joni Mitchell CD for Christmas. “To continue your... *emotional* education,” he explains, proud of presenting such a thoughtful gift. After all, just a few weeks ago, his wife Karen had revealed, “Joni Mitchell is the woman who taught your cold English wife to feel. I love her, and true love lasts a lifetime.” As Karen opens the present, the beginning of “Both Sides Now” begins to play. It’s an atmospheric beginning, for this is the later version of the song: an older Mitchell, her voice lower, the sonic tapestry much more complex than in her unadorned acoustic guitar rendition of 1969. After all, the gift is an unpleasant surprise, for it’s not the gold necklace Karen had spotted in her husband’s pocket days before. It must have been given to another woman. The camera then shifts the viewer to the privacy of the bedroom, where Karen excuses herself to cry, just as Mitchell’s vocal line enters. As Karen struggles to compose herself, Mitchell’s voice divulges, “I really don’t know love at all.”

This is just one of many examples of how Joni Mitchell is often construed as powerfully, iconically emotional.¹ Indeed, it is part of a much larger pattern of how female artists’ music tends to be represented in the popular media and its institutions. In their mixed-methods quantitative analysis of how gender factored into the albums that were consecrated via their inclusion in *Rolling Stone’s* “500 Greatest Albums of All Time” list of 2003, Vaughn Schmutz and Alison Faupel found that female artists were significantly less likely to achieve consecration within the

¹ Mitchell is often invoked as emblematic of the emotional woman in various films and TV shows. See Ruth Charnock, “The Only Thing That’s Never Going Away: Still Listening to Blue,” in Ruth Charnock, *Joni Mitchell: New Critical Readings* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

realm of popular music.² They also found that “critics more often draw on notions of historical importance, artistic autonomy and high art criteria for male performers, while female performers are more often legitimated through their personal and professional ties and their perceived emotional authenticity,” and that this correlated with how high they placed in the *Rolling Stone* rankings.³

In other words, it’s not simply that reviews of female artists’ albums tend to mention emotion, or even that *Rolling Stone* ranked the highest woman-authored album at only 30th. It’s that they refer overweeningly to emotion and relationships, reinscribing gender binarism at the expense of other legitimating capital.⁴ For instance, the *Rolling Stone* list’s blurb on Carole King’s *Tapestry* emphasized King’s personal and professional networks, referred to the emotional qualities of the album, and concluded with a claim that she “created the reigning model for the 1970s female singer-songwriter,” as opposed to the model for singer-songwriters in general.⁵

Of course, the use of authenticity as a criterion of value in popular music is hardly marginal or specific to women’s music. Perceived authenticity—however we define it—is incredibly important in many musical genres, including classical, folk and rock music; it is considered especially important in differentiating rock from commercial pop music.⁶ However, a greater proportional emphasis on *emotional* authenticity, specifically, has been used in reference

² Vaughn Schmutz and Alison Faupel, “Gender and Cultural Consecration in Popular Music,” *Social Forces* 89, no. 2 (December 2010), 685–687. Consecration is originally Pierre Bourdieu’s idea, and it describes how taste-makers elevate some artworks and artists to a “sacred,” “high-art” status; Schmutz and Faupel point out that popular music critics are hugely influential in this process via reviews, lists, and critical awards.

³ *Ibid.*, 693. Those were the markers that went into how they measured “legitimacy” and how it correlated with the *Rolling Stone* list, along with popular success as measured by sales.

⁴ That said, the *Rolling Stone* list is 20 years old, and the albums it considers even older. *Rolling Stone* has revised their list, most substantially in 2020.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 696–7.

⁶ See Allan Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” *Popular Music* 21, no. 2 (May 2002), 210. Moore points out that these fixations on authenticity are not only apparent in critics’ and fans’ writing, but also in academia (209). For an example of a case in which a group’s perceived inauthenticity led to their marginalization in the critical discourse (at least for a time), see Anne Desler, “History without Royalty? Queen and the Strata of the Popular Music Canon,” *Popular Music* 32, no. 3 (October 2013), 385–405.

to women. In addition to correlating with lower ranking on the *Rolling Stone* list, this suggests a reinscribing of gender binaries: emotion has long been associated with women and the feminine (at least in the West since the vise-grip of Cartesian body-mind dualism took hold).⁷

Rolling Stone is not an isolated case, but emblematic of a broader trend. As David Shumway points out, singer-songwriters' expressions of emotional sensitivity and emotions other than anger were seen as insufficiently "rock'n'roll," and insufficiently masculine—especially by the time punk values came into ascendance.⁸ When it comes to vulnerable or "feminine" emotions, perceived authenticity may create a sort of glass ceiling: it may get a female musician in the door (or onto a list!) but it will only get her so far compared to her male peers, who benefit from the "high art" criteria more typically used to legitimate them.

The manner in which this emotional authenticity is constructed and explained is equally pernicious. It's not only that emotionality is emphasized over high art criteria in the case of women's music, but that assessments of skill are not more often invoked to explain those emotional effects. Instead, autobiography is used as authentication.⁹ In the case of *Blue*, the blurb from the *Rolling Stone* list spent almost half of its limited space on a quote in which Mitchell herself refers to the album's autobiographical nature. On top of this, *Rolling Stone* emphasizes the vaguely-defined emotionality of the album, honing in on a quality of sadness and claiming that "Mitchell sounds utterly alone in her melancholy, turning the sadness into tender, universally powerful art."¹⁰ One must assume that Mitchell's actual emotional pain, and not how she

⁷ Similarly, critics' focus on personal and professional ties (what Schmutz and Faupel call "networks") correlates with traditional views on gender in which women are the keepers of relationships (and not, say, history or politics).

⁸ As Shumway sees it, female singer-songwriters were allowed, even lauded for, their songs' confessional properties, while James Taylor was handily dismissed. Shumway points out that *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* does not give any singer-songwriters (including male-identifying ones, such as Taylor) their own chapter. David Shumway, *Rock Star: The Making of Musical Icons from Elvis to Springsteen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

⁹ This is a nod to Moore's "Authenticity as Authentication."

¹⁰ Schmutz and Faupel, "Gender and Cultural Consecration in Popular Music," 685.

constructs and conveys it, is to thank for the album's merit and influence. It is as if the only way to explain what Mitchell had created—the only way to understand her efficacy at what is essentially a sophisticated form of communication¹¹—was to prove that the songs' events and attendant emotions were objectively real outside their musical life. It's circular reasoning: it *feels* real because it *is* real.

Moreover, a continued failure to understand *how* emotionality is effected in these songs is redolent of old ideas of women as “unknowable” and Other. Singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco's rumination in a 1998 interview with Joni Mitchell is telling:

Why has Bob [Dylan] been so canonized and Joni so thoroughly condescended to over the years? ... Maybe it's also because Bob's songs are inherently more masculine (go figure), and therefore have been viewed as more universal, while Joni's writing, which has a more feminine perspective, is put in a box labeled “girl stuff.”¹²

Whether we like it or not, most of us have ideas that immediately spring to mind for what typically gets put in that “girl-stuff” box: Vulnerable emotions. Romance and relationships. Personal revelations and private disclosures. DiFranco's suggestion that Dylan is “viewed as more universal” strikes at the heart of it: the male subject as Self, and the female as Other. “Authentically” Other, perhaps, but Other nonetheless.

These issues of emotion, authenticity, and consecration are also tied up in the idea of a song or songwriter as “confessional.” Unaware of the term when I started conducting research on emotionality and singer-songwriters, I encountered a rash of articles about how it is disproportionately thrust upon women, such as Alexandra Pollard's 2015 *Guardian* article “Why

¹¹ I agree with popular musicologist Phillip Tagg when he writes, “Let us assume music to be that form of interhuman communication in which individually experienced affective states and processes are conceived and transmitted as humanly organised non-verbal sound structures to those capable of decoding their message in the form of adequate affective and associative response.” Philip Tagg, “Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice,” *Popular Music* 2 (1982), 40.

¹² Ani DiFranco, “Court and Spark,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 20 September 1998, 430. See also Shumway, *Rock Star*.

are only women described as ‘confessional’ singer-songwriters?”¹³ But the term also has a relationship to a genre of poetry exemplified by Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell, first used in 1959 by poet and critic M. L. Rosenthal to describe Lowell’s *Life Studies*.¹⁴ Often, the topics of these “confessional” poems were quite extreme, but Rosenthal didn’t intend the term to reflect guilt, nor did he even mean that the material was necessarily autobiographical. What was important was the way that the self is presented in the poems—the *illusion* of there being no speaker distinct from the poet. In the case of songwriters, however, this distinction is rarely retained. Musicians’ roles as star personae, and their ability to speak about the origins of their work in interviews and media, can sometimes reinforce ideas of the songs as pure unmediated expression, contributing to writings that lean on autobiography as authentication.

To summarize: There appears to be a problem with usage of the terms “emotion” and “authenticity” in writing about songs by women. These are two of the most important values in popular musics, but also two of the least well-defined. These concepts, sometimes combined as “emotional authenticity,” may be especially powerful but also problematic, especially in the case of artists who fit the singer-songwriter genre. The idea seems to intersect with the even-more-problematic “confession,” which often has negative associations, but also raises intriguing questions about subject position and the nature of song. Most importantly, such terms, even once better-defined, must work in tandem with analysis of songs’ actual sounds and

¹³ Alexandra Pollard, “Why Are Only Women Described as ‘Confessional’ Singer-Songwriters?,” *The Guardian*, 9 April 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/apr/09/why-are-only-women-described-as-confessional-singer-songwriters>> See also Clara Scott, “Confessionalism and the Female Voice,” *The Michigan Daily*, 4 February 2020. <<https://www.michigandaily.com/arts/clara-scott-confessionalism-and-female-voice/>>

¹⁴ In fact, this is not the first use of the term; it had been used in reference to prose. “The *OED*’s earliest citation is of Nathan Drake, writing in 1817 of Shakespeare’s ‘confessional’ sonnets.” Stephen Reynolds, “Autobiografiction,” *Speaker* 15 (1906), 28–30.

symbols, acknowledging the craft used to produce them, in order to redress some of the issues in how women singer-songwriters have been received and consecrated.

Toward analysis of emotion in popular recorded song: Björk's *Hyperballad*

In light of all this, I contend that we would benefit from more thoughtful and thorough scholarship studying emotion in popular song. We need this in order to better understand emotional meaning in music for its own sake, and also to reflect that there is value in studying “feminine” aesthetic traits that have often been marginalized.¹⁵ We especially need this work in the realm of theory and analysis— work that, while acknowledging that music is an inherently cultural, socially situated act, nonetheless studies the aesthetic product itself, examining how it presents a complex network of potential gestures, symbols, and signs.¹⁶ These analyses should neither ignore songs’ power as emotional expression, nor laud them for apparent emotional “authenticity” without seeking to understand how this power may be a product of craft. This type of interpretation can restore agency to the composer/author as a skillful producer of signs, and to listeners as interpreters of those signs.

To this end, this dissertation studies Björk’s song *Hyperballad* from the 1995 album *Post*. Björk is frequently dubbed quite “emotional” by critics, and by her own estimations. *Hyperballad* is her most popular song, and is often considered extremely emotionally affecting by her fans and critics. Yet Björk is not subjected to as many of the problematic and gendered legitimization

¹⁵ Of course, this is not just about gender, but sexuality as well. For instance, there is musicological scholarship about anxieties surrounding Schubert’s lyricism, “femininity,” and how his work has been received and constructed. See Poundie Burstein, “Lyricism, Structure, and Gender in Schubert’s G Major String Quartet,” *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (Spring, 1997), 51–63.

¹⁶ As Moore points out, popular-music scholarship that focuses on socio-cultural meanings has been increasingly common, while the interpretative approach “lags behind.” He says that bringing “music analysis” and “popular music” together is still not very common as of his writing in 2012 (*Song Means*, 2). Tagg’s “Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice” is relevant to this discussion, as is Richard Middleton, “Popular Music Analysis and Musicology: Bridging the Gap,” *Popular Music* 12, no. 2 (May 1993), 177–190.

strategies that Schmutz and Faupel discovered, at least in *Rolling Stone*. Rather, she is often consecrated using high art criteria. This may be because of the many ways that Björk doesn't fit the "singer-songwriter" stereotype. The term is quite complex and imprecisely used; it can refer to anyone who writes and performs their own music, but also to a more specific (albeit still imprecise) way of making music that has its roots in the 1960s and performers like Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell. Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams argue for a broadened definition of the term, such that it include Kanye West, for example.¹⁷ As I'll discuss in Chapter 1, Björk exists at the intersection of various genres, combining traditional singer-songwriter elements with a bevy of other types of sonic material. For instance, in *Hyperballad*, the vocal part largely fits within a singer-songwriter tradition: Björk's vocal timbre fits that genre or folk much better than pop or electronic dance music, and her rhythmic flexibility resonates with the singer-songwriter tradition's characteristics of metric ambiguity and rhythmic irregularity.¹⁸ But meanwhile, the rest of the sonic fabric is a *mélange* of sounds and influences that, bears resemblance to EDM, folk music, and classical music. All this makes Björk and *Hyperballad* a fascinating case study. Also, although Björk has received a fair amount of academic attention, scholars have focused on her later albums and not her most commercially and critically successful album (*Post*), nor her iconically emotional, most-popular song (*Hyperballad*). I want to fill this significant gap in the scholarship.

I also have personal reasons for choosing *Hyperballad*: my subjective experience of it as unusually emotional and powerful. When listening across Björk's oeuvre early on in this project's conception, *Hyperballad* repeatedly stood out to me; it seemed to affect me on a deep, physical

¹⁷ Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁸ For more on this subject, see Murphy, "The Times are A-Changin'."

level. At times, it provoked an emotional response in me in a way I had rarely experienced. I feel strong affinity for and curiosity about the song, and I want to deeply understand these phenomena.

My choice to study Björk is also shaped by my positionality as a woman composer. I am inspired by singer-songwriters of all types, and the aesthetic and emotional work they do. Some of my own compositional output has lived firmly in that realm or other popular song traditions, while some of my work fits clearly in the contemporary classical music realm. But most of my work has strived to integrate these various traditions—and has dealt concertedly with emotion in one way or another. As a woman composer of works that often explore emotion head-on and that straddle different aesthetic traditions, I have often felt frustrated by a lack of models and/or representation. Björk’s work is often considered to be “avant-pop,” genre-defying, and experimental; while she openly embraces the popular, she integrates materials and approaches typically associated with new music and “art” traditions. Equally important for me, Björk unabashedly embraces emotion in her work. I admire and aspire to the complexity, modernity, and daring she manages to achieve in her music alongside what I experience as poignant, and sometimes quite direct, emotionality.

In short, I find Björk to be an inspiration, and *Hyperballad* to be somewhat of a mystery. While I’d never claim to “solve” it, I’d love to unravel the knot as much as possible. Indeed, I have a somewhat personal process goal with this dissertation: to approach musical meanings, especially emotional ones, by attempting to understand a relatively small artifact—a single song—through all relevant angles. To this end, I focus mainly on the sonic signals of the *Hyperballad* song track and their possible emotional meanings and affordances of “authenticity,” slippery though it may be. I attempt to treat them as results of craft and culture, and to locate where in the music these affordances might come from.

How can we make sense of signs of apparent genuineness while still recognizing them as constructed? How can we understand the powerful emotional signals of the song medium without collapsing into oversimplification? What tools allow us to ground them in the sounds and symbols of the artwork while also acknowledging our positionality as individuals and within a culture? And how might considerations of relationship and intimacy emerge, given that emotion and music are both essentially connected to the social realm?

Methodology & Chapter Summary

Methodology

In order to answer the questions I have raised, I engage with a variety of types of sources and tools from music and other disciplines. These sources range from influential works within popular musicology and music theory to articles from poetry journals and even religious journals. I also address Richard Middleton's calls to use scientific research:¹⁹ psychological and anthropological studies play a significant role in my analysis. As Allan Moore points out, "too often in the literature... interpretations are made without adequate anchorage in the details of an actual aural experience of a song."²⁰ I believe drawing on scientific studies from the fields of psychology and neuroscience can aid in my understanding this "actual aural experience," providing evidence of listening experiences other than my own even as I remain grounded in my own phenomenological experience of the song. But my approach in incorporating the scientific research is pragmatic rather than systematic; I draw from what seems useful for different specific cases as they arise.

¹⁹ Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Moore, *Song Means*, 5–6.

In terms of popular song analysis, I situate myself in relationship to two influential analyzers of popular music: Philip Tagg,²¹ whose work with semiotics and connecting them to social-cultural context is admirable, and especially Allan F. Moore,²² who stays close to the sound signal itself while also being focused on meaning and interpretation. The reader will notice that I especially often refer to what the song and its various components “affords,” which I do in line with Moore. In order to discuss meaning in a way that addresses the actual experience of the song, yet does not enshrine formalism or objectivity, Moore thinks in terms of *affordance* of meaning. Songs “afford” meanings in the sense that they offer a “range of possibilities” that is neither infinite nor singular.²³ As he puts it,

...we cannot presume an objective position from which to write hermeneutically. But this is precisely why an ecological position is so important, for the theory of affordance notes what opportunities are *available* in an environment: it does not *prescribe* which of those opportunities must be taken by a particular organism (emphasis added).²⁴

Affording meaning is a logical complement to the process of *constructing* meaning, which is a process every listener engages in.²⁵ Songs afford meaning, listeners construct it.

Chapter Summary

Even as my goal is to remain grounded in the song “itself”—in sounds and their meanings, not biography—I also want to account for as much as I can that may shape our understanding of the song track. So, in Chapter 1, I provide crucial background on Björk, *Post*, and *Hyperballad*, including situating them in time and place. I also conduct some reception history, including fan reception, in order to establish the song’s cultural context and relevance. This work is especially

²¹ Tagg, *Music’s Meanings*.

²² Ibid. and “The Persona-Environment Relation(ship) in Recorded Song.”

²³ Moore, *Song Means*, 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 330.

²⁵ I base this statement on my background as a teacher with a constructivist approach to learning and knowledge, informed by the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky.

needed because *Post* and *Hyperballad* have rarely been addressed in the academic literature; it also provides an opportunity to examine how treatment of Björk does and doesn't reflect the problematic trends I discussed earlier. I also highlight salient themes in Björk's work that make it especially fruitful ground for inquiry into music and emotion.

In Chapter 2, I begin my in-depth interpretation of *Hyperballad*, but focus first on the persona rather than the total sounding environment (a concept I will explain shortly). I first discuss the visual persona presented on the album cover and how it exhibits heightened naturalism, highly aroused affect, and a meaningful relationship between a person and her environment. I then move to the song track to unpack the three elements of vocal persona (lyrics, voice, and melody), arguing that the persona of the song affords a sense of "authenticity" by presenting various signals of spontaneity, which also contribute to a strong sense of emotional range and intensity. Ultimately, through being responsive to what I personally find in the song track I explore how the vocal persona can be seen as embodying different states of consciousness.

In Chapter 3, I move from examining the persona in isolation to examining the persona in relationship with the highly-differentiated accompaniment, or "environment," embarking on a left-to-right analysis. In addition to exploring the fruitful idea of the song track as embodying shifting states of consciousness, I interpret how its sonic materials suggest certain affects, and how those in turn might combine to afford certain emotional interpretations. I argue that *Hyperballad's* "emotional" quality is not that of a single emotion, but of the quickly-changing affective states, cognitive processes, and layered ambiguities that characterize human emotional experience in general. Moreover, I argue that Björk provides both a message and a sonic manifestation of emotional self-regulation—quite a higher-order cognitive and social-emotional skill. The chapter culminates in a discussion of intimacy as a useful way of thinking about

emotional connection and psychological trajectory in song forms. I suggest that this approach may be a way of integrating the individual and the social, which were never as separate or at odds as they were made out to be.

Finally, in the conclusion, I explore implications beyond *Hyperballad* and Björk, connecting back to the questions and concerns I raised in the introduction. I zoom out to revisit sociocultural issues, and argue that effective communication of affective experience in song is a form of emotional labor with social value.

Crucial Contexts & Definitions: Emotion and Music

Music has often been considered to be extremely, even *uniquely*, emotional among art forms. As music theorists Jenefer Robinson and Robert S. Hatten put it, “It is a time-honored theme in western thinking about music, going back to Plato and Aristotle, that music has an especially intimate connection with the emotions.”²⁶ While emotion in music (and in general) was under-researched for quite a while, there has been a recent “emotional turn” in music psychology. At this point, studies solidly confirm that “...there is some kind of consistent relationship between musical structure and emotional expression,” and that music can not only resemble or suggest emotions, but can actually arouse them in listeners.²⁷ However, many questions remain.²⁸ An overview of the state of research into music and emotion is beyond the purview of this project, but readers can refer to Swaminathan and Schellenberg’s excellent article “Current Emotion

²⁶ Jenefer Robinson and Robert S. Hatten, “Emotions in Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2012), 71. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/mts.2012.34.2.71>> While I am aware of seminal sources like Leonard Meyer’s *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. I found that this work was less helpful than more recent sources, especially given my focus on song rather than instrumental works.

²⁷ Patrik N. Juslin and Sloboda, “Music and Emotion,” in *The Psychology of Music* (3rd edition), edited by Diana Deutsch 2013, 8.

²⁸ As Juslin and Sloboda point out, “although music may convey meaning, it does not do so in terms of a language-like semantics where every note pattern has a fixed meaning. Juslin and Sloboda, “Music and Emotion,” 8. See also Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression*. (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press), 1994.

Research in Music Psychology” for reading along those lines.²⁹ My project approaches emotion in music through a particular lens, which I will explain here along with my working definition of “emotion.”

Though emotion is sometimes used as an umbrella term encompassing any type of feeling or sensation, I do not proceed with that understanding. To be fair, there remains some disagreement on how to define emotion, even among psychologists.³⁰ However, I find Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda’s definition to be effective and responsible, and it is the one I will proceed with. They define emotions as “relatively brief, intense and rapidly changing responses to potentially important events (subjective challenges or opportunities) in the external or internal environment, usually of a social nature, which involve a number of subcomponents (cognitive changes, subjective feelings, expressive behavior, and action tendencies) that are more or less ‘synchronized’ during an emotion episode.”³¹ Note that in its relatively brief duration, emotion differs from mood, which I believe we are often more adept at identifying in music, and sometimes gloss as “emotion.”

Emotion also differs from affect in important ways. As the neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett points out, affective feeling, unlike emotion, is an “inborn, core capacity deriving from interoceptive sense data from the body.” Affective feelings are “... a basic feature of consciousness – they are not specific to instances of emotion. We learn to transform affective feelings into instances of emotion in those moments using conceptual knowledge that we acquire via cultural learning....”³² Thus, affect is distinct from emotion, but fundamental to it. Affect is

²⁹ Swathi Swaminathan and E. Glenn Schellenberg, “Current Emotion Research in Music Psychology,” *Emotion Review* 7, no. 3 (March 2015), 189–197.

³⁰ Carroll E. Izard, “Basic Emotions, Natural Kinds, Emotion Schemas, and a New Paradigm,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2, no. 3 (Sep., 2007), 260–280. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40212206>>

³¹ Juslin and Sloboda, “Music and Emotion,” 3.

³² Lisa Feldman Barrett, “Hypotheses About Emotional Development in the Theory of Constructed Emotion: A Response to Developmental Perspectives on How Emotions Are Made,” *Human Development* 2020. <[barrett-2020-commentary-hypotheses.pdf \(affective-science.org\)](#)>

happening all the time, even if mildly and/or below our conscious awareness. Emotion, on the other hand, involves a meaning-making processing in which we interpret that information given historical, social, and cultural factors (and actually, this can be unconscious as well, further complicating matters!).

The two basic affective parameters of *valence* (positive/negative) and *arousal* (activated/calm) form the substrate on which further information and assessment occurs—more cognitive dimensions, informed by one’s history and culture—in order to conceptualize an experience as we call “emotion.”³³ Because of this, emotions are complex, layered entities with blurred edges and overlap between them. Posner et al. argue that this reality is reflected in how real people discuss and experience emotion: not as “isolated discrete entities,” but rather

...as ambiguous and overlapping experiences. Similar to the spectrum of color, emotions seem to lack the discrete borders that would clearly differentiate one emotion from another.³⁴

What I have just described is a *dimensional* or *circumplex* view of emotion, rather than a *discrete* one. Circumplex models espouse a view of emotions as comprised of complex layers of overlapping factors, both affective and cognitive, rather than as discrete, bounded entities that have fully distinct neurophysiological systems and physical externalizations. Instead, in the circumplex model, “emotions can therefore be seen as the end product of a complex interaction between cognitions... and neurophysiological changes related to the valence and arousal systems.”³⁵ I will operate based on a circumplex model of emotion, and my analysis will discuss both affect and emotion in light of this model. When I use the word “emotion,” I refer to a composite gestalt that involves not only a basic affective state, but also a significant component of

³³ Jonathan Posner, James A. Russell, and Bradley S. Peterson, “The Circumplex Model of Affect: An Integrative Approach to Affective Neuroscience, Cognitive Development, and Psychopathology,” *Developmental Psychopathology* 17, no. 3 (2005), 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, citing Russell & Fehr 1994.

³⁵ Posner et al., “The Circumplex Model of Affect,” 5.

cognitive interpretation based on cultural, social, and historical factors, and that can be interpreted on multiple dimensions in addition to valence and arousal.

Visuals can help us grasp the dimensional model of emotion. The figure below, for instance, represents only the two underlying dimensions of affect that are always at play in emotion (and all experience, if we agree with Barrett):

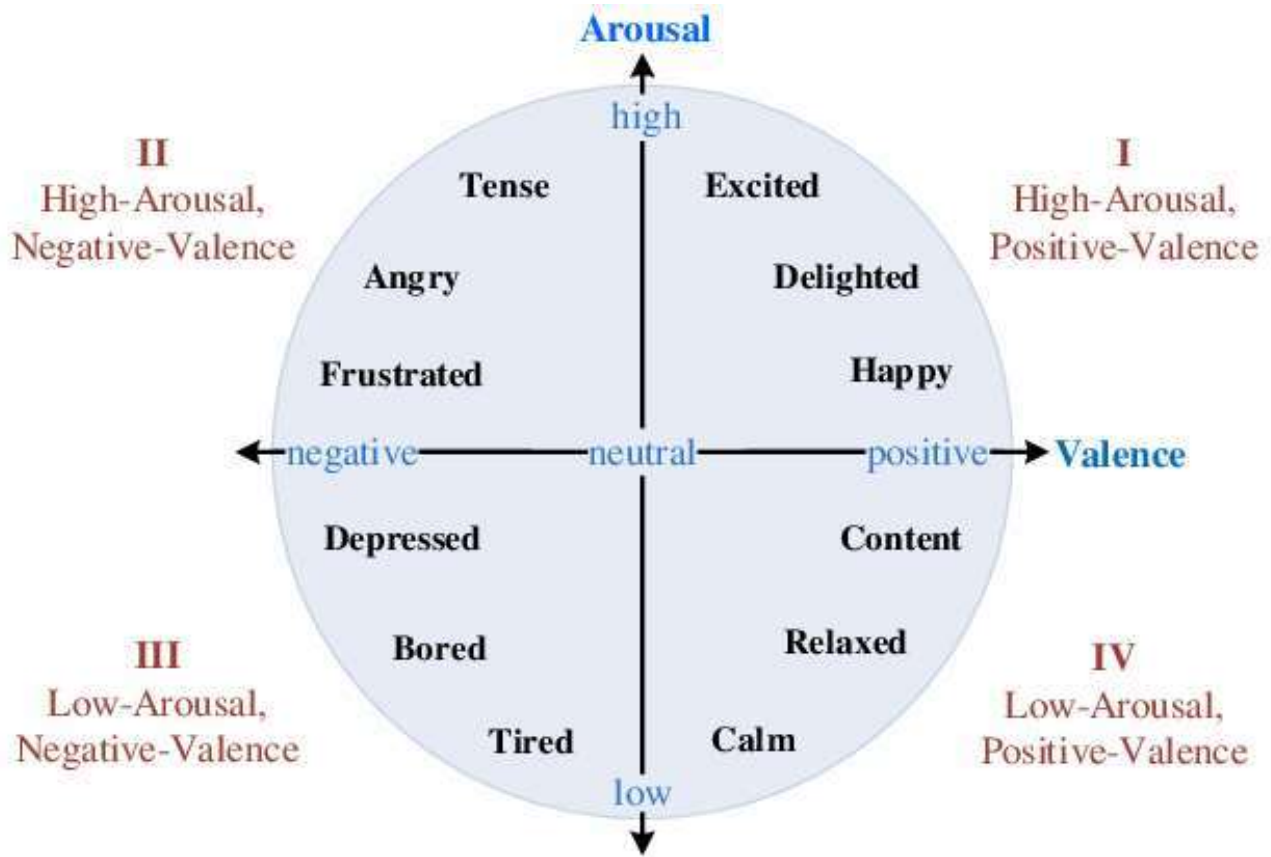


Figure 0.1: Visual representation of the circumplex model, incorporating only fundamental dimensions of valence and arousal. Yu, et al.³⁶

Other dimensions beyond valence and arousal come into play in order to create actual emotional concepts. Which ones, exactly, vary between scholars and models. The figure below, for example,

³⁶ Figure 1 in Yu et al., “Building Chinese Affective Resources in Valence-Arousal Dimensions,” *North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics* (2016).

Cowen et al.'s study of vocal bursts³⁷ includes 12 total dimensions: approach, arousal, certainty, commitment, control, dominance, fairness, focus, identity, improvement, obstruction, safety, and valence:



Figure 0.3: Cowen et al.'s visual representation of a vocal burst's perceived affect mapped on 12 dimensions³⁸

The configuration above is for the vocal burst that was most unequivocally rated as expressing the emotion “anger.” Note how valence is negative and arousal is moderate, and that there is a sense of high obstruction and moderate dominance, but low control and fairness. “Fairness” is a wonderful example of a dimension that clearly involves cognitive assessment and could be highly cultural and/or individual, as opposed to a basic physiological feeling such as arousal. It simply

³⁷ Alan S. Cowen, Hilary A. Elflein, Petri Laukka, and Dacher Keltner, “Mapping 24 Emotions Conveyed by Brief Human Vocalization,” *The American Psychologist* 74, no. 6 (2019), 698–712. Vocal bursts are a type of short non-lexical vocalization (i.e., “ooh!” or “ow!”) that conveys emotion; they are believed to predate language. I discuss vocal bursts further in Chapter 2.

³⁸ Cowen et al., “Mapping 24 Emotions,” interactive version available at <<https://www.alancowen.com/vocs>>. Note that it is not important for the reader to be able to read the different types of visuals presented consistently, or understand the different types of studies at play; they are simply meant to illustrate how different dimensions of experience can come together to suggest “emotion.”

makes sense to attend to these layers of affective and cognitive dimensions rather than only the complex, subjective composite emotions they result in.

I find the dimensional model incredibly helpful for explaining emotion in general, but it makes especially good sense for understanding emotion in *music*. Overlapping dimensions is also how music operates, for it is comprised of layers of multiple parameters that each exist on a continuum. Given that musical changes can be continuous as well as discrete, gradual as well as sudden, and can occur on various parameters simultaneously even within one instrument/voice—not to mention the compendium of multiple voices sounding!—a circumplex model seems incredibly useful. Although most studies have tended to focus on discrete emotions (and not the various dimensions of affect and cognition that comprise them), Juslin and Sloboda argue that there are benefits to the dimensional model:

Arguably, a dimensional approach to emotion is particularly suitable for exploring changes in expression, including shifting or conflicting emotions. ...Musical discourse talks of climaxes and points of repose, tension, and relaxation. Such variations are probably best described in dynamic terms, such as tension-release, crescendo-diminuendo, and accelerando-ritardando.³⁹

Perhaps identifying and unbraiding the different affective changes that are likely implied by musical changes can help us understand how listeners might afford more complex, composite concepts of emotion in music. Furthermore, given music's profound relationship to the motion and the body, it makes sense for us to pay attention to underlying affective dimensions that directly retain a relationship to physiology, rather than only higher-order concepts of emotion.

Finally, a circumplex model acknowledges the role of sociocultural differences in emotion. Much research (especially Paul Ekman's body of work) has suggested that, amidst the myriad complex possible emotions, there were nonetheless six "basic," universal emotions. While these ideas are often still considered canonic, Barrett's more recent research contends that there

³⁹ Juslin and Sloboda, "Music and Emotion," 7.

are *not* universal emotions. Her “theory of constructed emotions” says that the words we attach to emotions from an early age teach us how to categorize and conceptualize these multilayered feelings; essentially, they teach us abstractions that we apply to complex, contingent experiences. It seems to me that the theory of constructed emotions, in tandem with circumplex models, can account for the substantial role of cultural construction without ignoring what may unite all humans across these differences. I believe this is crucial in interpreting musical meaning, and it is personally important to me as a scholar.

So, I proceed from this understanding: emotions are not discrete or universal, but comprised of specific affective and cognitive dimensions. Examining these dimensions, and then how sounds and changes in sound can result in affective responses and afford certain interpretations,⁴⁰ can help us understand musical emotion.

Crucial Contexts & Definitions: Persona

One last concept is crucial for my interpretation of popular song, especially when “authenticity” is at play: persona. The concept of persona is important across various disciplines, and has several distinct meanings even within music. Critical musicologist Kai Arne Hansen sums up this complex situation well, and is worth quoting at length:

Following Jung, the term [persona] has come to generally concern the social role that people assume in relation to others, and that performers assume in relation to their audience. In popular music scholarship, the concept is often used vaguely (as a substitute for either the artist’s identity, alter ego, assumed character, or a song protagonist) or theorized and discussed in differing ways as musical persona or performance persona, vocal persona, electronic persona, or instrumental persona, which leads to a multiplicity of understandings that prioritize different facets of the music experience. While such plurality allows individual scholars to address in great detail specific aspects of how music constructs identities, the disparate understandings and uses of the term ‘persona’ can

⁴⁰ Music psychologists draw an important distinction between perceived and aroused emotions. It is more common to perceive emotions in music than to actually experience them, but it has been abundantly shown that people do experience actual emotional responses to music, as well.

simultaneously lead to confusion and ambiguity. These circumstances signal the need for scholars to clarify their own definitions of the term in order to avoid misunderstanding.⁴¹

Per Hansen, I will briefly review what I see as two general categories of persona that are relevant for my project to alleviate the “confusion and ambiguity” he warns against.

In its most common and general usage, the term persona suggests presentation, masks, and/or the adoption of a character. We may think of it as a public figure’s image as they project it (but stopping short of a full alter ego, such as Beyonce’s Sasha Fierce). The etymological relationship to the Latin term for an actor’s mask, as well as the term “dramatis personae,” reminds us of the term’s relationship to a sense of playing a character.⁴² As media scholar Philip Auslander sees it, all musicians perform personae in some way:

...all kinds of musicians (i.e., singers, instrumentalists, conductors) in all genres (i.e., classical, jazz, rock, etc.) enact personae in their performances (Auslander 2004:8). In some instances, musical personae are closely analogous to movie star personages: in performances by flamboyant rock stars, opera singers, and conductors, among others, our perception of the music is mediated by our conception of the performer as personage. But even self-effacing musicians, such as the relatively anonymous members of a symphony orchestra or the invisible players in a Broadway pit band, perform musical personae...⁴³

Moreover, the prevalence of star culture, tabloids, etc. means that we must consider musicians’ personae not only onstage, but in all public settings. But in some ways this is no different from how we *all* perform socially, for as Auslander points out, “one can speak of performing a self in daily life just as readily as one speaks of performing a text in a theatre or concert hall.”⁴⁴ In any case, for Auslander, there are at least three layers to a performing artist like Björk – at least three Björks or Joni Mitchells or Madonnas or Lizzos: There is the “real” person, the persona(e) when performing onstage, and a general public persona (which is different than the persona in the act of

⁴¹ Kai Arne Hansen, “(Re)Reading Pop Personae: A Transmedial Approach to Studying the Multiple Construction of Artist Identities,” *Twentieth-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (2019), 503.

⁴² *Britannica*, s.v. “Persona (literature),” 3 January, 2024, <<https://www.britannica.com/art/persona-literature>>

⁴³ Philip Auslander, “Musical Personae,” *TDR* 50, no. 1 (Spring, 2006), 102–103. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4492661>>

⁴⁴ Auslander, “Musical Personae,” 101.

actual performance but also distinct from the “real” private figure).⁴⁵ An artist can have different personae for different songs as well. Somewhat similarly, in literature and poetry, persona describes “the voice chosen by the author for a particular artistic purpose,” which is distinct from the actual author.⁴⁶ This is an important parallel in understanding the distinction between a singer-songwriter and the speaker (singer) in a given song, which can get especially messy given how they combine the roles of author and performer.

In sum, the author-singer heard on an album and song track is always a persona, and we are not gaining access to the author’s unmediated Self as a factual, real-life person. However, we also know that it is frequent for listeners to have an *illusion* that they are gaining privileged access to these figures’ actual interiority, and that this sense of access and even authenticity is a strong value in many genres of popular song. In certain times and places, such as the 1960s or early-mid 1990s in the United States, this value may be especially ascendant. The archetypal singer-songwriter still has a persona(e), but, unlike with a more diva-like figure, part of their performance is to create the impression that nothing is being performed, and that the real person and the persona are the same – in other words, to create the illusion of “authenticity.” Some singer-songwriters may rely on this illusion, and their public behaviors and aesthetic products may consciously choose to reinforce it (for instance, in interviews or through album covers).

Persona can help us grapple with authenticity, which is a hotly debated and problematic concept but carries a value for many listeners that we cannot simply deny or ignore. Schmutz and Faupel point out that, much like persona, usage of the term “authenticity” varies widely.⁴⁷ From a musicological perspective, authenticity can have three different overall meanings: genuine,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Britannica*, s.v. “Persona (literature).”

⁴⁷ Schmutz and Faupel, “Gender and Cultural Consecration in Popular Music,” 691.

original, or steeped within a tradition.⁴⁸ Depending on which of these three definitions are being assumed, completely opposite values might be used to justify assessments of an artist's purported authenticity. For example, Anne Desler shows that the band Queen were alternately embraced and denigrated in various canons across time based on how they passed or failed litmus tests of authenticity that depended on "historicized positions" and socio-cultural considerations that changed drastically over time.⁴⁹ Within popular musics, claims of authenticity most often connote the first of the above meanings: they "often revolve around establishing that a musician or the music is 'genuine,' 'natural' and without 'artifice.'"⁵⁰ But how this "natural" quality is constituted can change, and values of originality or rootedness in a tradition can still come into play as well.

I agree with Alan F. Moore's argument that when we acknowledge and investigate how authenticity is constructed, this deepens our understanding of musical meaning. Ultimately, authenticity is an unavoidable, important, and potentially productive fiction. While assuming it "inheres" in the musical artist or their aesthetic product is foolish, recognizing what role aspects of the artwork itself play in supporting constructions of authenticity honors the craft the composer-performer has employed. For this reason, in this dissertation I do address what elements of *Hyperballad* can function as sonic markers of "genuineness." This is not an assertion of absolute truth, nor do I deny the role of culture and the individual listener. Rather, I aim to understand the possible meanings that occur in the encounter between listener and song, which I view as a semi-abstracted communication act. The concept of persona helps us understand how meanings – including assessments of authenticity – are constructed and navigated between *all*

⁴⁸ Thank you to Beth Levy for clarifying this for me so succinctly. And indeed, in "Authenticity as Authentication," Moore points out that concerns about and constructions of authenticity are not only apparent in critics' and fans' writing, but also in academia. Moore, "Authenticity as Authentication," 209.

⁴⁹ Anne Desler, "History without Royalty? Queen and the Strata of the Popular Music Canon."

⁵⁰ Schmutz and Faupel, "Gender and Cultural Consecration in Popular Music," 692, citing sociologist and popular music scholar Richard A. Peterson.

parties involved in creating and consuming the art within a genre⁵¹ and sociocultural context.⁵²

The concept of persona helps remind us that we are never gaining access to the artist's uncurated, "authentic" interiority. Performers of popular music might create an *illusion* that the listener is gaining access to their real Self, brazenly adopt a persona, or fall anywhere in-between.

The term "persona" gets used in another way in music analysis: to represent something within and of the piece itself, including in instrumental music. As Fairchild and Marshall put it, "Music has a long history of what has been called 'personafication' (Marshall, Cruz & McDonald, 2018), where persons and personalities are imbricated into a continuing and strategic process of constructing persona."⁵³ Many theorists have turned to this idea of "persona" in order to understand music's *emotional* meanings, in particular, asking, *how can something that is non-human appear to "express" emotions?* For many thinkers, an imagined virtual agent is a necessary answer. For instance, in *The Composer's Voice*, the music theorist Edward T. Cone famously asked, "If music is a language, then who is speaking?"⁵⁴ In the case of art song, he answered that there are three personae. First, the vocal persona, which functions as a sort of protagonist; second, the accompaniment, which he calls a "virtual persona" and which can function as a sort of narrator; and thirdly, an "implicit" or "complete" persona that is a composite of the first two, and which corresponds to the composer's voice.⁵⁵

Allan F. Moore explicitly builds upon Cone's ideas within the realm of popular music. His work on persona within recorded song tracks, especially his article "The Persona-Environment Relation in Recorded Song," is rare and valuable in how it explores the differentiation of strands

⁵¹ Charles Fairchild and P. David Marshall, "Music and Persona: An Introduction," *Persona Studies* 5, no. 1 (2019), 8. Genre provides crucial context and what Fairchild and Marshall call a "persona range."

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 1, 7.

⁵⁴ Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 1.

⁵⁵ Matthew Gelbart, "Persona and Voice in the Kinks' Songs of the Late 1960s," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128, no. 2 (2003), 202. See also Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, 11.

of a musical texture and honors the role of the accompaniment. For Moore, “persona” describes everything produced by the main vocalist.⁵⁶ While some writers use terms like “subject” or “individual” for this entity, Moore points out that the term persona “reminds us that this identity is fictional”—that is, that it’s not the full, “real” Björk that we encounter when she is performing. (In other words, it connects us to the more general definition of persona I outlined earlier.) This is especially necessary to remember in the case of singer-songwriters’ songs, compared to the art songs Cone described, in which the composer, performer and poet are usually separate entities and there is an understanding that the singer is inhabiting a character of sorts. This is not the case in much popular music. Using the term “persona” helps address concerns that we not collapse an artist with their presentation to the world or their artistic voice in a particular song.⁵⁷

The distinction between vocalist and pianist, or soloist and orchestra, was crucial to Cone’s initial configuration; that is, the melody-background distinction was important, with the melody-carrying part conveying a sort of “protagonist,” even in the case of instrumental music.⁵⁸ We might ask, what is the meaning of a song’s persona in relationship with *everything else* sounding in a popular song track? What can that “everything else” constitute, and what roles can it play? To address these questions, Moore builds on work by Philip Tagg, who points out that “melody-accompaniment dualism” has been the dominant musical texture for the last 400+ years, from Haydn to AC/DC.⁵⁹ For example, Tagg points out that in the case of heavy metal, behind the singer, we hear an accompaniment that resembles the sonic environment of motorcycles, cities, modernity – that is, the physical, external environment of a particular time and place. In turn, the

⁵⁶ Moore, “The Persona-Environment Relation in Recorded Song,” [1–2].

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, [1].

⁵⁸ Arthur B. Wenk, “Review of *The Composer’s Voice* by Edward T. Cone,” *Journal of the American Musical Society* 29, no. 3 (Autumn, 1976), 491. Wenk suggests that Cone is “encouraging us to recognize the protagonist and to sympathize with his point of view,” suggesting possible implications for empathic identification. That is beyond the purview of this project, but something I explore in my compositions in the second part of this document.

⁵⁹ Tagg, *Music’s Meanings*, 425.

vocalist needs to be loud enough to be heard over these instruments, and this can be seen as representing, enacting, or overcoming the individual's inability to be heard—a way of exerting will in a crushing, overpowering environment. Thus, the non-vocal parts in a song, which we typically call “accompaniment,” can be thought of as an *environment*, in not only a musical sense but as an analogy to a physical or social one. It is “the environment within which (or against which) the persona operates is represented by the music which accompanies her/him.”⁶⁰

Moore asks why songs even have accompaniments at all, and points out that accompaniment can inhabit different roles, ranging from “significant to the trivial,” and that “the function of an accompaniment moves from simple pitch/meter orientation, through genre-setting and tone-setting, to support, amplification and explanation of the persona's situation, and finally to contradiction with it.”⁶¹ For instance, Moore argues that the accompaniment in John Lennon's “Imagine” exhibits a sonic fuzziness that supports the lyrics' message, and that the incorporation of additional voices “enacts” the lyrics in The Beatles' “With a Little Help From My Friends.”⁶²

Crucially, musical accompaniments or “environments” often seem to exhibit agential, human, and/or emotional qualities. Moore describes the environment using descriptors like “commenting,” “supporting,” and “contradicting”—terms that typically suggest some kind of human agency.⁶³ In fact, Moore's taxonomy essentially arranges song accompaniments on a continuum of agency, not just “particularization” (as he puts it), since they range from functions he dubs “inert” to ones that are more active, sentient, and even psychologically conscious (e.g., “commenting”). This leads me to a question similar to Cone's: Who is doing the “supporting,”

⁶⁰ Moore, “The Persona-Environment Relation in Recorded Song,” [1].

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, [27] and Abstract.

⁶² *Ibid.*, [17].

⁶³ *Ibid.*, [19].

“extending,” or “contradicting?” Who is it who seems to experience these emotions? And what type of environment is the song “environment” if it, too, appears human?

One option is that a sonic environment is envoicing human Other(s)—that is, that it can represent a *social* environment, not just a physical one. (And certainly, in real life, our social environments are a significant source of emotional response; recall that Juslin and Sloboda’s definition of emotion positioned assessment of the social environment as central.) For instance, Tagg interprets vocal polyphony as having multiple personae. This makes sense for a texture that definitionally features multiple equal melodic strands, especially if all those melodies are voices.

Accompaniments, including popular song accompaniments, can be quite rich and complex, featuring sonic entities that include static postures, chords, ongoing rhythmic substrates, figures, gestures, motives, ostinati, riffs, and melodies. For instance, the complex accompaniment we encounter in *Hyperballad* involves a variety of musical materials that run the gamut between extremes of inert background and full-fledged melody. These could all suggest different degrees or types of agency or humanness, and could ostensibly afford different analogies and thus meanings. Simply considering the accompaniment to be another, separate persona would flatten the variety of these different musical materials; it would also collapse the distinction between vocal/nonvocal and texted/untaxed materials, which is very important in song forms.

It may sometimes be productive (and probably not uncommon) to interpret a song “environment” as providing an *internal* environment. Perhaps the environment can flesh out a full sonic Self, envoicing the “anima” that complements the voice’s “persona.”⁶⁴ Within the reality of the song, there may be a suspension of disbelief – the creation of the illusion that we listeners are gaining access to a Self’s interior world via the sounds going on “beneath” the sung surface. This

⁶⁴ As Tagg points out, “persona is conceptually opposed to anima, the individual’s inner personality,” per the Jungian origins of these terms. Tagg, *Music’s Meanings*, 343.

could also help explain some sense of purported authenticity a listener receives or constructs when encountering some song tracks.

Conceiving of an accompaniment or “environment” as related to a protagonist’s inner world is hardly unique; it is connected to a bourgeois song tradition that includes art song, parlor song, the singer-songwriter tradition, and more. However, I think there are ways we can be more specific in demonstrating *how* music resembles elements of internal experience, and how it both resembles and actually evokes affective responses. For instance, the various entities in an accompaniment that may seem to exhibit emotion and/or agency could be interpreted as analogous to movements, sensations, emotions, and/or thoughts we humans experience. In fact, given music’s rootedness in the body, its possession of multiple simultaneous layers that unfold across time, and its apparent tendency to suggest emotion, I believe music is *uniquely* well-suited to represent, resemble, or virtually enact the simultaneous, difficult-to-categorize aspects of human experience. The words, voice, and melody—that is, the vocal persona—seem most reminiscent of conscious thought, be it stream-like or curated; it could correspond to ego and/or the illusion of a single, continuous Self that we construct. Meanwhile, some facets of experience may be envoiced through the sounds of the sonic environment. This could include a body’s external physical movements, but also interoceptive sensations, emotions, and other elements of the unconscious mind. Taken all together, this could give a song track more of a complete virtual subjectivity or agency, of which the persona is just one part. It would still be a construction of the artist, of course, but a more *complete* construction, with likely implications for emotion, authenticity, and intimacy. I pursue this idea further in my exploration of the sonic environment and analysis of the full composite song track in Chapter 3.

In sum, persona, like emotion, is an important but slippery concept that should be used thoughtfully, and not as a shorthand. In this document, I use the term to refer to the person-like character or protagonist of the song who both is and is *not* Björk—the source of agency who appears to generate the vocal portions of the song, at the very least, and the physical traces of whose voice we hear on a song track. My usage thus encapsulates both of the two umbrella definitions I’ve outlined: persona as mask or personality, and persona as a foregrounded, agential, and/or protagonist-like strand in a piece of music. In turn, the idea of accompaniment as environment provides an apt analogy for understanding the parts of the song that aren’t persona, and the rich meanings that may result from the changing relationship between them.

With the overall landscape in mind and new tools in hand, I believe we can conduct more responsible hermeneutic analysis that seeks to understand musical emotion with specificity, solidity, and humility. Let us now begin the work of affording emotional meanings in Björk’s *Hyperballad*—first, by establishing the time and place within which we can situate Björk and this particular song, addressing how their reception history relates to the issues I have raised in this introduction. This crucial context must be woven into the picture before we delve into the sounds of *Hyperballad* and their rich emotional meanings.

CHAPTER 1:

Getting to Know Björk, *Post*, and *Hyperballad*

In the Introduction, I warned against using autobiography as authentication: against using the “real” life of an artist to explain the emotional potency of their works, often through assessments of authenticity. However, I still believe in the importance of context. No matter how important the actual sounds of the song are, we must not jump directly into “the song itself” as if such a thing exists outside time, place, and culture. And certainly, if the reader only knows Björk for her infamous Oscars swan dress in 2001, that is hardly an acceptable state of affairs! Let’s get to know the creator of *Hyperballad*, the crucial themes in her work, and the unique position of this song track before examining its sounds and possible meanings in subsequent chapters.

1.1 Björk: Background & Themes

Biography, Career overview, & Reception

Björk Guðmundsdóttir (1965) is an Icelandic musician and recording/performing artist whose 40 years of output defies pat categorization. She grew up in Reykjavik, splitting time between her parents, who divorced when she was a baby. Her father was an electrician and union organizer; her mother, who is often described as a hippie, supported Björk’s musicality. Björk’s first solo album was recorded in 1977, when she was only 11. (This makes the title of her 1993 solo album, *Debut*, a playful wink.) Because of this, Björk was temporarily a sort of star, which

she hated.⁶⁵ She declined the opportunity to record another album. Björk also attended music school for ten years, and received classical training.⁶⁶

In the 1980s and early 90s, Björk was active in punk-influenced musical groups. After forming and joining various groups, such as jazz punks Tappi Tíkarrass (“Cork the Bitch’s Ass”),⁶⁷ she co-formed the post-punk group KUKL. This group eventually became the better-known The Sugarcubes, an alternative rock band with a strong DIY ethos.⁶⁸ The group was not only a band but also had a company, Bad Taste, “encompassing record label, art gallery, bookstore, publishing house, and radio station.”⁶⁹ Indeed, Björk refers to the DIY, democratic, and punk values she and her peers espoused at the time, and explicitly positions them against what she calls the “egotism” of the 1980s.⁷⁰ But the band called The Sugarcubes, which was one particular project under the Bad Taste umbrella, was actually a joke. Björk explains:

These people formed together a joke band called the Sugarcubes, where I was kind of the singer and we would throw out silly pop songs and get really drunk... We just did this little record as a joke and a year later we’d forgotten about it almost and some English journalist found it and made it song of the week in Melody Maker and then everything went berserk in England.⁷¹

Still, the band achieved a degree of international fame with the 1988 album *Life's Too Good*, including a video on MTV for the hit song “Birthday” (which Björk references in the quote above), a performance on Saturday Night Live, and a tour with U2.⁷² The band was also well-regarded by critics. A 1988 *Rolling Stone* article dubbed them “The Sugarcubes: The Coolest

⁶⁵ Polly Vernon, “I Didn’t Like Being a Celebrity. It’s a Service Job. Like Washing Toilets.” *The Guardian*, 7 July 2007. <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2007/jul/08/popandrock2>>

⁶⁶ Björk, “Debut,” *Sonic Symbolism*, 2022.

⁶⁷ Dave Simpson, “Björk, KUKL and Purrkur Pillnikk – The Anarcho-Punk Roots of Iceland’s Music Scene,” *The Guardian* 8 Jan 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jan/08/northern-souls-the-anarcho-punks-who-made-iceland-a-pop-powerhouse>>

⁶⁸ Trash Theory, “Post: How Björk Reinvigorated Electronic Music.”

⁶⁹ “Björk: Biography.” *Rolling Stone* archive, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20110707111540/http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/bjork/biography>>

⁷⁰ Björk, “Debut,” *Sonic Symbolism*, 2022.

⁷¹ Bob Gourley, “Early Interview with Björk Focusing on “Debut,”” *Chaos Control*, 1993. <<https://chaoscontrol.com/bjork/>>

⁷² Trash Theory, “Post: How Björk Reinvigorated Electronic Music.”

Band in the World,” and a few years later, another article in that publication claimed that the band “put Iceland on the alternative-rock map.”⁷³ *New Music Express*’s Simon Williams called The Sugarcubes “press darlings.”⁷⁴

Given these beginnings, it was a bold move for Björk to go solo – especially to explore electronics and dance musics instead of the guitar-based sounds and punk-rooted ethos that was most validated in the rock-centric popular music media of the time. But Björk wanted to strike out on her own. In her podcast *Sonic Symbolism*, Björk reveals that she had written many melodies that could never seem to find a home in the bands she was in. Though she found co-creation in a band to be beautiful—“a miracle,” even—she longed for both more individual control and the intimacy of 1:1 collaboration.⁷⁵ She has also described specifically wanting to rebel against guitar-centered music, and her feeling that electronics were not only new but also more accessible and democratic.⁷⁶ She had been exploring “experimental electronica” since 1989, and was intrigued by “the power and potency of cutting-edge dance music.”⁷⁷ Björk left The Sugarcubes in 1992 and moved to London in early 1993, where she met Nellee Hooper, a dance music producer who would produce 1993’s *Debut*—her first solo album as an adult.⁷⁸ The album was unexpectedly successful, resulting in five UK top 40 hits, an invitation to write for Madonna, and appearances on many magazine covers.⁷⁹

⁷³ David Fricke, “The Sugarcubes: The Coolest Band in the World,” *Rolling Stone*, 14 July 1998.

<<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-sugarcubes-the-coolest-band-in-the-world-75327/>>

⁷⁴ Emily Mackay, “Björk’s ‘Post’ 20 Years On: How The Icelandic Genius Created A Glossy, Future-Focused Avant-Pop Wonderland,” *New Music Express* 12 June 2015. <<https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/bjork-s-post-20-years-on-how-the-icelandic-genius-created-a-glossy-future-focused-avant-pop-wonderla-11836>>

⁷⁵ Björk, “Debut,” *Sonic Symbolism*, 2022.

⁷⁶ Trash Theory, “*Post*: How Björk Reinvigorated Electronic Music.”

⁷⁷ Ian Gittins, *Björk: There’s More to Life Than This (Stories Behind Every Song)*, Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002, 38. In the “Debut” and “Post” episodes of her *Sonic Symbolism* podcast, she reveals that she now thinks of this as having a great deal to do with gender and queerness as well, referring to rock and guitar based traditions as only one, male-dominated branch of the indie “tree,” and dance / electronica as another that suited her better, and was more rooted in queer and black culture.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁹ Trash Theory, “*Post*: How Björk Reinvigorated Electronic Music.”

Björk's next album, 1995's *Post*, embraced further collaboration and greater experimentation. She then toured widely, to the point that she had to retreat from the public eye in order to recover, soon beginning work on *Homogenic* (1997). The album was well-received, and to this day seems to have found a sweet spot in the Venn diagram between lingering public "accessibility" and the rigorous, avant-garde innovation that would characterize her future work and earn her critical accolades.

Indeed, Björk would continue to reinvent herself and her sounds with each subsequent album. *Vespertine* (2001) utilized music boxes, celestes, and micro-beats made from found sounds such as static in her partner's hair; *Medulla* (2004) features only human voices and electronic manipulations of them; *Biophilia* (2011) is a conceptual album and app that is used in the music curriculum for Icelandic middle-schoolers; *Fossora* (2022) explores themes of mushrooms, death, and the maternal through a palette of voices and wind instruments. As journalist Nitsuh Abebe put it in 2012:

Since the success of her first two solo albums—colorful collections, made with British dance producers, that seemed to approach pop music as one big inflatable bouncy castle—she's chased ever more rigorous ideas and more ambitious formal constraints... She dropped the funhouse sonics and peppy house beats and took to using instruments with spare, ascetic sounds—plucked harps, droning organs, crackling electronics.

Overall, while the shifts of the last 30 years have lessened Björk's mainstream appeal, they also contributed to even higher respect for her as an "artist" within various circles. By the mid-2010s and certainly by 2024, Björk was a significant figure who has inarguably achieved consecration. She was dubbed one of *TIME* Magazine's 100 most influential people of 2015, alongside Kanye West and Taylor Swift,⁸⁰ and had a retrospective of her work at MOMA that same year. In the

⁸⁰ Marina Abramovic, "The 100 Most Influential People: Björk," *Time*. 16 April 2015. <<https://time.com/collection-post/3823157/Björk-2015-time-100/>>

many articles written about her, monikers like “one of our greatest living artists”⁸¹ are not uncommon. She appears at #81 on *Rolling Stone*’s “100 Greatest Songwriters of All Time” list, and two of her albums, *Post* and *Homogenic*, are on its “500 Greatest Albums of All Time” list.⁸² As we have already seen, *Rolling Stone* has an immense influence on consecration in popular music—in fact, it is one of few entities able to consecrate in that realm, according to Faupel & Schmutz.⁸³ The inclusion of Björk on such lists indicates that she has achieved significant consecration.

There are many fascinating threads to pull when studying Björk’s work—gender, Icelandic nationalism, and nature & technology, among others.⁸⁴ However, I will focus on those that make Björk an optimal subject for my project: emotionality and genre-agnosticism.

Emotionality

First, and most importantly for my project, Björk’s music is frequently understood as being unusually emotional. The emotional impact of her songs is quite important for many listeners and fans, and is also commonly mentioned in the media. For example, *Pitchfork*’s Jeremy D. Larson writes, “The four decades of Björk’s music can be seen, simply enough, as a long trek to detail every last tendril of spiritual energy and spark of emotion that has existed in the world.”⁸⁵

Writer and journalist Margaret Wappler dubbed *Post* a “breakout work of feminine emotional

⁸¹ Marianne Eloise, “Your Guide to Björk, One of Our Greatest Living Artists.” *Dazed*, 24 August 2016. <<https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/32551/1/bjork-ultimate-guide>>

⁸² *Post* came in at #376 in the 2003 and 2012 versions, and #289 in 2020.

⁸³ Alison Faupel & Vaughn Schmutz, “From Fallen Women to Madonnas: Changing Gender Stereotypes in Popular Music Critical Discourse,” *Sociologie de l’Art* 18 (2011).

⁸⁴ See Nicola Dibben, *Björk* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁸⁵ “Björk: Utopia Album Review.” *Pitchfork*. <<https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/bjork-utopia/>>

electronica,” claiming Björk was able to “completely pour in the emotional into machines,”⁸⁶ while for *Rolling Stone*’s Will Hermes, *Vulnicura* is “devastatingly direct.”⁸⁷

In particular, Björk’s *voice* is often constructed as the conduit to emotionality—as a sort of raw, live-wire of the human experience—no matter what else is going on in the song track with it. For just one example among many, Alex Godfrey at *Vice* writes:

I generally regard myself as emotionally stable, but I stick Björk on and the lie disintegrates. Her emotions burst through her vocals, like her body can’t contain her. If she’s in my earphones I cry in supermarkets, my withered brain synapses glitching all too easily. It’s musical telepathy—I feel what she’s feeling. She’s E.T., I’m Elliott. Or the other way round. Not sure.⁸⁸

For Godfrey, Björk’s voice is a conduit of direct emotional communication. And the idea of Björk’s music as doing a kind of skilled emotional labor that is borderline magic is not unique to Godfrey. Björk herself often upholds or validates understandings of her oeuvre as emotional, and of the nature of her job as being a sort of emotional shaman. She proclaims, “It’s my job to be emotional... It’s my job to go through emotions and describe them to other people.”⁸⁹

But while media portrayals typically characterize Björk and her work as “emotional,” they also tend to employ high art and/or “masculine” legitimating strategies like craft, technique, and technology. In fact, Björk sometimes seems to miraculously heal this false binary, with emotionality being intertwined with genius, not at odds with it.⁹⁰ And tellingly, Björk’s work is

⁸⁶ Margaret Wappler, “Why Björk’s ‘Post’ is one of the greatest albums of all time,” *NPR, Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. <<https://www.npr.org/2020/12/22/949277871/why-Björks-post-is-one-of-the-greatest-albums-of-all-time>> A reconciling of the apparent contradictions between technology and emotion/warmth is a recurring theme, and one Björk herself emphasizes.

⁸⁷ Will Hermes, “Vulnicura: The Icelandic Art-Pop Queen Charts the Breaking of a Heart on a Devastatingly Direct Album,” *Rolling Stone*, 23 January 2015. <<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/vulnicura-100596/>>

⁸⁸ Alex Godfrey, “Björk: The History and Style of a Music Maverick,” *Vice*, 16 July 2013. <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/rdx7r/bjrk-the-history-and-style-of-a-music-maverick>>

⁸⁹ Dibben, *Björk*, 131.

⁹⁰ For instance, in discussing various songs from 2022’s *Fossora*, *The Guardian*’s Kitty Empire writes, “If it’s possible, ‘Sorrowful Soil’ is even more emotional” (than the prior song), but the album is also “hard-hitting.” Kitty Empire, “Björk: Fossora Review – One of her Hardest-Hitting Albums.” *The Guardian* 1 October 2022, <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/oct/01/bjork-fossora-review-one-of-her-hardest-hitting-albums>>

not often called “confessional”—again, despite it often being construed as emotional, intimate, and/or quite personal, and despite Björk herself referring to her songs as “pieces from my diary” and confirming the partially-autobiographical nature of certain albums.⁹¹ Even in cases like 2015’s *Vulnicura*, where Björk obviously signals the baring of her soul through the album cover, painful divulgences in the lyrics, and numerous interviews, “high art” consecration strategies remain the main way in which she is received and constructed.



Album cover for Vulnicura (2015)

The confessional moniker didn’t attach to Björk pre-*Vulnicura* – nor did it stick after.

Genre-agnosticism

Not only is Björk constructed as unusually emotional, but she and her music seem to reconcile the false binaries of emotion and high art, craft, or “genius.” This may be because her work both features and defies the stereotypical traits of singer-songwriters, and innovates significantly when it comes to genre. While Björk writes and performs music that features the voice, explicitly emotional lyrics, and personalized content, the materials, processes, and resultant product of her sonic environments departs dramatically from the archetype of the

⁹¹ Dibben, *Björk*, 139.

singer-songwriter self-accompanying on a single instrument. Perhaps most strikingly, Björk often conjures a public, less-interior sphere with the prevalence of dance-like beats. This has both immediate and deep-seated implications; as musicologist Nicola Dibben points out, “...reception of her [Björk’s] music... reflects a deeply-held conceptual opposition between the beat base of her music and her lyrical vocal melodies.”⁹² The role of technology and collaboration in the creation of Björk’s sonic environments, especially the beats, also complexifies typical notions of the singer-songwriter.

Moreover, these grooves combine with various other genre traces in complex and interesting ways. In Björk’s first two solo albums, *Debut* and *Post*, there was a clear relationship to electronic dance musics. Experimentation and genre-blending is already present in these albums, but it is easier to trace the songs’ relationships to subgenres, usually within EDM. As her career progressed, Björk pushed limits and definitions ever further, creating a distinctive, original-but-focused “flavor” for each album, rather than each song. Eventually, she pushed the boundaries of not only genre but form and medium; for instance, music critic Alex Ross flags the ambitious length of her 10-minute long song *Black Lake*,⁹³ and *Biophilia* is often credited with being the first app-album.

Björk’s blending and transgressing even occurs across that ill-defined yet crucial demarcation of “art music” and “popular music.” Her music’s conceptuality and experimentation, and especially her formal experimentation, bear a relationship to more avant-garde and art music traditions. Björk cites Meredith Monk as a huge influence, and has expressed her “admiration” for Stockhausen, whom she interviewed in 1996.⁹⁴ After speaking with Björk about her list of favorite

⁹² Dibben, *Björk*, 74.

⁹³ Alex Ross, “How *Björk* Broke the Sound Barrier,” *The Guardian*. 14 February 2015.

⁹⁴ Claire Elizabeth Richardson, “Stockhausen’s Influence on Popular Music: An Overview and Case Study of *Medúlla*,” Unpublished MA doc (Texas State University, 2015), 1–3.

albums, which included works by Alban Berg, Joni Mitchell, Public Enemy, a Thai pop album, and more, Ross writes:

It is as though, in a reversal of tectonic drift, isolated land masses of taste were re-forming as a supercontinent... Björk's list circumnavigates the globe and, at the same time, it overruns the boundaries separating art from pop, mainstream from underground, primeval past from hi-tech present.⁹⁵

Personally, I favor the term “avant-pop” that some have used to categorize Björk's work. It is the most succinct one, and sums up the two most fundamental attributes of her work:

experimentation, and the conscious choice to remain within the world of popular recorded song.⁹⁶

In any case, with the hindsight of 30 years and 11 albums, it's clear that acoustic and electronic, ballad and bop, Western classical instruments and “world music” collaboration are all part of Björk's idiolect, reflective of what Ross calls an “obsessive curiosity about every corner of the musical world.”⁹⁷ Björk reinvents herself on each album, down to the level of broad style characteristics, and many commentators construct her genre-defying quality as a crucial defining feature.⁹⁸ The genre-agnosticism of Björk's work likely contributes to a sense of her immense innovation and originality, and thus interpretations of “authenticity.”⁹⁹

A crucial component of Björk's experimentation and genre-fluidity is her continued commitment to collaboration. On her first two records, a wide range of collaborators are present,

⁹⁵ Ross, “How *Björk* Broke the Sound Barrier.” Note that Alex Ross typically writes about classical music. His frequent writing about Björk further hints at how she combines popular genres not only with one another, but also with avant-garde and art music worlds.

⁹⁶ Björk has often mentioned that she considered pursuing the New Music path, but wanted to reach a larger audience.

⁹⁷ Ross, “How *Björk* Broke the Sound Barrier.”

⁹⁸ E.g. Vlad Savov, “The 10 Essential Tracks to Listen to with New Headphones,” *The Verge*, 12 October 2017; as well as the rock critic at *The Ringer*. Rob Harvilla, “60 Songs That Explain the '90s': How Björk Became a Genre Unto Herself,” *The Ringer*, 21 April 2023. <<https://www.theringer.com/2021/4/21/22395193/Björk-hyperballad-post-history>>

⁹⁹ However, note that Björk's genre-agnosticism could contribute to *or work against* “authenticity” depending on the realm and values being applied, because it could suggest a lack of being steeped in a tradition or community. This could be especially true in the context of the punk values that became influential starting in the 1970s. (See Desler, “History without Royalty? Queen and the Strata of the Popular Music Canon.”) Indeed, it seems that this is part of what Björk was up against when she chose to strike out on her own with electronic instruments, as opposed to staying in guitar-based bands with a DIY, punk-rooted ethos.

generating a somewhat heterogeneous quality (especially on *Post*); the albums each featured a cover song, and technically did not feature Björk as producer yet.¹⁰⁰ Björk has continued to collaborate on subsequent albums, but usually with fewer people and with Björk taking on more agency and control as a producer. For instance, 2001's *Vespertine* featured collaboration with electronic music duo Matmos, and Björk's most recent albums have seen her collaborate repeatedly with the Venezuelan producer Arca.

Björk also innovates with technology, and is often venerated for her craft and technical prowess. For instance, in *The Verge's* "The 10 essential tracks to listen to with new headphones," Björk's "Hunter" (*Homogenic*, 1997) is the author's very first example. He writes,

When Björk builds up to the soaring "how" in "I thought I could organize freedom, how Scandinavian of me" at 1:40 into the song, you should get chills. No chills? Headphones can't be that great.

In this case, Björk's music is a litmus test for pure musical potential and power in a technical, non-referential sense. This strongly contrasts the girl-with-a-guitar stereotype of the singer-songwriter.

And yet, through all this experimentation with genre and technology, Björk does exhibit a relationship to a singer-songwriter tradition. The voice is at the core of almost every piece she writes. Björk's vocal timbre and vocal performance choices, as well as the choices in her lyrics, have a quality that connects her to a tradition of intimate divulgence through song, thereby retaining a relationship to singer-songwriter tradition, whatever the "art" or "classical" influences. Indeed, as Ross points out, Björk's vocal quality remains remarkably similar across her career, despite the aforementioned drastic differences in the sound of the albums' sonic "environments." If the albums are vastly different but the voice is a consistent core, this could contribute to a

¹⁰⁰ "Björk: Biography." *Rolling Stone Music*. <<https://web.archive.org/web/20110707111540/http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/bjork/biography>>

certain form of “authenticity”: no matter how differently decorated Björk’s image is on an album cover, or even how wildly different the sonic environments are, the consistent, idiosyncratic quality of her voice may help afford listeners a sense of some core Björk that is consistent—perhaps one that is “really her,” true to herself, etc., rather than just a presentation. Though an illusion, it can be a powerful one.

In sum, Björk is emotional yet not “confessional”; she is consecrated, but with high art criteria as much or more so than with the strategies Schmutz and Faupel found were typically used for women in the *Rolling Stone* lists (especially in the last 15-20 years). Her genre-agnosticism has often signaled craft and innovation to commentators, especially when combined with her engagement with technology. However, these typically-legitimated traits do not preclude her engaging with emotion and vocal expressivity, which are qualities that many commentators seem to find striking and meaningful, as well. *Post* (1995) is situated at many of these crossroads.

1.2 *Post*: Background & Themes

***Post*’s reception**

Post (1995) was well-received. One critic for *New Musical Express* wrote, “...‘Post’ is a fervently ambitious slice of (high) art that worships the past, welcomes the future and generally wobbles around cheerily mocking 99 percent of contemporary music.”¹⁰¹ Writing for *Rolling Stone*, Lorraine Ali gave the album a rave review in which she emphasized Björk’s experimentation and originality, claiming that “Björk charges headfirst into uncharted sonic terrain with little more than her intuition as a guide,” and that the album was “akin to nothing

¹⁰¹ Emily Mackay, “Björk’s ‘Post’ 20 Years On: How The Icelandic Genius Created A Glossy, Future-Focused Avant-Pop Wonderland,” *New Music Express*, 12 June 2015. <<https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/bjork-s-post-20-years-on-how-the-icelandic-genius-created-a-glossy-future-focused-avant-pop-wonderla-11836>>

else.”¹⁰² Generally, *Post* was admired for how experimental and challenging it was, and many reviewers expressed concern that the album might not reach the masses. But it was commercially successful, aided by the role of lively videos on MTV. Eventually, it garnered the most record sales of all her albums, and the most high-charting singles.¹⁰³

In the 29 years since *Post*'s release, positive critical stance towards the album has not waned, and the markers of canonization that scholar-performer Anne Desler says require the passage of time—“transcendence” and “historical importance”—have begun to appear in critical reception. Writing for the BBC Review in 2009, critic Mike Diver calls *Post* a “timeless classic” and invokes all three of Desler's consecration criteria: authenticity, historical importance, and transcendence.¹⁰⁴ With the benefit of 14 years of hindsight and four more solo albums in Björk's oeuvre, he writes:

Björk's recorded output has always been ahead of the curve, both in its embracing of technology (and the subsequent compositional rewards) and its audacious ambition and inherent eccentricity. What's truly arresting, though, is just how vibrant, how astoundingly fresh, her work sounds today. *Post* is 14 years old, but it could just as easily have sprung forth three months ago.¹⁰⁵

In one short paragraph, Diver not only hits two of the three criteria for authenticity, but also links them: Björk is so original (potential marker of authenticity) that she still sounds unique a whole generation later (transcendence). He also invokes “historical importance” when he claims that “*Post*'s influence is felt far and wide today.” Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, *Post* is one of

¹⁰² Lorraine Ali, “Review: *Post*,” *Rolling Stone*, 2 February 1998. <<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/post-249712/>>

¹⁰³ Jack White, “Björk's Official Top 10 Biggest Songs on the Official Chart Revealed,” *officialcharts.com*, 7 August 2019. <https://www.officialcharts.com/chart-news/bjorks-official-top-10-biggest-songs-on-the-official-chart-revealed_21070/>

¹⁰⁴ Desler, “History without Royalty? Queen and the strata of the popular music canon.”

¹⁰⁵ Mike Diver, “*Post*'s Imperially Audacious Design Qualifies It as a Timeless Classic.” *BBC Review*. <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/3pm5/>>

two Björk albums to make the *Rolling Stone*'s "500 Albums of All Time" list.¹⁰⁶ In sum, *Post* has definitely achieved consecration within the critical sphere.

But while *Post* is one of Björk's most commercially and critically successful albums, it is one of her least-feted within academia. Despite or perhaps *because* of its commercial success and critical acclaim, *Post* does not feature much in the growing scholarship on Björk.¹⁰⁷ This could be because the clear dance influence places Björk's first two albums (*Debut* and *Post*) closer to the "pop" side of "art-pop," while her albums from *Homogenic* (1997) on are considered more experimental and complex, and more organic and unified: qualities that are typically prized in academic study of music.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the album's collaborative nature challenges assumptions of solo authorship, which is typically prized in art music even more than in popular musics. *Post* thus represents a waystation in Björk's career, between her early time in bands and her first solo album and then most of her more-complex, purportedly "mature" albums. But Björk's early, clearly-collaborative, dance-inflected albums are worthy of study just as her later work is – and are worthy of being studied as artistic products, specifically.

***Post's* emotionality**

Even within Björk's generally-emotional reputation, *Post* stands out; it is often constructed as having extreme emotional range. Notably, even when the album was first released, this emotional quality was not positioned as being at odds with more high art criteria, genius, etc. For instance, Heather Phares invokes the standard romantic language of the artist "expressing"

¹⁰⁶ Björk doesn't have any songs on *Rolling Stone*'s "greatest songs of all time" list; on their singer-songwriter list, she comes in at #81.

¹⁰⁷ Following Bourdieu, Desler identifies three canons: commercial, critical, and academic. Desler, "History without Royalty? Queen and the Strata of the Popular Music Canon."

¹⁰⁸ For instance, Emily Mackay's book on *Homogenic* is predicated on the idea that Björk's creative voice is really only present starting with *Homogenic*, whereas on *Post* the producers had more of their stamp on the final product. See Emily Mackay, *Homogenic* (Bloomsbury, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). Academic study of art music has tended to prize unity and organicism in a single work, and one of the main qualities of *Post* critics emphasized was its range and variety of influence.

emotions, but emphasizes originality: “...Björk finds new ways of expressing timeworn emotions like love, lust, and yearning in abstractly precise lyrics.”¹⁰⁹ One telling paragraph from the Rolling Stone review is worth repeating at length:

Chock-full of curious noises, mesmerizing vocals and musical surprises, *Post* provides a much-needed escape route from alternative rock's dull offerings of late. While leagues of boys sporting goatees spill their dysfunctional guts over Ted Nugentesque guitar licks, Björk forages for inspiration in the soundscapes of orchestrated jazz, ambient techno and classical. On *Post* she uncovers a range of specific sounds—not broad styles—that best express her emotions and color her arrangements. With little awe or irony, Björk blends these recognizable scraps and otherworldly snippets into a striking pattern of her own design, making *Post* an album that's post-everything but akin to nothing else.¹¹⁰

In this review, Lorraine Ali invokes high art consecration values—and not at the expense of emotionality, but as a pinnacle of craft *used towards emotional ends*. Björk's achievement is not that she displays undisciplined emotion, but that she does so via her craft. For once, men are the ones painted as “spilling their guts”—so emotionally out-of-control that they make a mess—while Björk is perceived as constructing musical landscapes that, yes, “express her emotions,” but also shape them into something both original and communicable. Also note how genre shows up in this review: her work can be viewed in contrast or even opposition to “alternative rock” and grunge music that dominated the decade, but most of all, Björk not only blends genres, but paints with “specific sounds, not broad styles.”

Within *Post* and indeed Björk's whole oeuvre, the track *Hyperballad* in particular is notable not only for its popularity, critical consecration, and frequent reception as “emotional.” It also combines seemingly disparate musical elements that provide a rich site for analytical

¹⁰⁹ Heather Phares, “*Post* Review,” allmusic.com. <<https://www.allmusic.com/album/post-mw0000644035>.> Note too the reference to “new ways”—again, originality is important in these reviews.

¹¹⁰ Ali, “Review: *Post*.”

exploration. Before embarking on an interpretation of the song, I will provide some background on its reception, and situate it in relation to the big-picture questions I have raised.

1.3 *Hyperballad*: Background & Themes

Hyperballad is the second track on *Post*. It is one of the only tracks on the album with a medium-slow tempo (67 BPM), and also one of the only ones that doesn't invite dancing so much as intent listening (at least for the first half of its five and a half minutes' duration). It features string arrangements by the Brazilian musician Eumir Deodato in addition to electronic instruments (likely synthesizers and the 808 drum machines common at the time). Initially, the song feels related to a singer-songwriter tradition, despite its utilization of mostly-electronic instrumentation: it is fairly voice-forward, and exhibits a loose verse-chorus form. But halfway through the track, a house music structure and a four-on-the-floor rhythm enter, creating an extended dance-inducing grooved section including a breakdown and long ending that relates to EDM conventions.¹¹¹ Ultimately, the song's many layers gradually peel away, returning to a less rhythmically-driven, more ballad-like close that highlights the acoustic strings on their own, suggesting a narrowing back into an interior realm.

For me, *Hyperballad* exemplifies the genre-defying quality that characterizes Björk's work in general, specifically in how it doesn't merely straddle but actually *integrates* the worlds of the singer-songwriter ballad and that of electronic dance music. Nevertheless, *Hyperballad* is usually categorized in one of various subgenres of EDM: often, it is called "trip-hop," partly due to Nellee Hooper's role as a producer.¹¹² The song also bears a relationship to the northern

¹¹¹ Trash Theory, "Post: How Björk Reinvigorated Electronic Music."

¹¹² Harvilla, "60 Songs That Explain the '90s." On her podcast *Sonic Symbolism*, Björk decries the "trip-hop" term.

England “rave” scene,¹¹³ and to techno.¹¹⁴ In any case, *Hyperballad* can fall, if imperfectly, within the umbrella of electronic dance music, and it is often constructed this way. In fact, the BBC includes the song on a list of “30 tracks that shaped dance music,” claiming that it took “...her singular brand of experimental pop music and fused several electronic influences (acid house, drum 'n' bass, folktronica), fixating dance fans as well as the masses.”¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, Deodato’s string arrangements retain a surface connection to a world of classical music.

Hyperballad is one of Björk’s most-popular and most-played songs. Of all her singles across her solo career spanning three decades, *Hyperballad* is her highest charting original song, coming in at #8.¹¹⁶ In reviews from the ‘90s, *Hyperballad* is sometimes not mentioned at all, and is not consistently singled out more than other songs. However, over time, discussion of the song has become much more prominent. After almost thirty years, *Hyperballad* is one of the songs most praised by critics and fans. In measures spanning (and blurring) the commercial and critical, *Hyperballad* is consistently placed high on lists ranking Björk’s best songs:

<i>The Guardian</i>	#1	Faroutmagazine.co.uk	#4
<i>Time Out Worldwide</i>	#1	returnofrock.com	#4
sputnikmusic.com	#1	ClassicRockHistory.com	#4
Regeneration Music Project	#1	ask.com	#5
thetoptens.com	#2	projectrevolver.org	n/a
reddit.com	#2	singersroom.com	#7

¹¹³ Mathieu Guillien, “Sound as a Bell: Björk and Techno,” *Circuit Musiques contemporaines* 3, no. 3 (January 2021), 13–23.

¹¹⁴ Jenn Pelly, “Album Review: *Post*,” *Pitchfork*. 8 March, 2020. <<https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/Björk-post/>>

¹¹⁵ Jack Needham, “30 tracks that shaped dance music,” 5 June 2020. <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5ZF19S8FTX9WJcnr5j9JF3x/30-tracks-that-shaped-dance-music>>

¹¹⁶ The only song of Björk’s that peaked higher was “It’s Oh So Quiet,” a cover song that is also from *Post* and featured a memorable music video by Spike Jonze.

Figure 1.1: Rankings of *Hyperballad* on lists of “best” Björk songs (usually out of ten), generated by Googling “best Björk songs” and going three pages deep into the results.


I did not find any lists in which *Hyperballad* was omitted, nor any in which it was ranked lower than #7.

Importantly for my project, the comments on *Hyperballad* videos posted to Youtube evince how listeners often receive this specific song as unusually emotional.¹¹⁷ Here are some of the comments on the first video that comes up on Youtube¹¹⁸:

Pineapple: everyone jokes about Björk being an alien but some of her songs like this one are the most human ones I've ever heard

Sam - There's a certain intensity to the song that I can't explain. The lyrics are subtle yet tell such a huge story. The production is very engrossing. It's almost as if listening to the song, you're experiencing yourself what she feels.

Kharma Kelley - The last 30 seconds of the song is pure heartbreak, pure genius. I cry every time.

Mel - This song makes me feel things I didn't even know I felt. Chills down my spine! She is a beautiful genius. 

Ben Van Eekelen - She always knows exactly how to push the buttons to get into your deepest muzikal emotional feelings <3 Perfect timing, Mysterious groove. Magnificent voice. A masterpiece!

Figure 1.2: Select comments on *Hyperballad* youtube video

Note phrases like “certain intensity” and “making me feel,” which suggest the mechanism of emotional contagion, which Juslin found to be an important mechanism in how musical emotion

¹¹⁷ Encouragingly, as in reviews, there are many references to Björk’s “genius” and “innovation” and the song as “perfect,” with relatively little mention of her love life or autobiography.

¹¹⁸ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SDWFvsN2lw>>. Accessed 3/27/23.

is generated in listeners.¹¹⁹ “Things I didn’t know I felt” evokes a mysterious, perhaps atavistic emotionality that is beyond any one mood. It seems that *Hyperballad* channels profound emotional qualities for some people, and that many not only *perceive* this emotionality, but actually *experience* emotional response.¹²⁰ The song is thus a uniquely important and promising site for the investigations of emotion and authenticity I have proposed.

Having looked at Björk’s, *Post’s* and *Hyperballad’s* reception in various circles, I can now dive into what emotional meanings the song track itself affords, examining the signals Björk and her collaborators choose to emit. I will start my analysis of *Hyperballad* with the vocal persona, moving inward from album cover to lyrics to musical elements. Although the sonic environment has a literal primacy in that it goes first, both voice and text have a different kind of primacy; they have a tendency to grab focus, and they are certainly central to most popular recorded song. Moreover, because the vocal persona is itself comprised of various strands and layers, I believe it is productive and clarifying to unbraided it first before placing it back into the full sonic texture, which itself offers so many strands and layers of its own. Thus, I unpack *Hyperballad* through the lens of persona alone in Chapter 2, and then in context with the accompaniment to examine the whole song track in Chapter 3.

¹¹⁹ Patrik N. Juslin, Gonçalo Barradas and Tuomas Eerola, “From Sound to Significance: Exploring the Mechanisms Underlying Emotional Reactions to Music,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 128, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 281–304.

¹²⁰ This is an important distinction in the literature, along with a distinction between everyday emotions and aesthetic ones like awe. I discuss this distinction further in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2: Elements of Persona in *Hyperballad*

This chapter attempts a close reading of all aspects of *Hyperballad*'s vocal persona. Before discussing the three components of persona as sounded on the song track (lyrics, voice, and melody), I explore how Björk presents information and frames what messages the listener might receive through *Post*'s album cover. I then examine the vocal persona as heard on the recorded track, beginning with lyrics, then moving into voice (incorporating vocal timbre and other performance choices), and ending with melody. Within each of these strands of vocal persona, I work from the outside in. I begin with bigger questions about listener perceptions of the persona – questions about what impressions a listener may receive in terms of the vocal persona's degree of authenticity and overall affect, as well as “intimacy” and how close the listener may feel to this persona. I then travel inward to greater detail at the level of the song.

2.1 Unpacking *Post*'s visual message: Album cover & visual persona as a gateway

An album cover is arguably the most powerful element of an album other than the music itself, and is intimately wedded with it. Covers are extremely likely to be seen by listeners, and to operate as powerful signs; like titles, they have a high symbolic importance and substantial power to shape listeners' expectations of what we will hear.¹²¹ At the time of *Post*'s release, the album cover would still have been a necessary visual and physical manifestation of the album, attached to it in an unavoidable way. Whether in the mid-1990s or mid-2020s, album covers can make a

¹²¹ Even in the digital streaming era, these images often come up unbidden on such streaming services. In some ways, they are more omnipresent than ever, since many of us use devices with screens that we frequently look at, not just listen to. The album cover may thus be a subconscious touchstone even when we are listening on-the-go.

visceral connection with potential listeners. For instance, music journalist Michael Cragg was captivated by the cover for 1997's *Homogenic*, writing: "I was immediately drawn to the album cover's depiction of Björk as a serene yet battle-ready warrior princess. I had never bought an album based on the cover alone, or without hearing at least two or three singles."¹²² An album cover can also be a productive way-in to understanding how a performer of popular music, especially a composer-performer, might present on a spectrum between apparent authenticity and obvious embracing of artificiality. An album cover image sends a strong signal as to the artist's identity and genre associations. It may also shape the degree and type of emotionality we can expect to hear. And it can also suggest a relationship between persona and environment.

Album covers are especially relevant to Björk's oeuvre. Björk managed to maintain control over her covers, and she had a great deal of input into the visual components of her work in general, such as her music videos and the sets and costumes for her live shows.¹²³ Björk even centers her *Sonic Symbolism* podcast around the importance of her album covers, and how intentional she was with them—how intimately they reflect the overall message she was trying to send.¹²⁴ In fact, for *Post*'s cover, she so disliked the initial (rather expensive) shoot that she discarded it and pursued a new tack, resulting in the cover we know today.¹²⁵

How does Björk leverage the crucial artifact of the album cover? Generally speaking, the visual iconographies of her albums support a narrative of emotional communication or revelation,

¹²² "Björk: A Glorious Weirdo Who Taught Me to Be Proud to Be Different." *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/mar/24/bjork-a-glorious-weirdo-who-taught-me-to-be-proud-to-be-different>>

¹²³ Björk does not design her covers, shows, and videos alone, but rather works with collaborators like Alexander McQueen and Spike Jonze, giving them a good deal of creative agency. However, she is the generator of the initial vision, who then empowers her collaborators to play in realizing her goals. Note that the visual and multimedia elements of her work are considered important enough that MOMA featured a show of her work in 2015.

¹²⁴ See the beginning of the "Debut" episode for her explanation.

¹²⁵ Björk, "Post," *Sonic Symbolism*.

but in very different ways. The covers also exhibit varying degrees of obvious persona, ranging from the illusion of a figure in her natural state to one that clearly embraces an adopted identity:

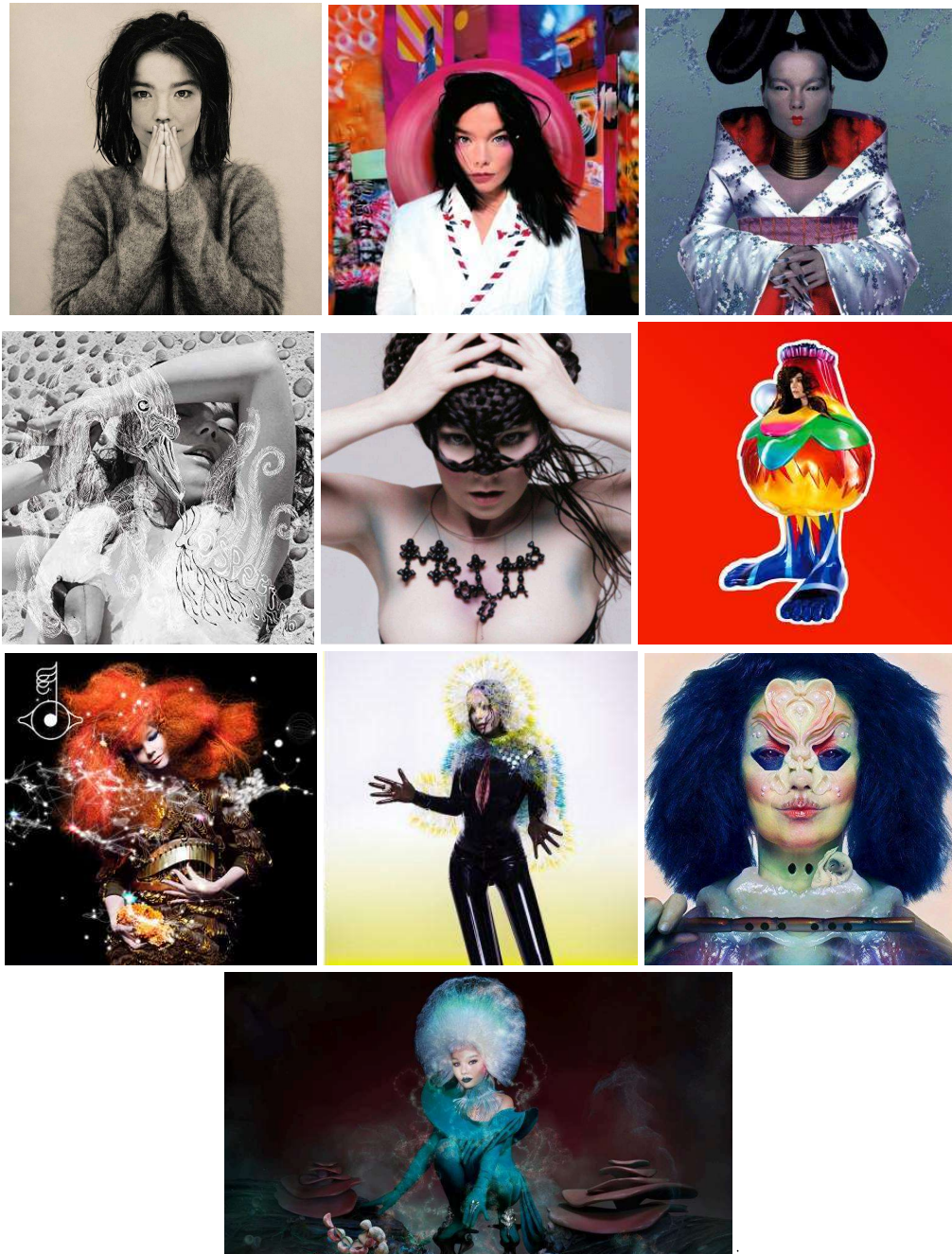


Figure 2.1: Björk's solo album covers, in chronological order.

Top row: Debut (1993), Post (1995), Homogenic (1997) Second row: Vespertine (2001), Medúlla (2004), Volta (2007); Third row: Biophilia (2011), Vulnicura (2015), Utopia (2017); Bottom-most image: Fossora (2022)

While any apparent “self” presented on a cover is always constructed, we can nonetheless distinguish between cases in which the viewer appears to receive access to a seemingly-unmediated Self and cases where the adoption of a persona is more obvious. Many of Björk’s album covers alter or obscure her appearance through makeup, costume, staging, body modification, and digital means, dispelling any illusions of “authentic” presentation of the “real” Björk. For instance, on *Homogenic*, Björk adopts adornments from various cultures and appears to have modified her facial features; *Fossora* features elaborate costume, hair, and makeup that suggests an adopted stance, perhaps even a full-on character, that falls outside of everyday life. In these cases, the album covers reinforce the idea of Björk’s creative and vocal presence on the album as an adopted persona. But other covers exhibit a verisimilitude that blurs these boundaries, potentially inviting an impression of access to the “real” Björk. On *Debut*, the image has a naturalistic aesthetic resembling a documentary, in line with singer-songwriter tropes. On *Vespertine*, Björk’s nakedness and the use of natural materials suggest intimate access to something private, as opposed to a publicly presented persona.

Post’s cover exhibits an intriguing combination of natural simplicity and heightened reality, and features a subject with a direct, penetrating gaze:



Björk’s styling is close to “natural,” but is clearly heightened beyond the woke-up-this-way quality of *Debut*. She is unadorned by jewelry or other modifications, and her hair color and style are indistinguishable from her natural hair as it is most often seen in the real world. However, makeup has clearly been used to enhance what occurs naturally at moments of arousal or high emotion: her cheeks and lips are quite flushed. Overall, Björk’s styling can be described as a *heightened naturalism* that affords interpretations that we are gaining access to Björk’s real self – but “turned up to 11.”¹²⁶

Björk’s attire walks a similar tightrope, and could be described as a quasi-costume: at first glance, it may simply look like a blazer, but upon closer inspection we can recognize the reference to a postal envelope. By referencing the mail through her attire, the album cover telegraphs one of the many possible meanings of the title “post”: the idea of sending a message.¹²⁷ Thus, both the title and the attire convey something about songs as *communication*. Along those lines, and perhaps most importantly, the subject is clearly aware of the camera and locked in a gaze with it. This suggests a communicative intention; the subject seems to directly address us, perhaps even *confront* us. This confers a certain type of authenticity: the viewer may sense that the “I” on this album is someone with plenty of agency and little to hide – someone who’s going to “tell it like it is.” The clarity and vividness of Björk’s figure in front of the energetic but blurred background makes this gaze seem even more direct and intense—hyper-real—further creating a direct connection and illusion of one-to-one connection with the viewer.

The human figure naturally aligns itself with persona; in turn, we can consider the image’s background as parallel to the sonic environments of the album’s tracks. More than any of her

¹²⁶ This is a phrase Björk herself uses to describe *Post* in general, for instance on her *Sonic Symbolism* podcast.

¹²⁷ In fact, Björk has often stated that the songs on the album are like letters sent back home to Iceland after having moved to London. Also, *Telegraph* is the name of the album of remixes from *Post*. This further reinforces the idea that Björk conceived herself as sending a message through these songs.

other albums, *Post*'s cover details the environment, suggesting that the relationship between it and the persona is relevant, and perhaps foreshadowing what the nature of that relationship might be. The bright colors, somewhat blurred as if from motion, convey an urban environment that is exciting and young in its neon intensity. The image conveys movement or action, and a density of it; its variety of shapes suggests the heterogeneity we have seen many critics, and Björk herself, highlight. In front of the blurred unreality of the background, Björk seems sharper; the persona being temporarily caught in clear focus within a fast-moving world augments our sense of capturing something real despite a frenetic environment. This is another way that, in tandem with the title and costume, the cover positions Björk as an emotional communicator who reports back to us—not only about herself, but also about the world around her.

Finally, in terms of affect, the cover's bright colors, density of images, and sense of movement all suggest high arousal (supporting or mirroring the makeup choices). The viewer receives a lot of stimulative input, and a lot of potential activation. The warm color palette and balanced composition of the image suggests a positive valence more than a negative one. Björk's facial expression doesn't give away much affective information, but her strong, squared stance can be seen as displaying dominance—a dimension that some dimensional models of emotion incorporate. Higher dominance is present in the opening track, *Army of Me*; there is also a shift to higher dominance when the beat drops in *Hyperballad*.

In sum, the album cover's bright colors, vividness, and sense of motion suggest an intense, affectively aroused emotional palette for the songs to come. Furthermore, many elements of the *Post* album art afford readings of "authenticity" in its sense of naturalism (albeit heightened) and, as the title suggests, of direct communication of one's own experience in a message-like manner – which is a common way of understanding Björk's oeuvre, songs in general, and even Western

emotional experience itself.¹²⁸

2.2 Lyrics: The authenticity of immediacy and metaphors of consciousness

Hyperballad delivers on the intensity, emotionality, and directness suggested by *Post's* album cover in various ways, from its quietly balladic yet dramatic opening, to the intense sweeps of emotion in the chorus, to the more aroused, dominant, grooved sections that arise later in the track. Much of this groundwork is laid in the song's lyrics, which features a plainspoken style that ranges from near free-association to a direct statement of communication to an Other. I first give an overview of the lyrics and enumerate how several of the basic elements of the poetry may afford listener perceptions of authenticity. I then go deeper into the role of metaphor in this particular song and its implications for perceived emotionality, as well as some interpretational strategies the lyrics' controlling metaphor invites.

The full lyric to *Hyperballad* reads:

We live on a mountain Right at the top There's a beautiful view From the top of the mountain Every morning I walk towards the edge And throw little things off Like car parts, bottles and cutlery Or whatever I find lying around	It's early morning No-one is awake I'm back at my cliff Still throwing things off I listen to the sounds they make on their way down I follow with my eyes till they crash I imagine what my body would sound like Slamming against those rocks
It's become a habit A way To start the day.	And when it lands Will my eyes Be closed or open?
I go through all this	I go through all this

¹²⁸ This is Nicola Dibben's argument in her article "Subjectivity and the Construction of Emotion in the Music of Björk." I discuss this intriguing idea further in the Conclusion.

Before you wake up So I can feel happier To be safe up here with you	Before you wake up So I can feel happier To be safe up here with you...
--	---

Figure 2.2: Recorded song track lyrics, Hyperballad (Post, 1995, *One Little Indian*)

Though there are many rich ambiguities in the lyrics, it is clear that this song is about some type of close relationship and the habitual self-regulation that is required in order to maintain one's well-being within it. Though it would be normative to read the relationship as romantic and dyadic in the context of popular recorded song,¹²⁹ this is not the only possible interpretation. The relationship could be platonic or familial, and need not be dyadic; "You" can be plural, so the persona could be referring to her children, for instance. It is even possible to read the song as being about relationship with oneself, with the persona constituting both the "I" and the "you" of the song, as many people do when they conduct inner speech.¹³⁰

In any case, given the central image of the mountaintop and its metaphorical associations (which I will discuss shortly), it is immediately clear that the relationship is a rarefied and precious one, perhaps constituting some sort of "higher" state of being or consciousness. Given the prevalence of the edge and bottom of the mountain, we also understand that this is a precarious state. The persona's act of going to "the edge," "throwing little things off" and watching them fall, is what enables her to maintain her well-being and that of the relationship. In the chorus, the persona states this directly, explaining that the actions of the verse are essentially

¹²⁹ For reading on the prevalent romantic and sexual subject matter of pop songs, see Peter G. Christenson, et al., "What Has America Been Singing About? Trends in Themes in the U.S. Top-40 Songs: 1960–2010," *Psychology of Music* 47, no. 2 (2019), 194–212.

¹³⁰ Inner speech is what it sounds like: the speech we use inside our own minds, which is tightly related to thinking itself, and believed to have been internalized from external speech during child development. See Constance Th. W. M. Vissers, Ekaterina Tomas, and James Law, "The Emergence of Inner Speech and Its Measurement in Atypically Developing Children." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11, no. 17 (March 2020). Interestingly, popular music scholar Tim Murphey found characteristics idiosyncratic to popular songs that arguably make them similar to inner speech. Tim Murphey, "The When, Where, and Who of Pop Lyrics: The Listener's Prerogative," *Popular Music* 8, no. 2 (May, 1989), 189. For more on the phenomenon of inner speech, see Russell T. Huriburt, "Not Everyone Conducts Inner Speech," *Psychology Today*, 26 October 2011.

a form of emotional self-regulation¹³¹: “I go through all this / before you wake up / so I can feel happier / to be safe up here with you.”

How does the way in which Björk chooses and arranges her words contribute to these meanings, and to our sense of the persona’s authenticity and emotionality? To my ear, the overall effect of *Hyperballad*’s lyrics is vernacular, not rarefied, and spontaneous, not premeditated; it is more reminiscent of someone thinking or speaking in the moment compared to, say, strict verse, which suggests time spent curating. Of course, it can take as much or *more* time and technique to create the appearance of naturalism, which is what I hope to demonstrate.

Affordances of “authenticity” in the lyrics

Subject & tense: Immediate and Intimate

Pronouns and type of address play a huge role in *Hyperballad*, and in popular song in general. According to Matthew BaileyShea, there are four basic options: first-person address (fairly common for popular song); third-person narration (less common); covert second-person (very rare); and direct address, which is first-person addressing an explicit “you” (most common in popular song overall).¹³² But the choice of address need not stay the same throughout a song – and quite often, it doesn’t. For instance, as BaileyShea points out in “From Me To You: Dynamic Discourse in Popular Music,” it is quite common for a popular song to move from a more distant mode of address to a more intimate direct address characterized by an “I” making direct expressions to a “you” who is prominent and clearly addressed. BaileyShea calls this the “distant

¹³¹ “Self-regulation refers to the human capacity to control urges in an attempt to change existing behavior according to some defined ideas or goals... and it is considered one of the key capabilities of the human.” Soniya Billore, Tatiana Anisimova, and Demetris Vrontis, “Self-Regulation and Goal-Directed Behavior: A Systematic Literature Review, Public Policy Recommendations, and Research Agenda,” *Journal of Business Research* 156 (2023).

¹³² Matthew L. BaileyShea. “From Me To You: Dynamic Discourse in Popular Music,” *Music Theory Online* 20, no. 4 (December 2014). See [6], [10], and [11].

→ intimate template,” and found it in 40% of songs from *Rolling Stone’s* Top 500 Songs of All Time.¹³³

Hyperballad loosely follows this trend; the first word of the piece is “we,” but switches to “I” thereafter, with no further mention of a “you” or even “we.” Effectively, it utilizes first-person in the verse, then moves to intense I-you statements in the chorus that certainly qualify as “climactic direct address.”¹³⁴ Note that the initial position of first-person address is fairly intimate, compared to a third-person perspective; it places us in the lyric mode and its world of subjective utterances, not a narrative mode that would create more distance between the singer and the subjects of the song.¹³⁵ However, this choice still leaves room to maneuver to the yet-greater intimacy of direct address: for BaileyShea, direct address in which the “you” is explicitly articulated and addressed is the most intimate option (in addition to being crucial to popular music of the last 70 years).¹³⁶ Also note that this shift to I-you statements occurs relatively early—less than a quarter of the way through the song track— before returning to first-person in the second verse and then direct address again in the second chorus, repeating the cycle. In *Hyperballad’s* case, intimacy is not a single point that is reached, but something we move in and out of (or perhaps through different types of). Still, the overall quality is one of starting close, and then getting closer.

Choice of tense may intensify these effects, compounding the listener’s sense of immediacy and thus authenticity. Björk mainly uses forms of the present tense throughout *Hyperballad*, including present continuous and present progressive. This creates a sense of the

¹³³ BaileyShea, “From Me to You,” [36]. He was writing based on the 2011 edition of the list.

¹³⁴ BaileyShea, “From Me to You,” [42].

¹³⁵ Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹³⁶ That is, he finds direct address to be more intimate than “I”-focused, first-person address without a “you.” I do not find it self-evident that direct address is more intimate than first-person, or at the very least it depends on how we define “intimacy,” but time does not permit discussing this topic at length here.

here and now, of the “psychologically immediate,” as the musicologist Lloyd Whitesell puts it.¹³⁷ Present tense creates an illusion of events and speech unfolding in real time, as if we listeners exist in-the-moment with the persona as events, perceptions, and thoughts occur to her. The present tense’s extemporaneous quality suggests less opportunity for curation, and thus could afford assessments of honesty or authenticity. The verse also features conditional and subjunctive formulations, introduced by phrases like “I wonder,” “[I] imagine,” and the big question, “When it lands will my eyes be closed or open?” These conditionals draw us into the persona’s inner world, balancing out other elements of the lyrics that may be mysterious or opaque. In this way, even what is unsure can nonetheless feel close; the persona is no more a cipher to us listeners than she is to herself. The persona’s use of questions and subjective and conditional tenses¹³⁸ suggest a willingness to reveal apparent vulnerability, which may also contribute to a sense of naturalism or trustworthiness.

Diction: Accessible but idiosyncratic

In *Hyperballad*, Björk’s diction (in the sense of word choice, not enunciation) is one of the elements that most strongly creates an illusion of genuineness rather than affected, premeditated utterance. Every line of the song uses relatively simple language. For example, as a little thought experiment, imagine if the second line of *Hyperballad*’s second verse was “No soul is awake” instead of “No one is awake.” This would heighten the language out of the everyday; the line would seem more conscious of itself—more like a constructed, premeditated statement meant for a setting and occasion that is more formal. As it stands, *Hyperballad* does *not* easily afford a sense that its text was curated for a public and/or formal setting. Instead, plainspoken, informal

¹³⁷ Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, 50–52.

¹³⁸ Technically, these are “moods,” not “tenses,” but I have avoided the term “mood” to avoid confusion, given my focus on emotion and affect.

word choice tends to create the impression of genuineness because it suggests an utterance that is of-the-moment and conversational, perhaps overheard. It may even seem as though the persona is addressing herself, engaging in inner speech or daydreaming; if this is the case, then there is no reason for her to consciously deceive. In *Hyperballad*, as I will argue, the verses at the very least afford this interpretation. In turn, the choruses clearly address an Other, but they retain an plainspoken, conversational, quality; it is difficult to imagine the lines there being any *more* direct. Thus, whether the utterance is a private reflection or an intimate address, vernacular diction keeps *Hyperballad* in a realm where the listener may experience the persona as natural, spontaneous, and genuine.

At the same time, Björk's use of a few oddly specific words, especially "car parts, bottles, and cutlery,"¹³⁹ ensures that the lyrics don't become *generic* in their accessibility. Instead, they afford a way-in to another type of purported authenticity: individuality. *Hyperballad's* lyrics have an idiosyncratic quality; while almost any song could contain a generically emotional turn of phrase like "I gotta get you out of my head," not just any persona would sing about "cutlery." Thus, apparent plainspokenness and spontaneity, combined with the idiosyncrasy of select phrases, creates a certain stamp of individuality, making it easier for listeners to believe that the "real" Björk's specific individual subjectivity is at work in the song—even if that persona is still mediated.

Rhyme: Extemporaneous and Unconscious

The relative lack of rhyme in *Hyperballad* also contributes to possible interpretations of the song as spontaneous and natural. End rhyme is completely absent from the song, which

¹³⁹ One critic ties Björk to a long Icelandic tradition of using everyday items and events, even the domestic or "quotidian," in writing—for example, in the eddas. Brent DiCrescenzo, "The 11 Best Björk Songs Ever," *Time Out*, February 26, 2015.

certainly contributes to the song's sense of spontaneity. To completely lack end rhyme is relatively unusual for much popular song, but not unusual within Björk's oeuvre.¹⁴⁰

However, rhyme can exist in various subtler ways, including the fairly well-known techniques alliteration and assonance, among others; rhyme is best defined as “foregrounded phonetic repetitions,” and, as William Rickert notes, should not be conflated with end rhyme.¹⁴¹ Unlike end rhyme, these subtler types of rhyme *are* present in “Hyperballad.” Björk utilizes assonance in phrases like “beautiful view,” “find lying around,” “no-one is awake,” “walk towards,” and “when it lands / will.” As BaileyShea points out, rhyme influences how a listener chunks the stream of information they receive into smaller groups, creating a sort of phrasing, “...whether regular, in the case of balanced phrases and subphrases, or irregular, as in the case of syncopations.”¹⁴² Björk's phonetic repetitions proceed without structural regularity: for example, the vowel and consonant “rhymes” I listed above are near each other, but not in parallel, rhythmically “rhyming” spots. This creates a sense of similarity and grouping while avoiding regularity and the sense of cadence that BaileyShea argues end rhymes would provide.¹⁴³

On a general level, this may abet a sense of genuineness by creating an organic quality—a loose organization that ebbs and flows—rather than a rigid patterning. In the context of *Hyperballad* in particular, the presence of repetition with less obvious segmentation or pattern creates an effect that is potentially dreamy, or at least less traditionally conscious; it suggests an *associative* sort of logic. *Hyperballad's* verses, in particular, suggest a state of mind that is closer to stream-of-consciousness than one that is more controlled, curated, and intentional. This type of

¹⁴⁰ BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*.

¹⁴¹ “...General classification of rhyme encompasses the specific poetic convention of “rhyme” (i.e. end-rhyme) as well as “alliteration,” “assonance,” “consonance,” and all phonetic repetitions that achieve prominence within the sound-structure of a poem.” William E. Rickert, “Rhyme Terms,” *Style* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1978), 34–35.

¹⁴² BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 83.

¹⁴³ Bailey Shea argues that end rhymes are like cadence in that they feel like a “point of arrival,” “indicate a pause,” and/or set up expectations. BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 74, 76.

mentation falls towards the center and right on psychologists Earnest Hartmann and Robert Kunzendorf's map of mental states, which presents a spectrum ranging from dream state to focused thought:

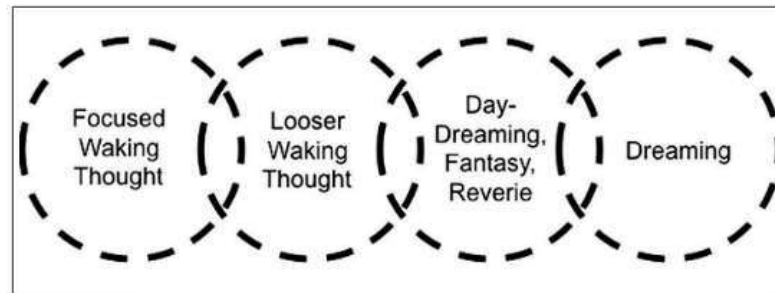


Figure 2.3: “A continuum of mental functioning.” Hartmann & Kunzendorf, “Thymophor in Dreams, Poetry, Art and Memory,” p. 188, Figure 2

The barely-there rhyme groupings may contribute to a sense of timelessness or suspension, creating a dream-like quality—perhaps even a sense that we are accessing the particular, raw genuineness of unconscious utterance.

Affordances of emotionality in the lyrics

While what I have outlined so far sheds some light on how listeners might afford readings in authenticity and intimacy in the song, it has barely scraped the surface of possible emotional meanings. Emotion words are clearly present in the lyrics' verbal content—“feel,” “happier,” “safe”—but is also created through metaphor and imagery, which are powerful ways we conceptualize and experience emotion.

Metaphor & Imagery: Polysemic vehicles of emotion

In their influential book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson showed that metaphor is not only a literary device. Rather, it is fundamental to how humans structure our

thinking. In their words, “the phenomenon of metaphor is not restricted to similarity-based extensions of meanings of individual words, but instead involves activating fixed *mappings that reconceptualize one whole area of experience in terms of another*” (emphasis added).¹⁴⁴ For instance, the orientation of up/down is a crucial organizing principle that carries a whole system of metaphorical meanings in Western culture. As Lakoff and Johnson show (and utilizing their format), UP IS MORE, UP IS GOOD, UP IS HEALTH, and UP IS CONSCIOUS; there are many more mappings beyond these.¹⁴⁵ These metaphorical mappings can be quite powerful, and/or subliminal, and can have very real effects. As the social psychologist John A. Bargh points out,

Metaphors also apply to the way we describe people we routinely encounter. Everyone knows the meaning of a “close” relationship or a “cold” father... In experiments, people who clutch a hot coffee cup for a brief time form impressions of others as being “warmer,” more friendly and more generous than if they hold, say, an iced coffee.¹⁴⁶

Note that, as Lakoff and Johnson put it, “...metaphorical orientations are not arbitrary. They have a basis in our physical and cultural experience.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, any given metaphorical mapping has roots in cultural learning, which can vary, but it also has to be a *good map* that is somewhat based in reality. Much as with the idea of affordance, there is not just one possible “answer,” nor are there infinite, equally-good ones. Moreover, various thinkers ranging from theologians to writers working at the intersection of literature and science emphasize that metaphors reflect the interconnectedness—not dualism—of thought and emotion, rational and irrational, self and environment, and even subject and object.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ekaterina Shutova, Barry J. Devereux, and Anna Korhonen, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory Meets the Data: A Corpus-Based Human Annotation Study,” *Language Resources and Evaluation* 47, no. 4 (Autumn 2013), 1261.

¹⁴⁵ Indeed, “up” is the example Lakoff and Johnson choose to elucidate their concept of orientational metaphors. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 15.

¹⁴⁶ Bargh, “Our Unconscious Mind,” *Scientific American*, 37.

¹⁴⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Recently, it is generally agreed that metaphors reflect the inseparability of logic and emotion, challenging the “traditional dichotomy between the cognitive and affective dimensions of metaphor” that has roots in Aristotle, as well as the boundaries between subject and object. See Hugh C. White, “Metaphor and Myth: Percy, Ricoeur and Frye,” in Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley, eds., *A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020), 246. Though metaphors can vary from culture to culture, and although our interpretation of metaphors can be intensely individual as well, they ultimately rely on some sense of shared

Recent scholarship building on Lakoff and Johnson’s work has emphasized the need to recognize the core role emotion¹⁴⁹ plays in metaphor. Lea Povozahev, for instance, argues that “metaphors effect emotive change”: in rhetoric, they are typically used as a way to make the listener *feel* something, which can in turn have an effect on belief and behavior.¹⁵⁰ Psychologists Hartmann and Kunzendorf go as far as to say that emotion is actually what metaphors are all about. They explain,

It is the underlying emotion of the user (speaker or writer) that determines which metaphor will be used. “It’s time to bail out” implies a very different underlying emotional state from “it’s all smooth sailing,” within [the conceptual metaphor] “Love is a journey.” ...Of course love—in the sense of a continuing relationship—is a journey, but love is also a growing plant, or two intertwined plants, or it may be a competition, a fight, a war. Everything depends on the underlying emotion. The choice of vehicle is guided by our underlying emotion.¹⁵¹

If we don’t acknowledge the central role of emotion, we cannot explain how or why a metaphor is specifically right for the situation, or perhaps even what its meaning is. Put another way, it’s not just that a metaphor’s vehicle (e.g, a journey) describes its tenor (e.g., love), but that the *relationship between them* reveals the speaker’s *feelings* about the tenor, which is what’s actually important. In fact, for Hartmann and Kunzendorff, it’s actually the emotion itself that is the real subject of the metaphor.¹⁵² Thus, metaphor is not just rife with meaning, but with emotional meaning(s) in particular.

experience; many thinkers argue that they are fundamentally intersubjective. See, for example, Amelia Gamoneda, “The Need for Metaphor,” in Gustavo Ariel Schwartz, Víctor Bermúdez, eds., *#Nodes: Entangling Sciences and Humanities* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2019), 49.

¹⁴⁹ While much of my project embraces affective terms rather than “emotion” categories (as discussed in Chapter 1), where authors use “emotion” I follow their cue in hopes of faithfully representing their ideas.

¹⁵⁰ Lea Povozahev, “Metaphor as Emotive Change: A Triangulated Approach to Thought, Language, and Emotion Relatable to Aristotelian Sensate Perception,” *Rhetoric Review* 32, no. 1 (2013), 47.

¹⁵¹ Earnest Hartmann & Robert Kunzendorf, “Thymophor in Dreams, Poetry, Art and Memory: Emotion Translated into Imagery as a Basic Element of Human Creativity,” *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 3, no. 1 (2013), 180.

¹⁵² In their words, “I believe we can more accurately state that what is being pictured—the tenor of the metaphor—is not the large concept (life, love, man) but the emotional state itself: our emotional attitude toward life, love, man. It is actually the underlying emotional state that is the tenor of the metaphor.” *Ibid.*, 179.

More specifically, Hartmann and Kunzendorf argue that it is usually a metaphor-based image that concisely, directly conveys emotion. They propose the concept of a “thymophor,” or “a picture-metaphor driven by and carrying the emotion” that “shows up as an essential element in our everyday inescapable use of metaphor... as well as in our dreams and our poetry.”¹⁵³ Though much of their research studies the prevalence of central images in dreams, the authors convincingly argue that similar forces are at work in poetry, film, and even instrumental music. This seems especially relevant to *Hyperballad*, which does not structure its metaphors in the obvious format “a [tenor] is a [vehicle],” but rather through an extended, image- and motion-based metaphor. In *Hyperballad*, the metaphor is crafted in such a vivid and comprehensive way that it completely foregrounds the vehicles: the mountain, cliff, throwing. The lyrics don’t make explicit what the tenor of the metaphor is; we are not told what these entities are being compared to, just that the throwing habit helps the persona self-regulate. This missing-tenor is actually a very common trait of myths and dreams.¹⁵⁴ Let’s continue examining *Hyperballad’s* lyrics in the light of understandings of metaphor as having to do with domain-mapping, and as potentially communicated through emotion-image (“thymophor”).

A mountaintop is the first image in *Hyperballad*, and one of the most central. On the most immediate and obvious level, the orientational metaphor UP IS GOOD means that a Western listener can quickly, clearly grasp “the top” as representing something maximally good. Similarly, colloquially we refer to reaching “the top of the mountain” as achieving a goal, and use the phrase “peak experience” to refer to something positive or ideal, perhaps even transcendent. Mountains have particularly powerful associations and implications in this regard. The *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* states that mountains can symbolize “constancy, eternity, firmness, and

¹⁵³ Ibid., 165, 180.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 178.

stillness” as well as a “center” or “a cosmic axis linking heaven and earth.” A mountain may represent “the state of full consciousness,” but also “the unconscious, the earth, our mother, and ‘mother nature.’” The entry continues, “Mountains evoke a special sense of awe and power and no single image or meaning can capture or express every facet of its symbolic significance.”¹⁵⁵ The word-image of a mountaintop might most immediately conjure a sense of something optimal or supreme, with positive affects and/or aesthetic emotions such as awe and transcendence. (The phrase “beautiful view” also creates that general feeling-sense.) But on a deeper level, the mountain flags meanings to do with un/consciousness and more ambiguous affective valences. And, because there is a long way to fall, a sense of negative valence and high unsafety may lurk beneath it all, as well. Thus, a complex field of affective possibilities is quickly established through the controlling metaphor of a mountaintop.

This sense of ambiguity and something deeper, perhaps not entirely positive, is furthered by the growing prominence of “the edge” as *Hyperballad* continues. For while the mountaintop is the first image (thymophor?) mentioned, it is not necessarily the most central or influential. The cliff/edge is the image most viscerally present in *Hyperballad*. After all, the song’s persona spends the majority of the song not merely at the mountaintop, but choosing to go to its *edge*. An edge is a liminal place where high and low exist seemingly side by side, where a wide range of possibilities are visible, and where a small move means a drastic change of state.¹⁵⁶ Affectively speaking, a cliff suggests uncertainty, another facet of affect sometimes used in dimensional models of emotion; it would also seem to suggest a higher level of arousal. These affective

¹⁵⁵ Thomas C. Putnam, “The Mountain,” *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, edited by David A. Leeming (Springer, 2014).

¹⁵⁶ A sense of the liminal or edge is powerfully present in the song even beyond being explicitly named. The “early morning” time mentioned in the second verse is also a sort of “edge,” a liminal time when night and day meet, just as the edge of a mountain separates high and low (and perhaps life and death, good and bad, etc.). The explicit statement that “no one is awake” in the second verse heightens this association, as well as a sense of solitude.

responses could in turn relate to different emotions, such as fear or excitement (both of which feature high arousal and uncertainty, but are very different in valence).

As the cliff and the throwing habit become more prominent, a theme of descent comes into focus, and with it, the idea of DOWN instead of just UP. As mentioned before, up / down and high / low have powerful, deep associations, including ones to do with emotion and consciousness. Music theorist Lawrence Zbikowski points out ways this mapping is embedded in our language for emotions (“I’m feeling up. My spirits rose. I’m feeling down. I fell into a depression. My spirits sank.”) and for consciousness (“Get up. I’m up already. He rises early in the morning. He fell asleep.”).¹⁵⁷ *Hyperballad’s* persona does not herself descend the mountain, but she does toy with the idea in a prominent and intense way. First she uses object-proxies, tracing them with her eyes and ears as they fall, identifying with them; then she imagines her own body doing the same, and asks vivid sensory questions about what it “would sound like slamming against those rocks” and whether her eyes would be open or closed. Yet again, this could relate to the mapping UP is CONSCIOUS—and indeed, in dreams and myths a descent into the sea, grave, or “heart of the earth” often symbolizes delving into the unconscious.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the lines “No one is awake” and “When it lands will my eyes be closed or open?” can be interpreted as referencing un/consciousness. Taken literally, they invoke sleep/wakefulness and death/life (respectively), but they can also stand for consciousness in its other meanings, such as that of clarity and awareness, as in the saying that we go into something “with eyes open.”

Before moving on, I want to explain how I am using the term “un/conscious,” as the concept will figure prominently throughout the rest of this document. The definition of

¹⁵⁷ Lawrence M. Zbikowski, “Metaphor and Music Theory: Reflections from Cognitive Science,” *Music Theory Online* 4, no. 11 (January 1998), [3.1].

¹⁵⁸ Jungian psychologist Maurice Nicoli in Robert E. Abrams, “The Function of Dreams and Dream-Logic in Whitman’s Poetry,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1975), 608.

un/consciousness remains rather unclear and inconsistent, even among scientists. Originally, Sigmund Freud used the term “unconscious” to describe thoughts and actions that were “not consciously intended or caused,”¹⁵⁹ much along the lines of how we tend to use the word “subconscious” in the vernacular today. But at this point, the term “unconscious” encompasses a great deal more than that. I will use “unconscious/ness” and “conscious/ness” with the understanding that they are polysemic words that include various meanings, including states, parts, and processes of mind, and that we humans do not yet fully understand these phenomena.¹⁶⁰ At times, I will discuss elements of *Hyperballad* as suggesting different overall states of relative consciousness in the sense of wakefulness, focus, and/or rationality, along the lines of Hartmann and Kunzendorf’s map of mentation. But I also use the term “unconscious” in the way the term “subconscious” tends to be used vernacularly, to refer a sort of second substrate going on “beneath” everything all the time, comprised of various thoughts or sensations that lie outside conscious awareness and intention even when we are conscious. Ultimately, I will argue that properties and strands of the music resemble this substrate—and that how they interact and change over the course of the song suggests a trajectory toward greater psychological awareness and “making the unconscious conscious” in a Jungian sense—which could be the type of self-regulation Björk is constructing through both her lyrics and her music.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ John A. Bargh and Ezequiel Morsella, “The Unconscious Mind,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 1, (January, 2008), 74.

¹⁶⁰ As John A. Bargh and Ezequiel Morsella explain, “there has been high consensus regarding the qualities of conscious thought processes: they are intentional, controllable, serial in nature (consumptive of limited processing resources), and accessible to awareness (i.e., verbally reportable),” but there is not such consensus when it comes to unconscious thought processes. Bargh and Morsella, “The Unconscious Mind,” 73.

¹⁶¹ I refer here to the fairly well-known quote “until you make the unconscious conscious it will rule your life and you will call it fate,” which I have often seen attributed to Jung but which appears to be someone’s unattributed summary of his ideas rather than a direct quote. Still, it is a solid representation of his philosophy, as seen in Jung’s statement that “...man’s task is... to become conscious of the contents that press upward from the unconscious. Neither should he persist in his unconsciousness, nor remain identical with the unconscious elements of his being, thus evading his destiny, which is to create more and more consciousness.” Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 326.

Textual Form: Dreamy self-observation and wakeful metacognition

Whatever we interpret “throwing little things off” to represent, the song makes clear that the persona uses this habitual action to maintain her well-being within the relationship. We know this because she makes a naked statement of explanation in the chorus: “I go through all this before you wake up so I can feel happier—to feel safe up here with you.” Notice how the chorus’s lyrics constitute a coherent, logical sentence that is mostly a grammatically correct sentence, rather than short phrases that combine in a long stream-of-consciousness (as was the case in the verse).

In fact, *many* aspects of the lyrics previously discussed can now be seen to support an overall shift in the persona’s mental state or consciousness between the verse and the chorus sections. While the verse uses present tense in a way that felt like an ongoing, timeless present, the chorus manages to stay in the present continuous tense while also looking backward at one’s actions and into the future to their results, which suggests conscious control, intent, and the cause-and-effect quality of minds at their most rational. Similarly, the loose, associative use of non-end rhyme in the verses (i.e. “beautiful view,” “no-one is awake,” and other examples discussed above) resembles a dreamy or daydreamy state – a mind that is active, but not fully linear or rational. This stands in stark contrast to the direct prose of the chorus, with its lack of even subtle internal rhymes. And while the verses resisted literal or singular meaning, making substantial use of metaphor, image, and symbol, the chorus is explicit and requires less interpretation; non-metaphorical, primary emotion words like “happier” and “safe” make the persona’s message unambiguous. Thus, the composite effect of the lyrics is that the persona moves from an associative, dreamy mode to one characterized by more linear thinking. Below, I summarize the differences in the poetry of the verse and chorus and how they can relate to a

“continuum of mental functioning,” as well as questions of emotion, consciousness, closeness, and communication.

	verses	choruses
Pronouns	I (first person)	I-you (direct address)
Tense	Various types of present, subjunctive, conditional	Present continuous
Engagement with emotion	Implied powerfully through metaphor, symbol, image	Explicitly referenced, with prominent primary emotion words
Logic	Dream. Associations rather than any linearity or causality	Rational. Linear, cause and effect
Line / phrase length	Short, descriptive phrases; at times no active verb, just “is”; not much subject-object relationship	Lines connect to form a single sentence that is grammatical and complete
Diction	Vernacular, slightly odd/idiosyncratic	Vernacular, completely clear and direct
Rhyme	No end rhyme; internal alliteration and consonance	None
Metaphors and imagery	High	None other than repeat of “up here with you,” which refers to the mountain and/or what it represents
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poetic -More like (modern) poetry than strict lyrics -Inner speech, description of a dream, observation -Dreamy; unconscious or less-conscious -“looser waking thought,” day-dream, or dream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prose-like -More like everyday conversation than strict lyrics -Outer speech to an Other (though it could be inner speech) -Describes reasoning for behavior and desired outcome -“focused waking thought”

Figure 2.4: Summary of differences in language usage in Hyperballad’s verses and choruses

In sum, analysis of *Hyperballad’s* text strongly invites an interpretive approach that considers the quality of different types of psychological processes, including states of consciousness and

changing relationships between the unconscious and conscious. The lyrics' sectionalized exploration of different states of consciousness invites exploration of how these psychological ideas may show up in the music, as does the prevalence of metaphor.

While the persona makes a leftward move on Hartmann and Kunzendorf's continuum as she transitions to the chorus, she does more than that: she integrates her experiences and insights from her time spent delving into the unconscious in the verse, reflecting on what has "become a habit" and why she "go(es) through all this." The subject or Self of the song thus engages in reflection and metacognition, mentally metabolizing her actions and experiences from the verse in order to make a self-aware statement that concertedly integrates emotional experience and even communicates it to an Other. This exhibits, but also goes beyond, focus and wakefulness. She is actually demonstrating the self-regulation she explicitly mentions in her transition from the dreamy observations of the early verses to the insights of the late verses to the direct articulation and communication of those insights to the Other in the chorus.

With these observations in mind, I can proceed (finally!) to the music of *Hyperballad*. I will first explore the non-lexical components of vocal persona: voice and melody.

2.3 Voice: Further affordances of spontaneity and varied mental-emotional states

Vocal timbre conveys a great deal of information about a person's identity, stance, and emotional state. The voice evolved mainly to communicate affective states, and humans are adept at discerning emotional signals from vocal cues—so much so that we often get more information from the quality of voice than we do from the words themselves.¹⁶² Björk's singing voice is

¹⁶² John Colapinto, *This is the Voice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021).

central to crafting an illusion of the “naked ‘I,’”¹⁶³ with all its implications for authenticity and emotionality. But more specifically, in this song, it plays a crucial role in constructing a persona who transitions between dreamy self-observation and direct emotional communication. Björk’s choices of how to use her wide palette of vocal options help take the listener along with the persona’s motions between different types of mental (and emotional) experience. I first cover some vocal characteristics that apply to *Hyperballad* but also to Björk’s idiolect in general, before moving to the specific choices that shape this unique song.

Voice at the level of idiolect: “Authenticity” and emotionality

Reviewers often remark on Björk’s voice, especially its unusualness and emotionality; some have called it “uncannily raw” and “stark, passionate,”¹⁶⁴ while others claim that she “sweeps across octaves with equal helpings of elegance and coarseness.”¹⁶⁵ As can be seen from these examples, contrast between extremes is something people often notice and respond to in Björk’s vocality.¹⁶⁶ And indeed, Björk exploits a wide range of dynamics and timbres, ranging from lax to tense, breathy to equilibrated. Yet, almost regardless of where in that palette she is singing, her voice has a quality of being clear with a touch of noisiness. It seems to me that this could help her seem both earnest and grittily “real” at the same time. In *Hyperballad*, Björk manages to reach affective extremes while also achieving a sense of genuine spontaneity that comes across as “natural.”

¹⁶³ Tegan Jane Schetrumpf, “Diminished but Never Dismissed: The Confessional Poetry of Sylvia Plath and Bruce Beaver,” *Antipodes* 29, no. 1 (2015), 119.

¹⁶⁴ Sam Goldner, “The Guide to Understanding Björk,” *Third Bridge Creative*, 8 January 2018. <<https://www.thirdbridgecreative.com/blog/the-guide-to-understanding-bjork>>

¹⁶⁵ Scott Weisswald, “Definitely No Logic: Björk’s *Debut*,” *Counter-Currents*, 27 December, 2019. <<https://counter-currents.com/2019/12/definitely-no-logic-bjorks-debut/>>

¹⁶⁶ Also, to non-Icelandic listeners, Björk’s voice may seem even more unique: elements that sound Other to a listener because they come from an Icelandic enunciating English might unknowingly be glossed as Björkisms rather than Icelandicisms. Even Björk’s enunciation of English may contribute to some listeners’ sense of her as an individual. This is an effect I noticed in my own assessments of her voice.

First, the highly idiosyncratic nature of Björk’s voice marks her as an individual, which may confer a certain type of authenticity. In everyday life, our speaking voices make us immediately recognizable and distinct to others. But when singing, some voices (and production choices) result in greater apparent individuality than others. Björk’s voice is quite idiosyncratic and could not easily be mistaken for anyone else’s, whereas a voice with less idiosyncrasy (not to mention a voice that is more processed or autotuned) would read as more generic and have fewer connotations of individuation or authenticity. Notably, Björk still manages to retain a good deal of her vocal individuality even when she increases her pitch and volume. This is difficult. In popular musics, a “belt” would often be the vocal strategy for generating loud, intense pitches as one ascends in range (up to a point). But while that strategy affords a sense of affective arousal, it flattens or “blats” out many of the upper partials that give a voice its individuality. (This is one way high arousal and individuality can be at odds musically.) However, Björk finds ways to *approximate* a belt through what soprano Heidi Moss calls “a deft combination of laryngeal and acoustic strategies that allow her to travel through complex emotional vocalizations whilst maintaining her vocal identity.”¹⁶⁷ This helps the song to potentially be received as emotionally aroused while retaining a sense of authenticity that could be flattened by more standard belting strategies.

More specifically, to my ear, Björk’s voice combines an overall quality of clarity with slight but omnipresent noise (or, more technically and less colloquially, vocal “roughness”).¹⁶⁸ As Victoria Malawey points out, a clear vocal timbre is associated with “perceptions of youth and femininity”; it follows that innocence or earnestness could be afforded from such timbres, as

¹⁶⁷ Heidi Moss, email to author, June 3, 2024.

¹⁶⁸ What we perceive as ‘noise’ in a sound has to do with very high acoustic energy. Thank you to soprano Heidi Moss for this clarification. For more on this topic, see Ian Howell, “Necessary Roughness in the Voice Pedagogy Classroom: The Special Psychoacoustics of the Singing Voice,” *VOICEPrints Journal of the New York Singing Teachers’ Association* (May–June 2017), 4–7. <https://www.academia.edu/32786831/Necessary_roughness_in_the_voice_pedagogy_classroom_The_special_psychoacoustics_of_the_singing_voice>

well.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the bit of vocal roughness that *is* present in Björk’s tone, especially in the verses, may confer a sense of authenticity to listeners, as noisier vocal timbres are often associated with “realness” in rock and pop genres.¹⁷⁰ Crucially, the quality of simultaneous clarity and light noisiness, combined with little vibrato, distances Björk’s voice from that of a classically trained singer, or even that of many mainstream pop singers who heavily utilize runs and vibrato, such as Celine Dion. Listeners tend to associate such voices with training or artifice, while seemingly untrained voices that sing in a way that resembles a heightened form of everyday speech can seem more “natural” to listeners.¹⁷¹ Purportedly “natural” styles like this are not uncommon to rock, indie, folk, and other popular music genres. As Eduardo Coutinho et al. explain, “Popular singing is characterized by an esthetic of naturalism which manifests as a declamatory style prioritizing the clarity of the text and encompassing paralinguistic features such as vocal creaks, roughness, and cries.”¹⁷² Hitches in the voice, audible breath sounds, irregular vibrato or wavering, and vocal bursts all augment the listener’s sense of the voice as coming from a material, physical body, and of it as an agent of spontaneous emotional expression. These vocal irregularities give a sense that the persona is revealing her inner state in a way we recognize from our own “real” life, as most of us have experienced a time when our voices betrayed something of our internal affective reality, regardless of our words.

And indeed, Björk exhibits these “paralinguistic features,” including in *Hyperballad*. For

¹⁶⁹ Victoria Malawey, *A Blaze of Light in Every Word: Analyzing the Popular Singing Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁷⁰ As Moore sees it, any strained timbre (as opposed to smoothness) would be “giving emphasis and conveying a sense of sincerity.” Moore, *Song Means*.

¹⁷¹ Listeners tend to have strong associations with voices that seem learned and tutored versus those that do not. Nicola Dibben argues that a perceived lack of “artifice and mediation” can be signified by “the lack of obvious vocal training, or adherence to stylistic norms of vocal production.” Dibben is not claiming that any of these attributes as *inherently* more emotional, but rather is pointing out how certain vocal qualities tend to lend themselves to such interpretations, especially by fans. Dibben, *Björk*, 144. Note that this is a salient issue throughout vernacular music and to ideas of authenticity, and is far from specific to Björk.

¹⁷² Eduardo Coutinho, Klaus R. Scherer, and Nicola Dibben, “Singing and Emotion,” in Graham F. Welch, David M. Howard, and John Nix, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Singing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–19.

instance, in chorus 1, on the word “safe,” we hear Björk’s voice catch as if with emotion. The long inhale after “throwing things off” in the second verse reminds us that there is a real human sound source present, and also of the need to breathe, to self-regulate. Sounds like these suggest a momentary loss of vocal control and contribute to perceptions of spontaneity while also bringing us viscerally into the world of affect. These sounds can contribute to a sense of closeness as well: as Ruth Dockwray points out, “inhalations and exhalations and gasps” give us a sense of being in a personal or intimate proxemic zone, because typically we would need to be very close to someone to hear such sounds.¹⁷³

Vocal bursts in particular are especially apt to confer a sense of spontaneity and affective arousal. Vocal bursts are a type of short non-lexical vocalization that conveys emotion, such as “cries, sighs, laughs, shrieks, growls, hollers, roars, oohs, and ahhs.”¹⁷⁴ Though they are believed to predate language, Alan Cowen emphasizes that these aren’t just reflexes; they have a communicative impact on others, and significantly structure our social interactions.¹⁷⁵ Elsewhere on *Post*, Björk interjects full-out, non-lexical vocal bursts in her songs, but in *Hyperballad*, is it as if they creep into the sung phoneme itself, blending with it. For example, in the first verse, the second syllable of “toward” has a stuttering playful quality, almost like an ululation. In the first chorus, the second time “so” is sung, it sounds as if Björk is laughing or smiling; the sound is also reminiscent of a slight whoop. And in the second chorus, the second time “safe” is sung, it borders on a yell or growl. The presence of these burst-like qualities within pitched phonemes in *Hyperballad* strongly contributes to a sense of it as emotionally aroused, but in a seemingly

¹⁷³ Ruth Dockwray, “Proxemic Interaction in Popular Music Recordings,” in ed. Russ Hepworth-Sawyer & Jay Hodgson, *Mixing Music* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 55.

¹⁷⁴ Rainer Banse and Klaus R. Scherer, “Acoustic Profiles in Vocal Emotion Expression,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70 (1996): 614–636. Music therapist Diane Austin calls these “sounds the body emits spontaneously, sounds that are instinctive expressions of what we are experiencing in a given moment.” Diane Austin, *Theory and Practice of Vocal Psychotherapy: Songs of the Self* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 27.

¹⁷⁵ “Cowen et al., “Mapping 24 Emotions Conveyed by Brief Human Vocalization.”

spontaneous way (especially given the irregularity of these occurrences). In sum, vocal bursts and other paralinguistic elements are potentially powerful signals of authenticity and emotionality; the closeness they suggest may afford a sense of access, which we can also interpret as creating a sense of intimacy.

Voice at the level of the song: Changing mental and emotional states in *Hyperballad*

Most of what I've discussed so far applies to Björk's voice in general across her oeuvre; it describes part of an expressive palette she has at her disposal as she constructs her various personae. But it is the voice's combination with the text (and rest of the music) that fully affords meaning at the level of the individual song. How do the vocal changes signify along with the text, supporting, extending or challenging it?

In the specific case of *Hyperballad*, Björk's application of two different resonance strategies generally maps onto the two types of consciousness or "modes of mental functioning" I identified in the lyrics. In the verses, Björk mainly utilizes a lax, semi-breathy phonation strategy that nonetheless still has "ping," meaning it carries despite not registering as very loud.¹⁷⁶ This type of vocal timbre could have many associations, including those of the natural and genuine, as discussed earlier. But in this context, the breathy, relaxed, but clear phonation of the verses combines with the lyrics to create something akin to lucid dreaming—a certain distance combined with a certain vividness, which reminds me of the world of dreams and daydreams. This choice also creates a certain type of authenticity without suggesting a high degree of emotional arousal yet, nor wide swings in any dimensions of affect.

¹⁷⁶ This is likely due to modification of the tract rather than a change in loose fold configuration. Personal correspondence with soprano Heidi Moss.

In the choruses, the vocal sounds are quite different, including and beyond timbre: Björk sings higher notes, more loudly, and with a tenser, more-pressed phonation. She exhibits a more fully present vocal tone characterized by equilibrium at the vocal folds and significant power in the resulting sound. Affectively speaking, this reads as greater intensity—as higher arousal, and perhaps higher dominance and certainty as well.¹⁷⁷ Crucially, this switch from lax, breathy phonation at the verses to a strong, affectively aroused, yet still-individuated timbre at the chorus reinforces a sense of transition from dreamily vivid observation to wakeful metacognition from the verse to the chorus. In the chorus, the Self seems more fully present, across multiple sonic parameters of voice. Much of this trajectory was already afforded by the lyrics, but note that if Björk sang those same lyrics in a different manner, the implied meaning would be quite different. If the lyrics of the verse were sung with a dramatic belt-like strategy, or with a grungy roughness that allowed even more noise in the tone, we would feel a higher degree of *presentness* to the voice—suggesting a higher degree of affective arousal, perhaps even pain.

To get more specific, take the previously mentioned example of “safe” being sung in a way bordering on a yell or growl in chorus 2. This is a case of the voice complexifying or contradicting the words (in Allan Moore’s terms, “extension”). Björk’s voice does not sound “safe” here; there’s a roughness and power to the timbre, but also a fragility and fallibility in how it breaks, as if straining for power but somewhat failing, unsteady. We may even get the sense that the persona is momentarily out of control. This underscores the sense of uncertainty or danger that has been implied by the text, and that safety is something that either needs to be continually worked for, or perhaps has not been achieved yet after all. Perhaps we listeners are hearing the *need* for safety, with the vocal performance filling in information about the persona’s subjective,

¹⁷⁷ These are other dimensions that may be used in dimensional models of emotion, for instance by Cowen et. al, “Mapping 24 Emotions Conveyed by Brief Human Vocalization.”

affective experience in ways that aren't explicit in the lyrics.¹⁷⁸ The fact that we hear Björk's voice briefly catch as if with emotion on the same word in verse 1 strengthens this reading – and furthers our sense that the affective dimension of certainty-uncertainty is important in this song, just as the lyrics eventually state.

Björk's variety of vocal timbres afford a unique map of possible meanings when taken in concert with the song's verbal content. The markers of "authenticity" I've discussed are important because they influence our sense of the vocal persona's subject position, potentially shaping listeners' receptivity to the more-explicitly-emotional material of the chorus sections.¹⁷⁹ But lyrics and vocal delivery are only two of the three parts of vocal persona. The melody is still a part of the vocal persona, not the accompaniment, and thus should be analyzed as part of that gestalt.

2.4 Melody: Degree of melodicism as degree of consciousness?

Hyperballad's vocal melody is characterized by a variety of gestures that suggest emotional variety and spontaneity, and that also support an interpretation of changing states of consciousness. A semi-melismatic and rhythmically flexible approach throughout the song affords assessments of spontaneous utterances that reveal interior emotional states, while changes to the melodic contour, pitch content, and phrase structure across formal sections suggest more-specific insights into the persona's evolving psychological state. The melody thus reinforces the contrast between verse and chorus that is present in the lyrics and vocal timbre, supporting an

¹⁷⁸ Thanks to Kirk Hamilton and Ixi music for bringing this idea to my attention. See Hamilton, Kirk *Hamilton*, "Hyperballad," *Strong Songs*, Podcast, mp3 audio, 48:21, 29 September, 2020. <<https://strongsongspodcast.com/episode/hyperballad-by-bjork>>. See also Ixi music, "Live Breakdown—Björk 'Hyperballad' Live Performance," YouTube video, 55:20, 11 May, 2023. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xxTL2bYTW8>>

¹⁷⁹ I wonder whether listeners may be more likely to read high-intensity emotional content as being genuine—not manipulated or saccharine, which is a common criticism of some singers and genres—if some markers of "realness" are there to balance it out, and if they came first. However, exploring this idea is beyond the purview of this project.

interpretation wherein the verse begins ambiguous and dreamy, starts to “wake up,” and then is more conscious and affectively aroused in the choruses.

Quasi-melisma: Balancing the “natural” with the emotionally intense

When it comes to text-setting,¹⁸⁰ the question of syllabic versus melismatic treatment is crucial to interpreting meaning. In the case of *Hyperballad*, the vocal line is often syllabic, but there are also many two-note melismas, as can be seen at a glance in the following chart:

<p>We live on a mountain Right at the top This beautiful view From the top of the mountain Every morning I walk towards the edge And throw little things off Like car parts, bottles and cutlery (Or) whatever I find lying around</p> <p>It's become a habit A way To start the day</p> <p>I go through all this Before you wake up So I can feel happier To be safe up here with you</p> <p>(chorus repeats one time)</p>	<p>It's early morning No-one is awake I'm back at my cliff Still throwing things off I listen to the sounds they make on their way down I follow with my eyes till they crash I imagine what my body would sound like Slamming against those rocks</p> <p>And when it lands Will my eyes Be closed or open?</p> <p>I go through all this Before you wake up So I can feel happier To be safe up here with you...</p> <p>(chorus repeats twice, followed by a “safe up here with you” coda in which each syllable / word gets two notes.)</p>
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Figure 2.5: Hyperballad lyrics as performed on Post recorded track, with melismas marked.

Syllabic setting = plain. Two-note melisma = **bolded**.

Three-note melisma = **bolded and underlined**.

¹⁸⁰ This term is misleading, as Björk typically writes her melodies first and then puts words to it. This, combined with the fact that she wrote both the text and music herself, makes the situation fairly different from “text setting” as it is typically discussed in the context of Western concert music. However, I do not know another or better term for choices about how the text and music interact, so I will use the well-known, if imperfect, term “text setting.”

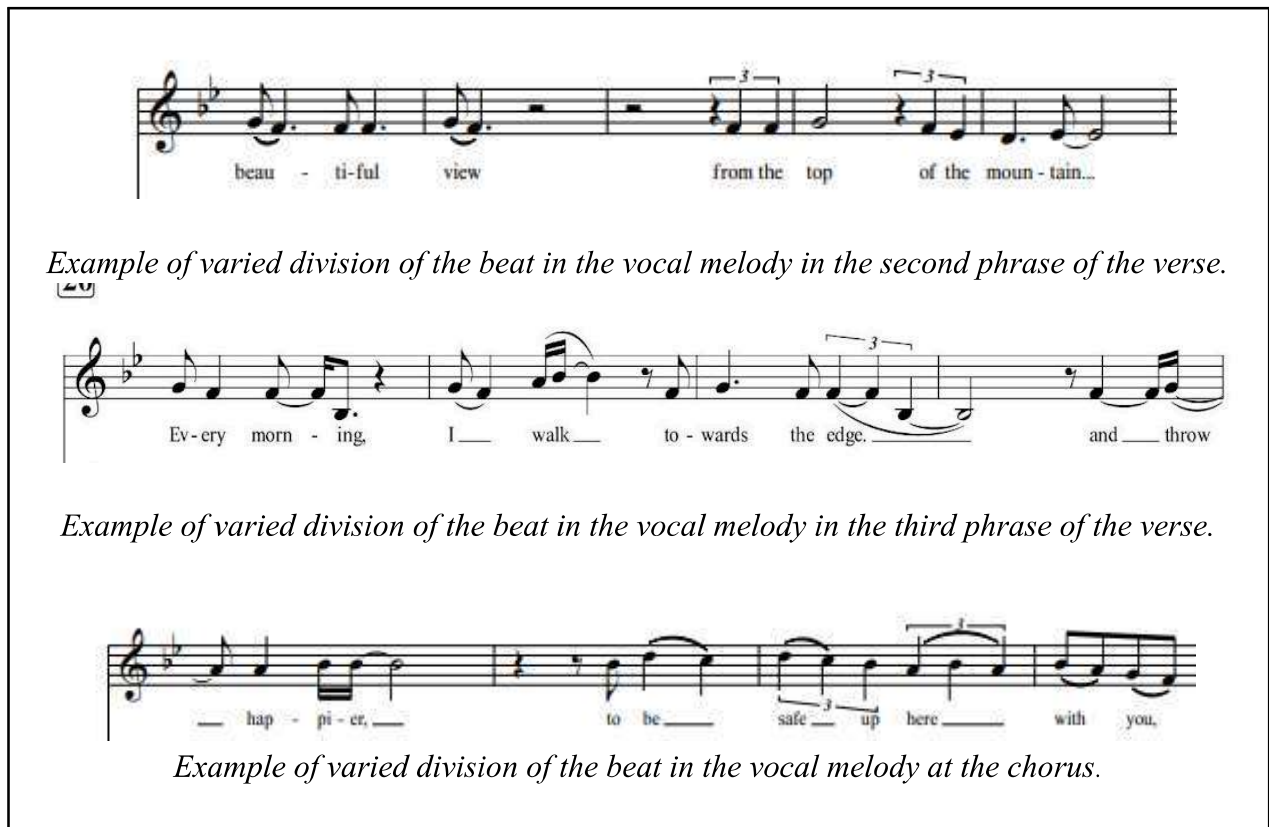
As can be seen above, there is a significant number of two-note melismas in *Hyperballad*, and some three-note melismas in the chorus. However, Björk never veers into actual melisma in its definition of more than four notes to a syllable.¹⁸¹ What is the expressive implication of this choice? Certainly, strong opinions abound when it comes to syllabic versus melismatic setting. From the Florentine Camerata to Bob Dylan, syllabic settings have often been associated with directness, naturalness, and verisimilitude. However, such settings have sometimes been seen to foreground lyrics at the expense of musical possibilities or to mask emotional meaning. On the other hand, highly melismatic vocal writing (and styles of writing that otherwise deprioritize clarity of text) may be associated with expression of emotionality above and beyond the text. But depending on the culture and genre, this approach might seem to be a signal of technique and craft rather than “genuine” emotion, veering into histrionic emotional display and potentially diminishing the meaning by obscuring the words. In any case, a melismatic approach is not apt to convey untutored authenticity to the 21st-century layperson, for whom syllabic rock and pop songs usually hold that distinction.

Thus, melisma exemplifies one way that “authenticity” and “emotionality” can be at apparent cross-purposes. I believe two-note melismas may strike a balance between these extremes for some listeners: something beyond the word seems to tug at it, stretching it beyond semantic meaning, and yet this expressive pull doesn’t continue long enough to lose naturalistic declamation or veer into virtuosic display. When these mini-melismas are combined with clear enunciation, the listener is able to experience both a sense of lyricism *and* a clarity of the sounds as words that hold semantic meaning.

¹⁸¹ *Britannica*, s.v. “Gregorian chant.”

Rhythmic variety: Freedom and spontaneity

Overall, *Hyperballad* fits entirely into simple duple and quadruple meters, but the vocal persona exhibits a high degree of rhythmic variety within this frame. At a local level, the persona's vocal rhythms are generally quite free and irregular. They feature both even divisions of the beat and syncopations, as well as cases of dividing the beat into three instead of two—all in a manner that has no discernible pattern. This is visible in the following excerpts:¹⁸²



The figure contains three musical excerpts, each on a single staff in G minor (one flat). The first excerpt shows the lyrics "beau - ti-ful view from the top of the moun - tain..." with a triplet of eighth notes over "from the top" and another triplet over "of the moun - tain...". The second excerpt shows "Ev - ery morn - ing, I walk to - wards the edge. and throw" with a triplet of eighth notes over "the edge." and a quarter note followed by an eighth note over "and throw". The third excerpt shows "hap - pi - er, to be safe up here with you," with a triplet of eighth notes over "safe up" and a quarter note followed by an eighth note over "with you,".

Figure 2.6: Examples of the rhythmic “DNA” of various melodic excerpts from *Hyperballad*. Notation has been quantized.

¹⁸² Nicola Dibben points out that Björk’s vocal relationship to the beat in general is often extremely free, not only in later albums but even in early albums like *Debut* and *Post* in which grooves and a fixed grid are more prominent. Dibben, *Björk*.

The voice's rhythmic variety and irregularity create a free quality, and lends itself to readings of spontaneous, "authentic" expression of interior emotional experience. This relates to the singer-songwriter tradition, which also often involves a flexible relationship with time.¹⁸³

But all this rhythmic flexibility also suggests emotional changes; we may have a sense that the persona is moving and changing based on the vicissitudes of the moment. The effect is augmented by Björk's performance choices: her attacks don't always snap to the rhythmic grid, rendering the result even more rhythmically nuanced than the above transcriptions capture. As Kirk Hamilton points out, Björk's attacks throughout *Hyperballad* variously arrive early, late, or on time.¹⁸⁴ This has significant affective implications. For Moore, late arrival suggests a "relaxed" state (that is, less aroused – think "laid back"), while being ahead of the beat is firmly "excitement" (i.e., more aroused).¹⁸⁵ Thus, the persona's constantly-changing relationship to the beat partly explains the song's overall "emotional" character, since quick changes are characteristic of emotional experience.

Contour, range, pitch, and phrase structure: Crafting changing mental-emotional states

In addition to a globally "authentic," "expressive" character suggested by *Hyperballad*'s semi-melismatic and rhythmically flexible vocal style, there are significant variations within the vocal melody. Over the course of a verse-chorus cycle, the persona shifts from dreamy observation enoiced by naturalistic prosody to a more integrated, songful melody that suggests a conscious, emotionally activated statement.

¹⁸³ See Nancy Murphy, "The Times are A-Changin': Metric Flexibility and Text Expression in 1960s and 1970s Singer-Songwriter Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 44, iss. 1 (Spring 2022), 17–40.

¹⁸⁴ Kirk Hamilton offers an excellent breakdown of where Björk is aligned with, ahead of, or behind the beat in his *Strong Songs* episode on "Hyperballad."

¹⁸⁵ Moore, *Song Means*, 105.

In the first halves of the verses, the aforementioned flexible rhythmic qualities combine with limited intervallic content and a prevalence of breaths within phrases¹⁸⁶ to create a recitative-like quality. The vocal line is firmly in Bb Ionian mode the entire song. However, the vocal line in the first halves of the verses lingers on scale degrees 5 and 6 with a touch of 3 and 4, encircling itself rather than “going” anywhere. The line is conservative, moving only stepwise, within a total range of a fourth.

More specifically, descending two-note gestures are very prevalent in *Hyperballad*'s verses, especially early on. Almost every single one of the persona's two-note melismas descend in contour, and descending two-note groupings are prominent across syllables and words as well:



Figure 2.7: First phrase of Hyperballad's first verse, demonstrating select descending two-note melismatic gestures

While it might seem exciting to discover this prevalence of descending motion in a song that so meaningfully conjures images of high, low, throwing, and falling, I believe these vocal gestures are common enough that they don't conjure powerful metaphorical associations. Rather, I think the prevalence of short descending contours in the verse mainly establishes a naturalistic relationship with text, because they resemble the prosody these words would have when spoken. Björk's speechlike, text-focused style in combination with her lax vocal timbre in the verses facilitates listeners' suspension of disbelief that this is a “natural,” un-premeditated expression of

¹⁸⁶ Per Robin Attas, I am identifying phrases based not only on where Björk takes breaths, but in consideration of where there is directed motion with a beginning, middle, and end. See Robin Attas, “Sarah Setting the Terms: Defining Phrase in Popular Music,” *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 3 (October 2011). <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.attas.html#burns_2005>

interior, perhaps even unconscious, experience. The initial narrow range affords a sense of low arousal and calm; and can be read as sleepy, detached, or slightly distant. The prevalence of oscillations between the same two notes (F4 and G4) enhances this, creating a feeling of rocking or stasis as well as a general lack of direction, especially in the first half of the verses.

The conservative, recitative-like setting also leaves room for more registral expansion and melodic variety later—and this is exactly what occurs. The second halves of the verses introduce significant differences in the vocal line. Narrow undulations in contour give way to drastically different figures that leap widely and suddenly, seeming to defy gravity:



Figure 2.8: Vocal line, third phrase of verse 1 (beginning of “second half” of verse)

The characteristic la-sol vacillations are still prominent, but are now punctuated by expressive leaps of fourths and fifths that reach up and down to the tonics on either side of the F4 that has been the voice’s central axis point. While the quality here is still recitative-like because of the short phrases and relationship to the declination of spoken prosody, the new leaping vocal gestures are significantly more energetic and suggestive of increased affective arousal than those earlier in the verse—especially when combined with Björk’s occasional use of a tenser and/or louder resonance strategy. Furthermore, the downward leaps could be more marked and potentially symbolic of descent than the earlier incantations, but the quick complementary ascent creates a general buoyancy and, to my mind, simply conveys more arousal and power. The fact that the leaps reach to the tonic confers a certain solidity—a sense of meeting up with reality or being on more solid ground. This could suggest higher dominance, power, or control (additional

especially notable at the top of the chorus, where Björk ascends from scale degree 5 up to tonic, climbing step-by-step in a determined line that seems to reach for something. This is the first time we hear the vocal part ascend in extended stepwise motion (rather than ascending only in quick flips up to a high note in short gestures). Combined with the lyric “I go through all this,” this shift to greater melodicism and linearity cements a sense of the persona’s subjective agency, reinforcing a sense of intentional, wakeful consciousness. Moreover, the melody emphasizes the traditionally “expressive” half steps of fa-mi and, for the first time, ti-do. Within Western musical traditions, may seem tautological or trite to point out that the leading tone tends to exhibit agency and suggest emotional arousal; still, the prevalence of the leading tone in the choruses is quite marked and meaningful given its absence in the verses.

In sum, the vocal melody is initially recitative-like and narrow, given its rhythmic irregularity combined with limited pitch material and short choppy utterances within functional phrases. This begins to change in the second half of verses, where the only leaps of the song occur, albeit in quick isolated fashion; the persona seems to be in a liminal space, a change of state. While the second halves of the verses envoice the process of “waking up” in some sense, the choruses are fully conscious. In those formal sections, the increased use of melisma and changes to contour and phrase structure create more traditionally melodic results that suggest the conscious, concerted mind moving intentionally in time in order to think and perhaps communicate to an Other—rather than the associative, stream-of-(un)consciousness style of mentation the verses exhibit. The choruses also feature a traditionally songful, lyrical, tune, which will have associations of emotional expression, even outpouring, for many listeners. This description supports the trajectory I have identified and argued for regarding the other elements of the vocal persona—the lyrics and vocal timbre.

Having examined the vocal persona on its own and in its entirety, we can see that there are many concrete qualities that can contribute to listeners' general assessments of both authenticity and emotionality, but also to a more nuanced interpretation involving a psychological trajectory involving changing states of consciousness and emotion that suggest a process of self-regulation. Interestingly, *Hyperballad's* lyrics, vocal timbre, and melodic content generally reinforce one another, supporting an interpretation of the persona as undergoing changes in her degree of consciousness and emotional arousal between the beginning of a verse and the end of the chorus. The lyrics move from distanced observation to embodied subjectivity; the vocal resonance strategy moves from lax and breathy to a timbre that is more tense, aroused, and thus "awake"; and the melodic construction progresses from short, recitative-like chunks to a more traditionally melodic line comprising longer phrases.

I have argued that all three strands of vocal persona work together to afford an interpretation of a changing state of consciousness in *Hyperballad*, and that this trajectory helps us understand emotional meanings of the song. But along with this rich information coming from the persona, Björk and her collaborators present an intricate sonic tapestry that stretches the typical definition of "accompaniment." As Allan Moore has pointed out, while it is quite common for accompaniments to simply exhibit generic qualities of a style, some accompaniments can exhibit more distinctiveness, more "particularization."¹⁸⁷ *Hyperballad* is exactly such a case—so much so that the word "accompaniment" doesn't even seem appropriate. Through its variety of sonic materials and through evolving relationships both amongst those materials and between

¹⁸⁷ Moore, "The Persona-Environment Relation in Recorded Song," [4]. As a counterexample, Moore uses the accompaniment of Patsy Cline's "I'm Blue Again," for which he says there "seems to be no particularized expressive content" and that "these elements could perfectly well be transferred to another song performed by Patsy Cline within the same style—and indeed they are."

them and the vocal persona, *Hyperballad's* sonic environment does crucial affective work.

Eventually, within this fuller context, questions of purported “authenticity” recede, and questions of *relationship*—to our internal and external environment, and to Self and Other(s)—become more meaningful.

CHAPTER 3:

The Persona-Environment Relationship in *Hyperballad*

Björk's relationship to the natural environment of her home country Iceland makes it surprisingly easy to imagine her actually standing on a mountain, throwing cutlery. This is a common way that people construct and understand Björk's music in general: in terms of the natural environment.¹⁸⁸ Many fans and critics understand *Hyperballad* along these lines of external landscape and terrain. For instance, in his analysis of *Hyperballad* on his podcast *Strong Songs*, the musician Kirk Hamilton goes so far as to invoke Iceland itself as a character in the song, and makes each of the initial elements of the sonic environment analogous to an element of landscape: He compares the song's first chord to sky, the bassline to dropping off of a cliff, and the percussion layer to wind. He also calls Björk a master of crafting musical space and travel.¹⁸⁹

To be fair, such affordances seem especially reasonable in the specific case of *Hyperballad*, where Björk's lyrics explicitly refer to the top of a mountain, a cliff, and "throwing things off" of it. The initial sounds of the piece do clearly establish relationships between high and low, while production decisions enhance the sense of space and movement along the lines Hamilton describes. Moreover, analogies of this sort are hardly uncommon or categorically unreasonable; as many have pointed out, it is nearly impossible to discuss music without resorting to metaphor. This is not due to some failure of language, but reflects something real: music is a fundamentally metaphorical art form. Music theorist Lawrence Zbikowski points out that for humans to interpret sounds as music at all—"as opposed to unconnected if pleasant noises"—

¹⁸⁸ As Nicola Dibben points out, nature and Iceland/Scandinavia are common themes in Björk's work, and in constructions of it; so are technology and emotion. Dibben, *Björk*.

¹⁸⁹ Hamilton, "Hyperballad," *Strong Songs*.

requires metaphorical transfer from another domain. As the philosopher Roger Scruton argues, “If we take away the metaphors of movement, of space, of chords as objects, of melodies as advancing and retreating, as moving up and down – if we take those metaphors away, nothing of music remains, but only sound.”¹⁹⁰ More specifically, Zbikowski argues that when we hear sounds as music, it is generally because they are operating as an analog for *processes*—mainly those of motion and emotion.¹⁹¹ For Zbikowski, music is not adept at static reference (e.g. a mountain or Hamilton’s “sky”), but other thinkers do find ways to embrace less process-dependent metaphorical mappings, certainly for single or isolated sounds. For instance, Daniel A. Putman argues that touch may be an appropriate metaphor for musical sounds, because it can convey the rich, less-rational types of meanings and feelings that sound—like touch—is able to communicate so viscerally.¹⁹² Space is another domain that is commonly mapped onto music, especially when that music seems more static.¹⁹³

How do metaphorical mappings actually play out in music, a medium in which sounds change through time? One of the most telling examples (and one particularly relevant to *Hyperballad*) is the mapping of the physical domain of vertical space onto pitch. As we saw in Chapter 1, UP/DOWN is a powerful metaphor in everyday life, one we use for various conceptual mappings. In music, its use in reference to pitch often seems to be ingrained to such a degree that

¹⁹⁰ Scruton (1983), 106 in Zbikowski, “Metaphor in Music,” 504–505.

¹⁹¹ Zbikowski argues, music’s “Primary function is to represent through patterned sound various dynamic processes that are common in human experience. Chief among these dynamic processes are those associated with the emotions... and the movements of bodies—including our own—through space.” Lawrence M. Zbikowski, “Music, Language, and Multimodal Metaphor,” 363–364. See also Robert Adlington, “Moving beyond Motion: Metaphors for Changing Sound,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128, no. 2 (2003), 297–318, and Zohar Eitan and Roni Y. Granot, “How Music Moves: Musical Parameters and Listeners’ Images of Motion.” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 23, no. 3 (February 2006), 221–248.

¹⁹² He positions this in contrast to our tendency to use more visual metaphors, which he claims privilege certain types of clarity and rationality while failing to convey less-rational meanings. Daniel A. Putman, “Music and the Metaphor of Touch,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985), 59–66. Note that the idea of sound as touch is not entirely metaphorical; there is actual physical contact through vibration.

¹⁹³ Frederico Macedo, “Space as Metaphor: The Use of Spatial Metaphors in Music and Music Writing,” *Annals of Semiotics* 6 (2015), 215–216.

to many of us it feels physically real.¹⁹⁴ But actually, Zbikowski explains, when we call pitches “low” or “high” we are applying the conceptual metaphor “...PITCH RELATIONSHIPS ARE RELATIONSHIPS IN VERTICAL SPACE, which maps spatial orientations such as up-down onto the pitch continuum.”¹⁹⁵ In Zbikowski’s view, this is not based on anything literally, physically, or inherently true. We map that spatial dimension (with possibility for motion through it) onto musical pitches, and it’s such a good map that we forget it’s there.

Because UP/DOWN and HIGH/LOW are commonly mapped onto various experiences in daily life *and* are powerfully associated with pitch space in music, there is a possibility for multiple layers of metaphor and meaning when it comes to pitch relationships in music. For example, because UP/DOWN and HIGH/LOW are sometimes mapped onto CONSCIOUS/UNCONSCIOUS, a song’s use of range, contour, and intervals may be able to resemble states of consciousness and relationships within the psyche—especially between parts that are below our conscious awareness. Mapping relationships in vertical space to relationships in our inner world or psychology (e.g., UP IS CONSCIOUS) enables and affords musical interpretations that have to do with a subject’s interiority—not *instead* of possible resemblances to motion or space, but partly *because* of them. In the case of *Hyperballad*, the deeply rooted musical mapping of vertical space onto pitch has the potential to reinforce the many references to heights and depths in the lyrics.

Perhaps most of all, music can help flesh out the emotional message that a metaphor’s vehicle and tenor carry (as proposed by Hartmann and Kunzendorf, Lea Povozaev, and others, as

¹⁹⁴ There is some inherent, embodied relation to the speaking and singing voice in terms of where a sound resonates, e.g. chest or head.

¹⁹⁵ Zbikowski, “Metaphor and Music Theory,” [3.4]. As he points out, pitch and vertical space have much in common, making it a robust and valid mapping. However, it is not the only way that people conceptualize pitch relationships; in different cultures and times, the contrasting options have also been “sharpness” and “heaviness,” “small” and “large,” and “young and old.” Zbikowski argues, “The differences among these ways of characterizing musical pitch suggests that the understanding of music is profoundly metaphorical.” *Ibid.*, [3.5].

discussed in Chapter 2). It seems to me that in the case of a song—where there is a vocal persona singing text with some degree of specificity, directness, and semantics—the musical environment is best suited to shedding light on what the tenor (target) of a metaphor is, and what emotional meaning that mapping conveys.

In this chapter, I explore the idea that *Hyperballad's* sonic environment can be viewed as musically metaphorical of the inner environment of the vocal persona, reflecting sense perceptions, intrusive thoughts and emotions, and other parts of Self that exist below conscious awareness or beyond our full conscious intention. Moreover, it can sonically reflect changes of psychological state. I argue that the mapping UP IS CONSCIOUS (and DOWN IS UNCONSCIOUS) is strongly operative in *Hyperballad*, both in the words and in the music. I show that the characteristics of the bass and percussion lines, as well as the unusual construction of the harmonic filler layer, create a texture that especially lends itself to interpretation of the environment as envoicing the complex bundle of experiences that constitute a Self. Simply noticing highs, lows, and descents in the music is not meaningful without also asking what emotional work these metaphors are doing—what meanings they help us afford. We must not forget that *Hyperballad's* presentation of the persona standing at a cliff and throwing things off its edge is a controlling metaphor.

I will now begin my analysis and interpretation, continuing to explore emotional meanings within an overall concept of consciousness and psychological trajectory. For an initial grounding in the basic form of the song, the reader may refer to the chart in the Appendix, which provides a full overview of the formal sections in *Hyperballad* and when the various sonic entities enter and exit.

3.1 *Hyperballad's* introduction: Establishing uncertainty through gaps and extremes

Much of the groundwork of *Hyperballad's* emotional affordances is laid in the initial 25” of the introduction. As popular music scholar Robin Attas notes, “Musical introductions are a site for first impressions. Over just a few seconds, the music establishes genre, tempo, and mood; creates a context for pitch, meter, timbre, instrumentation, and other musical parameters; captures listener attention; and pulls that attention into the main body of the piece.”¹⁹⁶ However, *Hyperballad's* introduction does not achieve those functions in a typical way. Genre is not solidly established; the meter and even the tempo are initially ambiguous, only becoming clear 15” into the track; and long after that, the sense of pitch center remains complex.¹⁹⁷ While build-up introductions in which information is slowly doled out are quite common in popular recorded song, especially in electronic dance musics, *Hyperballad* exhibits ambiguity above and beyond that norm—creating a sense of uncertainty that will continue throughout much of the song.

The first 15”: Metaphorical heights, gaps, and descents

The first moments of *Hyperballad* immediately enact the idea of rarefied, transcendent height and inevitable descent that are the central metaphor of the song’s lyrics – and offer up strong signals about associated emotions. The track starts with a high, sustained chord built on Bb, C and F that is played by a string section. Just before 0:05, a bassline enters several octaves

¹⁹⁶ Robin Attas, “Form as Process: The Buildup Introduction in Popular Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 37, no. 2 (2015), 275. Allan Moore says “feel” is what grabs a listener; it is something that lives beyond the four layers of popular song (vocal persona, harmonic filler layer (HFL), functional bass layer (FBL), and explicit beat layer (EBL)). *Song Means*, 28.

¹⁹⁷ Note that the build-up trajectory of *Hyperballad's* opening is common in EDM, but also in popular song in general, per Attas (although less common in traditional singer-songwriter songs where there are only 1–2 instruments available). Per Phillip Tagg, referring to EDM, “Rave numbers rarely start with all tracks sounding simultaneously and often build up several two-bar units of other tracks before the quantised kick drum sets in.” However, the opening wouldn’t typically be so rhythmically sparse or tonally ambiguous. Philip Tagg, “From Refrain to Rave: The Decline of Figure and the Rise of Ground,” *Popular Music* 13, no. 2 (May 1994), 216.

below at the sub-bass level, on a synthesizer.¹⁹⁸ The figure enters on Eb1,¹⁹⁹ then steadily steps down to C1:

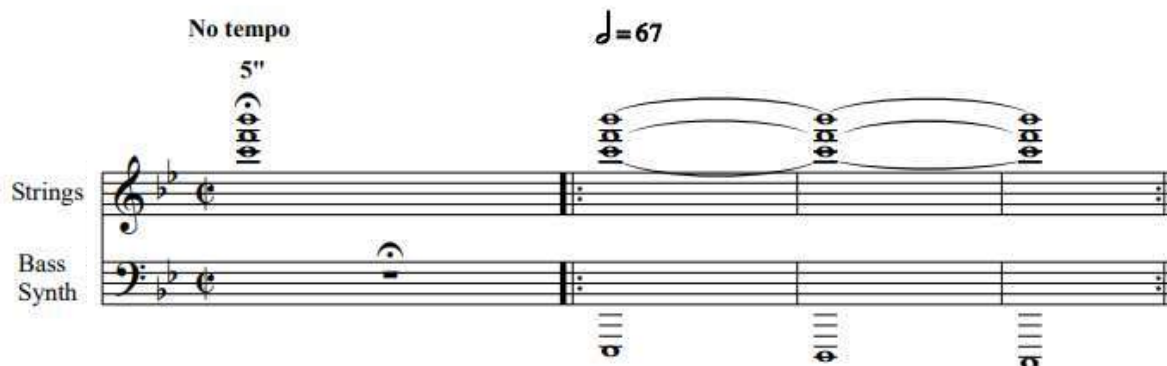


Figure 3.1: My transcription of *Hyperballad*'s first 15 seconds. Octava lines are purposely avoided to represent the wide range between the first two sonic entities.

A wide range separates the acoustic strings and the synth bass line. It is fairly common for a popular song to begin with a quick delineation of what will be the total pitch range, but such a large gap is less common.²⁰⁰ These two initial components of the musical environment open up an abyss that foreshadows the upcoming lyrics' mention of "right at the top" and the dangerous depths one can fall to from that height. The environment appears to be supporting the persona's lyrics even before they have been uttered.²⁰¹ While I argued that high-low pitch relationships in the vocal part to *Hyperballad* are *not* best understood metaphorically, this opening is extreme and prevalent enough that such associations are hard to ignore. The range is so wide as to be atypical, and foregrounds a sense of a gap between two entities that is crucial to the song's central

¹⁹⁸ "Sub-bass sounds are the deep, low-register pitches below approximately 70 Hz (C#₂ in scientific pitch notation) and extending downward to include the lowest frequency humans can hear, approximately 20 Hz (E₀)." <Sub-bass - Wikihttps://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub-basspedia>

¹⁹⁹ I am using Scientific Pitch Notation, in which middle C is C4, the B below middle C is B3, the octave above middle C is C5, etc.

²⁰⁰ Zbikowski, "Music, Language, and Multimodal Metaphor," 371.

²⁰¹ Moore, "The Persona-Environment Relation in Recorded Song."

metaphor. But before delving further into potential metaphorical functions, I wish to describe the sounds and their immediate affective implications.

The initial sounds' range, pitch content, and timbres do a great deal of affective work, both in terms of visceral response and their culturally learned associations. The string chord's high range will tend to convey neutral or positive valence,²⁰² and its pitch content creates an open and ambiguous but relatively consonant sonority that suggests neutral or positive affect. "Pure" harmonics played on bowed acoustic string instruments with a long sustain may evoke transcendence, especially for listeners enculturated in the West.

The bass synth part is more affectively ambiguous, suggesting further uncertainty. Perhaps most importantly, this bass part is extremely low. Many producers comment on this in youtube videos discussing the song, and several informal internet discussions about what songs feature the lowest bass mention *Hyperballad*. Slow, low notes typically skew towards low arousal and negative valence in psychological studies.²⁰³ Yet, interestingly, low notes in an EDM context may seem anything but low-arousal or negative—indeed, some studies suggest that low bass engenders more of a desire to dance.²⁰⁴ Very low notes can also simply engage us in the world of embodiment and feeling, since we may become more aware of the sound as actual vibrations we can feel in our bodies. This might prime us for more emotional experience – or at least for a general quality of “feeling,” of embodiment.²⁰⁵ As Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispirota points out, electronic dance music “foregrounds.... sonic elements that resonate with how we experience

²⁰² Tuomas Eerola, Anders Friberg, and Roberto Bresin, “Emotional Expression in Music: Contribution, Linearity, and Additivity of Primary Musical Cues,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 4, art. 487 (July 2013), 6.

²⁰³ Eerola et al. found that “register can be seen to have had a clear effect on the emotions happiness and fearfulness. A higher register corresponded to a higher happiness rating while a lower register corresponded to a higher fearfulness rating.” Eerola et al., “Emotional expression in music,” 6.

²⁰⁴ See for instance Cameron et al, “Undetectable Very-Low Frequency Sound Increases Dancing at a Live Concert,” *Current Biology* 32, no. 21 (November, 2022): R1222–R1223.

²⁰⁵ Tellingly, the wikipedia entry on sub-bass states, “in this range, human hearing is less sensitive, so these notes tend to be *felt* more than heard” (emphasis added).

touch... creating multimodal, trans-sensory resonances between the aural and the tactile, offering a sonic surface that is rich in texture and timbre.”²⁰⁶

Both of the initial timbres of *Hyperballad* have a visceral, irreducible quality that are reminiscent of touch. In the case of the bowed string instruments, the sound of bow hairs wavering on the strings—fluttering, alive, breath-like—“feels” gentle. (Perhaps we could say it sounds the way something gentle feels.) It’s a caress rather than a shove; a whisper of wind or breath in the ear, soft and non-threatening. Slight variation in the sound conjures a sense of physical bodies touching and/or the actions of the instrumentist herself. The synthesizer’s timbre is also striking, even if it doesn’t obviously conjure a particular instrument or action. It is a synth with only the first partial above the fundamental included; for me, this lends it a certain ambiguity and unfamiliarity, even an unknowability.²⁰⁷ This may be a good analog for un- or sub-conscious processes, which we undergo yet often struggle to bring to awareness, let alone comprehend.

The specific pitch content and implied harmonies of the first 15” are also likely to convey uncertainty. The initial string sonority has an openness and ambiguity due to its stacking of fourths; it does not sound very tense, but it is not completely consonant. (I typically hear it as a Bbsus2 chord missing the third.). The subsequent bassline pitches suggest increased complexity, tension, and/or uncertainty, because a descending Eb-D-C figure repeated over and over, and so low, makes the supposed Bb tonic much less clear. Depending on the individual listener and interpretation, the bass figure either introduces Eb major and C minor as contesting tonal centers

²⁰⁶ Garcia-Mispieta, *Together, Somehow*, 65. He continues, “Feeling is everywhere in electronic dance music... From ‘Feeling You’ to ‘You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)’ to ‘I Feel Love’ to ‘Push the Feeling On’ to hundreds of other permutations, dance music’s track titles pun endlessly on feeling’s double meaning as both emotional experience and tactile perception (that is, to feel by touching)... expressions such as ‘I feel you’ or ‘I felt that’ or ‘that got me feeling some kinda way’ can convey an affective epistemology, a deep understanding that arises from compassion, intuition, and shared feeling.”

²⁰⁷ Hamilton, “Hyperballad.”

alongside Bb (a polymodal interpretation), or can be heard as a repeated a 4-3-2 figure in Bb that repeatedly “fails” to reach tonic (a Bb Ionian interpretation). Personally, I experience *Hyperballad*’s introduction differently depending on the day, even after months analyzing it: on some occasions, I hear it as being in Bb from the beginning and remaining that way through the bass’s entrance, but at other times, I can hear Eb and C as tonal centers, with Bb only settling in as tonic once Björk sings “beautiful view” and additional information enters the sonic environment. Either way, complexity and uncertainty win the day: either the strings and the bass exist in different modes with competing pitch centers, or the bass repeatedly fails to reach Bb, presenting the listener with a persistent lack of resolution within the “environmental” layer. In any case, the bassline may create a sense of unsafety—an affective state the chorus’s lyrics eventually reveal to be integral to the song.

Finally, let’s revisit the metaphorical possibilities of these first two figures in the song. By calling the first sonority the “Mountaintop Chord,” I’m clearly not eschewing the idea of resemblance to natural physical entities mentioned in the lyrics; I believe these types of mappings to inert objects are most appropriate in the case of single sonorities, like the Mountaintop Chord. The bass figure, on the other hand, moves. To be fair, it moves in an eerily static way, as it is comprised of notes of completely even rhythmic value that descend and then reset, creating a three-bar ostinato that simply repeats. The figure has an atavistic, elemental, even “unknowable” quality, thanks to the extremely low notes that almost register as rhythm rather than pitch, and the synth timbre’s relative lack of timbral information. While this amorphous, uncertain quality could evoke some larger-than-life, ancient element of the external natural environment, I find it very reminiscent of the unconscious.²⁰⁸ As the lowest sounding parameter, it possesses a weight and

²⁰⁸ The fact that the bassline does eventually change and exhibit more agency, as I’ll discuss shortly, further supports this interpretation.

importance, but one that seems more unconscious or “felt” than foregrounded. The fact that this figure exclusively descends in the verses,²⁰⁹ combined with its extreme depth of pitch range, noisy timbre, and repetitive nature, makes it reminiscent of the un- or sub-conscious mind.

Entrance of the Explicit Beat Layer: Arousal & Further Uncertainty

Rhythm is a fundamental element of music with strong implications for affective meanings.²¹⁰ Global tempo and meter choices help to establish overall mood and emotion,²¹¹ while smaller-scale rhythmic structures strongly shape expectation and tension.²¹² However, as we have seen, rhythm is significantly backgrounded in the first 15” of *Hyperballad*. The opening chord is sustained and gives no clue to meter. Once the bass part enters, its regular attacks begin to provide a sense of time, but skeletally: more than one hierarchical level of regular pulse is required to determine meter, so all we can really be sure of here is an overall sense of slow tempo and a general quality of evenness. This initial lack of rhythmic information adds to a feeling of uncertainty. Given the lyrics and content of the song, it also sets a tone of unconscious “dreaminess”: without hierarchical organization of levels of pulse, we do not quite seem to be in the “normal” world of consciousness, linearity, or rationality.

At 0:15, the explicit beat layer (EBL) enters, and tempo and meter become clear, introducing a new affective quality that lessens uncertainty in some ways while increasing it in

²⁰⁹ I believe we will almost certainly group the first three pitches into a “chunk,” and then view the chunk as repeating or restarting (looping) when it returns to the Eb pitch. The shift from the C1 to the Eb1 does not qualify an ascent. For more on grouping, chunking, and meter, see Kristine Eggertson, ““Where is the Meter?”: An Investigation of Rhythmic Process in Björk’s Music,” Masters doc, University of British Columbia, 2005.

²¹⁰ For instance, Aaron Copland cites it as the most fundamental element of music in *What to Listen for in Music*.

²¹¹ Swaminathan and Schellenberg, “Current Emotion Research in Music Psychology,” 189.

²¹² Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*.

others. This percussion part presents more information, filling in some gaps, but presents so much information as to be less clear, perhaps overwhelming or confusing.²¹³

The drum kit confirms a slow tempo (67 BPM) and steady duple feel, while also providing a sudden, sharp increase in information via the rhythmic figures. The two basic sounds here are a kick drum with a low pass filter (omitting higher partials)²¹⁴ and a snare played with wire brushes, which are then doubled and have a stereo delay applied.²¹⁵ The kick sound attacks when the synthesizer's bass notes do; the snare fills in a detailed, syncopated layer in which most notes are attacked with equal force, but a slight accent occurs halfway through the measure:

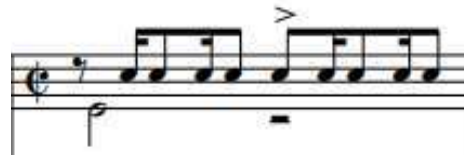


Figure 3.2: Hyperballad's explicit beat layer as it consistently sounds from the introduction until chorus 2 (other than slight rolls at the ends of verses)

The accent is subtle, but enough for us to perceive it as a beat at a higher level of emphasis than the other snare sounds. Listeners will likely hear this as a backbeat, given expectations from and of popular music, but it is less strong and less clear here than is typical for recorded popular song.²¹⁶ In any case, this subtle accent provides enough hierarchy of pulse to imply duple simple meter.

²¹³ As Thomas Schäfer et al. point out, from an evolutionary perspective, both a *lack* of sonic information in the environment and *too much* confusing or contradictory information can suggest danger and/or be fear-inducing. Thomas Schäfer, David Huron, Daniel Shanahan, and Peter Sedlmeier, "The Sounds of Safety: Stress and Danger in Music Perception," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (2015).

²¹⁴ <https://www.reddit.com/r/edmproduction/comments/8se9i3/how_do_you_produce_those_airy_ambient_drum_sounds/>

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ While the backbeat's absence is not odd for EDM, usually there would be a more prominent kick drum presence in grooves that omit the backbeat function.

Within this simple meter, the snare attacks feel unusually dense. In quadruple simple meter (e.g. if the song were in 4/4 time compared to my 2/2 transcription above), these syncopations and their relation to the beat would be typical.²¹⁷ But we are in cut time, and though the beat and pulse are articulated by the wire brushes on the snare, they are not heard on a different and/or louder instrument, such as the traditional snare sound that provides a strong “pop” on beat 2 in many popular musics.²¹⁸ (Typically, a snare sound would play that role while a high hat would fill in more of the beat divisions.) Instead, the snare drum articulates all the percussion attacks other than those on the kick drum, and these notes are near-equal, microscopic, and plentiful, giving the listener a surfeit of micro-rhythmic information between the bigger rhythmic events. It is as if the drums skip over the division of the beat (eighth and quarter notes in this transcription) to a more miniscule level that emphasizes subdivision instead of the traditional, grounding level of pulse. In this way, the rhythmic world of *Hyperballad*’s opening features a gap in which the middle is dropped-out, much as its pitch world does. Though this gap is less obviously related to metaphors of height and descent, it is just as relevant on an affective level. The missing rhythmic middleground constitutes another gap, a form of missing information that can create uncertainty or uneasiness.

The fast, fluttering subdivisions introduce a sounding layer that could convey higher arousal, whether excitement or anxiety. Others listeners have observed a similar character here: one reviewer referred to the rhythmic quality as “stuttering,”²¹⁹ and a Youtube commenter aptly refers to it as “skittering percussion.”²²⁰ IDM producer Ixi conceives of the percussion part as the

²¹⁷ Later, at chorus 2, a four-on-the-floor drum pattern does exactly that.

²¹⁸ In a typical rock beat, there would be kick, snare, and hi-hat sounds functioning on specific moments within a measure; Kirk Hamilton uses the term “pop” for the snare function. As Hamilton points out in his episode on “Hyperballad,” the full three functions will eventually be presented in the song—but only by chorus 2.

²¹⁹ Alexis Petridis, “Björk – Her 20 Greatest Songs Ranked!,” *The Guardian*. 24 October 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/oct/24/Björk-her-20-greatest-songs-ranked>>

²²⁰ Mic the snare,”Deep Discog Dive: Björk.” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ndsv16Nq9Yg>>

“nervous system” of the song, which strikes me as an apt analogy given how it suggests energetic changes through time.²²¹

The snare attacks also provide unusually rich timbral information: because there is doubling and delaying²²² of the sound signal on top of the already-diffuse timbre bestowed by the wire brushes, the rhythm is simultaneously precise and hazy, a flutter of attacks enveloped in a wash of gently noisy sound. This evokes the experience of something uncertain or complex, not seen clearly yet; emotionally, the feeling could be one of anxiety or excitement. The EBL can also be interpreted as conveying a dreamy quality. It is less about precision, clarity, and attack than we might typically expect from a drum track; instead, it provides a mix of vividness and haziness that is reminiscent of a day/dream state. Kirk Hamilton’s comparison to “wind” seems reasonable, given the white-noise-like quality created by techniques applied to the sound of the wire brushes and use of white noise sound waves.²²³

Finally, the EBL’s repetitive nature plays a role in our sense of the persona’s state as well. It exhibits a great deal of variation within the duration of its main bar-long figure, but then doesn’t vary from that pattern for the first half of the song (other than a brief roll at the transition to the choruses). It simply repeats that one-bar loop. We might interpret this as embodying determined progress despite anxiety or excitement; it could also afford a sense of sleepwalking or trance, especially given the EBL’s moving spatialization. For me, this layer feels as if it is moving forward, but somewhat akin to how it feels to be walking in a dream.

The introduction’s sonic materials establish an openness of pitch space and ambiguity of pitch content that can convey uncertainty; rhythmic information that affords interpretations of

²²¹ Ixi music. “Live Breakdown - Björk ‘Hyperballad’ Live Performance.” IDM stands for “intelligent dance music,” another subset of EDM that is sometimes applied to Björk’s oeuvre.

²²² Hamilton, “Hyperballad”; Ixi music, “Live Breakdown - Björk ‘Hyperballad’ Live Performance.”

²²³ <https://www.reddit.com/r/edmproduction/comments/8se9i3/how_do_you_produce_those_airy_ambient_drum_sounds/>

complexity and anxiety; and a subtle contrast of rich timbres that evokes mixed affective valences and an ineffable quality reminiscent of embodied experiences of both sensory contact with the external world and internal sensations pertaining to emotion.

3.2 *Hyperballad's* verse: Dreamy distance and beginning to wake up

Vocal persona and bassline: parts of consciousness operating on different planes

The vocal persona enters the texture at 0:27 and functions semi-independently of the sonic environment throughout the verse. As we saw in Chapter 2, the persona exhibits great flexibility and irregularity in her rhythmic language. Yet the bass and percussion adhere to the meter, and their patterns do not change until the first and second chorus, respectively. This regularity is especially notable in the case of the bass part: while having a stable, one-bar loop in the EBL is not particularly surprising, having the same three notes in the bass, and each of completely even rhythmic value, in a unidirectional contour, is less typical.

The bassline and vocal persona are also semi-independent from one another in terms of specific pitch content. While the bassline fails to provide enough distinct pitches to unequivocally indicate mode, the vocal line is full of diatonic half steps in Bb Ionian, and frequently articulates the tonic and dominant scale degrees of Bb and F. And though both the bass and vocal lines fall within the same diatonic collection, their focal pitches are different: while the bass avoids tonic and has a prevalence of scale degrees 4 and 2, the voice avoids scale degree 2 and features a prevalence of 1, 5, and 6. Along with the aforementioned rhythmic differences, this creates a sense that the main two pitched entities of the song are only loosely connected. They exist in the same overall world of Bb Ionian, duple meter, and groupings of three bars, but carve out different

spaces within it, and so there is a sense that the two entities each exist on their own plane and only occasionally happen to align.

As argued earlier, the bass figure has an atavistic quality that affords the conceptual mapping DOWN IS UNCONSCIOUS. While this was only one of many nascent possibilities in the introduction, the verse presents information that makes the bass figure feel much less tethered to the vocal persona that we would typically expect. Especially considering that the bass's very low pitches initially continue unabated, the bass figure here reminds me even more of something lurking in the unconscious. In turn, this contributes to a sense of a mental mode that is more dreamy or associative on Harmann and Kunzedorf's map of meditation, and less rational, agential, focused, and wakeful. With this in mind, we can imagine that the song's protagonist is actually daydreaming or dreaming—or perhaps she is simply not aware of something going on in her unconscious psyche.

Another element that lends a loose, associative quality to the verse is groupings of three at the level of hypermeter, across all sounding entities. The phrase length of three bars that the bass outlined in the introduction continues throughout the verse, and the voice operates within this grouping (albeit quite freely). This is striking. A phrase length of three measures is fairly unusual for popular song, where groupings of twos and fours at the phrase level are so common as to be normative.²²⁴ (It would be even more unusual in a standard EDM context where dancing is of utmost importance, though it would be less striking in IDM.) Symbolically, the number three is associated with heaven and the spiritual, and four with earth and “temporal” or even “corporeal.”²²⁵ Roland A. Laroche writes,

²²⁴ Drew Nobile, *Harmony as Form in Rock Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). Also, as Robin Attas puts it, in popular music, “the use of four-bar units in both melody and accompaniment is widely acknowledged as typical for the genre.” Attas, “Sarah Setting the Terms,” 13.

²²⁵ Randolph N. Currie, “A Neglected Guide to Bach's Use of Number Symbolism—Part I,” *Bach* 5, no. 1 (January 1974), 24.

...the dynamic and symbolic richness of 3 is so exceptional that it cannot be overemphasized. The number 3 represents the synthesis of 1 and 2 and thus solves the conflict posed by dualism. The number 3 plays an important role in Greek and Roman ritual, legend, and early history.²²⁶

As a composer, I have been taught that use of three in meter or phrase length can engender a more continuous, fluid quality. The beginnings and endings of phrases become less “square” or obvious; beginnings seem like endings; there may be less goal-directedness. All of this suggests a musical realm more governed by dream logic than rational logic, and a persona who has entered a semi-conscious state – rather than an awake, active protagonist who is fully agential in her utterances. Moreover, this reinforces the surprisingly calm and relaxed vocal timbre of the verses.

In sum, much as we can hear the Introduction’s strings and the bassline as being on different “pages” (perhaps even in different keys), during the verses the vocal persona and the bass part exist in a relationship in which they are only loosely tethered to one another. Paired with the bass’s extremely low register, the two entities’ untethered quality could suggest that the unconscious/subconscious is in a state of “darkness,” outside awareness, unintegrated. In turn, this can also suggest a dream or daydream state—or at the very least, a loose and associative, creative type of mentation. In any case, the relationship between the vocal persona and bass in the verse (or lack thereof) can support the idea that *Hyperballad*’s verses inhabit a less “conscious” psychological space, as the lyric, vocal timbre, and melody already suggest.

The bass and percussion layers remain very regular and constant in the verse, with their 3- and 1-bar loops simply repeating. But they are not all that comprises the sonic environment. Other non-vocal figures gradually populate the song, providing further meaning-making opportunities.

²²⁶ Roland A. Laroche, “Popular Symbolic/Mystical Numbers in Antiquity,” *Société d’Études Latines de Bruxelles* 54, no. 3 (July–September 1995), 570.

Harmonic filler layer, part 1: Envoicing the internal and external

As the verse progresses, a cast of sonic characters begins to fill in the middle register, which had previously been empty aside from Björk's voice. Typically, this range is filled by the "harmonic filler layer," which is one of the four normative components of popular song, according to Moore.²²⁷ In popular musics, this role would usually be played by 1-2 instruments playing material that is primarily chordal and clearly accompanimental. Interestingly, in the case of singer-songwriter music, this layer may gain added prominence, as the single accompanying instrument for the singer may be mainly chordal, whereas in EDM, it's not uncommon for this role and register to remain more empty. This is yet another way in which the two genre traditions Björk is most connected to exhibit stark differences.

At 0:37, sounds begin to populate the harmonic filler layer, but in a way that is atypical for most recorded popular song²²⁸: various figures begin to enter at different times, in an accretive, somewhat loop-based way, with the harmony still more implied than stated. Many of these figures are rhythmically differentiated enough that they qualify as themes or motives; all of them have enough shape and potential for markedness to qualify as a gesture.²²⁹ Moreover, these instrumental figures are introduced along with specific words that seem related to their content, thereby loosely text-painting the lyrics. The entry and exit of figures in the sonic environment is best seen at a glance in graphic form:

²²⁷ Moore, *Song Means*. As a reminder, Moore claims that the four layers of popular song are vocal persona, harmonic filler layer (HFL), functional bass layer (FBL), and explicit beat layer (EBL).

²²⁸ It is not as atypical for EDM, but still somewhat so. The figures looped in EDM would not exhibit this degree of variety, differentiation, or melodicism.

²²⁹ I am defining gesture per William Echard (2000), who points out that "Most music semioticians implicitly follow the definition of gesture suggested by Hatten: a gesture is any discrete bodily time-form marked for significance..." William Echard, "'Gesture' and 'Posture': One Useful Distinction in the Embodied Semiotic Analysis of Popular Music," *Indiana Theory Review* 21 (Spring / Fall 2000), 111–112. I use "figure" more generally, to include any sonic entity that I think is likely to group or chunk and be heard as a unit, including motives, melodies, and themes.

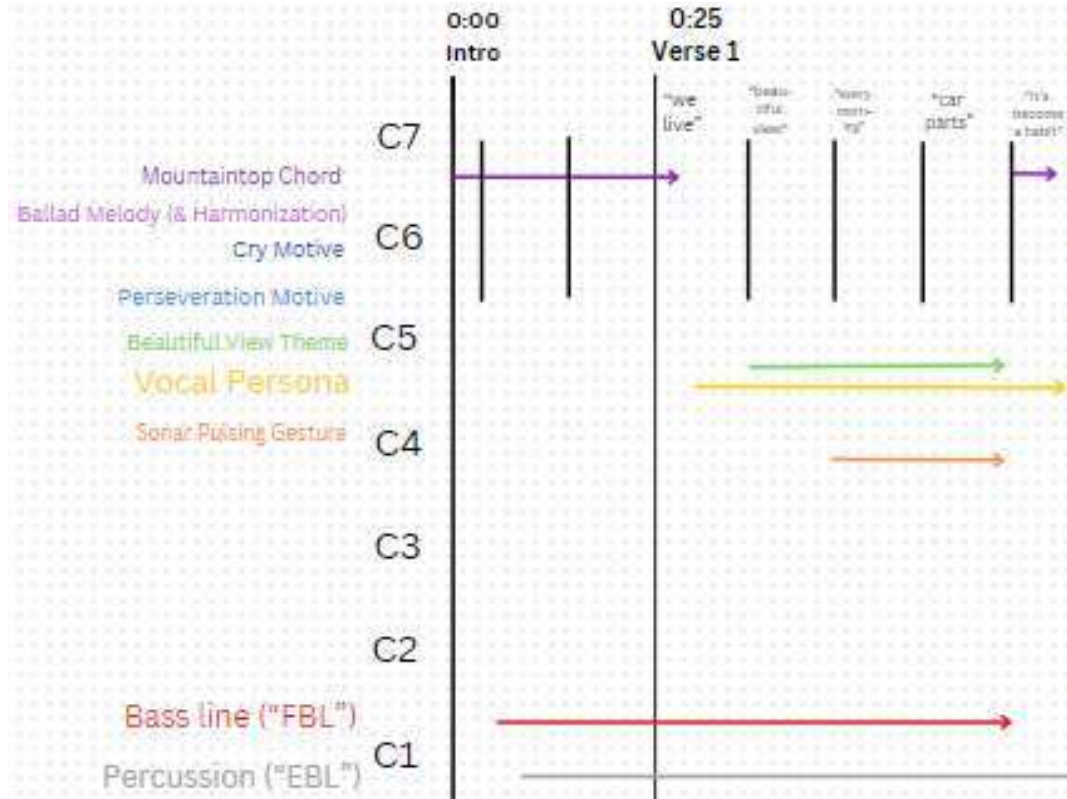


Figure 3.3: Schematic of all of Hyperballad's sonic entities and their entrances and exits through the end of verse 1. Placement in the pitch space is also indicated vertically, but only for general reference.

The first of these, which I call the “Beautiful View Theme,”²³⁰ enters just ahead of the persona singing the words “this beautiful view” a third of the way through verse 1.



Figure 3.4: “Beautiful View” Theme

²³⁰ I dub this a “theme” because it is a full melody, not a motive, gesture, or figure. Per Michael Berry, a motive would be shorter than a bar (and, in my experience, only 5-7 notes long). Michael Berry, “The Importance of Bodily Gesture in Sofia Gubaidulina’s Music for Low Strings,” *Music Theory Online* 15, no. 5 (October 2009). <<https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.09.15.5/mto.09.15.5.berry.html>>

The theme is played on a synthesizer with a bell-like timbre. The clarity and darkness of the tone provides contrast to the heavy sub-bass and splashy, hazy percussion. The Beautiful View Theme is also reminiscent of the string harmonics that opened the piece, because of how few partials are present; it may have similar associations of purity and innocence for many listeners. Gesturally, though, the melody is more similar to the vocal line: it features many two-note descending figures and a flexible relationship to time. It also has a loose antecedent-consequent structure: after the gentle, open-ended landing on scale degree three in its first half, it answers or gently corrects itself, moving down to G and thus outlining a vacillation between Bb major and G minor sonorities, with an implied tonic harmony answered by the bittersweet relative minor tonic chord. These qualities merit metaphorically mapping this theme onto something more sentient than inert entities in the external environment.

Furthermore, the combination of the vocal line and the Beautiful View Theme imply the G minor harmony, but *not* the bass. Instead, the bassline continues, throughout the verse, to eschew the typical role of providing harmonic grounding; it is not exactly a *Functional* Bass Layer, in Moore's terms. Instead, it exists in contradiction—or perhaps just obliviousness—to what's going on above it. The entrance of the Beautiful View Theme thus reinforces a sense that the bass exists on a different plane than the other sonic entities, it solidifies Bb major / G minor as dual pitch centers, but also augments the bass's relative uneasiness. Unmoored from the actual harmonic motions of the other sonic "characters," the bass figure continues to present a sense of conflict, or at least uncertainty, underneath the clear sonorites of Bb major and G minor.

The Beautiful View Theme remains in the texture for most of the rest of the verse, but recedes back in the mix as the next figure enters: a sonar-like pulsing gesture on a synthesizer:



Figure 3.5: Sonar Pulsing Gesture

The gesture unfolds over three bars, and changes slightly in its second iteration by descending to the supertonic instead of mediant, creating a six-measure distinct loop that will then repeat, just like the Beautiful View Theme. The Sonar Pulsing Gesture enters along with the vocal persona’s dramatic leaps on “every morning”; though it lacks the rhythmic and contour definition to be called a motive or theme, its repeated eighth notes effectively mimic the repetition and ritual that the lyrics refer to (“every morning”). In choosing the “sonar pulsing” moniker, I am acknowledging the figure’s resemblance to external, perhaps technological, pulsation—a connection that resonates with frequent association of Bjork’s work with natural landscapes and technology. However, the term also refers to physical experiences of periodicity in our own body: heartbeat and pulse. In Zbikowski’s terms of what “dynamic process” or embodied gesture this figure evokes, I experience it much like a feeling, be it physical sensation or complex emotion, washing over me—mainly in how it seems to come from somewhere unbidden, becomes stronger and closer (via getting louder), and then recedes (getting quieter). Note how I had to use a mapping from the external, natural world (water or a wave “washing” onto oneself) in order to verbally communicate my experience of feeling. This gesture is a prime example of how a sonic figure can be mimetic of different types of experiences or sensations—internal and external, animate and not, organic and inorganic—and that these can be mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive.

End of the verse: A transcendent transition and “aesthetic emotion”

On the final phrase of the verse, the bassline and other environmental figures drop out, percussion and voice remain, and the Mountaintop Chord from the introduction returns. The persona sings one more line, combining her initial lax vocal timbre with the large, active leaps that first arose mid-verse:

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is for the Vocal Persona, with lyrics: "round. It's be - come a hab - it, a way to start the day. I go". The second staff is for Strings, featuring a 'ppp' dynamic marking and a 'transcendent transition' annotation above it. The third staff is for Synths, showing a melodic line. The fourth staff is for Bass Synth, showing a low-frequency line. The fifth staff is for the Drum set, showing a rhythmic pattern with accents.

Figure 3.6: Last five measures of Hyperballad’s first verse, exhibiting high contrast and the dropping-out of low and middle tones from the sonic environment

Much like in the introduction, the middle of the pitch space is hollowed out, leaving a gap that musically enacts the lyrics’ themes of high, low, and the chasm between them. The vocal melody’s large leaps now feel weightless, free, buoyant—liberated from gravity. Björk’s return to a relatively breathy vocal timbre helps create this effect, as does the return of the Mountaintop Chord.

Some listeners, such as Kirk Hamilton, describe this moment in terms of flying. For me, it certainly has a transcendent quality. It induces a visceral, non-specific, and powerful emotional response in me that is an example of “aesthetic emotion.” Aesthetic emotion is distinguished from “everyday emotion” in the music psychology literature. While “everyday emotions” refer to most of the emotions as we typically name them (joy, fear, sadness, etc.), aesthetic emotions resemble awe or wonder. They are general but powerful responses generated by the beauty or craft of the music itself, rather than by any resemblance to or arousal of more specific emotions.²³¹ As it turns out, a dramatic change of texture via the sudden addition or removal of voices is one of the most potent, consistent qualities that create this emotional response in listeners, according to empirical studies.²³² The sudden thinning of texture at the last four measures of the verse may explain some of the effect that Kirk Hamilton, many listeners, and I experience at this moment. Especially if it induces aesthetic emotions like awe and even physical chills or ASMR responses, the textural and registral shift creates an effect that can be experienced as transcendent, uncanny, or spiritual.²³³

Thus, at the end of the first verse, Björk and her collaborators craft a sonic space that evokes the liminal time between sleep and waking, night and day, dark and light, and unconsciousness and consciousness. The chorus moves into a new realm, fully “waking up.”

3.3 *Hyperballad*'s chorus: Arousal, complexity, and “making the unconscious conscious”

²³¹ Patrik N. Juslin, “From Everyday Emotions to Aesthetic Emotions: Towards a Unified Theory of Musical Emotions.” *Physics of Life Reviews* 10 (2013), 235–266. .

²³² “Change in volume” was the other. Oliver Grewe, Frederik Nagel, Reinhard Kopiez and Eckart Altenmüller, “Listening To Music As A Re-Creative Process: Physiological, Psychological, And Psychoacoustical Correlates Of Chills And Strong Emotions,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 24, no. 3 (February 2007).

²³³ Leanne Pilgrim, J. Ian Norris, and Jana Hackathorn, “Music Is Awesome: Influences of Emotion, Personality, and Preference on Experienced Awe,” *Journal of Consumer Behavior* 16 (2017), 442–451.

The lyrics of *Hyperballad's* chorus state, “I go through all this before you wake up so I can feel happier, to be safe up here with you.” As we saw in Chapter 2, this line constitutes a marked departure from the dreamily distanced self-observation that characterizes the verse, as the vocal persona makes a simple, direct statement of purpose to an Other.

Accordingly, the music of *Hyperballad's* choruses differ significantly from that of its verses, and in ways that support the persona's change in consciousness, emotionality, and mode of address. As we have already seen, the vocal persona has a more traditionally songful melody here to suit the less dense text. In the environment, there is a higher overall energy level compared to the verse, achieved through louder dynamics, a denser texture, tenser harmony, and more aroused timbres. These shifts are somewhat normative for choruses of popular song forms,²³⁴ but they are no less powerful for their commonness. They have a huge impact on listeners' affective responses and meaning-making, given that changes in texture and dynamics are one of the main sources of emotional response in music.²³⁵ The choruses also feature changes that invite interpretations to do with consciousness and parts of self.

Voice and Bass: Waking up & consciously communicating

The vocal and bass lines in the choruses seem coordinated and goal-oriented thanks to their melodic design and composite harmonies, affording interpretations of the chorus as embodying “waking up” and/or psychologically integrating. The melodic contours of both parts are longer, smoother, and more connected than they were in the verses, which can afford a sense of coherence and conscious intention rather than fragmentation; the fact that the two entities are more aligned harmonically also suggests a mentation that is more conscious and integrated.

²³⁴ Nobile, *Harmony as Form in Rock Music*.

²³⁵ Grewe et al., “Listening to Music as a Re-Creative Process.”

Furthermore, ascent is also now just as prevalent as descent, suggesting agency and striving, especially when combined with relatively tense harmonies.

CHORUS

The image shows a musical score for the chorus of 'Hyperballad'. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a bass line (bass clef). The vocal line has lyrics: "I go through all this before you wake up so I can feel". The bass line has notes corresponding to chords: IV, V, vi, V. The second system also has a vocal line and a bass line. The vocal line has lyrics: "hap - pi - er, to be safe up here with you, I go". The bass line has notes corresponding to chords: IV, V, vi, V6. There are triplets in the vocal line and a "(slower the second time)" marking above the second system.

Figure 3.7: Vocal and bass lines in Hyperballad's chorus, including the essential harmonic progression outlined by these two voices (not including other sounding entities)

The difference in contour is especially stark in the bass line. While it only ever descended in the verse (and in short cells, at that), it is now characterized by oscillating shapes that create a longer ascending phrase:

<p>VERSE bassline: Three-note cells step from scale degree 4 down to 2, with no variation or extension; this three-bar unit simply loops.</p>	<p>CHORUS bassline: A longer line reaches up from scale degree 4 to 6 and eventually to 7, creating a longer composite line across 8 measures.</p>
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Figure 3.8: Comparison of verse and chorus basslines (9 and 8 bars' worth, respectively)²³⁶

²³⁶ In this case I use graphic notation rather than staff notation because I believe it better shows the contour and gesture differences at a glance. For more on the merits of graphic notation in popular music analysis, see Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*.

Given the common metaphorical mapping of “UP IS CONSCIOUS,” and the even more common association of pitches to the right on the keyboard as “higher” in Western culture, this sonic “reaching” may make the bassline seem more awake and aware than it did in the verses.

Additionally, the vocal and bass lines are now both more directed toward a shared tonal goal: Bb. In the verses, the bassline repeatedly descended through scale degrees 4-3-2 in Bb, pointing to 1 without taking that last step. In the choruses, the bassline still starts on Eb, but reaches up toward the tonic instead. However, it only “achieves” an A, never articulating the tonic Bb. This is much more tense, and suggestive of agency, here than it was in the verse, since the leading tone introduces much more “desire” to resolve to tonic than the supertonic does heading down to it. All this makes the bassline seem more unequivocally “in” Bb than it was in the verse, and also affords interpretations of striving and agency more typical to wakeful, focused mentation than dreamy, associative mentation. Furthermore, the bass and vocal persona now work together harmonically, conspiring to repeatedly outline tense V chords. While the assumption of the V chord as “tense” that is typical in analysis of functional Western art music may not always apply to popular musics, the prevalence of the leading tone in the choruses and the contrast with the harmonic language of the verse constitutes a palpable increase in tension. To be specific from a standpoint grounded in the circumplex models of emotion discussed earlier, “tension” is characterized by being high in arousal or activation and also having a mild negative valence, or simply “unpleasantness.” But this is also part of what gives impressions of agency, enacting the “I go through all this” that is stated in the lyrics.

In the choruses, the voice and bass are now more synchronized with one another and more agential. The two parts align rhythmically more than in the verse, are more similar in contour,

and, most crucially, finally suggest the same pitch center and outline shared functional harmonies. The shift in the relationship between these fundamental strands of the sonic environment supports the lyrics' more direct, self-aware statement of intent, creating a sense of an integrated subject making a conscious utterance, rather than a distanced, dissociated dreamer observing the world and herself. The shift of the bass to align more with the voice can be seen as metaphorical of an alignment between unconscious and conscious processes in our mind. And certainly, the sonic changes reinforce the lyrics' change to "I" statements directed towards a "you" in the chorus.

Harmonic filler layer, part 2: Agential motives as tense, aroused aspects of experience

While the voice and bass align to create a sense of a Self in an activated, striving and sometimes tense state, the rest of the sonic environment paints a more complex picture, furthering the tension but introducing even more information and less clarity. Three instrumental motives and melodies which enter at the chorus enhance its high arousal and mixed valence, creating a mild sense of danger that the persona is seeking to transmute into "safety," as she clearly references in the lyrics. I believe these can be interpreted as internal sensations, surges of emotion, intrusive thoughts, and other parts of Self and experience.

Two new motives enter immediately at the beginning of the chorus, creating a suddenly thicker composite texture:

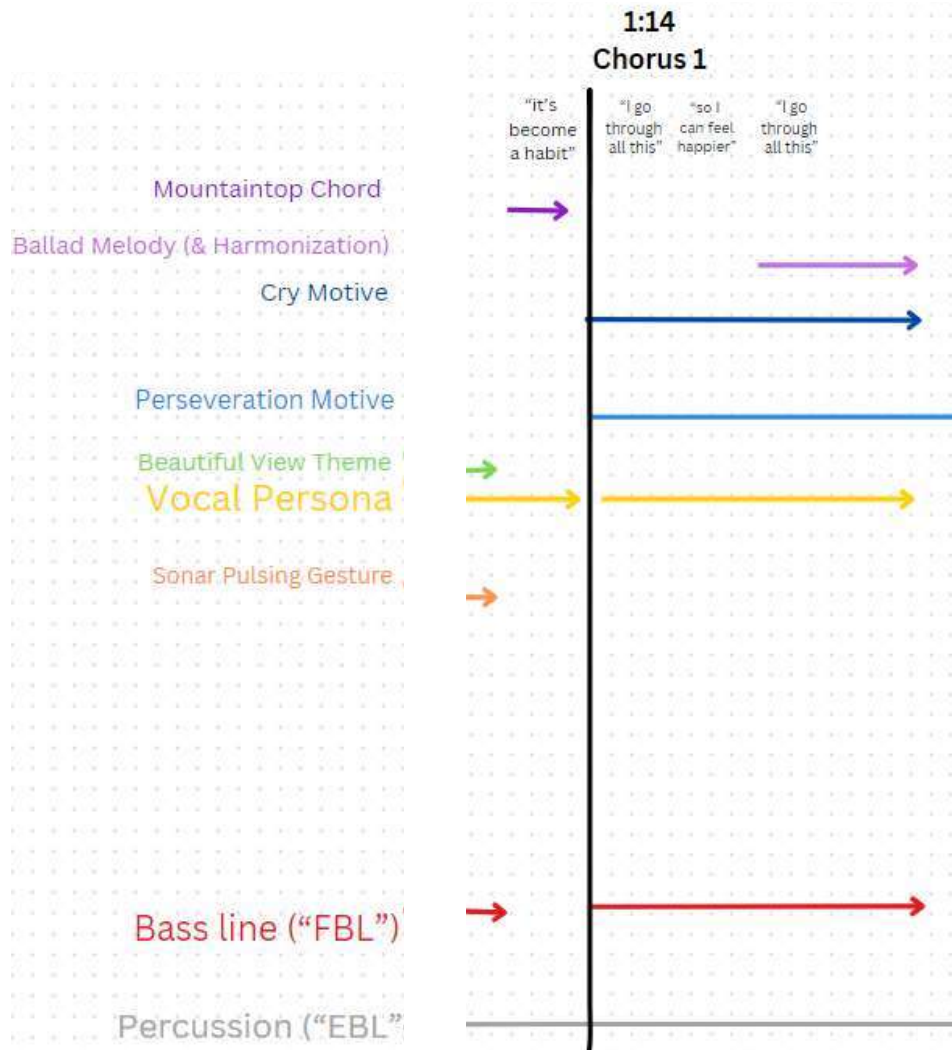


Figure 3.9: Schematic of all of Hyperballad’s sonic entities and their entrances and exits for chorus 1; note the sudden increase in density of texture coming out of the end of verse 1

These two motives remain in the texture for the entirety of the chorus. One of them, which I refer to as the Cry Motive, is a two-bar phrase that consists of dramatic leaping gestures that mainly outline the tonic and leading tone, but almost exclusively using leaps of a 6th or larger. The motive is performed with a timbre that is more conspicuously electronic than anything heard so far: a theremin-like sound, generated by sine wave with vibrato on a synthesizer²³⁷:

²³⁷ Ixi music, “Live breakdown—Björk ‘Hyperballad’ live performance.”

feeling is being allowed to extend beyond typical limits,. In this, it seems related to the atavistic, highly communicative world of vocal bursts discussed in Chapter 2. The Cry Motive’s connection to a voice in the throes of emotion further places the persona and listener in an embodied, emotional, subjective world rather than a dreamily observational one.

The other motive that enters at the top of *Hyperballad*’s chorus also presents sonic information that increases tension and complexity:



be read as a first step toward self-regulation of emotion if we take the song as being about a process of “making the unconscious conscious,” in Jungian terms: the nagging doubt, or “what if,” or counterstatement of an insistent supertonic was actually first present in the “unconscious” layer of the bassline. Now it has been made “more conscious” by coming “up” into a higher register, which I have argued could subtly relate to a higher level of consciousness.

Regardless of whether one hears it in that particular metaphorical fashion or not, the Perseveration Motive’s pitch content here creates a constant sense of non-resolution and suspension. In this context, the rhythm of this motive strikes me differently than it would in isolation (or a more typical EDM song), too: it seems to circle around itself without going anywhere, in motion that is rhythmically even but brisk and repetitive, creating a ruminating, anxious effect. Accordingly, I call it the Perseveration Motive. It conveys an insistent rebuttal, or nagging self-doubt—an intrusive thought that insists on “but” and “what if?”—that is characteristic of the anxious mind.²³⁹ In this, the motive not only nudges the chorus’s total emotional profile toward higher arousal, more negative valence, and increased complexity, but further allows for an interpretation of the sonic landscape as giving voice to various of the Self’s simultaneous, complex internal processes.

New theme, minor sonorities, and legato strings: Negative valence and “emotionality”

There is one more new figure that enters halfway through the chorus, when its first eight bars repeat, but with the addition of a melody that centers the relative minor, G minor. I refer to it as the Ballad Melody:

²³⁹ Sheryl Paul, *The Wisdom of Anxiety* (Sounds True Adult, 2019).

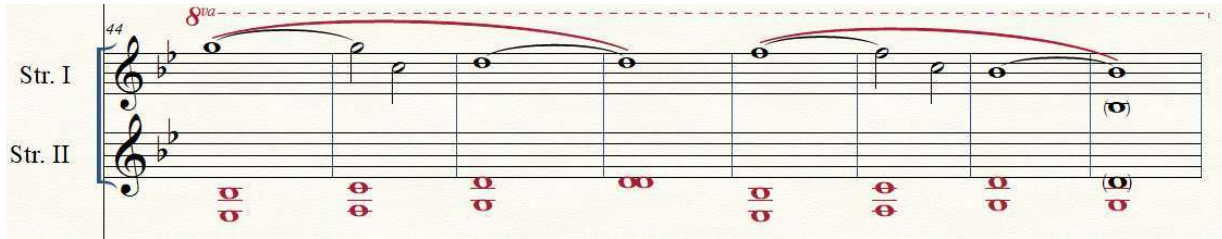


Figure 3.12: Ballad Melody & harmonies
(Enters in second half of chorus, which otherwise repeats the eight bars of material)

This figure might be easier to follow than anything we’ve heard this far in the song: it is rhythmically straightforward, unabashedly songful, and features a high register and legato articulation that lends itself to being heard as foreground. But the prevalence of G minor sonorities, as well as the legato strings, contribute to the chorus reading as complex, even negative, in valence; it also makes this section likely to read as highly “emotional” in a general sense.

Let’s address the elephant in the room: the association of minor²⁴⁰ with sadness and major with happiness, which is so common as to be a truism (at least within a Western context).

Whether, how, and why minor should “sound sad” and major “sound happy” has been the source of plenty of scholarly arguments, and many scientific studies into music and emotion still center their experiments around the words “happiness” and “sadness” and excerpts in minor or major.²⁴¹

For our purposes here, it’s sufficient to point out that, whatever the reasons, listeners enculturated

²⁴⁰ Unless otherwise specified, I use “minor” or “major” for those characterizations regardless of whether it is a chord, melody, or key area. Unfortunately, these distinctions are often not specified in studies.

²⁴¹ This is why I refer to sadness and happiness here, and not negative and positive affect: this discrete emotions approach (rather than a circumplex model) is how these associations are typically discussed and tested in studies. See Eerola et al., “Emotional Expression in Music,” 1. The question of how much of the major-happy / minor-sad association is biological or cultural is an important one that has been a frequent topic of research, though the answer remains unclear. Recently, associations of minor with negatively-valenced affects and major with positive ones have been thought to be exclusively a product of acculturation, but some even more recent studies have complicated this assumption, leading many to conclude that “more research is needed.” See Paula Virtala and Mari Tervaniemi, “Neurocognition of Major-Minor and Consonance-Dissonance,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 34, no. 4 (April 2017), 389. For an example of authors arguing for some biological basis to associations of minor with sadness, see Norman D. Cook and Takefumi Hayashi, “The Psychoacoustics of Harmony Perception,” *American Scientist* 96, no. 4 (July–August 2008), 318.

in the West do tend to associate minor keys with sadness and/or negative affect in studies, all else being equal (though all else often isn't equal).²⁴²

And yet, more importantly, minor sonorities seem to prompt emotional response *in general*. According to brain researchers Paula Virtala and Mari Tervaniemi, “In Western adults, music in minor compared to music in major elicits more activation in brain areas related to emotion processing.”²⁴³ Whether or not a minor sonority cues “sadness” or any negative affect, it may invite or afford a connection to the emotional realm in general.²⁴⁴ Obviously, this is relevant to *Hyperballad*, to constructions of Björk and other artists as “emotional,” and to the broader concerns that started this project. Vague as the term “emotional” seems, perhaps there are times when it’s simply most relevant to note that our emotions are likely to be generally engaged, without delineating a specific affect or emotion.

The use of a string section for the Ballad Melody also has implications of general “emotionality” (much as the sonority of G minor does). Music performed on a bowed string instrument with vibrato timbre and legato articulation can be a near-cliche cue for some kind of intense, personal expression of emotion. (Colloquially, think of the common joke in which someone rubs two fingers together and claims to be “playing a tiny violin” when a conversation partner veers into overblown, negative, and/or self-pitying emotion.) It may also suggest interiority or a solo protagonist in a Romantic sense.²⁴⁵ Bowed string instruments may be

²⁴² See Swaminathan and Schellenberg, “Current Emotion Research in Music Psychology”; Cook and Hayashi, “The Psychoacoustics of Harmony Perception,” 318; and Milton D. Heifetz, “The Relationship Between Minor Mode Music and Sadness: A Theoretical Concept,” *International Journal of Musicology* 1 (2015), 9.

²⁴³ Virtala and Tervaniemi, “Neurocognition of Major-Minor and Consonance-Dissonance,” 388.

²⁴⁴ As Juslin points out, though 100% of their subjects rated music in *general* as emotional, not all pieces of music induce perceived or induced emotions. So, the basic question of whether a piece of music is somehow experienced as “emotional” at all is relevant.

²⁴⁵ See Tuomas Eerola, Rafael Ferrer and Vinoo Alluri, “Timbre and Affect Dimensions: Evidence from Affect and Similarity Ratings and Acoustic Correlates of Isolated Instrument,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 30, no. 1 (September 2012), 49–70.

especially apt to evoke negative valences;²⁴⁶ This may be because of legato²⁴⁷ strings' timbral resemblance to the human voice, which in part evolved in order for us to successfully discern subtle emotional shifts in communication with one another. For music and emotion researcher Patrik N. Juslin, strings are the instrument *most* similar to the voice, and this makes them a likely source of “emotional contagion,” which is one of the mechanisms by which music can induce emotion.²⁴⁸ This could partly explain strings' “emotional” quality as perceived by many listeners. As mentioned earlier, many listeners also describe *Hyperballad* itself like this: as having a general but potent “emotional” quality, rather than emphasizing a specific emotion, or even positive or negative affect. The significant role of bowed string instruments, combined with minor sonorities, could explain much of that phenomenon.

Many of the distinctions between verse and chorus, and the psychological journey I believe they imply, apply to both the first and second iterations of those formal sections. However, there are also significant changes that occur in verse 2 and chorus 2. (This is why I have so far only focused on examples from the first verse and chorus). Specifically, the second half of the song can function as an enactment of the process of self-regulation that Björk has presented as a central metaphor in the verses and then directly referred to in the choruses. As we will see, the exact sounds present, their affective properties, and their relationships to one another shift at chorus 2, creating a virtual form of emotional self-regulation. This occurs through processes that suggest increased embodiment and intimacy, moving into a sonic realm of groove and dance that

²⁴⁶ A study by Behrens and Green (1993), summarized by Balkwill and Thompson, found that “...listeners were more sensitive to sadness and fear expressed in violin and vocal improvisations.” Laura-Lee Balkwill and William Forde Thompson, “A Cross-Cultural Investigation of the Perception of Emotion in Music: Psychophysical and Cultural Cues,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 17, no. 1 (Fall, 1999), 49–50.

²⁴⁷ Multiple studies have shown that “...staccato articulation is related to more active emotions such as happiness and anger, whereas legato articulation is typically used for tender and sad emotions.” Eerola et al., “Timbre and Affect Dimensions,” 55. Less arousal but more signs of negative valence could be what afford the leap to the specific emotion of “sadness,” though “disappointment,” “wistfulness,” or “resignation” also be appropriate.

²⁴⁸ Patrik N. Juslin, Gonçalo Barradas and Tuomas Eerola, “From Sound to Significance: Exploring the Mechanisms Underlying Emotional Reactions to Music,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 128, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 281–304.

suggests a different type of embodied intimacy with Self and/or Other, and then closing back in on a lyrical string texture that suggests calm interiority that reflects a subject still able to tolerate complexity and ambiguity. I will now outline the rest of the song after the first chorus, and the significant implications its unfolding has for our sense of the song’s states of consciousness, emotion, and intimacy.

3.4 *Hyperballad's* ending: Emotional self-regulation, embodiment, & varied intimacies

Verse 2: Increased complexity and affective arousal

In verse 2, in addition to the vocal variations and lyric changes that are fairly common for any second verse, there is another huge difference: the Perseveration Motive that entered in the first chorus remains in the texture, throughout not only an interlude but also the entire second verse, into the second chorus:

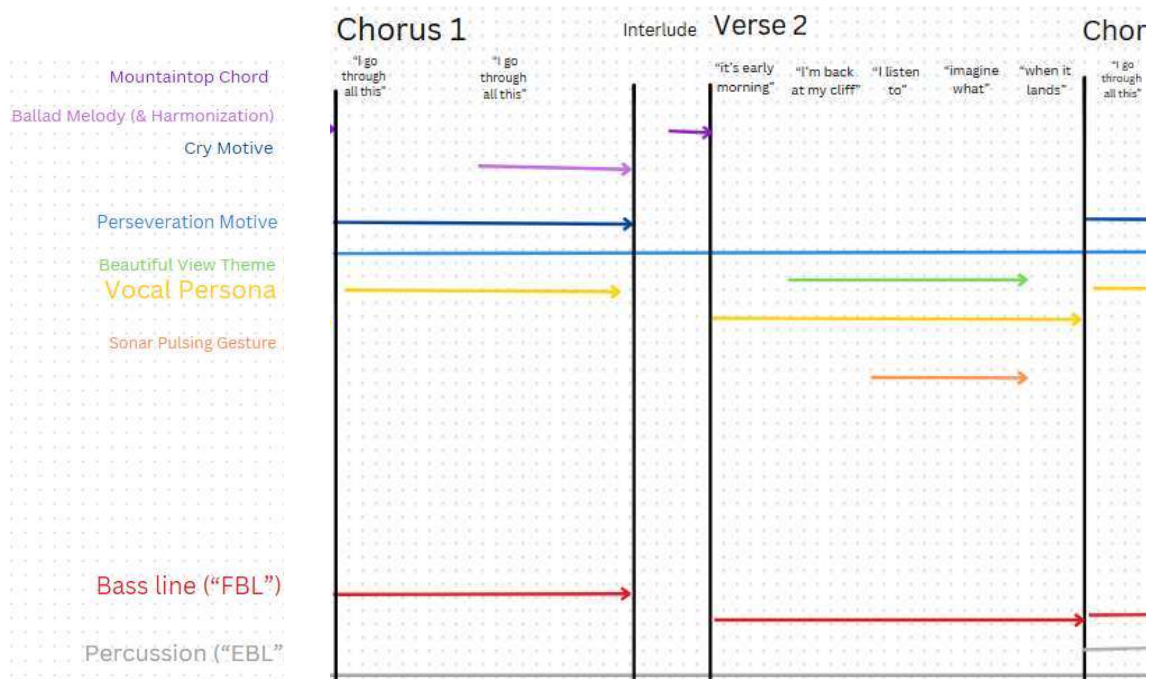


Figure 3.13: Entities present in *Hyperballad* from chorus 1 through the start of chorus 2. Note how the perseveration motive remains in the texture through the interlude and verse, which is a marked change from verse 1.

This produces a generally thicker texture, which helps create an overall trajectory of energy building up to the second chorus (and beyond). The Perseveration Motive continues to emphasize pitch class C, challenging and complicating the prominent Bb tonic in the voice, and indeed all the harmonies of the verse. The sense of uncertainty created by an ambiguity or multiplicity of pitch center, which has been an emergent and important theme throughout the song so far, is definitely heightened at this point. This can also be read as signaling or envoicing the sense of unsafety that is abundantly present in the persona, her words, and the song.

This musical intensification and complexification suits the text of verse 2:

It's early morning
No one is awake
I'm back at my cliff
Still throwing things off
I listen to the sounds they make on their way down
I follow with my eyes 'til they crash
Imagine what my body would sound like
Slammin' against those rocks
And when it lands will my eyes be closed or open?

While the verse does return to a somewhat calm and observational or distanced state in comparison to the choruses, it is more activated and even subjectively inhabited than in verse 1. “I” statements enter earlier this time, and there are even more active verbs (listen, follow, imagine, slammin’). Björk refers to the mountain’s edge as “my cliff,” claiming it as hers and relating, if not collapsing, landscape and persona. Moreover, the content of the words raises the stakes: instead of just relaying the information that she throws things, the persona creates more immediacy by “following” their trajectory visually and even (in her imagination) physically, using visceral words like “slammin’” and emphasizing sensory experiences, including the sounds of crashing.

The Perseveration Motive becomes especially prominent at the end of the second verse, in another iteration of the crucial moment I have argued is a “transcendent transition.” This time, referring to her own body, the vocal persona sings, “When it lands, will my eyes be closed or open?” The low end drops out as it did before, yet this time, the supertonic-focused Perseveration Motive remains:

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is for the Vocal Persona, with lyrics: "rocks. and when it lands, will my eyes be closed or o - pen? I go". The second staff is for Strings, showing a sustained chord with a *ppp* dynamic marking. The third staff is for Synths, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The fourth staff is for Bass Synth, showing a single note. The fifth staff is for Drum set, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 3.14: Final four bars of verse 2: A “liminal” transition that is rather different from the end of verse 1, because of the new Perseveration Motive (middle staff).

This question, which some take as referential to self-harm or suicide, is contradictorily set with an abundance of tonic pitches in the voice and a return to the laxer vocal timbre characteristic of early verse 1. Yet the Perseveration Motive and its persistent supertonic remain appropriately tense and unsure. Its C pitches trouble the waters of the voice and strings’ insistent Bbs and Fs; to my ear, the C carries more weight than ever before, thanks to the thinning of texture; I hear Bb and C now truly competing as pitch centers. This makes this transition from verse to chorus even

more liminal than before—more fragile, more precarious, perhaps (as suits the metaphor/image of a cliff). At the same time, it seems as though the sonic environment is providing us more information about the Self and her precarious state.

Chorus 2: Different affect, “groove,” and embodiment as a turning point

At the top of the second chorus, a “relentless four-on-the-floor house beat”²⁴⁹ sounds for the first time. This is arguably the biggest musical change of the entire song. The introduction of a four-on-the-floor beat on the kick drum changes the chorus’s feel from duple simple meter at 67 BPM to quadruple simple meter at 134 BPM. This tempo change alone suggests a significant affective shift: tempo is often found to be the single most influential musical parameter in assessments of musical emotion.²⁵⁰ A fast tempo almost invariably suggests higher arousal, be it positive or negative; this is one of the most robust, consistent facts we have about emotion in music across cultures.²⁵¹ A doubling of tempo from moderately slow to moderately fast will invariably create a significant change in affect, and a higher state of activation.

But the change goes beyond a doubled tempo. Whereas we only heard the kick drum once per measure (on the downbeat of each cut-time measure) up through the end of verse 2, beginning in chorus 2, we now hear it on *every single beat* of the measure:

²⁴⁹ Petridis, “Björk – Her 20 Greatest Songs Ranked!”

²⁵⁰ “Previous studies of the musical expression of emotions have suggested tempo as the most important cue (Gundlach, 1935; Hevner, 1937; Rigg, 1964; Scherer and Oshinsky, 1977; Juslin and Lindström, 2010)...” Tuomas Eerola, Anders Friberg, and Roberto Bresin, “Emotional Expression in Music: Contribution, Linearity, and Additivity of Primary Musical Cues,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 4, art. 487 (July 2013), 9.

²⁵¹ See for example Viirtala and Tervaniemi, “Neurocognition of Major-Minor and Consonance-Dissonance,” 389.

Reduction of Explicit Beat Layer (EBL)
from intro through chorus 2: Cut time

Reduction of EBL at start of chorus 2:
Common time, four-on-the-floor

Figure 3.15: Comparison of EBL before and after the transition to chorus 2

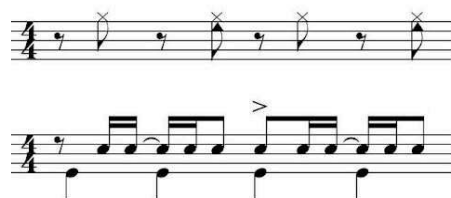
This quadruples the number of low, powerful, unambiguous attacks we hear from the kick drum. This is what makes the beat pattern in chorus 2 a four-on-the-floor beat, and not just a doubling of tempo and meter.

Affectively speaking, this shift makes the second chorus feel higher not only in arousal, but also in “power-control” or “dominance”—dimensions that are sometimes included along with valence and arousal in circumplex models of emotion. The change to loud, assertive attacks on every single beat, without even a question-and-answer between downbeat and backbeat, makes the musical character suddenly more “powerful,” activated and driving, perhaps suggesting emotions like “confident,” “elated,” or “excited.” And the predictable regularity of the beat pattern could indeed suggest control, in the form of an unflagging, unflappable, drive. Certainly, it would be difficult to afford an interpretation in which this switch to four-on-the-floor creates a more tentative, questioning quality.

This change in EBL is especially relevant given the prominent discussion of “safety” in the lyrics. While the arousal level is high, more signs of power, control, dominance, etc. suggest greater safety and less danger and attendant fear or anxiety. As mentioned earlier, Björk’s voice breaks slightly on the word “safe” when she reaches up to an Eb5 without fully flipping into head resonance, in a sort of broken belt; both Kirk Hamilton and rock critic Rob Harvilla specifically

point out a sense of “danger” in the way she sings that word.²⁵² The increased dominance and power in the explicit beat layer may transmute how we hear that effect; this time, the vocal roughness Björk exhibits whenever she sings “safe” might now be heard as a sort of growl, a show of strength or aggression rather than a moment of failure.

So, there is a significant change in rhythmic feel at the beginning of chorus 2, and in its first eight bars. This is augmented further when additional explicit beat layers (EBL) enter at each repetition of the main 8-bar chorus unit. First, a function typically associated with the hi-hat enters, emphasizing the “and” of each beat, and a tabla-like percussive sound also articulates the “and” of beats 2 and 4:



*Figure 3.16: Chorus 2, second 8 bars:
Newly present hi-hat function*

This adds an element of syncopation despite the continued presence of attack on the beat. At the third repeat of the 8-bar unit, a snare function enters on the backbeat of the new 4/4 meter, on beats 2 and 4:



*Figure 3.17: Chorus 2, third 8 bars:
Newly present snare (backbeat) function*

²⁵² Harvilla, “60 Songs That Explain the ’90s: How Björk Became a Genre Unto Herself.”

In addition to thickening the total sound and number of events going on at once, the entry of the backbeat and offbeat articulations reintroduces a back-and-forth quality to the EBL, on top of the continued, unidirectional assertiveness of the four-on-the-floor; we might see this as dialogical or an enactment of sociality.

Perhaps most importantly, these rhythmic changes invoke the body and progressively invite more and more movement. They introduce a sense of *groove*, which has been conspicuously absent from the fluttering, anxious EBL up until this point (part of what makes the song unusual for EDM despite the many ways it fits the genre). While the term “groove” has a meaning as a sonic object (a “1-4 bar composite pattern that gets repeated and varied, often through addition or subtraction”²⁵³), it also refers to a phenomenon, a feeling and action: “the pleasurable urge to move to music,” especially “in synchrony.”²⁵⁴ It is this latter meaning I am interested in here.

What constitutes groove varies from genre to genre and person to person, but Senn et. al emphasize four main elements that have repeatedly been positively correlated with groove across various studies: rhythmic syncopation, event density, beat salience, and rhythmic variability.²⁵⁵ *Hyperballad*'s drum pattern in chorus 2 features many more of these parameters than it did previously. The introduction of a four-on-the-floor kick drum at the top of the chorus increases beat salience (“the acoustical markedness of the regular beat in the audio signal”²⁵⁶) and density of events; the kick in particular is important, as “high sound intensity in the lowest bass range” correlates with listener assessments of groove. The density of events increases every eight bars as

²⁵³ This is the typical definition within analysis of popular recorded song tracks. See Attas, “Form as Process.”

²⁵⁴ See Guy Madison and George Sioros. “What Musicians Do to Induce the Sensation of Groove in Simple and Complex Melodies, and How Listeners Perceive It,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014), 1–14.

²⁵⁵ Oliver Senn, Lorenz Kilchenmann, Toni Bechtold, and Florian Hoesl, “Groove in Drum Patterns as a Function of Both Rhythmic Properties and Listeners’ Attitudes,” *PLoS ONE* 13, no. 6 (2018), 1. “Listener-related factors” also play a role, namely “expertise,” “taste,” “familiarity,” “motivation/interest,” and “proneness to dancing.” (Ibid., 3–4).

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

more layers are inserted. Thus, more and more of the makings of “groove” are presented over the course of the second chorus.

For many listeners, the introduction of groove may have implications of social interaction and public spaces—associations with experiencing the music not only through dancing and the body, but also *with other people*. While Björk has been known to say that her music is meant to be listened to through headphones and not in a club, and while this is the type of listening position and experience I myself write from, we must acknowledge the sociality and cultural context of music that grooves. Groove would originally have been generated through communal, coordinated activity; it has strong associations with public dancing and participatory social traditions.²⁵⁷ While technology means that this type of social process is no longer necessary in order to create thick, intricate rhythmic textures that “groove” and incite a pleasurable urge to move, experiences of embodied connection with other people is still central in genres like EDM and songs like *Hyperballad* that draw on its norms. Put another way, the shift to true groove forces us to acknowledge the world outside our heads: the world of body and touch, and perhaps also the world of relationship.

Indeed, “feeling” has a role to play here. In addition to the emotional senses of “feeling” I’ve focused on thus far, there is of course its more physical meaning. Ethnomusicologist and popular music scholar Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispireta says that touch between music and our bodies, and within our bodies, is crucial in the experience of EDM music—and sound in general:

Sound is by no means an intangible phenomenon; it involves impacts and vibrations that are perceived not only through the ear but also through the skin, flesh, and bones. Sound is

²⁵⁷ Charles Keil, among others, vehemently emphasized that groove unfolded through processes and between people. See Charles Keil and Steven Feld, *Music Grooves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also Vijay Iyer, “Embodied Mind, Situated Cognition, and Expressive Microtiming in African-American Music,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19, no. 3 (Spring 2002), 387–414, and Simon Zagorski-Thomas, “The Study of Groove,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 16, no. 2 (2007), 327–335.

also strangely tactile in how timbre and sonic texture can evoke tactile experience by conveying something about how touch feels—in both senses of the term.²⁵⁸

Perhaps the takeaway is not that the persona or the listener necessarily shift to a social realm at chorus 2, but that this music puts us “in touch” with touch, with the visceral, the embodied, with feeling itself.

We might also ask: how are these effects of touch (and intimacy) found in or generated by “the music itself”? According to Garcia-Misipreta, EDM typically “foregrounds percussion, texture, grain, and other sonic elements that resonate with how we experience touch.”²⁵⁹

Unsurprisingly, percussion has an especially crucial role to play, for “beats do not just sound like impact; they *are* impacts” (emphasis added).²⁶⁰ This is because the types of amplitude envelopes percussion instruments have will create a very real, physical impact on and in the body.²⁶¹ While *Hyperballad* has featured a array of medium-soft envelopes through the end of verse 2 (even in the EBL), more traditionally-percussive sound envelopes take the stage in chorus 2: the texture becomes full of sounds with “prominent transient with variable amounts of resonance” with a “sharp and loud attack, a sharp and deep decay, no sustain to speak of, and a release that can be abrupt or gradual.”²⁶² Especially when these sounds are arranged in a way that “grooves” and impels dancing, the embodied, physical and social aspects of “feeling” come more into focus, as opposed to meanings that focus more on the role of cognition and mental concepts in shaping affective information into emotion.

The impact and meaning of such intense, embodied, tactile experiences of sound is especially marked given its contrast to the softer qualities of *Hyperballad*'s first two-and-a-half

²⁵⁸ Luis Manuel Garcia-Misipreta, *Together, Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the Dancefloor* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023), 66.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 67-69.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 70. He writes, “At high volumes, these sonic spikes strike the body in a very concrete way, eliciting sensations not only in the ear but also in the body’s skin, flesh, viscera, and bones.”

²⁶² Garcia-Misipreta, *Together, Somehow*.

minutes. It can signal a turning point in the persona's emotional regulation process: after her varied states of unfocused and focused mentation, gradually "waking up" across verse 1, chorus 1, and verse 2, she now enters a state of greater embodiment and physicality—a newly integrated state that constitutes an undeniable being-in-the-world compared to the daydreamy verses. Indeed, this visceral bodily presence is especially poignant given that when the beat drops in, the second verse has just ended with lines about imagining her plummeting and possible death. Perhaps the introduction of an activated, visceral, organized groove in the EBL is a way of saying "I'm here" and tuning more into the body, which is an integral part of successful self-regulation.

Extension, release, and closure: Moving through varied states of embodiment and intimacy

As we have seen, chorus 2 shifts to a more dance-influenced texture that "grooves" in addition to exhibiting various salient affective changes, including a higher sense of arousal but also dominance. Somewhat surprisingly, this new character continues for quite some time in various short sections, and while the vocal persona initially remains in the texture, it quickly departs, leaving the last 1'30" entirely without voice. This time span consists of several eight-bar units featuring the departure and reintroduction of various sonic figures, including both an active breakdown section and a then a long outro. Many of these sections can be understood in terms of EDM genre and form—even as they all are built on the chorus's bassline and chord progression, and even though Björk ultimately leaves us with only the Ballad Melody and thus a final nod to song form. I outline these sections briefly below for clarity, and then discuss their implications for the song's overall meaning(s).

After the second chorus, which is already longer than the first because it features three repeats of the core 8-bar phrase instead of two, there is another 16-bar section of chorus material,

but with different vocal figures. Björk repeats and layers a two-bar phrase that is a slight variation on the last utterance of the chorus, “safe up here with you”:

The musical score consists of the following parts:

- Vocal Persona 1:** Treble clef, lyrics: "safe up here with you... safe up here with you..."
- Vocal Persona 2:** Treble clef, lyrics: "safe up here with you... safe up here..."
- Strings:** Treble clef, *mf*, long sustained notes.
- "Theremin" Synth:** Treble clef, *mf*, melodic line.
- Synth:** Treble clef, *mf*, rhythmic accompaniment.
- Bass Synth:** Bass clef, *mf*, sustained notes.
- Explicit Beat Layer:** Two staves, *f*, rhythmic accompaniment.

Figure 3.18: “Safe Up Here” chorus extension. Note the presence of voices in canon.

Let us call this the “Safe up here” or SUH chorus extension. The doubling or layering of a solo singer’s voice in a popular song is fairly common, perhaps common enough that it is not particularly noteworthy for most listeners. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the entrance of more voices *that are clearly still the same person(a)’s voice, and not different voices*, is meaningful. After all, the layering of the same person’s voice is not possible in real life in any literal, physical, external way. But it seems eminently reasonable that multiple parts of Self or voices in one’s head

might end up reiterating the core project of the song: to be safe. The persona's doubled, canoned voice blurs the boundary between individual and plural, self and social.

Once the SUH chorus extension concludes, *Hyperballad* continues for another 1'30", during which time no words or voices are heard. This is one way in which *Hyperballad* relates to EDM more than archetypal singer-songwriter traditions, in which this choice would be more unusual. Ostensibly, at this point the texture is all "environment" and no "persona"—or at least, no vocal persona. Starting at 3:56, there is an eight-bar period in which several sonic figures are removed simultaneously, followed by another in which they return. I will call these sections the "breakdown" and "core/chorus":

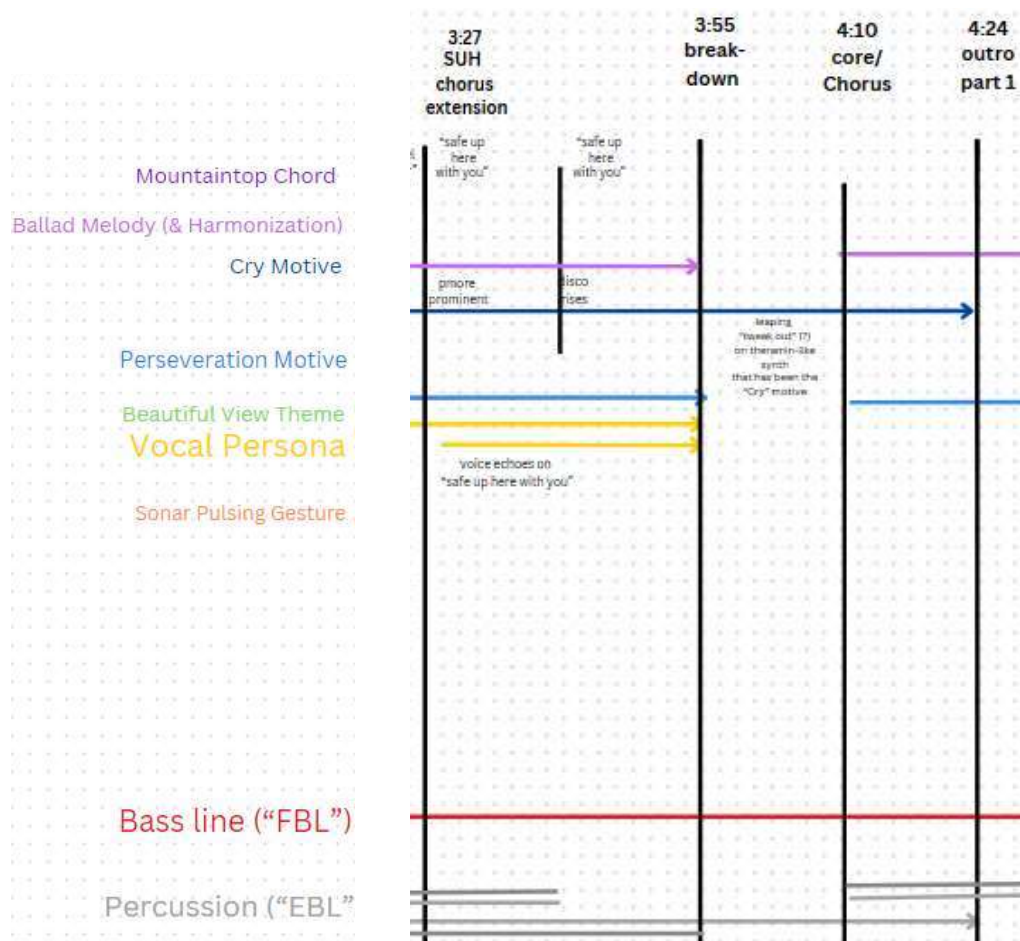


Figure 3.19: Texture/form map of breakdown and core/chorus (with SUH extension for context)

This first 8-bar period/section is similar to that of an EDM breakdown, which is a formal section that starts with and features a “dramatic drop to a thin texture” and is often eight bars long.²⁶³ Loosely, that is what occurs in *Hyperballad*: some figures drop out suddenly, and the listener’s attention is drawn to a single layer in the foreground, “focusing the listener in on single elements that were previously enveloped in a thicker texture.”²⁶⁴ However, atypically, it is the most lyrical components (voice and strings) that disappear, while percussive, bass, and synthesizer timbres remain. But we do focus in on a single instrumental figure: a variation on the Cry Motive that takes its original leaping gestures even further, varying more and for longer in a seemingly improvisatory fashion.²⁶⁵ The figure is rather untethered, ungrounded; its extreme irregularity and activation creates a sense of freedom, release—almost abandon or ecstasy. Are we hearing the persona “throw little things things off?” Perhaps this point of release is what enables her to wind-down, regulating from a state of joyful activation to the mature, complex calm of the ending.

But not before one last full, thick statement of chorus material. The breakdown is followed by another 8-bar section similar to an EDM “core,” which is a section that features the most textural density.²⁶⁶ Several of the song’s familiar figures reenter, including the Perseveration Motive and a soaring reiteration of the Ballad Melody that is embellished and dramatized with disco rises. In the context of *Hyperballad* (which has embraced clear song form in the sense of verses and choruses in a way EDM typically doesn’t), this section is really another chorus without any vocal line.

²⁶³ Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 224.

²⁶⁴ <<https://homedjstudio.com/edm-song-structure/>>

²⁶⁵ This may relate to processes Butler says DJs engage in during breakdown sections: “The bass drum is almost always removed, and usually most of the other instruments as well, so that a single instrument or small combination of instruments is featured. As the section unfolds the producer and/or DJ will often ‘tweak out’ these instruments by manipulating them timbrally with the EQs and (especially) the effects,” which is an “intensifying technique.” Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 224.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

From a practical standpoint within the culture of EDM clubs and parties, a breakdown and core have a clear functional purposes: to provide the listener with an opportunity to continue dancing. But from a within-the-piece, metaphorical standpoint, they can be interpreted as a continued evolution of the relationships with/in Self. Given my suggestion that we can read of these strands as aspects of individual, often internal experience, with their relationships resembling those between parts of Self, the quick changes in texture and continued high energy in the last 1'30" of the song could suggest a reorganization or metabolization of these sensations, thoughts, and emotions. The highly aroused but also highly organized aspects of music that grooves suggest a release, a form of self-regulation, especially by the end of the breakdown with its modified Cry Motive. In other words, these sections could both represent and provide an extended opportunity to process and regulate for both the persona and the listener.

After the two short sections just discussed, instruments continue to leave *Hyperballad's* texture. I conceive of this as an outro comprised of a few 8-bar segments:

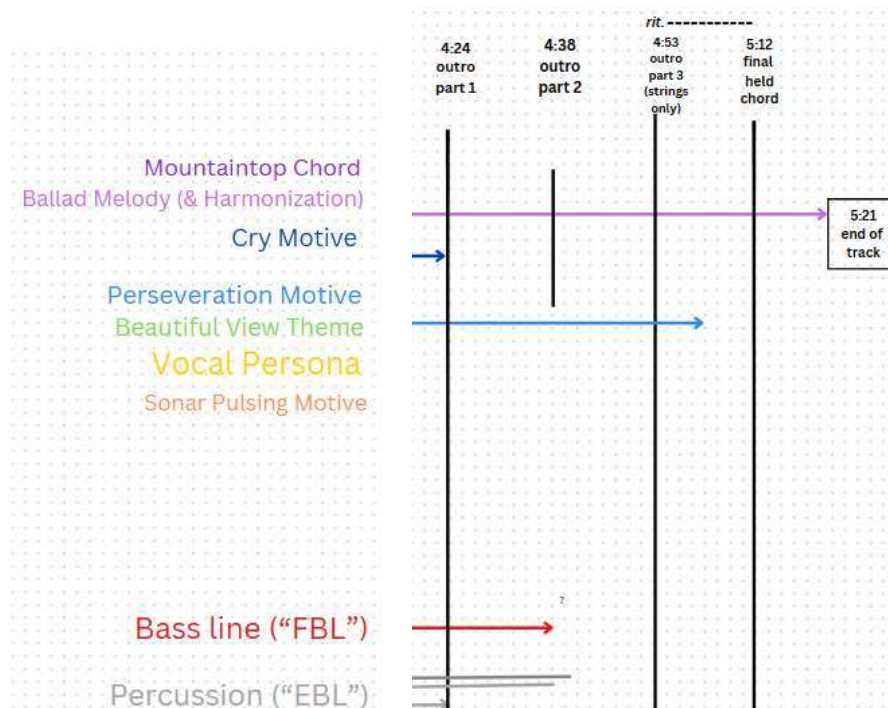


Figure 3.20: Entire outro to Hyperballad

Interestingly, the layers and instruments that were last to join the texture—the tabla drums and intricate grooved patterns, the Ballad Melody—are the last to leave. Some element of percussion remains in the texture for quite a while, keeping us in an embodied zone even as the overall thickness, intensity, and arousal gradually lessen. The EBL does eventually disappear, and sustained sounds take over. Yet instead of coming full circle back to the wide gap of just low bass and high strings, we end up with the mid-high strand of the Ballad Melody and its harmonization, all on arco strings, for almost 30”:

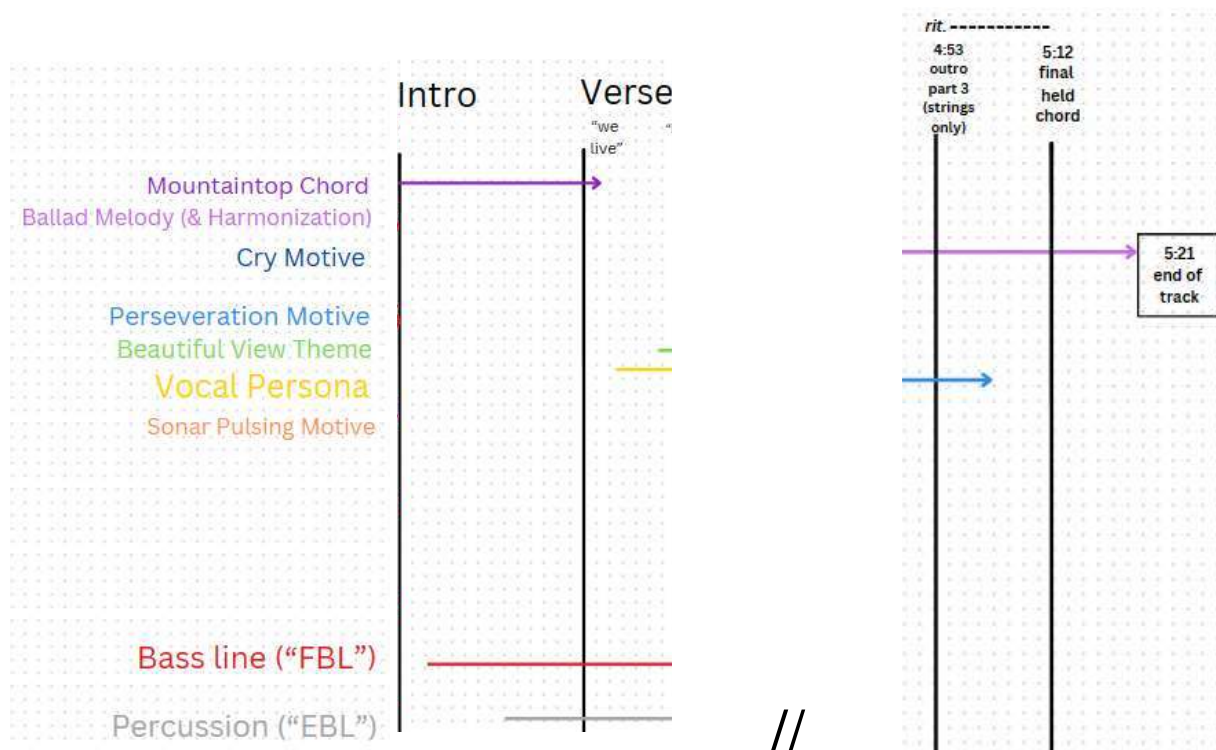


Figure 3.21: Comparison of which entities are present in the first and last 25” of Hyperballad

This constitutes an intimate narrowing-in that complements the song’s expansive Introduction rather than exactly mirroring it. The final 25” of the piece features only the strings in melody and harmony, and in the narrowest range that the total sounding register has been (other than at the ends of verses, which was suddenly high and still accompanied by the wash of EBL, and thus had

a very different effect). It is also the most limited in timbre other than the first few seconds of the track. As discussed earlier, both this string instrumentation and the G minor sonorities it clings to here are often associated with general emotionality. With the FBL and EBL both gone, these associations come more to the fore; they are no longer contested or complicated by the rather different implications of a low synth or the groove of a beat pattern, as they've always been before. Harmonically, the oscillations between Bb major and G minor that have run through much of the piece are now more foregrounded. These harmonies underline the uncertain, ambivalent quality that has been present throughout the piece, but they also exhibit a newfound calmness and maturity. This can be interpreted as embodying self-regulation: after a relatively sparse beginning, we increasingly experience a burgeoning of complex, aroused sonic messages that, in the first half of the song, come and go in a somewhat free manner. They are then gradually managed into greater organization, but also greater arousal, perhaps suggesting some kind of release. Finally, they are metabolized or let go, landing on an ending has a certain reflective quality, even if ambiguity remains. The end of the song does not suggest unequivocal positive affect, pat resolution, but it does achieve a certain calm.

The shift to the Ballad Melody heard on its own also suggests an inward, self-aware quality, as if the persona is returning to a private, individual, reflective zone of experience and mentation. The sonic chasms of the first few minutes of the song have collapsed in, suggesting an inward turn. Moreover, instead of short sonic figures looped and layered, a true melody with phrases and harmonization makes a persona-like statement on strings. Especially after such a long time “grooving,” this feels like a shift into a private, even reflexive realm—something solitary, drawn-in, and internal.

In fact, we might say that Björk explores different types of intimacy at different points in *Hyperballad*. Initially, she crafts the intimacy of solitary observation and reflection, albeit in a manner that is somewhat unusual compared to typical singer-songwriter reflectivity: in the intro and verse, the persona dreamily observes and narrates, inhabiting a rather vulnerable state of unconsciousness (be it dream or daydream). Then, in the first chorus, Björk crafts the dyadic intimacy of the “me to you” direct address that is most common in pop music and a default definition of “intimacy” for many scholars.²⁶⁷ In the second half of the song, Björk crafts a sonic space for the unique form of intimacy we can experience through group sociality and the body: the closeness of shared somatic experience in space, via the embodied touch experiences of dance, other bodies, and the music itself. Finally, Björk reverses this trajectory of accretion while also doing something new: she draws us back into an intimacy that is solitary, but in a manner that seems more self-aware and reflective than the dreamily atmospheric opening.

At first blush, the suggestion that *Hyperballad* offers up different types of intimacy could seem at odds with the long, grooved portion of the song. What does such a seemingly exteriorizing, typically-public type of music have to do with closeness? The word “intimate” may most obviously conjure private spaces and significant others, but as Nicola Dibben points out, “intimate” and “private” are not the same.²⁶⁸ Indeed, there is a certain brand of deep connection to self and others that can occur in the public dance contexts in which EDM music is often listened to; while those spaces are public, they can also be extremely intimate. This is exactly what Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispirota argues in his book *Together, Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the Dancefloor*: that electronic music “parties” are sites of “stranger- intimacy” characterized by an “exchange of surprising warmth between strangers,” afforded largely by physical proximity to

²⁶⁷ See for instance Matt BaileyShea, “From Me to You.”

²⁶⁸ Dibben, “Subjectivity and the Construction of Emotion in the Music of Björk.”

one another.²⁶⁹ As he puts it, “.we were there in the flesh, sharing space, atmosphere, and sensuous enjoyment. This improvised intimacy succeeded in bringing about a fleeting connection, despite the anonymity of the crowd.”²⁷⁰ In the case of electronic dance music gatherings, intimacy is not only found in dyadic relationships or individual moments of quiet reflection with Self. It is possible in large groups of strangers.

Of course, many of us may listen to *Hyperballad* alone, not in a club, and thus without the actual “bodily co-presence” with others that Garcia-Mispireta describes.²⁷¹ In fact, this is a tension Björk herself has often alluded to. One anecdote is particularly telling. In a 1994 interview following a festival performance, Björk asserted that her songs on *Debut*—already genre-blurring, but still more typically dance-influenced fare than *Post*—are “not dance music.” When the interviewer pointed out that Björk had just been dancing on stage while performing, Björk clarified that she meant the music isn’t primarily intended for clubs, but rather is “domestic.” Seeming a bit frustrated, she asks her interlocutor, “Haven’t you ever danced alone in your living room?”²⁷² While physical space appears to still be important to Björk, her visions for it don’t necessarily correspond to genre expectations. For her, a given album, song, or short dance break might be “extraverted”²⁷³ and/or suited to dancing, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s intended for a large social space, rather than for personal, private listening.

²⁶⁹ While Garcia-Mispireta’s book is based on ethnographic research conducted late 2000s and early 2010s, and refers specifically to house, techno, and minimal music, this research bears relationship to the dance music tradition adjacent to Björk and her music.

²⁷⁰ Garcia-Mispireta argues that intimacy can be “*enabled* rather than *hindered* by anonymity, crowds” (emphasis added), and that the music provides part of the shared experience that creates this special brand of intimacy. Garcia-Mispireta, *Together Somehow*, 2–3.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁷² ReelinInTheYears66, “Björk: “The Anchor Song”/Interview/”Crying”/”Violently Happy”: LIVE 1994 [RITY Archive],” Youtube video, 18:59, 14 September, 2022. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O4kC1PgR2Q>> This exchange occurs around 8:36, but the question starts about a minute earlier.

²⁷³ For instance, throughout her *Sonic Symbolism* podcast, but this is just one example of many.

I bring up Björk’s comments and intentions to point out ways that “intimacy” can be complex and how these distinctions may blur, especially the more that technology privatizes and atomizes our listening experience. Expectations about function, space, and sociality may be additionally complex because Björk bends and blends genres so much. In *Hyperballad* she has mixed (among other things) the sounds of EDM with singer-songwriter and balladic materials, combining styles that are disparate not only in sound but in implications for how we listen, why, and with whom. Some of us might dance to *Hyperballad* at a club, concert, or party; some of us will dance alone in our living rooms as Björk might prefer; many of us won’t dance at all. But meaningful associations with the physical and social nonetheless remain, even if we sit still and alone. Shifts to and from groove are powerful, and they suggest something about the protagonist and her state, in addition to likely evoking some change of affective state in listeners.

Note that shifting to a focus on intimacy reflects emotions’ indivisibility with relationship and the social world, and the fact that they, like the voice, originally evolved to help us *communicate*. Though solo expression and the “overheard” may be one way to interpret the song—indeed, I have explored the possibility of the whole song representing parts of one Self—ultimately *Hyperballad* is about relationship. Ultimately, emotion itself is ultimately inseparable from relationship, be it with the external landscape, other humans, or ourselves.

Of course, exploration of relationships and emotions is standard fare for popular songs. What is unusual is *Hyperballad*’s explicit reference to and enactment of emotional self-regulation. In Chapter 3, I have attempted to pull this thread in the lyrics and explore the possibility of the song as envoicing states and relationships with/in Self that can be seen as following a sonic trajectory of self-regulation. Introducing a lens of intimacy makes room for this interpretation, but also others that treat the lyrics’ “you” more literally. Engaging with ideas of intimacy also honors

the significance of *Hyperballad's* genre combinations, and the social roots of both emotion and music. These roots remain no matter how private the listening act could be by 1995—or 2024.

CONCLUSION:

Implications for Understanding Emotion in Recorded Popular Song

Social-moral implications: Song as emotional labor and play

Nicola Dibben argues that music is a powerful way that we can construct and understand emotion as a society. She points out that it offers a subject position that we construct as we listen, with the musical experiences themselves informing and shaping our understanding.²⁷⁴ She writes,

Despite the prevailing tendency to receive Björk's work in terms of her own subjectivity, music can offer a subject for the listener to identify with which is distinct from that of the singer-songwriter. ... In [Lawrence] Kramer's opinion, the listener consequently attempts to fill this personified subjectivity, and through the process of identification comes to experience both self and world in terms of specific cultural narratives...²⁷⁵

I agree with Dibben, and I believe that this phenomenon has social and moral implications. Art can be understood to be a form of play²⁷⁶ that serves to give us practice and insight into what it is like to be human, and what *others* feel it's like to be human. Often, it offers up ways of understanding both interior and relational experience. Dibben says that our experiences with music can tell us what emotion is about within our culture, and can help us construct it.

In the case of *Hyperballad*, the connection is explicit, in that the choruses make a direct statement of emotional self-regulation. This takes Dibben's idea about music shaping Western emotional experience even further: through the combination of the lyrics and the music, the song track models not only emotional expressiveness, but also emotional management. The listener is presented with not only the *feeling* being, but the being who *thinks about her feelings*—and then manages and communicates them. This type of metacognition and emotional reflection is part of

²⁷⁴ Dibben, *Björk*, 174.

²⁷⁵ Dibben, "Subjectivity and the Construction of Emotion in the Music of Björk," 173.

²⁷⁶ Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

what connects Björk to a tradition of singer-songwriters, even as she draws so heavily on EDM influences.

In turn, the song itself becomes an emotional regulation tool for listeners. For example, on a Youtube video of *Hyperballad*, commenter Sam Olsen writes, “I listen to this song when I need to feel something again.”²⁷⁷ Of course, this behavior is not unique to Björk’s oeuvre; it is a common function for popular music consumption in general, perhaps especially common since the experience of musicking became more private and consumption-oriented. And yet, even during seemingly atomized listening experiences, we use music to understand ourselves and others – to *connect* to ourselves and to others. Through the process of “identification,” as Dibben puts it, we may develop and practice *empathy* as well.²⁷⁸ Viewed in this way, we might consider songwriting to be a form of emotional labor. It offers models of emotional experience that provide opportunities for listeners to virtually “play” at understanding, feeling, and even regulating emotion, which in turn can foster empathy for self and others that translates to real-life compassion and connection.

Tools, insights, & takeaways

Lastly, I wish to highlight a few themes that have arisen through this project. Some are more processual takeaways about my own journey into popular music scholarship, while others are ideas that could benefit from further research.

One takeaway that was a learning point for me despite being a fairly common approach in music scholarship is the significance of metaphor. The idea that metaphor is not just a literary

²⁷⁷ <<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgXWv7Zg3DetxWghSWteF7A>>

²⁷⁸ It is fairly common to understand, discuss, and study the narrative arts as building empathy. See for instance Suzanne Keen, “A Theory of Narrative Empathy,” *Narrative* 14, no. 3 (2006), 210. Recently, scholars are beginning to examine how this can unfold in music, as well. See Eric Clarke, Tia DeNora, and Jonna Vuoskoski, “Music, Empathy, and Cultural Understanding,” *Physics of Life Reviews* 15 (2015), 61-88 and Steven Brown, Matthew Howe, and Michel Belyk, “Music Enhances Empathic Engagement with Characters in Films,” *Music and Arts in Action* 7, no.1 (2019).

device, but a fundamental form of cognition that is embedded in how we make meaning and understand our world, was new to me, while the idea that music itself is an inherently metaphorical art form had been, at best, implicit. Making these ideas explicit and keeping them at front of mind helped me better understand how music can create its many meanings, and especially what might be driving some of my own “intuitive” understandings of *Hyperballad*.

I believe my work has also shown the benefits of drawing on circumplex/dimensional models of emotion, and of integrating scientific findings to support purported emotional characteristics. It helped me remain specific and grounded in the song and listeners’ possible experiences, and also helped me connect to empirical findings without precluding more individual, provisional, or even fanciful interpretations based on that data. Connecting to this research is also a way of acknowledging musicking’s roots in shared human evolution.

My most gutsy contribution is the idea that the persona-environment relationship can represent parts of self and thus can metaphorically enact not only affects and emotions, but also changes in consciousness and even processes of self-regulation. Given the powerful metaphorical mappings of vertical space with pitch *and* with so many dimensions of human experience, I have argued that some song textures and forms can afford readings that deal with states of consciousness, such as sleep/wake, loose mentation/focused mentation, and even the process of “making the unconscious conscious,” which relates to the self-regulation habit *Hyperballad’s* lyrics directly describe. In this case, I have argued that the song affords an understanding of its different strands and layers as different experiences in the bundle of self. Specifically, I have suggested that the very low, foundational bass strand may be read as the unconscious, which enables its changes throughout a song form to suggest profound changes in mental state, such as waking up or becoming otherwise more aware, more integrated, and even self-regulated. For

some readers, such a vivid, specific configuration will surely seem like a stretch. But it does seem clear that rich sonic environments can suggest rich inner worlds, not just outer ones. These types of interpretations will necessarily be more appropriate in some cases than others, which is another reason to attend closely not only to a song's musical traces, but also its lyrics, as I have endeavored to do in this project.

Finally, my analysis affirms that intimacy is a productive pivot from questions of authenticity. That said, we can focus on intimacy without entirely dismissing authenticity's relevance to so many popular recorded songs and listeners; as I have shown, various specific choices that Björk made can lead listeners to afford interpretations of "authenticity," largely given cultural constructions and associations. This is important to study. It's also worth noting that most of the sonic attributes relevant to "authenticity" were rooted in the vocal persona (via both lyrics and singing delivery), while intimacy came to the fore after taking into account the environment and its complexities. It would be interesting to see whether this is generally the case, or an idiosyncrasy of the particular song and/or analyst. Still, intimacy is ultimately more useful as an actual analytical category. Focusing on types of closeness can help us understand how music retains its relationship to sociality even when it becomes more interior, privatized, and/or commodified. In this way, "intimacy" can help bridge the subdisciplines of musical analysis and musicology, which was a priority of this project. It also honors both emotion's and music's evolutionary origins: to help us bond, communicate affective states, and thus survive.

In the case of *Hyperballad*, the above tools and insights have helped me make sense of the experiences of various listeners, including myself. They have enabled me to honor fans' assessments of the song as unusually emotional and highly valuable without hunting through the creator's biography for explanations. I have aimed to center the idea of the song as a product of

craft, of choices, for reasons discussed in the introduction to do with gender and legitimation strategies. However, I have aimed to center the reader of the song-text as well, largely by allowing myself to make interpretations that come from my own subject position in intersection with the sounding musical artifact. This resulted in interesting and meaningful ways of understanding *Hyperballad*, and provided opportunities to reflect on music, emotion, and broader social questions.

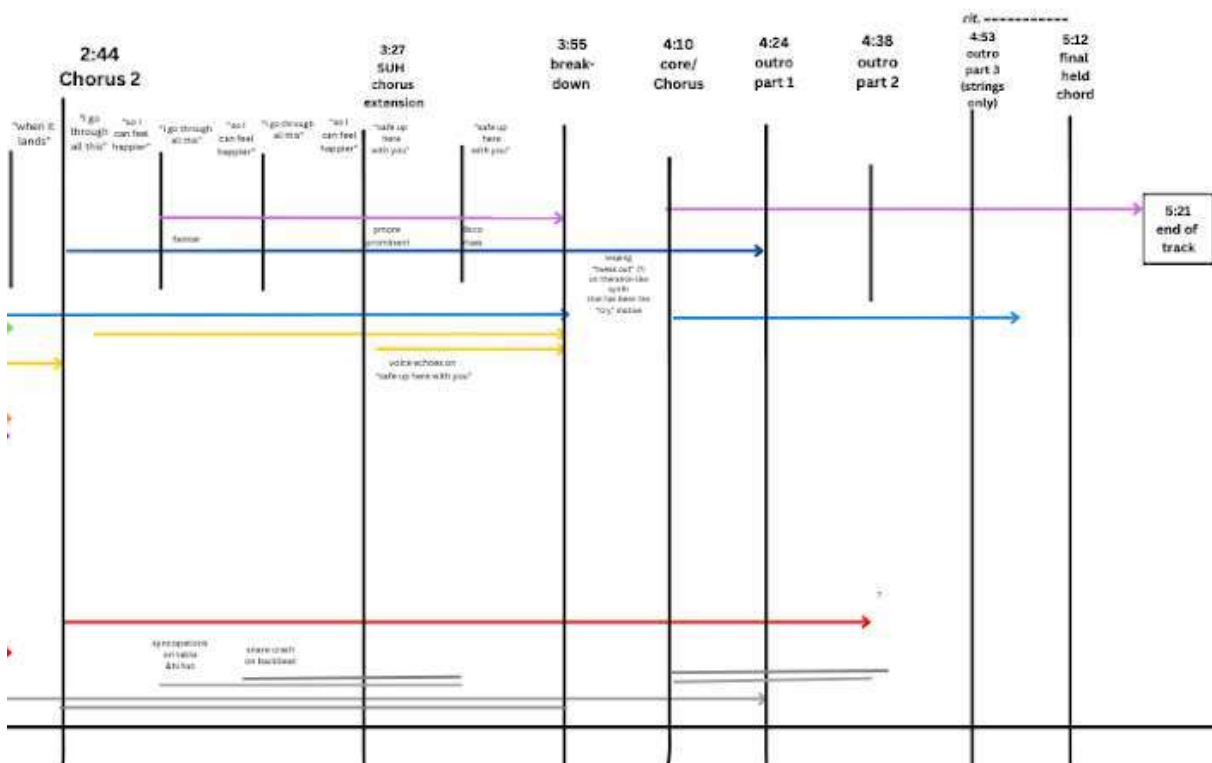
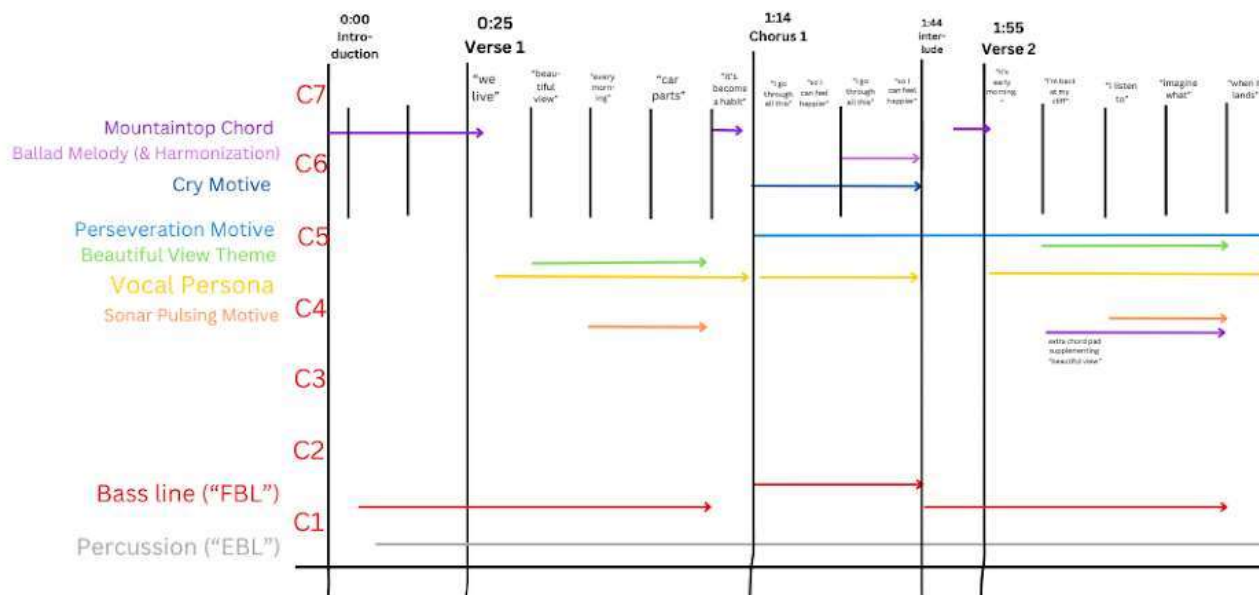
Representation and communication of affective experience in song has great social value, and must be studied with care and precision. I hope that my findings in relation to the specific song track of *Hyperballad* can be extrapolated as a larger methodology for interpreting emotion in popular song. I also hope that my work helps remedy the constellation of uneasy relationships between emotion, gender, popular music, academia, and consecration. As Sarah Kirkland Snider puts it, we need

...a proactive, vigilant rejection of the false dichotomy between the emotional/feminine and the intellectual/masculine in art, which is rarely articulated but nevertheless tends to linger just under the surface of many aesthetic arguments. A culture that colloquially refers to emotional awareness as “being in touch with one’s feminine side” will not be easily shifted in this regard. For this reason, public forums such as academia, journalism, and the media have a responsibility to take a conscious lead in flushing out the problematic currents of pre-supposition that travel subterraneously.²⁷⁹

Let’s not travel subterraneously. Let us live out in the open, and see what emotional meanings popular song can afford us.

²⁷⁹ Sarah Kirkland Snider, “Candy Floss and Merry-Go-Rounds: Female Composers, Gendered Language, and Emotion,” *New Music Box*, 17 May 2017. <<https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/candy-floss-and-merry-go-rounds-female-composers-gendered-language-and-emotion/>>

Appendix: Full formal map of *Hyperballad*



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“I Hope You Stay Soft”: A portfolio of works exploring vulnerability through music & self-authored text

The composition portion of my dissertation consists of a portfolio of pieces exploring different ways self-authored text and music can combine to explore vulnerability—including topics, processes, and products that are also very personal. I ask: What are some ways I can express emotionality in my music, neither falling prey to simplistic conceptions of emotional transmission nor absconding from the communicative attempt altogether? In what ways can personal content be embraced and/or transcended on the contemporary classical music stage?

The “confessional” moniker was a prominent and complex influence on me. While the term was less relevant to Björk’s work, it made an impression on me nonetheless; it seemed to loom large with some of my favorite songwriters, including Joni Mitchell and Ani DiFranco. And it certainly seemed relevant to my ongoing struggle to find my place within the contemporary classical music world. As much as the divulging of personal, highly emotional information in and through music has a mixed status in popular musics (as discussed in the Introduction), it seems to me that it is even more taboo in contemporary classical music—or simply peripheral, irrelevant. But is it true or fair that certain topics don’t belong on a contemporary classical music stage, or are simply better suited to other media, contexts, etc.? After all, what even defines the “contemporary classical music” context at this point in time? What are some ways of being vulnerable and even personal in contemporary concert music composition in a way that feels appropriate for me but still functions as a form of communication with audience, as well as performers? As I wrote my portfolio pieces, the only way to even *begin* to know my own answer

to these questions was to step right up to, perhaps even over, that line. In other words, I couldn't be vulnerable without actually being vulnerable.

In general, my work as a composer does not live only in one genre, domain, or even medium, and so exploring the potentialities of different formats and styles was important to me in this project. It was also important to me to explore the possibilities of collaboration—both in order to take advantage of the visitors that UC Davis had to offer, and because relationality in musicking is a core value for me. Björk's process in making *Post* inspired and informed me: her spirit of collaboration and embracing of heterogeneity resonated with many of my own goals and values.

A brief note on the choice to write my own text, how I write lyrics, and how I relate to words in general. Typically, words come to me quickly and unbidden, and rather constantly. Of course, they are not always the ones I want, nor do they always come in an organized or useful way (and there are often far too many, no matter whether it's prose or lyrics). I then pursue a long, reflective, messy process of arranging, cutting, and revising these words. I think that words are so comfortable for me thanks to my upbringing by journalist parents and my schooling in a system that prizes reading and writing (at times to the detriment of other valuable ways of knowing). Words continue to excite me because of their potential to point to elements of human experience, helping us communicate, share, and connect with one another.

I have long been interested in how words can combine with music's capacities, which are so very different. I am interested in retaining these differences in my pieces—that is, in letting words retain their semantic possibilities, but also letting music do what it does best. I am interested in music supporting or filling-in text's meanings in a complementary, bi-directional way. More specifically, the intelligibility of the words is usually important to me. I believe this

positionality comes from my long background in taking-in popular media: popular musics, where the words are usually fairly direct (or at least not often fully stripped of semantic meaning); film and television, where music does the emotional labor while words remain uttered as words by characters; singing in choirs, in which text is often set fairly traditionally and clearly; and perhaps most of all, musical theater, where words are as or more important than the music. Together, it seems to me that words and music can do amazing composite expressive work, encapsulating multiple modes of being, thinking, and feeling. That is what I have always connected to, and aspired to, in my vocal music and musico-dramatic works.

Along with the somewhat unusual focus on self-authored text, my project centers on questions of vulnerability, as well as related themes of confession, emotionality, and personal content. As my project evolved, vulnerability became increasingly present in the process of composition and performance—not just as content I sought to communicate, but part of the concept, structure, and format of my work. Performing live with collaborators meant I had less ability to control and predict; this is inherently risky, vulnerable. I have also emerged from this project with less of an illusion that the abstraction of a score is necessarily a useful, safe authority. When it came time for me to actually make music—to create sound that reverberates in our bodies in relationship with other performers—I often found my score less useful for actually realizing the artistic experience I sought to create. I also came to realize that abstraction can often be a way to abscond from vulnerability. Indeed, I watched myself do this time and again. I would persevere over scores, maps, and discussions about music, repeatedly letting that precedence over *actually making sound*. I have had to confront what in myself avoids this real, embodied, vulnerable aspect of musicking that I simultaneously crave. I won't share my nascent answers here, since there are still some things that are private—a few boundaries I don't wish to cross.

Below, I discuss each of the pieces in my portfolio. I provide necessary background, explain my process, discuss how the words were generated, and provide the rationale behind some of my musical choices. I also use this as an opportunity to be reflective about my practice as an artist, including questions about where I go from here.

Fontanelle (2023)

ca. 7'

For the Magela Herrera Quartet (piano, bass, drums, flute) & Emily Joy Sullivan (voice)

In writing *Fontanelle*, I sought to explore emotion and vulnerability in a somewhat traditional songwriterly sense: through content of the song as possible message, through the symbolic and semantic meanings of words combined with affective results generated by the music. However, unlike my prior songs in that vein, it would live within a performance practice involving song and idiomatic style of Afro-Cuban jazz. I also wanted to create a song that was less obviously divulgatory and more observational than my past singer-songwriter work – a song in which I took a point-of-view other than my own but nonetheless explored vulnerability through that lens.

The first reason was philosophical. Having reflected on the stereotype of confessional singer-songwriters as navel-gazing or “complainy,” I wanted to sidestep that possible issue for the time being, taking it as an opportunity to challenge my personal songwriting default of writing as an explicit, divulgatory “I.” There were also pragmatic reasons. I was writing for a group, not my own voice with a solo accompanying instrument. Because it was a group that played in a very specific idiom with potential for groove, the solo style of songwriting I was most familiar with

was not necessarily desirable. Moreover, groove is often associated with groups more than solo artists, with the social realm more than the intimate one, and with exteriority rather than interiority. I welcomed this opportunity as a challenge. Was there a way to square this with a lyric that was still introspective? To make sense of the potential exuberance of the music, decided to explore lyrics that involved not only reflection but also celebration and sociality, albeit through an individual's eyes. I also wanted to explore the idea of "softness," and so that is the main focus of the text and music, as I will demonstrate.

Here are the lyrics to *Fontanelle* (The score is available in the next section):

<p><u>Verse 1</u> A riot of color was in the streets the kids were full of their tricks and their treats And you were standing at the door Felt a pang for something more</p> <p>You're thirsty, you're sated; you're hungry then you're full The wheel just keeps spinning, the push and the pull and you're not sure you like the ride So pull the wool over your eyes</p> <p><u>Prechorus 1</u> Now every night's a party, and every day's a blur As you sniff around for the Next New Thing... You advocate the devil, then pretend that it's a game Grab the nearest warm body, ask her, "please..."</p> <p><u>Chorus 1</u> "Take me... ah..."</p>	<p><u>Verse 2</u> But then you spot this baby, with his lazy baby neck He cries, he giggles, he isn't world-weary yet He hasn't learned to numb Hasn't learned to play dead</p> <p>And his head lays so easy on his mother's chest, He's dressed up like Elvis; you just can't help yourself You have to crack a smile And then "The King" smiles back...</p> <p><u>Prechorus 2</u> 'Cause the crying of a baby's not an existential cry He might be asking questions, but he isn't asking why You wanna go preverbal, you're longing to go limp; For the first time, you start to pray:</p> <p><u>Chorus 2</u> "Take me... ah..."</p>
<p><u>Bridge 1:</u></p> <p>They tell you that you're privileged, but you're lonely nonetheless You long to be more honest, but then who could ever guess? You choose to keep your distance, you make a snide remark Use humor to protect yourself from the joy that never comes You'd rather be half hearted than a little bit exposed Nothing's ever vulnerable when everything's a joke...</p> <p><u>Instrumental</u></p>	

Bridge 2:

We, who hide our hurt and keep our heads erect
We, so eager to enlist and defect
We, who deny ourselves then “overindulge”
We who throw our stones but crave unconditional love
We who waste our time pretending not to care
We lick our wounds and hide our faults build castles in the air
We who crane our necks and throw our stones and wrap ourselves in tact
We forget ourselves... (I forget myself...)
I lead myself away instead of back.

Chorus 3

So take me... ah...

Text: Distance & Closeness

In writing the lyrics for *Fontanelle*, I still worked with my personal thoughts and real-world observations, but assembled them very loosely and invented additional ones in an attempt to not naively replicate my own experience. I was interested in an observational approach that would not merely be judgmental; I wanted the singer of the song, and hopefully the audience, to still identify with the “character,” and perhaps even empathize.

The main way I played with identification was through my mode of address, especially through perspective and pronouns. I started by writing with “you” rather than “I,” with the intention that it be genuine second-person, but could be interpreted as covert second-person. I found that writing about a “you” instantly generated a different stance as I wrote. Wonderfully, I also realized that it opened up the potential to move closer as time progressed: switching to first person could enact a trajectory of empathic identification *through the course of the song* rather than as a static state from the beginning. I eventually decided I would shift perspectives from “you” to “we” to “I” by the end of the song. The narrator/singer starts with observing and possibly judging a “you,” but then comes to know more about him and his interiority and vulnerability, slightly “softening.” She then reflects that this is something “we” all do, not just the

“you,” and eventually becomes more part of this “we” until eventually she actually sings “I”. In this context, the “Take me” phrase from the chorus – which originally seemed to be a quote, a momentary inhabiting of the “you’s” perspective – now feels different. In fact, another valid reading of the song could be that this “me” was in fact the narrator/singer all along, and that the “you” was just a sign of the self-objectification in which we so often engage.

Music: Hard/soft and Open/closed

Fontanelle embraces the potential of the Afro-Cuban idiom, and I strove to mainly utilize those norms while also integrating in some grooves, harmonies, and vocal rhythms from other “popular” music styles. The score also leaves some components open to improvisation, as is idiomatic for the style and increasingly a part of my compositional practice.

I tied my selections of overall drumset groove, and micro-choices within the grooves, to my affective goals. For instance, a tight, “militaristic” rock pattern is used in sections where I wanted more judgment or distance, using the drum kit to convey a certain tightness. I hoped the strictness to the beat and more closed timbres would sonically enact my affective goals. By contrast, the mambo in the chorus is meant to be looser and splashier, reflecting the subject’s desire for release and connection. Since mambo typically features more interaction and joining in on the vocal part, I thought this choice could create more dialogue and blurring of pronouns, of singular and plural, etc. (I also wanted the band to echo the soloist, as in a traditional mambo, but this was not realized in time for the performance).

Within the drumset grooves, I played with when the hi hat was more closed or more open, again to reflect and support the implications of the subject’s openness or closedness in terms of temperament. This parameter is most prevalent at the bridge to the final chorus, in which open

hats, cymbals, and rims are introduced quite gradually, creating a freeing effect. Indeed, most of the “softening” (and hopefully, empathic identification) occurs around the bridge and final chorus, where some crucial changes happen, Timbrally, I reinforce the shift to greater softness/openness in the lyrics and groove by indicating a switch to “head voice” (using thin folds, and in my case also a breathy phonation strategy) when higher notes and “we”/”I” become more prominent in the bridge. This reflects a softening, yet also a breaking-through. Of course, this relates to the title of the song, “fontanelle,” which refers to what is colloquially referred to as the “soft spot” on a baby’s head. (Though the title never appears in the song, a baby, with his “lazy baby neck,” plays a prominent role in the second chorus.)

The first two choruses are characterized by a prominent #4 on the “ah” that follows “take me.” I chose the sharp, bright, Lydian-inflected scale degree to create a sense of a bursting through of desire, but still in a somewhat controlled way. But in the final chorus, this “ah” changes to be on diatonic scale degree 4, “fa,” and is harmonized with a Bb (IV) chord instead of a F13#11. Music theorist Drew Nobile calls the IV chord a “softener,” and I have personally always felt it to be soft and home-like—certainly less tense than the layered, Lydian chord used previously.²⁸⁰ Compared to the tension of having the tritone #4 present above the tonic in a state of constant, shimmering tension, the natural “fa” with the half step in the scale pointing down reads as more relaxed, open, or “soft” (in addition to simply being more common within Western musics, and thus more normative or perhaps somewhat less marked for meaning).

Takeaways and implications for future compositions

²⁸⁰ Drew Nobile, *Harmony as Form in Rock Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 33.

Ultimately, I was unsure of whether this song worked; I definitely think it could work better. My hope was that the joyful grooves and major mode would retain enough positive affect to prevent complete emotional distancing, but it is possible that the text and vocal tone overpowered this, and/or that the contrast may have come off as ironic or cynical, which was not my intention. Spending so much time in a low range paired with dense text produces a sort of speakiness that may not be best for inviting empathic identification.

The lyrics of the first bridge might be the main culprit: I return to an Othering stance here, even though the second verse had made strides toward identification. There are also cases where what should be subtext is text; this could be what reads as critical and, ironically, closed-off, since it is less open to interpretation. Also, the section is followed by a two-minute instrumental / dance break, so the listener is perhaps too distanced from the protagonist for too long in the middle of the song. For future versions of the piece, especially a recorded version, I would cut the first bridge and shorten the instrumental break.

Musically, I learned a great deal from the constraints of the idiom; I was able to delve into writing groove for drumset and to dip my toes into jazz chords and voicings. However, a revised version would benefit from the freedom to employ more components outside the Afro-Cuban jazz idiom: perhaps some less-grooved sections and a string layer to provide more sustained sounds. Sustained tones and legato articulation are virtually absent other than in the voice and flute parts at the chorus, and as I have recently learned, shorter sounds do not invite interpretations or feelings of emotionality as much as longer ones do.

Finally, I should acknowledge that there is a tension present in using musical references involving the body and community, as well as a constant state of musical groove that would typically generate embodiment and dance, performed in a hall like Pitzer. It is a phenomenal

concert hall, but people might not think they can or should dance, sing, talk, etc. People tend to follow the (relatively recent) social compact of the concert hall as silent. I am interested in pieces being performed in atypical places and exploring the meanings and tensions that can create, but ideally *Fontanelle* wants to live in a more informal space, such that audience embodiment and connection can occur more freely. Similarly, the format of writing a thorough score and then having only two rehearsals was also suboptimal for this type of musicking. It was also at times uncomfortable to be “the composer,” yet also an utter beginner in the performers’ idiom—a form of vulnerability I wouldn’t repeat in the future without having more time to negotiate it. But I felt lucky to get to be part of a group that was so connected, and that truly grooved via their close relationship and adept communication.

Bride’s Lament (2023)

ca. 8’

For musical theater soprano & piano

Composed as a commission for the NATS (National Association for Teachers of Singing)

Mentoring Program for Composers

I chose to gear the NATS art song commission more towards musical theater, utilizing it to write within my preferred genre. It is not always easy to find performance opportunities or funding for this type of work, and it can feel uncomfortable to embrace it within contemporary concert music contexts. So, I decided to write a song drawing on various music-drama genres, once again composing the lyrics as well as the music.

I am interested in the relationship between musical theater soliloquy arias and how in some ways they are very similar to “confessional” singer-songwriter songs—albeit with the huge difference that the song is so clearly written for a character, rather than any illusion that it is by

and about a real person. The fact that I was writing for someone else to sing the song this time reinforced this distinction. To make a connection to my study of *Hyperballad*, almost all Cone’s different personae were present, with the exception that I was composer and lyricist, rather than there being a separate poet’s agency or “voice” to account for.

With *Bride’s Lament*, I wanted to see how I could explore something highly specific to my own life—wedding preparations and their attendant emotions—into something more generalized, that many people could sing. It also was a way to explore some of the gendered tensions I found lurking amidst my project’s central questions.

The song draws on a tradition of list songs, such as George Gershwin’s “100 Ways to Lose a Man.” It also makes use of quotation and reference. For instance, there is a verbal reference to the bible verse (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) that is iconically used at weddings:

67 Regal, Stately ♩ = 76 (or alternately, manic)
mf Rather less regal and stately, this time! The sarcasm can be clearer now;
the vocal tone may still be beautiful, OR more nasal, or through clenched teeth

S
67 Love is pat - ient, Love is kind. Love is grit - ting your teeth

Pno. *mp* broad, lyrical

Bride’s Lament also contains a musical quotation of Lerner & Loewe’s classic “Adelaide’s Lament,” which has spawned similar songs in recent years (i.e., “Alto’s Lament”). It seeks to blend different styles and genres of musical theater with a more recitative-like opening. My inspirations included “Not Getting Married Today” (Stephen Sondheim) and “Modern Major General” (Gilbert & Sullivan).

Bride's Lament was the least conceptual and most direct of my portfolio pieces. It was also the most firmly rooted in a genre (though it aimed to combine different styles and even associations of opera as well as musical theater). Accordingly, I will take this opportunity not to point to specific choices in the song, but to reflect on what this piece revealed about my practice and learnings as a composer more broadly.

During this project, I became acutely aware of often having too much material, both verbal and musical, for any given project. Even after much editing, I struggled to let go of various sections and ideas; I had a longer form in mind than was actually possible for the opportunity and circumstances. This experience impelled me to be more narrow in the next three compositions, exploring forms that focus on only 1-2 types of musical DNA that are integrated throughout the piece.

On the other hand, the performance of *Bride's Lament* realized my aesthetic goals more successfully than I expected, in part because I had such excellent performers. The singer understood my essentially dramatic intentions, and used elements of performance other than her voice to bring that to life. Many ideas I had doubted clicked into place once performed in a format that embraced the visual and dramatic modes of expression as well as the aural dimension. This experience reminded me of the centrality of drama and storytelling in so much of my work.

Finally, in terms of my ongoing inquiry into vulnerability and confession, I felt that this project moved beyond the individual, but definitely remained rooted in the experience of a fairly small group. I also noticed that while I thought humor might be a way to balance the seriousness of divulgatory, it could still read as “whiney” depending on how it is specifically handled. Discerning where such assessments are valid versus rooted in sexist tropes is an ongoing question for me.

***We* (2023)**

Ca. 7'15"

For Wendy Richman (viola) & Emily Joy Sullivan (voice)

The first two works in my portfolio project revealed a lingering tendency towards a prose-like, even journalistic approach to lyric-writing. My words were leaning too specific and explicit, perhaps even too *clear*, and studying *Hyperballad* had me appreciating the merit of ambiguity in song. While a journalistic approach to songwriting is valid, I needed to try another way.

In composing a piece for viola and voice for artist-in-residence Wendy Richman, I knew I could work outside the constraints of composing within a specific genre. This meant I could be looser with my approach to “song,” both in terms of what could constitute a lyric and in terms of how many experimental and “contemporary classical” elements I could incorporate. Because I observed my lyrics veering too wordy and difficult in those first two songs, I decided that for this piece I would write a poem, not lyrics. Moreover, I would make it short, and also include plenty of vocalise when I set the text.

Crucially, this shift to fewer words and a less-strict form suited my desired subject. After having explored vulnerability and personal content through a somewhat critical-minded persona in the first two songs, I would write something unambiguously earnest and hopeful, meditating on the theme of marriage. This topic was genuinely personal and timely, and exploring it was a way to challenge the idea that personal reference is solely the purview of popular music, not concert music. That said, the piece would not unequivocally be about marriage without the supplement of program note. From the piece “itself,” it would only be clear that it was about interconnection in relationship, which needn’t be romantic (not unlike the case of *Hyperballad*).

The poem came to me intuitively and quickly. It is a direct statement of gratitude and love
– an ode of sorts:

We are
a couple of birds in the hand
worth more
than
anything.

Though the message of the poem is fairly clear, the role of metaphor and image are stronger here than in any of my prior lyrics. This shows the influence of my scholarly research into metaphor for *Hyperballad*, and my new awareness of the emotional power that metaphor can carry.

Eventually, I began to analyze the poem’s potential alongside sonic improvisations that explored the emotions I wanted to invoke, regardless of any future text-setting concerns. Symbolically, I + you = we, so a form of marriage exists right there. But each of these pronouns is itself a sonic composite of two vowels, as well:

I = ah + ee

You = ee + oo

We = oo + ee

I realized that I could explore these component sounds and build them into words such that “the medium is the message”: the actual sound material would *be* a joining of two entities, as opposed to using text as symbols to make a statement *about* the joining of two entities. Conveniently, even the vowels of these three words happen to transition seamlessly between one another; this would help me blend the sounds even more effectively, helping mask that I was creating three separate

words until the moment I wanted to reveal it. The fact that these pronouns are comprised solely of vowels and transitions between them was conducive to embracing greater lyricism and songfulness, as the portions of the vocal line could be completely liberated from consonants! (From a vocalist’s perspective, consonants require resetting the vocal folds and can result in a loss of flow;²⁸¹ from a listener’s perspective, they can generate a speaky quality that may generate a greater sense of distance than I wanted, as was at times the case in *Fontanelle*.)

So, before any singing of the full poem is sung, *We*’s opening explores hummed melodic gestures and then plays with the aforementioned vowel sounds and transitions between them, gradually building the words “I,” “You,” and “We”—making something new, greater than the sum of its parts. In generating these musical materials, I explored Kurt Rohde’s suggestion to write “my own folk song” and let this guide the melodic choices and relationship between the instruments, especially at the beginning of the piece. I explored more repetition but less periodicity, and slowness and stillness rather than rapidity and density. Pitchwise, the world would be almost entirely diatonic, and embrace secundal and quartal-quintal harmony; this would be sufficient given the positive and calm affect I sought, and because timbre would be a more important musical parameter in this particular piece. In my compositional practice, I relied more on my own voice & improvisation rather than on software and/or mental processes. I allowed myself to follow my intuition more, and did less analysis and planning than I typically lean on when writing a piece.

After an actual textual-melodic statement on the poem, the song returns to wordlessness in the middle section. This time, it takes the form of a structured improvisation that plays with all the elements that have been introduced thus far. I wanted the “medium to be the message” in the sense that not only one person (the composer), would have control. Instead, new things could

²⁸¹ Thank you to Heidi Moss for helping me realize this.

alchemically be created in the moment from shared choices. After this central section, the piece follows a loose mirror form, albeit with differences that build a sense of climax and subsequent repose.

Interestingly, one audience member noticed some sonic resemblance between *We* and Kate Soper's work. Of course, I owe a debt to the composers before me who have played with phonemes liberated from words, working with their sonic qualities rather than their symbolic meaning (for example, Meredith Monk). However, the way I deploy deconstructed words is very different from Soper's and Monk's approaches—as is my goal for doing so. I utilized the component parts of the words with the goal of *putting them back together*, not breaking them down; ultimately, I still presented them as words that combine in traditional ways and produce semantic meaning. My ultimate interest was in constructing, not deconstructing. I hope that I managed to create a sense of visceral emotional meaning *throughout* the piece, whether intact words were being heard or not. Ultimately, I found *We* to be the most successful piece in the project so far in terms of creating a unity between text and music, as well as in its efficacy as a total work.

Dear Daughter (2024)

ca. 7'15"

for flute, viola, percussion, harp, and cello

Performed by Empyrean Ensemble

Dear Daughter is an instrumental composition that explores the relationship between music and text in yet another way. In this case, I explore vulnerability and emotion through the concept of the piece, and not through any words heard or even read by the audience. (The score included in this document has the poem largely redacted, for this reason.)

I generated *Dear Daughter's* text from reflections on deciding to (hopefully) become a parent, through the exercise of writing an ongoing virtual letter to my future child. The intention was never that she would read this letter; rather, it was more like a journal. I then crafted a poem from various snippets of these reflections. I then shared this poem with the performers – some of whom I have never met, some of whom I've met once or twice, and one of whom is an actual mentor, collaborator, and friend – via the score's frontnotes. This was a central concept of the piece. In giving the performers access to verbal content that was extremely personal and emotional, I was offering up a form of vulnerability as well as an attempt at an actual communication act, which I also hoped would create a kind of virtual intimacy. This was a way of addressing—perhaps redressing—a broader trend: I had been longing for more actual relationship with the musicians who bring my work to life, even though this is often not how “new music” opportunities operate.

In terms of the sounding product, I hoped that the poem would be meaningful and present for the musicians, and that that might translate to the performance and even the piece “itself.” However, it was completely possible and permissible for the performers to forget the text, or even ignore that page of the document altogether. After all, I was seeking genuine exchange, wherein they had power and influence as well. I hoped *Dear Daughter* would feel more alive and relational—that it would give the performers a sense of relationship with the composer as a real person, rather than toiling away on their side of the abstraction of a score. Anecdotally and phenomenologically, this way of utilizing personal text felt quite different. I felt like I was operating in a spirit of sharing, of giving rather than taking, which Kurt Rohde and I discussed as a crucial (if slippery) distinction when thinking about “confessional.” I still felt somewhat exposed and scared; there was a genuine risk there.

Because of the text's unusual role in this piece, the music would have to do a great deal of emotional labor. I wanted the music to convey experiences of tenderness as well as anxiety and struggle, and then the metabolizing of that struggle in order to return to a mode of tenderness, in a dance that must repeat again and again. To this end, I relied on a long iterative process of crafting harmonic progressions that I felt captured the mood I wanted, pacing their flow in a satisfying way. I combined quartal-quintal, diatonic, and more dissonant sonorities in order to craft this musical throughline. Pedagogically speaking, I used this piece as a way to build my awareness of phrase structure, and to use less technology and more analog tools in my compositional practice.

But to create a sense of tenderness directed towards a child, specifically, I had another conceit: to channel the role of the non-lexical elements of voice in emotional communication, via the inspiration of "parentese." Parentese (formerly known as "motherese," formally known as "infant-directed-speech") is that special mode of speaking that most of us automatically adopt when talking to infants. In this mode, we emphasize and exaggerate the paralinguistic elements of our utterances, using a gentle timbre and exaggerated contours. This is because at this stage of human development, vocal communication is more about *emotional* messages, which are best conveyed through timbre and contour.

I believed that finding a way to channel parentese in instrumental parts could be a direct and powerful way to get the sound world and perhaps even affects that I wanted. How to do so was the question! I gave the performers specific parameters in terms of their pitch collection, but then added affective indications for timbre rather than technical ones. To convey gesture, I used graphic notation along with standard Western notation:

The image shows a page of a musical score for the piece "Dear Daughter". The score is for five instruments: Flute (Fl.), Violin I (Vib. I), Harp (Hp.), Viola I (Vla. I), and Cello (Vc.). The tempo is marked "Piu Mosso" with a quarter note equal to 66 (♩ = 66). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into measures 8, 9, 10, and 11. Various dynamic markings are used: *mf*, *p sub.*, *mp*, and *mf*. Expressive markings in boxes include "PRAISE", "SOOTHE", "COMFORT", and "QUESTION", each with a musical gesture above it. The Harp part includes the instruction "(continue occasional bisbigliandi reinvigorations)".

This was absolutely an experiment. In performance, the use of the parentese gesture-timbres worked even better than I'd hoped. I was thrilled to find that *Dear Daughter* successfully conveyed the affects and emotions I intended—especially, as one listener put it, “tenderness.” I am not sure if this emotional success can be attributed to the act of sharing the poem with the performers (though one of the musicians did share that he felt that reading the text made a significant difference for him). I did intend *Dear Daughter* as a way of experimenting with how emotion might “come through” in musical performance; I wondered whether having read my words would have any effect on the performer and their playing, especially through timbre and gesture. Though this would be impossible to quantify or prove, I nonetheless thought it might be something I could “feel.” That was actually my experience, when listening to the performance – it seemed to click into place, come alive, feel full of intention, with the ensemble working together

as an organism rather than being stuck in their scores. Still, at the end of the day, these “experiments” are not actually experiments: I can’t control the variables.

In the future, I will ideally have more time for rehearsal and more of a relationship with the musicians, so I can dialogue about these questions. Indeed, a desire for a working method rooted in ongoing relationship, with plenty of time to realize my ideas, was emerging as more and more important with each piece I wrote. That said, I am still interested in score-based, traditional methods of composition, and in being able to participate in the common practice of sending scores to performers without collaboration—and *Dear Daughter* paired with the Empyrean Ensemble was a perfect example of how that model can be successful, despite my overall misgivings about it. In this particular case, communicating as much as I could via a notated document, and then entrusting the musicians to realize it almost entirely without my further input, worked extremely well.

Un/titled (2024)

*Ca. 14’ (7’ “scene,” 7’ “song”)
For soprano, alto, and fixed media voices
Text: Anonymous x 43 & Emily Joy Sullivan
Emily Thorner & Emily Joy Sullivan, voices*

For my final portfolio piece, I wanted to create a work that explored vulnerability through both the subject matter *and* the fundamental concept of the piece. As I reflected on my role as an artist, and of art in our society, I was looking for a way to make art that was not so siloed off in a corner, and that involved genuine connection to others.

I decided to challenge the trope of confessionals’ individuality while still maintaining its anonymity, finding ways it could be a source of connection. To do this, I wanted to source text

from other people, as well as myself. I wanted to find a way to provide people with an opportunity to share information anonymously and then have it given a voice through my piece. The topic would be self-image. This is an issue that is close to my own heart—it is indeed “personal”—but is also a source of suffering for many people.

This concept was partly inspired by my participation in productions of *The Vagina Monologues* in college. In addition to performing the existing work, we submitted our own anonymous monologues, which were then performed by others in the group. The experience of having an anonymous outlet, and the discovery that I had more in common with the other women than I thought, created a sense of intimacy and shared experience. In this, there was a real social and communal benefit to the artistic, performance-based work we were doing. Now, I wanted to use music to do the emotional labor for a similarly connective creative work, envoicing what might be below or within the words people would submit.

For this last portfolio piece, I will spend more time explaining the process of crafting my composition than with the others, as it was unusually complex and unorthodox. I believe understanding my intentions and the choices involved will provide helpful context, and can shed crucial light on the stakes involved in this type of project.

Initial pre-compositional process

I had entertained the general idea of writing a piece along the lines of *Un/titled* for several years, and was thrilled at the opportunity to finally craft it for AiR ultrasoprano Emily Thorner. I chose to pursue this project with and for Thorner partly due to her stated preferences and strengths, which included “improvising given an emotional prompt.” I was also intrigued by her sound healing work; though I did not end up incorporating it into my piece in any direct way, it let

me know that she was open to approaching music in a nontraditional manner. Finally, I knew that having more than one voice present would be integral to my piece, and Thorner's work with looper pedals was an apt way to generate more voices, especially if I performed beside her and did the same.

For the text, I designed an anonymous, voluntary Google Form²⁸² about aspects of self-image and circulated it on Facebook. The form was not in any way limited in terms of who could participate, and it provided an opportunity to self-identify, but didn't require it. All questions were optional. The form ultimately received over 40 submissions. I want to clarify and emphasize: *I did not know what I would receive in the responses to the form.* I did not know how many people would respond, or whom. I could have received a disparate heterogeneity of responses, and would have strived to reflect that, were that the case. However, in reality, I received many responses that expressed *strikingly similar experiences* along a few veins (as well as a few responses that were more singular). At the end of the day, the product was meant to be art, not research, but I did want to reflect the general proportions of what respondents said, and not select arbitrarily. I knew I wanted to use my power-responsibility as the artist to highlight common themes and then to metabolize them, adding elements of my own. So, I spent a great deal of time reading these submissions in different ways in order to extract common themes, as well as powerful anecdotes and vivid phrases. Gradually, this shaped the form of the composition. I also decided to add the concept of dissociation, and of reassociating through a process of embodiment, as a structural element. Music would represent, enact, and/or enable the act of tuning-in through the body (though I also wove it explicitly into the text). I included this intervention in order to bridge the negative experiences that people had shared and the positive

²⁸² The survey form is still open, and lives here: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1hLVRyO-kovDr4QDM7mjqcqSYwNb7eo3DeyowDmIKIzk/edit>
This project did not qualify as "research," and thus, per IRB, did not require IRB approval.

words the survey asked them to extend to themselves. Specifically, in reclaiming body parts that I had presented as part of objectification early on, newly focusing on the actual embodied feelings that live in those places, I wanted the piece to move from an alienated position to a more integrated, subjective one.

Artistic and compositional choices: Part 1 (spoken “scene”)

I always intended for the words I’d gathered to sound as intact language at some point. I did not want to throw the words’ direct, often painful connotative meanings out the window; this would be antithetical to my goals for the piece, and could be irresponsible and disingenuous to the respondents. I originally planned on the words looping (via pedals) to be mimetic of repetitive thought-grooves that would eventually transform into sheer sound and form an overwhelming residue that would suddenly disappear. However, this did not work for various practical, philosophical, and even ethical reasons. One of the values I have developed over my time at UC Davis is to remain responsive to the artist task in front of me, letting the material speak to me. This became necessary many times over the course of bringing the piece to fruition. I also wanted to be responsive to the participants in the project (via empathetic imagination) and the performer (via actual communication and collaboration). My biggest pivot was the decision to include a sizeable section in which words would be enacted, somewhat like monologues, before music entered. This is because *I strongly felt that most of the words I received did not only want to be sung or musicalized, and needed to be spoken directly.*

In a way, my experiment in *Un/titled* became to see what happens when we let text be text and music be music, juxtaposing the two both side by side and also simultaneously. How might I let text do what it is best at, and then music do what it is best at, rather than forcing them to fully

merge? I believed music was best positioned to envoice the emotions at the root beneath the surface of the aggressions and objectifications we subject ourselves and others to; it could represent and engender the actual embodied experience of emotions, with less labeling. Yet our healing is not as simple as casting off words entirely. Words never entirely go away, and reflecting this reality was crucial to my goals and vision. I was attempting to make “the medium the message”: I wanted to use the presence of lack of music *structurally* and *metaphorically* in order to embody some of the ideas I was exploring.

Committing to this choice presented me with unexpected pedagogical benefits as a composer. Even arranging the spoken section was musical. I spent many hours rearranging the words in order to find the elusive “just right”; most of my changes had to do with rhythm, pacing, dynamics, form, and timbre, not semantic content. This opened my eyes to how these elements cross-modally apply to arts other than music. I became aware of form, rhythm, and repetition in a new way: as fundamental aspects of quotidian experience, as well as music, text, drama, dance, and visual art.

Artistic and compositional choices: Part 2 (“song” comprised of various pre-recorded voices and live improvisation)

After a while working with Emily Thorner’s voice and my voice (mainly through imagination, as well as through recordings initially intended as mock-ups), I realized I wanted to have other people’s sounding voices speaking some of the phrases from the survey. To this end, I got different volunteers to complete an exercise reading and recording various phrases aloud given different emotional prompts.²⁸³ Much as I did with the survey, I arranged these utterances in order that would be potentially cathartic or at least have some positivity or antidote at the end,

²⁸³ This was not the same people who completed the anonymous forms, to my knowledge, though it is possible that could occur.

speaking calmer, more accepting phrases. Thus the process would not only be to create a product, but would hopefully be an interesting and valuable process for the volunteers as well.

As for the music of Part II, I initially composed with a plan for Thorner and me to create a cumulative, clustery musical texture using looper pedals. However, I eventually realized that this technological mediation would detract from my goals, and I pivoted to craft the sung “accompaniment” as fixed media instead (along with snippets of spoken speech). This would free our live performance to be more responsive and improvisatory, and would also enable a thicker total texture. This change required many additional steps, including gathering and manipulating dozens of recordings of mine and Thorner’s voices in addition to the spoken texts I was gathering, and massive changes to the score’s role as a document. However, it enabled me to give the musical background more definition and nuance. I moved away from the idea of accruing massive residues of “feeling” through tones, and toward crafting an emotional journey through harmony, texture, and timbre. Spoken words would still be present in Part II as well, both in the fixed media and live performance. However, day by day I found myself stripping these phrases out to be sparser.

To connect to my scholarly research for a moment, I viewed the fixed media texture as an interesting meld of persona and environment. Though it was a sonic “background” for the live performers, who will tend to be a focus or “foreground,” my use of exclusively voices in the “background” gives that tapestry a hybrid quality. The presence of spoken voices in that recorded media, and the fact that Thorner and I responded to them live, suggests that these voices, though remote, are personae not just environment—are partners with us in a complex texture rather than a mere background or accompaniment. In fact, at times it may be unclear where a given sound or phrase is coming from, since mine and Thorner’s voices are present in the fixed media as spoken

and sung entities, too. What is live or recorded? Who is speaking and singing what parts? I hoped these experiences of ambiguity would suggest complex blendings of self and other, which was part of my overall goal of connection, empathetic identification, and healing.

Thorner's and my relationship with the recorded texture and one other continued to evolve through rehearsal and performance. Many decisions about the live improvisation changed in the final days of working together in person. Although I had prepared and notated what I thought I wanted, it was only through actually interacting and sounding the piece that the "right" choices finally settled in. The score presented later in this document represents where I landed for the April 2024 performances, but I envision this project as ongoing and flexible—even protean and modular. The participatory Google Form about self-image remains open, and I hope to circulate it more and get many more submissions. I hope to develop different versions of the piece over time, offering different options for Part 1 both in terms of how many performers there are and in the specific thematic content of the "monologues." It is even an option to completely omit Part 1, and only perform Part 2. In any case, the fixed media and improvisational guidelines for Part 2 will remain the same, reflecting that this section explores more universal themes and processes, regardless of the more specific nature of Part 1. I also intend to create a version of Part 2 that works on its own as fixed media.

Throughout this process, I made myself vulnerable in a very real sense. I chose to put myself in a position to have to publically speak hateful and embarrassing things. Though I suspected and even intended that this would be the case when I first designed the project, it was certainly not easy; even the process of silently reading submissions was more difficult than I'd anticipated. As the performance approached, I felt real discomfort and fear, and even wanted to "bail." I still felt unsure in terms of my ongoing questions about toeing the line of vulnerability

and the personal into “complaining” or “whining,” and potential judgments about the work being oversharing or narcissism, perhaps even “not art.” Ultimately, this is a subjective distinction where people draw their lines wildly differently, as is their right—though I also believe these judgments have strong gendered, potentially misogynistic, implications. Regardless, I ultimately had to listen to my *own* voice—to where *I* drew that line. I definitely felt I was toeing it, teetering on the edge. The week of the performance, I debated omitting the monologues and presenting only the second part of *Un/titled* on its own. However, I chose to be responsive to the situation and person(s) in front of me: Emily Thorner repeatedly asked me to keep the monologues in. I, too, felt something “click” and “feel right” the moment we tried them for the first time, and others who happened to be in the hall expressed something similar. I decided to leave them in the piece.

Questions & quandaries

Some people have raised questions about my responsibility to the audience in the case of *Un/titled*, and especially what situations such a direct presentation of unadorned words in Part 1 might create. I was very focused on my responsibility to the people who had participated in the project. Because I had sourced real-world text, I felt a larger connection and responsibility to these words. I had created something that was no longer only “mine.” The project became less abstract: these were the real words of real people, some of whom expressed excitement at having a chance to share their experience but have someone else “be our voice,” as one respondent put it. This gave me a sense of real meaning, but also great responsibility. As mentioned earlier, I felt it was important to let the main themes of the surveys speak relatively unadorned at first, arranged thoughtfully and performed with as much empathy and embodied inhabiting as possible—so, more as drama than as music. I did not feel ethically okay with chopping up the words beyond recognition without first hearing them intact. (Such a treatment is also not within my main

aesthetic as a composer). Also, I believed that hearing the utterances as dramatic text first was what would make the transformation, the envoicing, the music, more meaningful.

Still, the question can be raised as to whether *Un/titled* is better suited to a different context, such as a blackbox theater: an environment in which the piece's existence as music-drama, including a spoken "scene," would be less surprising. This might be especially important given the sensitive subject matter of the piece. This question is aesthetic—that is, what will be successful in achieving my communicative goals?—but may also have an ethical valence for some people. They might ask: What is appropriate or responsible to present in a concert hall, where audience members may have certain expectations, including, perhaps, not being directly confronted with personal texts? First, I should note that these are not my expectations when entering a performance, having attended and enjoyed performances blurring these lines. I have often been excited by the ideas of works that involve transgression, boundary-blurring, and cross-pollinating, perhaps even involving audience participation. I believe this is because of my personal experience and positionality, which involved growing up during an era of globalization as a consumer of various art and media rather than being steeped in specific, intentional communities surrounding the creation of music within a specific tradition. Of course, I know I have norms and cultures of art embedded in my values and approach, no matter how idiosyncratic or disparate they are. However, they relate less to concert music traditions and more to those of theater, musical theater, and dance, since that is where more of my formative experiences reside. I view this positionality as a strength—a form of diversity I bring as a contemporary composer.

Some people might claim that *Un/titled* violates the boundaries or definitions of art in some way. Does it treat subjects in a way that is too direct, approaching something resembling therapy, and does it fail to maintain the safe boundaries that art provides? Again, in my

experience, these lines are not so clearly defined. While I did aim to construct a sonic form of catharsis, perhaps even “healing,” this is something I believe art can do anyway, even in more traditional pieces. It is something my favorite works do, and it is something I have experienced time and again when taking in music, even when the work doesn’t explicitly take mental health or catharsis as a theme. *Un/titled* is more obvious about this potentiality, but still ultimately artistic in how it attempts its goals of catharsis.

Moreover, I believe that when a work is presented on a stage and situated in an artistic context where the audience gets to be a somewhat-private observer, there is a form of safety to that. Even as this special situation can also engender a virtual closeness that makes these experiences potentially moving, even transformative, there is protection in being the observer, not a discloser. I believe the paradox of distance and closeness, and of safety and danger, is exactly what enables us to encounter painful subjects in the arts in such a unique way. Much like children’s play, the experience of art is both real and not real, us and not us. In the case of *Un/titled*, many of these framing parameters remained intact, even as I tested some boundaries. The maintenance of the fourth wall retains some separation: the audience members were watching and listening to someone *else* onstage and could remain silent in their seats, and were not forced to offer up their own words or subjectivity (which I believe would indeed blur the line between art and group therapy session). In a therapeutic context, a different type of consent would be required, but so would a different form of participation. And though the texts in *Un/titled* are all from real respondents, the piece also still has elements of fiction, which creates another layer of safety: as the program notes make clear, the text has been significantly shaped and does not mainly derive from the performers. Indeed, my program notes for *Un/titled* do crucial framing work, explaining the piece’s somewhat unusual process, providing a content warning, and even

allowing the audience members the opportunity to view the survey questions, or even take the survey themselves, by scanning a QR code. This empowers audience members to leave the hall ahead of time, should it be content they think might be too charged for them.

Of course, there is a wide range of personal experiences a person can have in response to these framing and preparatory gestures, and to the piece itself. The program notes and content warning might not be enough to prepare some listener-viewers. I am empathetic to this question and will continue to consider it in the future. There may be other ways to frame *Un/titled* (though doing so without impinging on the work itself will certainly be tricky). However, I do *not* believe that leaving this piece out of the concert hall entirely, as a sort of preemption of potential discomfort, would be appropriate. To do so would be inauthentic to my beliefs about emotion, connection, and what art is meant to do. It would also be to abnegate what I see as artists' sacred duty to experiment and integrate new ideas into their works such that they not only "comfort the disturbed" but also "disturb the comfortable."²⁸⁴ Furthermore, I believe that preemptively choosing to keep this piece out of the concert hall would be patronizing to audience members—that it would constitute making a decision *for* them.

I will keep asking these questions, always striving to remain open-minded. Certainly, I wouldn't have sought to create a piece like *Un/titled* if I didn't believe that art, including music, had substantial ethical implications. How much do the physical space, the title, the printed program format, and other framing elements that are present at a "concert" or "show" create expectations in the attendees? These are open questions that I would like to discuss further with people in intentional relationship and in compassionate, open-minded dialogue.

²⁸⁴ This refers to a quote often attributed to the street artist Banksy, but originally comes from the poet Cesar A. Cruz.

After two years, my project's original questions remain. One emerges as more relevant than ever: What constitutes "new music" or "contemporary classical music" versus... something else?

Is the direct, semantically-intact use of words acceptable in this context as long as they are still sung, not spoken (as is the case in most art song, popular song, folk song, opera, and musical theater)?

Is the direct, semantically-intact use of words, even if spoken, acceptable as long as the content is not too personal, quotidian, sensitive, or triggering?

... Or as long as some form of music is also sounding along with them?

And when and where is there an *ethical* dimension at play, versus only a philosophical, aesthetic, or practical one?

When is respecting a boundary or norm an act of care for others, and when is it an example of my socialization to please and play small, as girls and women have often been expected to do?

In other words, are there some boundaries that truly shouldn't be crossed, and who gets to decide?

For me, these questions and concerns reiterate the importance of making music and art in genuine community, where actual discussion of such questions and values is possible. After all vulnerability is only possible in the context of relationship, though the nature of that relationship can vary. I have realized that the virtual, imagined, or alienated states of relationship that sometimes exist in contemporary classical music—which have been exacerbated by world events

like COVID-19 in recent years—are often uncomfortable and unsatisfying for me. *Dear Daughter* was one attempt to redress this, as was *Un/titled* (albeit in drastically different ways).

This project as a whole, and especially *Un/titled*, also resurrected questions about where my compositions involving music and text should live. While I will continue to write instrumental music, art songs, choral works, and musical dramas, I wonder whether my more experimental engagement with music and text—especially self-authored text—may reside better in worlds typically categorized as “theater” and/or “popular music.” Perhaps direct address involving personal, explicitly vulnerable content is indeed less of a good “fit” with the contemporary concert music hall. I personally do not feel this is the case, but I also acknowledge that I exist in society with other people, whose experiences I must consider. I certainly want to present my works in contexts where they will be most welcome, and most able to do their expressive-connective work.

These tensions remain unresolved. Perhaps this is inevitable when we choose to make ourselves vulnerable by creating and sharing art.

Performances, Sound Files & Scores

Links to streaming video of performances

Fontanelle: <https://youtu.be/0ZirQWfF5XI?t=2065>

Bride's Lament: <https://www.cincinnati-songinitiative.org/events/let-it-be-new-23>; start at 29:30)

We: <https://youtu.be/OE0o8wleMbw?t=1732>

Dear Daughter: <https://youtu.be/PxhCOKjGw4s?t=1485>

Un/titled: <https://youtu.be/bLDgaVvocsA?t=2623>

**Link to folder of downloadable files of performances for the first four pieces,
& fixed media track for *Un/titled***

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WQnOHIa1aS7rE6GlmJx9aWan3ApfM62d?usp=sharing>

Scores begin on the next page.

Emily Joy Sullivan

Fontanelle

For the Magela Herrera quartet + additional voices

2023

ca. 7'

Instrumentation

Voice doubling C flute (Magela) **it's also an option for Magela to be only on flute, and Emily to sing**
 Upright bass
 Piano
 Drum kit
 Optional additional voices (1-3; Emily provides)

Notes

Hi, Magela Herrera Quartet!

I was so inspired by you, and by Afro-Cuban idioms! I came up with something that is a fusion of that and singer-songwriter traditions.

This is a score that is through-composed and fully written out, other than some piano parts. I am open to changes but I wanted you to have a clear vision documented. I also can easily add in all the chord symbols, and make any other changes you'd like. If there's anywhere you are finding the texture too thick or busy, you're also welcome to cut parts out. Band members can also join in on the "take me"s at the chorus – it is a mambo, after all!

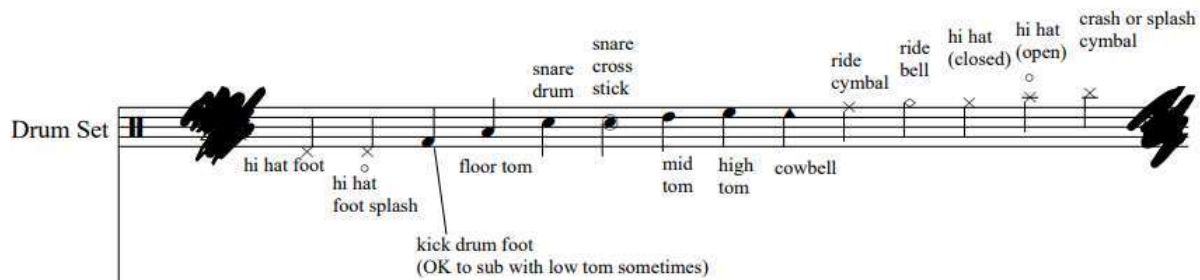
PS: Fontenelle = the "soft spot" on a baby's head.

Voice / Flute:

This is intentionally in a very speaky, singer-songwriter style.

Percussion:

Notation:



-I don't use the + symbol for hi hat; assume closed unless given the o for open

-I don't notate rims, nor toms, but feel free to take liberties, especially in the Mozambique groove.

I'm totally open to your changes and expertise! Obviously you know Mambos and Mozambique grooves better than me!

NOTE: Pitzer is a very live hall for drums/perc - we often don't even mic them compared to other band members - so you may find you need to pull back some of the splashiness I've written in.

Piano:

The piano is the only part I leave largely to fill in with improvisation. Please feel free to revoice, place notes higher in the range to give Magela's voice room to be heard, etc.

Bass:

I had a lot of fun with this! But some of my octave placements might not be the best at times, including for balance and steering clear of Magela's voice. Take liberties!

Inquiries?

Contact the composer: emilyjoysullivan@gmail.com

Score, ca. 7'

FONTANELLE

Emily Joy Sullivan (b. 1987)

INTRO

Moderately Fast, ♩ = 112

2-3 son clave throughout

Mozambique groove

Drum Set

mf

Contralto 1

tacet

improvise using mainly held chords at first,
then allowing more activity

F maj9

F9

Piano

mf

8va--

Upright Bass

D. S.

4

F add2add#11

F maj9

F9

Pno

(8va)--

Bass

mf

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FONTANELLE

9 **VERSE**
2-3 son clave

verse 1: as written, maybe integrating some toms along with cowbell.
verse 2: clave is just a guide; more activity, splashier timbres, maybe related to the chorus (it should still be less active than the chorus, but not so drastic a difference as is written.)

8

D. S.

Vce 1

Pno

Bass

mp

mf

mp

mp

Fadd2add#11 F7 F9

1st verse: minimal improvisation, mainly just support with chords
2nd verse: more activity

1st verse: minimal - spare - just the root as a little punctuation, at first
2nd verse: more active, like other sections (improvise)

A ri - ot of col-or _____ was in _____ the streets;
then yousee this ba-by, withhis la - zy ba - by neck;

11

D. S.

Vce 1

Pno

Bass

mf

F7 F11 B♭add2

the kids were full of _____ their tricks and _____ their treats, and you are watch-ing from the door...
he cries, he gig - gles; he is - n't _____ world - wear - y yet, he has - n't learned to numb,

FONTANELLE

17

use more ride cymbal and bell along with the cowbell, bringing in more notes to lead to Mozambique groove that's coming in a few measures

14

D. S.

Vce 1

Pno

Bass

8

feel an urge for some-thing more... You're thir - sty, you're sat-ed; you're
has-n't learned to play dead... His head lays so eas-y, there,

f *mp subito*
mf

B^bsus B^bsus A^badd2 F7

f *mf*

f *mf*

18

D. S.

Vce 1

Pno

Bass

8

hun-gry then you're full; the world just keeps spin-ning... the push and the pull, and you're not
on his moth-er's chest, he's dressed up like El-vis... you just can't help your-self, you

(moving into Mozambique groove)

F9 F7 F9add4

4

FONTANELLE

Mozambique groove

21

D. S.

Vce 1

sure you like the ride...
have to crack a smile... so pull the wool o - ver your eyes...
and then the King smi - les back

Pno

B \flat add2 B \flat add4 B \flat add4

Bass

25 PRECHORUS

pull back to a subtler but still-intense Mozambique groove with cowbell and rims and toms; less splashy metals at first

24

D. S.

Vce 1

Ev' - ry night's a par - ty, ev - ry day's a blur,
Cuz the cry - ing of a ba - by's not an ex - i - sten - tial cry. He

Pno

A \flat add2/B \flat more activity / improvisation here

Bass

f *mf subito* *f* *mf subito* conversational, speaky up until the Chorus

FONTANELLE

bring in more busy-ness / splashy metals
 leading up to chorus - especially ride bell,
 to prep it being prominent in the Chorus

27

D. S.

Vce 1

8

as you sniff a - round for the Next New Thing...
 might be ask - ing quest - ions, but he isn't asking "Why?"

You ad - vo - cate _ the de - vil, pre -
 You wan - na go _ pre - ver - bal, you're

Pno

Bass

mf subito

30

D. S.

Vce 1

8

tend that it's _ a game, you find _ the warm - est bo - dy, ask her "Please..."
 long - ing to _ go limp, for the first time, _ you start to pray...

Pno

Bass

f

G 13/B Cadd2 N.C. G7

33 CHORUS

Mambo (2-3 son)

Musical score for the first system (measures 33-40). The score includes parts for D. S., Vce 1, Pno, and Bass. The D. S. part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks. Vce 1 has lyrics "take-me, ah,". The Pno part includes chords F9, F7, and F13#11. The Bass part has an 8va marking and a forte (f) dynamic.

Musical score for the second system (measures 36-43). The score includes parts for D. S., Vce 1, Vces 2, Pno, and Bass. Vce 1 and Vces 2 have lyrics "take-me, ah,". The Pno part includes chords F9 and F7. The Bass part has an 8va marking and a forte (f) dynamic.

FONTANELLE

41 TRANSITION

39 this can be thinned out or made more subtle.

D. S. *ff* *mp subito, intenso!*

Vce 1 *mf subito* But/they tell you that you're priv-ileged, but you're

Vces 2 *p* ahh...

Pno just straight chords or improvise - quieter but stay in a wide range in order to maintain drama
F m7 F 7
ff *mp subito, intenso!*

Bass *ff* *mp subito, intenso!*

42

D. S. *f*

Vce 1 *f* lon-ely none - the-less, you long to be more hon-est, but who would ev-er guess? You

Vces 2 mm/ah...

Pno F 9 Fm7/Ab Fadd4/Bb *f*

Bass *f*

8
45

FONTANELLE

D. S. *mf subito, intenso!*

Vce 1
choose to keep your dis-tance. You make ___ a snide ___ re - mark, use hu-mor ___ to pro-tect your self from the

Vces 2 *mp*
ah...

Pno *mf subito, intenso!*
Fm7 F7 F9/G Fm7/Ab
(8^{va})

Bass *mf subito, intenso!*

49

D. S. *f*

Vce 1 *ff*
joy that ne - ver comes... You'd ra-ther be ___ half heart-ed than a lit-tle bit ___ ex - posed, and

Vces 2 *mf*
Ah...

Pno *f*
Fadd4/Bb Fm7 F7 F9
(8^{va})

Bass *f*

FONTANELLE

51

D. S.

Vce 1

Vces 2

Pno

Bass

noth-ing's___ ev-er vul-nera-ble if ev'-ry thing's a joke... Oh, Oh... Oh...

fff *mf* *f*

Fm7/A \flat Fadd4/B \flat C7/B \flat (stay away from low range for a bit)

54

D. S.

Vce 1

Vces 2

Pno

Bass

ah...

f *f* *f*

Fadd2add#11 Fadd2add#11 Fadd2add#11

FONTANELLE

58 GROOVE SECTION / SOLOS

still mambo for now

(but splashier, with open hats)

57

D. S.

Vce 1

Vces 2

Pno

Bass

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

TO FLUTE

Fadd2add#11

F9

Dm7

E7addb9

60

D. S.

Fl.

Pno

Bass

mf subito

play with the technique - I love what you do in two sidewalks with the shorter, punchier notes!

mf

mf subito

tacet

F9

Dm7

E7addb9

FONTANELLE

63

D. S.

Fl.

Pno

Bass

66

D. S.

Fl.

Pno

Bass

mp subito

mp *f* *mf*

F9 Dm7 E7addb9 F9

FONTANELLE

70 Any of these 4-bar sections can be repeated more than 2 times and improvised over, at the band's discretion.

Rock groove!

vary open and closed hats; maybe you could work up to this many open ones

69

D. S. *f* *p sub.* *mp*

Fl. *f* *fiercely!* **tacet**

Pno *f* *mp solo* *mf*

Bass *f* *p sub.* *mp*

Chords: Dm7, E7addb9, F, D13(b9), E7(b13)

right hand may be changed or omitted; left hand is more important

74

(continue playing with open versus closed hi hat)

72

D. S. *p sub.* *mp*

Fl. *mf solo* *f*

Pno *mp solo* *mf* *mp subito*

Bass *p sub.* *mp*

Chords: F, F7, F7, Cm7, E7addb9, F7add#11, Cm9/F

from here I definitely think you could play with this more than written

FONTANELLE

75

D. S. *mf* *p sub.*

Fl. flutter or growl *mf*

Pno *mf* *mp subito*
 Cm9/F Dmin7b9 Eb7/G E7addb9 F7add#11 Cm9/F

Bass *mf* *p sub.*

78 Mozambique groove (2-3 son)

play with open versus closed hi hats

77

D. S. *mf*

Fl. *mf*

Pno *mf*
 D13(b9)

Bass *mf*

80

D. S.

Fl.

Pno

Bass

82

second time 8vb (or other change at your discretion)

83

D. S.

Fl.

Pno

Bass

growl / flz

growl / flz

86 **back to Rock Groove**

but splashier -
more cymbals on offbeats

Musical score for measures 86-88. The score includes parts for D. S., Fl., Pno, and Bass. The D. S. part features a rhythmic pattern with cymbal marks (x) on offbeats. The Fl. part has a melodic line starting at measure 86 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Pno part has a bass line with chords marked 'F' and a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Bass part has a melodic line starting at measure 86 with a forte solo (*f solo*) dynamic.

Musical score for measures 89-91. The score includes parts for D. S., Fl., Vce I, Pno, and Bass. The D. S. part continues with the rhythmic pattern, marked *poco accel.* with a dashed line. The Fl. part has a melodic line starting at measure 89 with a forte (*f*) dynamic, ending with a box labeled 'to VOICE'. The Vce I part has a melodic line starting at measure 89. The Pno part has a bass line with chords marked 'Fm7', 'F7', and 'F9'. The Bass part has a melodic line starting at measure 89.

94 RETRANSITION

Militaristic Rock Groove that gradually morphs back into Mambo

a tempo
Militaristic in its tightness, then accumulating more and more freedom and splashy sounds / rims

92

D. S. *ff* *mp* *p sub.*

Vce 1 *mp* conversational, but crisp
We, who hide our hurt and

Pno *ff* *tacet*

Bass *ff* *p sub.*

95

D. S. *mp*

Vce 1 *mf*
keep our heads e-rect; We, so ea-ger to en-list... and de-lect.

Vces 2 *ppp*

Pno *p* *mmm...*

Bass *mp*

98 if not following exact notation, try to put closed sounds more in the early half of the bar and phrase, and allow splashier sounds / open hats more in second half of the bar. **FONTANELLE**

D. S.

Vce 1
mp We, who de-ny our-selves, then "o-ver in-dulge," We, who throw our stones but crave
f
mf

Vces 2
mp
 throw our stones

Pno
mp
 F m7 F 7 F 9 F m7/A b
 very minimal at first; do more fills and activity as the section progresses.

Bass
 98 (8va)

102 (I have the hi hat switching to hands now, but whatever works)

D. S.

Vce 1
 101 un-con-di-tion-al love... We, who waste our time pre-tend-ing not to care; We,
f
p

Vces 2
 We...

Pno
 101 G 13/F G F m7 F 7 F 9
mf intensify / more activity

Bass
 101
mf

18
104

FONTANELLE

106

D. S. *f*

Vce 1 *ff*
lick our wounds and hide our faults build cast-les in the air. We who crane our necks and throw our stones and

Vces 2 *mf*

Pno *f*
Fm7/A^b G13/F G7 Fm9 F9

Bass *f*
(8va)

107

D. S. *ff*

Vce 1 *ff*
switch to head voice; soften
wrap our - selves in tact, We ___ for - get our - selves... ___

Vces 2 *ff*
ah....

Pno *ff*
F9 Fm7/A^b F13(#11)/B

Bass *ff*

112 Mambo

110 *poco rit.* ----- **Slightly Faster,** ♩ = 116

D. S.

Vce 1
We lead our-selves a-way — in - stead of back.

Vces 2
Ah, take - me,
play with mixing around these figures, different ranges,
etc. - not verbatim the same as Chorus 1 and 2.
F9 F7

Pno
wild, intense to build into the final chorus

Bass

113

D. S.

Vce 1
OR go to FLUTE
ah,

Vces 2
ah,

Pno
F 13(#11)

Bass

20

FONTANELLE

116

D. S.

Vce 1

Vces 2

Pno

Bass

take-me, ah, ah,

f relaxed

f relaxed

f relaxed

f relaxed

f relaxed

8

F9 F7 Bb

3

120 If desired, this could be repeated more than 2x,
 playing with omitting some parts sometimes.

119

D. S.

Vce 1

Vces 2

Pno

Bass

take-me, ah, ah,

take-me, ah,

play with mixing around these figures, different ranges,
 etc. - not verbatim the same as Chorus 1 and 2.

F9 F7

F sus4add2

8va

FONTANELLE

21

122

D. S.

Vce 1

Vces 2

Pno

Bass

8

take-me,

take-me,

F 13(#11)

F 9

F 7

(8va)

125

D. S.

Vce 1

Vces 2

Pno

Bass

8

ah,

ah,

F 7

Bb

3

Emily, Joy Sullivan

Bride's Lament

For soprano

2023

ca. 7'00"

Notes

General:

Though initially inspired by the composer's own experience with wedding planning, the piece synthesizes many others' experiences, as witnessed over the course of a year following bridal groups on social media. It is envisioned as the last song of an eventual three-song cycle exploring the beauty-, diet-, and wedding-industrial-complexes.

Vocalist:

The performer is encouraged to stage the song as if were an aria or musical theater scene. Optional elements of interaction with the pianist are written into the score, and interaction with the audience is welcome as well.

You might have fun imagining that the character herself is a musical theater lover! Here are just a few of my many inspirations (some of which are quoted or referenced in the song): "Adelaide's Lament" and "Alto's Lament"; *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*; *The Last Five Years*; "Glitter and be Gay."

In the fast, pattery sections, the performer is empowered to speak any phrase where it feels dramatically appropriate or more comfortable vocally.

Pianist:

Pedal indications are not dictated; the pianist is invited to use their artistry and common sense to pedal in a way that serves the dramatic aims of the piece.

Inquiries?

Contact the composer: emilyjoysullivan@gmail.com

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Score, ca. 7'00"

BRIDE'S LAMENT

Commissioned by the National Association of Teachers of Singing and Cincinnati Song Initiative, with major support from Lori Laitman

Recitative, freely ca. ♩ = 76

Emily Joy Sullivan (b. 1987)

The score consists of four systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (Soprano or Soprano) and a piano accompaniment (Piano or Pno.).

System 1: Soprano part begins with *mf* brightly. The lyrics are: "I used to laugh when peo-ple said, 'a wed-ding is so much work!'". The piano accompaniment starts with *mp* and features a triplet in the right hand.

System 2: Soprano part continues with the lyrics: "It's just a par-ty! How bad could it be?:" I'd say, with a satis-fied smirk. But". The piano accompaniment features a triplet in the right hand.

System 3: Tempo marking: **Slower, stricter; ♩ = 72**. Soprano part lyrics: "now that I'm the one do-ing it, I have to ad-mit it's true; _____". The piano accompaniment starts with *mf* and features a triplet in the right hand.

System 4: Tempo marking: **Slightly slower, deliberate. ♩ = 68**. Soprano part lyrics: "Plan-ning a wed-ding in the mod-ern day — is de - signed to tor-ture you...". The piano accompaniment starts with *f* and includes an *accel.* marking with a dashed line.

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2
8 *accel.* ----- *rit.* -----

Bride's Lament

S

Pno.

Detailed description: This musical score is for a section titled 'Bride's Lament'. It features a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The piano part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand and a melody in the right hand. The melody includes several triplet markings (3) and a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) in the right hand. The tempo markings are *accel.* (accelerando) and *rit.* (ritardando), indicated by dashed lines above the staff.

10 Moderately, ♩ = 72 (= Tempo I)

mf *matter-of-fact*

S

10 First you need your ven-dors, that much is clear. There's so much to choose, it takes you all year, get

Pno.

p *pert, crisp, background*

Detailed description: This is the first system of a 'Moderately' section. It includes a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The piano part has a consistent eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand and a melody in the right hand. The vocal line starts at measure 10 with the lyrics 'First you need your ven-dors, that much is clear. There's so much to choose, it takes you all year, get'. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) and the instruction *pert, crisp, background*. The tempo is marked as 'Moderately' with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute, and it is equal to 'Tempo I'.

12

S

mar-ried in a church or a park or a club, you can have a plat-ed din-ner or a ta-co truck.

Pno.

mf

Detailed description: This is the second system of the 'Moderately' section. It includes a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The piano part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment and melody. The vocal line starts at measure 12 with the lyrics 'mar-ried in a church or a park or a club, you can have a plat-ed din-ner or a ta-co truck.'. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and some accents (>) on notes in the right hand.

14 *mf* *again, starting sunnily!*

S

Once you've got your food and drink, you're al-most done! HA. that's-what YOU think.

Pno.

p

tr.

Detailed description: This is the third system of the 'Moderately' section. It includes a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The piano part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment and melody. The vocal line starts at measure 14 with the lyrics 'Once you've got your food and drink, you're al-most done! HA. that's-what YOU think.'. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) and trills (*tr.*) in the right hand.

Bride's Lament

3

16

S

So much stuff that you might for - get... that's when you make a BIG mis-take:

Pno.

18

S

ask the in - ter - net! How a - bout a ne - on sign — of your name?

Pno.

freely, but quick

19 a tempo OR slightly slower
mf dramatic, diva

mp cheesy!

20

S

How a - bout a wall — of champ - agne? How 'bout a D J who brings his own fog?

Pno.

mf more matter-of-fact

8va

22

S

How 'bout a cock - tail named for your dog?

Pno.

4
23 *accel.* ----- **Bride's Lament**

S

Pno. *p* *mf*

This musical score for 'Bride's Lament' features a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The piano part begins with a dynamic of *p* and gradually increases to *mf*. The tempo is marked as *accel.* with a dashed line. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 3/4.

25 **Reverent, Stately.** ♩ = 68 - 72
mf reverent! glorious!

S

Pno. *mp* broad, lyrical

Love is pat - ient, love is kind. Love costs twice as much

This musical score for 'Reverent, Stately' includes a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 68 - 72. The piano part is marked *mp* and described as 'broad, lyrical'. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 3/4.

S

Pno.

when it's wed - ding time. Love does - n't en - vy, it is not proud,

This system continues the vocal line (S) and piano accompaniment (Pno.) for 'Reverent, Stately'. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 3/4.

S

Pno.

accel. -----

love is the choice that sat - is - fies the crowd. So go a -

This system concludes the vocal line (S) and piano accompaniment (Pno.) for 'Reverent, Stately'. The piano part includes a tempo change to *accel.* with a dashed line. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 3/4.

35 ♩ = 69 (Slower than Tempo I) Bride's Lament

5

mf proper, genteel, speaky

S

head, take my mo-ney! Make this ea-si-er on me! Make it ev'-ry thing my mo-ther ev-er wan-ted it to be;

Pno.

Suddenly faster, ♩ = 100

f smarmy

S

Yes I'm get-ting mar-ried! Yes I'll pay your fee! Come and make a dol-lar off of

Pno.

accel.

S

me. Come and make a dol - lar off of

Pno.

43 ♩ = 80 (Faster than Tempo I)

S

me.

Pno.

f

p subito

Bride's Lament

6
45

S

mf

Pno.

mp *mf*

tr

3

tr

3 3 3 3

Now

♩ = 72 (Tempo I)

47

S

who could for - get? Per - haps you can guess. The most im - por - tant thing? Your wed - ding dress!

Pno.

mp

tr

49

S

As you stand in front of peo - ple who you have - n't seen for years,

Pno.

tr

sinister, ominous

tr

51

S

try to look hot AND bring your dad to tears. Ball gown, mer - maid, fit - ted or trum - pet.

Pno.

f

marcato

Bride's Lament

53

S

Em - pire, drop - waist, a - line or cor - set; Long sleeved, cap sleeve, sleeve - less AGH.

53

Pno.

sim.

55

S

time to grab your friends and try some on. So ma - ny o - pin - ions, you can't hear your own! the at -

55

Pno.

f

f chaotic

6

57

S

en - dan'ts a witch and she's star ing you down. Then she says it, the thing you've been dread - ing:

57

Pno.

Slightly slower, marcato

59

S

judgy!

"Do you plan to lose weight for the wed - ding?"

59

Pno.

conspicuous silence; staring daggers!

8
61 Back to ♩ = 72

Bride's Lament

mf ... possibly less "reverent and glorious," this time!

S

Love is pat - ient. Love is kind. Love is grit - ting your teeth

Pno.

mp broad, lyrical

S

when it's wed - ding time. Love does - n't en - vy, it does not boast;

Pno.

gna

S

Love is the dress that "flat - ters" you the most. So may the road rise to

Pno.

take liberties / stretch time here **Piu mosso, ♩ = 76**

S

meet you, may the wind be ev - er at your back, may the

Pno.

Bride's Lament

73

S
sun shine — u - pon your face; and may you —

Pno.

75

S
spend fourteen hours searching for veils on Etsy and categorizing them by length, and type, and order of

Pno.

fast recitative, frantic yet crisp

76

S
pref' - rance... and wheth - er they're for the ce - re - mo - ny or the re -

Pno.

breathe dramatically
OR hold "nn"

ironically reverent.

77

S
cep - tion. — Now I have -

Pno.

resuming, but a bit off-kilter

accel. ----- *rit.* -----

79 ♩ = 66 (Tempo I or slower)

mf dramatic

S

se-ven hun-dred op-en tabs— on my phone, thir-ty se-ven e-mails from the ca-ter-ers, a lone...

Pno.

Broadening, ca. ♩ = 63

Suddenly faster, ♩ = 104

S

O-K! I sur-ren-der! and here's my plea: Come and make a dol-lar of-fa

Pno.

S

me. *growing angry* Come 'n make a dol-lar off of

Pno.

p kinda crazy

88

accel. ----- **Still fast, but loose; ca. ♩ = 100**

f intense, fed up

S 86 me... Some make a dol - lar off my

Pno. 86 *ff*

S 89 sense of ob - li - ga - tion. Some make a - dol - lar off my

Pno. 89 *f*

rit. -----

S 91 sheer o - ver - whelm - sion. Most make their mo - ney off my in - se - cur - i -

Pno. 91 *mf* *p*

Bride's Lament

Slower and quite free, ♩ = 72

rit. -----

94

S *p* *earnest*

ty, they say they'll make me beau-ti-ful... on the-

Pno. *p*

8va-

8va-

Slower, molto rubato, ♩ = 52

accel. ----- *rit.* -----

97

S

day I most need to feel — beau-ti-ful... and if

Pno. *ff*

♩ = 72 (Tempo I or faster)

100

S *f*

just for once you de-liv-er, if you

Pno. *f* *manic*

8va-

leave pedal down, allow it to get really blurry and heavy

Bride's Lament

101

S fin - all - y come through, _____

Pno. *tr*

(*8va*)

Manic, ♩ = 80

102

S I'll keep giv - ing my bus - iness to you! _____

Pno. *tr*

(*8va*) pedal normally

104

S *rit.* *brassy* I'll keep on fal - ling for _____ your

Pno. *tr*

*

106 **Motoric.** start painfully slow, ♩ = 52, then accel. and cresc. poco a poco

p *speaky, overarticulating, intense*

S gold - pressed in - vit - at - ions and the pup - py themed li - ba - tions, the

Pno. *sub. p*

Bride's Lament

14
107

S
thou - sand dol - lar dress - es with their months of al - ter - a - tions, the

Pno.

108 *mp*

S
for - ty strands of fai - ry lights and flow - ers for the fa - vors, fa -

Pno.

109 *mf*

S
109 for - ty se - ven Ma - son jars with cake in fif - ty fla - vors, the

Pno.

110

S
110 wa - ter - proof mas - ca - ra for my eye - lash im - plants,

Pno.

111

S
111 mic - ro - der - ma - bra - sion and Pi - la - tes ses - sions, a

Pno.

ca. ♩ = 72

Bride's Lament

15

S

112 gir - dle and a gus - set and a bust - le and some Spanx!...

Pno.

112 sloppy, jumpy

ff

(8^{va})

Optional "Spanx cadenza"! 10-15" (or skip to next measure)

S

113 (spoken): Now after all that, I'm holding out hope:

Pno.

116 Loose, quasi-recit, ♩ = 80

S

115 a per - son... a WO - MAN...

messy, dramatic (not perfect and "feminine!")

Pno.

115 *p*

Slower and quite free, ♩ = 72

S

118 could - de - cide to e - lope.

freely but matter-of-fact

Pno.

118

8^{va}

8^{va}

Emily Joy Sullivan



WE

For singing violist

OR

Voice and viola

2023

ca. 7'

Program notes (for the performer; not for the public)

I wrote *We* for my soon-to-be husband. After writing a tongue-in-cheek song about the odd and upsetting trials of wedding planning as a 21st-century bride, I wanted to focus on the other side of things. I was feeling grateful and awed at what my partner and I have, what it actually means to commit yourself to another person. Viola and voice were a perfect way to explore disparate entities joining, and the idea of making something new.

There is no hint of negative feeling in this piece, not because love and marriage don't have trials that need to be overcome... but because I wanted to create something that would be earnest, grateful, and meditative in this world that usually feels the opposite of that.

We is an ode, a promise, a place of rest, a comfort. It aims to shine a bit of light in the world.

Performance notes

Notation

Rhythmic notation is somewhat loose. Though it may be interpreted strictly in terms of quantized values, it is meant more in general sense of short and long and placement, with flexibility given to the performer. This is especially the case on the many fermatas that occur in the opening. Where the relationship with time is loosest, a durational goal is given. The tempo often = 60; my hope is that this aids in counting clocktime durations rather than quantized beats, but still gives you both options. Given the meditative nature of the piece, I also encourage you to do whatever feels right for the performer in the moment.

Vocal Timbre

Vocal tone may be breathy throughout. Overall, more "folksy" than classical, especially on low notes. Higher range can be more a folk or art song tone than vibrato/operatic tone.

The "ah" vowel that starts the piece should be a bright, warm "ah" sound that can easily transition to a hint of a "yuh" sound, or the word "I." It can even be somewhat nasal, especially in the beginning. Think about associations of morning, beginnings, and hopefulness.

Improvisation & Liberties

*The improvisation in the center section should be guided by expressive goals and in the moment response, like a meditation.

*In the event that any moments are too difficult to coordinate, freedom with the timing should be your first recourse; maintaining the mood is more important. Some of the timbral demands can also be simplified. Vowels may also be streamlined in some cases. For double stops, it is permissible for any note to be a harmonic if needed. Finally, as a last resort, the violist may revoice a multiple-stop or omit the highest note.

Questions?

Contact the composer: emilyjoysullivan@gmail.com

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Emily Joy Sullivan (b. 1987),
text and music

Slow, expansive, free. ca. ♩ = 52 *sempre rubato*

ca. 10 - 12" ca. 12-14"

pp warm and bright; loving meditation **

ah... ah...

circular bow*, starting from ord. position

Voice

Viola

pp

Piu Mosso, ♩ = 66

ca. 10"

3 *p*

ah... ah... oh...

ord.

Vla.

p

5 *p* *rit.* -----

oh → oo oh → oo ah

(ord.) → ST ord. → ST

Vla.

p flautando

poco accel. ----- **Faster, con moto**, ♩ = 80

7 *p* *mp* joyful, playing

(ah) mmm ah ee oo oo

ord. SP ST

Vla.

mp molto legato

*Assume this bowing continues until cancelled with "ord." Henceforth abbreviated "C.B."
 **Breath may occur before the end of the bar, and may be audible, albeit within the overall dynamic and mood.

we
rit. ----- $\text{♩} = 72$, then *accel. poco a poco* through m. 16)

9 ee oh, ah ee oo ee

Vla. *mp* *mf*

ord. → SP → ST → SP

$\text{♩} = 80$ $\text{♩} = 88$ $\text{♩} = 100$

11 ah ee oo ee ah oo ee ah oo ee (free play between ah, oo, and ee)

rapid C.B. between ord. molto ST and molto SP, generating lots of harmonics

Vla. *mf* *f*

ord. → SP → ST → SP

15

$\text{♩} = 108$ rit. ----- **Medium-Slow, with a bouyant, reverent energy. $\text{♩} = 66-72$ (still con rubato)**

14 (only oo and ee, freely) *f* *fervent* *p*

oo ee oo ee oo ee oo ee oo ee oo ee oo ee oo ee oo ee oo We are, We are,

molto SP ord.

Vla. *f* *p* *p flautando*

17 *mp* gentle, firm, even rit. ----- *mf*

We are a coup-le of birds in the hand, a coup-le a birds _____ in the hand, worth

Vla. *mp* *p* *mf*

$\text{♩} = 60$ *rit.* ----- **we** **Slow and free,** $\text{♩} = 40$

mp *p* 15" - 20"

20 *mp* *p*

mmore... worth more. mm.

Vla. *mp* S.T.

22 $\text{♩} = 100$, then a mix of fast and slow and with a very free relationship to time through the rest of this page

Vla. *pp subito* ST

flautando, sweet, "ooh"-y

--> Improvise around the pool of gestures below for at least 60". Above all, allow it to be calm and exploratory; improvisation as meditation, and as ode. You may reflect on something personal, or let the piece itself guide you. The rhythms should be interpreted in a relative sense, loosely, with free tempo.

Start with a quiet dynamic emerging from the prior measure, and embracing plenty of space / silence, lightness, sweetness; imagine fleeting things running through your fingers. Build over the minute or so, following the dynamic and mood, trajectory. Pull freely from among the gestures below in a non-linear fashion, but pull more from the right as the improvisation progresses, and transition into m. 26.

Voice: Timbre may vary from warm folksy and bright to a paler, "ooh"y sound. Any vowel may be used, and humming on "nn" is especially encouraged. Don't focus on text but if you feel inspired to use words, do it. Explore any / all registers, but err on the medium to high side of your range.

Viola: Timbral freedom encouraged, incorporate things like the "silent fingering" where indicated.

fluttery, delicate.

hushed, intimate

precious

sweet

shimmer

praising

questioning

tender

grateful

awed

proud

p

mf

silent fingering, Sul D (stop bowing)

silent fingering (stop bowing)

we

26 With growing intensity and cohesion, ♩ = 88

sub. *p*

mm, mmm, ah, ee,

ST ord. SP

Vla. sub. *p*

a tempo

With energy and a sense of arrival

A bit slower and more deliberate, ♩ = 88

mf glorious, celebratory

(I) (You) (We) (I) (You) (We) *f* (We) , (We) (I) (You) (We)

ah ee oo ee ah ee oo ee oo ee oo ee ah ee oo ee

rapid circular bowing; generate lots of harmonics

Vla. *f*

34

Slow, reverent, rubato ♩ = 52

lunga

pp tender; intimate *p*

we are, we are, we are... We are a

flautando until end of piece; circular bow on long notes at your discretion

Vla. *mp* *pp* delicate *p*

mp enjoy the nn; more a maternal hum than nasal

coup-le a birds in the hand (nn) - (d) worth

slow bow, drag hair on strings.

Vla. *mp*

Piu mosso, ♩ = 60

rit. ----- a tempo

we

5

37 *p* 3 *pp* rit. -----

more than an-y-thing. an-y-thing. nn.

Continue to explore slow bow and/or circular bowing on long notes at your discretion. The goal is to generate a lot of harmonics.

Vla. *p flautando*

Slower, ♩ = 52 (but feel more in duration than beats)

ca. 10-12"

ca. 8-10"

explore slowly-billowing crescendos and descrescendos freely, between pp and mp.

41 *pp* reverent, meditative

ah → ee → oo → ee, ah → ee → oo → ee,

continue to utilize flautando and circular bowing through the end of the piece, at your discretion.

flexible, free, SLOW play with the C string open versus harmonic C4

Vla. *pp* reverent, meditative

More energy, ♩ = 60

ca. 16-20"

43 *p* *pp*

ah → eeoo → ee, ah → eeoo → ee,

ord. → SP ST → ord.

Vla. *p* *pp*

45 Slow, ♩ = 52

at least 18"

(sneak in; not too much attack or clarity)

ppp (no more billowing)

(sneak out and back in as needed; there should be a breathy quality regardless.)

(dying out; fine to just stop whenever out of breath)

we.

45 *ppp*

Davis, California
2023

Emily Joy Sullivan

Dear Daughter

Flute, Vibraphone, Harp, Viola, & Cello



2024
ca. 6'45"

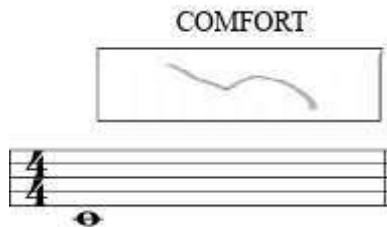
For Emphyrean Ensemble
UC Davis Ensemble in Residence

Performance Notes

Improvised gestures: Parentese” boxes

Most of *Dear Daughter* is through-composed and notated in a manner traditional to concert music. However, on occasion, I ask you to improvise a gesture guided by a given contour and expressive verb, inspired by the prosody of “parentese.” Parentese is the formal term for “baby talk,” which most of us seem to naturally adopt when speaking to infants. This type of vocalizing exaggerates the emotional content of spoken prosody and thereby helps with their development, speech acquisition, and general feelings of connection. (See further explanation in the “Programmatic Inspiration & Intention” section).

These parentese gestures are marked by a contour line in a box with an expressive indication above it:



The line loosely reflects the melodic gesture’s pitch contour. Beyond this, these gestures may:

- 1) **Draw from any notes in A major / f# aeolian.** Those of you on chordal instruments may find it easiest to draw from the notes you’ve just struck; when in doubt focus on F#, C#, G#.
- 2) **Be executed medium-high to high in the range.**
- 3) **Use as “round” and “pure” a timbre as is possible on your instrument, such that there are as few overtones as possible. For example, you might use flautando, harmonics, non vibrato, etc. “Head voice” may also be a useful comparison.**

The held note that continues underneath the box signifies that you can leave your underlying harmonic note to execute this gesture whenever within the bar, and return to it as well. It does not mean you need to somehow still hold the lower note!

Eventually, you will see these gestures transform into fixed figures.

Other FYI

***Enharmonics** carry through the bar.

***Flute: Aeolian sounds** - these are produced in playing position, not unpitched noise. For **multiphonics** (marked with “M.” and only occur in one short section), you may choose one that involves the pitches listed. (I have selected ones others have found to roughly exist, but ultimately it is up to you and your instrument. Also, in lieu of multiphonics, just the top notes there would be acceptable.

***Vibraphone:** You will need **two bows of your choice** and **four soft yarn mallets**. For **bowing**, you need not actually bow the entire length of the note; as long as it's still sounding via pedal that's fine (and will enable more dynamic variety / move to next note). When in doubt, assume to allow bleed rather than mute. For **pedaling**, assume plenty of pedal and bleed, especially in the middle section. Similarly, when in doubt, let vibrate / ring. Finally, for execution of the contour gestures, use of **rubber mallet to get pitch bending** would be one lovely option for getting less quantized pitch and a voice-like effect, but this is not required.

***Harp:** All tremolo marks denote bisbigliandi.

Programmatic Inspiration & Intention

(private - not for program notes, please do not share)

Dear Daughter was composed while reflecting on the decision to become a parent. Obviously, this topic is quite personal. Much of my work at UC Davis has focused on ways that the personal can be part of writing music – not only in

traditions that explicitly prize it (such as singer-songwriter work), but also in contemporary classical music.

The piece is inspired by various journal-like letters I wrote to an imagined future child, which really turned out to be letters to myself. I have included a curated, redacted, poem-ized version of these letters. This text is simply for reference and context, and may be used or *not* used at the performer's discretion. Within the given frame and time constraints of contemporary classical music, I wanted a way to offer something personal, rather than a disembodied act of abstraction – with the possibility of the performer making their own personal connection to it. This offering and asking is meant as a gesture of trust and vulnerability, which can, of course, be broken, refused, or denied.

I hope to have provided a rich field of affective and musical information for you to explore, within what is mostly clear and structured, and with material that does not pose too great a technical difficulty but is still interesting. Please do not hesitate to email me with any questions, issues, or feedback on the experience at **emilyjoysullivan@gmail.com**.

Thank you for joining me in one of my last experiments at UC Davis!

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I hope you are wild

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Dear Daughter,

I hope you feel solid

I hope you

stay soft

Score, ca. 6'45"

DEAR DAUGHTER

Emily Joy Sullivan (b. 1987)

3

Outside Time

Slow & very free, ca. ♩ = 60

14 - 18"

Flute

Vibraphone 1

Harp

Viola I

Cello

initial pedal:
D E F# G A B C#

arco

arco flautando

bisbig.

SOOTHE

pp *ppp* *pp*

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throughout this section, explore moving between 50% air/tone and 100% tone (ord) to bring vitality and variety to held notes. breathe as needed.

2

Fl. *boxed gestures arco, struck, or rubber ball mallet at your discretion* SOOTHE *arco* *irregularly rebow or change bow mid-bar, lightly reinvigorating note* *simile (free, irregular re-bowing on held notes)*

Vib. I *simile: irregularly, gradually, gently explore bisbigliandi with each chord.* COMFORT

Hp. *throughout this section, held notes may be reinvigorated with tremolo, ad lib.* COMFORT

Vla. I *occasional tremolo at your discretion to invigorate the note; shudder & shimmer* *pp* PRAISE

Vc.

8

Fl. PRAISE **11** *Piu Mosso, ♩ = 66* *mf* *p sub.*

Vib. I SOOTHE COMFORT *mf* *p sub.*

Hp. *(continue occasional bisbigliandi reinvigorations)* PRAISE *mp* SOOTHE *mf* *p sub.*

Vla. I SOOTHE QUESTION SOOTHE *mp* *mf* *p sub.*

Vc. *mp* *p sub.*

12

COMFORT

SOOTHE 3

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp.

Vla. I

Vc.

(continue optional timbral variations and invigorations)

mp

QUESTION

accel. -----

QUESTION

QUESTION

QUESTION

QUESTION

ENGAGE

SOOTHE

SOOTHE

16

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp.

Vla. I

Vc.

(flautando) → ord.

COMFORT

mp

p

mp

p sub.

p sub.

mf

mp

p sub.

ord.

ord.

4 *a tempo*
20 **Faster and more erratic, ♩ = 92**

Fl. *mf* *p* sub., murmuring

Vib. 1 *mf* switch to yarn mallets *sub. p* perseverating

Hp. *mf* QUESTION *sub. p* cajoling

Vla. I *f* sul tasto *sub. p* muttering

Vc. *mf* *sub. p* convincing

25 M.

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp. 3

Vla. I 3 *mf* 3

Vc. 3

29 Vacillating, stuck

As written (no extra invigoration)

M. M.

Fl. *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f*

Vib. I *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f*

Hp. *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.*

Vla. I *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f*

Vc. *mf* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f* *p sub.* *f*

accel. -----

32

Fl. *p sub.* *mf*

Vib. I *p sub.* *mf*

Hp. *mf*

Vla. I *p sub.* *mp* *p*

Vc. *p sub.* *f* *mp*

6

poco rit. *a tempo*

37

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp.

Vla. I

Vc.

f *mf* *f*

f *mf* *f*

f *mf* *f*

f *mf* *f*

f *mf* *f*

as fast as possible

42 Freely, plenty of rubato, ca. ♩ = 46
 Unconducted solo (quasi-cadenza)

Piu Mosso, ♩ = 52

Vib. 1

Vla. I

Vc.

mf dolce *> p* *mf* *> p*

pizz. *pp*

molto rall. -----

acolian (50% air, 50% pitch)

Fl. *ppp*

Vib. 1 *mp* *mf* *p sub.*

Hp. *mp*

Vla. I *ppp* *sneak in* arco flautando

Vc. *ppp* *sneak in*

if possible, bow held note

49

Piu Mosso, ♩ = 66

Fl.

Vib. 1 *mf* *> p* *mf* *> p* *mp*

Vla. I *pp* *p* *mp* *pp subito*

Vc. *pp* *p* *mp* *pp subito*

54 *accel.* Faster, anxious, ♩ = 90

Fl.

Vib. 1

sub. *p* *f* *pp subito*

Hp.

bisbig. *p* *f possible* *pp subito*

Vla. I

sul tasto *mp* sub. *p foggy*

Vc.

(harmonic refers to top note only) *mp* sub. *p foggy*

59

Fl.

pp

Vib. 1

mf

Hp.

p

Vla. I

Vc.

62 *accel.* -----

Fl. *f*

Vib. 1 *f*

Hp. *f*

Vla. I *f*

Vc. *f*

approximate / messy is fine
(this is more for the gesture)

64 Duet; freely, no conductor Slower, ♩ = 60

at least 10"

Fl.

Vib. 1 *mp subito* *p*

Hp. *p*

69 aeolian (50% air, 50% pitch)
ppp possible

69 bisbig.

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp.

74

Piu Mosso, ♩ = 66 poco accel.

73 ord.

73 *mp*

73 *mp*

73 *ppp sneak in*

73 *ppp sneak in*

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp.

Vla. I

Vc.

Slower again, ♩ = 60

78

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp.

Vla. I

Vc.

f *p sub.*

f *p sub.*

f *p sub.*

mf *p sub.*

82

Fl.

Vib. 1

Hp.

Vla. I

(still 50% air, 50% tone)

ppp

ebbing and flowing, stopping and starting, weaving...

ebbing and flowing, stopping and starting, weaving...

ppp

88 More emphatic, even mechanical

12

86

Fl. *pp* *p* *mp*

Vib. 1 *mp* *mf* *mp*

Hp. *mp* *mf* *mp*

89

Fl. *mf*

Vib. 1 *mf* *mf*

Hp. *mf* *mf*

91

Fl. *mf* *f*

Vib. 1 *f*

Hp. *f*

ord. *accel.*

91

Vla. I *p* *f*

Vc. *ppp* *ppp*

sul tasto; G string

94 *a tempo*

Fl. *f* overtaking

Vib. I *f* ruminating

Hp. *f* persuading

Vla. I *mf* perseverating
weave around C, C#, D, D#, E
(exact observation of this figure is not necessary)

Vc. *p* insinuating
sul tasto, G string

96

Fl. *ff*

Vib. I *ff*

Hp. *ff*

Vla. I *f* ord.

Vc. *f* *mp* ord.

14

98

Fl. *f*

Vib. 1 *f* *mp*

Hp. *f* *mp*

Vla. I *f* *mp* *sul tasto*

Vc. *sul tasto*

102

rit. ----- Like a heartbeat, ♩ = 50

100

Fl. *mp* *p*

Vib. 1 *p*

Hp. *p*

Vla. I *p*

Vc. *ppp* *sneak in*

103 SOOTHE at least 7"

Fl. *mp*

Vib. 1 arco *mp* COMFORT

Hp. *mp* COMFORT

Vla. I *mp* COMFORT

Vc. *p* SOOTHE *pp*

ord.

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains five staves. The Flute (Fl.) staff starts at measure 103 with a melodic line, marked *mp*, and includes a 'SOOTHE' marking with a box containing a wavy line. The Vibraphone (Vib. 1) staff is marked 'arco' and *mp*, with a 'COMFORT' marking and a box containing a wavy line. The Harp (Hp.) staff is marked *mp* and has a 'COMFORT' marking with a box containing a wavy line. The Viola (Vla. I) staff is marked *mp* and includes an 'ord.' (ordine) marking with an arrow pointing to the start of a phrase, and a 'COMFORT' marking with a box containing a wavy line. The Violoncello (Vc.) staff starts at measure 103, marked *p*, and ends with a *pp* marking and a 'SOOTHE' marking with a box containing a wavy line. A performance instruction 'at least 7"' is placed above the Flute staff.

Buffalo, NY
February 2024

Untitled

Text: Anonymous x 42 & Emily Joy Sullivan

Part 1: “Scene”
ca. 7'

Part 2: “Song”
ca. 7'

**A musico-dramatic work
for soprano, alto,
and fixed media voices**

ca. 14'

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PART I ("SCENE")

Initially, the piece is more dramatic than musical in the traditional sense. It need not be memorized - a sense of reading from submissions may even be a desirable performance choice - but it should be practiced such that there is a control of timing and pacing, with a sense of energy and intention. Play with contrast between the clarity of longer utterances with plenty of space between them versus times where the words can come faster, tumble on one another, perhaps interrupt or talk over one another. (The spacing of the text strives to reflect pacing to some degree, but this is ultimately up to the expressive discretion of the performers.)

Emotion and vocal timbre are your main resource here. Speaking the text with varied, genuine emotion is the most important thing. Other than occasionally, it should not just be a list.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PART 2 ("SONG")

In this section, we improvise using both text and tones, responding to one another and the recordings.

Part II should be a process of gradual "envoicing," wherein text begins to coexist with textless toning, then gestures, and eventually full motives that join with the text. The idea is that we are genuinely entering feeling now, not objectification, as we work with these words and emotions. Judgment opens up to questioning.

When we reach that section, the two pages are a mix of chart and score that gives the parameters for improvising in the four different sections. Within the circles, be free and repeat, continuing to improvise with those materials until ready to move to the next event, generally moving left to right. Occasionally, there is a more fixed phrase or gesture, which will not be in a circle.

Look for opportunities to interact with your partner, but also the recording, and yourself. Ability to respond in the moment, and not be rushed, is more important than strict timing. Emotional intention is the *most* important.

PART I ("SCENE")

Try to really inhabit these words as if our own, but it's also fine to embrace the idea of reading and that these are various people's experiences we are inhabiting.

pause,
ca. 3-5"

a. Emily Joy Emily Thorner

From the beginning...

from the beginning,
external.

from the beginning...

Every day,

every winter,

the moment I wake up,

for as long as I can
remember,

virtually always....

external, external.

My entire life,

All the time,

Almost every minute
of every day.

external,

External,

external.

b. Emily Joy Emily Thorner

When I was 5...

mf
numb-
of face

Every day, since I was 5, my mom would
put hot rollers in my hair to curl it and try
to hide my ears.

The other girls
didn't want to play with me.

a beat

"Monkey ears."

"You look like a
drowned kitten."

a beat

too tall,
too big, don't fit -

You're pretty...
pretty ugly.

You should get your
stomach stapled.

a beat

stomach nose
ears

dissociate.

a beat

stupid ugly
fat

dissociate.

a beat

ugly fat
stupid

scrawny

slob

lonely.

dissociate.

dissociate.

When I was 5...

When I was five, I was told that the
whole family was too fat and we all
needed to diet.

In school, the kids
would torment me -

I felt insecurities
I didn't even understand.

"Pisbury doughnut."

"Miss Piggy."

Scrawny, gangly,
homely, awkward-

pizza face

You're an embarrassment
to the family.

pause,
ca. 3-5"

c. Emily Joy Emily Thorner

Since I was 8,

Eating disorders.

I starved myself.

"Being thin just
looks better."

disgusting, chemical
taste of diet food -

I tried to make myself
throw up...

Almost every girl I knew had an eating
disorder. Most people would rather lose a year
off their life than have to look like me.

a beat

stomach arms

thighs dissociate.

weak puffy
gross

dissociate.

pig cow

slug whale

leech sloth
dissociate

ugly fat

lazy stupid
gross

slob disgusting
disgusting

dissociate

dissociate

all of it

dissociate

dissociate

mf
determined,
fast

mf
brisk
awkward, desperate

mf
astounded

mf
drily listing

fast,
getting louder
and more intense
/ emotional

mf
an autopilot

d.

Emily Joy **Emily Thorner**

Every time I look
in the mirror,
I wish I that were smaller.

a beat

I straighten my hair
I compare myself to
the women around me.
Who's thinner?
Who's the prettier?

a beat

And then, there's
the shame I feel for
even feeling shame.

Why do I care so much?
I feel so vain

Plastic surgery at age 12...
Why can't I just be normal?

a beat

stomach
hair
varicose veins
old
obsessed
vain
ashamed
disgusting
disgusting

a beat

nose
"parasail arms"
flat
guilty
shallow
embarrassed
disgusting

a beat

I wish they were bigger...
I wish I'd been born
someone else.
spend an hour
on my makeup
I will never be
good enough.

I'm ashamed that I care.
Why am I so shallow?
I'm ashamed for wanting
to "fix" my body.
I think about getting a boob job.

mp ashamed

mf contemptuous

mf urgent command

e.

Emily Joy **Emily Thorner**

Everywhere you go,
comments

a beat

staring down my shirt,
abusive attention
"trophy wife."
groped at a
business dinner.
unsafe
dirty.
stomach
legs
gross
homey
hungry
lazy
ugly
trash.
trash.

a beat

He wouldn't take no for an answer
staring at my chest the entire time
"nice legs."
groped and flashed
without consent.
unclean
used for sex.
disgusting.
chest
ugly
obsessed
lonely
chubby
angry
stupid
fat
trash.

a beat

dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.

Once I was walking home from yoga
and this man was hitting on me. When
I just kept walking, he called out,
"you're too big to be sexy."

I was walking down the street in a large
purple puffy coat, and a man drove by,
rolled down his window, and barked at
me. I didn't know if I should be
embarrassed or angry.

mf scared

tumbling, fever-pitch

mf obsessive, repellent

f command

f.

Emily Joy **Emily Thorner**

as soon as I wake up,
Shame for the
shame for the
shame,
I hurt myself.
I went to some
very dark places,
...skip events to stay
out of sight.
What's the point?
I will never be good enough.
I call myself a lazy,
porky, waste
and I mean it.

a beat

stomach
stress
lonely
dis dissociate.
fat
stupid
lazy
waste
waste
waste
I'm a waste
of amino acids.
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.

a beat

chest
dis dissociate.
guilty
despair
ugly
crazy
putrid
waste
waste
waste
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.
dis dissociate.

a beat

turn slightly toward each other

From the beginning, → **CUES
FIXED MEDIA
(SEE NEXT PAGE)**

mp ashamed

mp ashamed resigned

mp these emotions

not too fast

p enervated, breathy whistles

mf/l. fervent, desperate cry

PART II ("SONG")

FIXED MEDIA BEGINS (TRIGGERED BY STEPHEN) 0:00

I. Ca. 0:20

(various texts and pitches; only some are represented here)

Why do I feel this way? Why didn't you want me? What if I'm not enough? I wish I didn't care so much. Am I what's wrong? What if I'm all alone? **Dissociate.**

(pitches begin to enter) From the beginning. From the beginning. From the beginning.

pp *mf*

II. Ca. 2:05

(various texts and pitches; only some are represented here)

I'm caught in this vicious cycle... my mother she wanted better for me. father pit in my stomach. grandmother dissociate. grandfather I'm stuck. they wanted better for me. dissociate. **Shame for the shame...** *(pitches continue)*

mp *f* *mp* *f* *mf*

Questioning, opening, vulnerability, GRIEF

"Why" and "What if" asking a litany of genuine questions.

OOHS, breathy or straight tone; narrow range.

Engage with any tones you hear and echo any text, as feels meaningful to you in the moment.

Mix of grief, anger, and reflection; beginning to process

"Vicious cycle," "mother/father/grandmother/grandfather" then BREATHING and HERE-ness as the beginning of a shift.

OOHs and OHS moving to AHS. Allowing more warmth and vibrancy in the tone. Range widens / rises.

Long tones continue, but embrace faster / shorter rhythms and gestures as well.

Emily Jay
From the beginning.

Emily Thorne
From the beginning.

Together
From the beginning.

Long tones & text ad lib as well as the below

occasionally find one another and swell, but don't write too much

why do I feel this way? What if I'm not enough? what if no one will want me? What if I'm too much?

DISSOCIATE
DISSOCIATE

I minor world, (eventually, all ♯ distant glitches)

Tones & text ad lib as well as the below

grievous in my chest this pit in my stomach (any pitch, new) SHAME FOR THE SHAME

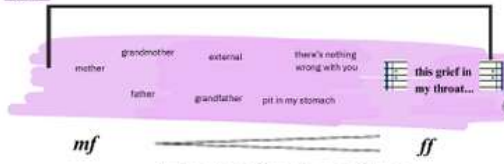
Emily Jay
Grief in my throat...

Emily Thorne
But you're here, breathing.

OTHER NOTES / NOTATION YOU CAN READ LEFT TO RIGHT MORE LIKE A GRAPHIC SCORE

PITCH INFORMATION, IF HELPFUL.

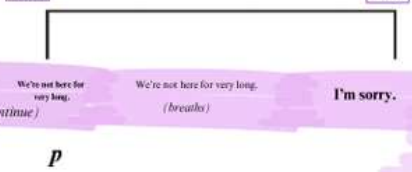
III. ca. 3:15



Tension & the spiral staircase of change. Some sort of revelation or turning point. Beginning to interact with one another.

Various previous phrases comingling. This is the freest improv, most open to what happens spontaneously within and between us. All vowels are OX except "ea." Range widens and rises to its highest. Freedom & variety in rhythmic and gestural options

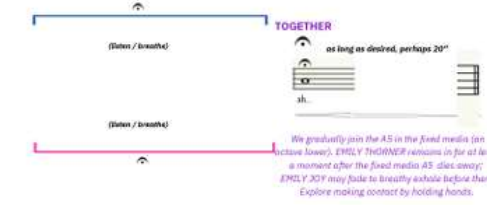
IV. ca. 4:20



Calm, whole, healed, with tinges of hope and grief. Acceptance. Connection.

"We're not here for very long." Mix of oohs and breathy ahs, not too strong / vibrant. Range is medium-wide and low. Long, calm tones again, if short, should be quite light and breathy, overall, MINIMAL, sparse, plenty of breathing.

ca. 5:05



TOGETHER as long as desired, perhaps 20" We gradually join the AS in the fixed media (an octave lower). EMILY THORNER remains in for at least a moment after the fixed media AS dies away; EMILY JOY may fade to breathy exhale before then. Explore making contact by holding hands.

Emily, NY and Davis, CA April 2024 ca. 6:40

MAIN ENGLISH PROMPT TO GUIDE IMMERSION/STATION

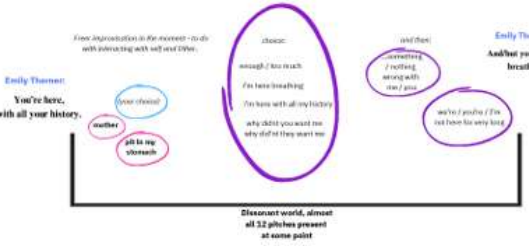
MAIN PHRASES IN TEXT

VOICEL, TONAL, & RANGE

WHAT TO DO: RHYTHM, LENGTH, GESTURES / MOVES

OTHER NOTES / NOTATION YOU CAN READ LEFT TO RIGHT NARRATIVE LINE A GRAPHIC SCORE

PITCH INFORMATION, IF HELPFUL



Emily Joy: I'm here, breathing.



6 major world with loose emphasis on D7 chords until the end, which lingers on a dominant function