

things twice

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Preface

I CAN'T HOLD Eric Clapton entirely responsible for this book, but neither is he entirely without blame. Being a musical scholar with a great love for Dylan's music, I've taken his statement quoted in the first chapter – that Dylan's music 'doesn't make sense musically to the scholar' – as a personal challenge.

The articles have been written over the past ten years, and they vary considerably both in style, in depth, in contents, and in quality. Most of them have been published on my website, www.dylanchords.com, either as independent articles or as introductory remarks to specific songs or albums. Some also come from my blog which has given name to this collection. Some are new in this collection.

In the first part, YOU'VE BEEN WITH THE PROFESSORS, I've gathered the heavier, more analytical articles which treat more general aspects of Dylan's music making, in relation to aesthetics, to music history, to musicology, and to aspects of culture at large. *Analysing Dylan Songs* was the outcome of an initial attempt of defining a field of study. It was partly conceived as a sample chapter for a book that I had plans of writing together with Mike Daley. That book never happened, but re-reading it now, the chapter wasn't so bad. 'Beauty May Only Turn to Rust' was written for *Judas!* and is an analysis of Dylan's concept of beauty (yes, he has one!). *The Momentum of Standstill* started out as a reflection over Dylan's use of time on *Time Out Of Mind*, triggered, I think, by some early commentator who was surprised to find that 'Standing in the Doorway' lasted as long as it does. It grew from there, however, and in its present state is a wider study of Dylan's experiments with time and the blues. Finally, 'Going through all these things twice' is more about ritual and ritual theory than about Dylan. It takes the ritualistic elements of the concert culture around Dylan as a point of departure for a discussion of ritual in general. It has been published in *Genre and Ritual* ed. by Østrem, Bruun, Petersen, and Fleischer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

The second part, HARMONY AND UNDERSTANDING, is the outcome of my belief that analysis of chord structures (or, to appease the non-structuralists:

patterns) may be a valid path to understand what is going on in Dylan's songs and performances. *'What I learned from Lonnie'* is my take at an explanation of what Dylan means with his reference to a system of mathematical music which he allegedly has learned from Lonnie Johnson some time in the mid-sixties. A word of caution: That I've written about it, doesn't mean that I think there *is* an explanation, but I do believe there is some sense behind it, and this is my attempt at bringing out some of that sense. This is put to practical use in an analysis of *Three Tambourine Men*.

Just Like a Woman, *Dear Landlord*, and *In the Garden* are all subjected to a similar kind of analysis. If these chapters appear quite dry and tedious on paper, it is the unavoidable consequence of the violent abuse that writing about music necessarily is. My apologies for that. The tediousness may be alleviated by reading them while actually listening to the songs.

The third part, ALBUMS AND SONGS, contains discussions of single albums or songs. This covers the whole span from short reflections on prominent stylistic traits in some album, to the full-scale analysis of *'Love and Theft'*, *'A Day Above Ground is a Good Day'*.

The last part, I'LL SEE HIM IN ANYTHING, concerns Dylan's live appearance(s). It contains my 'farewell' to Dylan. As this collection should prove, that farewell wasn't as seriously meant as it was taken by some.

I've been called a 'pompous windbag mixed with deep knowledge'. I got the feeling that it was intended as an insult, but it is a description I can live with and even like. I consider questions about culture, music, society, identity, and communication important enough to deserve to be treated with some pompousness and gravity, especially in these dire times with Bushes and Blairs around every corner, when national culture is used as a means of oppression and not for edification and liberation. If I can use some of my 'deep knowledge' to rock someone's confidence in 'eternal values' geniuses, and icons, I don't mind being a windbag. There may even be an answer blowin' in there. Or a question, which is better still.

All the music examples in the book have been typeset with Lilypond (www.lilypond.org).

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I
You've Been With the Professors

Chapter 1

Analysing Dylan Songs

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

ERIC CLAPTON once said about Dylan: ‘His way of playing anything is totally hybrid. It doesn’t make sense musically to the scholar. [...] At first listening, everything he does is just real hopeless. Then you look back and realise it’s exactly right.’ As a scholar I take this as a challenge: If something is ‘exactly right’, but still doesn’t make sense to the scholar, it is either the scholar’s sense or the scholar’s analytical tools that are inadequate. I take the liberty of disregarding the first possibility (although that *is* probably the commonest cause for scholarly not-being-made-sense-to-ness) and concentrate on the second: the problems inherent in musical analysis of music of Dylan’s kind.

THE OBJECT

The practice of musical analysis is closely connected with developments in the genres and styles of music making of the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century. This is the so-called classical-romantic period with composers like Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Wagner. It is also the period when the concept of art took the shape that is familiar to us today.¹

An analysis presupposes an *object of analysis*. A central idea in traditional analysis is the double notion of a unified musical *work* with an *internal development*. The *work* may be the product of a composer’s free and creative mind, but it is laid down once and for all in the score, and there ends the

¹ I’ve discussed this a greater length elsewhere, see e.g. *Apples and Pears – the ancient and the modern concepts of art*, available at <http://hem.passagen.se/obrecht/>, and ‘“The Ineffable”: Affinities between Christian and Secular Concepts of Art’, in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. by Petersen, Clüver, and Bell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004)

liberty. Any realization of the work must be compliant with the score – add a note, and you have, strictly speaking, a different work. There is really no room for improvisation, except within very limited boundaries, and even these are usually not exploited: in the place where the pianist is *supposed* to improvise an exuberant cadenza, most performers are content with playing the cadenzas that Mozart himself, or Beethoven, wrote. This is of course lamentable from the point of view of musical creativity, but the analyst applauds: it gives him a clearly defined object of analysis, from the first note to the last.

Contrast this with the situation of a Dylan song: what is the object of analysis of, say, ‘The times they are a-changin’? The published ‘score’, usually with some remarkably silly piano arrangement of Dylan’s guitar strumming? The album version, tabbed and uploaded to some tab site? Clearly both alternatives are inadequate, to say the least. My first encounter with ‘Forever Young’ was of this kind. I saw it in a song book before I had ever heard it. I looked through the melody, the chords, tried to imagine how it might sound – and rejected it as a fairly uninteresting post-motor-cycle-accident, pre-*Blood-on-the-tracks*-song. When I later, almost reluctantly, bought the album, this song was a shock of emotional intensity, in this case even reinforced by the tension between the two versions. And you can probably take any Dylan song the same way: It doesn’t look much on the paper – whatever power there is lies somewhere else.

This is one reason why a transcription in any form cannot do the song, as a musical work, justice. The other is, of course, that no matter how meticulously you note every single detail of one particular performance, the next time you hear it, it will be different, either because Dylan has rearranged the song, or simply because of the improvisational character of popular music in general and Dylan’s music making in particular. With an object of analysis which cannot be objectified, since it changes all the time, there is really no other alternative than to endorse Paul Williams’ approach: to treat every single performance of a song as an independent work of art. The performance is the object.

We might have settled with this, but upon closer look, it is still too simple an explanation. I used to be attracted to Jeff Todd Titon’s approach to the improvisational character of blues². He assumes that most of the early blues songs were improvised on the spot; that words and music were assembled while singing, from the singer’s storehouse of phrases, situations, turns, de-

² *Early Downhome Blues*, 2nd edn (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995)

scriptions, according to some specific pattern, but without a fixed text that is repeated exactly from performance to performance. Even when singing the 'same' song several times in a row, it is improvised from scratch each time, and minor (and even major) differences occur between the versions (he actually tested this).

I used to think of Dylan's performances in the same way, given the huge mass of text and the re-workings of some of the texts, until I realized that the variations are too small to really fit the model. The texts are actually memorized in a next to exact form, and the different versions of a song like 'Tangled up in Blue' are for the most part conscious re-writings, not improvisations. There may be exceptions to this, such as the constantly changing lyrics to 'Simple Twist of Fate' during the 1984 tour and of 'Ain't Gonna Go to Hell for Anybody' some years earlier, but whereas they may well conform with Tilton's blues model in their outward appearance, and to some extent also in their cognitive foundation, they are still not improvisations taken from a storehouse of building blocks. Rather, they are literary sketches, worked out in front of a live audience instead of in the poet's solitary chamber, but they are *literary* all the same.

Now, the same goes for the music. This may seem odd since what is usually considered to be a distinctive trait of Dylan as an artist is his way of constantly changing the musical setting of his songs. The melody is probably the most unstable element, but even the tempo, the rhythm, the instrumentation change all the time. But still: the songs are always recognizable as such. Usually the chords and harmonies are intact, and variations are within the normal limits of the genre. However different two performances of 'Just Like a Woman' may be, they are versions of the same song all the same, and not only two different works of art which happen to have the same words attached to them. There is always something that is preserved, through all the variations.

This simple observation opens up a large field of interesting questions concerning Dylan's relation to the different styles that have influenced him (blues, English folk ballads, The Beatles and rock 'n' roll) on the one hand, and to the different genres of music production (the orally transmitted folk/blues, the performed, score-based classical music and the commercial popular music, transmitted through electronic media). To make this long story short: Dylan relates strongly to improvisational musical traditions, but also to traditions with an ultimately defined 'work': defined either by what the composer has decreed, as in classical music, or by what is considered commercially most efficient.

In this sense, Dylan's songs are *not* improvisational once they have reached an album:³ he seldom deviates strongly from and always relates closely to the 'official' versions. This means that although each performance may be considered an independent 'work of art', it is still meaningful to treat the group of works that can be subsumed under the label 'Just Like a Woman' as one single work of art with many realizations, much in the same way as fifty prints from the same plates are individual works but at the same time representations of the same work.

Paul Williams has proposed a view similar to this. In the introduction to his books *Bob Dylan: Performing Artist* he relates an anecdote about a backstage meeting with Dylan. He was going to make a comparison between the different Dylan versions and a series of lithographs by Picasso, worked on over the course of six weeks. He writes:

At first Dylan protested that he wasn't interested in that kind of art at all, but he looked at the page and seemed to be pulled in. Staying with his initial (it seemed to me) anti-intellectual stance, he pointed to the second earliest of the drawings and proclaimed it as the best: 'He should have stopped at that one.' Then, looking closer: 'Oh, but I see why he had to keep going . . .'

But the problems still remains: what is it about a performance that makes it worthy of the label 'work of art'? What are the criteria, and are they the same for Dylan as for, say, Pavarotti or U2? Are 'works of art' from different media or styles comparable at all? This discussion presupposes another discussion: that about what a work of art is in the first place. One possible definition may be: 'A structure made up of elements that are considered apt for reflection or contemplation, and conceived and presented in a way that stimulates this.' That seems to be what we do with art: we enter a different state (of mind or place) to expose ourselves to something that we allow to influence us, emotionally or intellectually.⁴ That implies several things: the 'structures apt for reflection' are not objectively given, but open to interpretation on different cultural or historical contexts – in other words: they are dependent upon *style*. A work of art can only be efficient in some kind of relation – including the revolutionary – to a style.⁵ In periods of stylistic change this relation tends to be explicit, whereas in most cases it is implicit. In Dylan's case there are a

³ Although the creational process seems to involve a substantial element of improvisation.

⁴ The definition is taken from my aforementioned article on aesthetics, and I refer to that article for a further discussion of this.

⁵ The entirely revolutionary art without any precedents, although theoretically interesting is rare enough to be disregarded

number of such implicit styles involved: the blues background, the folk, the standard rules of European/American harmony, the development of rock, traditions of voice treatment and the relationship with the text, including the relationship between song and spoken language, etc. To be able to appreciate a performance fully, as a work of art, it is in fact necessary for the listener to relate it to the stylistic systems he/she finds relevant, on all different levels, from the individual style (Dylan's own style), through genre style (rock/blues/folk in general), and maybe even to some kind of 'meta-style' of song in general. Seen this way, every performance can be seen as a contribution to an ever-going debate – what can be done within this genre? where are the limits? which crossovers are possible or artistically interesting?

This brings us back to the definition given above, and the second implication that can be derived from it: that art-status presupposes a voluntary act by the listener, both by allowing it to influence us, and regarding the stylistical references we make, whether these are explicitly voluntary (I choose to regard Dylan as a blues singer even when he sings 'Emotionally Yours', because I find it rewarding), or unconscious (I don't consciously realize it, but my appreciation of a Dylan song must derive from a whole lot of different things I've heard and appreciated before), or for lack of knowledge (I don't know enough about the folk movement in the early 60s to really be able to understand that possible relation fully).

Most of this happens unconsciously – we don't ponder a performance and then decide to let it hit us in the stomach with a feeling that changes our life. Rather, the choices have been made beforehand: we choose to like a certain kind of 'screaming' or whining when it seems that it can be rewarding. I seriously doubt that eighteenth-century Viennese, however sophisticated and developed their taste may have been, would have understood anything of any Dylan song. Even (half) the audience at Newport in 1965 and during the following tour with the Band chose not to be moved or touched by performances that are now classical precisely because of their emotionality.

THE HARMONY

The other problem with the concept of the *work* is its inherent idea of *organicism*. According to the organicist theory, a work of art is, very simply stated, to be judged as an organism, where all the parts are related to each other in much the same way as the limbs of the body are. This is one of the basic aesthetical principles behind classical music. Even harmony is arranged in a similar man-

ner: all the available chords are related to the tonic, the fundamental harmony of the piece, in a coherent and logical way, which determines the transition from one chord to another.

This system found its way from classical music into the realm of popular music through the hymns and the popular tunes of the Stephen Foster-type, and the military marching bands. They even managed to influence the field-hollers and laments of black Mississippi workers to eventually produce the twelve-bar blues, and from here it spread to today's popular music genres. But in these new settings, most of the underlying aesthetic presuppositions of the Western classical harmonic system were originally not present. The aesthetics behind the rural blues is almost the exact opposite: instead of striving for a coherent organical whole with beginning, middle and end, it rather emphasises timelessness, through ostinato patterns (the twelve-bar blues pattern itself can be considered one) and through the predominance of the tonic and the fifth. Wilfrid Mellers describes two songs by Pete Williams, an early blues singer, as 'still basically hollers in which speech is translated into pentatonic tumbling strains, with the guitar providing an ostinato accompaniment with no sense of harmonic progression.'⁶ Harmonic progression, which is so essential to western music, has virtually no place at all in blues music, and the dominant chord, the means *par excellence* by which harmonic progression is achieved, is also a foreign flower in the landscape of the blues. It is remarkable how the dominant chord often sounds awkward – if it is clearly sounded at all – in much rural blues, mainly due to the sharp contrast between the blues' flat pentatonic seventh, and the sharp leading note of the dominant chord.

ANALYSING AN IDEA

Knowing what a pie is doesn't make anyone a baker. If the foregoing may be taken as a statement that Dylan's music *can* be analysed, it still remains to show *how* that can be done. This is not entirely easy, and one major obstacle is that there is no firmly established analytical tradition for this kind of music. The tools and methods of musical analysis which are used today rely heavily on the work of the founders of the discipline in the nineteenth century, for better or for worse. They were certainly clever and skilled academics, but their material and theoretical background was limited, and modern musicology has only

⁶ Wilfrid Mellers *A Darker Shade of Pale: A Backdrop to Bob Dylan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 116

reluctantly, and most often half-heartedly, realized that theories based upon works by Mozart may work excellently for analysing works by Mozart, but may be worthless for other genres. Popular music is one of these, but there are even examples from within the 'established' field of musicology: Most, or all, early (pre-Bach) music defies analysis with the traditional methods, in much the same way as a Dylan song does. It quickly becomes evident that the established models or methods for musical analysis – Schenker analysis, functional analysis, thematic analysis etc. – are all derived from and therefore applicable only to music from the classical-romantic era. The moment one crosses this border, in one direction or another, there is a tendency that the treatment of the music itself stops at the descriptive level, or it is abandoned altogether, in favor of a sociological approach. Counting measures and determining keys can be done with any kind of music. Determining what is *really* contained in those measures, is a completely different matter.

Not only the tools and methods are received for free within the traditional fields of analysis; so is the goal of the analysis. When undertaking a Schenker analysis of a Schubert sonata, it is obvious what the goal is: to find the underlying tonal structure of the piece and its relation to the 'surface level' of the sounding music. This goal rests on a number of implicit presuppositions (that there *is* such a tonal structure; that it stands in a certain relation to the 'surface'; etc.). These are basically presuppositions about the underlying systems of musical 'meaning' at work in the piece. Since these belong to the foundation of both the music in question and of the analytical method, they can more or less be taken for granted. (*organicism, harmony*). This is not the case when analysing a Dylan song or a Palestrina motet: there are no such analytical shortcuts available, because of the discrepancy between the underlying ideas of the music and the established analytical methods.

Even though there is a growing tradition of popular musicology, each new analysis will still tend to begin more or less from scratch and make up its own goals and methods along the way. We will therefore start out each separate analysis with very elementary questions: Why does the music sound the way it does? Which are the decisions and choices the artist has made, and why has he made them; what is his 'goal'? Which are the means involved in reaching that goal? Which are the choices he has *not* made himself but that have been made for him, because they are so integrated in his musical background? Which are the underlying conceptions or systems of meaning that come out of this background? How does he relate to the different traditions (blues, folk, gospel)? Possibly also: What are the choices he has decided *not* to make, and

why? A further development of this, as a kind of 'meta-level' would be the question of the cultural/aesthetic implications inherent in these choices.

Two basic presumptions are worth mentioning. One is that the music under consideration is interesting because of the effect it has on the listener, and that this effect has causes that can be explained or at least related to or deduced from specific characteristics of the music itself. Musical effect is not the result of 'one heart speaking directly to another' or 'the forces of cosmos (or God) channeling energy through one individual in a mystical and ineffable manner' or 'the simultaneous contact with heaven and earth' – it stems from a certain use of dissonance, agogics and rhythms, phrasing, texture, tempo, breathing, voice tessitura, instruments, interplay between musicians and a whole lot of other factors which may be difficult to pinpoint, and the totality of which may never be fully grasped, except in the immediate and intuitive manner of the listener, but which nevertheless are at the basis of the experience.

The other is that the musician does not have complete control over the making of an artwork. In one end is the influence of the musical traditions, which may not be conscious on the part of the musician himself. On the other end is the listener, who in the sense outlined above is the real 'creator'. This means that what Dylan himself has to say about his music may be interesting but not necessarily essential for the understanding of his music.

On the other hand, this may be a too structuralistic understanding of music, which partly misses the point that music may also function as *communication*, not the least for Dylan. It is not an 'empty' structure to be filled by the receiver, it is an intended structure with a specific content from Dylan's side, which may or may not be perceived by the listener, but which still should be treated as an essential part of the 'artwork'. In other words, to the extent that musical elements are also expressive and communicative elements, it will be of importance to the analysis *what* is being communicated, so that although our emphasis lies on the study of the music, any song analysis which doesn't take into account the lyrics of the song will be incomplete.

* * *

These are the some of the elements that will show up again and again in the articles that follow. I have seen it both as my task and as a pleasure to use whatever knowledge I have of aesthetics and traditional music analysis and theory, and apply that to whatever knowledge I have of Dylan's music. If I have a *project*, it is to demonstrate how long-ranging ideas are: when I discuss ancient theories of the harmony of the spheres in connection with Dylan's

music, it is not *only* because I happen to enjoy reading ancient texts, it is also – and primarily – because I think they are relevant. We may not share the beliefs and the world view of the Ancients, but our beliefs and views have been formed out of whatever we as a culture have received and incorporated from what has come before us, and there is no easy way of deciding where that influence stops and something entirely new takes its place.

Chapter 2

'Beauty may Only Turn to Rust'

'Dylan can't sing.'

90% of the Western population

'That boy's got a voice. Maybe he won't make it with his writing, but he can sing it. He can really sing it.'

Woody Guthrie

It's a pleasure to be able to begin an article about Bob Dylan with one of the most widespread clichés about him: that he can't sing. No matter what standard response one has whenever the topic arises ('Well, then Picasso can't paint either', 'Since so many people like him, there must be *something* there to like', 'To each his own; if you don't like him, it's your problem', etc.) there is something about the question that goes beyond the urge to defend. That is what this article is about: where the question stems from and in what it consists, and it will bring us back to classical Antiquity, through medieval and Renaissance aesthetics, and up to a modern interpretation of Dylan's song-making, against this background.

What does it mean, 'Dylan can't sing'? What does it mean to sing? Not *just* to utter sounds; singing belongs to the sphere of *music*, and although we all 'know' what music is, it is still useful to remind ourselves of what we mean by it. A fairly wide definition, which covers everything from Gregorian Chant to John Cage, goes: *Music is organized sound*, or slightly more precise: *Music is sound organized according to some generally accepted system of criteria for production and reception of such sounds*, or shorter: *Music is aestheticised sound*. There are books to be written about this; at the moment it may suffice to say that to most people aesthetics has something to do with *beauty*, and to most people who disapprove of Dylan's vocal capacities, this is the reason: he can't sing beautifully, and no matter how many other criteria for singing he fulfills –

a certain vocal dexterity, a sense of rhythm and harmony, etc. – all this doesn't help: Dylan can't sing.

Thus, it would seem that for a broader appreciation of Dylan, a more thoroughgoing study of beauty would be useful – *his* concept of beauty, and ours, we who judge him. This is at the heart of the question of what it means to be able to sing, and the reason why the verdict may differ is that there is no *one* concept of beauty.

THE BEAUTIFUL WORLD OF BOB DYLAN

Dylan touches upon beauty in a number of songs, but in two songs only is it a genuinely good thing: in the exuberant, I'm-such-a-happy-family-man-who-loves-my-beautiful-wife anthem 'Never Say Goodbye' ('You're beautiful beyond words, You're beautiful to me'), where it becomes such a huge word that it almost tears the song apart; and in the endearing 'Tomorrow is a Long Time', where the beauty of it actually works: 'There's beauty in the silver, singin' river / There's beauty in the sunrise in the sky | But none of these and nothing else can touch the beauty | That I remember in my true love's eyes.'

But in the majority of cases it is rather the negative aspects of beauty that are emphasised. Either its deceptiveness – most explicitly expressed in 'Long Time Gone': 'So you can have your beauty, It's skin deep and it only lies,' and in 'Trust Yourself': 'Don't trust me to show you beauty | When beauty may only turn to rust. | If you need somebody you can trust, | Trust yourself' – or its fickleness: the saddening inevitability of its decay in 'Cold Irons Bound' ('It's such a sad thing to see beauty decay'); the despairing inaccessibility of its fading away in 'Where Are You Tonight?' ('As her beauty fades and I watch her undrape [. . .] Oh, if I could just find you tonight!'); the ridiculed vanity of it, when the beauty parlours on 'Desolation Row' are filled up with unshaven, unwashed and generally rude, filthy, smelly, abusive, and *ugly* sailors. And the world-weary realization that 'behind every beautiful thing there's been some kind of pain' ('Not Dark Yet').¹

Then there is a group of songs which treat the subject in a more ambiguous, ambivalent way. In 'Dark Eyes', beauty becomes an expression for the *real*, which is left unrecognised in a (sadly human) world hanging between

¹ I'm not quite sure what to make of 'Sweetheart Like You' ('You can be known as the most beautiful woman who ever crawled across cut glass to make a deal'), but the slight sarcastic tinge to it makes it impossible to place it in the positive category.

discretion and lust for revenge, where life is a game and nothing is taken seriously ('I feel nothing for their game where beauty goes unrecognised'). We find the same utopian view on beauty in 'Shelter from the Storm' ('Beauty walks a razor's edge, someday I'll make it mine'). This is clearly a different kind of beauty than in the other group of songs: a more intimate concept, not directed at (or emanating from) *things*, but a way of taking in the world, be it good or bad, pretty or foul; closer to 'Song to Woody' ('I'm seeing your world of places and things | of paupers and peasants and princes and kings') than to 'Sugar Baby' ('I can see what everybody in the world is up against').

Finally, there is the beauty of divine justice in 'I and I' ('Took a stranger to teach me to look into justice's beautiful face'), which is not at all concerned with the appearances of the world, but with moral ideals in the widest sense – far removed, perhaps, from the other examples, but nevertheless important.

In an interview from 1981, the question of beauty came up during a discussion of the value of art:

Herman: Well, if it expresses truth and beauty then it's leading you to God?

Dylan: Yeah? (laughs)

Herman: Well, wouldn't you say?

Dylan: If it's expressing truth I'd say it's leading you to God and beauty also.

Herman: I've always thought that those were the only two absolutes that there were.

Dylan: Well, beauty can be very, very deceiving. It's not always of God.

Herman: The beauty of a sunset?

Dylan: Now, that's a very special kind of beauty.

Herman: Well, how about the beauty of the natural world?

Dylan: Like the flowers?

Herman: Yes, and the beasts . . . and the rain . . .

Dylan: All that is beautiful, That's God-given. I've spent a lot of time dealing with the man-made beauty, so that sometimes the beauty of God's world has evaded me.

Here, all the different categories that I've pointed to in the songs are gathered: the vain beauty, the god-given, natural beauty, and beauty as a general concept, almost equated with God.

Before I go on with the exegesis of relating Dylan's concept of beauty, as expressed in this handful of songs, with 'our' concept – that is: with the various concepts that we find in the traditions of thinking around these things, and that are still relevant, directly or indirectly, for how each one of us forms our perception of the world around us (for no less a perspective than this is at stake

here) – I must bring up the most important text of them all from Dylan's hand concerning beauty: the liner notes to *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*.²

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

The historical background of the text sets an interesting frame for the interpretation of it: the Beast's story about his journey to appreciating the Beauty. On the surface level it can be read as a story about how Dylan overcame his resistance towards this voice of hers, that to him represented an untrue beauty – untrue because it was unreal. The voyeuristically inclined might see it as the closest we will ever get to an account of Dylan's feelings about her. But it is not *only* a story about Joan Baez – it is in fact a manifesto about beauty, reality, ugliness, buffoonery, kingship. It begins:

In my youngest years I used t' kneel
 By my aunt's house on a railroad field
 An' yank the grass outa the ground
 An' rip savagely at its roots
 An' pass the hours countin' strands
 An' stains a green grew on my hands
 As I waited till I heard the sound
 A the iron ore cars rollin' down
 The tracks'd hum an' I'd bite my lip
 An' hold my grip as the whistle whined
 Crouchin' low as the engine growled
 I'd shyly wave t' the throttle man
 An' count the cars as they rolled past
 But when the echo faded in the day
 An' I understood the train was gone
 It's then that my eyes'd turn
 Back t' my hands with stains a green
 That lined my palms like blood that tells
 I'd taken an' not given in return
 But glancin' back t' the empty patch
 Where the ground was turned upside down
 An' the roots lay dead beside the tree
 I'd say 'how can this bother me'
 . . .
 An' I asked myself t' be my friend
 An' I walked my road like a frightened fox
 An' I sung my song like a demon child

² The full text can be found on http://www.slopbucket.com/bob/tbob/writtenword/joanb_li.html and in *Lyrics*.

With a kick an' a curse
From inside my mother's womb –

To be slightly pompous about it, one might say that these lines introduce the theme of the individual between physical reality (represented by the grass on the railroad field) and surrounding humanity (the train and the throttle man). They both leave him, one way or another, and the only option is isolation. The realization of a something beyond the I sparks a desire to reach this other, and to leave the vegetative level behind.

The end of the quotation is the first of a series of 'An' I walked my road . . .' phrases which are the backbone of the poem and which map the development of the I-character. The first stage is that of the 'frightened fox': the savage, the beast, the complete egoistic innocence, innocent because it is lawless, but only to a point – is a kicking child innocent of the pain it inflicts at birth? Is a frightened fox innocent just because it doesn't *mean* any harm?

This is followed by a rejection of words and symbols ('An' I locked myself an' lost the key | An' let the symbols take their shape | An' form a foe for me t' fight | . . . | An' my first symbol was the word 'beautiful'). Why precisely beauty should be the first target is explained in the following lines:

For the railroad lines were not beautiful
They were smoky black an' gutter-colored
An' filled with stink an' soot an' dust
An' I'd judge beauty with these rules
An' accept it only 'f it was ugly
An' 'f I could touch it with my hand
For it's only then I'd understand
An' say 'yeah this's real'

The ugly and the tangible as all that is of value, opposed with beauty. It is not the ugliness itself that matters, though. Rather, ugliness is a representative of reality, or, more precisely: that part of reality which has not (*had* not, in the early '60s) traditionally been allowed into the beautiful world of high-flying ideas about the world: art. The lines are a rebellion against that branch of the late-Romanticist concept of art which overflows with elves and the superhuman, hyper-real part of reality, be it expressed as beauty, power, or any other fascist ideal.

This is not the only way to react, but the Dylan in the poem doesn't know that yet. For him, the reaction was to conflate the real with the ugly, the opposite of the only version he knew of the first symbol in his crusade against (and quest towards) the outside world: beauty.

The next few 'An' I walked my road' lines are a merciless series of steps into the deep isolation that the fundamental questioning of concepts must lead to.

First he is 'Like a saddened clown | In the circus a my own world', the clown being the ridiculous character who doesn't know the appropriate way to react and act in a given situation, who like the child hasn't yet learned the ways of life (or, as Graham Greene so exquisitely put it: the clown is the one who doesn't learn from his mistakes).

Then he is 'Like an arch criminal who'd done no wrong ... screamin' through the bars | a someone else's prison', and still 'isolation' is the key word: the confinement of having to live in a world where the concepts through which the world becomes meaningful are not your own. This may be the most concise image ever carved of the terrors of adolescence on the verge (but not yet there) of growing up. At the climax of this series, he is 'Like a lonesome king ... Starin' into / A shallow grave'. He is now the supreme ruler of his own world, but it's a lonely world, and when he tries to look beyond it the step forward also seems to lead six feet down: to give up his isolated kingdom is also the ultimate liminality of death.

The last step in this journey of the sensitive mind towards the world is the 'scared poet | Walkin' on the shore ... Afraid a the sea'. The poet is a madman, but a madman who *communicates*, who transcends the limits of his own world, despite the fear, either of the open grave in front, or of the infinity of the ocean of people and words and voices out there. The image of the poet on the shore, frightened of the sea, wonderfully captures the notion of the sublime: the awe before the frightening immensity of the infinite, which during the age of Romanticism became the most important correlative to beauty. The sublime is terrifying, but necessary for the poet (and, by extension, the human being), because in a wider sense it represents the awakening to the world outside. And, significantly, unlike the previous 'walked my road' lines, this is not only a metaphor: the person in the poem is physically placed somewhere in the real world (perhaps on the same beach to which the Tambourine man led him and where he danced with one hand waving free a few years later?).

This not only brings us full circle back from symbols to reality again, but also to the topic of the text: Joan Baez and her voice. The next section of the poem brings the peripeteia, the transformation of the protagonist after the preceding crisis. During a car drive he hears Baez tell the story of how, during a childhood spent in an Arab country,³ she watched dogs being beaten to death in the street, to the general amusement of the onlookers, and how she tried to save one of these dogs, but failed. This becomes the realization that

³ Iraq, actually, where the family lived for a year in 1951, when Baez's father was working there.

that voice, which to him so far has only represented vanity, may be founded in the ugly reality after all – even more so since, at the same time as he was killing grass in Minnesota, she was actually trying to save life.

An' that guilty feelin' sprang again
 Not over the roots I'd pulled
 But over she who saw the dogs get killed
 An' I said it softly underneath my breath
 'Yuh oughta listen t' her voice . . .
 Maybe somethin's in the sound . . .'
 . . .
 An' at the time I had no song t' sing.

Silence replaces the struggle. The song he has so painstakingly won for himself is no more real than hers. And if that which at first glance appears as vain beauty proves to hide within it the most brutal reality, the whole system of oppositions that he has constructed for himself must fall. His tired nerves succumb to her singing, in something which may not be a wholehearted acceptance of it and its beauty (but rather a surrender to its force), but the immediate consequence is liberation, both from the rationality of concept formation, and from these very concepts.

This is again madness, of course, 'An' I laughed almost an insane laugh'. The laughter is directed both at himself and at the foolishness of his previous creed, that 'beauty was | Only ugliness an' muck'. And after finding his new truth in 'the breeze I heard in a young girl's breath' which 'proved true as sex an' womanhood', he finds himself, at the end of the poem, going back to the railroad track in his mind. Again he is suspended between raw reality and society, but this time it contains no threat, no danger, but also no desire:

An' I'll walk my road somewhere between
 The unseen green an' the jet-black train
 An' I'll sing my song like a rebel wild
 For it's that I am an' can't deny
 But at least I'll know not t' hurt
 Not t' push
 Not t' ache
 An' God knows . . . not t' try –

This is not really resignation, but a realization that neither beauty nor ugliness nor any other symbols need to be opposed; they are not more dangerous to the 'frightened fox' than the poet is to the ocean (or vice versa?).

The consequence that runs parallel to this freedom is a reshaping of the concept of beauty which has been so central to the development up to this point. The journey to the appreciation of the beauty in Joan Baez's voice is also about personal maturation and growth. What started out as the assimilation

of reality and the ugly, and the opposition of this to beauty, has given way to the insight that there are several concepts of beauty, and that at least in some of them there is a place for reality.

This can be taken yet another step: ultimately, it may not be reality itself that matters, but the ability to perceive this reality and to express that perception to someone else. Thus, the initial opposition can be rephrased as that between beauty and expression, and the insight gained is that this does not necessarily have to be an opposition: even the beautiful can contain the expressive.

And with that, we are ready to step back into the history of aesthetics.

PROPORTION AND EXPRESSION

The two stances in *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2* can easily be followed through the entire history of art. One is the idea that beauty lies in an orderly and proportionate relationship between parts of a whole and between the parts and the whole. This idea forms the backbone of any concept of beauty up until the eighteenth century. Pythagoras discovered that the sounds that we find pleasing are based on simple proportions, while ugly sounds have more complex proportions. Plato considered this kind of mathematical harmony to be the fundamental property of the world. In his creation myth *Timaios*, the creator-god shapes the world beginning with unity, then extending it with 'the other' and 'the intermediary', and along the corresponding number series 1, 2, 4, 8 and 1, 3, 9, 27. This specifically Greek idea found its way into the Bible through the Wisdom of Solomon 11: 21: 'thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight'.

This is not to say that beauty was perceived as a purely intellectual, rational matter of weights and measures. Behind the dry façade of beauty as numbers lies the notion that numbers and numerical relations are reflections of the divine principles governing the universe; that we find the same relations in the universe as a whole, in human beings, in musical sounds, and in visible beauty.

The belief that the harmonious is a reflection of the divine may (together with the neatness of the system) explain why such a concept could rule supreme for two millennia. But it was never entirely unchallenged, and all the other perspectives on beauty that we have encountered above are recognisable in the history of aesthetics: the sublime, the beauty of the law, natural beauty, and the ethics of beauty. These could all be seen as extensions of the basic

concept of beauty, as concessions to the assaults from reality (or truth) on the neatness of mental constructions.

But the most persistent opponent has been the character that shows up at the turning point of *Joan Baez in Concert, part 2*: the madly laughing poet. Plato writes in the *Phaedrus* that one of the frenzies to which people are subject comes from the Muses. When these pour inspiration upon a man, it 'inspires [the soul] to songs and other poetry. [. . .] But he who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen'. The relationship between *art* and *beauty* is a long and complex one, but we may condense it here to the opposition, in Plato's account, between the craft which rests on knowledge of the divine principles, expressed as rules, and the expression – *of* an experience of reality, and *for the benefit of* the rest of us – which defies such rules.

This conflict between rule-based beauty and inspired expression pops up now and again through history. Josquin des Prez (d. 1521), whose music to modern ears is the epitome of soothing, Renaissance beauty, was chided by his greatest fan for occasionally not having 'repressed the violent impulses of his unbridled temperament'.

The most famous occasion of such a conflict is probably the debate between the composer Monteverdi (d. 1643) and Artusi in the early seventeenth century. Artusi took it upon himself to represent the true art of music, and he had found a number of 'errors' in Monteverdi's works. Monteverdi's reply was that, yes, he had broken the rules, but he had done so for the benefit of expression. The words demanded it; in his practice, the words were no longer to be the *servant* of harmony, but its mistress.

Even though Monteverdi's new style was in one sense a radical breach with the prevalence of beauty-as-harmony, the theoretical legitimisation that he gives of his new approach plays on the same field as the old. He can place words above harmony because 'the words conform to the disposition of the soul; and the rhythm and the harmony follow the words'. It becomes another path to the divine principles: what appears as raw, ugly expression, nevertheless has something of beauty in it, because it, too, goes back to 'the disposition of the soul'.

Sounds familiar? With some modification, this could have been incorporated into the discussion of *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2* – the apparent conflict between rational beauty and expressivity, and the tearing down of the boundaries between them.

EXPRESSION AND STYLE

One point appears more clearly in the Monteverdi controversy than in Dylan's poem, but that at the same time is such a central point in Dylan's whole work, that it can easily be added to the discussion: the influence of the word.

Have a look at the Guthrie quotation at the top again:

He can really sing it.

It. Not just 'sing', but 'sing *it*'. That little extra word turns this short statement from the dying hobo-poet into the most precise description of Dylan's art. Because to sing is not *only* about music, but, as Plato knew, and Josquin, and Monteverdi, and Dylan, it's about words too. It's about *what* you sing, what you project, what you express.

It is a commonplace among musicians to claim to be influenced by Dylan, but apart from a general desire to write meaningful lyrics, it is often difficult to see more precisely how this influence really comes through. And by taking only the style of writing, they miss half of the equation – perhaps the most important part, for a singer, anyway. What makes Dylan so special, I believe, is not only his ability to shape words according to the 'disposition of the soul', but also to let this disposition come to expression, through the words, in a style which is shaped precisely to fit this expression. As with Monteverdi, this style will go beyond the requirements of the beautiful, of criteria of melodiousness, because Dylan's art is founded in a perfect symbiosis between lyrics and singing style.

And just as personal and individual as the perception that is expressed is the style: the symbiosis between lyrics and style includes the singer himself, in an identification between singer and song, so that when Dylan sings, we not only hear the song, we hear Dylan. This is most immediately evident in songs like 'Sara', where the singer is almost physically present in the song, but fundamentally it is just as true about 'Blowin' in the Wind', and just as irrelevant a perspective on a song like 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand'.⁴ What we hear is one individual's perspective on the world, and since it presumably is the same world we ourselves relate to, as we tear up grass somewhere else along the same train line, this perspective is potentially of vital importance –

⁴ This is precisely the point that Toby Richards-Carpenter made in his article in the previous issue of *Judas!*, where he compared Dylan with Paul McCartney: 'Bob Dylan owns his songs. [. . .] The songs are his tools and he will use them as he likes. Paul McCartney, on the other hand, is the tool that 'Hey Jude' uses in order to get heard.'

far more so than some divine principle, long forgotten and well hidden in the kind of beauty that will, inevitably, only turn to rust.

Chapter 3

'Going Through All These Things Twice'

THE RITUAL OF A BOB DYLAN CONCERT

An' here I sit so patiently
Waiting to find out what price
You have to pay to get out of
Going through all these things twice.

Bob Dylan, 'Memphis Blues Again'
(1965)

DEUS in adiutorium meum intende.
'Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen! Would you please welcome
Columbia Recording Artist Bob Dylan!'

Two beginnings – an invitatory from the medieval office services, and the speaker's voice introducing a concert with Bob Dylan; the two sound-events that are depicted above do not necessarily lend themselves to comparison beyond the fact that they are both beginnings. In the case of the Gregorian invitatory, we 'know' that this is about ritual, a Medieval liturgical ceremony. Likewise, 'Would you please welcome Columbia Recording Artist Bob Dylan!' is just as obviously an announcement of a rock concert. So what do they have to do with each other?

Or one might turn the question around and ask if there are not fundamental similarities which outweigh the obvious differences between the two



FIGURE 3.1 'Deus in adiutorium meum intende.'

actions. One might suggest that they are both formalized ways, repeated exactly the same way every time, of introducing communal actions that involve people in different roles that are more or less fixed (and an architectural space with certain specific characteristics that are fitting or even necessary for the occasion), and they are both laden with meaning which goes beyond the mere fulfillment of the action.

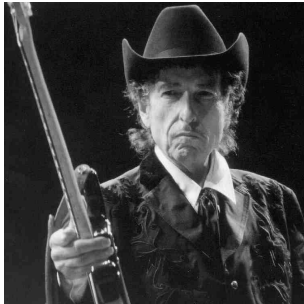


FIGURE 3.2 'Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen! Would you please welcome Columbia Recording Artist Bob Dylan!'

Whether one considers these similarities significant, depends on why one has made the comparison, and on how significant the chosen criteria are deemed. The features I have emphasized in the comparison – formalism, iterativity, symbolism, and the communal function – are some of the features that are most commonly brought to the fore whenever attempts to define ritual are made. This approach to the comparison may already indicate that the similarities may indeed be significant, although significant *of what* is still an open question. There is a fairly wide agreement among scholars concerned with ritual that to give a definition which covers all actions that somehow can be labelled 'ritual' is

an impossible task. The consequences that are drawn from this, range from a slight caution to a questioning of the usefulness of the concept of ritual altogether. The idea behind the comparison between a Dylan concert and a medieval vespers service is not to uncover common, inherent traits which unite the two activities under an objective, extra-/supra-empirical concept, 'ritual', which will tell us something about them beyond what we know about them individually. My objective is heuristic rather than comparative – to circle around the double question, what may a point of departure with traits that are associated with ritual bring to the understanding of a Dylan show? and vice versa: what may the application of this perspective on a Dylan show add to the understanding of ritual? What is *really* ritual about a medieval service; and what do we mean by *really* ritual?

THE EXTERNAL SIMILARITIES: CEREMONY

It is not difficult to find the direct parallels between a Dylan show and a medieval church service, once one starts scraping the surface.¹ We've already seen the 'invitatory'. Since *c.* 1990, this announcement, 'Ladies and gentlemen, . . .' has been repeated in exactly the same way at just about every single concert – to the extent that to the audience (or congregation) it *is* no longer an announcement but an element belonging to the proper order of things – a 'liturgical' item.² But even what precedes the invitatory is fixed: the preparation of the hall with buckets (literally) of Nag Champa incense, and portions of the 'Hoe-down' from Aaron Copland's *Rodeo* suite from the sound system, while the audience (or congregation) fills up the venue; then houselights off, invitorium, and then – then the show begins.

Even here there is a 'liturgy', an order followed by Dylan and expected by the audience. The most common topos in reviews of Dylan shows is that he is so unpredictable. A brief look at his setlists will reveal the opposite. A Dylan concert always involves fixed and variable elements. During most of the 90s, 'All Along the Watchtower' was always played as the third song, and other songs have had similarly fixed positions in the ceremony over shorter or longer stretches of time. Then there is a group of songs that are chosen among the songs that an 'average listener' – the ones who have three or four Dylan albums at home – would want to hear: 'Like A Rolling Stone', 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'Mr Tambourine Man', etc. Finally, there is almost always one or two

¹ The following description is based on my own experiences with Dylan concerts since 1991, encounters with fellow Dylan fans, and a varying but substantial involvement with the Dylan community on the Internet. I am thus not a participating observer, but an observing participant.

² At one of the late summer shows in 2002, there was suddenly another text: some highfalutin summary of his career: 'The poet laureate of rock'n'roll. The voice of the promise of the 60s counterculture. The guy who forced folk into bed with rock, who donned makeup in the 70s and disappeared into a haze of substance abuse, who emerged to 'find Jesus', who was written off as a has-been by the end of the 80s, and who suddenly shifted gears and released some of the strongest music of his career beginning in the mid-90s.' The indefatigable Dylan-Influence Search Squad quickly found this to be an exact quote from a newspaper article about the concert the day before. In the same article, *Under the Red Sky* from 1990 was called one of Dylan's weakest albums, so when Dylan played the title song from this album, which has not been performed regularly since the mid-90s, at the same concert, it is difficult not to see the new 'invitatory' as a wry comment of some sort, on Dylan's part. It stuck, however, and interspersed as it is with elements from the old introduction, it almost resembles the tropes of Medieval liturgy, where the original text is commented on or explained by textual additions.

songs for the die-hard fans: a rarely heard song from an obscure 80s album, an old hillbilly standard, or an unlikely cover song. All in all a sequence of songs that could very well be described in terms of the *ordinarium* and *proprium* of the medieval mass: some songs that will be heard every night, like a Kyrie or a Credo, and others that belong to the specific feast day, and which will make *that* particular show unique.

Also concerning the songs themselves, the concert and the medieval service share an important field: that of canonicity. They are both centered around texts which are deeply rooted in their respective societies and which have canonical status of some kind.

During all this, the celebrant(s) and the congregation alike perform certain acts, well aware of their respective roles. A Dylan concert is usually a seated arrangement, but about two thirds into the show there is the so-called stage rush – the moment when, as if on a given sign, in an act of communal attention the initiated rush to the front of the stage to spend the rest of the concert at the Master's feet – as a latter day equivalent, at least in outer form of action, to the communion. Post-concert talk within this group of people may for instance take up whether or not one got eye-contact with his Bobbliness or someone else in the band.

Whenever Dylan has commented upon his role, it has always involved a certain amount of dualities and ambiguities; they seem to be unavoidable in all the areas where he, as an artist, meets the audience. One peculiar aspect of this is possibly to be traced to his double role, being both the celebrant *and* the object of veneration. On stage he acts with the unemotionality of a celebrant who performs an office he knows goes beyond himself, thereby underlining the 'objective' character of the ceremony/concert, and downplaying the personal: he hardly ever speaks on stage; he does move – not with the normal 'look-at-me' gestures of your average rock star, but with quirky knee-bends and awkward dance steps, looking like a cross between Elvis and a shy kid from Hibbing, Minnesota. He is just up there, doing what he happens to do best: being 'just a song-and-dance man'.³

At the same time, he is well aware that every movement he makes is being monitored and interpreted by 7,000 pairs of eyes. One of his more mysterious songs, *Dark Eyes* (1985), ends with the phrase 'A million faces at my feet, and all I see are dark eyes,' which most immediately can be interpreted as the

³ The expression, with its slightly derogatory sound evoking images of shallow entertainers, was one of Dylan's stock phrases when describing himself during press conferences in the mid-sixties.

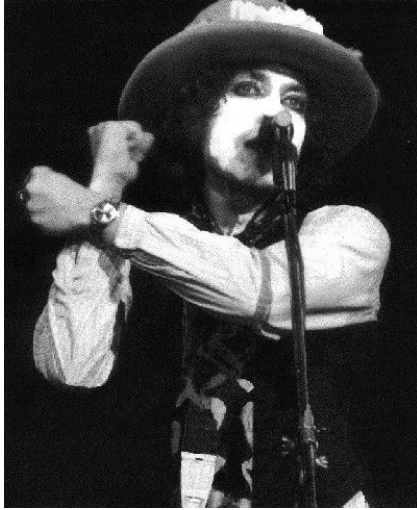
performer's reflection on how idolization looks from the idol's point of view. But two other phrases in the song open up for the possibility to regard the whole song as something heard more specifically from high up on a cross: 'A cock is crowing far away and another soldier's deep in prayer,' and 'The French girl, she's in paradise' – a possible allusion to the thief on the cross.

If the preceding paragraphs have served to suggest that, given a certain (common-sense) set of criteria for ritualness it is difficult to exclude one and include the other of the actions, this does not mean that the differences between a rock concert and a medieval service are not equally significant. Especially two such differences seem particularly important. One is the dependence on a *religious* framework. The other is the role of *artistic production*. Whereas the vespers service has a clear function related to the hereafter and to interaction with the godhead, it would be difficult to claim that a Dylan show entails religious observance in the strict sense – there are no ontological overtones, no dogmatics, no 'theology' (or 'bobology'⁴). Depending on how important one considers the religious aspect, this may or may not be a problem for the ritualistic reading of a concert: the mere presence of outer similarities is no guarantee for the usefulness of comparing religious observance with secular entertainment. But one might instead weigh the similarities more positively and consider them to go deeper than mere coincidences of common surface traits; an activity like a rock concert – inscribed in the modern world of art presentation and transmission and given a formalized frame in such a context – may be seen to fulfill functions and needs that, in earlier ages, have been covered by religious ceremonies, without for that reason necessitating an explicitly religious explanation.⁵

Apart from the notion of the transcendent in a very general sense, and the role of artistic production, there is one aspect of Dylan's production and its reception which more immediately lends itself to comparison with medieval liturgy: the ample occurrence of elements which are closely connected to a traditional conception of religion in a Christian context, such as the prophetic, divine inspiration, the high priest, the vocation, and the chosen who sacrifices himself for others. These elements have, to various degrees, been present both

⁴ Although there is a website called *Church of Bob* (<http://www.geocities.com/churchofbob/>) [accessed 17 November 2004]. See also the reflections cited in the *Postscript* at the end of the article.

⁵ See the discussion of the quotation from Koenigsberger at the beginning of the introduction to this volume.



I picked up his body
and I dragged him inside,
Threw him down in the hole
and I put back the cover.
I said a quick prayer
just to feel satisfied.
Then I rode back to find Isis
just to tell her I love her.

in the way Dylan has been received by the public ever since the sixties, and in his own relationship to his role. Let me just point to three examples.

THE ROLLING THUNDER REVUE

During the late 1975 and the early 1976, Dylan with friends went on the road with a show that was called the *Rolling Thunder Revue*. The grand idea behind the tour was that it was supposed to be a never-ending touring circus, where the artists on the bill would change all the time. The *Revue* would also be self-served with sound equipment and all the other practical aspects of a tour, so that they could make landfall here and there without much prior planning, and without having to go through the administrative treadmill of managers, concert organizers, etc. In this respect, the *Revue* was yet another expression of Dylan's wish to be nothing out of the ordinary, just another musician, at any time replaceable with any other member of this creative community.⁶

One striking element of these concerts was the use of masks, facial paint, and symbols of various kinds. Dylan would frequently come on stage with his face painted white. A powerful scene from one of the concerts shows Dylan

⁶ The concerts themselves were generally lauded, but heavy criticism was raised against the failure to sustain this idea of playing only small venues, which had been presented as a promise. Within short, most of the shows were after all played on the big stages. An insider report on these and other aspects of the *Revue* can be found in

holding his hands crossed in front of him, with clenched fists. The song he is singing is 'Isis', a mystical treasure hunt story which is ultimately about love and death. The song is full of references to religious symbols and concepts, directly or indirectly: 'a high place of darkness and light' is where the protagonist meets his partner in crime; they make a covenant ('I gave him my blanket, he gave me his word') and set out 'to the cold and the north', to find the treasure by the 'pyramids, all embedded in ice'. Then, in the quick sequence of events that is the dramatic climax of the song, his friend dies, he finds the tomb – but the treasure is not there – he drags his partner inside and leaves him in the tomb along with the missing treasure, and then: 'I said a quick prayer just to feel satisfied. | Then I rode back to find Isis just to tell her I love her.'⁷

The song is a masterly example of Dylan's lyrical art – the play with various symbols and meanings, with time, and with his own life; merely as a set of lyrics it opens up a lot of interpretational possibilities: the double partnership (or double incarnation of the idea of partnership), one based on love, the other on friendship, trust, and material gain, the latter of which must be sacrificed in order to reach – which is also a return to – the first partner; the transformation he goes through, as evidenced in the concluding dialogue between man and wife:

She said, 'Where ya been?' I said, 'No place special.'
 She said, 'You look different.' I said, 'Well, I guess.'
 She said, 'You been gone.' I said, 'That's only natural.'
 She said, 'You gonna stay?' I said, 'If you want me to, Yes!'

and the eerie treatment of struggle and death, madness and joy, pain and pleasure, which may or may not be connected with the programmatic introduction to the song at several of the shows: 'This is a song about marriage.' None of the interpretations are clear, but all are open.

The stage enactment of the song, as evidenced on the recent album *Live 1975*,⁸ adds to this openness – and to the uncertainty of meaning. The white face ('death mask?'), the crossed fists ('power'? 'Christ?'), the outstretched arms (again: 'power'? 'Christ?') – they are hardly random movements, they all seem to mean something, but what? The concerts involved a play with symbols of various kinds, symbols that are easily associated with religious ritual, but

⁷ These are the lyrics that were actually sung. They differ slightly from the official lyrics, which can be found on the official website (<http://www.bobdylan.com>).

⁸ Bob Dylan. *The Bootleg Series Vol. 5: Bob Dylan Live 1975: The Rolling Thunder Revue*. Columbia COL 510140 3 (2002). The 'Limited Edition' includes a bonus DVD with live video footage of two of the songs.

which lack a clear symbolic background in the specific context in which they were used. The gestures thus appear as signs removed from a sign system that can render them immediately understandable (which, on the other hand, does not preclude that they can still be *meaningful*, in the sense of being charged with meaning). Also the quasi-religious connections made throughout the tour to settings such as Gypsy mythology and Indian shamanism, can be regarded in this light.

While the symbols that are used can be related to religious spheres of understanding, they are arguably *not* religious in content. The eclecticism which brings together pyramids and prayers, crosses and canyons, precludes any connections with a narrowly defined symbol system; they are used precisely in their general sense, evoking images of human conditions and relationships. Thus, the cross – if interpreted in conjunction with the text that it accompanies, the climactic verse which sees the switch from the partner-friend to the partner-lover/wife – becomes just as much a symbol of human as of divine love.



All this is closely related to the fact that these concerts weren't *just* concerts, and the band wasn't *just* a group of musicians. Dylan had brought a film crew on the road, and just about everything that happened, on stage and behind it, was filmed. The outcome of this was the nearly four hours long *cinema verité* opus *Renaldo and Clara*, which was released – as an immediate commercial and critical failure – in 1978. Be that as it may, the meaning of the actions on stage go beyond that of a rock concert; the movie, the songs that were newly written before the tour, as well as the 'drama' that was enacted on stage, all and together brought up the 'eternal themes': love, death,

marriage, divorce, violence, trust, children, identity, dreams. This is enacted in a meta-narrative taking place both on stage and in some sort of reality, but the lines between the world as lived and the world as enacted (to paraphrase C. Geertz)⁹ are blurred – every statement takes on a meaning which goes beyond

⁹ Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in: *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* ed. by Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), pp. 1–46 (p. 28).

the statement itself, because it belongs in all the different contexts at the same time: both in the 'real' and in the 'transcendent' media-/hyper-reality.¹⁰

THE GOSPEL YEARS

Three years later, Dylan 'went Christian'. For a period, he was associated with the extreme evangelical Vineyard Fellowship in Tarzana, CA. During the 'gospel years' 1979–1981, Dylan mostly performed new songs, filled with evangelization and images of end-time and apocalyptic cataclysm. In one sense, his concerts from these years are directly connected with Christian ritual, by virtually having been turned into Christian services, including 'raps' – mini-sermons – between the songs. In another sense, however, the concerts from his born-again period may, paradoxically, serve as an example, contrasting with the *Rolling Thunder Revue*, of a period which from a ritual perspective is the *least* interesting. The main reason for this assessment is that the message was over-explicit, in the well-established tradition of evangelical preaching; there was little left of the transcendental message of the earlier tour – i.e. the message which transcended what was physically presented on stage – only a message *about* the transcendental, which is a completely different thing. What had previously been a *play* with symbolic elements, which then took on a meaning beyond their contents, was now a mere *use* of them, as traditional elements with a fairly clear meaning, used in a general way in a conventional context.

THE VOICE OF A GENERATION

The epithet that has stuck most stubbornly to Dylan through the decades is probably that of 'the Voice of a Generation': the one who said things that many felt. One way of gauging the quasi-religious importance of this role is to watch the reactions when he stopped saying what at least some of his followers wanted him to say. The world tour of 1966 was a *tour de force* in a literal sense: while the first half of the concerts still had the bard standing all alone on stage, with nothing but a microphone, a glass of water, and a spotlight to distract the attention, the second half of the concerts was an outburst backed by The Hawks (later The Band), with the loudest sound-system anyone had ever heard. This betrayal of his former art was famously greeted with the shout 'Judas!' at the show in Manchester, May 17, 1966. Hand in hand with this musical betrayal of the folk idiom went the fact that he had left out the political message from his songs; the step from 'Come senators, congressmen,

¹⁰ The most striking example of this blur are the scenes between 'Renaldo' (Dylan), 'Clara' (Dylan's wife, Sara), and 'The Woman in White' (Joan Baez, Dylan's sometime girlfriend), which is a painfully embarrassing peek into a relationship in the process of breaking up, at the same time as it is a play with cultural characters and clichés (one of which is 'Bob Dylan'), and metaphysical themes ('I am the law', quoth Renaldo).

please heed the call' to poetic imagery like 'Upon four-legged forest clouds the cowboy angel rides' was a bitter pill to swallow for many.

But in fact, Dylan has always claimed to be uninterested in politics. Already in 1963, before his break-through album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* was released, he could be heard talking disparagingly about the folk movement in a radio interview with Bob Fass,¹¹ and in 1968, in connection with his first public appearance in two years, he almost irritably answered questions about his recent reluctance to address political issues:

Dylan: You check your old newspapers, you won't be able to find too many statements I've made on those issues.

Press: What exactly then is your position on politics and music?

Dylan: My job is to play music. I think I've answered enough questions.¹²

Again, it is the 'Just a song-and-dance man' speaking, the artist-as-craftsman who goes to work with what he is best at: 'Basically, I'm just a regular person. I don't walk around all the time out of my mind with inspiration. So what can I tell you about that?'¹³

But his renouncement of his own ability or even desire to project a 'profound' message also takes on an almost opposite character, where this very renouncement becomes important. In an interview from 1978 where Dylan comments upon *Renaldo and Clara*, we find the following discussion about what he wants to do or not:

Dylan: Let's say you have a message: white is white. Bergman would say 'white is white' in the space of an hour – or what seems to be an hour. Buñuel might say 'white is black and black is white, but white is really white'. And it's all really the same message.

Interviewer: And how would Dylan say it?

Dylan: Dylan would probably not even say it. He'd assume you'd know that.¹⁴

If this is a way of saying that he does not have a 'profound' message, it is at the same time as if this rejection itself is part of the message; 'not even saying it' – or rather, not in principle *having* to say it, because it is already known, latently, if not patently – is precisely what he wants to say. The statement does, after

¹¹ The interview is available in various bootleg recordings, under the name *Radio Unnameable* (Bob Fass radio broadcast, WBAI-FM, New York, NY, March 28, 1963).

¹² Press conference (transcript), Isle of Wight, August 27, 1969, available at (<http://www.interferenza.com/bcs/interw/69-aug27.htm>) [accessed 17 November 2004]

¹³ *Rolling Stone Magazine*, November 22, 2001.

¹⁴ *Playboy Magazine*, March 1978.

all, fall during a discussion of a film the meaning of which is anything but obvious. It might also be related to the following, from an interview in 1984, which plainly contradicts the faith in the audience's ability to understand, at least if the 'He'd assume you'd know that' is taken at face value:

I don't think I'm gonna be really understood until maybe 100 years from now. What I've done, what I'm doing, nobody else does or has done.¹⁵

The same notion of the uniqueness of what he is doing in bringing out songs that are true and that live, independently even of Dylan himself, is expressed in a recent interview:

I don't get bored singing the songs because they have a truth to them. They have a life to them [. . .] I don't think there is anybody playing the type of songs that we're playing.¹⁶

This could be interpreted as an ideology concerning meaning in artistic production, where the artist is no structure-erecting craftsman, whose production is food for thought in an intellectual, modernist way. Rather, it is the Romantic image of the artist-genius, the intuitive medium, who, thanks to his special gift, is able to pick up wisdom where others just see everyday reality – who sees the answer that is blowin' in the wind. He nods in recognition to a statement from Woody Guthrie, that all the songs are already written, floating around in the universe, ready to be picked up (*Mojo Magazine*, february 1998). He uses a similar phrase to describe his own writing of *Desolation Row*:

Dylan: I don't know how it was done.
Kurt Loder: It just came to you?
Dylan: It just came out through me.¹⁷

In principle, his message is unnecessary because what he says is simply what is just lying around to be picked up by anyone who cares to look, plainly for anyone to see who has the ability. But at the same time his role as the medium through which this wisdom can be channelled out among others, puts him in a special position, similar to Schopenhauer's description of genius, as 'the

¹⁵ *Sunday Times*, July 1, 1984.

¹⁶ *Mojo Magazine*, February 1998.

¹⁷ *Rolling Stone Magazine*, December 1987. The same notion, of picking up what is available to anyone who cares to look, is given another twist in relation to language and the social dimension in the following statement, 'I'm just into language. I pick up what's in the air, what's on people's minds' (Woodstock 1968. Elliot Landy)

capacity for knowing the Ideas of things – in the platonic sense of Ideas – and for revealing these Ideas in works of art for the benefit of the remainder of mankind who, borrowing as it were the eyes of genius, may behold through these works what the genius beholds directly.¹⁸ In an interview from 1984, these two opposing approaches appear in the same part of the discussion:

I mean, if I didn't have anything different to say to people, then what would be the point of it?

[. . .] Anybody who expects anything from me is just a borderline case [. . .] You can't keep on depending on one person to give you everything.

It does not seem like an exaggeration to say that Dylan sees himself and his role *vis-à-vis* his audience in the light of religious notions, whether they are explicitly presented as such or not. Even though he has never (to my knowledge) explicitly called himself a prophet, the statements above – about universal truths coming out through him and him alone – only lack the outspokenly religious aspect and the ability to look into the future, and both these are present in a comment during a concert in 1979, during his 'religious years':

I told you 'The Times They Are A-Changing' and they did. I said the answer was 'Blowin' in the Wind' and it was. I'm telling you now Jesus is coming back, and He is! (Albuquerque, December 5, 1979)

Even though his religiosity is less outspoken these days, he keeps referring to what he is doing in religious terms, even in the latest interviews. Concerning his currently ongoing 'Never-ending' string of tours, which has kept him constantly on the road since 1988, he describes its beginning in terms of a religious experience on stage:

It's almost like I heard it as a voice. [. . .] *I'm determined to stand, whether God will deliver me or not.* And all of a sudden everything just exploded. [. . .] After that is when I sort of knew: I've got to go out and play these songs (*Newsweek* October 13, 1997).

Consequently, although his task may be fulfilled through a craftsmanlike performance of a job no different than any other, in the larger perspective the outcome of the job is conceived of in a higher order:

¹⁸ Quoted from Arthur C. Danto, 'The appreciation and interpretation of works of art', in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 23–46 (p. 23–24).

I don't feel like what I do qualifies to be called a career. It's more of a calling (*Rolling Stone Magazine*, November 22, 2001).

SECULAR RITUAL

The preceding discussion of Dylan's role, its contents and its form, can be summed up in the suggestion that Dylan is seen – both by himself and by his audience¹⁹ – as a secular prophet, performing a secular ritual, for a modern world. This would in turn imply a notion of 'secular religion', but what is that, if anything at all?

In one sense, it is a meaningless juxtaposition of opposing terms. But at the same time it seems like an apt term to describe Dylan. First, because it captures a certain paradox in Dylan's self-appreciation, in that he fundamentally conceives of a religious framework for the transmission of a message which, however, is not in itself religious.²⁰ Second, because it opens up for an understanding of the way in which a Dylan concert can meaningfully be regarded as a ritual. We are, thus, back to the question implied in the introduction: *is* a Dylan show 'really' a ritual?

This is not the place to define ritual, nor to survey the existing definitions, but a few words still need to be said about the premises for my understanding of ritual.

First, I consider ritual a historical concept. This has a positive and a negative side. The negative determination of ritual entails a rejection of various phenomenological definitions of ritual – that ritual refers to something with constant contents, whether one discusses the Chinese *li*, medieval liturgy, Balinese initiation rites, or modern, secular rituals. I will also disregard biologicistic and psychologistic explanations, that e.g. take behaviour in birds and animals into consideration in order to explain human ritual, or regard ritual as a response to fundamental needs – psychological or even physiological – inherent in the human nature.

On the positive side, this standpoint connects with a certain branch of historicism, not in its Rankean form with the aim to establish 'wie es eigent-

¹⁹ The emphasis here has been on Dylan's own perception of his role; for examples of his fans' appreciation bordering on the religious, see Nils Holger Petersen's article in this volume, and the *Postscript* to this article.

²⁰ His 'gospel years' songs, where the religious message is more outspoken, play only a minor role in Dylan's current live repertory, which is the immediate background material for this article.

lich gewesen' (or, more narrowly concerning the content of texts, that it 'receives its intelligibility from its connection to the social conditions of the community that produced it or to which it was destined'²¹), but rather by claiming that a concept can only be meaningfully used and understood in the light of its history. Most immediately, this involves the historical continuity of the term itself. The usage of the word 'ritual' has progressed from its Roman Latin etymological origin, through its various medieval applications (none of which correspond directly either with the Ancient or the modern usage) and its widened use in early anthropological and religious studies, to the every-day application of the term to beer-drinking rituals and shoelace-tying. As with other terms that have been used over long periods of time, the use of the same term is no guarantee of co-extensiveness between early and late instances, but their belonging to the same terminological strand enables us to trace the changes that have occurred.

It also involves the importance of the historical continuity between the various activities that are or have been characterized through the term, for our understanding of them, in the sense that the historical continuity between a medieval vespers service and a modern church ritual shapes our understanding of both to a radically higher degree and more directly than either of those shape our understanding of 'rituals' outside of this historical thread, such as the Chinese *li* and Balinese initiation rites.

Just as important as the immediate historical continuity, is the fundamentally historical character of concept formation. Any concept will be meaningful only through its use within the community of users, and is, thus, historical insofar as it goes beyond the lifespan and memory of the single users. Whether it refers to events that took place yesterday or six hundred years ago, is insignificant concerning its historical character; it must in any case be incorporated into the individual user's language world and resonate with notions that are already processed, or *prefigured*, to use Hayden White's term.²²

This stance involves an opposition towards a structuralist understanding, in favour of an orientation towards *practice*: the structure has no existence of its own and no primacy in relation to practical experience. A general, ab-

²¹ Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian Press, 1976), pp. 89–90.

²² 'A discourse is itself a kind of model of the processes of consciousness by which a given area of experience, originally apprehended as simply a field of phenomena demanding understanding, is assimilated by analogy to those areas of experience felt to be *already* understood as to *their* essential natures.' Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 5.

stracted concept carries less explanatory force the farther it is removed from the experience and recollection of a concretely lived life (memories) or one's appropriated 'memories' (history). In this sense, the 'surface level' is all there is. A corollary to this is that surface similarities may be of importance – such as the surface similarities between the Dylan show and the medieval service alluded to in the introduction.

Second, I side with those who consider a concept of ritual which does not in some way or another take into account a notion of religion to be too much deprived of what has formed the definition of ritual outlined above.

'The religious' can be approached in various ways. A narrow definition centering on the relation of one's understanding of the important issues in life – such as death, suffering, other human beings – to some divine being, and (especially with respect to ritual) channelled through a more or less fixed set of observances based on canonical texts, will only be *part* of the understanding underlying the present discussion – albeit importantly so. As an example of phenomena where a sharp line between religious and non-religious is difficult to draw, one might mention the suggestion, building on Freud's comparison between ritual and neurotic behaviour, that the dramatic increase in cases of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder over the past fifty years is related to the decreasing importance of the traditional forms of religious rituals in the West, as a consequence of the disappearance of established and accepted frames for addressing or even answering the unanswerable questions.²³

'The religious' can also be taken to refer to a system of thought concerning a wider notion of 'the transcendent', regarded as something with an existence in reality, but still principally lying beyond the grasp of human sensory experience and rational capacity.²⁴ With this definition, the transcendent, and hence the religious, can be extended to the self's experience of something outside of the self, which can only be known via a perspective outside of the self, because it in principle is determined and presented to the self from the outside, independently of the self.

²³ Diana Smay: 'The Disease of Ritual: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder as an Outgrowth of Normal Behavior', (<http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/MARIAL/pdfs/ObsessiveCompulsive.pdf>). See also my 'Ritualets grenser: Ritualbegrepets nytte og skade', i *Ritualer i kontekst*, ed. by Mette Birkedal Brun and Kim Esmark, Kirkehistoriske fragmenter, 2 (Copenhagen: Department of Church History, The Theological Faculty, University of Copenhagen, 2004), 175–192, where I discuss safety demonstrations on airplanes as rituals of death (pp. 183–84).

²⁴ This way of using 'transcendence' draws more on the scholastic tradition than on the way it is used in Kantian philosophy.

More specifically, the notion of the transcendent is central to the approach from language philosophy. There will always be something beyond oneself which determines language, and hence also oneself. Derrida's *différance* and the blind spot,²⁵ and Wittgenstein's rejection of private experience are both expressions of the fundamentally transcendent character of language and thought.

The criteria which are usually brought forth as central for ritual – repetition in a formalized form and within a certain community of actions with a certain symbolic character – have interesting parallels to Wittgenstein's philosophy. His tenet that a word's meaning is its use,²⁶ can be expanded to say that the constitution of meaning is based on repeated exposure to a certain linguistic act, and the discovery of, appropriation of, and establishment of *tacit knowledge* about the formal(ized) system of rules behind, valid within the community of language users.²⁷ In this sense, one might say that all meaning depends on ritual activity.

Community is thus central both to the historical and to the religious or transcendental approach to ritual, as the precondition for meaning as well as for the formation of the self and of identity. A community is necessary for our process of defining our identity as historical beings, as well as for conceptualizing this identity, both to ourselves and to others.

Such a perspective does not presuppose a concept of the divine or the sacred, but it is certainly open to include it. Conversely, it provides a way of borrowing notions that are central to a modern, Western understanding of religion and of applying them to matters which are usually not considered to belong to the religious sphere.

I have so far been reluctant to give a definition of ritual, other than the general use I have made of it – for the reasons that are implied in the foregoing paragraphs: the need for a historical connection, and the discussion of the transcendental. The latin word *ritus* has two different meanings. The

²⁵ 'The speaker's potency does not derive from solipsistic self-presence but from presence to the community. The illusion of self-presence that Derrida sees as the essential blind spot of metaphysics is the originary cultural illusion: the illusion of unmediated subject-object interaction. It is a variant formulation of the constitutive 'illusion' of the sacred center: the existence of sacred Being independent of human desire and representation' (Eric Gans: 'Chronicles of Love and Resentment', (<http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw130.htm>)).

²⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 43.

²⁷ See also chapter 5 ('Analysis of Chant Melodies – Methodological Considerations') of my *The Office of Saint Olav: A study in Chant Transmission* (Diss., Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2001), where this perspective on musical meaning is developed at length.

first definition (as given in the Lewis-Short dictionary) is relatively unproblematic in relation to a medieval service: 'the form and manner of religious observances; a religious usage or ceremony, a rite.' The second definition is significantly wider: 'a custom, usage, manner, mode, way,' and it corresponds more closely with the modern everyday usage, where just about any action that is repeated the same way every time, and where some kind of meaning is ascribed to the way it is done, can be called a ritual. Ritual, then, is no longer exclusively a religious term.

For the purposes of the present article, however, it does not seem necessary to operate with such a wide definition: it is my contention that a Dylan show lies closer to a medieval service than to toothbrushing, however properly performed. The initial descriptions of a typical Dylan concert, and the analyses of the religious element in Dylan's production were meant to demonstrate some of the reasons for this closeness.

As a first step, I will therefore take as my point of departure in the criteria already listed in the introduction – repetition, in a formalized form and within a certain community, of actions with a certain symbolic character – with the explicit qualification discussed in the two previous sections: the need for a historical understanding, and for some notion of religion.

FUNCTIONS AND MEANS

My suspicion towards a concept of ritual based on abstraction, away from the level of practical experience, does not imply a discarding of any talk about the function of ritual, or a philosophically based approach – on the contrary. The most explicit statement of such a standpoint is probably Frits Staal's claim that 'ritual has no meaning [. . .] ritual is pure activity, without meaning or goal. [. . .] Ritual is for its own sake.'²⁸ Although Staal's argument has strong merits, it also serves to demonstrate the dangers this approach may run into.

Hans Penner has pointed out some of these, primarily that Staal's discussion is based upon a notion of syntax and a theory of meaning which are obsolete, and, furthermore, that the idea of 'ritual for its own sake' comes strikingly close to the Romanticist 'Art for Art's sake', only in reverse: 'Staal thinks that because ritual is for its own sake it is therefore meaningless. For the romantics art for its own sake entailed a superabundance of meaning.'²⁹

²⁸ Frits Staal, 'The Meaninglessness of Ritual', *Numen*, 26 (1979), 2–22 (pp. 8–9).

²⁹ Hans H. Penner, 'Language, Ritual and Meaning', *Numen*, 32 (1985), 1–16 (p. 5).

Penner sums up his article with a comparison – as an alternative to Staal's thesis that the origin of syntax in language, and hence of language itself, is ritual – between the ways in which language and ritual can be considered meaningful, quite in line with the Wittgensteinian perspective I have hinted at above:

Although the performers of the ritual may not be able to explain the rules, they do *know* when they are broken and they also *know* what is to be done when the rules are broken. [. . .] There is a sense in which performers of ritual learn to perform a ritual as we learn how to speak our language in spite of the fact that we cannot explain the rules upon which both are based.³⁰

To Penner's criticism, one might add that the reason why Staal can reach the conclusion he does ('ritual is meaningless') is that he fails to distinguish between the *activities* he is describing (the Vedic *Agnicayana* ceremonies) and the *theoretical framework* ('ritual') in relation to which he performs his search for meaning (or rather: lack of meaning).

This failure has the immediate consequence that because Staal has as his point of departure in a Western concept of ritual (with references to van Genep, Levi-Strauss, and others), chances are that this is a different theoretical framework than that which informs what the participants in the '3000-year-old Vedic ritual' think about what they do. When he claims that 'the majority [of the participants] would not be able to come up with an adequate answer to the question why they engage in ritual' (p. 3), one might as well say that they would not even know that what they engage in *is* a ritual, at least not in the sense in which Staal uses it in the rest of the article.

But the main failure lies in the commixture of two different kinds of meaning. When he asks about the meaning of the Agnicayana ritual, he asks for a meaning which is explainable in words, a reference to symbolic activity or to a specific function – a *semantic* meaning. But his conclusion about the meaninglessness of ritual is based on the kind of meaning that Penner describes in the quotation above, which sees rites as activities which are based on rule-following in a way which resembles that of other systems of activities where it makes sense to talk about meaning – such as language – but without necessarily having semantic or conceptual meaning.³¹ This is implied in Staal's

³⁰ Penner, p. 13.

³¹ In this respect, ritual most closely resembles music; see my 'Music and the Ineffable', in *Voicing the Ineffable: Musical Representations of Religious Experience*, ed. by Siglind Bruhn (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2002), pp. 287–312, esp. pp. 306–8.

conclusion that ‘ritual, then, is primarily [. . .] an activity governed by explicit rules. The important thing is what you do, not what you think, believe or say’ (Staal, p. 4), but since Staal operates with a referential theory of meaning, he still – despite his attempt to avoid the problem of logocentricity by placing the origin of language in ritual – preserves the primacy of conceptual meaning.

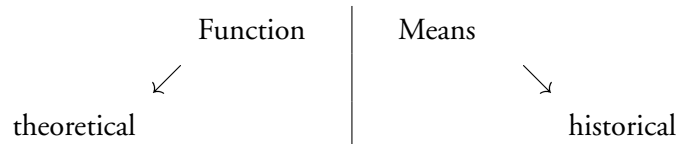
Based on these considerations, we can modify the qualifications of the general approach to ritual theory given above even further by adding the principal distinction between the *functions* a rite may have (including what a participant or an observer may think about this function, be it symbolically, economically, religiously, etc.) and the concrete *means* used to fulfill that function in each particular rite. I will elaborate on this in four stages.

First, the connection between function and means can be described as arbitrary, in the sense that the means may not necessarily have had the aim of fulfilling a certain ritual function; they may have come to be used in a certain ritual for many different reasons, including reasons that do not necessarily belong within a ritual definition. Likewise, the function need not be explicit, or even recognizable, in the means. The same function can be fulfilled by many different means, and the same means can fulfill different functions in different contexts. Once the specific means have been incorporated in the system of rules that defines a certain ritual action, however, it is no longer possible to talk about arbitrariness; although there are many means through which one *could* have encountered a certain function, the specific means that make up a ritual action are the only way one *in fact* encounters it. *Ex post facto*, there is no arbitrariness, and there is nothing *ante factum*.

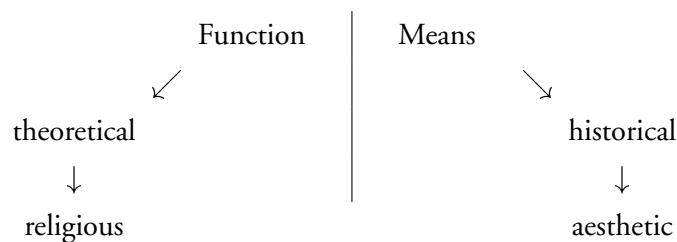
Function		Means
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Second, any talk about the function of ritual will be an abstraction, a theorizing (whether it takes the form of a philosophy, a religious doctrine, or a cultural theory) about the conditions of man and ways of influencing them. This applies even when a function is explicitly stated (by the participants) as the foundation of a certain ritual; functions are never absolutely defined, they always belong within the realm of philosophy in a wide sense. The means, on the other hand, are concrete actions in specific historical settings, and should be studied as such, with whatever help the various scholarly disciplines of textual and historical criticism can bring. When a historical perspective is applied to ritual, then, what is studied will usually be either theoretical systems concerning functions (e.g. Amalar’s explanations of the liturgical items of the mass), or specific activities, significant only – but significantly so – in their his-

torical situatedness. This distinction is meant as an aid to avoid the possible pitfall of treating the function or the conceptual meaning of a ritual – such as bringing salvation or rain, upholding social systems, or fulfilling basic human needs – as inherent traits of the means.

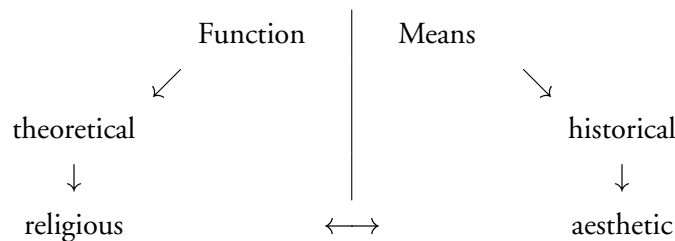


Third, as implied above, I treat ‘the religious’ as a category of ‘the philosophical’, both as abstract systems of thought, and in the more general sense concerning notions of ‘the transcendental’. The distinction has to do with essentials: whereas the essence of ‘the transcendent’ has been the problem that has ridden philosophy since Plato, from the religious perspective it is not a problem at all – it is assumed. Likewise, the aesthetic experience may be regarded as a category of the experience of a formalized action, in this case a ritual action. They are both experiences of rule-bound activities having meaning as such (in the Wittgensteinian sense of ‘use governed by an internalized understanding of the underlying rules’), but dependent upon a ‘philosophy’ in order to be meaningful in a conceptual sense (or: susceptible to translation into conceptual meaning through a ‘philosophy’). The bringing together of aesthetic and ritual actions is a concession to the primacy of sensory experience (over theoretical speculation) in both, as well as to their historical interconnections.



Fourth, if the dichotomy between ‘function’ and ‘means’ has been upheld so far, there is an interesting cross-connection between the aesthetic and the religious, which unites the philosophical and the historical approach and illuminates the importance of the aesthetic means in ritual (historically speaking), and of ritual connections for the development of aesthetic thought (theoret-

ically speaking). As I have discussed at greater length elsewhere,³² the conflict between physical reality and rational thought has been solved in aesthetic theories in ways which approximate the religious: Plato's 'divine madness', the mysterious presence of the divine in a Byzantine icon, the 'non so che' ('I-don't-know-what') of early modern theories of art, and the Romantic genius – they all have the experience of physical reality as their point of departure, but in each case this experience is supplemented by a notion of something transcending that experience, something which lies beyond the grasp of rational thought. It is striking how, throughout the history of Western civilization, aesthetic thought and religion have related to similar phenomena and to the same ranges of experiences and given them explanations that overlap and interconnect.



DYLAN AND RITUAL REVISITED

It is time to return to Dylan again – to the interplay of functions and means and the historical continuity, across the centuries, between medieval service and modern rock show, which may or may not add to our understanding of both.

I have presented the 'surface layer' of the two kinds of activities in such a way as to bring out the similarities between them; they can both be regarded as 'rites' – as means to fulfil a ritual function, or as self-contained, 'meaningless' activities, the meanings of which are understood by the participants, regardless of whether these have been explained, theologically or not, and whether such an explanation is understood or known by the participants.

³² Eyolf Østrem, "The Ineffable": Affinities between Christian and Secular Concepts of Art', in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and Their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. by Petersen, Clüver, and Bell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 265–92.

One example of an area where there are elements of continuity, both of functions and of means, is the concert genre itself. This way of presenting music has firm roots back to medieval ritual. The polyphonic mass of the late Middle Ages defended its place only insofar as it fulfilled its liturgical function, essentially indistinguishable from its medieval counterpart, but despite its functional basis, there is evidence that it was often enjoyed primarily for aesthetic reasons; the *Abendmusiken* and the church recitals in seventeenth-century protestant cities seem to have fulfilled a similar function, being primarily entertainment, as forerunners of the public concert, but, significantly, usually performed in church before or after the ordinary church services; and, last but not least, the public concert in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of which modern 'classical' concerts are heirs, was closely related to the cult of the genius and his ability to bring out the sublime, a notion akin to the transcendent – summed up in the notion *Kunstreligion*. These are all practices where it is hard to draw sharp lines between the religious and secular functions of the music – between worship and enjoyment.³³

When it comes to Dylan, this general aspect of *Kunstreligion* inherent in the concert genre itself is brought together with popular culture, in its two incarnations as *folk* culture – a tradition which until the twentieth century has mostly remained on the outside of the line of continuity sketched above – and *mass* culture – the commercial exploitation of entertainment-as-commodity. Dylan – together with other artists – has started over again, so to speak: out of a genre which was originally functional in a way similar to medieval ritual music – only fulfilling other functions, such as dance or the 'news reports' of a folk ballad – a new concert genre has evolved, in a way that is comparable to the aestheticization of the functional mass music in the fifteenth century. This is a genre that spans the whole continuum from mindless entertainment – noticeable both in the commercial mass appeal, as evidenced by the blatant advertisement of the Columbia Recording Company in the 'invitatory', and in the dancing in the aisles and visits to the bar (and, consequently, to the restroom), vestiges of the traditional functions of popular music making – to the deepest seriousness, which encompasses meaningfulness, world view, and ideology, no less profound than that of a classical concert. For the most part, a Dylan audience is completely quiet, hanging on to every word that comes from the stage, and such has been the case ever since his break-through in the early sixties. As a genre, the transformed, 'serious' pop concert takes its *raison*

³³ See also my 'Music and the Ineffable' for a more thoroughgoing discussion of the religious-aesthetical background of the mentioned genres.

d'être from the common understanding among the audience that something is offered which goes beyond entertainment – that the actions carry a level of meaning which transcends the surface level of the actions themselves.

The same ritual aspect can be discerned in the way the songs are used in his current live repertory; their effect is partly based upon the assumption that words that were laid down a long time ago can transcend their own historical situation and can even transmit an esoteric meaning, or at least a meaning which goes beyond the words themselves and the acts of performing and listening to them. Seen in a ritual perspective, it is not primarily the songs and the texts themselves which are meaningful, but the context to which they belong as meaningless – arbitrary – elements. I am reluctant to call this a complete arbitrariness (cf. the discussion above), but would rather call it a meaningfulness which is disjunct from the primary function of the songs, historically and generically speaking.

If the concert genre, thus, is an example of a continuity of means which also go beyond the obvious similarities, the question of a possible continuity also in function is more complex. One might for instance, claim that religiously charged concert music fulfills certain basic human needs, regardless of the external frames, or that several of the functions that a medieval liturgy fulfilled, in a society where the doctrine that had shaped the rituals also dominated every other aspect of society, will remain unfulfilled by that particular ritual in a society where the doctrine is no longer universally acclaimed, and must instead be fulfilled by other ‘ritualized’ actions, such as a Dylan show.

That such a functional aspect is possible in the case of a Dylan show, is indicated, e.g., by the emphasis Dylan places on performing his songs live (and not just let them ‘speak for themselves’ on the albums), and the importance for the audience to attend it in person.³⁴ What is meaningful about it, is not only the contents of the lyrics (important as they may be), the person (thrilling as it may be to see a cultural icon in the flesh), or the concert genre, but all these taken together.³⁵

One problem is that it is not indisputable which functions a medieval ceremony has fulfilled; we may have some access to the practical means (prayers,

³⁴ See the first remark in the *Postscript* below.

³⁵ A concert with another band playing Dylan songs can hardly have the same function, no matter how well they play. It works almost like a concert version of a medieval mass: when one element of an original setting is removed, the action as a whole is changed, and so is its function (and whatever function the new product is thought to fulfil, it will be another than the original).

chants, texts, etc.), but both the unconceptual understanding the participants have had of these means, through their repeated participation in them, and the connections they have made between the actions and the wider conceptual system are, in principle, beyond the reach of the modern scholar. The same basic problem applies to the modern ritual – in one sense to an even higher degree, since there is no over-arching theoretical system comparable to medieval christianity against which a means is tied to a certain function. Thus, the question of functions, and even more of functional continuity, must remain open to interpretation, and the answers will vary depending on which theoretical vantage points one chooses.

The comparison between a medieval church service and a Dylan show has been made not only as a test case of a theoretical model, apt precisely because they they appear to be worlds and centuries apart. On the contrary, the idea originated in the practical experience of a similarity, paired with the conviction that Dylan is probably the artist today who is best suited for such a comparison: that there are good reasons to make the connection. As a way of summing up and tying together the various threads that run through this article, I would like to point out three main areas where Dylan's role approaches that of religious services.

One is the notion of a transcendental truth, revealed and administered by the artistic medium, as emphasised in the discussion of Dylan as the 'Voice of a Generation'. The second is that of creating a community and a sense of connection between the individual and the community around a canon of texts and facts informed by the medium's revelation – a canon which is potentially of vital importance for one's life. This relates to what has previously been said about historicity and the transcendent. The third, which also relates to the discussion of historicity, can be described with a cliché which has often been used about Dylan: that he serves as the 'soundtrack of our lives' – as the one whose music has been allowed to shape our experiences of the important things in life (perhaps even to define what have been important experiences); as the one who points out those things that define our identity as historical beings, through which our individual experiences are anchored to the continuum of societal time. Dylan fans range from those with a deep appreciation of his musical and lyrical artistic production to those who are almost religiously obsessive about everything related to him. But common to both extremes are the sense of community created by repeated, communal activities, and the resonance of one's own experiences with expressions – musical, literary or others – that have acquired a canonical status.

POSTSCRIPT

The fact that surprisingly many people go surprisingly far beyond the stage of nodding sympathetically to the words of Dylan’s songs, but also lead their lives, make their choices in life, and form their outlook on life in accordance with, or at least with an eye on, what Dylan says, does, sings, and means, indicates an approach which borders on the religious.

The advantage one has in this field as opposed to medieval studies, is that one can ask the participants what they think. I published an earlier version of this article at the website (<http://www.dylanchords.com>). Some of the reactions were posted at the *Dylan Pool*, currently the most popular and widely used website for day-to-day banter about Dylan, where people from all around the world with an over-average interest in Dylan gather. The following is a selection of the responses:³⁶

The performance of the thing is key. I would love Dylan’s music if I sat at home and listened to his officially released albums. But it’s up on a whole other level when you are there for the performance. [. . .] I have often thought of Bob’s concerts in terms of the Catholic Mass. [. . .] Something special, something extraordinary happens. And only an ordained priest can do this. It’s the Consecration and the event of Transubstantiation. That bread and wine are transformed. Christ does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But this miracle happens at each celebration. And this is what Bob does with his music. It is not just singing an old crowd favorite. The song is called forth in a new way. It’s creation, it’s transformation. [. . .] Maybe I sound like I’m going over the top, but I don’t know how else to convey the sense I have of his music and performance. Just like at Passover.

I’ve always felt that there is a shared consciousness at Dylan concerts that the performance has some significance beyond its own entertainment value. It’s not just what Dylan does – it’s the audience responses, the antiphonies.

And the following, from an article in *New Statesman* (January 6, 2003) by Will Self:

I suspect that, like a good many fans of Bob Dylan’s work (the silent but sympathetic majority if you will), my communion with his work is a link between the intimate minutiae of my personal life and a moiety which, while non-specific, is still a great deal larger. [. . .] When I listen to Dylan’s music, I subconsciously apprehend this connection, although at the same time I am transported to a place where, vis-a-vis with my own wellspring of feeling, I am alone. This sense of being a communicant

³⁶ The full exchange can be found at (<http://pool.dylantree.com/phorum/read.php?f=2&i=216836&t=216836>)

at an altar rail that is shared by millions has always inclined me to limit the amount I know about the artist himself, or even the wider context of his work. For lyrical music to conjure up such a powerful level of identification, it is better that it be shrouded in numinous ignorance.

Chapter 4

The Momentum of Standstill

OR: *Time Out Of Mind* AND THE BLUES

TIME OUT OF MIND is a blues album. Dylan finally sounds like the old blues man he wanted to be when he was 20. In the beginning of his career – before the folk music got in the way – he was considered a blues singer first and a folk musician second. His voice treatment and his phrasing, as well as the songs he performed and the models for the songs he eventually began writing himself – they’ve all got their roots deep down in the Delta. Robert Shelton wrote in his review of Dylan’s first major gig – the review that may have helped Dylan get his first record contract:

Mr. Dylan’s voice is anything but pretty. He is consciously trying to recapture the rude beauty of a Southern field hand musing in melody on his porch. All the ‘husk and bark’ are left on his notes and a searing intensity pervades his songs [. . .] Elasticized phrases are drawn out until you think they may snap. He rocks his head and body, closes his eyes in reverie and seems to be groping for a word or a mood, then resolves the tension benevolently by finding the word and the mood (from the liner notes to *Bob Dylan*, 1962).

The blues: twelve or eight fixedly patterned bars of three-chord music – seemingly a low standard for excellence. But that depends on the perspective. One thing is that the twelve-bar scheme isn’t the one, never-changing cliché it is normally presented as; there are numerous variations within the pattern. These are still small, though, and it doesn’t raise the bar considerably. The real excellency of a good blues musician lies elsewhere: in the phrasing, in the tiniest rhythmical changes (which is what creates the ‘mood’, the ‘feeling’), in the timing. The Blues – even when played instrumentally – always seems to give a nod to the rules of vocal delivery – and being plentifully rewarded for it. Sometimes it could be seen as a way of speaking more than a way of singing, with all the almost unnoticeable nuances of speaking available, to help achieving the goal of speech – to express oneself and to be understood. This is available to a large extent because of the blues’ freedom from the con-

finer of notation. But at the same time, what gives the blues its peculiar power is the combination of the expressiveness of speech with that of music.¹

Music can be defined as 'organization of sound in time'. It possesses detailed systems for how this organization is to be brought about: rhythmical hierarchies, harmonic 'laws', frameworks of different kinds, upon which melodies are built.

One of the most fundamental features of this organized object called music, is the regulation of tension. It can be defined as that expectation of a release, a return to a level of rest, which is created by a deviation from this level. This is a very open definition, which must be supplied with extra information specific to each particular style, such as: what counts as a deviation, what counts as a return, which means are considered adequate to effect this return, and which musical parameters are involved?

So what is the neutral level for a blues melody? There is the key note, of course. That's where most melodies start and end, and what comes between is what is supposed to compell us to keep listening. If no deviation from this note occurs, we lose interest, of course. Then there is the twelve-bar pattern itself, using some kind of variation of the three basic chords *tonic* (key note), *subdominant* (a fifth lower) and *dominant* (a fifth higher). But there are other such neutral levels. The blues is an oral musical tradition, and like most of these, it consists of a highly developed set of standardized formulae – short snippets that are appropriate in specific connections. They can range from the shortest lick to a complete melody. This is a feature that is has in common with both indian *raga* and Gregorian chant. Now, what separates an expert performer from the strummers and hummers, is the ability to use these licks in an interesting way: to balance between the traditional material which defines the style, and the new, the inventive. As a harmonica tutorial puts it, after giving numerous examples of blues licks: 'To play a blues solo, all you have to do is to put some of these licks together. To play a good blues solo – now that's a different matter.' To rephrase this using our terminology: the licks of blues may in themselves represent a neutral melodic level, where a new twist to a well-known formula may suddenly give it that compelling character that keeps us seated (or perhaps: brings us to our feet, dancing).

Similar elaborations can be made concerning rhythm and harmony: what is musically interesting is (among other things) the interaction between the

¹See Mike Daley's article on *Like a Rolling Stone*, available at his website <http://www.mikedaley.net>.

basic pulse and the tiny expressive deviations I've been talking about above, or between the twelve-bar scheme and whatever changes are made to it.

DYLAN AND THE BLUES

So how does this relate to Dylan's music in general and 'Time out of Mind' in particular? Let's begin with the quotation from Shelton's review: 'Elasticized phrases are drawn out until you think they may snap. He [. . .] seems to be groping for a word or a mood, then resolves the tension benevolently by finding the word and the mood.' Anyone who has heard *Rocks and Gravel* from the *Second Gaslight* tape (*The Gaslight Café*, NYC, Oct 1962) immediately understands what Shelton is talking about. Here Dylan halts every phrase on some word, stretches it out and leaves it hanging in thin air for longer and longer time as the verses unfold.

Takes Rocks and gravel-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l, baby, make a solid road.

This is accompanied by an unchanging D major chord in a monotonous fingerpicking pattern.

A long held note over an accompaniment where nothing happens – how can that create tension? For two reasons. One is that to hold a tone like that is actually not normal procedure – it is in itself a deviation from the neutral level of melody. The other reason is that you never know how long he's going to hold the tone – there is nothing in the guitar part that says that 'now comes the turn'. Compare that to his unsuccessful first single, 'Mixed up Confusion', also from 1962. The similarities are striking, but so are the differences. Even here there are long held notes once in a while, in much the same fashion as 'Rocks and Gravel'. But this time there is a band involved, and that makes all the difference. For a band to function, the band members must know when to enter, when to change chords, when the verses end. So the long notes are of pre-defined length, and the same length every time. It takes exactly one verse for the listener to discover the trick, and that robs it of any tension-creating force it may have had. Predictability and interest never were close friends.

IN THE EVENING

He apparently liked this trick, especially early in his career. 'In the Evening' from the *Minnesota Hotel* Tape from December 1961 synthesises what I've

had to say about this. 'In the Evening' is a standard twelve-bar blues tune (with a text that is so paradigmatically bluesy that once when I was howling my own on-the-spot improvised blues clichés to this tune while washing the dishes, I suddenly found myself singing exactly the same words as Dylan. . .). Half ways through there is a harmonica solo which consists of one long draw note held during a whole twelve-bar verse, until the standard finishing phrase at the end.

The first time I heard this song, it struck me as a subtly brutal way of creating tension. With a single sweep, all the conventions of blues licks are swept aside, leaving us with an unfinished beginning. For it is normal to hold a note for some time – only not this long. And it is normal to begin a lick with a long note on the dominant, which is the note Dylan stretches here – but then only as a beginning of a lick that is supposed to end on the key note <ex: g f e c >, as it so often does in this particular style. In fact, one can say that melodically speaking this kind of descent back to the key note represents the neutral level of rest in this situation, and remaining on the dominant is a way of creating momentum through standstill.

Equally interesting is the end of the song. Another harmonica solo, another long held note. In fact the second solo is almost identical to the first one – identical on all but one point: the effect on the listener. Where the listener (this listener anyway) was captivated by the single note the first time – how long is he going to hold it? when does the expected ending phrase come? how much air does he have left? (was it true what he said, that he can hold his breath three times as long as Caruso?) – with all attention fixed on that single note, the second time it falls flat to the ground. It's like reading a crime novel for the second time. We know who killed Mr Black. We know it wasn't Mrs White, as the author would have us believe in chapter three. The similarity with the crime novel is striking, because in both cases the effect depends on a rather crude – in the case of the crime novel: literally brutal – technique, and the cruder the technique, the faster its aesthetic effect wanes, since everything depends on one single card. Once that card has been played, whatever power it had has been spent.

In musical terms, we can say that what the first time was surprising because of its defiance of stylistic rules, the second time has itself become part of the 'work style' or the 'idiom' of the song. It loses its place in the centre of the listener's attention, and slides into the background, while other things become more important, such as the guitar playing.

Thus, *In the Evening* is an interesting cross between *Rocks and Gravel* and *Mixed Up Confusion*. It demonstrates that the long note can maintain its effect

even outside the very free declamation of *Rocks and Gravel*, but that there is a thin line between success and failure. If the effect is to be maintained throughout a longer song, the technique must be reshaped in different form – either more powerful or more subtle.

I PITY THE POOR IMMIGRANT

In 1976, *I Pity The Poor Immigrant* was sung in a similar manner. It was sung in duet with Joan Baez, and as so often was the case, this is just as much a duel. It all starts in the instrumental introductory verse: Guam, the band, plays through the whole song apart from the last line, but instead of tying up the whole thing with the expected reprise of the first line, everybody stops playing, except Bob himself, who does some odd strumming, as if to tune the guitar (that was my first impression when I first heard it: they have stopped, something went wrong, they have to tune the guitars) (maybe they should have . . .!). Then, suddenly, Guam breaks loose again for the final line, and the song starts again. This time with the vocals, one of the legendary Bob and Joni duets.

The performance, preserved for eternity on the *Hard Rain* TV special, is very energetic, until they reach the same place in the song. Once again the instruments stop. But Bob and Joni go on.

And on.

And on.

They hold their tones for three hours, twenty-three minutes and fourteen seconds. Maybe a little less, maybe only for the fourteen seconds, but the point is: they cross a line, the line between what is a normally long held note, and what becomes abnormal.

It is easy to imagine it as one of Dylan's little 'breaking Joanie' tricks, but upon second or third hearing you realize that the tones aren't *that* long – he's not out there to prove that he has bigger lungs than her. Besides, they did this on every show (and on other songs – the most wonderful moment of this kind is the final note of 'Railroad Boy' as heard and seen on the *Hard Rain* video. If I could ever have fallen in love with Joan, it would have had to be there), and although they obviously have their little onstage skirmishes going on during the tour, it is not fought on this trivial level – in short: it's not a trick.

The renaissance music scholar Rob Wegman has commented on a passage in one of the masses of Jacob Obrecht (1458–1505), that is quite similar, *mutatis mutandis* (quite a lot in this case) to the Immigrant case. One of the fundamental principles of renaissance music, is variety. Therefore it is quite remarkable when Obrecht, after a passage of a few measures, repeats the passage one step lower, then repeats this procedure again. And again. The third or fourth time the whole situation is beginning to feel uncomfortable. But when Obrecht just continues, the situation is transformed. Just like Dylan, he crosses the line between the normal and the abnormal. This is a dangerous line to cross; there is a thin ice between what is abnormal and what is ridiculous or mad. So what is this? Is it ridiculous, mad or something else?

Let's examine more closely what is at issue here. What is he trying to prove? Or more fundamentally: what does this *mean*? It is easier (and more trivial) to do this when one has recourse to a text, but the idea here is a musical idea of some sort. Musical ideas are generally more difficult to grasp than other ideas, because they are not connected with a conceptual system, they don't automatically *mean* anything. Any talk of meaning in music must either refer indirectly to and get its supply of meaning from an external conceptual system, such as a program or a text, or create its own meanings, which are then relevant only within the system: a purely *musical* meaning does not mean anything in the outside world. But it is also my contention that in order for an extra-musical meaning to be assigned to music (to say 'this music is sad, this describes a sunrise over a desert' etc), this will have to be related to the musical meaning, through analogies or conventions of interpretation.

By dragging an effect out of the ordinary, as in the case of the poor immigrant, the focus is shifted from the expected *goal* of the effect, to the *effect itself*, including the ability of the effect to reach the goal. The effect becomes a meta-effect, pointing to itself and its own effect-ivity. The danger lies in the possibility that the effect is not strong enough to bear the closer scrutiny that this metastasis involves.

The effects that are highlighted in this performance could be described from the point of view of both these spheres. On the musical level, Dylan creates *a temporary point of repose in a cycle of hierarchical tonal relationships*, but on a tone which is usually characterized by momentum rather than by standstill: he highlights an otherwise melodically unessential tone beyond the normal by stretching it out in time, and by doing so, he emphasises its *directionality* by singeling out the *potentiality* which on the face of it nulls out that very directionality. By standing still on the dominant, he holds time, musically speaking.

What is going on on the extramusical level, is necessarily less clear to define. A striking element of the performance, as we can witness it on the TV special, is how tired Dylan looks during the first few songs of the show. The circumstances certainly sound defatigating: an obligation to produce a TV concert, unceasing rain, a soon-to-be-divorced wife on the set, and, for all I know, a drink or two the night before. I'm not trying to say that the musical effect of holding a certain tone in a certain song a little longer than usual is what brought energy back to the band and the bard, but still, the change from the beginning to the end of the recorded part of the show is so pronounced, that I would hardly have raised a brow had someone told me that this was a carefully planned, staged enactment of questions of fatigue and energy, all set to music and culminating in this particular line.

Another possible approach is through the comparison with 'Lo and Behold!', which, in Greil Marcus' excellent interpretation stops and starts as if someone put another coin in the machine, with little or no regard for musical logic. Likewise with the Immigrant: it continues after the dissolution as if nothing has happened. No matter how exhausted the singer is, or how complete the break-down of musical material is, the end of the verse is splendidly unaffected.

STANDING (STILL) IN THE DOORWAY

If *I Pity the Poor Immigrant* is stopping time by brute force, but thereby concealing (or revealing, both possible outcomes of *pointing out*) the delicacies of the process, *Standing in the Doorway* is the direct opposite: subtly holding back time, only to brutally realize its power.

```

E           /d#  C#m           E/b
I'm walkin' through the summer nights
E           /d#           C#m  E/b
the jukebox playing low
E           /d#  C#m           E/b
yesterday everything was goin' too fast
E           /d#           C#m  E/b
Today it's movin' too slow
  A           D/a           A           D/a
  I got no place left to turn
  A           D/a  A           A  B
  I got nothin' left to burn
E           /d#           C#m           E/b
Don't know if I saw you if I would kiss you or kill you
E           /d#           C#m  E/b
It probably wouldn't matter to you anyhow
A           E           B           F#
You left me standing in the doorway cryin'
A           E
I got nothin' to go back to now.
```

It's all in the chords. During the first part of the verse, nothing happens. Nothing at all. What we have is basically an E major chord, sustained all through the first four lines. The only 'ripple' on this surface is the repeated, stepwise descent in the bass, but it doesn't really change anything. This is a waiting progression, a technique for the prolongation of a chord, which usually takes place on a dominant chord, as in *Friend of the Devil*, after the bridge, or in *Covenant Woman*, after the chorus. In both these cases, it works as a suspension: the fourth time around the bass continues its descent, and reaches the tonic, the key note, and we're home again. But in *Doorway*? Even here the fourth descent continues downwards, but this time we reach the Subdominant. This is quite in accordance with the general blues scheme: even here the subdominant is the first new chord that appears. Here the subdominant (A) alternates with its own subdominant (D), in such a way that it can be regarded as a sustained A with an embellishment. This too is replicated exactly in the blues – it is what lies behind the commonest blues patterns of all:

E (tonic)		A (subdominant)
-----		-----
-----		-----
-----		-----
-----	etc	-2--2-4--4-2--2-4--4-
-2--2-4--4-2--2-4--4-		-0--0-0--0-0--0-0--0-
-0--0-0--0-0--0-0--0-		-----

Or to put it in musicologist's cipher: T-T6/4-T and S-S6/4-S. After this it is back to the tonic (E) again for the final four lines. So far, and with the reductions we have done, *Doorway* and *In the Evening* follow exactly the same structure.

But then it happens: the second time the waiting/sustaining bass line reaches the subdominant, it doesn't stay there, as it did the first time. What happens instead is a straight and persistent line, up through chords a fifth apart in the dominant direction: A – E – B – F#. Incidentally, this sequence occurs at the point which corresponds to the shift to the dominant in the twelve-bar blues. The rapid chord sequence can be likened with going up the stairs: each new step costs some energy, but also increases the potential energy in the form of a higher position. The energy it costs must be taken from somewhere, and in this case it is as if a lot of tension that has been held back during the first two parts of the verse, is suddenly released, and bursts out in one single, sudden and climactic effort. Then it is as if this was too much to take: in the last line we are back to the subdominant A again, which, after the rocketing of the

previous line, seems like an anticlimax. We are back more or less where we started: to the motionless state of . . . What?

What kind of immobility does this song deal with? Is it a still summer evening at a lake, lying on the bank, with only the slightest ripple on the surface? Or is it a sultry day, flies buzzing around your ears as you lay in the grass, sipping at a cold beer, which is all you have the energy to do?

Neither. Let's first have a look at the lyrics.

First verse: 'I' surrounded by signs saying 'Nothing happening in here'. Here's the heavy summer night and the quiet jukebox, streets where things move too slowly. But these are just the outer signs of what's *really* at stake: the inner inability to act, because 'I' don't know what is to be done. This is as exact a correspondence to what the music 'says' as one can possibly ask.

Then, in the last part, comes the real protagonist *in absentio* onto the stage: 'you'. And all of a sudden there are signs of activity, talk about kissing or killing – and leaving. The emotional climax of the text, the title line, which contains both 'you', 'I', action and emotions, coincides with the musical climax, followed by the deceptive return in the last line, of the music as well as the text.

The same pattern is repeated in the rest of the verses. Strumming a 'gay' guitar, which doesn't sound very happy at all; the possibility of an ominous threat come true – only that it won't happen, not here and now, anyway; then the church bells ringing, and fatalistically accepted, although chance is they're ringing for 'I' himself.

Then meeting 'you' and the ghost of our old love, always at the beginning of the last part of the verses. As the verses unfold, it becomes clearer and clearer that the forced inability to act is caused by this ghost: its presence (it 'will not go away') is completely overpowering any initiative on the part of 'I' ('Last night I danced with a stranger, But she just reminded me you were the one') – to the point that any attempt to fight its influence is treated purely hypothetically ('*if* I saw you'; 'I would be crazy *if* I took you back').

And the last line of each verse: always back to the mire of the first parts, made even more desperate by the recurring intermezzo.

Here are the entire lyrics, the 'I' world in boldface, the 'you' world in italics.

I'm walkin' through the **summer nights**
 the **jukebox** playing **low**
 yesterday everything was goin' too fast
 Today it's **movin' too slow**
I got no place left to turn
 I got nothin' left to burn
Don't know *if I saw you*
if I would kiss you or kill you

It probably wouldn't matter to you anyhow
You left me standing in the doorway cryin'
 I got **nothin' to go back to now.**

The light in this place is so **bad**
 Makin' me **sick** in the head
 All the **laughter** is just makin' me **sad**
 The stars have turned cherry red
 I'm strummin' on my **gay guitar**
 Smokin' a **cheap cigar**
 The **ghost of our old love** has *not gone away*
 Don't look like it will anytime soon
You left me standin' in the doorway cryin'
 Under the **midnight moon.**

Maybe they'll get me and maybe they won't
 But **not tonight and it won't be here**
 There are things I could say, **but I don't**
 I know the mercy of God must be near
 I been ridin a midnight train
 Got **ice water in my veins**
 I would be crazy *if I took you back*
 It would go up against every rule
You left me standin' in the doorway cryin'
Sufferin' like a fool.

When the last rays of daylight go down
Buddy you'll roll no more
I can hear the church bells ringin' in the yard
I wonder who they're ringin' for
 I know **I can't win**
 But my heart just won't give in
 Last night I danced with *a stranger*
 But she just reminded me **you were the one**
You left me standin' in the doorway cryin'
 In the **dark land** of the sun.

I eat when I'm hungry drink when I'm dry
 And live my life on the square
 And even if the flesh falls off of my face
 I know someone will be there to care
 It always means so much
 Even the softest touch
 I see nothing to be gained by any explanation
 There's no words that need to be said
You left me standin' in the doorway cryin'
Blues wrapped around my head.

The last stanza is special. It seems conciliatory at first. The first part does not have the desperate apathy of the other verses – rather a reconciled contentment, a satisfaction with the small details of life (if you can call the softest touch a small detail). More than in the other verses, the words seem to be directed at someone – maybe ‘you’, maybe just ‘someone’. The effect is quite similar to that of *Desolation Row* and *Gates of Eden* (although this may be to drift too far from where we’re heading with all this: what the music is all about): after a long tirade reflecting ‘the World According to “I”’ through scattered images, the narrator sweeps all that aside and tells us (someone) what’s *really* on his mind.

But all the same: this time it’s different; the bottom line of *this* doorway is that it’s *still* no use – ‘there’s no words that need to be said’. Just as the presence of ‘you’ for the first time is discernible in the first part of the verse, this time the inactivity takes over the place in the verse where ‘you’ used to come in. And the two last lines are as desperate as ever before, and so is the singing.

Which brings us back to the music and the question that was left hanging: what kind of immobility. What is described – musically – in this song, is a way of stopping time, holding back time. Or maybe rather: disregarding time, saying that it doesn’t matter. And at the same time it is a realization that it can’t be done – time is too strong to be overlooked.

There are three elements in this musical story. First the long standstill itself. Just like in *In the Evening* and *I Pity the Poor Immigrant*, the holding in itself creates tension. The longer the standstill, the more imperative it is that something just *has to* happen, and the stronger the focus on and the attention to the standing itself.

The standstill is accomplished through a figure that is normally associated with suspense and preparation for a return – but a return to the point where we already are. I don’t know if this kind of restlessness – because that’s what it really is – has a name: the feeling that you ought to go somewhere, get something done, but you can’t think of anything else to do or to be than what you’re already doing, being. This is the kind of inactivity: the apathy that stems from a dissatisfaction with anything you’re doing, no matter what, because what you *really* want is too big to be wanted, but still standing in the way of trivialities such as happiness, trout fishing or the coldness of the beer on a warm summer evening.

And the third musical element is the consequence of this intense immobility. The dominant of the twelve-bar blues is stretched, beyond the breaking point. And when something is stretched that far, it breaks. It’s a crash on the

levee, so to speak. In accumulated desperation you run up the stairs, too fast to notice that there are only four steps, and you fall flat, despite the effort.

The brilliance of all this is the way he uses a blues-pattern as a template for the writing of an elaborate song, where the various parts of the pattern contribute to the expressive force of the song, but where this force is not limited to the pattern, but draws on sources lying way beyond the simple pattern. This is to say: it is not the blues that tells the story, it's the way the (purely musical) elements of the blues are combined with other elements (a descending figure, a chord progression) and – through a web of expectations, connotations and analogies – to the text.

RING THEM BELLS

He's used the same elements before, without telling the same story: the bridge in *Ring them bells* is one of the most prominent examples. First: the same kind of standstill-like pendular alternation between C and Am that has earlier been used as an interlude between the verses:

```

C   G/b Am
Ring them bells
                G/b   C
for the blind and the deaf,
                G/b Am
Ring them bells
                G/b C
for all of us who are left,
```

But then it all breaks loose in the kind of seemingly never-ending progression that brings a smile to your face, a tear to your eye and a strong conviction that man can fly (luckily, I was living on the ground floor at the time when I first heard it, so I'm still alive). I've asked myself why this bridge differs so much from the bridge in *Shooting Star* from the same album. Harmonically they are almost identical.

```

C   G/b Am
Ring them bells
                Am/g#
for the chosen few
                Am/g
Who will judge the many
                D7/f#
when the game is through.
                F
Ring them bells,
                C/e
for the time that flies,
                Dm7
For the child that cries
                F/g
When innocence dies.
```



```

Am
Listen to the engine
Am/g#
listen to the bell
Am/g
As the last firetruck
Am/f#
from hell
F
goes rolling by,
G C
all good people are praying
Am
It's the last temptation
/g#
the last account
/g
The last time you might hear
/f#
the sermon on the mount
F F/g
The last radio is playing.

```

Again the main difference, it seems, is one of pacing and phrasing. In *Shooting star*, the whole chromatic bass descent is part of the same phrase, just filling out the interval between Am and F, in a fairly straightforward chord progression Am-F-G-C, which is then repeated. This 'one-dimensionality' applies to the melody as well: it is all one phrase, beginning and staying on the same, high note and ending with a cadential turn.

Ring Them Bells works differently, in both these areas. The downward chromatic progression is slowed down. Every step gets its allotted time. Every musical 'sentence' is given its own meaning. Every meaning is given enough time to work. It is almost like a paragraph with short sentences. All the sentences separated by a full stop.

This is another way of saying that the sense of direction (or directionality) is different. The passage in *Shooting* goes back to the three chords which dominate blues, folk, and the rest of western (as in Western civilization, not as in C&W) music since 1450 (roughly). Am is the pivot between C and F, to both of which it is closely related, harmonically, but as a chord in its own right it can be disregarded. It works like this:

The Am and C belong to the same area, and the rest is a traditional cadence pattern, going through three fixed levels.

The passage in *Ring Them Bells* works like this:

<bilde>

The one-thought-per-step character in the chromatic descent and the fact that the descent continues past F, relieves Am of its role as 'just' a pivot chord and gives it a character of its own, as the chord that sets a progression in

motion that spans the whole bridge, a continuous progression through the whole scale.

This changes our perception of the first half of the bridge, of course, but the strongest effects are on the second half, after the F chord – the half where Dylan's voice and delivery really takes off and leaves the ground, flying. It has to do with the F chord and where in the scheme of the bridge it enters, but even more with the G chord, which isn't even there until it is hinted at at the very end of the bridge.

The F chord first: It enters after four measures which in other cases, such as *Shooting Star*, would have led back to C again. I.e., it takes the place of the stable chord, and assumes its role. F becomes a second firm ground and a new starting point – like a landing in a staircase – not just a stage on the way back to C.

But G is the real beauty of this passage. In a sense, the second half is dominated by this chord, even though it is not heard. It is the complete absence of this chord that explains the expansive character of the second part of the bridge – the feeling that the music just goes on and on without ever coming to rest, ever needing to. The last phrases hover around the resolution that we know has to come, the final turn to G and C. This hovering begins with D7/f#, whose natural resolution would be to go to G, as the first step in a chain of chords a fifth apart which would eventually lead to C again: D>G>C. Here, that resolution is delayed by the detour to the F with its freshly gained stability, but it is only a temporary stability. And it is this ambiguity between fixity and progression which lends the bridge its special character, its expansiveness and its transcendence.

Another reason for the effect of this bridge is the contrast with the verses, which are also dominated by a descending bass line. It is like a twisted echo: where the verses sweep through a whole octave in one breath, the bridge is a slow chromatic movement, where the melody on each step of the descent becomes a phrase of its own.

Seen in isolation, each of these mini-phrases sounds quite like all the others, but taken together, they almost form a musical narrative: there is a certain expansiveness to the whole bridge, the voice seems to wish to break out of the repetition of the same phrase. (Does it succeed? Sometimes when I hear the song, I think so, other times not.)

Even live the same element has been used, this time more as a part of a purely musical dramaturgy. During 1995 *Mr Tambourine Man* was usually played in a subdued, slow acoustical arrangement with Bucky Baxter's slide guitar solo as the climax. In Philadelphia on June 21, 1995, the song starts

slower than ever, and the singing is very calm all the way through. Then, at the last harmonica solo all hell breaks loose. on that occasion the 'story' was one of testing how long and how much one can hold back (and it worked: the audience went wild, of course).

HIGHLANDS

Time Out Of Mind ends with the seventeen minutes long *Highlands*. It is the closest Dylan ever comes to a successful attempt at stopping time. It succeed, not by trying to stop it in the tracks or hold it back, but by realizing that time goes on regardless of everything, and by tapping into its flow and disregarding it, instead of fighting it.

For this, the blues is a perfect vehicle. Musically, the blues is not a fixed structure with beginning, middle, and end, but an infinite loop, which can begin or end anywhere – or nowhere at all. The little riff that dominates the song is pronounced enough to be recognized as a separate entity, but unobtrusive enough to quickly fade into the background, like a clock ticking.

Time is an explicit topic in the song: turning back the clock, going back, stopping time. But more essential (to this interpretation, anyway) is its fragmented character, consisting of episodes without a combining narrative, interspersed with flashes of indefinite past and future.

A piece of wood drifting in a river does not move. An apple is completely still only when it falls from the branch. Free fall is weightlessness. 'Highlands' is free fall translated to music, freedom from the bonds of time, possible, in the end, only through complete submersion in time.

II

Harmony and Understanding

Chapter 5

'What I learned from Lonnie'

AN EXPLORATION OF SOME REMARKS IN *Chronicles*

WELL, WHAT IS IT – the musical style that Dylan talks about in *Chronicles*? The mysterious style which he had been taught by Lonnie Johnson in 1965 and then dusted off again when he needed it twenty years later, when his hand was severely injured and his heart was disconnected from his own songs? It seems to be important – to Dylan at the time, and therefore also to listeners who imagine they can wrest a little tangible sense out of the enigmatic bard.

But 'enigmatic' is the word also for the way Dylan presents his method: replete with references to numbers, metaphysics, and technical musical terms, but little or nothing to go by in terms of direct clues. When Dylan talks freely, he can be very eloquent, and one feels there is a profound insight behind the words. But once he starts giving examples, it all sounds quite mundane and very banal, and one is left thinking 'Was *that* it?!

And of course it wasn't – it's just that some people are better as poets than as teachers.

SECRETS IN THE BACK ROOM

Dylan introduces this system in Chapter 4 of *Chronicles*, which is really about the reawakening in the late eighties. He felt washed out artistically, and physically he was unable to play because his hand had been 'ungodly injured in a freak accident, [. . .] ripped and mangled to the bone' (p. 145). Then, inspired by an anonymous jazz singer he happened to hear in a bar, he realizes that he already has the solution to all his problems: a specific style of playing and/or singing that he had known for a long time, involving some mathematics, some music theory, and some metaphysics, and which *would always work*.

I didn't invent this style. It had been shown to me in the early '60s by Lonnie Johnson. [...] Lonnie took me aside one night and showed me a style of playing based on an odd- instead of even-numbered system. [...] He said, 'This might help you,' and I had the idea that he was showing me something secretive, though it didn't make sense to me at the time. . .

He had been talking about this before. The first time was already in 1965/6. During the San Francisco press conference in December 1965, he refers to what he does as 'Mathematical music', and in the interview with Klas Burling in Sweden the following year, he says:

Well you know my songs are all mathematical songs. You know what that means so I'm not gonna have to go into that specifically here. [yeah, sure] It happens to be a protest song . . . and it borders on the mathematical, you know, idea of things, and this one specifically happens to deal with a minority of, you know, cripples and orientals, and, uh, you know, and the world in which they live, you realize, you know, you understand, you know. It's sort of a North Mexican kind of a thing, uh, very protesty. Very very protesty. And, uh, one of the protestiest of all things I ever protested against in my protest years. But uh. . .

Very very protesty, no doubt, but not very clear. What it does demonstrate clearly is that Dylan has had an idea about mathematical music already back then. Even though the context here is tongue-in-cheek, it might perfectly well be true that he learned something about this from Lonnie Johnson in 1965.

But what was it that he learned? If one wanted, one could go as deeply into this as one wished – the formulations are loose enough to allow for most any interpretation. There is a long tradition, going back to the Pythagoreans in pre-ancient times, of a connection between music and numbers. It is my contention, however, that

- What Dylan talks about in *Chronicles* has nothing *directly* to do with the Pythagorean tradition (but indirectly it may have),
- Dylan's method is less clear-cut and consistent than what he presents it as,
- it probably has little to do with whatever Johnson may have told him in the 60s, at least in terms of what is actually done on stage,
- but that doesn't matter, as long as it has worked for him,
- which it has, so it's a good method.

Before we step down in the material too deeply to get out again easily, a disclaimer is in place: a consideration of the potentially embarrassing possibility that this is just a ruse, a put-on – like it was (or at least appeared to have been) in the San Francisco press conference – a cleverly devised smoke-screen or just

a joke on the fans who scour his every word in search of a hidden meaning here, a key there, an explanation anywhere; in short: that there is no such system. When he says, 'This was just something he knew about, not necessarily something he used because he did so many different kinds of songs' (p. 157) – isn't that just a way of covering his tracks, in the eventuality that someone should try to find out what this invented system was by going to the source and listening to Lonnie Johnson? When the Lonnie patrol comes back again with a 'Mission *not* accomplished', he has the answer ready: 'I told you, you won't find anything there, 'cause Lonnie didn't use the system himself. Huh. Huh.'

It is possible, but I don't believe it, for two reasons.

One: Dylan is not a liar. Sure, he is a joker, a jester, and he loves carnivals, but he's always sincere. Not that everything he has ever said or written should necessarily be taken at face value, but it is my impression that he never says anything *just* in jest, there is always a strong sincerity behind what he says, even – or: especially – when he is joking.

Two: it makes sense, and I don't really care all that much if it is the 'wrong' sense – the investigation has been meaningful in any case. If it's wrong, the joke is on me, and I gladly take it upon me.

It makes sense because, judging from what he actually says and comparing it with what he does on stage, what he is talking about is the peculiar soloing style that he has developed during the Never Ending Tour years: the little two–three-note figure solos that he has kept churning out and that at times has driven most of us crazy, but which also – in a strange way and to a surprisingly high degree – work, musically. Another outgrowth of the system is probably also the horrible mannerism in recent years, the 'sing-song' style where every phrase is reduced to one single tone which skips up an octave at the end of the phrase: it all fits his description fairly well, of a system of infinite permutations of very simple formulas, seemingly nothing to do with improvisation or inspiration, but a schematical approach to the basic chords and melodic shapes, which can be applied to just about any song – which is what he does.

MELODIES OUT OF TRIPLETS – AXIOMS AND NUMBERS

With that option out of the way, we can finally get to work. The system that Dylan describes can be condensed to four different elements: (1) a certain approach to *rhythm* and (2) *melodic* cells, (3) based on more or less esoteric

considerations of the power of *numbers*, (4) which, taken together, makes up a *formulaic* system.

Where Dylan gets most eloquent is where the talk is of numbers. The problem is that he seems to glide between talking about *pitch* and *rhythm*. This calls for some untangling of concepts, and some caution in the re-tangling of them.

In either case, there is no easy connection between what Dylan *says* he does, and what one can *hear* him doing. Especially when he gets concrete. When he says:

It's a highly controlled system of playing and relates to the notes of a scale, how they combine numerically, how they form melodies out of triplets and are axiomatic to the rhythm and the chord changes

– there are a number of possible interpretations, but also a quagmire of possible mistakes, on Dylan's part and on the reader's. One is fairly easily taken care of: '*triplets*' is a rhythmical term, denoting the subdivision of a beat in three instead of two units. What he probably has in mind, is *triads*, the units of three tones separated by major and minor thirds, which have been the foundation of Western harmony since the fifteenth century, and which is usually called 'chords'.

But other points are less clear-cut:

'How [the notes of a scale] combine numerically' – is this a reference to the esoteric tradition of harmony-of-the-spheres which goes back to the Pythagoreans, or simply a way of saying that there are certain patterns in the scale?

'How [the notes of the scale] form melodies out of triplets' (i.e. triads). Is this a reference to the triadic nature of melody in the western tradition, where certain *melodic* tones get a particular emphasis because of their structural importance in the *triads*? In functional harmony, a certain sounding chord is described according to which function it fulfills, which means that the same chord can mean different things depending on the context (see the 'D' in different versions of 'Girl of the North Country'), or a chord can be called a G chord without even containing the tone G (see ex. 'Blood in my Eyes'). As I've argued in some of the other chapters, the skillful handling of these features can be observed in Dylan's music, but I still doubt that that is what Lonnie told him.

'Axiomatic to rhythm and chord changes'. Yes, again: the relationship between rhythm and harmony is close, even though they are different phenomena. The pivot is 'structural importance', which is decided in the interrelations between

triad and rhythm: a structural tone is one which is placed on a strong beat, but in some situations, a weak beat may become strong because it is inhabited by a structural tone.

This is fairly straightforward, but Dylan actually makes a much wider claim when he says that the notes of the scale are 'axomatic to rhythm and chord changes'. 'Axiomatic' would imply that the notes of the scale are the fundamental building blocks upon which the system is defined, without themselves needing any definition within the system. This would mean that rhythm is inconceivable without a structured pitch hierarchy, which – as a general statement – is pure bullshit. He may be thinking only of his own system, but for an artist working in a tradition based so heavily on rhythm, this becomes a strange statement, to say the least.

Is *this* what Dylan means, then, or does he actually mean 'triplets' when he says 'triplets', and hints at some direct, mystical connection between harmony and triple rhythm? If that's what Lonnie told him, he lied . . .

RHYTHM: THE LINK WRAY 'RUMBLE' CONNECTION

It makes sense, judging from Dylan's singing style in the late 80s and early 90s, that he has had considerations about various ways to circle around the different rhythmical strata in a song. When he says, 'With any type of imagination you can hit notes at intervals and between backbeats, creating counterpoint lines and then you sing off of it' (p. 158), this is almost verbatim what Levon Helm says in the VH1/BBC TV special about the making of 'The Brown Album', about how people think it must be difficult to sing lead and play drums at the same time. For him, he says, it's the other way around, because he can sing 'around' what he plays (or vice versa).¹

Rhythm seems to be at least part of the system: 'The method works on higher or lower degrees depending on different patterns and the syncopation of a piece' (p. 157). Syncopations – that can only be a rhythmical term. It usually refers to a local displacement of the accent from a strong to a weak beat. But what does it mean here – 'higher or lower degrees', 'different patterns', and 'the syncopation of a piece'?

Later on, in one of the few specific statements about this elusive system, Dylan refers to Link Wray's 'Rumble' as one of the pieces that uses this method. He says:

¹ *Classic Albums – The Band: The Band* (1997), directed by Bob Smeaton.

Once I understood what I was doing, I realized that I wasn't the first one to do it, that Link Wray had done the same thing in his classic song 'Rumble' many years earlier. Link's song had no lyrics, but he had played with the same numerical system. It would never have occurred to me where the song's power had come from because I had been hypnotized by the tone of the piece.

He then compares this to a performance by Martha Reeves where she 'beat a tambourine in triplet form [...] and she phrased the song as if the tambourine were her entire band'.

'Rumble' is an instrumental, played by a combo of two guitars, bass and drums. It is easy to see how the raw intensity may have caught Dylan's interest. The introduction goes something like this:

	D	D	E		D

	---0---0---	---0---0---	---0---0---	---0---0---	---0---0---
	---3---3---	---3---3---	---0---0---	---3---3---	---3---3---
	---2---2---	---2---2---	---1---1---	---2---2---	---2---2---
	---0---0---	---0---0---	---2---2---	---0---0---	---0---0---
	---0---0---	---0---0---	---2---2---	---0---0---	---0---0---
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	:
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Bass					
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	---0---1---	---2---3---	---0---1---	---2---3---	---0---1---
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	:
Cymbal	-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-	-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-	-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-	-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-	-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-
Bass drum	-x-----x-----x-x-x-	-x-----x-----x-x-x-	-x-----x-----x-x-x-	-x-----x-----x-x-x-	-x-----x-----x-x-x-

This is really all there is to the song – the riff above is repeated a couple of times on each of the scale steps through which the tune goes. The only deviations from this are a 'solo' verse, which consists of violent tremolo strumming, and a turnaround figure after each verse, which adds two beats to the general four beats per measure, giving it all a limp that is certain to wake one up, should one against all likelihood have fallen asleep:

```

      D      D      B7
      :      .      :
--0-----0-----|-----2-----|
--3-----3-----|-----0-----|
--2-----2-----|-----2-----|
--0-----0-----|-----1-----|
-----|-----2-----|
-----|-----|

                                E      D      D      E
                                :      .      .      :
|-----3-0-----|-----2-2-----| -0-----
|-----3-0-----|-----3-3-----| -0-----
|-----2-0-----|-----2-2-----| -1-----
|-----2-0-----|-----0-0-----| -2-----
|-----2-0-----|-----2-2-----| -2-----
|-----3-0-----|-----0-----| -0-----

```

It makes perfect sense that Dylan has liked this. There is the unpolished character of the whole thing, which reminds one of the best moments of Highway 61. There is the soundscape of sharply differentiated parts, each with its own distinctive rhythmic pattern, in fact 'creating counterpoint lines':

- a raw electric guitar, slightly out of tune, pounding three-chord patterns and a simple run at the end;
- a muffled bass playing simple, chromatic ascending figures over and over again;
- two widely different percussion sounds – the cymbals with their insistent triplets and the bass drums with their dump 'tam, tam, tam, ta-ta-ta';
- and the rhythm guitar, which only plays the strong beats and nothing else.

Both guitars, in different ways, take the part of the drummer, as Dylan has described his own solo guitar playing on several occasions, whereas the drums do just as much 'motivic' or 'thematic' work as any of the others.

But what does it have to do with Lonnie Johnson and mathematical music? At first sight: nothing.

At second sight: well, the number three is all over the place: the main line of the guitar is three chords – silence – three chords – etc, ended by a measure which is extended from 2x2 to 3x2 beats. The cymbals play different kinds of triplets all the time, and the bass drum plays three long and three short.

Hey, perhaps we're on to something here? Triplets – what is it about triplets? He says earlier:

I'm not a numerologist. I don't know why the number 3 is more metaphysically powerful than the number 2, but it is.

There is a long line of thinking behind this; the difference between two and three has been central to all numerological systems throughout the history of ideas, going back to the Pythagoreans and the Platonists.

I'm not saying Dylan is a Platonist (and he says himself that he's not a numerologist, so we better believe him, right?)(Right!), but it is not either unlikely that he has picked up some sort of idea along these lines, and why not from Lonnie Johnson? And if he believes the beauty of the system is that it works, regardless of artifice: the audience will go wild, no matter – if it works, then why not use it?

Be that as it may, the beauty of *this* explanation is that it works whether Dylan is right or not and whether there is a firm basis for the system or not. What Link Wray does, through his use of various permutations of threes, is to create a polyphonic structure with different layers of rhythmic activity in different instrument parts, all going on at the same time, and creating a remarkable complexity with very limited means. Whether it works because of the number three or because of the raw sound, the hypnotic repetitiveness, and the underground Rumble of ominous ta-ta-ta in the drums and weird chromatics in the bass, barely audible as such, but mostly *very* disturbing – . . . who am I to tell why it works?

And these elements: pared down resources, insistent repetition, sometimes weird 'chromatics' (which one might – O horrible thought! – have mistaken for *mistakes*, but now we know better . . .), guitars playing drums and vice versa – these are precisely what characterizes Dylan's band and his playing from 1988 and in the following years.

Now it remains to take a closer look at some of his own music making during those years, to see where the triplets went.

NUMBERS: DYLAN THE PYTHAGOREAN

'I'm not a numerologist', Dylan says (p. 159). But before and after this statement, he builds up such a metaphysical web around the force of numbers, that the only definition of a numerologist that he does *not* fit into, is the kind who calculate a lucky number from the letters of their name. Alright, this is after all not a book about Rod Stewart.

In the *Rolling Stone* interview from November 2001, where he first mentioned the Lonnie Johnson method explicitly, he says:

Lonnie Johnson, the blues-jazz player, showed me a technique on the guitar in maybe 1964. I hadn't really understood it when he first showed it to me. It had to

do with the mathematical order of the scale on a guitar, and how to make things happen, where it gets under somebody’s skin and there’s really nothing they can do about it, because it’s mathematical.

In *Chronicles*, he continues:

I had the idea that he was showing me something secretive, though it didn’t make sense to me at the time. . .

So, we have an esoteric system communicated to him in the secrecy of the back room, which works, regardless of what the player or listener know, understands, or thinks of it, solely on the force of the mathematical structure of the system – ‘because it’s mathematical.’ Methinks it’s time to step back in time.

THE PYTHAGOREAN TRADITION OF NUMBERS The belief that something can work simply ‘because it’s mathematical’, depends in some way or another on the idea that numbers have certain metaphysical qualities with a real influence on things in reality.

This is the foundation of the Pythagorean theory of numbers, which I’ve alluded to above. Most people know the Pythagorean Theorem, about the relations between the sides in a right-angled triangle: $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ (Dylan knows it too, even though he got the formula wrong in the Rome interview, where he presented it as ‘a square equals b square equals c square’, which may reveal a truth on a more profound level, but which would do you no good in your calculus 101 class).

But the classic didactical myth, handed down in numerous treatises throughout Antiquity and the Middle Ages, tells of how Pythagoras walked by a blacksmith who was pounding away on his anvils, and Pythagoras discovered that some of the anvils produced harmonious sounds together, while others did not. He investigated this closer, and found that the mass of the harmonious anvils were in simple proportions to each other – 1:2, 2:3, or 3:4 – while those in more complex relations produced unpleasing sounds. An anvil twice as big as an other would sound an octave lower, whereas one 1.3658 times the size, would sound like . . . dunno, the Shaggs or something.

The physical facts of this legend have been proven wrong, but what matters is the belief (1) that harmoniousness depends on proportions that can be expressed in simple ratios, (2) that these proportions, which can be described in a purely mathematical form, not only govern harmony in music, but also in the universe as a whole, between the soul and the body, and in the bal-

ance between the body fluids, and (3) that there is some kind of connection between the different kinds and areas of harmony. Thus, playing a tune in a mode which emphasises certain intervals, will influence the balance between the body fluids, and can thus alter the mood of the listeners.

This discovery and the theoretical/religious system that was built around it, became essential to all ideas of harmony and beauty from Antiquity up until the eighteenth century. Plato considered this kind of mathematical harmony to be the fundamental property of the world. In his creation myth *Timaios*, the creator-god shapes the world beginning with unity (which in this system of thought is not considered a number at all), then extending it with 'the other' – two – and 'the intermediary' – three, and around the corresponding number series 1, 2, 4, 8 and 1, 3, 9, 27, the whole world is created. In Plato's thought, each number has its distinctive metaphysical character.

In the Middle Ages, this idea was adapted to the Christian frame of thought. In the apocryphical *Wisdom of Solomon* in the Bible, it says, 'You have ordered all things in number, measure, and weight' (Wisdom of Solomon 11. 21), and this verse was quoted time and again in medieval treatises on music.

Thus, what at first sight may look like a dry and slightly tedious exercise in simple arithmetics, is of vast importance because behind the dry façade lies the notion that numbers and numerical relations are reflections of the divine principles governing the universe; that we find the same relations in the universe as a whole, in human beings, in musical sounds, and in visible beauty, and that by knowing the numbers, we can affect humans and glimpse God.

This is why the slight irregularities in the purely mathematical definition of the scale became such a heated topic. The theorists spent gallons of ink on discussing the problem with the division of a tone in two equal halves, which according to the Pythagorean system is impossible, because it is founded on ratios between natural numbers (the equal division of a tone requires the square root of 2, which was unknown to ancient and medieval thinkers).

The Christian heritage from antiquity was largely Platonic. One of the consequences of the humanistic re-appraisal of the classical traditions during the Renaissance, was that other voices from antiquity were added to the stew. Aristotle, with his less mystical and more rationalistic approach, was revived from the twelfth century, and in the field of music theory, Aristoxenos, whose theories were based on geometrical rather than arithmetical considerations, was more palatable to the practically oriented writers of the Renaissance, who were more concerned with actual sound and preferred the pure harmonies of just intonation to the theoretically 'correct' but ugly-sounding harmonies.

APPROACHING DYLAN AGAIN. If you object that this doesn't seem to have much to do with Dylan and Lonnie, you're absolutely right. It serves to demonstrate how important the concept of mathematical music has been, way back in history, and how widely the implications it carries reach.

In order to gradually work our way back to Dylan again, one might point to yet another element that entered the picture in the Florentine academies in the fifteenth century: an extension of the notion of the special mystical character of certain numbers. The mainstream medieval tradition had mainly been concerned with twos and threes, but – partly owing to influence from the cabalistic tradition – a more extended array of meaningful numbers was established and systematized. The Fibonacci sequences and other similar number sequences, and all the sacred numbers of the Bible – just about every number seemed to have a secret meaning, a value beyond the numerical one.

Furthermore, the mystical ‘range’ of the numbers widened. While the numerical foundation of the world had earlier been thought of more as a precondition on a structural level, more effort was now spent on pinpointing how and where the force of the various numbers could be applied, and on specifying the meanings of various numbers. Number symbolism flourished.²

This is the background for Dylan's perception of the system he learned back in '64. In the following quotation from *Chronicles* (p. 158), I have emphasised some words which highlight the strong dichotomy that Dylan sees between the world of 2 and the world of 3:

The system works in a *cyclical* way. Because you're thinking in odd numbers instead of even numbers, you're playing with a different *value* system. Popular music is usually based on the **number 2** and then filled with fabrics, colors, effects and *technical wizardry* to make a point. But the total effect is usually *depressing and oppressive* and a *dead end* which at the most can only last in a *nostalgic* way. If you're using an **odd** numerical system, things that *strengthen* a performance *automatically* begin to happen and make it memorable *for the ages*. You don't have to plan or think ahead.

What is most striking, I think (apart from the description of popular music as based on the number 2, which quite bluntly disregards the blues/jazz tradition, where a triple feel is predominant), is the statement that these are different worlds, different value systems, which have an *automatic* effect on

² At least that's what some analysts think, but since secret numerological structures are by definition hidden, ‘revealing’ these structures also means (re-)constructing them. In many cases, the constructions are hardly more than the fantasies of the modern interpreters.

the performance: it is not something the performer *does*, but something that is done *through* the performer.

Regarding the opposition that Dylan claims to exist between 2 and 3, I'd rather not go into that;³ what is worth noticing is that these are not *symbolic* numbers – in the sense of numbers to which have been ascribed a meaning, hidden or overt; what Dylan talks about is inherent properties of the numbers themselves (or of the things that are governed by these numbers). This is why the long detour through the ancient Pythagoreans is relevant: because that's where such ideas developed and where this kind of thinking, as expressed by Dylan, stems from.

Does Dylan believe all this? Yes, I would think so. He is after all a poet, a sponge, a mystic, a sage; he takes what he can gather from coincidence, mixes it all together, and out comes . . . well, sometimes *Knocked out Loaded*, but we can forgive him that, since he also produces *Blood on the Tracks* and *Chronicles*, which is a fascinating read, even though what he writes is less clear than what an academic might have wanted.

Time to look at 'melody'.

MELODY: THREE TIMES 2, AND 7 AND 4

In a diatonic scale there are eight notes, in a pentatonic there are five. If you're using the first scale, and you hit 2, 5 and 7 to the phrase and then repeat it, a melody forms. Or you can use 2 three times. Or you can use 4 once and 7 twice. It's indefinite what you can do, and each time would create a different melody.

Now, what *is* he talking about?!

In a way, it's very simple. In a scale there are certain tones, and if you pick some of them and put them together in a sequence, 'a melody forms'.

I doubt it, however, that his point is as trivial as that. He's not describing just *any* melody, but rather a way of creating counter-melodies that – for some mysterious reason, which in Dylan's version of it is connected with the symbolic force of numbers (or with the force of numbers *tout court*) – will always yield good results:

³ In classical theory, two is the first of the feminine numbers, which were considered weaker than the masculine odd numbers (divide an even number and nothing is left; two evens can never make an odd; odd + even produces an odd, which are therefore the masters, etc). One might take Dylan to mean that popular music has been forced into the weak domain of 2, which makes it a depressive dead end because 3 is the productive number. But again: I'd rather not go there.

There’s no mystery to it and it’s not a technical trick. The scheme is for real. For me, this style would be most advantageous, like a delicate design that would arrange the structure of whatever piece I was performing. [...] And because this works on its own mathematical formula, it can’t miss (p. 158f).

TWO FIVE SEVEN FOUR TWO TWO . . . WHAAT?! And this melody – just what is it? First of all, I severely doubt that the exact tones he mentions has anything to do with it; most likely, they are whatever numbers popped into his mind at the time of writing it (the passage in the book resembles the kind of vague ramblings that he occasionally gets himself into during interviews). But for the sake of completeness, let’s take his example at face value and see what the result becomes. In the key of G, we get the following:

```

Chord   Scale                               alternatively:
||--3--||-----0--2--3--||  --1--3--||
||--0--||-----0--1--3--||  -----||
||--0--||--0--2-----||  -----||
||--0--||-----||  -----||
||--2--||-----||  -----||
||--3--||-----||  -----||
          1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8          7  8
\end{tab}

\begin{tab}
||-----2-----2--||-----||-----2--2--||
||-----3-----3----||-----||--1-----||
||--2-----2-----||--2--2--2--||-----||
||-----||-----||-----||
||-----||-----||-----||
          2  5  7  2  5  7          2  2  2          4  7  7

```

The first thing we notice is that the steps 2, 5, and 7 incidentally form a chord: D major (or D minor, if we use the minor seventh for the ‘7’). This might be a clue to a solution, but I don’t think it is, for several reasons. The main reason is that the tones and the melodic fragment that is mentioned here, a broken D major chord against (or even ‘in’) the key of G, is not something I recognize from Dylan’s music making. The dominant is not very important in Dylan’s music – one might say: other than by being absent (in which capacity it draws some attention to itself).

The other reason is that the D major chord emerges out of the numbers 2, 5, 7 only under the assumption that Dylan uses the traditional numbering of the tones in the scale, but this is not necessarily so. We know from the terminology of blues musicians that there are many ways to refer to chords and scales. I don’t know if Lonnie Johnson is known to have used any particular terminology in this respect, but at least one alternative is worth mentioning before we abandon the search for a meaning in those particular numbers: If we

shift the relation between numbers and scale one step, so that ‘1’ denotes the first step *above* the keynote and not the keynote itself, we get the following:

Chord	Scale	alternatively:
-3-	-----0--2--3--	-1--3--
-0-	-----0--1--3--	-----
-0-	-----0--2--	-----
-0-	-----	-----
-2-	-----	-----
-3-	-----	-----
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7	6 7
----0--3--	----0--3--	----3--3--
-0-	-0-0-0-	-3-
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
	2 5 7 2 5 7 2 2 2 4 7 7	

This makes far more sense: a playing around with the main steps in the chord, with a sixth thrown in for good measure. This accomodates both the ‘sing-song’ style of singing that we all love so well, and many of Dylan’s trademark licks.

FORMULAICISM: INVENTIVE REDUNDANCY

In a more thorough study than this, I might have gone through a number of tapes and searched out examples to corroborate this interpretation. But when I do go in that direction, in the next chapter, it is not in order to check for these particular numbers. I strongly suspect that such a search would be futile; one might find such examples, but they would not prove anything. A more fruitful path is, I believe, to take Dylan’s statement more as an indication of a general principle than as an exact example. This principle would consist in:

1. a **selection** of some scale steps, either within the chord or, for that matter, outside of it,
2. which are combined to **simple patterns**
3. which are **repeated** or **combined** as building blocks.

What this means is that Dylan’s system is a *formulaic* system of composition/performance, where a set of generic rules can be applied in a variety of situations and produce the goods.⁴

⁴ This has been described in the field of literature by Albert Lord and Milman Perry, who studied the formulaic composition of epic poetry in the Balkans, and compared it, as a

This not only makes sense in relation to Dylan's music making since 1988, it also makes sense as a description of an improvisational system. In order to be usable in practice – not the least as a 'learned' system – such a system should be simple, and it should be based on or related to a wider musical system (in this case, e.g. the musical grammar of the blues and its descendants).

A LITTLE MUSIC THEORY (HAS NEVER KILLED ANYONE) A tonal system means a system out of which meaning can be gleaned from conjunctions of tones. Fundamentally, musical meaning does not lie in the connection between certain tones and something in the outside world (i.e. a piece of music cannot in itself *mean* love, rain, brick walls, etc.), but is founded on connections between certain combinations of sounds and certain experiences and expectations, and this must be learned, through repeated exposure to the connection and to the regularity by which the sound is accompanied by the experience. This is what we know when we *know* a musical style: we know that in a blues tune an E is followed by an A, and we expect a turnaround at the end. In this way, and only in this way, can the tones of 'Another Brick In The Wall' *mean* meat grinder, inhumanity, and bricks.

Musical meaning thus lies in a habitual fulfillment of the expectation of this kind of connection to take place – and the constant adjustment of expectations against the experienced fulfillments.

A complex system at the base allows for a wide array of possible meanings within the system. In the classical music tradition, harmony has been the central field of development since the fourteenth century, culminating in the invention of the twelve-tone technique in the early twentieth century. Thereby, the range of possible connections between tones was stretched to the extreme (some would say: beyond that): everything is accounted for (or accountable) within the system.

But that is not the only option. Expectations can be established temporarily. Play an ever-changing series of tones, and nobody knows what to expect for the next tone – play 2, 5, 7, 2, 5, . . . and you have already established a pattern with certain inherent rules which makes people expect a 7 to follow; and play that against a song which follows another set of rules, and you already

(then, at least) living tradition, with the Homeric epics, and found the same fundamental traits. The conclusion that the Iliad and the Odyssey are written-out versions of improvised poetry, while upsetting some notions about the Genius who laid the foundation for Western Literature, is hardly surprising, since Homeros was supposed to have lived before the development of writing.

have a quite complex field of potential meaning, created with very simple means.

INVENTIVE REDUNDANCY Against this background, Dylan's description can be rephrased in more general terms:

Make patterns out of any selection of tones, and repeat and combine them; by repeating the patterns, you thereby temporarily establish a new tonal system, exploiting the field of tension between the musical backbone of the song and the new pattern;

this meaning is brought out in the interplay between expectations and experience – between the cultural knowledge that the listeners and the musicians have, and the newly established tonal system;

in order for this to be recognized as a new tonal system, however ephemeral, in the short time that is at the musician's disposal, the patterns must be simple;

but if they are, and a balance is struck between redundancy and inventiveness (there is a limit to how long you can play 2 5 7 2 5 7), it will always work, with these very simple means.

A TRANSLATION

This is, I believe, the core of Dylan's technique, which he has explored – with varying degrees of success, but mostly ending up with a huge surplus in the balance – during the 90s and the 00s. It also explains some of his other statements where he explains his system in more general terms:

A song executes itself on several fronts and you can ignore musical customs. All you need is a drummer and a bass player, and all shortcomings become irrelevant as long as you stick to the system.

The method works on higher or lower degrees depending on different patterns and the syncopation of a piece.

Very few would be converted to it because it had nothing to do with technique and musicians work their whole lives to be technically superior players.

This can be translated fairly exactly, if not word for word then at least concept by concept, into the following:

A song can exploit several different meaning systems at the same time, and you are not limited to the rules set by one such set of musical customs. Since I play rock, I need a drummer and a bass player, but all shortcomings become irrelevant as long as you stick to the system, since this system is based on a conscious play with 'inventive redundancy' and not on the intricacy of the base system and the technical prowess of the musician.

Since the system works in the interplay between the song and the newly established fields of meaning, the concrete way of playing or singing will have to be adjusted to the different patterns already present in the song.

Very few would be converted to it because, whereas most music making takes place in contexts where value judgement is based on *complexity* and most musicians thus depend on technical prowess to accomplish this, the 'Lonnie' method instead emphasises and requires *simplicity*, both on the part of the performer and as a constitutive element of the system itself.

This is my take at what Dylan has meant: he describes a method for temporarily establishing a formulaic system of musical meaning, involving a conscious use of certain numbers, at the base of which may lie a belief that these numbers have certain objective properties. In short, what I have called *inventive redundancy*.

In Dylan's description, he emphasises the redundancy part, and pairs it with the metaphysical qualities of numbers which make the system Just Work. My interpretation is a little different: That the redundancy may be a precondition for the system, but what really makes it Just Work is the other element: inventiveness. I don't think it is a system that someone else can learn to use, at least not directly, as a system – it is hardly insignificant that there are twenty years of touring and music making between the time he first learned it and when he understood how to put it to use. It has taken him those years to gain the musicianship (and perhaps also the need for routine which persistent touring must bring with it) which he then could cross-fertilize with what Lonnie Johnson had told him, to produce his new method. In other words: I think Dylan should receive more of the credit for it than Lonnie.

Chapter 6

Three Tambourine Men

LISTENING TO DYLAN never gets better than during the moments when one senses that he and his band are engaging in some kind of exploration on stage – where a small melodic figure is exposed to any kind of treatment imaginable. This is a style which has been used consistently during the Never-Ending Tour years, and it may have to do with the ‘Lonnie Johnson’ method. This chapter may therefore be seen as a more practical application, to concrete music, of the more theoretically oriented points in the previous chapter.

A personal favourite in this category is the trading of solos between John Jackson and Dylan on ‘Positively 4th Street’ in Brixton, London, 1995. But there are three performances in particular which stand out as examples. As it happens, they are all live versions of the same song – ‘Mr Tambourine Man’. The first is from Drammenshallen, Norway, June 10, 1981, the second from Cascais, Portugal, July 13, 1993, and the third from Vienna, Austria, March 1999.

Is this a coincidence, that they are all Tambourine Men? Perhaps not – as I intend to show, there are some musical traits in this song which may have opened up the possibilities that he explores in these performances.

PREAMBLE: THE SONG – A CARNEVAL IN SOUND

Most songs begin with the key note, the *tonic*. A song in C major begins with a C major chord, etc. Usually some kind of dynamics is created by moving to other tonal areas – the *dominant* and the *subdominant*.¹

¹ This is discussed more extensively in some of the other chapters, such as *The propelling harmony of ‘Dear Landlord’* (109), *Just Like A Woman Revisited* (105), and in the first chapter, p. 3. – The following presentation will be full of references to chords, chord functions and tones. I will distinguish between these with typographical means: *note names* will be set

Put simply, this means that there is a contrast between two tonal areas: a level of rest, represented by the keynote, and a contrasting level, represented by the *dominant*, the tone a fifth above the keynote.

The fifth is the stable, loyal companion to the keynote, always there, not without its conflicts, but they are always resolved, and always in favour of the tonic – somewhat like a good old (or bad old, depending on the perspective) patriarchal marriage. In fact, one might consider all music within the western musical tradition (until the late nineteenth century in the art-music tradition, and until this day in the popular traditions) as nothing more than a play with the balance between these two scale steps.

But then there is the third important chord in the basic three-chord pattern: the *subdominant*. It usually stands a little behind the other two in the lineup – doesn't have the self-conscious power of the tonic, nor the rebellious subservience of the dominant – but in 'Mr Tambourine Man', it's the real protagonist.

The subdominant has a double role. Partly it is a chord closely related to the tonic, in many cases hardly more than a variant of it. This is most clearly seen in the standard blues embellishment, presented on 58. In this capacity, it functions as a reenforcement of the tonic. But it also has a more expansive role, as the first step *away* from the tonic, especially in combination with the dominant, in some kind of cadential progression. The mother of all such cadences, at least in text books, is T-S-D-T (the beginning of 'Blowin' in the Wind' is an example). The dominant creates a tension which demands a resolution, back to the tonic, and the subdominant is a helper on the way to get there, roughly speaking.

What is special about 'Mr Tambourine Man' is that it does *not* begin on the keynote, but on the subdominant, from where it returns to the Tonic by way of the Dominant (S-D-T). In other words: the song begins in the middle of the cycle of tension and resolution that the cadential progression is, but without ever establishing, or even hinting at, a level of resolution first. Instead, Mr Tambourine Man starts on the second step of the T-S-D-T cycle. One might say that the song doesn't have a real beginning: musically speaking, it has already started before we hear the first sounds, since the Subdominant implies something to precede it.

in italics, chord names in **bold face**, and the abbreviated function names, T, S, D, in typewriter style.

The chord on ‘... (song for) me’ is again a Subdominant, and in a way we have come full circle – only it is the wrong circle. (S-D-T-S, instead of the ‘correct’ T-S-D-T).

After the initial burst, the Tonic that we were cheated of in the beginning is now finally established. – Or is it? The next phrase, ‘I’m not sleepy and there is no place I’m going to’, brings another fragment of the standard cadential cycle. This time it’s the beginning: T-S-D. This gesture, which is supposed to be the build-up phase in the cycle, where the Dominant proves its ‘proper’ function as the disruptive force demanding a resolution, here works the opposite way: it is how all the mid-verses, the full verses, and the mid-refrains end, after shorter or longer stretches of uncertainty, and Dominant becomes the point of repose, where some kind of resolution is actually reached.

Concerning the refrains, the exposition above can be summarized in the schematical overview:

```
S D T S || T S D . |
S D T S || T S D T |
```

First an ‘upside down’ cadence going the wrong full circle, then a ‘reversed’ cadence resting on the unstable D step; this is then repeated, and we finally, *finally* get the resolution in the very last line of the refrains.

And the verses? They can be found in the intersection between the two ‘wrong’ cadence gestures:

```
-----
| | | | | | | | | |
S D T S || T S D .
```

The first ends with T S, the second begins with it. The chords are the same, but the function is different: first an uneasy coming to rest on the wrong step, next the start of a new beginning.

What happens in the verses is not so much that the T S || T S part is repeated, as that the two halves merge into one little T S segment which is repeated ad libitum.

```
S D ||: T S :|| D .
```

The difference is subtle but important: This segment becomes a single unit which retains the character of both its former incarnations at the same time; it is impossible to decide whether the chords to the line ‘the haunted frightened

trees' in the last stanza is an end or a beginning: it is both (and therefore, perhaps, neither).

All in all we might say that in the musical narrative of Mr Tambourine Man everything is backwards and upside down (as an equivalent to the *textual* narrative of 'All Along the Watchtower'). Every character plays someone else's role. It's a musical carnival . . .

FIRST MAN: DRAMMENSHALLEN, 1981

Memories . . . This was the first concert I didn't see. It was the first, because I *could* have been there, but I wasn't – because I had no idea it took place. I was fourteen and also had no idea that Dylan had sent shock waves through the musical world with his conversion. I don't remember exactly, but I like to imagine that while Dylan was playing his first show on Norwegian ground, I was playing football on my grandparents' lawn, spitting distance from Drammen.

But it is also another 'first': it was the tape with which I lost my tape-collector's virginity. A kind soul (thanks, Karl-Erik!) had allowed me to pick five tapes from his list – *five!* – five more hours-and-a-half of live Dylan; five drops from the ocean which I knew was out there. I had no idea what it would sound like – concert tapes? could I expect to hear anything at all, apart from screeches and scratches? I had no idea – but I knew I had crossed a line. I was no longer a casual listener with a soft spot for Dylan – I was a dedicated *fan* and a *tape collector*. I had gone to distances, I had made an effort to seek out secret material. I had entered the circles which had access to this material. I had become a member of a secret brotherhood. If the tapes sounded like crap, this would in fact make me an even more dedicated fan.

Drammenshallen 1981 was the first tape I put on.² Out into my kitchen flowed 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' in the most fantastic arrangement I had ever heard (I had only heard the official releases, mind you), and the rest of the show was just as brilliant. I don't know if it is the thrill of the first time experience, but to this day, many of the songs from this concert are among my all-time favorite versions: 'Just Like a Woman', 'Girl from the North Country', 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' – and then there was the Tambourine Man . . .

² The others were the 'Judas!' concert from May 1966, the Boston show from the 1975 Rolling Thunder Revue, and one of the 1995 Brixton shows. It is a list I can recommend to any new tape collector.

The image shows the beginning of the song 'Mr Tambourine Man' by Bob Dylan. It consists of four staves of music in G major, 4/4 time. The lyrics are: 'Hey, Mi-ster Tam - bourine Man Play a song for me I'm not slee-py and there is no place I'm go - ing to Hey, Mi - ster Tam - bou - rine Man Play a song for me In the jingle jan-gle mor-ning I'll come fol - low-ing you'. The chords are F, G, C, F, C, F, G, C, F, C.

FIGURE 6.1 Drammen 1981: Mr Tambourine man (beginning)

It begins innocently enough (see Figure 6.1). So much so that it took me a couple of listenings to even notice it, among the other gems on the tape. The intro and the beginning of the singing sounds nothing out of the ordinary – closer to the saccharine Budokan than to the desperate Charlotte from December 1978, which is a fierce contender for the #1 spot on my list.

But it grows. The end of the first chorus is a foreboding of things to come: the audience doesn't know it, Dylan himself doesn't know it yet, but the final measures contain *in nuce* everything that is needed for what over the next couple of minutes will become a remarkable, memorable, performance.

These are the elements he plays around with: a displacement of the rhythm, either in a simple, basic syncopation (| |) or a looser phrasing, involving some kind of triplets, but which in many cases is impossible to fix in notation; a reduction of the melody to a handful of tones and figures; a positioning of the lyrics to these fixed, syncopated figures, with complete disrespect for the inherent rhythm of the text.

19 C F G C F
 Though I know that evening's em - pire has returned in - to sand

24 C F C F G
 vanished from my hand left me blindly here to stand but still not slee - ping

29 G F G C F
 My weari-ness a - ma - zes me, I'm branded on my feet I

34 C F C F G
 have no one to meet And the ancient empty street's too dead for drea - ming

FIGURE 6.2 Drammen 1981: Mr Tambourine man, first verse

In the first verse (figure 6.2), it is one figure and one figure only that rules. The line *c a g f e* recurs again and again, and the tones *a* and *e* are elevated from their anonymous positions in the original melody, to become the constantly recurring start- and end-points in an endless series of repetitions.

In the second verse (figure 6.3), the melody is raised from its position at the bottom of the scale around the lower *c* an octave up above the upper *c*. The tones *a* and *e* gradually lose their freshly acquired status. Their place is taken by *f*, *c*, and *g*. These also happen to be the key-notes of the chords F, C and G, but that should not fool anyone into believing that no harmonical tension is left. On the contrary: the tones occur where the logic of the motivic repetition decrees – not where the harmony might suggest. And lastly, the span of melodic movements widens in frequent, restless skips through *c g f*.

The last verse (figure 6.4) continues the rumination over the three tones *c*, *f*, and *g*. The rhythm becomes looser and looser, wilder and wilder, more and more engaged, mostly rushed, but once in a while pausing, as if to give the band a chance to catch up (or perhaps to allow the singer a chance to come up for air).

F G C F

Take me on a trip u - pon your ma - gic swir-ling ship My

44 C F C F

sen-ses have been stripped My hands can't feel to grip My

48 C F C F G

toes too numb to step Wait on - ly for my boot - heels to be wan - de - ring

53 G F G C F

I'm rea - dy to go a - ny - where I'm rea - dy for to fade In-

58 C F C F G

to my own parade Cast your dancing spell my way I promise to go under it

FIGURE 6.3 Drammen 1981: Mr Tambourine man, second verse

A new logic is created, a musical logic which only applies here, during these five minutes, but which are undisputable while it goes on. Towards the end of the verse, this logic has become so integrated in the performance and the listener's perception of it that it comes as a great surprise when a new inflection is suddenly introduced. The direction of motion is reversed from the predominant downward churning, to a rising figure, which also touches the highest tone in the entire song, a high *g*. Coincidentally, this happens to the lines 'With all memory and fate | driven deep beneath the waves', which thus – had anyone been in doubt – becomes the emotional climax of the song.

The elements that make up the logic of the Drammen Tambourine Man come together in a particularly successful union on this night and in this song. But they are recognizable in other songs and on other nights during the same

64 F G C F
Take me dis - ap - pear - ing through the smok - er - ings of my mind Down the

68 C F C F C
foggy ruins of time Far past the fro - zen leaves The haun - ted, frightened trees

73 F C F C F G
Out to the windy beach Far from the twisted reach of crazy sor - row

79 G F G C
Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand wa - ving free

83 F C F C F
Silhou - etted by the sea Circled by the circus sand With all

88 C F C F
memo - ry and fate driven deep beneath the waves let me for -

92 C F G
get a - bout to - day un - til to - mor - row

FIGURE 6.4 Drammen 1981: Mr Tambourine man, last verse

tour. The reggae-ish syncopated looseness of phrasing is prominent during the entire 1981 tour (an obvious example from the same concert is 'Knockin' on Heaven's door', to which the audience responds with an embarrassing display of 'stadium clapping', to which Dylan mysteriously replies: 'You people got rhythm. You got more rhythm than they got back in Texas' – either an insult to the Texans, or a subtly ironic comment).

FIRST CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS. What is it then, that makes this particular performance stand out? It is hard to tell – it could be that Dylan is particularly inspired, but what is that? What is it that he's doing, which either brings about this inspiration (which doesn't seem to be there in any particular degree when the song begins) or brings it *through*?

In *Performing Artist*, Paul Williams quotes Christopher Ricks' reaction to the song:

Dylan alters his inflection throughout, his voice rising on a word or phrase where we would expect it to fall, an vice versa. The effect is to invite and require us to experience the song as something new (our old sense of its language has been annulled, destroyed).³

I like the description. It is only natural that a literary scholar like Ricks would emphasise the sense of the song's *language*. But I, as a musical scholar, would much rather point out the *musical* work as the decisive playground here.

Tentatively, I'd like to point out three possible factors.

First of all, the the phrasing – the interplay between the singing and the text – is in compliance with general rules for generating musical interest, not the least the interest which is generated in the area where text and music meet, where the *sonorous* aspects of text (such as rhythm, stress, vowel quality, speed) become a matter of musical interest – an area which has always been at the centre of Dylan's creative output.⁴ This is, I believe, the basic precondition for the performance to work: Dylan makes the text talk in a different way than usual – and than usual talk – by manipulating those elements *other than* the literal meaning that words consist of, through a rigorous musical logic.

And this logic is the second factor: the performance of 'Mr Tambourine Man' from Drammen is a worthy representative of the 'Lonnie method', seven years before it was made into a conscious method. Even though most or all

³ Paul Williams, *Performing Artist 1974–1986: The Middle Years* (London: Omnibus, 1994), p. 217.

⁴ Cf. the final discussion in the chapter 'Beauty May Only Turn to Rust', 22.

of the elements in the performance are recognizable from other performances, they are combined more consistently here than elsewhere, and in stronger accordance with the Lonnie-principles.

And thirdly, the motif that he chooses or finds is strong enough to establish this additional level of (musical) meaning, and it is strong enough to carry the interest of the listener (and, not to forget, that listener most actively involved: the performer himself).

Take away any of these elements – and you may still have a decent performance. But the combination . . .

SECOND MAN: CASCAIS, 1993

The second T-Man is a wonderful example of the ‘Lonnie’-style of playing: Cascais, Portugal 13 Juli 1993. The 1993 tour is notorious for its long solos, causing ordinary songs to clock in on well over ten minutes. This is no exception, and every minute is glorious, of course.

The Lonnie hat comes on during the first solo section, *c.* 3:17 into the song. The background for this solo is not choruses and verses, but the circling around the Tonic and the Subdominant which makes up most of the verses. This is extended indefinitely – or to be more precise: the sequence D G/d is played 82 times. After the first nine repetitions, the solo itself begins. In the beginning, it is far from remarkable. Dylan doodles around with a couple of tones, and some of them clearly sounds like errors – all in all, one of these two-string things which on a bad day can become slightly vexing.

This isn’t one of those days.

Throughout the entire solo – two and a half minutes – six tones are played, in two groups: an upper cluster of f, g, and a (and an occasional f♯), and a lower with c, c♯, and d. That’s all. These tones are played around with, in a way which resembles how an Indian sitar player presents the tones in the *raga* he has chosen.

Gradually, the tones find more fixed places, and the doodle morphs into a little motif (at 3:52):

G/d	D	G/d
.	:	.
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
--7-3-	-5-3-	-----
-----	-----3-45-	-----
-----	-----	-----

Musical score for the beginning of the Cascais solo, measures 1-16. The score is in treble clef, key of D major, and 6/8 time. It features a melodic line with various chords (D, G/D) and rhythmic patterns including triplets and slurs. Measure numbers 1, 5, 9, and 13 are indicated at the start of their respective lines.

FIGURE 6.5 Cascais solo, beginning

This is repeated a couple of times, then cut up and stretched out:

G/d D G/d

-----|-----|-----|

-----|-----|-----|

-7-3-|-5-3-|-----|

-----|-3-45|-----|

-----|-----|-----|

Musical score for the continuation of the Cascais solo, measures 17-26. The score is in treble clef, key of D major, and 6/8 time. It features a melodic line with various chords (D, G/D) and rhythmic patterns including triplets and slurs. Measure numbers 17, 20, and 23 are indicated at the start of their respective lines.

And then: the whole thing is played again, but started one beat earlier (at 4:12):

G/d D G/d

```

: . . . :
|-----|-----|
|-----|-----*|
|-----|-----|
| -7-3-5-3-|-----|
|-----| -3-45---*|
|-----|-----|
    
```

27 $D_{4:11}$ $\overbrace{G/D}^3$ D G/D D G/D

30 D G/D D G/D D G/D

33 D G/D D G/D D G/D D G/D

After 4:32, the thing is played in yet another position:

D G/d

```

: . . . :
|-----|-----|
|*-----*|
|-----|-----|
| -7-3-5-3-|-----|
|*-----3-45---*|
|-----|-----|
    
```

37 \overbrace{D}^4 G/D D G/D D G/D

40 D G/D D G/D D G/D \overbrace{D}^5 $\overbrace{D}^{4:45}$ G/D

These are the main variations that are used; repeated over and over again, with slight variations – most prominent of which is the reduction of the motif to the gesture *a f . . | a g . .* which lends it an uncompromising insistency:

54 D G/D D G/D D G/D D G/D

58 \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square

62 D G/D D G/D D G/D D G/D

66 D G/D D G/D \square \square \square \square \square \square \square \square

The shifting of the motif to three different position in the bar looks innocent enough on paper, but when heard, the character of the motif changes completely⁵ from one version to the next, because of the way different tones are emphasised in the interplay between the motif and the underlying chord structure.

In general, the selection of tones includes *c* and *f*, both of which go against the $c\sharp$ and $f\sharp$ of the key (D major). In addition to that, the key notes of the two chords D and G occur among the notes in the motif, but they appear in different positions in relation to the underlying chords.

⁵ This is an exaggeration, made with the best intentions: to make the effect of the system stand out as clearly as possible, as something truly striking. A more appropriate word would be 'subtly'.

In the first variant, the tone *g* is concealed, as a mere auxiliary tone to the *fff* in the **D** chord, and when the chord **G/d** is reached, the melody strikes a *d*. Thus, in the sections that use the first variant, **D** is the dominating sonority.⁶

In the second variant, it is the other way around: the tone *g* falls within the **G** chord block, and these two aspects of G-ishness reenforce each other mutually and emphasise the **G** sonority. Furthermore, the additional tones in the beginning of the motif, *a* and *f*, give the **G** chord a character of **G9**, which strengthens the **G** chord's proper character even more. The **D** chord, on the other hand, is dominated by the tone *c*, which gives the chord a **D7**ish quality – a quality which leads away from **D** and over to **G**.

The third variant is the most neutral of the three. If anything, the *c* in the melody gives the **G** step a touch of **Gsus4**, which suggests the implied harmonization: **D . . . | Gsus4 . G .** – far from dramatical, compared to the other two. Which is not necessary: the effect of shifting the motif is more than enough.

The solo as a whole is a text-book illustration of the method Dylan describes in *Chronicles*: pick some tones, repeat them, make some changes, and the effect will inevitably come, no matter what.

This is also to say that the analysis above is *not* a suggestion as to what Dylan might have thought while he was standing there, on stage in Portugal, playing some notes over and over again. He was *not* thinking: 'if I start this motif one beat earlier, this will emphasise the ambiguity between beginning and ending in the alternation between Tonic and Subdominant' – on the contrary: he was just doing it, and the effect came afterwards.

A NOSE. After the solo follows a verse ('Take me disapperaring...') which is sung with a fire which I hear as inspired by the successful solo. But then comes the real stroke of genius: In the middle of the following refrain, over the Dominant chord **A**, what does Dylan play if not that little bugger of a motif, again!

Not a single tone is 'right', but still, the effect is glorious.

The motif was devised to work in the environment between Tonic and Subdominant, where it, in a mixture of serendipity and musicality, subtly brought out different aspects of this environment.

⁶ Instead, the tone *c* gets a certain emphasis, so much so that an imagined harmonization of those passages might be **D . C/d | G/d**. introduced in the arrangement in the long harp solo towards the end change, uneven phrase lengths, everything emphasises the unstable element, the 'waiting for the resolution' character of the dominant.



Now we're on the Dominant, and every one of the tones that have been in play the first time around – *g, d, c* – clashes violently with the sustained *A* chord. But by throwing in the motif like this Dylan proves two things: first, that he is a true cubist: the motif works like a Picassean nose-from-all-sides-at-once, a synthesis of all the possibilities inherent in the song, in the motif, in the combination of the two, in the interplay within the band (I haven't yet mentioned that Bucky Baxter also picks up on the motif after a while), in the Portugese summer night – and with this little flick of the wrist, he also proves that everything is possible.

One last time we get to hear our little friend the motif, towards the end of the song (at 8:22). This time we're back in the Tonic area again, and it's like the afterglow of an orgasm. Hence, there is not much to say about it.⁷

THE THIRD MAN: VIENNA, 1999

My third example of a successful use of the Lonnie method, is the Tambourine Man from Vienna, April 1, 1999. It is not as striking as the Cascais experience, but it is interesting both because it is a vocal example, because of the interplay between instruments and voice, and because of the ways the song was sung before and after this night.

Again, it is a very simple figure, a selection of some tones from the scale, that is in the centre of attention. In this case, it's not just 'some' tones – it's the entire scale.

It turns up for the first time at the end of the first refrain:

⁷ There is, however, more to say about the performance, such as the final harp solo, where the tempo slows down to a majestic pavane and the chords change – again! – to finally give the Dominant the prominence it requires but has so far been denied. Then again: perhaps the time has come to stop talking and succumb to the power of sound, which words can only mimic.

C F G C

In the jin-gle jan - gle mor - ning I'll come fol-low-ing you

At the end of the first verse, we see two other elements being combined with the downward scalar rush: first, the phrase starts on a different tone, and second, the contraction of the whole phrase in a rapid succession of eighth notes, with complete disregard for any inherent phrasing in the melody or any textual rhythm:

F G C F C

My wear-iness a - mazes me, I'm branded on my feet I have no one to meet

F C F G

And the ancient empty street's too dead for dreaming

In the second refrain, the motif comes into full bloom in several downward rushes, this time from the high *e* and down an entire octave or more, first to the *d* below and later yet another half octave down to *b*:

15 F G C F C
 Hey, Mi-ster Tam-bourine Man Play a song for me I'm not sleepy and there

20 F G F G
 is no place I'm go-ing to Hey, Mister Tambourine Man

25 C F C F G C
 Play a song for me In the jingle jangle morning I'll come follow-ing you

As the song unfolds, these elements are combined and recombined in ever-changing ways, never straying far from the simplicity of the original downward scale, but always introducing some little variation which keeps the listener (this listener, anyway) interested. And just as with the Man from Drammenshallen, 1981, much of what makes this particular performance stand out, is recognizable from other shows at the time, and it's hard to tell just what makes the performance on this particular night sound like it was *here* he was heading, even though he didn't know it the night before.

This is the fine balance that calls for a qualification of Dylan's statement in *Chronicles*, that the system always works: creating a counter-system of musical meaning from more or less random notes and sticking to that – such a method works 'objectively', i.e. regardless of the inventiveness or skill of the musician, because it works in the borderland between a given (the original melody) and a 'taken' (the random selection of notes), but it is not self-evident that it *works*. Repeating a downwards scale twenty times would soon drive most listeners crazy (just as stripping down any melody to a single tone which skips up an octave on the last note of every phrase will – and has done): regardless of the beauty and simplicity of the system, it takes a *musician* to make music come out of it.

Just Like A Woman Revisited

It is generally pointless to perform a traditional ‘thematical’ analysis on a popular song. The song structure, with the same – relatively short – music repeated for each verse, hardly allows for very intricate motivic elaborations. Neither is a harmonic analysis often very rewarding, beyond pointing out the obvious: that the song (any song) is closely related to formalized chord patterns. We knew that already.

But still – the temptation remains, and the desire to ‘find’ something in the song. And lo! (and behold) suddenly a connection strikes you, and you can’t help but grasping for your analytical box of tools, to see if there isn’t a wrench somewhere that will fit one of the screws after all.

Take *Just Like A Woman*. It was one of the first Dylan songs I heard, yet it took until Friday (March 6, 1998) before I suddenly saw the genius in the song (as apart from its beauty or its cleverness). It all works on a harmonical level, of course. Not much more than three chords and its variations, but here it all comes together very nicely. Whatever the text is about – drugs, transvestitism, or whatever – the music is about pain and unfulfilled love.

‘Nobody feels any pain,’ the first phrase states. The music says precisely the same, in its own language: F major-Bb major-C major-F major. Or more technically: Tonic (T), Subdominant (S), Dominant (D) and Tonic (T). The oldest and most thoroughly established turn in tonal music, popular and classical alike, and it represents the highest degree of tonal stability. Full circle. Nothing has happened. It means Rest, Stability, Repose, Return, Cadence – No pain.

In the next phrase there is evidence of rain, but the chordal level is still the same: No pain.

The third phrase – ‘Everybody knows’ – goes with the chords Bb major-C major, or S-D, which is the beginning of the turn back to the tonic in the basic tonal cadence, as it has already been exposed twice already. At this point, at least the harmonically oriented ear begins to feel that, well, yes, we’re beginning to know by now, even musically. The expected tonic is further delayed

by the declaration ‘that baby’s got new clothes’ to the same two chords as the previous phrase – once again: think I’ve heard that before. (And why did he have to do it twice?)

‘But lately. . .’ – yes, it *is* late, and still no return to the tonic, only a quasi-descent, but still circling around the Subdominant-Dominant area, waiting to be resolved. This could be called: building up tension. Prolonging a preparation. Like when you’re travelling, you always reach a point when you’re no longer leaving, you’re returning, and if you still have ten days left on the road when you reach that point, that’s going to be ten *long* days. That kind of tension.

And then, after all this: ‘have *fallen*. . .’ You realize the train you got on didn’t take you home, it went to the shitty, no-good neighbour town of yours, Kill Devil Hill, Goosebum Gulch, Namsos or whatever it’s called, and you still have a long way to go. In the language of tonality it’s called the *relative tonic*, and is represented here by D minor. This harmonical turn, to the minor key that is the closest relative of the tonic, which is just about the smallest conceivable deviation from the ‘trodden path’ of the three-chordal scheme, is nevertheless one of the pillars that the dramatical course of events rests upon. The effect is a combination of the expectations that have been created and the words that accompany this: ‘fallen’, ‘fog, amphetamine, pearls’, ‘I was *hungry*’. It’s a punch in the stomach that forces you to reevaluate all that has happened so far. The State-of-No-Pain was just make-believe. And what’s worse: there’s more to come.

Whereas the introduction of D minor was more of a gesture, the *real* drama begins in the bridge, and it’s hardly bringing anyone safely over troubled water this time – ‘It was raining from the first, and I was dying there of thirst.’ The lyrics recount past events, as a reference to the rain in the first verse, but the thirst is new information, you didn’t say anything about that then? The chord here is A7, what one might call a ‘reconciliatory gesture’, since A7 is the dominant – the preparatory chord – of Goosebum Gulch, *a.k.a.* D minor. Look upon it as an attempt to look at the Gulch from a more benevolent perspective; maybe it isn’t such a shitty town after all. But just at the point where the now longed-for D minor was supposed to enter, comes the most fatal mistake: ‘I came in here’. Back to the Tonic, F major, instead. Really – you shouldn’t have done that. The Tonic, which only a moment ago signified Rest, Stability, Repose, Return, Cadence, No pain, is now rather an act of desperation in a hopeless situation. You can’t recover what’s lost. (She breaks, you know.) But this time, you can’t escape: ‘This long time curse hurts, and what’s worse . . .’ – yes, *what* is? Once again the A7-chord waiting to get to D minor

– ‘... is this...’ – are we finally going to get a D minor after all? – ‘*pain in here*’. Not even a Tonic this time, but a Bb major: the Subdominant of F major, but not even remotely related to A7. A complete loss of tonal direction, in other words, or as the lyrics state: ‘I can’t stay in here.’ Well, don’t say I didn’t tell you?

Back to start, but then not at all. The same full circle in the beginning of the last verse (as in every verse), but this time: ‘I just don’t fit’. The same music, but with a completely different ‘meaning’. Interestingly enough, this is exactly the way a classical sonata works: The exposition is quoted again in the end of the movement, but all that has happened in the mean time transforms the music (or the experience of it) into something different.

These are the essentials of the song, musically speaking: A delayed release of tension, then a release in the ‘wrong’ direction, before at the third attempt the release is withheld completely. From here the analysis can go in several directions. One is the rather obvious question: Is this withheld tension sexual tension? And in that case: what happens when the string breaks? The musicologist Susan McClary has called Beethoven a rapist based on the evidence of his ninth symphony, because of the enormous tension that is generated and then violently released, with a ‘pelvic pounding’. The style of Beethoven had such an influence on his followers, which remotely includes even popular music, that it is not entirely wrong to compare Dylan with him. Arguably, the aesthetics of the violently released tension is fundamental to most or all music written ever since. But in the case of Just Like A Woman, there is no pelvic pounding, only frustration.

A more psychologically oriented analyser might find it an interesting task to go through all the different live versions to see if there is more or less ‘pelvic pounding’ in the performances depending on how Dylan’s life was at the moment. I prefer, in accordance with my analytical *credo*, to view the song solely as a musical expression of a frustrated love affair and the laborious and impossible way back from the point of no return. It is the flip side of Robert Frost’s ‘The Road Not Taken’, if you like.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveler, long I stood
 And look down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth;
 Then took the other, as just as fair,
 And having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
 Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

In that sense it really is a 'Just Like A Woman Revisited'. And it turns out that that's not any better place to be than Highway 61.

The journey is over. Please leave by the left hand side.

Chapter 8

The propelling harmony of 'Dear Landlord'

Whereas a considerable number of Dylan songs use only a limited number of chords, often the classic three-chord blues pattern, often just one sustained chord throughout a whole song (e.g. Political World), some songs stand out as far more advanced, harmonically speaking. I would like to discuss Dear Landlord from this perspective.

LEVEL I – THE DRY DESCRIPTION

Dear Landlord begins with a C¹ held for most of the first line. At the end of this line (at 'soul') the harmony changes to E. The next line sees this E used as a dominant to a, which, by way of a standard bass-descent, reaches F. Again, after a short excursion to d, this chord is used as a new dominant, this time even as a seventh chord (F7), to the Bb of the third phrase. The last phrase leads the harmony back to d, where it seems to end, until the accented F and G chords bring back the C of the opening.

```
C                               E
Dear landlord, Please don't put a price on my soul.
Am           F           Em       Dm
My burden is heavy, My dreams are beyond control.
F           F7
When that steamboat whistle blows,
Bb           (Bb7)
I'm gonna give you all I got to give,
      C   Dm7       C           Gm/bb
And I do hope you receive it well,
      F           Gm           Dm       F F   G
Dependin' on the way you feel that you live.
```

¹ I will refer to major chords with upper-case letters alone, and minor chords with an added '-m', e.g. Am

LEVEL 2 – THE HARMONIC ANALYSIS

Now, this dry description of the basic harmonic outline of the song conceals a very dramatic line of events. The move from C to E is in fact a wide leap. Why this is so, can be explained in many ways. Traditional harmony considers chords to be arranged according to the *circle of fifths*, based on the understanding that chords a fifth apart (i.e. with the lowest notes separated by five steps) are more closely related than other chords. This gives two close relatives for each chord: a fifth above and a fifth below. The chord above is, for different reasons, the nearest relative, and is called the *dominant*, whereas the chord below is called the *subdominant*. A song in C will then have G as its dominant and F as subdominant, and there you are: the three chords upon which 80% of all blues, rock – and classical music – is based. The distance from C to E along the circle of fifths is four steps: C–G–D–A–E, which is a long way to go in a single leap.

Another reason for the wideness of the leap is that the *e* of the E chord is the third in the C chord. As such, it is the tone that defines the chord as a major chord – lower it one step and you get instead a minor chord, leave it out, and you get no chord at all, just an interval, a fifth. Thus the third is the most essential interval in traditional harmony. The variability of the third makes a chord based upon this tone somewhat unstable, in relation to the firm relations between C, G and F.

Thirdly the major chord over E contains two tones a half step removed from the corresponding tones of the C major chord: E–G sharp–B, as opposed to E–G–C. The half tone is the interval of suspense in traditional harmony – ‘demanding’ a resolution back to where it came from. This is the *raison d’être*, so to speak, of the seventh chord: the G chord contains the leading note B of the C major chord, and this is further enforced by the ‘extra’ tone f, the seventh, in the G7 chord, which is experienced as leading to the tone E in the C major chord.

All these factors contribute to the experience of the passage from C major to E major as a wide leap, generating a certain tension, which ‘needs’ a resolution. In this perspective the leap from C to E works as a harmonic ‘motor’ for the music that follows. The E major chord immediately serves as a dominant chord for the A minor that follows. (It should be mentioned, at least in a parenthesis, that this chord sequence – C, E, Am – is very common in several genres of popular music. But usually the E is merely inserted between the C and its close relative, Am. What is special in this song, is that the E major chord is given a prominence of its own; not merely as a passing, preparatory

chord, but as the goal of the first phrase. It is rather the Am that is a passing chord in the following sequence, to which I will return, if only I can get out of this parenthesis.)

I will be more brief on the following: As I said in there (it is not really formally correct to refer to what has been said in parentheses, but that's how it is when you get stuck) the E may be seen as a preparatory chord to the Am that follows. But this Am is also just a passing chord, on the way 'down' – harmonically speaking – to F and its relative Dm, where the second phrase ends ('control').

Compared with the high-point at E, we have now reached a more relaxed level, five steps down, so to speak. But now enters the hand of God: The F/Dm level of repose is turned into a level of tension by divine intervention, i.e. by the artist. The F of relaxation is turned into an F7 of renewed tension (the seventh makes the whole difference) and we tumble yet another staircase down to Bb. And as if that was not enough, the last process is (almost) repeated, when even the Bb is turned into a Bb7. The distinctive seventh note of the Bb7 chord, which Dylan reaches on 'got (to give)', is the tone Ab. On a piano this is the same key as the G# in the E major chord. In reality it is the farthest away you can get – 12 steps along the circle of fifths, which happens to make a full circle and get back to a tone that may *sound* the same, but which *feels* very different. (Time for a new parenthesis. It is only on a modern, equally tempered instrument like the piano that the tones Ab and G# sound the same. The wonderful mystery of the tonal system is that 12 steps in the circle of fifths do *not* bring one back to the same tone, but to a tone a little bit higher. On a piano this little interval has been divided in 12 and distributed among all the fifths, which means that any interval played on a piano is in fact out of tune... A singer, on the other hand, will usually bring out this difference, consciously or unconsciously.)

To put it bluntly: going from E to Am is just to follow the call of nature, but to redefine F into F7 – that is a creative act. To repeat the act is daring, but to refrain from fulfilling it, is just as daring; the Bb7 never reaches its 'natural' goal, which would have been Eb. Instead we are left suspended in the air, until we somehow land on C, but still not, since the C is just one among many restless steps on the way down to the Dm which seemingly ends the last phrase. At this point it may be correct to say that so much has happened in the meantime, that one really doesn't remember the sound of the C that started it all. The C major chord has appeared here and there throughout the song, but always in passing, never as the basic tonality upon which everything rests. Now this C is evoked again through the abrupt hammering of F and G, which

rashly sweeps away everything that has happened and very emphasisedly re-establishes C as the tonal centre again.

LEVEL 3 – THE INTERPRETATION

What's happening in here, then? I'm not about to argue that the E in the first phrase by necessity leads to everything that follows. Nor, actually, that it is a successful song – maybe the hand of God is too daring, maybe the return from Bb to C is too blunt, and maybe the final directionless descent to Dm and the following return to C is too contrived, I really don't know. What I know is that the song touches me, precisely because of these things. What I've tried to do above, is to explain, in harmonical terms, why it is that the tremendous burst of energy which I sense in the song, ultimately feels so tired.

Chapter 9

In the Garden

IN THE CONTEST ‘Dylan’s strangest song’, there are few that can challenge *In the Garden*. Dylan himself has expressed some bewilderment as to how it all came about, and upon first hearing, one can only agree: The chord changes seem to go randomly in any direction, but strangely, it doesn’t fall apart, and somehow it even seems to make sense. What’s going on here?

The whole ‘mystery’ of the song hinges on the chord at the end of the first phrase. For the sake of simplicity, in the following explanation I have transposed the song up a semitone, to C.

When they [C] came for Him in the [G] garden, did they [Am] know? [?]

To begin with, it is all plain and easy chords, well within the C tonality. The last chord, however, is the pivot. When it first enters, if one judges it according to what comes before it, it should either be seen as a $Ammaj7$ (i.e. $G\sharp mmaj7$ 465444 in the song). The logical continuation would then be $Am7 - D$, which could eventually lead back to C again, either directly or by way of $G7$ – something like this (the next few examples are of course constructions, just to provide possible, working continuations):

When they [C] came for Him in the [G] garden, did they [Am] know? [$Ammaj7$]
When they [$Am7$] came for Him in the garden, did they [$D7$] know? (etc.)

Or it could be regarded as a variant of E, which would work as the dominant of Am, with possible continuations to F or back to Am again:

When they [C] came for Him in the [G] garden, did they [Am] know? [E]
When they [F] came for Him in the [$D/f\sharp$] garden, did they [$G7$] know?

It could even be seen as a variant of C itself, which might have continued like this:

When they [C] came for Him in the [G] garden, did they [Am] know? [C/g]
 When they [F] came for Him in the [C/e] garden, did they [D7] know? [G7]

The reason for this wide array of possible interpretations is that the chord I've called [?] is an *augmented* chord, i.e. a chord where the fifth step – G in this case – is raised a semitone (one fret). This gives a chord which consists of three equal intervals – major thirds or four semitones – and they may in principle be stacked whichever way you want. The tones in the chord are c, e, and g \sharp , and depending on which tone is given priority and is interpreted as the key note, it can either be heard as a C (c-e-g), an E (e-g \sharp -b) or a G \sharp (or Ab) (g \sharp -b \sharp -d \sharp , or Ab-c-e \flat). In each of the alternatives, the fifth is altered, for extra flavour. The Ammaj7 option is basically a variant of the C interpretation.

Now, the C and E interpretations are both well within the limits of the main tonality, as the examples above will show: they don't really stand out, and they don't cause major disturbances in the tonal fundamentals of the song. This is because they are both united to C through their common 'relative', Am.

What Dylan does in In The Garden, however, is to choose the third alternative, G \sharp , which is a much bigger step. True, it is 'just' a matter of going in the opposite direction of E, and, true, it is used, occasionally (the James Bond theme comes to mind), but the effect is much more spectacular than the turn to E.

Once the augmented chord has been interpreted as a G \sharp , the whole trick is done: we are now in the key of G \sharp – for a little while. But first the chord is reinterpreted again. In the following line:

[G \sharp aug]
 When they [C \sharp m] came for Him in the [G \sharp aug] garden, did they [E] know?
 [F \sharp]

both of the G \sharp aug chords could be played as plain G \sharp , but as an augmented chord, it is already almost an E, which is where it immediately goes to. So one might say that Dylan repeats the trick: he has shifted the whole key of the song down in two leaps, first from C to Ab/G \sharp , then further down to E – both times in the unexpected direction. The rest of the song is laboriously working its way up again, step by step, whole tone by whole tone: E, F \sharp , G \sharp , A \sharp , and finally back to C again.

The E doesn't live long enough to take on the role of 'tonal centre' on its own – it appears as an episode within the larger G \sharp episode. But one might

call it, slightly figuratively speaking, the collecting of the energy necessary for the ascent through the keys back to C again.

If we stay with the 'energy to run up the stairs' metaphor, this will account for the end as well: the melody has reached the top, but needs an extra step in order to gain balance and to really be able to come to a halt – it is not enough just to rush up through the keys – an ending 'needs' something more to be felt like an ending, and the final flourish, after the singing is over, is what accomplishes that.

Thank you for your attention, will the last one to leave please wipe the blackboard.

III

Albums and Songs

Chapter 10

The Uneven Heart

BOB DYLAN THE MUSICIAN

IT IS EASY to be seduced by Dylan's lyrics: *they* were essential when he was nominated for 'Voice of a Generation', and *they* stuck in the fans' throats when he converted to Christianity. Equally easy is it to question his musical abilities: 'He can't sing', 'he can't play the harmonica', 'he only knows three guitar chords', 'his lyrics are good, but I can't stand the voice'. Et cetera. But what if it's first and foremost the *music* that has captured one's attention? Or put differently: if one is of the opinion that *what* is being said cannot meaningfully be separated from *how* it is said? That the meaning of a word is its use, as Wittgenstein expressed it, and that this is true to a high degree about Dylan – both as a musician and as a poet.¹ This article is predominantly a survey of certain aspects of Dylan's musical life, and the emphasis on these particular aspects is intended to suggest that some of that which is most appealing about Dylan's art and what creates the impression that what he does and says is significant, is the sense of a direct address, as an expression of a life and a pulse, and that this aspect of his work first and foremost comes to expression through musical means just as much as through the lyrics.

I would like to introduce this theme through two examples. My very first encounter with Dylan's music was not through Dylan himself, but through Peter, Paul and Mary, in a clip which I have later identified as a performance from the Newport festival, taken from the documentary *Festival* (1967). They were singing 'The Times They Are A-Changin'', and it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen or heard. Mary Travers' blonde hair, waving in the wind in the evening darkness of the festival around her powerful face, and the perfect three-part harmony in the refrain, where one voice remained on the same tone as a pedal point around which the other two would circle, caressingly

¹This seems to be a more unproblematic premise in painting, where how something is painted is usually considered more important than what the painting is *of*.

like a cat around a leg – it impressed me deeply. When several years later I heard Dylan's own version, it was a completely different song. The voice was one thing – I was prepared for *that* – but it was everything else: all harmonical complexity was gone; the guitar may have played some of the tones that used to accompany Mary Travers' hair, but the sensual beauty was not there. The same goes for the rhythm: where the trio had been soaring through the song and the night, with the message: 'We can fly wherever we want to, 'cause the times are a-changin'', Dylan's voice and guitar hammered out, in the most unsophisticated way, the ominous perspective – like a desperate but controlled, calculating man who was likely to stab whoever was blocking up the hall. It was raw and insistent, unpleasant and yet inescapable. All the beauty was gone, but when the loss of the pleasant dream had resided, what remained was the experience of something much more real.

This is not to say that Dylan can't fly. But when he does, it is the result of his shimmering, nervous energy, like in the scene from *Eat the Document* (1966) where he's at the piano playing 'Ballad of a Thin Man' – although sitting? no, he is dancing, soaring, jumping, rocking, and his piano is dancing along with him. He can't sit still; he stands up, the fingers on the keys are trembling and his whole body is glowing with a force which one could not have imagined could have lived in the quiet song.

His entire career can be described in similar terms: there is a restlessness, a quest for ever new challenges, new genres, new formats, new forms of expression, which is deeply engaging and which makes it an interesting project to follow the process, investigate new aspects and angles, listen to screechy old concert recording and figuring out what to say about them. It is interesting mainly because it all has to do with ways of coupling *meaning* with *sound*, whether it is the sounds of language or of music. Thus, it is not simply a metaphorical description to say that Dylan's and Peter, Paul and Mary's versions of 'The Times' are completely different songs: they *are* different songs. And Dylan's well over a thousand versions of 'All Along the Watchtower' are in a certain sense a thousand different songs, each with different layers of signification.

It would be an exaggeration to say that all these thousand 'songs' are equally exciting – some are clearly of the *day-at-the-office*-kind – but seen in the full perspective, even the unsuccessful days contribute to the image of a heart beating. Studying Dylan's music over the years is thus the study of a life – that life which comes to expression in the performances, but first and foremost the musical 'life' whose pulse it is one is hearing. This life is not necessarily accessible through a traditional study of genre, influences, and biography, be-

cause its life-character resides in a chain of interpretations which – possibly – starts with Dylan himself, but which in any case has one necessary participant: the individual listener. It is as a listener, then, that the following analyses are made. I'm not trying to find out what Dylan has *really* been up to, objectively speaking and in splendid isolation, but how he has engaged in activities which seem meaningful to me. To quote Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder, the question is not 'What's that you're doing?', but 'What's that you do to me?' or, with Gerry and the Pacemakers: 'How do you do what you do to me?'

SPONGE BOB (1960–65)

In the film *No Direction Home*, John Bucklen, Dylan's schoolday friend from Minneapolis, talks about Dylan's return to St Paul after his first trip to New York in 1961:

He was playing at some party or something, and it was like a whole different guy. You hear those stories about the blues men who go out to the crossroads and sell their soul to the devil and come back all of a sudden able to do stuff – Robert Johnson, Tommy Johnson, that whole mythology. It was one of those kind of deals, almost. When he left Minneapolis he was just average. There was five, six other guys doing the same thing. When he came back, he was doing Woody and he was doing Van Ronk and he was fingerpicking, he was playing cross harp, and this is a matter of a couple of months. I mean, this is not like he was gone a year or anything.²

It is tempting to do as Bucklen and associate to the Faust myth, especially since Dylan himself in recent interviews and in the same *No Direction Home* has more than intimated that that's how he sees himself: he has made a deal with the Chief Commander:

Dylan: Well, it goes back to that destiny thing. You know, I made a bargain with it, you know, long time ago. I'm holding up my end.

Bradley: What was your bargain?

Dylan: Get where I am now.

Bradley: Should I ask who you made the bargain with?

Dylan: Ha, ha ha. With the Chief . . . you know, the Chief Commander.

Bradley: On this earth?

Dylan: This earth, and the world we can't see.³

² Transcribed from *No Direction Home*.

³ Transcribed from interview with Ed Bradley, *CBS 60 Minutes*, 6 December 2004.

Be it as it may with this ‘bargain’: during this period, Dylan is frequently referred to as a ‘sponge’, sucking up any influence he came in touch with. That the development was quick, probably has more to do with hard, insistent work than with spiritual covenants, even though Bucklen’s reaction is understandable. Dylan’s then girlfriend Bonnie Beecher gives a unique picture of this process. She had bought him a harmonica holder, and Dylan was captivated.

And my friends would come in and they would just go, ‘Urgh! Who is this geek?’
 . . . I wanted him to play guitar, which he could play well and which I knew would impress them, but he just wasn’t having any of it. He was saying, ‘Naw, I wanna get this – hwang! WHwaongg!’⁴

This means that when Dylan left for New York early in the winter of 1961, he already had a certain technical foundation, which, given his ambition and energy, quickly was to be extended when he plunged himself into the creative milieu in Greenwich Village, and with the circle around Woody Guthrie’s sickbed as a second power supply. Hungry, receptive, and with a certain serendipitous luck he had all the prerequisites to take full advantage of his new surroundings.

It is a commonly held attitude that Dylan may have written good lyrics from the beginning, but that as a musician he is hardly more than mediocre. This attitude is, for example, behind the estimation of the guitar track on ‘Don’t Think Twice’ from *Freewheelin’* (1963): it is so good that it *can’t* be Dylan himself – it must be somebody else. Clinton Heylin seems to be the originator of the dogma that it is played by Bruce Langhorne. This dogma is repeated here and there, with authoritarian certainty, although nothing supports it – apart from the quality of the playing.⁵ Granted: ‘Virtuosic equilibrium’ has never been an adequate description of Dylan’s musicianship, but if one looks beyond the cliché about the hoarse, crudely hammering three-chord musician who mainly has good lyrics, and instead listen to what Dylan is actually doing during these years, the picture one gets is far more positive. First, there is a musician who has mastered certain techniques with the obviousness that only a solid foundation can give. Bucklen mentions his finger-picking, and rightly so. In many of the recordings and live performances from the early years, Dylan uses different variants of the ‘clawhammer’ technique, where the thumb alternates between the three bass strings and the other fingers fill in between the beats, either simply with chord tones, or with more

⁴ Quoted from *heylin:shades*, p. 46.

⁵ See ‘It wasn’t Bruce – a musical whodunnit’ (p. 155) for a decisive refutation.

advanced variants where a melody can be indicated – usually syncopated since the strong beats is the thumb’s domain – or other figures may get a life of their own. ‘I Was Young When I Left Home’, which was recorded in December 1961 and circulates as part of the the so-called *Minnesota Hotel Tape*, and which was released as a bonus track together with *Love and Theft* (2001), is a good example: the basic technique is simple, but by varying the thumb’s patterns and picking out both melodies and counter-melodies with the other fingers, a remarkably full sound is achieved, with constant variations which give a guitar track far more complex than the basic technique alone would accomplish.

On *The Gaslight Tapes*, the recordings which have survived from two concerts at the Gaslight Café in October 1961, at about the same time as the recordings for *Freewheelin’*, the finger picking is perfected. Two of the songs where it is used deserve special mention: ‘Rocks and Gravel’, and ‘Barbara Allen’. In both of the songs, there is a little figure in the upper voice of the guitar which is repeated over and over; one might imagine that it would become monotonous, but it doesn’t – the *figures* get under your skin and *become* the song.

They do this together with another important element which features already in the early years: an unfaltering sense of timing and establishment of a longer musical progression. ‘Rocks and Gravel’ is one of these performances which one finds here and there in Dylan’s career – songs which ask the question: how long can a tone be held, in one verse after another, before it becomes boring or pathetic? And it turns out that the answer is: exactly *this* long.⁶

In other words: through his persistent sponging, Dylan had gained a solid technique which, joined by his strong musicality, laid a foundation upon which his words could freely play out *their* themes, supported by the music. (If he had jeopardized his soul to get there, I leave that to the theologians to decide). Again, it has little to do with virtuoso technique but with virtuosity in employing as little technique as possible to maximum effect.

PERFECTION AND BREAK (1965–66)

This musicianship was perfected over the following couple of years. One hardly notices it. It’s like typography: if you see it, something is wrong. Hence, the one example which best illustrates Dylan’s first perfection is the singular

⁶ See ‘The Momentum of Standstill’, p. 51.

performance where something goes wrong. It happens during a magical version of 'It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)' from the 'Halloween Show' in October 1964, which (finally!) was released forty years later as *The Bootleg Series, vol. 6*. Dylan is apparently in a very good mood throughout the concert; he jokes and laughs (at his own jokes, mostly), plays wrong here and forgets a verse there. When he presents 'It's Alright Ma' with its full title – 'It's Alright Ma, It's Life and Life Only', someone in the audience finds it funny and bursts out laughing, and Dylan replies: 'Yes, it's a very funny song', before he hurls himself and the poor, unprepared audience into the most serious, anything but 'funny', rendition of the song imaginable.

The first three verses are magical. Time and place cease to exist as independent categories, they are subordinate elements under a guitar, a voice, and some words. But in the middle of the fourth verse, he forgets the lyrics, and the enchantment is broken. The mood is still good; he solves it with a quick laugh and completes the song in style, but the song is no longer the same.

And that may be just as good, because without that little mistake, we may have had a performance for the history books, but not this demonstration of how perfect Dylan's stage art was: how with a few simple introductory chords could transform the feeling in the hall completely, from unrestrained hilarity to abysmal seriousness; and how he with purely musical means is able to maintain and develop this mood through five, six, eight, twelve minutes. When this one time he stops in the tracks, it is like an alarm clock which drags one out of the most pleasant dream which one would have loved to remain in; one curses the wretched clock, but without it one would have just kept sleeping, not even remembering that there ever *was* a dream. For this reason, I value this performance higher than most – perhaps all – of Dylan's live accomplishments from the 60s: because it shows just how good all the others are.

I have already described the music as a landscape. The musical technique which has been perfected consists in the establishing of such a landscape which is even enough for the character and characters of the lyrics to stand out clearly, and still varied and exciting enough in its own right to give the characters an interesting stage set on which to act. The acoustic set which introduced the concerts in 1965–66 does all this: the dominating impression which remains in the listener, is the impact of the lyrics, which is how it is supposed to be. But when songs like 'Desolation Row' or 'Just Like a Woman' can have the

effect they have, it is not the least thanks to the accompaniment which is the background and foundation for the words.⁷

And then it's time to leave. If there is one theme which runs through Dylan's entire career, it must be this: *absorb, internalize, and move on*.

Bringing It All Back Home, the first in the trilogy of albums from 1965–66, has one side which leaves one breathless in all its tremendous greatness: 'Mr Tambourine Man', 'Gates of Eden', 'It's Alright Ma', og 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' – is there a stronger side anywhere in the history of recorded music? – and then there is another side (strictly speaking, the first), with electrical instruments and a full band, which. . . well, what is it really? And what does it do?

Ideologically speaking, it does all the things which ever since the Newport festival in 1965 has accompanied the myth of the electrified Dylan, whether it is interpreted as a goodbye, a sell-out, a betrayal, a result of the increasing power of the almighty manager Albert Grossman – or for that matter a return to the roots: those roots, that is, which in Dylan's childhood in Minnesota were planted firmly in the *other* end of Highway 61 and nourished through the radio. These elements have been amply discussed by others, and can therefore be passed over quite briefly.

What is certain is that the concerts in 1965–66 had the highest sound volume that anyone had heard from a stage, that the ticket prices were higher than the ordinary, and that many felt they had been cheated – also for musical reasons.

Dylan's position as a musician in the new performance situation was more withdrawn. He strums on his new love, the Stratocaster, of course, but he mostly plays the same things and in the same ways as before his electrification: simple flatpicking, frequently with a capo. If he ever became an electric guitarist (which can be doubted), it didn't happen until much later.

But there were also things that didn't make it to the other side. Musically speaking, the transformation from folk-strummer to rock artist most of all represents a radical *simplification*. Subtle nuances in bass progressions and fingerpicking patterns were replaced with powerful effusions from a full rock band where Dylan is no longer in exclusive control – he is still the conductor, the band-leader, the choreographer, ideologist, and power supply, but the full

⁷ Not to forget are Dylan's phenomenal diction and his alertness to the effect each line of lyrics has on the audience. Prime examples are the first live versions of 'Love Minus Zero' and 'Desolation Row', where the reaction – the audience's *and* Dylan's – to lines like 'Draw conclusions . . . on the wall is fresh and spontaneous.

control of the musical expression has been laid partly in the hands of others. Fingerpicking has no place here anymore, neither have bass progressions and licks à la ‘Barbara Allen’; and although he did re-tune his guitar from time to time in the beginning, but one can hardly hear it, unless one puts in an effort. All this, which had earlier been such important widgets in Dylan’s toolbox, loose their *raison d’être* when there is a solo guitarist (and *what a* solo guitarist!) there to do the ornaments; a bass player in charge of the lines in the lower register; and a full band to take care of the variations in sound and register which were previously accomplished through different tunings and capo positions. Even the one element that Dylan does keep for himself, the simple, rhythmical strumming, is strictly speaking redundant: *that* is done better – or at least more forcefully – by the drummer. All the technical elements that were fundamental for the early Dylan fade into the background, and they have barely been heard since.⁸ The main function of the guitar was – and has been ever since – iconic, not musical.⁹

The changes I have mentioned so far, have mainly to do with the external sound, but also concerning the harmonical character of the songs, there is a similar change. On the surface, there doesn’t seem to be that much of a difference between ‘Mr. Tambourine Man’ and ‘Subterranean Homesick Blues’, both from *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965). Both songs consist of the three chords which according to the classical theory fulfill the three main chord *functions*: that of *tonic*, *subdominant*, and *dominant*. Simply put, the **tonic** (T) is the keynote, the stable level of repose where the song usually begins and ends, whereas the **dominant** D is the contrasting, tension-laden level represented by the chord five steps up from the keynote. It is an exaggeration, but just a slight one, to regard all music produced within a western art- or popular music tradition since the sixteenth century as a play with the balance between these two steps.

The third chord, the **subdominant** S, assumes a double position in relation to the other two. In many connections, it works as hardly more than a variant of the tonic, but its classic function is that of being the first step *away* from the

⁸ The most pleasant surprise on the two acoustical retro-albums *Good as I Been to You* (1992) and *World Gone Wrong* (1993) was the guitar work – he was actually still able! Concerning re-tuning, the New York versions of *Blood on the Tracks* (1975) are of course legendary exceptions, but they stand pitifully alone.

⁹ It may even have been a mask; even though it was mostly redundant, it kept hanging there, and wasn’t taken off until the performance of ‘Isis’ during the 1975 tour – when it was, significantly enough, replaced by another mask: the white-painted face.

tonic, as in the cadential figure T-S-D-T (see e.g. the beginning of 'Blowin' in the Wind'). The dominant creates a tension which requires resolution back to the tonic, and the subdominant is one step on the way to gaining this tension, simply put.

It is not unproblematical to use these terms about popular music. They have grown out of a particular musical repertory – classic-romantic music of the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries – and with a theoretical apparatus which is based on this music, and which cannot easily be applied to any other material without violating the material. When I nevertheless use the terms in the following discussion of 'Mr Tambourine Man', I do this for two reasons. First, the classical western tradition cannot be excluded from the study of popular music. Even though various African and European folk music traditions – which can hardly be done justice through descriptions in a terminology and a conceptual apparatus shaped with the eyes fixed on Mozart and Beethoven – have been essential constituents in the popular music of the past century, this does not mean that popular music *is* folk music. In his *merwe:origins* (1989), *merwe:origins* convincingly argues in favour of the influence of classical 'art music' – especially in the harmonical area but also concerning melodic outline and phrasing structures – also in a 'purely' afro-american genre like the blues. For a harmonically structured song like 'Mr Tambourine Man' I thus consider it a relevant model of interpretation.

On the other hand, this doesn't make the model as such a good model. The value of the theoretical foundation of classical functional harmony can be doubted also in its 'native' field of classical music, and even more so applied on traditions which are farther removed from its original context. When I use terms like 'tonic' and 'dominant', I use them as neutral designations – to the extent that that is possible – for fundamental harmonic relationships like rest, contrast, and dynamics, and for some of those relations between these which are strongly established in classical western music and in traditions which relate to it.

What's special about 'Mr Tambourine Man' is that it does *not* begin on the tonic (T) but on the subdominant (S). From there, it passes via D to T, but without coming to a halt; instead, it returns back to S again. We thus have a complete cadence cycle, but with the 'wrong' steps: S-D-T-S instead of T-S-D-T.

The second phrase ('sleepy, and there is no place I'm going to') is another variation of the standard pattern: we get the beginning, T-S-D. This progression, which is usually the build-up phase of the cadence cycle, here has the opposite function: instead, D becomes the resting point were all half-refrains

and every whole and half verse come to an end. Not until the end of the refrains is there a T which actually works as a resting point; all the others have been part of movements somewhere else.

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S D T S || T S D . |
S D T S || T S D T |
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A similar analysis can be made of the verses, which follow the same basic pattern as the refrains, but with an interesting twist. The two ‘wrong’ cadential figures in the refrain, come together in the T-S which the first ends and the second begins with.

Although the chords are the same, their functions are not. First time around: an uneasy rest on the wrong step, then: a new beginning. In the verses, this little segment assumes an independent role, and this little T-S block is repeated as many times as necessary for the unevenly long verses.

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-----|
| S D T S || T S D . => S D | : T S : | D .
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The difference is subtle but significant: in its emancipated version, the T-S segment retains both its original characters – ending and beginning – and it is impossible to decide at any single occurrence which of them is in action: both are, at the same time.

An analysis such as this one isolates one element – harmonic functions and interconnections – and ignores others which for the final impression are just as important: the lyrics, of course, but also melodic shapes and gestures, rhythms, phrasing.¹⁰ But given this limitation – and in spite of it – the analysis intends to show that even a ‘real’ three-chord song like Mr. Tambourine Man can hold harmonic complexity to an entirely different degree than the other song in the comparison: ‘Subterranean Homesick Blues’. This does not mean that the new songs are ‘simple’, only that Dylan sought other channels for his expression.¹¹

If one only compares the two sides of *Bringing it All Back Home* one can perhaps understand the enraged critics we see in *Eat the Document* and *No*

¹⁰ For a more extensive treatment of this song, which also takes some of these aspects into consideration, see ‘Three Tambourine Men’, p. 87. See also the shorter analyses of ‘Dear Landlord’, ‘Just Like a Woman’, and ‘In the Garden’ (pp. 113, 109, and 105, respectively).

¹¹ It should also be added that Dylan’s use of the blues genre is far from simple. Only a small handful of his countless blues-based songs can be called twelve-bar blues, and only rarely do two songs use the simple blues pattern in the same way.

Direction Home, also without sharing their political or cultural-ideological 60s indignation. One can easily miss the ability to hint at a melody with an inimitable mixture of stringency, simplicity, and what can best be termed *sprezzatura* – the sophisticated, controlled nonchalance which was held in such high esteem in the court culture of the Italian Renaissance, and which Dylan embodies better than anyone else in today's cultural landscape. Hearing the two parts of the 1966 shows, for example, it is impossible not to be swept along by the sheer power in the electrical set, but when the sound orgasm has passed it is the beauty, the perfection, the expressivity of the acoustic solo set that remains, and one cannot but wonder what kind of nonsensical ramble – a jive against the press, perhaps? – it is when he claims to have been bored to death by the cursed solo sets and was only longing for the band to get on stage. No! *This is not the work of a tired man*. Dylan must be lying.¹²

All of this he abandoned, and compared to this, the ideological changes are mere ripples on the surface.¹³ It is tempting to regard it as an answer to the question: what to do next when perfection has been achieved? Or, in the poet's own words: 'You find out when you reach the top, you're on the bottom'.¹⁴ It is as if to say: done here, nothing more to do, must move on, must get away from here.

THE LONG LOST WEEKEND (1967–74)

And off he went. Chronologically speaking, the electrified revolution in 1965–66 became only a short phase. Through three ineluctable albums, a hectic

¹² I usually have no problem believing what Dylan says. Sure, he is a sphinx who is obsessed with carnivals and loves to tease journalists, but for an artist who is notorious for being intangible, mystical, and a riddle, he has always been frank and communicative – surprisingly so, perhaps – both in interviews and in the songs themselves, and to the extent that I have checked his facts, they always make sense. But not this time.

¹³ Again, Dylan has been honest: he was never particularly political, and he became the Voice of a Generation purely by mistake. Hearing the preserved recording of a Bob Fass radio show from 1963, where Dylan stumbles into the studio in the middle of the night with the acetates of his new album, *The Freewheelin'* and jokes liberally about the politically correct folk purists; it becomes very difficult to uphold the thesis that a radical change occurred two-three years later which made him turn his back on 'his' movement: he was already thoroughly uninterested in that part of the folk movement by the time 'Blowin'' and 'Hard Rain' came out.

¹⁴ Or, as he has expressed it more recently, talking about why old records sound better than new ones: 'Back then, it was more important to be great than to be *perfect*'.

world tour and a uniting of textual fullness of meaning with a popular mode of expression which changed both spheres,¹⁵ he perfected this genre – whatever it should be called; neither ‘mathematical music’ nor ‘drug song’ seem quite adequate – in a short time. But then he was gone. There was rumour of a motorcycle accident, but in those days, before chatrooms and newsgroups, the rumours had less to work with, the uncertainty correspondingly more. In hindsight, we are probably justified in saying that it should not be ‘Dylan survived a motorcycle accident’, but that ‘Dylan survived *thanks to* a motorcycle accident.

It is easy to sympathize with the need to turn the page and start something new after the long and intensive eruption through the previous two years, not least given the new situation as a married man and a family father (and, in 1968, fatherless). But the same hindsight also tells us that the sharp break with creative activity was only apparent; to the public, it may have looked like he was spent, but 1967 was in fact his most productive year ever, with the released album *John Wesley Harding* as the tip of an iceberg the full extent of which was only gradually revealed. Fourteen songs from the ‘Basement Tapes’ soon began to circulate as the first bootleg album ever, but in its entirety the collection counts more than a hundred tracks. They vary dramatically in character and in quality, from funny but utterly meaningless ‘See you later, Allen Ginsberg’ and ‘I’m your Teenage Prayer’ and unfinished fragments like ‘Won’t You Be My Baby’ and ‘I’m Alright’, to classics like ‘Tears of Rage’ and ‘I Shall Be Released’ – and the most legendary of them all: ‘I’m Not There (1956)’. But even though the collection is uneven, it is also a demonstration of a creativity which is deeply fascinating, not only as a ‘document’ of the lost years, but as an independent ‘work’.

Over the years between 1967 and 1973 – i.e. between *John Wesley Harding* (1967) and *Planet Waves* (1974), Dylan recorded *c.* two hundred different songs, in addition to the hundred Basement tapes. Just like them, it is an uneven batch of recordings. Close up, it is easy to perceive the whole period as a long ‘lost weekend’ – a series of unengaged mediocrities, where the rubble buries the occasional gems. Song by song there is little to be excited about; album by album they place themselves between the adequate (*Nashville Skyline*), interesting (*New Morning*), and the strangely embarrassing (*Self Portrait*), but even the best is far from great. But considering the period as a whole, it becomes easier to see a general direction for the creative process, beyond ful-

¹⁵ ‘Dylan freed the mind the way Elvis freed the body’, as Bruce Springsteen said at the introduction into the Rock’n’roll hall of fame, 20 januar 1988.

filling contractual obligations for a number of albums – it may even only gradually have become clear to Dylan himself what he was ‘actually’ doing.

It may be seen as a tripartite project. Most striking is of course the turn towards *country music*, in all its variants. *Nashville Skyline* (1969) comes close to being a pure country album, but the country element is predominant also on the other albums. It may be a small step from certain parts of the folk tradition to certain parts of the country tradition (is Jimmie Rodgers a blues, folk, or country artist?), but with a vantage point at the angry young man on *The Times They Are A-Changin’*, or the powerful young man (skinny, granted, but definitely powerful) on *Blonde on Blonde*, the slick crooner on songs like ‘I Forgot More Than You’ll Ever Know About Her’ on *Self Portrait* will come as a surprise all the same – to most listeners probably an unpleasant one. What *is* he doing?

One can see the country ballads as a musical expression of the simple life, which reaches its most unadulterated, enthusiastic, unabashed heights in the ‘la la la’-chorus of ‘The Man In Me’ and in lines like ‘Build a little cabin in U-tah [. . .] Have a bunch of kids who call me Pa, / That must be what it’s all about’ from ‘Sign on the Window’. The message is actually so clear that one is tempted to ask: ‘Is that *really* what you think, Mr Dylan? Is *that* really what it’s all about?’

It is more productive, at least from a musical point of view, to see the country period as another stage in Dylan’s exploration of *band sound and dynamics*, of the possibilities it gives to play together with others, despite the limitations it also entails. Hence, the period also marks the fruition of a feature which later has become something of a trade-mark: the constant reworking of songs.

Reviews of Dylan shows usually manage to mention how unpredictable Dylan is and that he changes his songs completely from night to night. This was just as untrue in the early 60s as it is today. Dylan’s concerts consisted of thoroughly prepared and rehearsed songs, a fixed set of songs each night, and in the same version throughout the tour. This is true also of the world tour in ’65–’66: a couple of songs were exchanged for others during the tour, but in general, it is a fixed show that is presented.

With the intensivated collaboration in the quiet basement in Woodstock, with musicians who knew each other inside out, we get radically different versions of the same song – exactly as the myth about Dylan has it. ‘Like A Rolling Stone’ from the Isle of Wight concert in 1969 which is included on *Self Portrait*, may not be impeccable, but hey! it’s an entirely new song.

What we have is a musical exploration of and in the dynamic interplay between musicians, arrangements, guitarist/singer. Had the official albums been all we had this would mostly have been hidden, but thanks to the out-takes which have leaked into circulation over the years, we can peek into this laboratory and see the whole period as a continuous *processing*, not just as the motley bouquet that appear from the albums.

Two pearls deserve special mention. 'Spanish is the Loving Tongue' in the version that was released on *Dylan* (1973; recorded April 1969) is probably the most tasteless waste of tape and minutes that has been released in Dylan's name. Complete with La-la-la chorus, mariachi band, and a performance which reveals little respect for either the song, the lyrics, or what energy may have gone into the making of the track.

One year later: Dylan alone at the piano, accompanied only by Charles Daniels on bass. The song is the same, at least on paper, but this time the outcome is the most magical creation Dylan has ever accomplished: an intensely personal rendition where the grief in the text is tangible. The piano starts out with a hint of a sound without a fixed rhythm; between the verses he rolls out some arabesques which come from no known place, but which occupy the space with the assuredness of the permanent resident; gradually a rhythm materializes which together with the emotional drama of the lyrics and the warmth and intensity of the singing forms a subdued climax which lasts and lasts . . . No, it's not the same song. But the question is if the glorious version could have existed without the damned one.¹⁶

Second pearl: The recording of the soundtrack for *Pat Garret & Billy the Kid* was according to all reports a traumatic experience, and the result is, despite certain highlights, uneven. One of the tracks, which Dylan calls 'Billy Surrenders', begins as a form- and directionless plucking of some notes on the guitar, up and down on a couple of strings, nothing more. The other musicians try as best as they can to follow lead – something takes form in the chaos, and suddenly one notices the musical idea which lies behind it all, which turns out to have (or to become) both a melody, a rhythm and a direction, and it was there all the time: a new variation of the 'Billy'-theme and the verse about being 'hunted by the man who was your friend'.

Keeping these examples in mind, we may revise the history of the period 1967–73: not as the story of a burned-out, tired artist with a new family situation, but as Bonnie Beecher's harmonica story over again: a plunge into a

¹⁶ The question is purely rhetorical; of course the answer is 'yes', but the thought is as enticing as the contrast is glaring.

style, a tradition, and a method which was virgin territory, where he to a large extent had to start from scratch. In this light, Greil Marcus's legendary reaction to *Self Portrait* – 'What is this Shit?' – turns out to be exactly the same as Bonnie Beecher's. And the answer to Marcus's indignant question is: it's just Dylan once again saying: 'Naw, I wanna get this – hwang! WHwaongg!'

The third part of the project is closely related to this: it may be that Dylan during these years has not had anything he wanted to say with the former immediacy or an intuitive way of saying it, whatever it is, but he is searching.¹⁷ On *New Morning* (1972) no song resembles the other, everything is tried out – scat singing and swing jazz on 'If Dogs Run Free', country-waltz on 'Winterlude', and the strange but captivating 'Father of Night' and 'Three Angels'.

BLOODY TRACKS AND ROLLING THUNDER (1974–75)

The above is a construction, as are all stories, and should be read with the necessary reservation – he was of course burned-out and family father *as well* – but it is undeniably a more interesting story, and not entirely wrong either. It is also a story which makes it easier to present the next chapter: about the *Blood on the Tracks* and *Rolling Thunder Revue* years.

Because without it, it becomes difficult to pinpoint *what* is the greatness and novelty of this phase, even though everyone agrees that it is there. But if one sees it as a natural continuation of the preceding years, one may have to explain what 'Tangled Up In Blue' has to do with 'Spanish is the la-la-la-ving Tongue', but it also provides an answer: they are extremes in the same quest for a voice and a point (where the quest, and not necessarily the answer, is the most important).

On *Blood on the Tracks*, the enthusiasm of having something to say again, both textually, musically, and formally, is unquestionable¹⁸ A unique combination of a renewed interest in open tunings (inspired by Joni Mitchell), a new perspective on narrative and time (inspired by the mysterious art teacher Norman Raeben), and a broken heart (inspired by Sara), resulted in an outpouring of creativity which bears comparison with the trilogy from the mid-60s.

¹⁷ Cf. Dylan's own statement that he had to 'get to do consciously what I used to do unconsciously' (interview with Jonathan Cott, *Rolling Stone*, 16 November 1978).

¹⁸ Even though Dylan may not have been all too enthusiastic about the *contents* of the message; cf. his remark to Mary Travis, that he 'found it hard to understand how people could *enjoy* hearing that type of pain' ([heylin:shades](#), p. 373).

It is a dear topic of dispute in Dylan circles which version of the record is the best: the one that was recorded in New York in September 1974 or the one that was finally released, where Dylan, encouraged by his brother David had rerecorded a number of songs. Many say that it would have been better had he not messed around with songs that were already perfect, but instead kept the intense New York versions.

Both versions have their strong points. On the one hand there is an undeniable emotional intensity in the original versions, which is occasionally lost in the new recordings. On the other, the new versions make the album as a whole a far more varied and – to my ears – satisfying listening experience than the New York versions, which are all played in the same open E tuning and only intermittently breaks away from a certain bitter melancholy. Luckily, we don't have to choose, since both versions are available.

But even though I tend to prefer the revised version, musically speaking the New York versions are by far the most interesting, precisely because of the open tuning and the way he uses it. Normally, the strings of a guitar are tuned so as to make it possible to play as many different chords as possible: the tones of the strings are placed at certain neutral intervals which, although they do favour certain keys, do not exclude others.

Open tuning, on the other hand, takes the opposite approach, in that all the strings are tuned to tones from one chord only. Thus, one is also limited to this chord and its closest relatives,¹⁹ but as long as one stays within this area, the many open strings boost the resonance and thus provides a fuller sound. Even more importantly, one will tend to use the open strings of the base chord also in other chords where those tones don't naturally belong, which works in two opposite directions at once: providing tonal stability, while the extra notes produce 'juicy' chords.

Joni Mitchell is usually given the credit for having opened Dylan's eyes to the possibilities of open tunings. If so, it can't have amounted to more than a reintroduction: a substantial part of Dylan's earliest repertory was played in various open and altered tunings.

Also in other ways, *Blood On The Tracks* marks a return to the acoustic Dylan of the early 60s. While the records since 1965 have the character of 'Dylan with band', *Blood on the Tracks* is rather 'Dylan with accompaniment', and the guitar playing is of the same kind as in the early days: a rhythmic,

¹⁹ One can of course play other chords with simple barre chords anywhere on the neck, but this gives an unflexible sound and is against the spirit of open tuning (where the open strings are essential), at least in the form Dylan gives it.

driving ground work; the full sonority that the open E tuning provides; the same economical playing style with maximum effect achieved with a minimum of effort; similar licks between verses and stanzas; and Dylan's guitar as the obvious musical centre. But it is a return only under the influence of the intervening period: both the expressivity of the mid-60s and the later excursions to the broader harmonical palette of the jazz and country repertoires can be heard in the songs on *Blood on the Tracks*, e.g. on 'Idiot Wind', which with simple guitaristic means (thanks to the open tuning) moves in the borderland between major and minor with several different versions of the same chords. What the acoustic set in 1965 was in relation to the solo artist of the early 60s, *Blood on the Tracks* was in relation to the preceding years: the perfection of a process of absorption.

If *Blood on the Tracks* is primarily an album experience, *Desire* can hardly be judged separately from the concerts of the *Rolling Thunder Revue*. Here, the creative, musical community has central stage. Dylan originally wished for the tour to function like a travelling circus, a carnival which could give concerts wherever they happened to be, on short notice and in small venues. It was not intended to be a Bob Dylan tour but an incessantly rolling caravan where artists could come and go – including himself.

It didn't quite turn out that way: Dylan was the obvious centre of attention and interest, and fairly quickly the shows ended up in large arenas after all. But nonetheless, the shows are characterized by an exuberant variety – of styles, musicians, instruments, art forms – which lend them their very special character, and which must have been deeply satisfying for Dylan and the other participants. The full show lasted for *c.* four hours, and even though Dylan was undoubtedly the protagonist, he was still one among many others on stage and his set just a small part of a bigger whole. Thus, what the acoustical set in 1965 was in relation to the solo artist of the early 60s, the *The Rolling Thunder Revue* was in relation to the concerts with the Band in 1966: the perfection of Dylan as a fellow musician who mastered *sprezzatura* in a musical companionship the way he once did it as a soloist.

BATTLING THE BOUNDARIES – FIGHTING THE FORM (1978)

The *Rolling Thunder* shows used to end with the song 'Gotta Travel On', and that's exactly what Dylan did. Again, the perfection that had been attained was a call for departure and not for further refinement. And again, there were external circumstances which emphasised the break, beyond the artistic or

musical reasons. A couple of years of divorce hassle and the undeniable failure with his cinematographic magnum opus *Renaldo & Clara* had apparently made Dylan a poor man, and the world tour he embarked on in 1978 – his first real world tour – has been nicknamed ‘The Palimony Tour’.

The contrast with *Rolling Thunder* could hardly have been starker. Dylan no longer performed in jeans and bandana, but in silk vest and brocade; the band was no longer the former group of friends and musical libertines, but a slick band to a large extent taken over from the remains of Elvis’ old show band; the whole appearance radiated ‘Las Vegas’ instead of ‘Gypsy caravan’.

Musically speaking, the menu that was served during the tour was as close to *pop* as we have ever seen it in Dylan’s career. It was music for the masses. At the opening concerts in Budokan in Japan, Dylan even let the concert arrangers dictate which songs he should sing.

And it certainly started bad. The live album ‘At Budokan’ which came out of the visit to Japan starts off with a ‘Mr Tambourine Man’ where the pop arrangement is dominated by a flute. Even Mozart hated the flute!

If 1978 is a memorable year, it is mainly because of the autumn leg of the tour. The greatness of these concerts has, strangely enough, been recognized only in recent years. The expectations to the European summer shows were enormous – this was his first appearance on European soil since 1966, and for most people it was their first chance to see him live. The concerts were gigantic; the out-door concert at the Blackbushe airfield in England is assumed to have had 200,000 visitors. Another highlight – perhaps not the least for Dylan himself – was the concert on Hitler’s stadium in Nuremberg where Dylan played from the opposite side of the arena from where Hitler had been standing, and introduced ‘Masters of War’ saying that ‘It is a great pleasure to sing it in this place’. Hence, there is a certain mythical glow around this part of the tour. But back in America in the fall, the reviewers were negative to Dylan’s accomplishments, for reasons that had little to do with the music. The late shows have therefore been largely forgotten until they have been resurrected thanks to a handful of outstanding bootleg albums.²⁰

It is an exciting period because it demonstrates Dylan’s battle against the boundaries of genre norms. It can be heard as a long answer to the question ‘An artist like Bob Dylan, with his roots in folk and rock music and whose version of perfection can be defined as *sprezzatura*: the studied, confident non-chalance, how can he find himself at home in a commercial soundscape and

²⁰ *Hush Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (see below, p. 138) has taken the place of pride among the shows, but others are just as good.

under formal and artistic constraints which are dictated by what the people wants (because he needs their money, or simply because he wants to)?' And the answer is that an artist like Bob Dylan solves the problem in part by redefining the genre norms so that *they* feel at home with *him*. It appears to be this work with the form which is what generates the engagement in 1978, in the same way that the material and the companionship did it during the Rolling Thunder years.

The same 'Mr Tambourine Man' is the song which most clearly illustrates the radical transformation that this formal labour led to, between the first concerts and the last. The flute is still there during the summer leg, but it has become more frenzied, and come autumn it is gone. The arrangement is also changed: the happy clappy pop song has lost most of its drive; instead, the instruments weave a carpet of sound upon which his voice meanders. And the vocal is as far from the spring tour as one can possibly come: the rhythm is completely free and every phrase ends with stretched-out tones which tend to slide upwards into the area of scream in a way which resembles John Lennon's primal scream therapy on his *Plastic Ono Band*.

The song that stands out as the true highlight of the 1978 season undergoes the same treatment: 'Tangled Up In Blue'. It was introduced in the setlist during the summer in a new arrangement, a slow, broad, emotional grand ballad. The accompaniment, which consists of guitar, saxophone, and keyboard, intimates more than marks a pulse. To begin with, the song is rather square, with a fixed melody and predominantly a firm rhythm which because of the slow tempo leaves the melody in a constant danger of falling apart in single syllables; the rhythm decides in this song, and it is as if it takes some effort to keep it together as a meaningful unit.

But how different isn't the autumn version! The grand ballad arrangement is basically the same as during the summer tour, but it now becomes a sounding background for the most intensive (and intensively slow) vocalizations ever. And this time it is the text and the sound that reigns, and the soul in turmoil who restlessly roams the American continent in the song (and – one may imagine – also on stage), gets free reins in a performance of the same cloth as in 'Mr Tambourine Man'. The square rhythm is gone; only in a single phrase here and there is it perceivable, and the effect is striking: what used to be fixed form, a musical straitjacket for a text that wants to get free, is now an effect which can be used or avoided at the wish of the singer in the moment. When the fixed puls can suddenly be heard in the phrase 'They never did like mama's

home-made dress',²¹ it stand out dramatically from the surrounding phrases, whether one hears it as an echo of the serious formality of the nuptial liaison, or just as a musical expression. Regular rhythm is hardly anything new, but this time, it's as if it is heard for the first time.

ARE YOU READY? (1979)

In November 1978, Dylan picked up a cross from the stage floor which someone had tossed up to him, and the rest is history. The last few times he sings 'Tangled Up In Blue', the lyrics are changed. He no longer visits topless places to have a beer, nor does he smoke pipes or read Italian poets: the topless place has become the the Flamingo hotel, where 'she' is dancing in a dress made of stars and stripes. He now reads the Bible and thinks about death ('all the people I used to know, at least the ones that ain't in the grave').

In other words: it is time for new chapter and a new departure, more radical this time than ever before. As a reborn and saved Christian he suddenly had an agenda which in one single blow rendered all his old songs useless. In a quick succession, Dylan writes a collection of songs where he distances himself from all the traditions he has always felt at home in and being inspired by and instead turns to the gospel tradition. The suddenness and comprehensiveness of the change means that in the 'gospel years', we have an unusually clear picture of 'Who is Dylan the musician right now?'

The conversion became an opportunity for Dylan to delve more seriously into a tradition which had always been dear to him even though he had never taken the chance to live it out. The Staple Singers had, according to Dylan himself, been an important influence ever since he heard them on the radio at night at age twelve. When Dylan became a gospel musician himself, this was the direction in which he turned. He was attracted to Roebuck Staples' voice, which united a sweet and gentle voice with a rough bluesy edge which made him '[sound more] like a blues singer singing gospel'.²² And the same could be said about Dylan; a large portion of the new songs are undeniably blues songs, even though they come with a different sound than before. The rhythm section is more lively than earlier, and there are two keyboard players in the

²¹ In the version from Charlotte, 10 December. Other nights might have had other variants, but the effect is the same.

²² The statement is from an interview Dylan gave on the occasion of The Staple Singers tribute show, 27 Oct 2001, quoted from *gray:enc:staple*, p. 638.

band. The backing singers, who all had their background in black church choirs, were chosen more for their feeling than their perfection: It wasn't so much standing there with the music and trying to prove how perfectly you could sing, but people who had a story in their voices, when they'd sing there was a feeling there. That feeling comes from life experiences, and that's what he was after.'²³

In the best Christian spirit he throws himself into the 70,000 fathoms' depth, and apparently sees it as liberating. The joy of absorbing the gospel tradition the same way he earlier did with folk and blues is tangible, and never before or after has his singing been more exuberant or the union of vitality and joy and deep seriousness more contagious, no matter what one may think of his conversion.

And he didn't do a 'hwang WHwaongg' this time. Dylan had a message to deliver, at any cost, and he hired some of the most outstanding producers in the rock world, the duo Jerry Wexler and Barry Beckett; he brought in the rising star Mark Knopfler on guitar; and he even overcame his own displeasure at hard work in the studio. The result – *Slow Train Coming* (1979) – did, not surprisingly, turn out to be one of the strongest albums in Dylan's catalogue – if one can see through the layers of doomsday and armageddon that pour out of many of the lyrics.

THE NEVER-ENDING TOUR (1988–)

The eighties were, for Dylan just like the rest of us, a difficult time. *Down in the Groove* from 1988 is a good representative of this period. Six of the then songs on the album are straightforward three-chord rock in A major, where the biggest difference between the songs is the titles. And undeniable gems like Ralph Stanley's bluegrass ballad 'Rank Stranger', the album as a whole confirms that the eighties (here defined as the period between 1983 and 1988 – incidentally Reagan's central years in charge) are – hopefully – forgettable.

Down in the Groove is in good company: *Empire Burlesque* from the previous year has a couple of acceptable songs, but as an album it is fairly unbearable, mainly because of the production by Arthur Baker, the star producer of the eighties. *Knocked Out Loaded* from the following year has only two redeeming features: it lasts half an hour only, and a third of it is 'Brownsville

²³ Carolyn Dennis, who was to become Dylan's second wife (*Follow That Dream international*, December, 1992).

Girl', a road movie better than any I've seen on the screen, which unfortunately means that one has to buy the album.

It was therefore a great surprise to all: nobody had expected anything more to come from Dylan's hand. The first two volumes of Paul Williams' excellent *Bob Dylan: Performing Artist* have the subtitles 'The Early Years, 1960–73' and 'The Middle Years, 1974–86' – an entirely plausible plan for a trilogy where one could expect a volume three 'The Last Years', where it would be too much to hope for to get enough live material to fill a whole volume about the 'performing artist' alone, but where the rest might be filled up with some retrospective filler material to finalize the series in style. But such expectations were shattered by events: *Performing Artist* vol. 3 has the somewhat tentative and vague title '1986–1990 and beyond', and volume 4 is scheduled to appear with the title '2003–1990 and back again'.²⁴

The surprise that ruined William's neat outline, was 'The Never-Ending Tour'. It started in 1988 and at the time of writing it is still true to its name.

The name, the 'Never-Ending Tour' only indirectly goes back to Dylan himself. In an interview in 1989, he was asked: 'The last tour has gone virtually straight into this one.' According to the published version, he answers: 'It's all the same tour. The Never-Ending Tour.' But as Michael Gray has revealed, the name was formulated by the journalist, Adrian Deevoy, in a follow-up question which Dylan answered affirmatively if 'unenthusiastically'.²⁵

The term may still stand. It is well established, and it covers well a period which forms a natural chapter in the history of Dylan as a musician – not only for the obvious external reasons concerning biographical acts and facts, but also because even though many traits of Dylan's artistic profile are still the same, there are also some thoroughgoing changes in premises.

The most evident change is quantitative: from the beginning until 1987, Dylan had given a little more than five hundred concerts; today he is rapidly approaching the two thousandth *Never-Ending tour* show, with an average of one hundred a year. While there was a time when it was perfectly possible to have a complete Dylan collection – not only all the official albums but also every existing concert recording and bootleg album – as the years pass and the tour rolls on, this has become virtually (and perhaps also practically) impossible.

²⁴ Williams:1991; Williams:1994; Williams:2004.

²⁵ gray:enc, p. 173. The interview was first published in *Q*, no. 39, December 1989. Dylan has on several occasion rejected the name; in the booklet to *World Gone Wrong* (1993) he says that it ended in 1991 when G. E. Smith left the band.

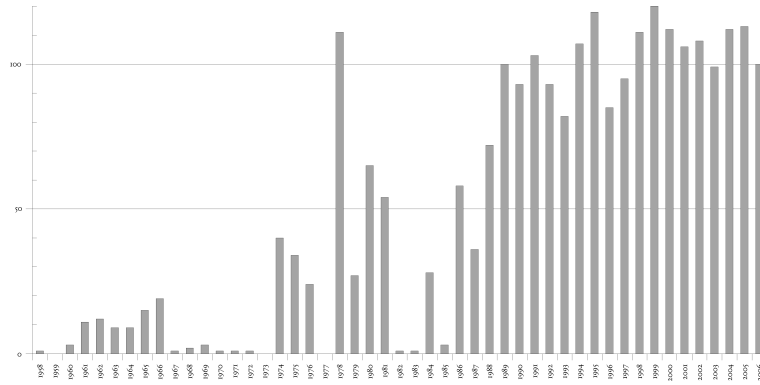


FIGURE 10.1 Registered concerts per year, 1958–2005. Source: <http://db.dylantree.com>

Which also means that this is a difficult chapter to write. To present a meaningful survey of these nearly twenty years of modern rock history is way beyond the scope of an article like this. I will therefore go for a more limited task: first, I will give a brief sketch of the whole period, then focus on a few distinctive features.

* * *

The *Never-Ending Tour* was born out of an awakening, a spiritual experience not unlike the one that led to the conversion in 1978. In various interviews, Dylan has explained how in 1986 he was tired of it all, felt no connection with the songs he was singing, and used the backup singers as a screen to hide behind. During a short tour with the Grateful Dead (whom he seriously considered to join, as a regular member) he realised that what *he* could no longer do – fill the songs he was singing, his *own* songs, with meaning – the Dead did without any problem. Then, during a concert in Locarno, Switzerland, 5 October, 1987, it happened:

It's almost like I heard it as a voice. [...] *I'm determined to stand, whether God will deliver me or not.* And all of a sudden everything just exploded. [...] After that is when I sort of knew: I've got to go out and play these songs.²⁶

²⁶ *Newsweek*. October 13, 1997

And so he did. The format was supposed to be as small as possible: no more backup singers, just drums, bass, and a guitar. It was tailored to the new project: to rediscover his own songs.

The years of the Never-Ending Tour are both very different and quite similar. They may be likened to bottles of wine from the same vineyard, which may vary in quality and character from one year to another, but where there are no sharp breaks.

The first year, 1988, is a good one – vintage Never-Ending Tour. The shows were fairly short, but in return, he worked his way through an impressive amount of songs, and the energy Dylan draws from the joy of having found a way to do his thing again, is apparent. A regular element, which remained so for the first ten years, was an acoustic set in the middle of the concert where Dylan, usually supported only by an acoustic guitar, pulled out songs from the folk repertoire again, but also early rock'n'roll, Tin Pan Alley schlagers, and more recent songs. Alley-schlagere og nyere covers.

The general opinion on the years 1989–1991 is more mixed. Again, Dylan has claimed it to have been his final blow against the myth of Bob Dylan, Icon And Voice of a Generation. Whether this is true, or it was caused by changes in the band or that Dylan's visions went too fast and too far for the others on stage to keep up, or simply by an excessive consumption of liquids – during these years we find some of the worst concert experiences Dylan has ever exposed us to.

And yet: it was never a *clear* 'Hwang WHwaongg'. In his best moments, Dylan managed to bring new life to the old songs, not least through a singing which is both expressive and inventive regarding melody lines and phrasing.

In 1993, band and leader had found a form, and we get a series of good years. Characteristic of the '93 shows are the long, long numbers with many long guitar solos ('Tangled up in Blue' lasts twelve minutes). The series culminates with 1995, where particularly the spring concerts in Prague and Brixton stand out.

The music in the following years, until today, is more spotless than before – for better or for worse. There wasn't a tighter rock combo than Dylan's band in existence on the surface of the planet around the turn of the millennium. The downside is that there was far less room for the expressivity, the unexpected experiments of the former years. Instead we get a well-rehearsed, professional programme performed with great technical and musical expertise – one knows what one gets, and one knows that it is good, but one *knows* it.

Somewhat simplified one may summarize the tendency during these years as a development away from simple *folk* and more expansive rock, towards

a cleaner rock style, in combination with other genres within *Americana*: bluegrass, inspired by the Stanley Brothers; different shades of country music; and the improbable but highly satisfactory cross-over to swing-jazz which is so prominent on the two latest albums.

* * *

What is it, then, that Dylan is doing and has been since 1988? How can he keep going at his breakneck speed, year after year? the only year prior to 1988 that even comes close, is 1978, and that, apparently, was an experience which almost destroyed him. What is different now?

'Never-Ending' is probably part of the answer: he is now a hard-working musician who goes to work every day and is happy with that. When the single moments are seen 'sub specie aeternitatis', he no longer has to be a genius and a prophet every time he goes on stage; he can instead be the skilled craftsman who does what he is best at together with other professionals who can make sure the job is properly done. He is, in the best and most relaxed sense of the word, 'just a song-and-dance man'.

Another interesting tendency, which also follows its own pulse, is the relationship between concerts and records. Dylan has always expressed a deep disdain for recording studios, microphones, and producers, and – at least according to the myth – his best tracks are those which have not been perfected through numerous takes, but which have been perfect on the first take, preferably with musicians who haven't even heard the song on beforehand, so that they haven't tired of it or learned it too well to be spontaneously creative any more. The live situation, filling the moment with music which is born out of that same moment – *that* is Dylan's art form. Significantly enough, during the periods which are held to be his weakest – the *Self Portrait* and *Knocked Out Loaded* eras – the number of album releases has not gone down (even though they perhaps should have): it is as a live performer that he has been absent.

During the Never-Ending Tour years, he seems to have taken the consequences of this. It may not be surprising that the new releases are scarcer when he is on the road all the time, but he also seems to have had a more relaxed attitude towards it, as if he is thinking: 'I'm a song-and-dance man – the records will have to come when they come.'

When they did come, they were not bad. His last three records, *Time Out Of Mind*, *Love and Theft*, and *Modern Times*, have been received very favourably by critics and audience alike, and they have – hardly surprising, but worth pointing out – found a natural place in his live repertory, side by side with the classics of the 60s.

It is not that the repertory needed expansion. In average, Dylan has played a little over one hundred different songs per year since 1988 – 374 different songs altogether.²⁷ The repertory falls in three different categories. The core is of course his own songs, where a relatively small group of songs dominate, but where he has also reintroduced a substantial part of his entire production, reviving songs that most people had given up the hope of ever hearing live.

The second main group consists of old classics from the folk repertory – the same treasure trove he pillaged in his early career and which has followed him ever since. For a long time, the Never-Ending Tour concerts had a fixed structure with an acoustic set in the middle where he was only accompanied by a guitarist, and the gems are too many to mention: songs like ‘Eileen Aroon’, ‘White Dove’, ‘Roving Gambler’, and, in the later years, religious songs that are best known – if at all – from the hymnals: ‘Rock of Ages’, ‘I am the Man, Thomas’, and ‘Hallelujah, I’m Ready to Go’.

And finally his inimitable covers, spanning the whole range from evergreens like ‘I’m In The Mood For Love’ and Charles Aznavour’s ‘The Times We’ve Known’, 50s’ hits like ‘Any Way You Want Me’ and ‘Blue Bonnet Girl’, to modern standards like Leonard Cohen’s ‘Hallelujah’ (which I am bold enough to claim that nobody has sung better, including the originator), the odd Beatles song, Neil Young’s ‘Old Man’, and more obscure songs like Charles Daniels’s ‘Old Rock’n’roller’, which he presented, at the one concert where he played it: ‘In case you’re wondering what happens to people like me, here’s a song to tell about it.’ A rare gesture was the inclusion of several songs by Warren Zevon in 2002 while Zevon was terminally ill in cancer. As one fan expressed it: ‘Jesus is the last guy bob dedicated three songs to in a show.’

In a certain sense, he treats all three categories in the same way. When with the help of the Grateful Dead he rediscovered his own songs, it was precisely as a repertory of songs with qualities in themselves, independently of him as the originator – that he had in fact written them, was almost an insignificant coincidence. In recent interviews, he talks proudly about his old songs, but also with a detached awe: they have come *through* him.

This also means that he is emancipated from them: he can let go of the demand – from himself or from the audience – that he has to bring out new emotional depths and write them down in heart blood: the songs have their effect on their own. He is just the messenger. He performs them like a cover act – ‘Dylan does Dylan’ – which also appears from the fact that he usually

²⁷ Between 1988 and the summer tour of 2005.

returns to the original versions of the songs: the wonderful re-writes of songs like 'Tangled Up In Blue' and 'Simple Twist of Fate' are gone.

One significant difference remains between how he treats his own songs and those of others. When he sings Zevon's 'Accidentally Like A Martyr' it is by and large a faithful rendition of the original; the arrangement is the same as Zevon's own, and the text is presented clearly and audibly. It is as if he wants the audience to hear the song, and to understand what they hear.

'Like a Rolling Stone', 'Just Like A Woman' or any other of the familiar Dylan classics are a completely different matter. Here, it is often difficult to follow the lyrics, unless one knows them already; the melodies are normally (and – through the years: increasingly) reduced to short figures which are repeated *ad nauseam* and boredom, so that just about every line in every single song have at times consisted of monotonous recitations punctuated by rising octaves at the end.

These performances are probably responsible for the concert review topos about how unpredictable Dylan is and how he always changes his songs beyond recognition. But the truth of the matter is that if one disregards the singing, the arrangements are overwhelmingly stable and mostly faithful to the original album versions.²⁸ This is an important point for the understanding of Dylan as a live artist during the Never-Ending Tour years: he uses the listener's knowledge of the songs as the foundation upon which he constructs the evening's show, the canvas on which he 'paints his masterpiece'. Given this '(p)recognition', he can move freely around in his melody lines and his phrasings, his accents and his gestures. The arrangements have the same function as the guitar accompaniment in the early acoustic years: as a necessary but not sufficient point of departure; a field of action, not an independent 'work'. Sometimes the result is forgettable, routine-like – and what else can one expect? – but then there are all the other times, when a lyric line gets a surprising twist because of a new accent, or a counter-melody brings out new musical associations, and what we have is an entirely new song, even though the arrangement is the same as the night before or the night after. These are the moments which make it worthwhile to collect piles of almost identical concert recordings: you never know where the nugget is, so you gotta have 'em all, and without a good knowledge of Dylan's sometimes peculiar 'can-

²⁸ There are exceptions, of course, such as the swing-jazz version of 'Trying to Get To Heaven' and less radical but still new arrangements of songs like 'Boots of Spanish Leather', 'Gotta Serve Somebody', etc.

vas', there is the risk that one would overlook the brilliant strokes and mistake them for specks on the canvas.

'MATHEMATICAL MUSIC'

But there is also a method in the madness of variations. In a central and much discussed passage in his autobiography *Chronicles* (2004), Dylan gives a candid account of how a certain, apparently very precise system of 'mathematical music' which he had once learned from Lonnie Johnson in 1965, was a decisive factor behind the change which set the Never-Ending Tour in motion. He describes it as a system which can be applied mechanically, and which will *always work*, because it is based on the properties of certain numbers:

There's no mystery to it and it's not a technical trick. The scheme is for real [. . .], like a delicate design that would arrange the structure of whatever piece I was performing. [. . .] And because this works on its own mathematical formula, it can't miss²⁹

He is relatively detailed in his descriptions of this system and certain of the number relations with respect to melodies and rhythms, but that does not mean that everything is understandable ('In a diatonic scale there are eight notes, in a pentatonic there are five. If you're using the first scale, and you hit 2, 5 and 7 to the phrase and then repeat it, a melody forms. Or you can use 2 three times. Or you can use 4 once and 7 twice. It's indefinite what you can do, and each time would create a different melody.') But from more general descriptions of the system one can form an outline of what he means, which also corresponds well with what he does on stage.

What Dylan describes is a *formulaic* system for composition and performance, where a set of general rules can be applied to many different situations. The system builds on a certain approach to rhythmic and melodic cells, based on more or less esoteric considerations of the properties of numbers, but it's actually not very mathematical at all: rather, it is a method to establish a temporary musical system of meaning through a conscious use of certain numerically based formulas, and repetition of these – possibly but not necessarily also against the background of a conviction that these numbers have certain objective properties.

²⁹ Bob Dylan, *Chronicles* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 158–9.

³⁰ *Chronicles*, p. 158.

A summary of the system, which I would prefer to call ‘creative redundancy’ rather than ‘mathematical music’, might read:

1. Make a random selection of tones and form patterns out of these, which are then repeated and recombined.
2. Through these iterations, new tonal centres are established, and hence a field of tension between the original tonal focal points of the song and the new patterns.
3. For the patterns to be recognized as a new tonal centre (and not just a random selection of tones) in the short time that the musician has at his disposal, they must be simple;
4. but if they are, and if one finds a balance between redundancy and creativity (meaning: there is a limit to how long one can keep on playing 2 5 7 2 5 7, whatever it means), it will always work.

So when Dylan says:

A song executes itself on several fronts and you can ignore musical customs. All you need is a drummer and a bass player, and all shortcomings become irrelevant as long as you stick to the system.

The method works on higher or lower degrees depending on different patterns and the syncopation of a piece.

Very few would be converted to it because it had nothing to do with technique and musicians work their whole lives to be technically superior players³¹

it can be translated freely but contentswise fairly precisely to the following:

A song can exploit several different meaning systems and the tension between them at the same time, and you are not limited to the rules set by one such set of musical customs. Since I play rock, I need a drummer and a bass player, but all shortcomings become irrelevant as long as you stick to the system, since this system is based on a conscious play with ‘inventive redundancy’ and not on the intricacy of the base system and the technical prowess of the musician.

Since the system works in the interplay between the song and the newly established fields of meaning, the concrete way of playing or singing will have to be adjusted to the different patterns already present in the song.

Very few would be converted to it because, whereas most music making takes place in contexts where value judgement is based on *complexity* and most musicians depend on technical prowess to accomplish this, the ‘Lonnie’ method instead emphasises and requires *simplicity*, both on the part of the performer and as a constitutive element of the system itself.

Dylan himself emphasises the ‘redundancy’ part and pairs it with the meta-physical qualities of numbers in his explanation of what it is that makes the system Just Work. My interpretation is a little different: that redundancy may

³¹ *Chronicles*, p. 158.

be a precondition for the system, but what really makes it Just Work is the other element: inventiveness. I don't think it is a system that someone else can learn to use, at least not directly, as a system. It is hardly insignificant that there are twenty years of touring and music making between the time when he first learned it and when he understood how to put it to use. It has taken him those years to gain the musicianship (and perhaps also the need for routine which persistent touring must bring with it) which he then could cross-fertilize with Lonnie Johnson's secret. In other words, the system is based less on mathematics and Lonnie than on 'inventive redundancy' and Dylan's own musicianship.

If it has seemed meaningful to give Dylan's more or less clearly formulated thoughts about his mathematical model this much attention, it is because it has seemed to be a good key: this *is* what he's actually doing. His solos mostly consist of little figures which are repeated and varied,³² and the same goes for his singing which makes unprepared first-timers shake their heads in bewilderment and say with the critics: 'I didn't recognize any of the songs; he has changed them all.' The 'Lonnie theory' may be seen as the principles behind that which concretely happens when he uses the original songs as starting points for his own variations.

Furthermore, it gives a vantage point for answering the question what is different now and in 1978. 'Inventive redundancy' is the successful outcome of transferring Dylan's governing principle as a guitar player – maximum effect with minimum effort – to the live situation with a full band.

THE PRE/POST-MODERN DYLAN

Dylan has always borrowed liberally from the traditions he has involved himself with: most of the melodies to his early songs are slightly reworked or exactly copied versions of existing folk songs. On his last couple of albums, this has come to the fore again, in ways which make one ask what his current 'project' really is.

It all started when Chris Barnes read the Japanese gangster biography *Confessions of a Yakuza* by Yunichi Saga and recognized phrases and whole sentences which he knew well from another context: the lyrics to *Love and Theft*. He noted down several of these instances. When *The Guardian* picked up on

³² See especially my analysis of 'Mr Tambourine Man' from Cascais, 1993 and Vienna, 1999 in 'Three Tambourine Men', 96–103.

the story, it created a bit of a stir in the media for a while (and Saga's book skyrocketed on the bestselling lists).

New discoveries followed: not only the lyrics but also the music was borrowed. 'Floater' is virtually identical with Guy Lombardo's 'Snuggled On Your Shoulders'; 'Sugar Baby' is Gene Austin's 'Lonesome Road' with new lyrics (mostly; the central admonition 'Look up, look up, seek your maker / 'fore Gabriel blows his horn' is Austin's), and so forth.

With *Modern Times* the story repeated itself. The texts have taken more than scattered images from 'the Poet Laureate of the Confederacy', Henry Timrod and from the Penguin edition of Ovid's *Tristia*. And seven (so far) of the ten songs have known models not just for the melodies but for *all* the music: arrangements, solos, the whole thing. And yet, the record sleeve states: 'All songs written by Bob Dylan'.

Again, one may ask: what is he doing? The media have mostly been pre-occupied with the lyric borrowings, and this is perhaps understandable: that the Voice of a Generation no longer finds words himself but has to steal them from others, is a better story than that an old Bard who can't sing anyway nicks a melody here and there. But the musical borrowings are actually a far more serious matter: they are more substantial and the implications are wider. Playing around with fragments of existing texts and assembling them in new ways is a well-established literary technique; playing music that someone else has written as if it was one's own, is less favourably looked upon.

When the method is as consistently and pervasively used as it is, it invites the question if he has ran out of own ideas or if this on the contrary is a new, grand creative model in a postmodern spirit: a gigantic collage where the methods of the folk tradition are extended way beyond their established genre limits. What if the models that have been discovered are just the tip of an iceberg – what if *all* of 'Floater', or for that matter all of *'Love and Theft'* has been borrowed (or stolen, as the title of the album indicates) from many different sources, and put together like a jigsaw puzzle of ideas, images, and cultural heritage?

Over the past ten years, Dylan has delivered three successful albums, the acclaimed documentary *No Direction Home*, volume one of his autobiography *Chronicles*, the motion picture *Masked and Anonymous*, he has his own weekly radio show, and the tour – well, it hasn't ended yet and probably never will. During this period, Dylan has passed from a 'has-been' to an obvious mega star with a constant media presence and a high status, not just among historians and fans, but in general. The only thing that may give cause for concern, and which also makes the benevolent collage interpretation dubious, is that

the quality of his live show seems to have gone down over the past few years.³³ One day at the office follows another, without any noticeable engagement. If the live show, which has always been Dylan's hallmark, is on the decline and the record production ends up as competent renditions of cover material, where does that leave us regarding the question of the heart behind it all? Should we consider whatever decline in quality we may sense as an inevitable and temporary heart beat, or has the distancing involved in the 'inventive redundancy' gone so far that the heart has left the project altogether?

THE UNEVEN HEART

I have construed Dylan's musical career as an uneven heart, as a pulsating series of phases of appropriation (of a genre, a style, or a form), which are then used with internalized obviousness, only to slide into the background for the next phase of appropriation. My fascination with Dylan's nervous energy, as I presented it initially, then becomes just one side of the coin: just as important is the element of controlled calm, and the combination of these. One may also regard it as an oscillation between extrovert and introvert, between phases of appropriation mostly for the artist's own pleasure (Bonnie Beecher will probably nod in recognition to this), and of use of the appropriated in a communicative situation.

Whereby the final core concept has been introduced, which is the true motivation for the emphasis of the 'heart': communication. For Dylan, it is not simply a matter of a pulsation between different musical styles, but of ways of using different musical styles as a means of communication through organized sound.

Woody Guthrie has apparently said about Dylan: 'That boy's got a voice. Maybe he won't make it with his writing, but he can sing it. He can really sing it.'

Not just 'sing', but 'sing *it*'. That little extra word transforms the words of the dying hobo-poet into the most precise description of Dylan's work: as an artist who can sing *it*.

Initially, this might be read as a devaluation of the musical side in relation to the textual: that what counts is, after all, *what* one sings, which opinions

³³ This is of course a personal judgement; see 'Genius, Guitars, and Goodbyes' (p. 281) for a discussion of the reasons for this judgement. A similar criticism has been voiced by Michael Gray, such as in the final chapter of *gray:song3*.

and emotions one expresses. But that can not be what Guthrie has had in mind: it is the *voice*, not the words, that brings 'it' out.

Even though this turns the most common opinion about Dylan upside down, it is not difficult to agree with Guthrie: what makes Dylan special is not only his ability to put words together in a way which has resonance in many different listeners, but also to let these words come to expression in a musical style which is shaped precisely to fit this expression, or even to amplify it.

One might even turn it upside down once more and say that what makes Dylan special is his ability to shape his music in a way which has resonance in many different listeners, and then combine this music with words which are able to amplify the musical contents.

This is not just a logical-rhetorical exercise. It is grounded in a Wittgensteinian understanding of language, where the meaning of a word is its use, and where that connection between a sound even (a 'word') and a certain conception which we perceive as the word's meaning, does not have any particular metaphysical status determined by properties in the object (be it 'red' or 'C major'), but is founded in a conventional, internalized pattern of associations between previous experiences of similar sound events and other regularly occurring events ('G major'). In this perspective, there is no radical difference between music and language; it makes perfect sense to say that language is a kind of music.

The ultimate question is, then, what Guthrie's 'it' is, and where the perception stems from that it is somehow communicated, through the voice or in music. When it is felt that music says something, it is because connections within one system of meaning (e.g. music) can be based on elements which are also important and can be recognized in others (e.g. language): tension/resolution, compliance or break with conventions, etc. My survey of Dylan's musical career can be regarded in this light: as an exegesis of which 'sounds' he has used and which associations with other sounds and other meaning systems these may be made in hearing and interpreting them. Most directly, one may point to Dylan's use of the sounds of language, where he, in Mike Daley's words,

uses pitch in a way that seems to directly draw on the meaningful properties of pitch in everyday speech. This 'speechlike' pitch use he combines with more abstractly 'musical' pitch to create a performance. The dialectic between these two poles of vocal expression causes Dylan's performance to be received as 'meaningful' in some rather specific ways; the linguistic [...] meanings that are encoded in Dylan's

performance find a high degree of concordance with some types of meanings decoded by listeners.³⁴

But also the monotonous, insistent seriousness of 'It's alright, Ma', the bittersweet arabesques in 'Spanish Is the Loving Tongue', or the floating tonal directions in 'Mr Tambourine Man', and in a more general sense the feeling of restlessness both in single performances and in the musical oeuvre as a whole – they all give occasion to draw associations between musical and non-musical patterns of meaning. To the extent that I have made explicit interpretations of these elements, these should only be regarded as personal reflections; it would be a degradation of the purely musical meaning of a song such as 'Mr Tambourine Man' to say, e.g., that the free relationship to fixed cadential patterns means the same freedom as in the line 'just to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free'. Rather, one might say that Dylan at his best manages to unite a distinct musical material with lyrics which are open and *undistinct* enough in relation to a fixed, conceptual meaning, in ways which opens up to associations of this kind, without giving neither the musical nor the lyrical side the upper hand in the relation.

Just as personal and individual as the perception of reality is that comes to expression in the texts, just as personal and individual is the musical style. When Dylan sings, we not only hear the song, we hear an individual's reaction to the world: also in the music, we hear the person Bob Dylan, a human being who talks to us as fellow human beings about the reality we all share, in a way which makes it meaningless to distinguish between the musical and the lived life.

³⁴ daley:voices, p. 2.

Chapter II

The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan (1963)

AH, BUT WHAT CAN I SAY...! This is the album that is responsible for my addiction to Dylan (and not because I bought it when it was released). It is not the one I play most regularly, but whenever I pick it out, I ask myself why I don't do it more often.

Several of the songs are part of the daily routine, of course. Don't Think Twice, Masters of War, Hard Rain, Girl of the North Country, not to mention Blowin' in the Wind – I do believe I hear at least one of these every day. Half an album of songs, almost 40 years old, by a then folk singer, that still hold their ground in the repertory of a man who has for 35 of those years been a rock artist – that's in itself a brand of quality. And the rest of the songs ain't so bad either.

What this album first of all shows (and which was confirmed by Good As I Been To You) is what an accomplished guitar player Dylan was – and still is, when he wants to. There is some really nice guitar work on some of these tracks: the finger-picking on Don't Think Twice and Talkin' WW₃ Blues, the free-rhythmical blues a la Big Joe Williams of Down the Highway, the lyricism of Corrina Corrina, and the persistent, rhythmical hammering-on of Masters of War. None of it is really (really) difficult – he gets as much effect as possible from techniques that are actually quite simple (once you master them). This is not to say that he's a cheater (those who have access to 'Hero Blues', an outtake from the Freewheelin' sessions, can hear for themselves that Dylan anno 1963 had a quite good control of his instrument).

A contributing element is the use of altered or open tunings. Three of the songs on Freewheelin' are in open D (I shall be Free, Corrina Corrina, and Oxford Town) and three in Dropped D tuning (Masters of War, Down the Highway, and Hard Rain). Several of the outtakes also use such tunings. It is noteworthy that the playing style in these songs differs considerably from the style of the Blood on the Tracks songs, which were also originally played in open D tuning. It is said that it was Joni Mitchell who inspired and/or taught

him to use open D tuning, and although he apparently knew it even ten years earlier, he didn't use the same style and technique then.

A striking unifying feature of the playing style on *Freewheelin'* is the many second-inversion chords, i.e. chords that have the fifth in the bass, such as D/a (x00232) – so prominent in Blowin' In The Wind. Another (I think related) feature is the many ways he uses to avoid the dominant, such as the turn C – Gadd4/b – G in Blowin' in the Wind and Bob Dylan's Dream, about which I intend to write a little piece some day.

Chapter 12

It Wasn't Bruce – Don't Think Twice (1962)

A MUSICAL WHODUNNIT

*Case 1962-77002: People vs. Langhorne
Courtroom of Honor
Judge Paul N. de Disgavel*

JUDGE We now come to case seven-seven-o-o-two, the People vs. Bruce Langhorne, concerning the guitar playing on a certain track, 'Don't Think Twice', recorded in Columbia Studio A, New York, in the afternoon of November 14, 1962. The People holds and has always held that the guitar which accompanies Bob Dylan's singing on this track is played by Bruce Langhorne. Against this, Dr. Eyolf Østrem contends that the guitar is in fact played by someone entirely different.

I ask District Attorney William Gully to step forward and present the evidence on behalf of the people.

GULLY Thank you, Your Honor. In addition to written evidence directly connected with the case, I will present testimonials from esteemed witnesses whose judgement is generally trusted and which should be weighed heavily.

Let me start with Exhibit A: the album sleeve of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, where the song was first released. They were written by Nat Hentoff, a person very close to Dylan at the time. The People call Mr. Hentoff to the bench to explain the facts.

NAT HENTOFF There really isn't much to explain:

Dylan's accompaniment on this track includes Bruce Langhorne (guitar), George Barnes (bass guitar), Dick Wellstood (piano), Gene Ramey (bass) and Herb Lovelle (drums).¹

¹ Liner notes to *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, released May 27, 1963.

GULLY Thank you, Mr Hentoff. I'm tempted to say, 'Case closed' already, but if the defense wants to go through according to procedure, it's your witness.

EØ We certainly do, Thank you.

Mr Hentoff, may I ask you: what happened to Misters Barnes, Wellstood, and Lovelle? According to your testimony, they *all* played on this track, but I can't hear them anywhere. Did they play very quietly? That is hard to believe, especially after hearing the track they had just spent fifteen takes on during the previous hours, 'Mixed up Confusion'. Am I right to assume that the notes you wrote are in fact referring to *another* take of 'Don't Think Twice', recorded on the same occasion but never released?

HENTOFF I'm sorry, I can't answer that question – it's too long ago now. You might perhaps consult the documentation of the recording session.

EØ That's a good idea. Meanwhile, I motion to disregard Exhibit A, the liner notes to *Freewheelin'*, as inconclusive and irrelevant for the case.

JUDGE Sustained.

EØ Mr Gully – Bill, was it?

GULLY I prefer to leave the first names out of this thank you very much. The session documentation, yes. The People would like to call as our next witness Mr. Olof Björner, distinguished and well-respected chronologer and sessionologist, who will bring the details.

BJÖRNER This is what I know about that recording session:

Studio A
Columbia Recording Studios
New York City, New York
14 November 1962
The 6th Freewheelin' Bob Dylan session, produced by John Hammond.

1. Mixed-Up Confusion
2. Mixed-Up Confusion
3. Mixed-Up Confusion
4. Mixed-Up Confusion
5. Mixed-Up Confusion

6. Mixed-Up Confusion
7. Mixed-Up Confusion
8. Mixed-Up Confusion
9. Mixed-Up Confusion
10. Mixed-Up Confusion
11. Mixed-Up Confusion
12. Mixed-Up Confusion
13. Mixed-Up Confusion
14. Mixed-Up Confusion
15. Mixed-Up Confusion
16. Don't Think Twice, It's All Right
17. Ballad Of Hollis Brown
18. Ballad Of Hollis Brown
19. Kingsport Town
20. Kingsport Town
21. Whatcha Gonna Do

Bob Dylan (guitar, harmonica, vocal).

1-15 George Barnes (guitar), Bruce Langhorne (guitar), Dick Wellstood (piano), Gene Ramey (bass) and Herb Lovelle (drums).

16-21 Bruce Langhorne (guitar).

Notes.

Recorded 3-5 pm.

Clinton Heylin mentions an electric Don't Think Twice, It's All Right and a Dixieland version of Mixed-Up Confusion as rumoured takes.

13 overdubbed by unidentified musicians 8 December 1964.

- Only 10, 13, 16, 18, 20, and 21 are in circulation.
- 2-5, 14, and 17 are fragments only.
- 6, 12, 19 are incomplete takes.

Reference.

Clinton Heylin: *Bob Dylan. The Recording Sessions [1960 – 1994]*. St. Martin's Press December 1995, pp. 13-18.

Glen Dundas: *Tangled Up In Tapes. A Recording History of Bob Dylan*. SMA Services 1999, page 10.²

EØ Mr. Björner, let me first commend you on your outstanding work, which I've myself perused extensively. Even on this occasion – although I dispute one little detail in it – your summary of the session in question is an excellent opportunity to recreate the events of that day. I ask you to go through it with me.

² <http://www.bjorner.com/DSN00150%201962.htm#DSN00290>

They started, I can see, with fifteen takes – *fifteen* takes – of ‘Mixed up Confusion’, where Dylan was backed by the musicians that Mr Hentoff has just mentioned. There certainly seems to have been a fair amount of confusion there, that’s for sure. Then, according to your survey, three of them left and only Bruce Langhorne remained in the studio, to play backup guitar on four more tracks: ‘Don’t Think Twice’, ‘Ballad of Hollis Brown’, ‘Kingsport Town’, and ‘Whatcha Gonna Do’. Is that correct?

BJÖRNER To the best of my knowledge, yes.

EØ You also indicate the possibility of two more tracks recorded that afternoon: an electric version of ‘Don’t Think Twice’, and a Dixieland version – God forbid – of ‘Mixed up Confusion’. That’s a whole lot to cram into two hours of recording, wouldn’t you say? There wouldn’t be much time to rehearse and go through the songs on beforehand, would there?

BJÖRNER It certainly sounds like a lot, but I’m a sessionologist, not a session musician, so I wouldn’t know.

EØ But as a sessionologist, would you say that it was possible?

BJÖRNER I suppose so. There are plenty of other examples in Dylan’s recording history where things have gone quickly.

EØ With rehearsals and all?

BJÖRNER Probably not. That would usually not have been the case. Dylan is notorious for not rehearsing but rather working things out in the studio, while recording. But he certainly was able to record a lot in a short time.

EØ Let us go through these songs. ‘Mixed up Confusion’ – fifteen takes. Then we have a single take of ‘Don’t Think Twice’. Then a fragment of ‘Hollis Brown’ followed by a full take. The same was the case with ‘Kingsport Town’ – a fragment and a full, single take, and finally there was a single take of ‘Whatcha Gonna Do’.

Now, on the last three, we can clearly hear two guitars. One is Dylan’s own, hammering rhythmically and restlessly on ‘Hollis Brown’, strumming calmly

on 'Kingsport Town', and mainly marking the rhythm on 'Whatcha Gonna Do'. The other, then, is Langhorne, who embellishes the skeletal accompaniment laid down by Dylan. Would you agree that while 'Mixed up Confusion' is an attempt at working out an arrangement of a song, the last three songs are more to be considered as Dylan-with-flourishes, songs which might as well have been recorded by Dylan solo, but now that there was an accomplished guitarist there . . . ?

BJÖRNER That sounds reasonable.

EØ I will come back to this point later on. Let me just ask you one more thing: where have you got all this information? You refer to Clinton Heylin and Glen Dundas – what about direct documentation of the session, isn't it common that such things are written down?

BJÖRNER That is correct. For most of Dylan's session from the 1960s we have such documentation, but

Recording sheets from this session is missing, the info is taken from Dundas.³

EØ Thank you. I have nothing further.

GULLY The people now calls Clinton Heylin, a famous Dylan biographer and sessionologist, who has also studied this case thoroughly. Mr Heylin, are you of the opinion that the guitar on 'Don't Think Twice' was played by Bruce Langhorne?

CLINTON HEYLIN I definitely am,

With all the musicians, save Langhorne, paid scale and sent packing, Dylan got back on the program with a gorgeous rendition of 'Don't Think Twice, It's All Right' that might just have illustrated how good a guitarist Dylan had become, save that it's Langhorne who provides the faultless accompaniment. Whatever 'very interesting things with guitar' Dylan was coming up with, they were evidently best expressed by a virtuoso like Langhorne.⁴

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *Behind the Shades, Take Two* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 104.

GULLY Very well. I think that settles it, don't you think? Defense?

EØ Mr Heylin, if we leave the quippant bathos aside for a moment, let me come back to the question: how do *you* know this? Have you had direct access to source material the rest of us don't know?

CLINTON HEYLIN Unfortunately, no. The session records are, as Mr Björner stated, missing. But I have worked with Sony's archives in New York, and produced

by far the most complete and accurate record of Dylan's Columbia recordings to date. [...] With just a couple of dozen CO numbers [the numbers assigned to each recorded song] and access to Sony's overfull cardex system, I could at last begin to reconstruct session after session. As the CO numbers multiplied, so the gaps began to be plugged.⁵

EØ Does that mean that you have plugged this particular gap too?

CLINTON HEYLIN Uh, no, not this one. Because of Dylan's

profound distaste for those who attempt to document his work,⁶

and the obstinacy of Dylan's people and their fear of a *real* critic like myself, they have not let me in to study the tape boxes themselves. Instead,

the ostensible overseer of Dylan's archive, Jeff Rosen, has finally put one lesser Dylan authority to work on his behalf, rummaging through the very same vaults [...] [This I.D.a., Michael Krogsgaard,] has published two articles on Dylan's Columbia sessions. Largely because he is a discographer, not a critic, and therefore no 'threat' to Dylan's carefully constructed mystique (nor to Rosen), Krogsgaard has been given access to the tape-boxes themselves, that Danish sonofabitch...⁷

EØ Sorry, say that again?

CLINTON HEYLIN Oh, nothing.

⁵ *Behind Closed Doors*, p. xviii.

⁶ *op. cit.*, p. xix.

⁷ *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 234.

EØ Oh ... Well, whatever. So not even *you* have firm evidence that it is in fact Bruce Langhorne playing on 'Don't Think Twice'?

CLINTON HEYLIN Well, I should perhaps qualify my initial statement and instead say that

It is *presumably* also Langhorne who contributes the tasteful guitar fills that embellish the last three songs recorded at the November 14, 1962, session. If Dylan did leave in a huff after the Dixieland 'Mixed Up Confusion', he evidently returned in a minute, and a huff. Four songs – all acoustic – were recorded after the *Freewheelin'* band packed up their instruments and left Studio A. I say four but, if Nat Hentoff's liner notes to *Freewheelin'* are to be believed, 'Don't Think Twice, it's All Right' was actually recorded with the November 14 band and an electric version was assigned to the album. Even more mysteriously, according to Columbia's files, the released version of 'Don't Think Twice' was a first take [...]. Could it be that the released version was recorded with the session musicians, who were then subsequently removed from the mix? It seems inconceivable – a band rip-roaring through the same rendition as on the album? I think not. yet, as of 1995 the mystery (and the liner notes) remains.⁸

EØ Do I understand you correctly – that the quality of the playing is an important element in your verdict that this is Langhorne playing? You use words like 'tasteful fills', 'faultless accompaniment', and you call Langhorne a 'virtuoso'.

HEYLIN That might be an element, yes.

EØ Oh, not only *an* element, if I may: it appears to be the *main* element, the last straw to a stack of indices: Nat Hentoff's liner notes, the presence of a renowned guitarist like Langhorne on the previous and following takes ... aren't those the *only* 'facts' that substantiate the claim that Langhorne is the man?

HEYLIN ... well ... if you put it like that ... perhaps ...

EØ One last question, Mr Heylin. Are you a musicologist, or do you have any other training in music analysis?

⁸ Clinton Heylin, *Bob Dylan: The Recording Sessions [1960–1994]* (St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 13–18 (emphasis mine).

HEYLIN No, sir. But I'm very . . .

EØ Then I have nothing further, at this point.

The defense now calls Mr Michael Krogsgaard.

Mr Krogsgaard, you are the 'lesser Dylan authority' that Mr Heylin referred to, is that correct?

KROGSGAARD I would prefer to use other words, but I am the person who was allowed to study the materials in Columbia's archives, yes.

EØ So, did *you* find concrete evidence about this particular session, then?

KROGSGAARD No,

Unfortunately the tapes (and recording sheets) for the next session were not available.⁹

EØ What are the implications of that? Can you explain to us what exactly is contained in the recording sheets?

KROGSGAARD

Recording Sheets are lists made during each session and put into each tape box. The sheet records the date, the studio, the artist, which tracks were recorded and the CO number (Columbia's own reference number) for each composition (of which, more later). Each recorded take is marked as complete (C), with a short false start (b) or a long false start (B). It is indicated on these sheet which takes are removed to other tapes for further use.

The Tape Boxes themselves also usually contain information about each take and which takes are removed for further use.¹⁰

EØ But in this case, even the tape boxes are missing?

KROGSGAARD Correct.

EØ And those two source types are the only place where exact information about who played on what take would be recorded, is that correct?

⁹ <http://www.punkhart.com/dylan/sessions-1.html>

¹⁰ *ibid.*

KROGSGAARD Yes.

EØ What is your conclusion about who played what, then?

KROGSGAARD

Columbia Recording Studio
New York City, New York
November 14, 1962, 3-6 pm

Produced by John Hammond.
Engineers: Knuerr and Dauria.

1. Mixed Up Confusion CO76982
2. Don't Think Twice, It's All Right CO77002
3. Ballad of Hollis Brown CO77003
4. Kingsport Town (trad.) CO77004
5. Whatcha Gonna Do CO77005

1 overdubbed at Columbia Recording Studios, December 8, 1964.
Backing undocumented, but probably same backing as November 1 for track 1
and Bruce Langhorne on guitar on tracks 3–5.¹¹

EØ And track 2 – 'Don't Think Twice'?

KROGSGAARD I have no clear opinion about that, sir.

EØ Thank you very much. I have nothing further.
I do have two more witnesses. Would Mr Langhorne please come in?

[disorder in the audience]

Mr Langhorne, could you tell us a little bit about your playing during that
November session in 1962?

BRUCE LANGHORNE

I remember doing a version of 'Corrine Corrina' with Bob that was acoustic, and
I played acoustic. I think it was acoustic. I don't really remember the session that

¹¹ *ibid.*

you're talking about, though. It might have been overdubbed, or something. [...] Don't really know. I really can't remember.¹²

EØ What about 'Don't think twice'?

BRUCE LANGHORNE

I'm pushing the edges of memory here. If I remember correctly, he [Dylan] did play the guitar. I didn't play anything but ornaments. The bulk of the guitar playing is himself on that tune.¹³

EØ Ornaments, you say. Personally I find it difficult to hear more than one guitar there; could it be that Dylan played that song all by himself?

LANGHORNE As I said, if I remember correctly, Dylan played the guitar. I can't remember. This was – when? some time in the sixties? If you can remember the sixties, you weren't there. I was there.

EØ Thank you very much, mr Langhorne. By the way, what's that with your hand?

LANGHORNE Oh, it's nothing. I was dabbling in rocket science when I was a kid, lost three fingers. Django and me, you know.

EØ That's on your picking hand too – how has that affected your playing style?

LANGHORNE Quite a lot –

Since I have fingers missing, some styles of guitar playing were forever unreachable for me. Like, I couldn't really play good flamenco. Classical was difficult for me, though I did play some classical. But since I couldn't develop technique to the point where I could just play the entire repertoire of guitar music, I had to develop a technique based on my own aesthetics. Because I had to listen to everything and say, okay, this sounds okay with three voices. Because I had pretty good control of three voices on guitar. I could control four-note voicing, but it was only with extra physical effort. Because it would mean, since I played basically with three fingers,

¹² Interview by Richie Unterberger, [no date], <http://www.richieunterberger.com/langhorne2.html>.

¹³ *ISIS*, November 14, 2002.

it would mean that I would have to play two notes with one finger on a six-string instrument, or I would have to strum. So I developed a style and a technique that was based partially on classical music, because I separated voices. I used each of my fingers to generate a line, a polyphonic line, or I would play, which is why I say I really needed someone who had a thread going to really do my job. Because then they could generate a couple of lines of polyphony, or a rhythmic structure. And then I could enhance that.¹⁴

EØ From what you are saying, I take it you would primarily play the kind of fills and ornaments we can hear on tracks like 'Corrina, Corrina' and 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit', and not the kind of plain – if also exquisit – accompaniment we hear on 'Don't Think Twice'?

LANGHORNE Definitely, yes.

EØ Thank you very much, Mr Langhorne.

My very last witness cannot be present in person, but he will be with us on a satellite connection from somewhere in the world, where he is on tour. So, once our fine technician has plugged in everything . . .

[waiting while the court technicians set up a video screen and a beamer]

. . . we are ready to welcome – Columbia recording artist Bob Dylan. Mr Dylan, as you know, we are here to discuss a certain performance on one of your albums – *the Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Can you tell us a little bit about it – what it was like making it?

BOB DYLAN

Well, I felt real good about doing an album with my own material, and I picked a little bit on it. 'Don't think twice.' Got a chance to do some of that. Got a chance to play in open tuning . . . 'Oxford Town,' I believe that's on that album. That's open tuning. I got a chance to do talking blues. I got a chance to do ballads, like 'Girl from the North Country.' It's just because it had more variety. I felt good about that.¹⁵

EØ You mentioned 'Don't Think Twice' – did you play on that?

¹⁴ Interview with Richie Unterberger.

¹⁵ Interview with Jann Wenner, *Rolling Stone*, 1969

BD Yeah, isn't that what I said?

EØ Actually, no. You mentioned it, and then said you got a chance to do some picking on that album. We would appreciate an even clearer answer. There are some who maintain that the guitar on that track is not by you, Mr Dylan, but by Bruce Langhorne, who was also present at that session. Do you have anything to say to that?

BD People are entitled to their own opinion.

EØ But you ought to be the first to know, first hand, so to speak – can you tell us: is that guitar played by you or by Bruce Langhorne? Did he play at all on that track?

BD Bruce? Yeah, he was there. He . . . [*screeches and white noise from the video screen as the connection is lost*]

EØ Mr Dylan? Can you hear us? Hello?

We appear to have lost him. What a shame.

But I don't think we need it. Your Honor, Members of the Jury. Let us gather together what we know by now: The recording sheets are missing. The tape boxes are missing. All we have are some liner notes – which in any case are wrong, stating that 'Don't Think Twice' was backed by a full band – and an assumption that since there was a tasteful, faultless virtuoso present that day, he must be responsible for the fine playing on this track too.

The first point would easily be accounted for if we accept Heylin's assumption that a full-band version was recorded – with Langhorne on guitar – and scheduled for the album at least seriously and long enough for Hentoff to have based his liner notes on it. But that there was also another version, which eventually ended up on the album.

And who played there?

It is time to look up from the recording sheets and the tape boxes, and actually listen to the song itself – *that* we have, even though the rest is gone.

Three songs from that session have Langhorne on a second guitar. 'The Ballad of Hollis Brown' – on first hearing, one doesn't notice that there are two guitars there. When Dylan played this on his own, it used to go like this:


```

: . . . . . : . . . . .
|---0-keep-----|-----|
|---3-strumming---|-----|
|---2-----|-----|
|-----0-----3-|-0-----0-----3-| etc.
|-----3-----|-----3-----|
|-0-----|-----|

```

This playing style is pervasive throughout the two shows at the Gaslight Cafe, which were given just a couple of weeks before this recording session. An important element in this playing style is the frequent variations in the thumb pattern. Usually these go downwards, like here, in ‘Motherless Children’:

```

: . . . . . : . . . . . : . . . . .
|-----|-----|-----| |
|---|---|---|---|
|-----|-----|-----|
|-3-----2-----0-----|-0-----|-----|
|-----|-----|-0-----3-|-0-----|
|-----|-----|-0-----|-----|
hard road ... mother... dead

```

```

: . . . . . : . . . . . :
|-----|-----|-----|
|-----|-----|-----|
|-3-----2-----|-0-----|-----| etc
|-----|-----|-3-----2-----|-0-----|
|-----|-----|-3-----|-0-----|

```

Langhorne’s playing on ‘Hollis Brown’ uses the same kinds of patterns, but takes advantage of all the six strings, and plays figurations upwards too. That is what he does: he adds to what Dylan is already doing.

In ‘Whatcha Gonna Do’, his contribution is a series of blues licks which certainly sets the song off from the urgently straightforward strumming in the version which was recorded in December, but again, it is very obvious an addition to something that’s there already.

‘Kingsport Town’. Again, Dylan plays through the song as he would have done if he were all alone in the studio. Langhorne adds another kind of figurations to that: a sweet, gentle melody line frequently in parallel sixths high up on the guitar neck, the same style we can hear him use on two other tracks he recorded with Dylan: ‘Corrina, Corrina’, also from *Freewheelin’* and ‘Love Minus Zero/No Limit’ from *Bringing it All Back Home*.

Here, it is even more clear that he is adding to what Dylan is already doing: he is bringing in something from his own bag of licks and tricks and placing that alongside, around, within what Dylan plays. He enjoys the freedom that a soloing sideman has: he knows the basic stuff is taken care of, so he can

concentrate on embellishment and arabesque, he can vary his licks as the song proceeds – try out a dissonance here and an interval there.

In the company of lyric arabesques like these, the guitar part on ‘Don’t Think Twice’ sounds like . . . yes, it sounds like it was played by an entirely different musician. This is a musician who doesn’t worry about a rough edge here and an inadvertently muted string there (such as in the first bars of the intro) – in sharp contrast to Langhorne’s impeccable style; a player who is entirely fluent in this particular style of fingerpicking – unlike Langhorne, whose mutilated hand forced him to develop a distinct playing style, *not* particularly suited for laying down a basic accompaniment, but rather based on *listening* and entering into an interplay with someone else who supplies that kind of structure; a musician, furthermore, who drives forward at an insistent, nervous speed – in contrast to Langhorne’s lyrical lines; and who plays a remarkably stable accompaniment during the verses and saves for the short interludes whatever embellishment there is of the main pattern – nothing at all like the varied solos on the other tracks Langhorne played on.

The guitar playing on the track uses an advanced version of fingerpicking, but it doesn’t take a specially trained studio musician to play it – it’s not *that* hard. It depends on *one* extra technique in addition to the basic fingerpicking skills: the ‘limping’ anticipation of the highest tone of a new chord, played on the last eighth note of the previous measure and hammered on to the first beat of the next chord, simultaneously with the thumb stroke on the bass string:

C	G7	Am	C/g	F
:	:	:	:	:
-----0----- -----0h1----- ----- -----	-----1(p0)----- -----1----- -----0h -----1-----0h	-----0----- -----0----- -----0h2)2----- -----0----- -----2-----2-----	-----2-----2----- -----0-----0----- -----2-----2----- -----3-----3-----	-----3-----3----- -----3-----3----- -----0----- -----
-----3-----3----- -----3-----3----- -----3-----3----- -----1-----0h1-----				
C/g	G7	C/g		
:	:	:	:	:
-----0----- -----0h1----- ----- -----	-----1----- -----1----- -----1----- -----1-----	-----0----- -----0----- -----0----- -----0-----	-----2-----2----- -----2-----2----- -----2-----2-----	-----3-----3----- -----3-----3----- -----3-----3-----
-----h1-----h1----- -----h1-----h1----- -----h1-----h1----- -----h1-----h1-----				
-----2-----2----- -----2-----2----- -----2-----2----- -----2-----2-----				
-----3-----3----- -----3-----3----- -----3-----3----- -----3-----3-----				

Even a ‘lesser’ guitarist like Dylan – although he was otherwise incapable of expressing what he had come up with, if we are to believe Mr Heylin – could manage that. Here is what he plays on ‘Suze’, recorded a year later (when his guitar skills were, if anything, *declining*):

C				F									
:				:									
-0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----1-	-----1-	-----1-	-----1-						
---	-----1-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	0h2-----2-	-----2-						
---	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----3-	-----3-						
---	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----1-	-----1-						
---	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----1-	-----1-						
D7/f#		C/g		G		Am		/g		F		G	
:		:		:		:		:		:		:	
---	-----1-	-----1-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	h1-----1-	-----1-	-----1p0-----*	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-
---	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----0-	-----0-
---	-----0-	-----0-	-----2-	-----0-	-----0-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----2-	-----3-	-----3-	-----0-	-----0-
---	-----0-	-----0-	-----2-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-	-----0-
---	-----2-	-----2-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----3-	-----1-	-----1-	-----3-	-----3-

And by the way, the guitar playing on ‘Don’t Think Twice’ from the Langhorne session sounds suspiciously like the version that was recorded as a Witmark demo in March 1963, at a session where even Heylin lists Dylan as the only musician present: a little more polished here, a little blunter there, but essentially the same arrangement, the same playing.

I’ve saved my weightiest proof until last. The harmonica interludes.

Between the verses, Dylan plays the first line of the verses again, on harmonica. Only, he deviates slightly from the chord pattern that is used elsewhere in the song, in a way which would be virtually impossible to coordinate between two musicians without overdubs, especially on a first take. Here is what is played between the first two verses – the vertical bars indicate the ‘harmonica parts’:

C . | C G Am . F . C . . . |

Second to third verse:

C | C G Am . F . C . . . |

And between the last two verses:

C | C G Am . F . C G7 C . . . |

The differences are subtle but significant: in the second interlude, he jumps in with the C G Am part one measure earlier than the first time around. The rushed entry is reflected – as if of one mind – in the extra emphasis on the first tone of the harmonica. He also begins the following verse one measure earlier.

In the last interlude, he throws in a G7 at the end, followed by four full measures of C.

Now, Langhorne may be an excellent guitarist and session musician, but show me the musician who can, on the spot, interact *that* closely with Dylan, pick up his little variations, without the slightest indication on the recording of any surprise or hesitation.

Also during the verses, the interaction between the guitarist and the singer is perfect – too perfect to be accomplished without former preparation.

The only possible way this could have been done in an interaction between two musicians is if they had rehearsed it: decided on beforehand that ‘second time, we cut one measure here and add a G7 there’. *Then* the shift to G could come earlier one time, later the next. But *why* would Dylan – the man because of whom Joan Baez dedicated a song ‘to some rehearsal time’ – do something like that? *How* would he remember between the instances – ‘second time: now we cut here and here ... or was it ... nah ...’ – and still accomplish a perfect and coherent first take? And *when* would they have had time to sit down and work out such an arrangement? Fifteen wretched takes of Confusion, a frustrated departure in a huff, six more takes of four different songs – and on top of that a chit-chat about details in the arrangement?

The last tones of the harp solo are the final nail in the coffin of the Langhorne hypothesis. Listen to the perfect synchronization between the two instruments in the final turn to F and the last guitar strum, followed by a little *duh* on the harmonica, and tell me if that isn’t all done by the same person.

No, Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the guy who plays guitar here *knows* when the chords are going to change. And the only man who could have possibly known that, is Dylan himself.

Hattie Carroll (1963)

‘**W**HAT DOES DYLAN MEAN in the line ‘... or criticize all fears.’ What would someone be like who criticized all fears, and what would that have to do with a person who prematurely reacted to the unfolding tragedy of that song? Help!’

I usually don’t like questions like ‘what does the line so-and-so mean?’ but in this particular case, I’ve been tempted to attempt an answer. As I hear the song, the clue lies in two aspects. One is the preceding line: ‘You who philosophize disgrace’, i.e. the ones who take a purely rational point of view on disgrace and the injustices of society, the ones for whom the Hattie Carroll incident was a racial ‘issue’ – *just* a racial issue, a pretext for making a critical point about society, but without regard for the *real* issue, at least for the ones involved: the personal tragedy of Hattie. If one forgets that – which is easily done, even more so today that in the 60s, I think – whatever tears one has to shed, will to some extent be dishonest. And conversely: a response to ‘issues’ like this *must* be open to a personal reaction – ‘Fear’ – and whoever claims that one has to get beyond the personal – the ones who ‘criticize all fears’ – to view the case objectively, are wrong.

That’s the point that I think Dylan conveys brilliantly – and if the line is perhaps unclear on paper, the way he sings the song straightens out that unclarity. It may be that the ‘philosophical’ punch line is the last refrain with its ‘*Now* is the time for your tears’ (i.e. at the point when the legal system, the representative of the rational perspective on the ‘issue’, breaks down). But in most live renditions, it is the third verse that carries the song emotionally: that’s both where the fundamental social injustice is outlined, in the very concrete representation of the structural repression (‘[Hattie Carroll] never sat once at the head of the table, she [...] emptied the ashtrays on a whole other level’), and the narration of the murder-by-whim is literally hammered down in the singing, which pungently emphasizes the internal rhymes of the text:

Got *killed*
by a *blow*,
lay *slain*

by a *cane*
That *sailed*
through the *air*
and came *down*
through the *room*,
Doomed
and *determined*
to *destroy*
all the *gentle*.
And she *never*
done *nothing*
to *William*
Zanzingeeceer . . .

(just writing this down sends shivers down my spine. . .)

When the final verse concludes that the rational, distanced observer of injustice finally can bring out his rag, that's in a certain sense an unimportant afterthought: 'we' (the narrator and his listeners) have already seen the real point: that injustice can never be detached from actual injustices into an abstract system. Besides, with the rag 'buried deep in his face', there's little chance that he'll see the point anyway.

Another Side of Bob Dylan (1964)

ANOTHER SIDE OF BOB DYLAN was recorded during one glorious, nightly session on June 9 1964, over a bottle of Beaujolais – and it shows . . . The album may be a ‘rich, complex album’ and a proof of his ‘genius’, as Paul Williams and Paul Cable have it, but – for once – Clinton Heylin may have given the most adequate description, as ‘a typical Dylan session – flashes of sheer brilliance, improvisational flair, songs coming together and falling apart (in fairly equal measure) – in the studio’.¹ In other words: he can’t be all right all the time.

In several of the songs, most notably in *Ballad in Plain D* and *My Back Pages*, it is evident that Dylan hasn’t really learnt the chord changes properly before he started recording. In these two songs it is difficult to find two verses that are played in the same way. There are lots of temporary solutions. True enough, the variations work out quite well, but it would be over-indulgent to call them planned...

Apart from this, it is interesting to note how a few guitaristic specialties recur in song after song. One is the use of the chord changes C/d - G/d (xx0553 - xx0433), as in *All I Really Want To Do*, slightly varied in *I Don’t Believe You*, and most beautifully in *Chimes of Freedom*. Another is the progression xx0430 - xx0210 - 320003 which occurs both in *All I Really Want To Do* and in *Spanish Harlem Incident*. And the most persistent of these ‘tricks’ is the figure G-G6-G7 found in *To Ramona*, *My Back Pages*, *I Don’t Believe You* and *Ballad in Plain D*. Add to this that all of the songs (except, of course, the piano song *Black Crow Blues*) are played in G or C, with an occasional capo, and you have an album which is quite simple, guitaristically speaking.

Then there is the genius, of course.

¹ Heylin: *Dylan Behind Closed Doors: the Recording Sessions [1960-1994]*.

Chimes of Freedom (1964)

CHIMES OF FREEDOM was, I think, the first Dylan song that I really made an effort to transcribe. This was before the days of the Internet and in my case also before the days of *Lyrics*, so if I wanted the words on paper, I had to write them out myself.

Which I wanted, and which I did.

I was spellbound by those words. The layer upon layer of different meanings connected to different sensual experiences: the thunder storm, the lightning, the sounds, the 'we', which is not explained in the song, but I imagined a loving couple, on their way home from a date, to . . . , well, you know – *all* these and more, working together, flowing in and out of each other and each other's natural domains, lightning itself evoking sounds, not by laws of physics, through its companion, the thunder, but by laws of *association*.

And all this channeled into *Freedom*, even giving that flashing sound a political or at least social dimension. No wonder the post-pubescent me had to love it.

And I had to see it on paper, to savour it, possibly also to understand the bits that escaped me in their sounding form. I only had it on vinyl (of course, this was back in those days . . .), and it's only owing to my quick (and illegible, to anyone but me) handwriting that there aren't more scratches and dents in that track. Somehow, I managed to get through it, and even solve some of the textual mysteries.

For this and other reasons, I have quite a special affection for the album version. I don't know if it is because of this, or because Dylan has never really done it better, but I've never been quite satisfied with his live versions. They always leave me cold, don't do it for me, and the result of having listened to all these versions that leave me cold, has been that the song itself has lost some of its attraction.

Then came *No Direction Home*. I won't claim that this is the best version ever – it probably isn't. The singing is the whining, slightly tense, 1964 voice

– not his best year. I’ve even heard the track before, without any noticeable effect.

But this time, somehow, it worked.

I can’t explain why – probably a combination of circumstances (I was listening on headphones, walking around in our local grocery store, looking for some aubergines and some washing powder), and the thing that caught me was something as insignificant as the guitar playing between the verses.

It goes something like this:

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      G
      :
      | -3---3---3---| -3---3---3---| -3---3---3---|
      | -0---0---0---| -0---0---0---| -0---0---0---|
      | -0---0---0---| -0---0---0---| -0---0---0---|  etc.
      | -0---0---0---| -0---0---0---| -0---0---0---|
      | -2---2---2---| -2---2---2---| -2---2---2---|
      | -3---3---3---| -3---3---3---| -3---3---3---|

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Nothing much, and yet...

At first, the performance disturbed me. Especially two of the between-verses passages, where he keeps strumming this one G major chord abnormally long. I thought, ‘Damn, he has forgotten the lyrics.’ It has happened before. But this time, ‘phew’, he managed to get back on track again. Until next verse, same thing again, even longer this time. But both times, the following verse with all its intricate images and assonances followed without any hint of a problem, so relieved by this I ended up listening to the sheer sound of the guitar: never have I heard a more perfectly ringing, shimmering tone from Dylan’s hand. It’s not that it’s simple word-painting or anything – that would have been trite; they don’t sound like church-bells, those guitar chords – especially not the kind which are caused by lightning. But they chime alright.

And I started wondering, if he hadn’t forgotten the lyrics, perhaps there was a *reason* he did it like this? Playing the waiting-game like that – unless one believes it’s just a mistake, and all one can think of is how painfully embarrassing this is – it forces one to notice that which *is* going on in place of that one expected but which is *not*. And what goes on here, is sound – simply sound. ‘Only silence is more beautiful.’

Chapter 16

John Wesley Harding (1967)

THERE ARE THREE general remarks to be made about this album. One is the consistent use of the capo. Several of the songs (John Wesley Harding, All Along the Watchtower, The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest, As I went out one morning, I pity the poor immigrant), are played with the capo around the fifth fret, which produces the high, ringing guitar sound that is so typical of this album (if it's successful is another question: it also creates a very thin, open sound-scape, with the bass and the guitar far removed from each other and from the drums – they all stand very much alone; maybe he should have gone back to the studio and added some tracks with the Band as he originally planned).

The other is the very simple chord progressions in many of the songs (The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest, The Drifter's Escape, The Wicked Messenger, not to mention All Along the Watchtower). That these songs nevertheless stand out as some of the most effective on the album is a testimony of Dylan's superb singing on this album.

His harmonica work is also outstanding. A year of wild touring with the Band may have come close to killing him, but his harp playing certainly became more expressive – and this is the only album where it shows directly, IMHO.

One song stands out – in the negative sense: the title track. It was what kept me from buying the record for several years.

Self Portrait (1970)

‘WHAT IS THIS SHIT?!’ wrote Greil Marcus in his Rolling Stone review of this album, and there is something to that question. There are only three possible explanations to the mix of the blatant sentimentality of *I forgot more* (and a bunch of others), the ludicrous chord changes of *In search of Little Sadie*, the duet between the old, nasal Dylan and the new country-crooner Dylan in *The Boxer*, which is fun on the first hearing, but gets quite dull already on the second (and I don’t know what happens after the second hearing), and – the best of them all – *All the tired horses*, which brilliantly captures the mood of this album.

Either it was, as Dylan himself has explained, conceived as a collection of country standards, maybe inspired by the sessions with Johnny Cash in 1969. This would imply that it’s a serious effort. If so, it’s the best proof that his muse was silent at the moment (as Paul Williams asks: if the tracks that ended up on *Self Portrait* and Dylan were just warm-ups for the band, then where are the real tracks?).

Or it was, as Dylan himself has also explained, an attempt to shake off the annoying role of icon and voice of a generation that he felt he was being forced into and kept locked up in – a big ‘fuck you’ to everyone caring to take it as a provocation. But why then the effort? There are more sessions for these albums (counting also *New Morning*) than for any other Dylan album. And why the inclusion of tracks that are actually quite enjoyable, among the shit?

Or was it, perhaps, an ironic kick in the butt to the country idiom, and a clever, multi-level analysis of sentimentality and of his own music-making, where the packaging adds to the wit of the music?

I wish I could say that the third alternative is the correct answer, but I can’t. What I can say is that Dylan was experimenting with his singing style, not only in the direction of country, but also a blues style which sounds new (and actually quite fresh!) in his oeuvre. They also seem to be having a good time, at least on some of the tracks (whereas others sound very uninspired). It is an amusing album, but not a good one...

Postscript: Having lived with this album for a couple of days now, while tabbing it, I have quite reluctantly reached the conclusion ('insight' is too strong a word) that the most interesting songs on the album are *In search of little Sadie* (heard in conjunction with *Little Sadie*, of course) and *All the Tired Horses*. They both stretch some limits that aren't usually touched upon. What's interesting about the *Search for little Sadie*, is that it's a stylized search – it sounds like (and is probably meant to sound like) Dylan sitting at home, searching for a melody, trying out things, discarding them on the way, and picking up the next thing to try out. But it isn't: it's a planned progression through various stages, planned so as to sound erratic. At times it is genuinely erratic, of course, but only on the surface level: the chromatic progression of chords in the first half leads Dylan to melodic goals he can't have foreseen (which is evident from the recording – lots of sliding-up-to the last note of a phrase, to make it fit the chord). But the course through the song is orderly enough to be labeled 'planned'. This ambiguity puts the aesthetics both of improvised and of pre-planned music (which is to say: the entire history of Western Classical Music) under scrutiny, by using the one to nullify the other. What remains, may be crap, but at least it's interesting crap (oh my, I'm turning into a garbologist!)

New morning (1970)

NEW MORNING has been haunting me ever since I bought it. This must be Dylan's most stylistically varied album ever (possibly topped by 'Love and Theft'), but I still can't decide whether it belongs in the 'weak' category together with *Self Portrait*, or if it is a glorious testimony to the sprezzatura that only Dylan can handle without collapsing completely.

I've had heated discussions with a friend of mine about 'The Man In Me' – is it a good song? an exuberant jubilation of the bliss of true love? a rare moment in Dylan's catalogue of a love song with no hint whatsoever of uncertainty, bitterness, pain? No! it's just too sweet; things that are too good to be true usually aren't. It's like 'Sara' or 'Wedding Song', another couple of songs that I just can't take seriously. What they have, though, is an intrinsic seriousness which commands some kind of respect: only Dylan can say 'I love you more than blood' and get away with it.

And what does 'The Man in Me' have ?

'La la la la la.' Not quite the same.

In the same category come 'If Not For You' ('I'd be sad and blue' or 'I wouldn't have a clue / If not for you' – c'mon Bob, you can rhyme better than that!), and, to some extent, 'New Morning' and 'Winterlude'. But they aren't too bad after all: *Winterlude* has this corny guy-on-the-sleeve-of-Nashville-Skyline-ish, country dude thing going on, and if such a down-to-earth guy 'thinks you're fine', what is there to complain about? And 'New Morning' has these wonderful snapshots of situations which may be just reminiscences of random glimpses, but which may also be filled with meaning ('Rabbit runnin' down across the road / Underneath the bridge where the water flowed through', 'Automobile comin' into style / Comin' down the road for a country mile or two'), and they are introduced with a shade of desperation in the insistent questions: 'Can't you hear...?' ('You really can't hear it? Don't you remember? But... that was an important moment! I thought we shared it... Don't you love me anymore?') Besides, the song is forever redeemed by the

treatment it got in 1991 – when someone goes though something like that, you just have to care for them. . .

The three songs that really got to me and made me think of it as a great album after all, were 'If Dogs Run Free', 'Three Angels' and 'Father of Night'. I'm not positive that the scat singing in 'Dogs. . .' is great, but I know it makes me smile. And the choir on the other two. . . – heavenly! In fact, if Dylan ever wrote a heavenly line of music, it's the two bars of dirty-winged angels' song between the verses in 'Father of Night', or the very end of 'Three Angels'.

Chapter 19

Wedding song (1974)

I TRY TO BE meek and mild. I try to be humourous too. And I'm always serious. Honestly. To some people, those don't seem to go together well. I've never received more complaints – verging on the indignant — than after I wrote about *Wedding Song* that

It may be a silly song, hastily written, badly rehearsed, and with some of the least successful poetic images Dylan has ever written ('I love you more than blood' – yuck!)

I'm sorry if I hurt someone's feelings by trashing their favourite song, but I do think it's a silly song; all reports agree that it was hastily written; and the recording bears ample evidence to the short rehearsal time, even though the performance miraculously hangs together and succeeds in the way that only Dylan can make it succeed and for which I love his music. For once I agree with Clinton Heylin:

Though it is hard not to interpret the lyrics on a literal level, Dylan's performance once again transcends the at times slipshod sentimentality. Which may well stand as the motif for all of *Planet Waves*. Though it is an album suffused with brilliant performances from both musicians *and* vocalist, Dylan had yet to fully excise some bad writing habits picked up during the amnesia. (*Dylan Behind Closed Doors*, p. 99)

The 'slipshod sentimentality' keeps me from seeing the honesty that Dylan so desperately tries to display (or: which the persona in the song so desperately tries to display, or: which Dylan so desperately tries to make the persona in the song display), and which makes it sound dishonest to me, despite all the overwhelming images. 'You try so hard. . .,' as the poet says.

Many have kindly suggested to me that 'blood' is not to be taken literally. Frankly, I didn't believe that Dylan was sitting at his breakfast table with Sara's hand in one hand and a glass of freshly poured blood in the other, thinking 'Now, which one do I love more. . .?' I'm well aware of the associ-

ations between family and blood. That still doesn't make it a successful poetic image, for me.

There's more to the poetic than making cunning connections or crafting rhetorical figures. Those things are to a poetic text what a virus is to a computer: They can be very powerful, but just *being* there — on the harddisk or in a text — isn't enough. As long as they don't run — if they aren't executed — they do no damage; they do nothing, apart from taking up space.

So, what does it take for an image to be executed?

The very *sound* of it is important, the physical qualities, that which is *not* connected with concepts, words, ideas. Already here, 'I love you more than bleahd' fails, and not only because of the kitchen-table associations.

A certain broadness in the range of associations isn't a bad thing either, instead of monomaniacal insistency on one topic (unless of course that insistency itself is what is on display). The blood image alone might have done it for me in a different context, but in the company of the other larger-than-life images in the song, trying to top each other in greatness of sentiment — More! More!! More!!! — it reminds me quite a bit of Dan Bern's song *Tiger Woods*, which has the same escalation on overdrive:

I got big balls
Big ol' balls
Big as grapefruits
Big as pumkins,
Yes sir, yes sir
And on my really good days
They swell to the size of small dogs —

Balls big as small dogs — now, *there's* some poetic imagery for ya!

But most important for how I judge a poetic image is its ability to project a persona which we all know is literary but whose experiences are close enough to our own that we can make them our own *as if* they were genuine. This is the fundamental failure of *Wedding Song* for me: I can't for the life of me think of it as a genuine, honest expression of anything. Too many things stand in the way and prevent me from making it my own. And if that is the case, I'd rather go out there and get those experiences myself — and tell myself that I don't need Dylan to tell me what it's all about.

Which I did. There's a *reason* why that particular song was featured on the front page on that particular day. . .

Blood On The Tracks (1975)

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS is Dylan's best album. Others may tell you that *Blonde on Blonde*, *Highway 61 Revisited* or even *Desire* is his best album, but they're wrong, and when pressed (up against the wall, and in the presence of a .44, if necessary), they will eventually agree.

Blood on the Tracks is also Dylan's best album in its released form.

Others may tell you that had he not tinkered with the songs, but left them alone as they were recorded in September 1974, it would have been a far better album, and that the songs that were rewritten and re-recorded over Christmas, with local Minnesotan musicians brought together by Dylan's brother David, are inferior, both textually and musically, to the intensively emotional New York versions.

They're wrong even here, although they're closer to the truth this time. In a one-to-one comparison between the two versions, the New York versions may get the upper hand (the one undisputable exception is 'If You See Her, Say Hello', but even 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' is better in the Minnesota version). But even if we were to define the New York versions of 'Tangled up in Blue', 'Idiot Wind' and 'You're a Big Girl Now' as perfection, the Minnesota versions are close enough to this level, musically, and the extra qualities they add to their New Yorkean counterparts (the rhythmical drive of 'Tangled', the angered bite of 'Idiot Wind', the softness of 'Big Girl'), more than make up for the lyric changes. In the case of 'Idiot Wind', these are generally to the better.

But single songs is one thing – an album is another. And this is the real reason why the re-designed album was a good idea. Let's compare them: On the one hand you have an album that starts with the cross-continental tour (de force) of the never-surpassed masterpiece 'Tangled up in Blue', coast to coast, north to south, performed with the same restless, unhesitant intensity that the lyrics reveal – revolution in the air, indeed; continues with the sleepy drama of 'Simple Twist' and the bitter-sweet tenderness of 'You're a Big Girl

Now' (which one of these two is Dylan's best song?), the rage of 'Idiot Wind', seemingly mellowed by the lyricism of 'You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome' ('seemingly' because the lyricism of the lazy river and the crimson hair can only heighten the pain brought about by the inevitable loss of all this – this must be the best song of the album); then exquisite blues; hilarious Western movie script; loving recollection of things past, placed in a distant future; salvation myth; and Zen in a bucket: all in all a kaleidoscopic reflection of love & loss in 10 movements.

On the other hand, you have 10 songs, all quite slow, mostly staying in the emotional range between sadness and bitterness, all in the same open tuning, played with the same three or four chords, where the constant ringing of the open e' and b strings will drive you crazy after a while.

I know which album I prefer.

That said, the most interesting musical remarks concern the New York versions. This is of course mainly owing precisely to the open tuning. The biographies (i.e. Heylin) say that Dylan had learned the open D/E tuning from Joni Mitchell (I'll refer to it as 'open E' hereafter). This can't be all true, since Dylan used this tuning extensively during the recording of *Freewheelin'*. He does use it in a quite different way, though.

The center of gravity in the open-tuning *Blood on the Tracks* songs, is the root chord E=054000 (or 054300). It may seem odd to use a chord like this, when you have the same chord on the open strings – after all, that's the whole point of open tuning, isn't it?

Well, not quite. Beginners – like the Dylan of *Freewheelin'* – may find the 000000 chord convenient. But a more proficient and mature player like 1974-Dylan, realizes that it has a series of disadvantages compared to 054000. First, an open string is like a binary number: it's either on or off, and beyond that, there is really nothing much you can do about it, whereas a skilled instrumentalist has a far greater control of the tone quality once there is a finger on the string. Second, the uncontrolled sounding 000000 has a fifth between the two lowest string, which will easily produce a 'muffled' sound. This is avoided through the 054000 root, which instead gives the same full, doubled bass tone as in the 'Dropped C tuning' that Dylan was so fond of in the 60s. Third, in the 054000 chord, the tone of the third string (g \sharp) is doubled on the fourth string. This shimmering, doubled tone is essential to the sound of the album. This is the 'third', the tone which decides whether a chord is minor or major. Here it is major, emphatically so. Odd, maybe, for an album so full of sadness, but effective all the same. Fourth, one should not underestimate the value of

having somewhere to place one's fingers. Besides, fingering a chord also means holding the guitar still . . .

So much for 054000 (did I say that I like that chord quite a lot?). the other main chords also have their special characteristics. The A is fingered 020120. The attentive ones (and/or those with training in music theory) will notice that although it is an A chord, the tone A is nowhere near the bass, where it should properly be, to establish the key of the chord. Not until the third string is there an A. Instead, the chord is dominated by the tone E, on strings 1, 4 and 6. And, in fact, this A in this tuning is most of all an embellishing variant of the main E sonority. This is precisely the same function as the C chord has in Dylan's most cherished figure: G-C/g-G (320003-3x2013-320003). This 'embellished E' character is emphasized by the alternative fingering 020100, where the open b string adds yet another tone from the E major chord. In 'Buckets of Rain', where the fifth string is not used, it is impossible to decide whether the chord 0x0100 should be regarded as an A or as an Esus4.

Even the B is different: x02120 is its standard form, and where the A was merely a variant of E, this B is merely a variant of A. This conflation of A and B (or in general, and more technical, terms: the subdominant and the dominant) has a name: it's called BII, and is basically an A chord paired with a B in the bass. This is a very frequent chord, especially in Dylan's production after Blood on the Tracks. Part of the explanation is that IITH chords are central in the gospel tradition, which Dylan dived into shortly afterwards, but it is not either impossible that he discovered its sweetness through the use of this B chord. It is a quite rare guest in his songs prior to Blood on the Tracks.

When Dylan wants a 'real' B sound, as in the outtake 'Up to Me' he uses the barre 777777.

Two more figures should be mentioned:

E B(iii) A	G#m/ E Emaj7 B A E
-0---0---0-	-(0)--0---0---0---(0)-
-0---0---0-	-(0)--4---2---2---(0)-
-0---0---1- and	-(0)--3---1-or-1---(0)-
-4---2---0-	-(4)--4---2---0---(4)-
-5---4---2-	-(5)-----2---(5)-
-0---0---0-	-(0)--0-----0---(0)-

Although they go in opposite directions (E-B-A and G#m/B-A-E), they are closely related, tonally. Look at the fourth string: that's what it's all about. Both figures are realizations of the basic progression g#-f#-e (try it!), but this progression is given different functions through different harmonizations. In the first figure, g# is home base and e is part of the contrasting sonority A (see

Up to Me). In the second this is reversed: here $g\sharp$ belongs to the contrasting 'B-area' ($G\sharp m$ and B are closely related), and e brings resolution to the phrase by landing on the tonic (see *You're a big girl now*). (I doubt that Dylan is aware of this, but it's a neat little twin-figure all the same).

These few elements account for most of the songs on the album. Some of the songs stand out by employing other effects. The second figure above is prominent in *Idiot Wind*, but here it is supplemented by the effect of the contrast between A major and A minor, through the chord $Am=x05450$ (note also the wonderful economy of means in the progression $xx4340-xx2120-x05450$). The same major/minor A can be found in *Simple Twist of Fate*, whereas *Meet Me in the Morning* holds this debate in the area of the tonic E itself, in the blues manner.

(Did I mention that this is a tremendous album?)

Tangled up in Tangled up in Blue

This short essay was written as a commentary to a tape compilation of selected versions of Tangled Up in Blue.

The four september days of 1974 which saw the creation of Blood on the Tracks, occupy a special place in the history of rock 'n' roll – at least regarding Bob Dylan's share in it. A unique combination of a new interest in open tunings (inspired by Joni Mitchell), a new perspective on writing and time (inspired by the mysterious art-teacher Norman Raeben), and a broken heart (inspired by Sara), brought about a burst of creative energy comparable only to the making of his mid-sixties trilogy. Apart from the intensive energy of singing and playing, the most fascinating aspect of the **september version** of Tangled up in Blue (Studio A, New York, 740919) is the clicking of the jacket buttons against the guitar; not only is it a vivid illustration of the inspired state of mind, which would never let such trivialities interfere with the creative work. It also creates a constant counter-rhythm, which is as ephemeral as it is hypnotizing, once one becomes aware of it.

The **official album version** was recorded in Minneapolis with local musicians, December 30, 1974. Dylan went home for christmas, proudly (one may assume) played his fresh album for his brother and asked for his opinion. Brother David answered: 'Nah . . . , weell . . . ', Dylan took the hint and gave five of the songs a new finish. Most commentators seem to lament this and think that Dylan chickened out by doing it: the subdued New York-versions are certainly more naked musically, and the lyrical changes give some of the songs (especially 'If you see her say hello') a more detached character. On the other hand, the Minnesota version sees the 'rhythmic intensity' meter turned up another 3 or 4 steps, and I for one think that it sets the album in motion in a way that the New York version would not have managed (I just realized that Paul Williams agrees with me too, so I can't be all wrong).

Then comes the 'Rolling Thunder' era and two renditions that are truly amazing. The **Boston** version (Nov 21, 1975; featured in *Renaldo and Clara*) will always be special to me: I've realized that it was the first version I ever

heard (and saw) of this song. Those eyes (which you can't actually see for most of the song, but you can feel them), in the white face . . . And the voice, so full of I-don't-know-what – anger, bitterness, fatigue, motion . . .

Toronto, less than two weeks later (Dec 2, 1975), is another story again. The intro is very long: one can hear how Dylan searches for a rhythm, barely finding it, changing his mind, taking his time, and then embarking on his journey, coast to coast and from the great north woods to Delacroix, more slowly than ever. Whether it was meant to be that way, or he just thought 'Hell, I'll take this tempo' – it doesn't really matter. It sounds uncomfortable to begin with, but in the end it's just right.

For the 1978 tour Dylan came up with a completely new arrangement: a broad, emotion-laden ballad in the grand style. Once again, it's remarkable how different two versions can be, that are basically the same. The summer version, e.g. as sung in **Paris** (July 6 1978), is actually rather square, with a fixed melody and a remarkably regular rhythm, with just an occasional emotional outburst – more and more as the song unfolds. And as tour proceeds, this emotionality takes over completely, and all that's left of the square rhythm is the line 'They never did like mama's home-made dress', which in its new context becomes highly expressive. In Seattle in November the song is introduced with the words: 'Here's a love ballad I wrote a few years back, about three people who were in love with each other, all at the same time.'

Two weeks later, Dylan picked up a silver cross that someone had thrown onto the stage. The rest is history, as they say, and part of that history is the **Charlotte** miracle (Dec. 10, 1978), probably the most heartfelt and multi-dimensional version I've heard of this song. The desperation of a soul in turmoil is tangible throughout the performance. The grand ballad arrangement, which is basically the same as in Paris, becomes a sounding background for the most intensive (and intensively slow) vocalizations ever. And once again the lyrics are changed: He no longer visits topless places to have a beer, nor does he smoke pipes or read Italian poets: the topless place has become the the Flamingo hotel, where 'she' is dancing in a dress made of stars and stripes. And he now reads the Bible and thinks about death ('all the people I used to know, at least the ones that ain't in the grave').

Tangled up in Blue wasn't played again until 1984, and this time completely re-written once again. Hearing the **Real Live** version (London, July 7, 1984) for the first time was like meeting an old friend whom you haven't seen for a long time, and suddenly discovering new sides of him: changed, but still the same. The fact that 'he nearly went mad in Baton Rouge' comes as no surprise, given what you already knew, or at least suspected, about his wandering years,

and changing the 'it' of the last verse to a 'she' adds another dimension to the mystery of who the song is about ('We always did love the very same one, we just saw *her* from a different point of view'). Which lyrics are the best? Which side of a coin is most valuable? Which of your children do you love the most?

The five versions on the B-side is at the same time a summary of the Never-Ending Tour. This gives the opportunity for a reflection over 'what happened'. In an interview he has said that throughout the 80s he more and more lost contact with his own songs, he didn't know what they meant anymore. Then, while touring with the Grateful Dead in 1987, during one show (in Locarno, Switzerland) he got an intensive feeling that 'I have to go out and sing these songs, they mean something to others, The Dead play them better than me. . .'. Since then two things have happened: He has toured relentlessly, with about a hundred shows a year. And, which is quite interesting, he has gone back to album versions of his songs. No more messing around with revised lyrics, no more grand ballad arrangements. It is as if rediscovering the songs meant taking them back to the start and keeping them there, either because that's the form the audience will have met them in, or because that's the form Dylan himself once met them in.

Hence the Never-Ending tour versions are five different versions of the same song, rather than five different songs played by five different persons and with five different contents. The '88 version, here represented by the **Berkeley** show (June 10, 1988; Neil Young was featured as a guest, although not on this song), is typical of the energetic approach to many of the electric songs this year, where the active bass of Kenny Aaronson plays a central role (just as Rob Stoner's did in 1975).

The version from **Milan** (June 27, 1993) is probably the weirdest of them all. 1993 was the year of the long improvisations, and this is no exception: it takes him no less than 11:38 to get through the song. Along the journey are some incredible howls.

From his '95 triumphs in the **Brixton Academy** (March 29, 1995) is the up-tempo rock version that follows. Later the same year he switched to an acoustic, almost country-style version, as played in **Oslo** (June 29, 1995). This has been the standard version ever since, more or less. One outstanding specimen is the slow version from the **Wolftrap** (Aug. 23, 1997) which reverts the song back into the slow lamento it was in the September days of 1974.

Chapter 22

Saved (1980)

WHILE THERE IS general agreement that no matter what one thinks about the lyrics on *Slow Train Coming*, musically it is one of Dylan's strongest, the general verdict is not equally lenient with *Saved*. With its ghastly cover — rivalled in tackiness only by *Shot of Love* — and its unequivocal title, it has proved to be an even bitterer pill to swallow than the precursor.

Which is understandable, but not quite fair. *Saved* is an excellent album, provided one can endure the obnoxious born-again evangelization. It may be a far cry from *Slow Train Coming* in the areas of polish and commercial appeal, but it has an energy, a punch, and a new approach to communication and message that is quite unique in Dylan's production, and, as such, quite refreshing.

It should be said, however, that this more positive verdict is only partly true about the published album. *Saved* is unique in connection with Dylan in consisting only/mostly of songs that had already been tried out on stage for a long time before they were committed to vinyl. There is critical and historiographical consensus that the album suffered from this: by the time of the sessions for the record, the band (the same band that had played the songs on tour — another Dylan rarity) was already tired, and the spirit of the live renditions, which even the staunchest critics could not deny, did not translate well into a studio production.

There may be something true in this. Many of the songs are exuberant numbers of praise and thanksgiving, which come better into its own from a stage, where extatically jubilant confession seems more natural than on a record.

This applies to the **title track**, a born-again statement if there ever was one, slightly too over-eager to be taken quite seriously (unless one shares the sentiment), perhaps, but a powerful and driving gospel rock number all the same, which I don't mind listening to.

The same could be said about the brother-in-arms, “**Solid Rock**” (or, as the full title goes when it is presented during the shows: “Hanging On To A Solid Rock Made Before The Foundation Of The World”); and, to an even higher degree, to “**Pressing On**” og “**Are You Ready?**” — the intensity that grows out of the slow build-up of these two songs during the live concerts can make even the hardest of heart jump to his feet and rejoice: “Yes! I’m ready! Take me, Bob! Take me with you!”, but that is mostly lost in the album version.

It probably couldn’t be any other way. None of the songs I’ve mentioned are among his strongest — from the gospel period or any other — but their effect depends on *presence* — the *physical* presence of the person and the band producing a sound of wall to bang one’s head against, and the *temporal* presence, exploiting the contrast between the *indefiniteness* of not knowing where this is going to end, and the *inevitability* of the process set in motion by the first “on-an-don-an-don-an-doon”. In the absence that the record medium necessarily entails, some of that is naturally lost. But some remains (and five bonus points for trying).

Besides, it doesn’t matter: there are strong songs left that *do* make the transition from concert stage to recording studio. Partly, perhaps, because they are stronger songs altogether, but mainly because they don’t depend on the live situation to the same extent.

“**In The Garden**” is easily Dylan’s most harmonically complex song, and although it shares some traits with the likes of “Saved”, such as the escalating intensity and the lyric repetitiveness, it depends more on the harmonic meandering to hold our attention.

Both “**Covenant Woman**” and “**Saving Grace**” are harmonically interesting, although not as wild as “In the Garden”. They are also touching, introspective reflections on the role of faith and salvation in the trials and tribulations of everyday life (at least that’s what a theologian might say about them). Especially “Covenant Woman” stands out in this respect, in a way which transcends the religious sphere. Lines like:

He must have loved oh me so much
to send me someone as fine as you.

and

I’ll always be right by your side
— I’ve got a covenant too.

work well with or without God in the equation.

This leaves the two real gems. “**What Can I Do For You**” gives us Dylan’s best harmonica solos ever — for once captured better on an official album than in any live rendition, at least among the ones I’ve heard. It is inventive, it is raw, and it is fragile, all at the same time. (It may be to go way beyond what kind of metaphors are appropriate for this particular album to say so, but there’s good sex in those two solos.) The sound of the mix in general comes across to me as a bit on the hard side, but the harp sound is unsurpassed.

And last but not least, and the opener, “**A Satisfied Mind**”, which in my book is one of Dylan’s crowning achievements as a singer. It’s not powerful, it’s not showy, at times he breaks like a little girl, but there is an intimacy in the delivery which gives the message credibility and urgency. The interaction with the backing singers is exquisite all the way through, and my mental image of the song is that of calm deliberation, there is actually an intensity which just grows as the song progresses. There happens remarkably much in a little less than two minutes.

Have I made my point clear enough? Damn, this is one hell of an album. If you’re a godless heathen, don’t let the cover scare you away from this album. And if you’re a true believer, don’t let your benevolence and agreement prevent the album from grabbing hold of you in ways and places you might not have expected.

Down in the Groove (1988)

DOWN IN THE GROOVE came at a time when Dylan wasn't exactly at the zenith of his powers as a recording artist. His struggles with the modern recording techniques (at the time mostly resulting in lost battles), as well as a steadily decreasing audience since his religious trilogy, hadn't been good for his reputation. And *Down in the Groove* didn't make things much better.

It is probably one of the last albums people buy. And in my most critical moments I'm inclined to say: 'And for good reason.' But still: the album has qualities, not only compared with *Knocked out Loaded*, which only has one quality ('Brownsville Girl').

I'll return to the qualities in a moment. First a general overview: The six first songs, and eight out of ten songs on the album as a whole, are in the key of A major, most of them are fairly standard twelve-bar blues, with slight variations (such as the F#m in 'Had a Dream About You Baby', which in this case is counterbalanced by the rather monotonous singing)(I didn't say it was bad, though). The main difference between 'Let's Stick Together, Sally Sue Brown, Had A Dream About You Baby' and 'Ugliest Girl In The World' is the titles.

'Death is Not the End' is, I think, the only Dylan song that has left a really bad taste in my mouth. It was a general joking subject around here, until an old man wanted to borrow the album to play this song in his wife's funeral. They had heard it on the radio a few days before she died, probably the only time it was ever played on the radio. I pass her gravestone every day on my way to work. It hasn't changed my opinion about the song, I just don't laugh about it anymore.

'Silvio' is a strange song in many ways. The lyrics by Grateful Dead-lyricist Robert Hunter are often referred to as typical Dylan-wannabe-writing. Be that as it may – on this album it compares favourably not only to the non-Dylan songs. For a very long time it was the regular ending of the first electric set of just about every show, which added to its strangeness: a song that for tape-

collectors was a nuisance and a drag, as the eternal song no. 5, but which most others had never heard – who had got *Down in the Groove* apart from the collectors? (The song request of all times: in Stockholm, June 9 1998 someone yelled out SILVIO after song nr. 4.)

Musically it is a carbon copy of Isis. That's perhaps not where the real genius of Isis lies, but it's a persistent little bugger of a riff.

The songs that are neither square rock 'n' roll in A or 'Death is not the end', go to the other opposite – three of them are played in a very loose rhythm ('When Did You Leave Heaven?', 'Shenandoah', 'Ninety Miles an Hour'). These are not only standing out, they are really outstanding. Sure enough, the drumming on 'When did you leave heaven' is a bit strange, but that's forgivable. 'Ninety miles' is a perfect example of how to create an intense pulse (quite fitting the lyrics) without a drum or even a fixed rhythm.

One song left, one performance, and what a performance! 'Rank Strangers To Me' is one of the reasons to have this one on CD – not because of the sound, but because of the repeat button.

World Gone Wrong — A Body in Sound

WORLD GONE WRONG (1993) is a body. Not just a great body of work, but a body.

The greatness of this album of folk and blues classics is that there is *one* voice speaking on it and one person speaking with this voice, whether he speaks guitar, harmonica, or English.

I'll try to make it a little clearer.

NOT-A-ONE-MAN-BAND

Perhaps if I start by saying what it's not: The tracks on *World Gone Wrong* are not those of a one-man band, a skilled display by a person who can speak different languages at the same time, or, more down-to-earth, is able to sing and play harp and guitar at the same time.

Instead, it is as if the different parts of the performance — words, guitar, language, harmonica, rhythm, sound — come together and blend into one; *here* more than on any other Dylan album (or any album whatsoever, probably).

YOU SPEAK TO ME IN BODY LANGUAGE

It is as if the different parts of the performance represent different facets of the same language, which materialize first as 'mouth language' (which is not to be confused with spoken language): voice range, talking speed, voice quality, and — as a special case — harmonica style; and as 'hand language': the guitar playing. The languages of these different body parts are so prominent that they together form, if not a full human body, then at least the image of one, the impression of a full body in our presence, speaking body language in sound.

To phrase it differently, what I hear on *World Gone Wrong* is all the informational extras, the toppings on the 'message': that which we see/experience/understand

when we speak with someone face to face, but which disappears in *this* medium, the disembodied text (or the un-incarnated Word, which is more or less the same), where they are replaced with smilies or rhetorics (or parentheses like this one).

Hence the distinction between ‘mouth language’ and the language that comes out of the mouth: speaking is a physical act of communication, not a structural representation of rational processes.

The stylized worlds of music and poetry frequently lead an uncertain life in-between: poetry departs from the written word by drawing attention to the physical quality of words and text. And singing usually takes one step back from the act of speaking, by inserting a layer of artfulness and/or aesthetics between what is said and who says it, adding something in the process, but at the cost of blurring the person at the other end.

But on *World Gone Wrong* I can hear him. I hear all that which *fleshes out* the message, i.e. makes it appear *in the flesh*, as a human expression and not just as a stick figure.

SPEAKING GUITAR

This would not have been possible had Dylan not been a great, natural guitar player: technically speaking, *World Gone Wrong* is Dylan’s greatest achievement as a guitarist since *Freewheelin’*. Worth pointing out is the consistent technique of picking out the melody line or fragments of it on the bass strings and strum on in the higher strings as if nothing special was happening. **Two Soldiers** is the standout track in this respect, but also Love Henry and one of the many superb outtakes in Dylan’s production, **You Belong To Me** shine. Delia and Ragged and Dirty do some of the same: the little riffs that go through each of those songs, echo snippets of melody line as well. *World Gone Wrong* could be on the curriculum of any course in “Solo song with guitar accompaniment”.

But even more important is the way Dylan makes the guitar one with the body, hence with the voice, hence with what comes out through the voice: the words. The interludes and ornaments flow as freely and naturally as the syllables of the text. An alacrity in the words is transformed into strokes on the strings — a slightly harder strum here, a vaguely noticeable tempo gain or hesitation there. The strokes set and adjust to a pace: the guitar breathes.

THE LIMBS OF THE BODY

Among the individual performances, I have favourites, of course, musically speaking. But at the other end, I really can't pick any of them out as superfluous, just as little as I can tell which finger I could do without.

World Gone Wrong, the title track and opener, is the most unappealing, unsexy opening track in Dylan's catalogue. Never has his voice been raspier, more piercing, less redeeming. When the album came out, I still had a couple of albums from the back catalogue left to buy, and I was standing in the record store, trying to choose between some classic and this new one. When I heard the first seconds, I thought: "This is grim! I must have it." I still feel the same about it.

Blood in my Eyes was one of the first songs I sat down to seriously figure out the chords to, and it was one of the first tab files at what was later to become **dylanchords**. It's not revolutionary, it's not pretty, and it's not showy or particularly difficult. But it's hypnotic and near, and I thought: "I must know how he does that." I still feel the same about it too.

Apropos hypnotic: **Ragged and Dirty . . .** The hours I spent playing that little riff over and over again — some would say they were spent in vain and are now lost forever, but that's a lie: they have etched that sound-and-body union into my fingers and my soul, and brought the memories of that part of my life with them. I'd be a poorer man and a lesser person without them.

The same goes for the little riffs and interludes in songs like 'Love Henry', 'Lone Pilgrim', and 'Delia'. They are all based on the same figure, over the same chord structure. And they are all repeated almost identically throughout the songs: it would have been easy for a musician with Dylan's good knowledge of the style to vary the riffs, but the only variation there is, comes from imperfection: a wrong finger placement here, an accidentally struck string there, and here and there a missed beat.

In fact, the whole album is based on the same figures over the same chord structures: most of the songs are played with C type chords (varied through different capo position), embellished with Csus4 or Csus2 chords, either to echo the melody line, or as "hints" of F; and the Gsus4-like chord xx3300 which is so prominent in 'Blood In My Eyes' is used in many of the other songs too.

This lack of variation might have led to the same verdict as for **Down in the Groove**, but it doesn't. In fact, the difference between the albums couldn't have been bigger. The difference is in principle the same as between "Mixed Up Confusion" and "In the Morning", which I've **discussed earlier**: one fills

a pattern the same way every time, and after five, ten, hundred repetitions, it becomes clear that the pattern is all there is. The other can be seen as a pattern the same way that people can (two arms, two legs, etc.), but in the end, what we notice and remember are all the things that deviate from the pattern, and we recognize the person as an individual, even though it may be hard to describe why.

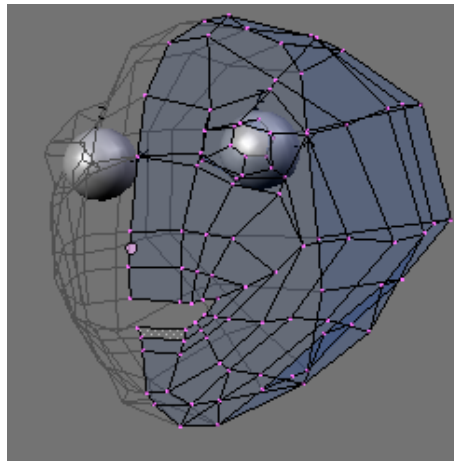


FIGURE 24.1 Down in the Groove: a stick figure

The use of C_{sus4} chords instead of F is a case in point: the pattern — the three-chord pattern of most western music — prescribes F, and it is perfectly possible to play F everywhere there is a C_{sus4} . But Dylan doesn't want that. The slot which schematically is an F chord, is occupied with every possible shade of chord between C and F. The differences are hinted at more than stated.

It is as if he is saying: this may be a song with a fixed verse and chord structure, but musically, this isn't poetry, it's prose. It's a human talking freely, someone speaking guitar — not someone following and (ful)filling a given pattern.

The same variability can be seen on the rhythmical level. *Delia* is the most extreme case. The wait before the final "All the friend I ever had are gone" is differently long every time. Sometimes the basic pulse is maintained, but more often it is not. It is borderline annoying. The performance is balancing on the edge of falling apart, but miraculously it doesn't. Again: the variations give body where the plain structure is just dead surface.



FIGURE 24.2 World Gone Wrong: a body in sound

Greatest of them all, **'Broke Down Engine'**: Dylan's best guitar track since 'Hero Blues', the outtake from *Freewheelin'*. The rhythmic drive and the precision of the playing is fabulous. The "Lordy lord" part is amazing, in more ways than one: It's well played, of course, but it is also a good illustration of the synergy of body languages: I find it impossible to sing that line without a guitar, but effortless when the two are together.

I've always heard this song as the shadow of a rock history in miniature. There is a clear connection between Dylan's version and Blind Willie McTell's original, but despite the strong continuity, Dylan could never have played the way he does without forty years of rock in his baggage. This is not to say that Dylan's version is a rock'n'roll song — far from it. But there is an energy, a punch, an attack in the playing which is not and could never have been there in Blind Willie's playing — because he hadn't heard Chuck Berry and Little Richard.

MOUTH LANGUAGE

I haven't said anything about the texts. That's not because I don't care about them — on the contrary, I feel very strongly about many of them. But while my most common impression of the interplay between words and music is that the music may enhance the words, it is the other way around here: I hear the lyrics as a commentary to the music. If I can identify with the ragged and

dirty one who sneaks out the back door when his lover's husband comes home,
it is because I can identify first with the riff and the bodily state it puts me in.

Chapter 25

Can't Wait (1997)

TWO THINGS IN PARTICULAR make *Tell Tale Signs* a god-send for the Dylan analyst. One is that it shows how tightly interconnected Dylan's last three albums are, not only musically but also lyrically: text fragments and themes float between them as if they were part of the same triple album. The other is that it gives an opportunity to study the process that so many musicians who have worked with him have mentioned: that songs can change radically from one session to the other or even between takes. The three versions of "Can't Wait" are particularly revealing in this respect.

THE STORY IN BRIEF

Here's how I imagine the story behind the song (for the record: when I refer to the narrator as "Dylan", it is in the sense outlined in "Dylan the postmodernist"; when I refer to him as "I", it's because that's how the narrator refers to himself, not because of any attempt on my part to assume the protagonist's part in the story – of course not):

Dylan has had an affair (extra-marital? "I've been drinking / drinking forbidden juices" . . .) with a woman and fallen deeply in love with her. But he can't have her (either because she's out of reach, too good to get, doesn't want him, or because she belongs to someone else), and he goes through a deep depression, but he gradually gets over it, gets a grip of himself, becomes more rational about it. In the process, it is shown how depression turns to frustration and frustration breeds anger.

The album version takes place somewhere at the beginning of this last stage, the original versions in the middle of the whole process. The album version is a song about longing for something outside – you, people, places, love – whereas the original was a song about a longing inside – for the internal power and presence of you and love.

The original is a love song – a song about love, about the pain of love and about the longing for death as a last desperate way out of it.

The later version is *not* a love song but a *loss* song – a song about the pain of loss, and about death as the logical consequence of this loss.

The differences between the versions is condensed in three sets of lyric changes, relating to the State of Mind of the Love Sick, The Object of Veneration, and The Way Out.

For simplicity's sake, I mostly treat the two outtake versions as one

“THAT’S HOW IT IS” – OK, BUT HOW EXACTLY, AND WHERE DOES IT
LEAD?

One line is used in all three versions, but in three different ways which represent three stages of the desperate man's relation to the world. “That's how it is, when . . .”

The first time it's about the realization that I can't get a grip on the world:

Every day,
I can't say if I want the pain to end or not
Well, the blindness overtaking me
is beating like a drum
I don't know where it starts
or where it's coming from
That's how it is
when I try to concentrate

That's how it is when I try to concentrate: there's pain, and the pain is so sweet or so all-encompassing that I can't do without it, because without it, I'll be losing myself. But it also makes me senseless, unaware of up and down, blind and deaf from the pounding of drums or hearts, and the more I try to grasp it, focus on it, concentrate on it, the more it disappears. I don't know where it comes from – could be from the outside, could be from within.

The lack of concentration stems from desperate pain, and it leads nowhere.

In version #2 we find the lines that ended up being used in “Sugar Baby” on *Love and Theft*:

I pretend
being close to her is where I don't belong
Well, my back is to the sun
because the light is too intense
I can see what everybody
in the world is up against
That's how it is
when things disintegrate.

I'm cut off from community, but with a heightened sense of reality; that combination can drive a man insane and make the world fall apart.

Where do I belong?

With her.

Can I be there?

No.

Can I be anywhere else?

No, because I belong with her.

Can I be with her?

No. Etc.

Pain is the path to realization. I can see the world, the reality *that* I desire and *in which* I desire (the desire is no longer just a pain within), but I can't get there, and things fall apart.

Concentration is no longer the problem – disintegration is: I do get a grip of the world, and I realize that it's falling apart.

The third version is yet another take on the question “how is it when . . .” Here, I realize that it's not the world that is falling apart after all, it's me, and I don't give a damn:

It doesn't matter anymore where I go,
I just go
If I ever saw you comin'
I don't know what I might do
I'd like to think I could control myself,
but it isn't true
That's how it is
when things disintegrate

The sense of being cut off from what I want, the incongruity between desire and reality, is still there. This time, there not just disorientation clouding everything or disconnection from everything, but the realization that there may be an outcome to the mess, an active element, but it's potentially violent. I will probably not be able to control myself.

Interestingly, the next album in Dylan's recent “trilogy”, *Love and Theft* could be seen as a theme album about tenderness turning violent: just about every song has a moment of a threatening mayhem in the midst of loving bliss. (Cf. “A Day Above Ground Is a Good Day”). On “Can't Wait” we have the same thing within the song's own development.

FROM "GETTING TO YOU" TO "CONTROLLING THE THING"

The second motion goes from love as an inner condition which has lost its direction, to love as a thing which has been lost. One couplet sums up this difference and perhaps the whole development of the song. In the early version, in one of the most naked vocals ever, Dylan sings,

Skies are grey
Life is short,
and I think of her a lot.

Just like that. Three facts are stated. They stand there side by side without any causal or dependency relationship between them. There's sorrow and pain. It's going to end, somehow, sooner or later. Meanwhile, I think of her. A lot. I think of her a lot. I do.

A lot.

Compared to the emotional turmoil of the surrounding verses, this is like a sudden glimpse of sanity or calm in the hurricane's eye.

Later, it goes:

Skies are grey
I'm looking for anything that will bring a happy glow

The elements are the same: The skies are still gray; there is the quest for happiness (which here replaces death as a way to end the sadness – a reasonable exchange); and there is the focus. But where this used to be a directionless whirlwind of thought about *her*, it now has a direction: there's this *thing* I'm looking for that might end it. Cause and effect.

Love. That's the thing. It is no longer a feeling or a condition, but a thing, and most of the song is spent wondering where it is and how to get it back:

I've tried to *recover* the sweet love that we knew
Well *your loveliness* has wounded me,
I'm reeling from the blow
I wish I knew *what* it was
that keeps me loving you so

and:

I left *my life* with you
somewhere back there along the line

Love has moved from the inside to the outside, and so has the main line of action. I am now standing outside the gate, wondering how to get to the inside. What is earlier best seen as metaphorical, internal landscapes becomes more concrete. In the bridge, the "rolling through stormy weather" is first

placed next to a distressed state of mind, later next to a hypothetical travelogue of love:

First:

I'm torn and I'm tattered
I've been rolling through the stormy weather
My heart's been shattered
But I'm holding all the parts of it together.

Later, love itself comes as a curse from the outside:

I'm doomed to love you.
I've been rolling through stormy weather
I'm thinkin' of you
and all the places we could roam together.

CAN'T WAIT – BUT FOR WHAT?

This leaves one phrase to be discussed: the title line. In itself, it can be used both in the literal sense and as an idiomatic expression, meaning “looking forward to”, as in “I can't wait to see that movie”. The song explores both these options, as well as the undecidedness about what to wait for.

The song starts with a statement which in isolation might have sounded like “I'm so excited – I just can't wait!” The effect is the same as in “Summer Days” off *Love and Theft*: it may sound nice, but the point is that those nice days are *gone*.

After the initial “Can't wait for you to change your mind”, there is no indication in the early versions that there is anything in particular that is being waited for: it's the waiting itself that is unbearable. All the themes that fall under the “That's how it is” heading are part of this. There is nothing worth waiting for, and that makes the waiting a directionless pain.

In the version on *Time out of Mind*, on the other hand, there is a development. The first verse is really just about the outer circumstances and a man trying to find his way around and within them. The wait is that of a hunter or a guard, patiently posted, people going up and down and here I am.

In the second verse, love is introduced, as a thing which can wound and bind, be lost and – perhaps – recovered. There's the awareness of inside and outside, and me

... breathin' hard
standin' at the gate,

and the concluding

I don't know
how much longer I can wait

would probably continue "... before I break in".

In this perspective, the lines "I wish I knew what it was / that keeps me loving you so" get their natural continuation: "... so that I could cut it off (one way or the other)".

This potential for violence is made explicit in the third verse with the "I'd like to think I could control myself" lines.

In general, this version is about balance: walking the line, thinking straight, holding oneself *back*, where the earlier attention was to holding the parts of the shattered heart *together*. In the earlier versions, balance isn't an issue – it's not "I" who is thinking of walking the line, keeping the balance act – it's "you" who will hopefully step out on the thin, uncertain line, take the risk.

The End of Time

The last verse is about death in both versions, but even when the same words are used, the statements are radically different.

My hands are cold,
the end of time has just begun.

becomes

It's mighty funny:
the end of time has just begun.

The first is a premonition of death: this is it. In an earlier verse, all feeling was swallowed up by the pain. Now, senses are awakened, only to find that what one is reawakened to, is the end. The new version takes a step back and looks at this with wry sarcasm: it's mighty funny. Yes, isn't it ironic, as Alanis says, but that is something one can't see when one is in the middle of it.

"CAN'T WAIT" AND THE *Blood on the Tracks* EFFECT

If there is one area where Dylan shines, it's in the ability to transform a heart-wrenching expression of desperation over an unfulfilled personal relation into a detached, poetic report of how a desperate man deals with the world. Many have held that this is what he did it on "Idiot Wind" and other of the *Blood on the Tracks* songs: that the revised lyrics removed the most personal element from the texts – moving from "I'm sad" in the original versions to "You're

stupid” or “**this** sucks” in the new ones – and that this made the songs less powerful.

I’m not sure if I agree with this: the final version of Blood on the Tracks has tremendous songs, which goes to show that hiding one’s feelings does not necessarily make a lesser song, just as baring them does not guarantee greatness.

Be that as it may, my first impression was that this was exactly the case with “Can’t wait”. The earlier versions are breathtaking in their emotionality and intensity. The version that was released on *Time Out Of Mind*, on the other hand, has some great lines, but I never quite warmed to it. At first, I blamed this on the “*Blood on the Tracks* effect”.

But I have changed my mind: this is *not* a cop-out – Dylan is not hiding his true feelings – he is displaying his feelings at a different stage in the process. I just find it much more rewarding to listen to the earlier stage.

I have no clear answer as to why this is so. The eleven years of familiarity with the Time Out Of Mind version may be part of it – hearing the song anew is refreshing.

Also, if the dominating emotion in the earlier versions is sadness and in the later frustration, the former lends itself more easily to a “likeable” performance than the latter.

This is so, not because people are the sadists that Dylan implicitly chastized when he told Mary Travers in an interview: “A lot of people tell me they enjoy that album. It’s hard for me to relate to . . . people enjoying that type of pain”, but because there’s a difference between experiencing pain, experiencing someone else’s pain, and experience someone’s communicated expression of experienced pain. Pain may not be enjoyable – neither one’s own nor someone else’s – but artistic expressions of pain are: they are not painful in themselves, neither for the listener nor (necessarily) for the artist.

When painful songs can be so enjoyable, it’s because they are like emotional candy: anyone who has ever sighed in grief (and who know enough about the cultural codes of orchestral music to recognize the gesture) can relate to the “sighing” descending seconds in baroque music, and anyone who is asked:

Did you ever lay awake at night,
your face turned to the wall?

will have to answer: “Yes I have – I know how you feel!” There’s no fuss, no intellectual filter, no web of metaphors to entangle, just basic human emotion seen from the outside. It is art’s equivalent to the four basic tastes: sweet, sour, bitter, and salt.

That the emotions are simple, basic, does not mean that it's simple to produce them, or that works that are based in these emotions are worth less than those presenting more complex ones. One might even say that since it is so simple to add some sugar to a cake to make simple tastes happy, it takes skill and courage to use the sugar in less blunt ways. That's what Dylan – the *pâtissier* of rock 'n' roll – does, here and on *Blood on the Tracks*.

It's more complicated with the *Time out of Mind* version. The semi-self-conscious detachment from the world and from oneself; the mixture of cool and warm which may snap at any point; the love-based violence – these are more complex emotions, not kids' stuff.

The later version is filled with clichés and commonplaces: “my heart can't go on beating without you”, “some on their way up, / some on their way down”, “Night or day”, “rollin' through stormy weather”, “Oh honey, you're still the one”, etc. Add to this the way love is moved from inside to outside, and one may easily suspect that we are witnessing a de-emotionalization of the song.

That's probably why I didn't quite like the song when this was the only version we had. Seeing where it comes from, and how it fits into the larger picture of the *Time* triptych, however, it seems more as if all these words have been put in there, not to hide the true feelings, but as a poetic representation of how it is that one hides one's feelings; the protective measures one takes when the pain of love is so remote as to be manageable but not remote enough to have lost its power.

*'A day above ground is a good day'*¹

BOB DYLAN'S 'LOVE AND THEFT' (2001)

BOB DYLAN – the 'Voice of a Generation' in the 1960s, the self-appointed gypsy and divorce poet in the 70s, the sulphur-fuming prophet in the years around 1980, who through a series of mediocre albums in the following years lost whatever he may have had left of commercial status – what does he have to say today, forty years after he first entered the stage? Quite a lot, actually.

In 1997 Dylan released *Time Out Of Mind*, which not only became his best-selling album ever, but which was also generally lauded, by critics and fans alike. The follow-up *Love and Theft* has already positioned itself at the top of the charts, and all worried predictions that Dylan would do as he usually has done: follow up a masterpiece with an unengaged embarrassment, have been put to rest.

DYLAN AND CHRISTIANITY, WOMAN, AND LOVE

When Dylan issued the album *Slow Train Coming* in 1979, it was a surprise to most of his fans: the protest singer, beatnik, former Jew even, had converted to Christianity, and to one of the more extremely evangelist directions, at that: the Vineyard Fellowship in California. The message that is conveyed on *Slow Train Coming* and the two following albums, *Saved* and *Shot of Love*, is uncompromising. The lyrics, especially on *Slow Train*, are marked by the strong conviction that we are living in the endtimes and that Judgement Day is just around the corner.

¹This article was originally written for the journal *Transfiguration, Nordic Journal for Christianity and the Arts*, hence the emphasis on connections with Christianity, which in a different context would have been less pronounced. What was originally footnotes have been placed in square brackets in this version.

As it turned out, that particular day didn't dawn (although Dylan himself saw the events in Afghanistan in 1980 as a confirmation of his exegesis of the end time prophecy of the Revelation), and the original fire gradually changed into a more nuanced understanding of Christianity, in which there was room for more than dystopias and over-zealous evangelization. In the years since, there have been much speculation about Dylan's religion. To the extent that religious themes have occurred in his lyrics, the threads have gone to Jewish just as much as to Christian thought.² At the same time, he has on several occasions stated that he does not believe in organized religious communities: 'I find the religiosity and philosophy in the music. [...] I don't adhere to rabbis, preachers, evangelists, all of that. I've learned more from the songs than I've learned from any of this kind of entity. The songs are my lexicon. I believe in the songs.'³

Several authors have pointed to another motive that seems to have been inseparable from Dylan's religiosity: Woman and Love. Dylan's own salvation history can be read as the story of the development of his relation to these two, which for Dylan are almost one and the same. Not only was it through a woman (the actor Mary Alice Artes) that Dylan came in touch with the evangelical Christianity. This is also a topic that recurs in many of the songs, both from the time of his conversion and the years before it: the redemption, salvation even, through carnal love. In a song like 'Shelter from the Storm' from *Blood on the Tracks* (1975) Dylan gives the I-character christological overtones ('In a little hilltop village they gambled for my clothes [...] 'Come in,' she said, 'I'll give you shelter from the storm'), while the association between salvation and earthly, carnal love is explicit also in the songs after his conversion ('Change My Way Of Thinking' on *Slow Train Coming*, 1979 has: 'I got a God-fearing woman, One I can easily afford | She can do the Georgia Crawl, She can walk in the spirit of the Lord').⁴

² *Infidels* (1983) contains the song 'Neighbourhood Bully', which is an open defense of Israel; 'Not Dark Yet' from *Time Out Of Mind* (1997) contains a direct quotation from a talmudic rabbi, and the same is the case with Dylan's acceptance speech at the Grammy show in 1991.

³ Newsweek, Oct 6, 1997

⁴ The exact content of the expression 'the Georgia Crawl' is unclear, but its sexual connotations are not. Dylan has probably taken it from Blind Willie McTell's 'Broke Down Engine', which he recorded in the early 90s: 'What made me love my woman, she can really do the Georgia Crawl.'

ANALYSING DYLAN LYRICS

Dylan is often credited for having brought *meaning* into popular music through his lyrics. That is not the same as saying that it's always clear what his songs *mean*. On the contrary, Dylan's poetics is based on a resistance against clear-cut meanings; instead he puts together seemingly unrelated images, characters and situations in a collage which becomes confusing if one searches for exact meanings. But if one lets that go, it is easier to approach his technique: some of his greatness as a poet lies in his ability to serve the listener with a web of associations and semi-graspable connections, in a way that imitates how the mind works, and which therefore gives the listener a point of departure for *creating* meaning, which by far exceeds what 'meaningful' lyrics, which say what they want to say but nothing more, can give.

One of the texts that is often mentioned in this connection, is 'Desolation Row' (1965), which may serve as an example here, both of Dylan's technique and of my own analytical vantage point. The song begins: 'They're selling postcards of the hanging, they're painting the passports brown. The beauty-parlor's filled with sailors, the circus is in town.' The cast that glides by in the song, is slightly surrealistic: Einstein disguised as Robin Hood, Dr. Filth with his world in a leather cup, the death-romantic Ophelia, Cinderella as a street-sweeper, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot fighting it out on the Titanic.

What, then, do these brown-painted passes *mean*? Is it a grand metaphor of suppression in the modern society, an expression of the status of art, or something completely different? It is hard to tell, first and foremost because Dylan usually does not take his images and metaphors from coherent motivic circles, which would have opened up for 'holistic' interpretations where the motives support each other. I therefore prefer a simplistic model of interpretation, where 'brown passports' means 'brown passports', Cinderella is Cinderella, and Romeo is the lover of Juliet, and then see what happens.

This is not as simple as it may sound: in order to do this, we must first know what a brown passport really is, which involves all the associations we have to each of the words, the connection between them and between similar concepts that are invariably actualized in the juxtaposition of these concepts: 'brown passport' then becomes the outcome of the cluster of meaning 'colour – identity – document', etc., with all the layers of symbols and associations that each of these brings with it – in short: a never ending chain of connections that can in principle not be delineated: in the end it embraces our entire world and world view, seen from one perspective: that of the brown passports.

Usually it is not meaningful to stretch this horizon of understanding and interpretation beyond the song itself and its references to someone's (Dylan's, the listeners) reality.⁵ A close reading of *Love and Theft*, however, seems to support an interpretation of the entire album as a more or less unified whole, where certain central motives turn up in song after song, weaving themselves around and within each other throughout the record: the main motives are the same, but their value changes, gets reverted: the important becomes unimportant, the innocent becomes dangerous, and what remains when a song is over, changes from song to song, depending on which motives are connected, and how. Sometimes several motives are combined in an action- and idea-packed narrative of great dramatic force, other times the 'narrative' comes to a halt, and the world is regarded from one single perspective – be it good or bad – that dominates entirely. This can perhaps be likened to the function of the aria in opera: characters step out of the action for a moment, to present their view of things, from *their* perspective.

This motivic web even extends beyond the songs on this album, and include both Dylan's earlier production, and a more general Western symbolic universe, above all the Christian and the American, and the combination of these: the Christianization of 'Americana'.⁶

The primary legitimation for using a model of analysis like this, which might easily turn into a self-fulfilling hunt for hidden connections, is that this procedure has a precursor in Dylan's own production. The four-hour film *Renaldo & Clara* from 1978 was composed around motives, characters, colours, symbols, in a similar manner. Allen Ginsberg witnessed the process, and explains the working method as follows:

⁵The 'Dylanologist' A. J. Weberman, who was in close (too close, in Dylan's opinion) contact with Dylan in the early 70s, has made attempts to read a consistent symbolic language into Dylan's texts, so that 'rain' always means e.g. 'war' or 'heroin' etc., but this can hardly be regarded as more than a curiosity. Central to his 'investigation' was a methodical scrutinizing of Dylan's garbage, in the search for discarded scribbles and other important material. Weberman's interpretations stem from an obsession to prove that Dylan is a drug addict and that he has AIDS. They used to be accessible on the web site www.dylanology.com, but he has not been able to maintain it, apparently because he's in jail – for drug crimes.

⁶It is not a coincidence that Dylan in recent years has expanded his catalogue with a number of songs by the profoundly Christian *and* profoundly American bluegrass group The Stanley Brothers, with titles such as 'Hallelujah, I'm ready to go' and 'I'm the Man, Thomas' ('Look at the nail scars here in my hand').

He shot about 110 hours of film or more, and he looked at all the scenes. Then he put all the scenes on index cards, according to some preconceptions he had when he was directing the shooting. Namely, themes: God, rock & roll, art, poetry, marriage, women, sex, Bob Dylan, poets, death – maybe eighteen or twenty thematic preoccupations. Then he also put on index cards all the different characters, as well as scenes. He also marked on index cards the dominant color – blue or red [...] and certain other images that go through the movie, like the rose and the hat, and Indians – American Indian – so that he finally had a cross-file of all that. And then he went through it all again and began composing it, thematically, weaving these specific compositional references in and out. So it's compositional, and the idea was not to have a 'plot', but to have a composition of those themes (quoted from Clinton Heylin: *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades. Take two*, Penguin Books, p. 460).

I will particularly emphasize three such motives on *Love and Theft*. They can be called: The Apocalypse, The River, and Love. Along the way, several others will turn up.

THE APOCALYPSE

The apocalyptic is the carrying motive in two of the songs, which can be regarded as the pillars around which the whole album and its motivic threads spin: 'Mississippi' and 'Highwater (for Charley Patton)'.⁷ The outer connection between the two songs is evident: Highwater takes its point of departure in Charley Patton's description of the big flood in Mississippi in 1927 – the Apocalypse in American form.⁸ This is a prominent feature in both songs. In Highwater it is the thread that goes through the whole song, dominating it to the degree that whatever positive bits of thread that are weaved in, lose

⁷ That the album reached the stores in the morning of September 11th, 2001, the same day and hour as the assault on the World Trade Center in New York, makes the album's apocalyptic strand even more prominent, but as was mentioned, this has been a strong preoccupation for Dylan throughout his career.

⁸ Charley Patton (1891–1934) was one of the 'Fathers of the Delta blues' (for biographical references, see e.g. Robert Santelli: *The Big Book of Blues: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, London: Pavilion, 1994. Patton's life style follows all the clichés for a 'blues man': he was raw and bullyish, enjoyed a good fight, drank heavily, allegedly had eight wives and spent time in prison. His guitar style and song technique had an enormous influence on virtually every blues musician in the following generation, and is both directly and indirectly a model for Dylan's own blues style. Patton's 'High Water Everywhere' is a long description of the flood, even this a topic that Dylan has treated earlier, e.g. in 'Crash on the Levee' and the parodic 'The Big Flood', both from the 1967 Basement Tapes).

their good appearance and become twisted images: *Dance*: ‘You dancing with whom they tell you to, or you don’t dance at all’;⁹ *Art*: ‘I can write you poems, make a strong man lose his mind’; *Justice*: ‘Judge says to the High Sherriff: ‘I want him dead or alive, either way, I don’t care’; *God*: ‘I’m preaching the word of God, I’m putting out your eyes’. Love seemingly keeps its good connotations (‘I just can’t be happy, love, unless you’re happy too’), but still: this is an ambiguous message: he isn’t actually saying that he’s happy, only that *he* can’t be happy unless *she* is, and judging from the gloomy mood of the song, there really isn’t any reason why she would be. All that remains is the threat of the not-lasting, destruction, the Apocalyptic – hammered in through the refrains: ‘It’s tough out there’, ‘Things are breaking up out there’, ‘I don’t care’, ‘It’s bad out there’, ‘It’s rough out there’.

At the same time, *Highwater* isn’t primarily a song about a natural disaster. Rather, the physical calamity is the metaphorical starting point for the *real* topic of the song: the way people react and interact when they are left to themselves in a pressured situation (be it flood or love), where the solitude and the pressure are allowed to dominate: ‘“Don’t reach out for me,” she said, “Can’t you see I’m drowning too?”’

Highwater is a monothematic movement *à la* Haydn, both lyrically and musically. Just as the feeling of disaster pervades the lyrics, so the sound is dark and monotonous. The verses are dominated by a solitary banjo, which not primarily (but also) is a reminiscing gesture to Patton and the delta-blues; even more, it underlines the loneliness and hopelessness in the song itself: it fills its part of the soundscape, high above the rest of the sonorous field and without any contact with it, where its manic plucking over a sustained chord turns into a musical representation of the nightmare situation where you run and run without ever getting anywhere. The refrains are accompanied by ominous thunder in the drums and growls from deep male voices.

THE RIVER

‘Mississippi’ is dramatically different, despite the common point of departure. Even here the Apocalyptic is the framework for the narrative, established already in the second line of the song: ‘Your days are numbered and so are mine [...] Nowhere to escape,’ and: ‘Sky full of fire, pain pouring down’. The song

⁹ This article was written before the official lyrics were available. All quotations from the album are my own, unofficial, transcriptions, and they may be erroneous.

culminates in wreckage and death: 'Well, my ship's been split to splinters and it's sinking fast. I'm drowning in the poison, got no future, got no past.'

But still, 'Mississippi' is a fundamentally positive, life-inspiring song. The difference from Highwater is noticeable already in the music: Highwater is dark and heavy, Mississippi has one of the few ascending bass lines in Dylan's production (with prominent exceptions, such as 'Like a Rolling Stone'), and a lighter sound overall. But even more interesting are the lyrical differences. Again, the disaster situation is rather to be interpreted as a human (and inter-human) condition, but unlike Highwater's isolated fates, it is instead the *possibility* of communication that is explored. The River is still the river of flood and drowning, but at the same time it is used as an image of the Crossing of boundaries ('I crossed that river just to be where you are'). If we bring the two together, we get a complex metaphor of the dangers of being close to someone – a human-life version of the Biblical 70,000 fathoms, if one likes: approaching another human being is a voluntary matter ('some people will offer you their hand, and some won't', as it is said in the second verse), but doing so entails a danger, one enters unknown territory, and there is no way back ('You can always come back, but you can't come back all the way', third verse).

A development seems to take place within the song, concerning the possibility of communication, from 'We're all boxed in' in the first verse to 'Stick with me baby, stick with me anyhow' in the last. One of the steps through which this development goes, is the insight: 'All my powers of expression, my thoughts so sublime, could never do you justice in reason or rhyme'.¹⁰

¹⁰ This can be seen as yet another one of the small motifs that recur here and there on the record, which in this case may (possibly) be traced back to Petrarch's Canto 332, *Mia benigna fortuna: I miei gravi sospir non vanno in rime, e 'l mio duro martir vince ogni stile* ('and my heavy sighs can not be brought into rhyme, and my hard fate conquers every style'). In 'Mississippi' the narrator takes Petrarch's position: Love cannot be described, captured in poetry, whereas in 'Bye And Bye' he states, seemingly matter-of-factly, that 'I'm singing love's praises in sugar-coated rhyme' (see below). It is not obvious that Dylan has known these lines from Petrarch, but there is in fact a more or less direct link between them, which at least invites speculation: in *Tangled Up In Blue* (1975) the I-person follows a woman home to her place, where she reads for him from a 'book of poems written by an Italian poet from the thirteenth century'. Well, Petrarch didn't live in the thirteenth century, but in an interview Dylan once intimated, in his usual, anti-intellectual way, that the poet's name is 'Plutarch' (Dylan: 'I like that song. Yeah, that poet from the Thirteenth Century.' McGregor: 'Who was that?' Dylan: 'Plutarch. Is that his name?' McGregor: 'Yeah'. Craig McGregor interview, 12 March 1978. Published in *New Musical Express* on 22 April 1978). Even thematically Petrarch seems to be a likely candidate, with his personal relation, rich in contrasts, to Woman, not unlike what Dylan expresses in other songs.

Not only the border towards other people is crossed, but also the limits of time. Even here there's a development through the song, from a perception of time as a physical burden ('time's piling up'), to an almost Augustinian concept of time, where time, in the moment of crossing, disappears completely ('got no future, got no past').¹¹

All through the song, the boundary-crossing is represented as a journey, and here lies the main difference between 'Mississippi' and 'Highwater': in 'Highwater' the protagonist is content with his closedness and standstillness – and it all ends in disaster; *here*, on the contrary, the *necessity* of the journey is emphasised ('Everybody got to move somewhere'), both related to communication and to time, and through the insight about this necessity (which despite its hints at 'fate's decree' nevertheless does not end up in fatalism, because it is based on the necessity of choice), the fearful in the disaster dissolves. Therefore the apocalyptic climax in the central 'wreck-scene' quoted above, ends in reconciliation and harmonious redemption, not in fear: 'But my heart is not weary, it's light and it's free. I got nothing but affection for those who've sailed with me' – one of the most loving lines Dylan has ever written.

Likewise, in Mississippi the presence of evil is counterbalanced by the good, and, unlike in Highwater, the good is allowed to stand for itself: Highwater's ambiguous concern is here explicit and clear: 'I know you're sorry, I'm sorry too'. Thus, even though the last verse brings drowning and death as a consequence of the Crossing, and ends with the refrain 'I stayed in Mississippi a day too long', it is still the tender declarations of love that remain when the song is over: 'give me your hand and say you'll be mine' – in dramatical contrast to Highwater's 'Don't reach out for me, can't you see I'm drowning too?'

Two further motives are worth mentioning, because they show up in other songs as well. The transformation from the 'Highwater'ian isolationism to the last verse's empathy goes through the lines: 'Walking through the leaves falling from the trees, feeling like a stranger nobody sees.' The same foliage shows up time after time on the album, as a symbol of comprehension – either the one not reached, as in 'Lonesome Day Blues' ('Last night the wind was whispering,

That the quoted line has been of a certain import for Dylan, appears, not only from it being the emotional climax of 'Tangled up in Blue', but also from the fact that after his conversion, fall 1978, precisely this line was re-written: now, the quotes are from the Bible and Jeremiah.

¹¹ Augustine's discussion of time, where he concludes that neither the past nor the present exists, other than in memory, can be found in his *Confessiones*, book II.

I was trying to make out what it was'), or the appropriated, dogmatic truth of 'Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum': 'They walk among the stately trees They know the secrets of the breeze', see below). As a motive, this reaches back to at least two earlier Dylan songs: 'Blowin' in the wind' from 1962 – the answer is there, in the wind, for whoever so wishes to pick it up, but at the same time: who can catch the wind? – and 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall': 'I heard ten thousand whispering and nobody listening.'

'The Tree' is in itself a motive with branches in many directions, appearing both as one element of the idyll in 'Floater', with leaves rustling in a mild summer breeze and logs crackling on the hearth, and as menacing ghosts in the concealed *murder ballad* 'Moonlight' ('The branches cast their shadows over stone. Won't you meet me out in the moonlight alone').¹²

Lastly, one of the Journey associations in 'Mississippi', is, maybe surprisingly, the Journey motives in the Biblical Christmas narrative. Both the wise men – 'I got here following the southern star' – and Mary's mule – 'Well, the devil's in the alley, mule's in the stall' – are represented. In 'Floater' too, the Christmas motive shows up, as one of the joyful memories of the untroubled past ('I had 'em [i.e. dreams and hopes] once, though, I suppose, | To go along with all the ring dancing, Christmas Carols on all the Christmas Eves').

LOVE

Several of the other songs treat motives that may be referred to the Love motive in different ways. What they have in common is that they – again like opera arias – choose one perspective at the time, and try them out.

In an interview from 1981 Dylan comments on a phrase in one of his new songs – 'the politics of sin' – saying that 'Yes, that's what sin is: politics'.¹³ In 'Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee' he characterizes this version of the political

¹² This last motive is also closely related to the culminating lines in another classic Dylan song, 'Mr Tambourine Man' (1965): 'Take me disappearing through the smoke rings of my mind, | down the foggy ruins of time, | far past the frozen leaves, | The haunted, frightened trees, / out to the windy beach, | Far from the twisted reach of crazy sorrow.' Here the Tree offers a whole chain of images in a *rite de passage* away from 'the twisted reach of crazy sorrow', out to the freedom on the beach, where one can dance 'with one hand waving free'. (As an aside, one might, at least in a parenthesis, wonder when was the last time Dylan himself did that; his present-day persona doesn't invite that kind of images. Then again, that's his concern only.)

¹³ From an interview by Neil Spencer: 'The diamond voice within', *New Musical Express*, 5. August, 1981, s. 29–31. Quoted from <http://www.interferenza.com/>.

man. The characters are borrowed from Lewis Carroll's *Through The Looking Glass*, where they are the archetypal unruly brothers: well attuned to each other, but just as quickly at each others' throats, if necessary – or if just so happens; not really evil, rather indifferent, unaffected, careless. In a central scene they recite the poem 'The walrus and the carpenter'¹⁴ for Alice, where it is hard to tell who of the protagonists is the most greedy: one grabs *most* but the other one eats *as much as he can* (Alice concludes: 'they were *both* very unpleasant characters'.)

Dylan's couple isn't much better. Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee are in the mason's trade ('They run a brick and tile company'), and they fulfill every cliché about the slightly mafiotic craftsman with affairs on the side, who owns the world and takes what he wants: 'Looking at a window with a pecan pie | Lot of things they'd like they would never buy'. They own the truth in the same manner ('They know the secret of the breeze'). When they 'trust their fate to the hands of God', they don't do so in religious confidence, but in somnambulous indifference – *they* certainly don't feel any need to take fate in their own hands, but if he up there wants to, that's entirely up to him. They're living in 'the land of Nod' – the land to which Cain was exiled after his fratricide. And it is not a nice neighbourhood that is presented in the song. All traces of love and good thoughts are twisted, with money as the only measurement of value, if at all there is one: 'I got love for you, and it's all in vain', 'My pretty baby, she's looking around. She's wearing a multi-thousand dollar gown.' 'Well, they're living in a happy harmony [. . .] They're one day older and a dollar short, They got a paid permit and a police escort'. The song is full of bizarre images and scenes, culled from the border land between the horror cabinet and the boy pranks:

Brains in a pot, they're beginning to boil
They're dripping with garlic and olive oil,
...
They're throwing knives into the tree
...
Two big bags of dead man's bones.

The song ends with a final assessment of their relationship: 'Tweedle Dee is a low-down sorry old man. | Tweedle Dum, he'll stab you where you stand. | 'I've had too much of your company,' | Said Tweedle Dum to Tweedle Dee.'

¹⁴ In connection with Dylan it is almost impossible not to associate the title with Dylan himself, whose original surname was Zimmermann ('carpenter'), and John Lennon with his song 'I am the Walrus', which was based on the same poem

'Floater (too much to ask)' is in a way a counter-image to 'Tweedle Dum'. Throughout most of the song, we are presented with a relaxed, almost idyllic mood, where bees are buzzing, leaves are stirring, and trees inspire neither insight nor fear, but simply heat, as firewood ('There's a new grove of trees on the outskirts of town [...] | Timber, two foot six across, | burns with the bark still on. [...] You can smell the pine wood burning.')

Even though the River isn't explicitly mentioned in the lyrics, it is apparent that the story takes place by the riverside, and the very title of the song points to yet another aspect of the River as a metaphor: that which floats by, always and never the same. The 'Floater' existence should not be misunderstood as carefree, but the cares are not given any importance. Motives that in other connections (other songs) become fatal or problematic, just float by, not unnoticed, but without import, with comments like: 'It doesn't matter in the end' and 'We will just have to see how it goes.' Some of the verses sound like comments on other songs. 'They [perhaps the flood victims in 'Highwater?'] say times are hard, | It don't bother me, times are hard everywhere | We will just have to see how it goes.' 'One of the bosses' hangers-on [Tweedle Dum or Tweedle Dee?], trying to bully you, strong-arm you, inspire you with fear: | it has the opposite effect.' The wind, which elsewhere make leaves whisper and boats sink, is here almost ridiculed: 'Sometimes it's just plain stupid | to get into any kind of wind.'

The perhaps most beautiful strophe tells lovingly about the grandparents: 'My grandfather was a duck-trapper | he could do it with just dragnets and ropes. | My grandmother could sew new dresses out of old cloth, | I don't know if they had any dreams or hopes.' This description flows straight into a rejection of such things as dreams or hopes on the part of the narrator: 'I had them once, though, I suppose'. And the context in which the strophe occurs, is far from idyllic: to begin with, he states that 'If you ever try to interfere with me or cross my path again, | you do so at the peril of your own life. / I'm not as cool or forgiving as I sound'. What is described is a breakup scene; a demanding partner is thrown out, and the unyieldingness involved in this, stands in sharp contrast to the seemingly peaceful mood elsewhere in the song. But this is the central motive in 'Floater' – the cool, disinterested observation, as a price to pay to get away from the deeper problems. Both the price and the reward are paid in hopes and dreams: he has escaped them, but also had to let them go.

We find some of the 'Floater' mood also in 'Bye and Bye', only with the contrasts drawn to an even stronger extreme. Most of the song is dominated by an uncritical carefreeness, as an example of the above-mentioned phrase

‘I’m singing love’s praises in sugar coated rhymes’, and supported musically by the light swing-jazz arrangement. The last of these ‘sugar-coated rhymes’ is: ‘You were my first love, and you will be my last’. But the very last strophe brutally turns the whole situation upside down, and all of a sudden we are back in the apocalyptic verbiage, this time explicitly connected with a love relation.

Papa gone mad, mama she’s feeling sad.
I’m gonna baptize you in fire so you can sin no more
I’m gonna establish my rule through civil war
Gonna make you see just how loyal and true a man can be!

The same sudden shift to a violent reaction in a seemingly calm and peaceful situation, can be found in just about every song on the album. ‘Lonesome Day Blues’ presents, in strophe after strophe, lost relationships, all in accordance with the first line of the song: ‘Today has been a sad and lonesome day.’ Twice motives from ‘Floater’ turn up: family ties, with the straightforward and honest ‘I wish my mother was still alive’ (Dylan’s own mother died in January 2000), and the breakup from a woman, this time left standing in the doorway, with the crushingly laconic remark: ‘Funny the things you have the hardest time parting with are the things you need the least.’ (Last time, on *Time out of Mind*, the roles were reversed – there it goes: ‘You left me standing in the doorway crying.’; see *The Momentum of Standstill – Time out of Mind and the blues*, p. 51, for a discussion of this song). The end is heralded with the lightly reshaped quote from Virgil: ‘I’m going to spare the defeated, I’m going to speak to the crowd | I’m going to teach peace to the conquered, I’m going to tame the proud’ (The quote is from book 6 in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where Anchises exhorts his son Aeneas about how to rule:

‘Remember, Romans, these will be your arts:
to teach the ways of peace to those you conquer
to spare defeated peoples, tame the proud.¹⁵

In the final strophe there is again the echo of disaster, and again associated with love: ‘The leaves are rustling in the wood, things are falling off the shelf | You’re gonna need my help, sweetheart, you can’t make love all by yourself.’ We recognize the Help motive from ‘Mississippi’ and ‘Highwater’ – here it shows up from yet another perspective.

In ‘Moonlight’, the connection is more subtle. The refrain is an innocent invitation to a saunter in the moonlight, but small hints elsewhere in the text

¹⁵ VI,851–853; from Allen Mandelbaum’s translation, Bantam Books (pp. 160–161).

make us suspect that it may not be going to be a romantic stroll: the air is thick and heavy, twisted trees cast their shadows (See note 12) and 'the earth and sky [...] melt with flesh and bone'. Three lines in the middle of the song sound like a direct comment to 'Floater': 'I'm preaching peace and harmony, the blessings of tranquility, yet I know when the time is right to strike.' Perhaps should the song be seen in relation to the *murder ballad* tradition, as, e.g. in the traditional 'Banks of the Ohio', where the man takes his beloved's life during a walk on the riverside? The narrator in 'Moonlight' does say: 'I'll take you 'cross the river, dear' (like a Charon across the Styx? – again a River metaphor), and we are suddenly not sure if the bells call to a wedding or a funeral: 'For whom does the bell toll for, love? | They toll for you and me.'¹⁶

The bells are ringing in 'Summer Days' too. These bells are explicitly wedding bells, but not even here can we be absolutely sure: 'What looks good in the day, at night is another thing.' This ambiguity is implicit already from the song's title: 'Summer days' foreshadows a light and merry summer song, which is also supported by the poignant rockabilly arrangement. But what the song really is about, is autumn: 'Summer days *are gone*'. This song too is constructed around a series of images and motives that we recognize from other songs: the Help motive ('She's lookin' into my eyes and she's a-holdin' my hand'), Time ('She says, 'You can't repeat the past,' | I say 'You can't? What do you mean you can't? Of course, you can',¹⁷), The River ('standing by God's river, my soul's beginning to shake'), and the breakup – again violent and surprising: 'I'm leavin' in the morning [...], gonna break in the roof, set fire to the place as a parting gift.'

On the surface 'Cry Awhile' is the most explicitly hostile song, with the refrain 'I cried for you, now it's your turn, you can cry awhile', and the final point 'I always said you'd be sorry, and today could be the day. | I might need a good lawyer, could be your funeral, my trial'.¹⁸ Thus, the song seems to point back to 'Moonlight' and 'Floater', from the perspective of the repenting sinner: 'I'm on the fringes of the night, fighting back tears that I can't control

¹⁶ In the Doomsday-laden 'Not Dark Yet' from *Time out of Mind* (1997) we find the line: 'I can hear the church-bells ringing in the yard. I wonder who they're ringing for.'

¹⁷ This line, one of Dylan's most exuberant, is based on a dialogue in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. See this article at <http://pool.dylantree.com/> for a lucid discussion of this connection

¹⁸ *Your Funeral My Trial* is, among other things, the title of an album by Nick Cave (1986). Cave has also recorded an entire album of *Murder Ballads* (1996), which also included Dylan's 'Death is not the End'. This is not to suggest that Dylan has borrowed the line from Cave, but rather to indicate a certain range of connotations.

/... | But I'm crying to the Lord, trying to be meek and mild'. Thereby it is also, in a twisted way, the most loving song – even though the perspective entails that it may perhaps be too late.

All these songs, then, relate to the same basic motive – a breakup from a love relation. It is treated in different ways, from different perspectives, but in the final end, the outcome is always the same. It is as if Dylan wanted to say: no matter where one starts or how one attempts to solve the problem, it ends in disaster. All roads lead to Rome (or to Doom) – whether one wants to get there or not.

The last song on the album, 'Sugar Baby', is a 'Grand Ballad' of the same cut as the closing songs on several Dylan albums. The song begins with the large overview, where the narrator stands alone against the rest of the world, but is in possession of esoteric knowledge, thanks to his alienation: 'I got my back to the sun 'cause the light is too intense. | I can see what everybody in the world is up against.' The recurring theme is again separation – 'Sugar Baby get on down the road, ... | you went years without me, might as well keep going now' – but here the perspective is more distanced than in the earlier songs: sober and motto-like, the state of affairs is presented in cliché-like turns: 'Can't turn back, you can't come back, sometimes we push too far', 'Some of these memories you can learn to live with, and some of them you can't.' His own painful experience of the separation is drawn into the same distanced framework of both understanding and language: 'Your charms have broken many a heart, and mine is surely one.' The deeply personal is mixed with the general, without ever dominating: the generalization 'There ain't no limit to the amount of trouble women bring', leads directly into the next generalization, about love, but with the opposite value: 'Love is pleasing, love is teasing, love – not an evil thing.'

The apocalyptic element is there, but only as a shadow, in another cliché phrase: 'You got a way of tearing the world apart, love', followed by the album's only direct reference to the Apocalypse in a Biblical sense: 'Look up, look up, seek you maker 'fore Gabriel blows his horn.'¹⁹ This *might* be read as if the circle is closed, that the religious redemption is the solution to love's problem, but this would be reading too much into it. Rather, the message – if there is a message – is that just as unfathomable as religious redemption, just as difficult is the 'redemption' of earthly love. By using the one to describe the

¹⁹ The line is a direct quotation from Gene Austin's 'The Lonesome Road' from 1927, which has also contributed with the melody to 'Sugar Baby' – without credits, it might be added.

other, the problem is brought to an existential level, where religious themes are relevant, for comparison or description, but we are not offered any *solution*. As I pointed out in the introduction, this is the strength of Dylan's poetic, and in *Love and Theft* it is generally treated with great care and skill.

From the survey so far one might get the impression that *Love and Theft* is a dark and somber album, and there are certainly plenty of dark strands in the weave. But an equally salient feature is the exuberant joy of pouring out words: the lines are filled to the point where they seem to burst, and the songs are mostly long. They are also filled with humorous flashes, especially puns of the kind that Dylan from time to time has delivered from stage during his shows: 'Call down to room service, say "send up a room"', 'Politician got on his jogging shoes, he must be running for office, got no time to lose.'

THE MUSIC

Love and Theft is not a cycle of poems, it is a record, so a few words about the music is appropriate. Most striking is the total mix of styles, and particularly the unabashed use of swing-jazz from the '30s. On several occasions Dylan has expressed his liking for artists like Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, but he has never used such a style in his own music.²⁰ This may, perhaps surprisingly, explain the musical freshness that pervades the record: when Dylan relates to a style that is new to him (in the capacity of listener, not of performer), it calls for an attentiveness and concentration which is not as compellingly necessary when he sails in the well-known waters of the blues. The same phenomenon could be observed when he, with the fervor of the convert, turned his attention to Gospel music in the late 70s. Add to this that Dylan this time has left more than usual to his musicians, mostly taken from his very experienced and tight touring band. Especially the two guitarists Charlie Sexton and Larry Campbell demonstrate a full command of the various styles that Dylan explores, be it swing or blues. Therefore, Dylan can, for the first time in his career, let his own guitar, one of his trademarks, be as good as absent (and his other trademark: the harmonica, is not heard at all).

It needs to be said that the appealing notion of the 60-year-old Dylan who all of a sudden turns into a 30s' crooner, isn't entirely truthful. There is a reason why the record is called *Love and theft*. The title seems to be a direct

²⁰ But he *has* played covers of this kind of songs during his concerts, with some consistency since the late eighties.

comment to its origin: he has not just 'stolen' the general style of music that he loves – at least four of the songs have 'borrowed' (read: stolen) both melodies and the entire arrangements from songs that were actually written in the 20s and the 30s, performed by Bing Crosby, Billie Holiday and others.²¹ This does not diminish the album's musical merits, but a note on the album sleeve about the origins and composers of the songs, would have been welcome; no such thing can be found.

The other main group of songs consists of variations of the blues pattern. Being a performer who has played the blues during an entire 40-year career, there is remarkably little 'straight' twelve-bar blues in Dylan's catalogue. He is a master in varying the simple blues patterns; it seems like a self-imposed constraint against which he constantly fights. The same can be said about *Love and Theft*. Ca. half of the songs fall in this category. This might have created a certain monotony, but so is in fact not the case. By exploiting large parts of the range of subgenres to which the blues has developed during its 100-years' history (delta blues, rockabilly, heavy, electric Chicago blues etc.), and through variations in phrase length and playful use of little riffs and licks, Dylan and his band manage to keep the listener's attention even in songs that otherwise might have felt too long.

If one particular feature is to be emphasized, it will have to be Dylan's continuous 'struggle' against the dominant. In its most common form the blues pattern is a principally uncompleted, cyclic form, where each round through the scheme ends with a strong dominant figure (e.g. the 'turnaround') which leads back to the keynote and the next verse. Dylan, on his part, has always preferred to tone down this function, either through different 'diverting manoeuvres', by modifying the dominant chord (e.g. by using an 11th chord, which in effect is a subdominant chord with a dominant bass), or by leaving out the dominant altogether. This is the case for most of the blues numbers on *Love and Theft*. Particularly elegant in this respect is 'Cry Awhile', which is never even close to the dominant, but precisely through its absence where it is expected the most, makes itself all the more felt. By treating the dominant

²¹ 'Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum' is taken from Johnnie and Jack's 'Uncle John's Bongos', 'Bye and Bye' is based on 'Having Myself a Time' by Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger, sung by Billie Holiday, 'Floater' is based on 'Snuggled On Your Shoulders' by Lombardo/Young – and has lifted several central lines from Junichi Saga's 'Confessions of a Yakuza', and 'Sugar Baby' is based on 'The Lonesome Road' by Austin/Shilkret, sung by Gene Austin, from which it has also taken the line 'Look up, look up, seek your maker | Fore Gabriel blows his horn'.

in this way the character of chord *progressions* is weakened – the different scale steps are instead treated as *stations*, freed from the course of time. In a subtle way this accords with the way the course of time is treated in the lyrics, both in the time-dissolving 'Mississippi' ('got no future, got no past') and in 'Sugar Baby's abstract, timeless catchphrase condition.

One song sticks out from the ones mentioned so far: 'Po' Boy'. It deals with a poor guy who washes the dishes and feed the pigs, pays too much in the store, has the police on his back and is (probably) made a cuckold by some Freddie, but who is still basically happy and satisfied. In the middle of the song we also get a glimpse of a conversation between Othello and Desdemona, about what actually happened with that poisoned wine. All in all a text that fits Dylan's own description well, as a tune that sings itself and a text that doesn't interfere with the tune:

That song sort of plays itself. . . . Because, that's a song that could exist without any lyric. It exists just on chord structures . . . and the lyrics are just trying to stay in the path and not to lay too much emotional rhetoric here and there.²²

It's a charming little gem.

'The Voice of a Generation' is getting older, but *Love and Theft* proves that he still stands comparison with any of the other generations to which he has belonged. He can still be poignant and playful like in the 60s, pensive and bitter as in the 70s, apocalyptic as in the 80s. Age has extended the field of possible subjects, but this comes in addition to and not instead of earlier periods' preoccupations. This is a particular kind of novelty: to be able to keep the old when the new is added. Not many artists master *that* art form better than Dylan.

²² The 'Rome interview' (July 23, 2001)

IV

Modern Times and Plagiarism

It's Modern to Steal

MODERN TIMES (2006)

THE QUESTION is not so much: “Is this a good Dylan album?” – which it is – as “Is this a Dylan album?” – which it isn’t.

First the lyrics: as Scott Warmuth has discovered, through an ingenious google investigation, several lines of lyrics are lifted from the works of the “Poet Laureate of the Confederacy” Henry Timrod in much the same way as Yunichi Saga’s *Confessions of a Yakuza* unwittingly contributed to “*Love and Theft*”. This has caused considerable reactions, in far wider circles than usual.

So, is Dylan a thieving scoundrel and a plagiarist, or a genius who transforms what he reads into new gems?

The lyrical side of his creative borrowings don’t bother me a single bit, and I’m surprised that such a fuss has been made over this. If anything, they add to the value of Dylan’s effort, rather than subtract from it. I would never call any of that *plagiarism*, neither in the case of *Modern Times* nor of “*Love and Theft*”. I can’t imagine Dylan sitting there in his divine solitude, struggling with a line, then walking over to the bookshelf and picking out Timrod or Saga in search for a line that would work. Now, *that* would have come closer to plagiarism: to let someone else do the job. I imagine it’s the other way around: Dylan has read *Yakuza* and Timrod, certain phrases and figures have stuck in his mind, from where they in due time have popped up again, in a completely new context. This kind of use is not dictated by need but by circumstance, coincidence, “intuition” if you wish. That is what I find fascinating about the use of these sources on these two albums: they highlight just how it is that things “pop up” in one’s mind – how people think.

But my surprise by the overreaction regarding a few creatively transformed word connections is multiplied by the lack of a similar reaction to the musical borrowings. These are both much more substantial and much more difficult to defend.

At the time of writing (Wed 20 Sept, 16:08 CET), the following songs on *Modern Times* have known models for their music:

- **Rollin' and Tumblin'** – Taken from Muddy Water's version of Hambone Willie Newbern's "Roll and Tumble Blues" from 1929.
- **When the Deal Goes Down** – based on Bing Crosby's trademark song "Where the Blue of the Night (Meets the Gold of the Day)" by Roy Turk and Fred E. Ahlert
- **Beyond the Horizon** – Taken from Jim Kennedy's "Red Sails in the Sunset"
- **The Levee's Gonna Break** – taken wholesale (apart from a few new lines of lyrics here and there) from Kansas Joe & Memphis Minnie's "When the Levee Breaks" from 1929.
- **Someday Baby** – taken from "Worried Life Blues" (aka "Someday Baby" or "Trouble No More"), performed by Sleepy John Estes, Fred McDowell, Lightnin' Hopkins, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Eric Clapton, the Animals, and Bob Dylan himself (Toad's Place, 1990), just to mention a few.

These are not just influences: in all cases, the chord structure is lifted from the models and the melody is clearly recognizable, and in some cases, the whole arrangement is "borrowed".

That's five out of ten. Furthermore, I'd be very surprised if the music to *Spirit on the Water* is Dylan's own. Thunder on the Mountain could be by anyone, and probably is. That leaves us with three songs where the music is – at least until proven otherwise – truly "by Bob Dylan".

It so happens that these are the three strongest songs on the album: "Nettie Moore", "Ain't Talkin'" and "Workingman's Blues #2".¹ I don't know if this is good news or bad: it is reassuring that his own songs are the best, but why, then, did he have to put in the rest of it – didn't he have more than three songs in him in five years?

If this is a sign of creative drought, that may be a matter of concern regarding the possibility of more albums in the future, but in *this* particular context, it's not my main concern.

If the various textual allusions and citations can be redeemed as a fascinating display of creative intertextual intuition, it is quite the opposite with the music. When Dylan w/band play the exact same notes and the exact same so-

¹ 'Workingman's Blues #2' is vaguely related to Merle Haggard's Working Man's Blues, but the influence stops at the title; musically, they are totally unrelated. In the case of 'Nettie Moore', the odds are slimmer: the melody and chord sequence are clearly related to/based on Roy Rodgers' 'Gentle Nettie Moore', but the character and the melodic details are quite different.

los as Muddy Waters did on “Rollin’ and Tumblin’”, that’s not “intuition” or creative translocation, it’s just “letting Muddy do the job”, plain and simple. That doesn’t add to my appreciation of the work – on the contrary.

Not all the borrowings are as straightforward as “Rollin’ and Tumblin’”. “When the Deal Goes Down” is a more interesting case. It is based on Bing Crosby’s “Where the Blue of the Night (Meets the Gold of the Day)”, and Dylan has in fact been open or semi-open about this. In a Live Talk with David Gates, who interviewed Dylan for Newsweek after *Chronicles* came out, Gates answered questions from the audience. One of them was:

Did Bob share any details with you regarding the songs for his next album? What’s the scoop?

And the answer was:

David Gates: Really only that he’s working on them. he did say he’s written a song based on the melody from a Bing Crosby song, “Where the Blue of the Night (Meets the Gold of the Day).” How much it’ll actually sound like that is anybody’s guess.²

We now know the answer to the last question: Not much, actually. Although the song structure and he chords are identical, the phrasing, the melody line, and the pace in Dylan’s version are all very different from Crosby’s slow, insinuating crooning. It is indeed “a song based on the melody” from “Where the Blue of the Night” rather than “Where the Blue of the Night” with new lyrics.

The case is quite analogous to Dylan’s version of “You Belong To Me” – or just about every live cover he has performed during the Never Ending Tour years: his melody differs considerably from the original; he has definitely made it his own, although the underlying tune is clearly the same. The difference is that “You Belong To Me” doesn’t have “Written by Bob Dylan” under it.

Putting the label “All songs written by Bob Dylan” on this CD is plain indecency. Again, this applies only to the music; I would *not* have wished to see anything like: “Words by Bob Dylan and Henry Timrod”. But I *would* have liked to see: “Words: Bob Dylan, Music: Muddy Waters” (disregarding here the fact that Muddy didn’t write the tune either, but that’s moot: *he* played those solos, *he* shaped the song into the form which Dylan has taken over, so for all intents and purposes Muddy is the originator). If Dylan has copyrighted

² From <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6099027/site/newsweek/>. Thanks to Jörgen Lindström for directing my attention to this.

the tunes of Rollin' and Tumblin' and Beyond the Horizon, he gets money from selling something he didn't own in the first place. And regardless of the money, by putting "by Bob Dylan" under it he is taking creative credit for something he didn't create, stating "This is what I have to say" without actually saying anything. *That's* my main concern: he isn't saying anything. And as Tom Lehrer so eloquently put it: "If you can't communicate, the least you can do is *shut up!*"

As more and more references and borrowings were discovered on "*Love and Theft*", I got this wonderful vision: what if it wasn't just a few lines of Japanese gangster-lore here and there – what if *every* note and *every* lyric line were direct quotations, put together in a grand collage – *that* would have been a major achievement and a bold highlighting of the problematic of communication by blurring the normally well-established pattern of sender-receiver; pointing (fingers) to our expectations and norms, and proving them to be wrong. It would have been like a game. And that title. . . But when the same thing happens on *Modern Times*, only without the extra level of "game", it just becomes a sign of someone who is content with playing lounge music, but who has a reputation to live up to and a record company with an over-zealous sales department on his back.

Some have defended Dylan with reference to the folk tradition. "This is what one does there: one takes what one hears and builds on that. This is what Dylan has always done." Etc. Fair enough, but only to a point. Of course, there are contexts where, for historical or other reasons, a legalistic approach to authorship may be less relevant than in other contexts, or at least require an interpretation in the light of practice, the "folk tradition" being one such context. The next question would then be if a multi-million seller is at all comparable to the swapping, sharing, reworking of songs in coffee-houses or dance halls which I would more immediately associate with the "folk tradition". If the folk tradition is about community, sharing, and freedom of expression, *Modern Times* does that, but it does a lot of other things too, such as making money for the artist, the record company, and the manager's uncle, which places it in a completely different context.

I don't know what Dylan's motivations have been – perhaps he hasn't even had anything to do with what's written on the album sleeve (he probably hasn't cared), but all the promotion material from Sony goes in the direction of: these are all new songs, newly written by this great genius who was counted out but now is back in the ring with a vengeance, buy it, buy it, buy it.

Besides, as Nick Manho said on the dylanpool (making a point that he had borrowed/stolen from emily smith):

The difference between Bob ripping off the blues guys in the 60s and Bob ripping off the blues guys now is that *in the 60s Bob's rip-offs were better than the originals*

There's a point in that. Not that quality would be a justification for rip-offs, nor that the statement is *always* true, taken literally, but to the extent that standing in a creative tradition would imply taking in something from a common storehouse (whether or not an original composer can be identified), processing it, and putting out something which adds something to the input. The point of standing on others' shoulders should be to see farther, not to stand taller. "Being in the folk tradition" isn't a valid excuse for acting more like a thieving bastard than as a creative musician with a rich heritage.

The many ways of stealing

I'VE MENTIONED IT before: I don't mind Dylan lifting lines from Timrod. I do mind his uncredited appropriations of entire pieces of music, but little snippets of text here and there – that's a completely different matter.

In all the many discussions and opinions about this matter, two areas have been mentioned with some frequency, either in order to emphasise the offense, or to diminish it. In each their way, they add some interesting twists to the case, although they don't change my verdict concerning the *musical* theft.

ACADEMIC BORROWING

One of the references is to the academic world. The argument goes that if something like this had happened there, Dylan would have been sent home with an F and a relegation.

I would argue against this, although in some cases he does, admittedly, come close. Plagiarism in an academic context is when one passes off someone else's work as one's own. If someone has written:

I have compared the lyrics on Bob Dylan's *Modern Times* to Henry Timrod's poetry and found a number of lines to be remarkably similar, beyond the coincidental.

and I write:

My scrutiny of the corpus of Timrod has revealed several lines borrowed by Bob Dylan on *Modern Times*. These are too conspicuous to be the result of chance.

this would be a clear case of plagiarism, and would obviously be worth an F, even though hardly a single word is the same.

However, what if I wrote:

I have compared the pictures in Andy Warhol's exhibitions to shots of Marilyn Monroe and labels of cans of Campbell's soup, and found a number of images to be remarkably similar, beyond the coincidental.

Most of the words are the same, and the structure of the sentence and the argument is identical, but I can hardly be accused of passing off someone else's work as my own, because the "work" in this case is not the words themselves, but that which they express. The first text expresses that Dylan has used lyrics from Timrod, the second that Warhol has used images from other places. The obvious similarities are inconsequential, irrelevant for the statements' status as academic texts.

One may lament this and think that the job of the academic should be not only to write *stuff*, but to *write* stuff; to shape sentences which are worth reading regardless of which ideas they express. But it remains a fairly established fact (or at least a convention), that if I rewrite a scholarly article and present the same evidence and conclusions with different words, it will still be the same article, whereas if I present the contents of one of Horace's odes in other words, it will be a different poem. It would take a very strict definition of plagiarism to claim that I've plagiarized Horace.

POETIC LANGUAGE

A poem can not be separated from the words in it. It's probably an exaggeration to say that the words *are* the poem, but at least one can safely say that whatever ideas are expressed in a poem, *they are not* the poem.

This distinction may get Dylan off the hook of academic plagiarism, but at the same time it may appear to strengthen the case against him on the poetical side. After all, didn't I just say that the words are the poem?

Ehem, no, I didn't. Without going too deeply into the history and theory of poetics, let's just say that every text is a combination of words and ideas, and where the emphasis will lie closer to the "idea" side for an academic text, it will move closer to the word for a poem.

The "words" side should also be subdivided into the sounding part: rhythms and rhymes, letter sounds and word bounce; and the rhetorical part: how words are combined into figures of speech – the *kind* of metaphors one uses, rather than the *meaning* of the metaphors – and the choice of stylistical level: whether one says "gal" or "girl", "babe" or "sweetheart", "woman" or "lady", "m'am" or "ma dame".

A poetic text will also usually involve some kind of meta-reflection: a consciousness about the combination of word and idea itself, so that the words not just point to the corresponding ideas or are to be enjoyed for their sonorous qualities – more like a musical work – but also point to this very relation:

e.g. the absurdity of having a sequence of sounds stand for something as silent as a rock; the meaningful coincidence of the first letters in “frail” and “flower” or “silent” and “stone”.

So whereas an academical text would be judged primarily according to the ideas expressed in it, the judgement on a poem will be based on the combined effect of all three elements, in some mixture or other. Thus, taking over the words but putting them in a different context where they present another idea; placing them in a startling new metrical context or embedding them in a different sequence of alliterating words; or turning their metaphorical reference upside down through a combination with other words and ideas than in the original – all this would constitute a change in poetic substance.

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING

Is this what Dylan has done? Let us take a closer look at some of the borrowings. Here is Timrod, some lines from his “Rhapsody of a Southern Winter Night”:

A round of precious hours
Oh! here, where in that summer noon I basked
And strove, with logic frailer than the flowers

Timrod’s “I” spends the hours of his summer days in heated, desperate speculation, trying to get to grips with something, but that something eludes him; rational thought can only get us so far, and beyond a certain point, logic proves to be a weak helper – frailer, even, than the flowers.

Then Dylan:

The moon gives light and it shines by night
Well, I scarcely feel the glow
We learn to live and then we forgive
O’er the road we’re bound to go
More frailer than the flowers, these precious hours
That keep us so tightly bound
 (“When the Deal Goes Down”)

We are no longer in the baking sunlight of noon but in the heatless moonlight at night; there is an echo of desperation here, but more of an afterglow, won over in calm and wisened subordination to fate and to the necessities of life: forgiveness and the need to take *some* road, no matter where it leads and what injustices and tribulations have brought us there in the first place; what is important is to belong together with someone, and although it may be a disheartening observation that the tight bonds are indeed frailer than flowers,

the other option is also open: to regard it as a comforting paradox of life that even though the bonds *seem* frail, they are after all tight enough to hold.

The differences between the two texts are marked also on the rhetorical level, where Dylan introduces paradox as the carrying figure (inviting us to ask, “how can something so frail bind so tight?”), and the sounding level, where he has straightened out Timrod’s disrespect for the line boundaries and instead brought the two rhyming words together in a rapid sequence of half-lines.

No matter which interpretation we choose, it is evident that the only things that remain are the phrase “frailer than the flowers”, and its companion rhyme “precious hours”. It is the exact opposite situation to Dylan’s own introduction to his topical songs in live performances in the 60s (was it Hattie Carroll?), that “Nothing has changed, except the words.” Here, instead, “Everything has changed, except the words”.

The same goes for many of Dylan’s other borrowings:

My memories are drowning
In mortal bliss
(“Beyond the Horizon”)

says something quite different than Timrod’s

Which drowned the memories of the time
In a merely mortal bliss!
(“Our Willie”)

These examples may show that although Dylan has taken over one of the three elements of a poetic text, he has indeed made something new out of it: he has not passed off Timrod’s work as his own. Other borrowings are less clear in this respect. In these lines from “When the Deal Goes Down”

In the still of the night,
in the world’s ancient light
Where wisdom grows up in strife

the last line is a single unit, both of words, ideas, and imagery, which differs little from Timrod’s:

There is a wisdom that grows up in strife
(“Retirement”)

And the strange line from “Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum”

Well a childish dream is a deathless need

takes everything, including its strangeness, from Timrod, who says:

A childish dream is now a deathless need
 ("A Vision of Poesy, Part 1")

Dylan doesn't add to this: he has stolen the line.

DOUBTS AND BENEFITS: ALLUSION OR THEFT?

I'm nevertheless tempted to give him the benefit of some kind of doubt: as isolated examples, they may be illegitimate appropriations, but seen in combination with the other examples, they merely appear as unsuccessful applications of his poetic technique. In many/most cases, he has "appropriated" the lines in the literal sense of the word: made them his own. In some cases, he has tried, but not quite succeeded. The important thing is that he has tried. The "benefit" I offer him, then, regarding these particular examples, is the choice between being a thief or a bad poet.

I have disregarded the question whether Dylan's textual borrowings should be seen as allusions rather than theft. I'm inclined to think not – that an allusion would require a source which was fairly well known (cf. Christopher Rick's distinction between allusion, where you want the source to be known, and plagiarism, where you don't), so that the play between the different fields of meaning, the original and the new text, will have a chance of being recognized. This would be the case if one uses phrases from the Bible, Shakespeare, or Homer, but not in the case of Henry Timrod.

Again, there is a benefit of doubt: one can certainly allude to or play around with things which are known to oneself regardless of whether it is familiar to one's audience, i.e. the reader who is supposed to spot the reference and take pleasure in the subtle intertextuality, may very well be the author himself. I know, because I've played this kind of game too: while I was finishing my dissertation in medieval musicology, during the final dreary weeks the only fun left was to put in hidden allusions to Dylan, which nobody in that field were ever likely to discover.

More important is that the criterion of analogy is a blunt knife, and the decision (from latin: caedo: cut) will inevitably have unsharp edges, with blurred lines towards the area of ethics and honour, whereas an argument based on a comparison between academic and poetic language works without this criterion.

The major question which remains for me is the double: *why* has he done it? And *how*? In his blog *Ralph the Sacred River*, Edward Cook lists some

passages in *Chronicles* which are also borrowed from previous literary works.¹
The passage

Walking back to the main house, I caught a glimpse of the sea through the leafy boughs of the pines. I wasn't near it, but could feel the power beneath its colors. (Chronicles, p. 162)

has borrowed quite a lot from Marcel Proust's *Within a Budding Grove*:

But when, Mme. de Ville-parisis's carriage having reached high ground, I caught a glimpse of the sea through the leafy boughs of trees, then no doubt at such a distance those temporal details which had set the sea, as it were, apart from nature and history disappeared ... But on the other hand I was no longer near enough to the sea which seemed to me not a living thing now, but fixed; I no longer felt any power beneath its colours, spread like those of a picture among the leaves, through which it appeared as inconsistent as the sky and only of an intenser blue.

How have Proust's words entered into the text of *Chronicles*, at that particular place? Has it made it easier for Dylan to write? Hardly. It seems more like he has shaped the surrounding text particularly to make space for the quotation – he has wanted those words there, and thus had to write the rest of the sentence to make a spot where they would fit. In none of the references that Edward Cook has found in *Chronicles* do the borrowed phrases seem *necessary*. On the contrary: it would have been *easier* to write this without the Proust reference – it is there only through an effort on Dylan's part.

One uncomfortable suspicion only remains for me: if all the *poetic* ideas in *Chronicles* – all those ideas, that is, which sets the book apart from a run-of-the-mill academic biography where the words don't matter, only the ideas – are borrowed, wouldn't that affect our appreciation of the book's merits, and of Dylan as the author of a remarkably readable biography, negatively?

This, I would say, depends on three things. First, the amount and general character of the borrowings: are most of them of the "frail flowers" kind or the "deathless need" kind? are the borrowings found so far all there is or just the tip of an iceberg? This will surely be studied more closely in the future, so the jury's still out on this one.

Second: even if every single poetic image in *Chronicles*, on *Modern Times*, and "*Love & Theft*" were found to be borrowed from somewhere, the mere act of bringing them together and reshaping them in the way I have indicated above would still make it a major creative act. The means and materials that

¹ <http://ralphriver.blogspot.com/2006/09/more-dylan-thefts.html>

have been used may lie on the border to the illegitimate, but precisely since we then move from the area of aesthetics into the related but separate area of ethics, the judgement will have to be for everyone to make, individually.

Third, if the one who says the things that make these texts into more than a transmittal of information and ideas isn't Dylan after all, doesn't that constitute a breakdown of communication? Again, communication is an individual matter, and so is the feeling that one is left out of it. Is this important? Depends. This will be the topic of my next post about Modern Times and plagiarism, where I will discuss the second main area: whether Dylan is a post-modernist.

Thanks to Scott Warmuth and Edward Cook, without whose discoveries this post would have been impossible to write

Chapter 29

Dylan: the Postmodernist?

The author is dead.

Roland Barthes

No, you're not.

The "Author"

WHO'S TALKING in a text? Is anyone? or: Isn't that obvious? The answer is no to both questions, and to a large extent the question about Dylan's borrowing of lines on "*Love & Theft*", *Modern Times*, and in *Chronicles* can in fact be regarded as a question about authorial roles.

BRICKS AND IMAGES

Everybody will agree that if I write the word "flower" in a poem, I'm not plagiarizing anyone, even though many have used that word before – it is too common to be any single author's "intellectual property"; whereas if I tried to copyright the stanza: "How many roads must a man walk down | Before you can call him a man?" I would – hopefully – be kicked out of the copyright office with my head first.

But where does the line between the two go? After all, even the second example consists only of single words and phrases which in and of themselves are common property. Can I write: "How many roads must a man walk down before he reaches Rome?"? Or "How many roads are there for a man to choose between before he can finally sleep in his grave?"? Or the simple "How many roads lead to Rome?"? Or "I need to get to Rome | To show that I'm a man | Now, baby, say: Which road must I walk down?"?

The term "property" here introduces a lot of other issues which are not necessarily relevant for the question of poetic inventiveness but which rather concern societal conventions and legal issues to which I will return later on.

In order to keep these out of the calculation for a while, let us take the detour through a more concrete metaphor: bricks and cathedrals.

If I build a beautiful cathedral out of mass-produced bricks, I'd consider it a major creative act and the cathedral itself my own creation, even if I haven't made a single brick myself.

Now, the stone carvers in the medieval cathedrals took great pride in their work – they signed their stones, and one can, on that basis, but also on more general stylistical and technical grounds, locate trends and individual traits in single churches and between cathedrals, even in different countries.

The word “flower” is a mass-produced brick, “frail as a flower” is close to that – two mass-produced bricks put together using the “mass-productive” technique of metaphor, and hardly an individual creative achievement. “Precious hour – frail flower” is more of the same: again, mostly a mass-produced item but with some individual traits: a stone which is distinct from the next stone, but not quite the beautifully hewn piece of craftsmanship with flowers and acanthi for which the stone carver would be rightfully admired. Only the full lines of poetry, where all three elements, sounds, style, and ideas, are combined¹ – only *there* would I call it an individual creation, but that's also where Dylan deviates from Timrod. So in the case of the “flowers | hours”, he has acquired some stones for his Cathedral from the mason down the road. In “Tweedle Dum & Tweedle Dee”, he has taken a whole column from Lincoln Cathedral and moved it to Westminster. But they are still different cathedrals, enjoyable as complete structures, whether or not one knows that one of the columns has been somewhere else before.

This is also to say: it is the complete experience of the cathedral – its atmosphere, lighting, mural paintings, grandeur, smell, columns, temperature and humidity, the baptismal font and the stained glass – which determines what we feel when we enter it, not the individual stones and tiles.

The important point is that the words and the ideas don't belong together – you're not necessarily missing an essential half when you cut off the “idea” part – unlike the way it would be to cut off a leg. Hence, a poem is more like a cathedral than like a body.

¹As a general rule; one may imagine exceptions where some element is left out and replaced by some self-reflective meta-level of discourse, such as is the case in “silent poetry”, concrete poetry, dadaism, etc., but I would argue that even in these cases, the missing element is still prominent in its absence – in fact more prominent than in an ordinary poem.

But what if someone took the entire Lincoln Cathedral and moved it to Santa Fe?

Or better: meticulously copied every single stone from Lincoln and built an exact replica in Duluth, so perfectly forged that not even a trained eye could spot the difference? The experience upon entering Duluth Cathedral would be exactly the same as in Lincoln as far as the sensual stimuli goes. Only if told would a visitor be aware that he is in fact not in a twelfth-century church in England, but a twenty-first-century copy in Minnesota.²

In other words: does the knowledge that Dylan has borrowed some lines – or an entire musical composition and arrangement – matter for our judgement of these songs? If the physical experience is exactly the same with or without that knowledge – why should it matter?

DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

It shouldn't, necessarily. When we tend to think that it does, this depends on a number of conventions which are embedded in the cultural practices of the art-world. We expect individuality and independency from previous works, but also conformance with certain genre criteria/norms; we expect novelty, but also quality – a quality which can only be judged against previous works.

There is also an expectation, going back at least to the eighteenth century, but known explicitly as early as the ninth century, and probably more fundamental than that, of knowing who is speaking, of being able to single out an authorial voice from amidst the common words.

It may seem trivial and simple: person A [writes|sings] something, which person B [reads|hears]. A message has been transmitted from A to B. End of story.

But that is too simple. In any text, there are at least two different authors and equally many readers, and this number can be extended indefinitely. First, there is the person A – we can call him *Bob Dylan*, a living person in flesh and blood who picks his nose, goes to the toilet, plays concerts, visits friends, and who at dinner may says things like:

² We of course assume that the innocent visitor has been drugged with a RapidSleep™ potion in one of the back-alleys in Lincoln on his way to visit the cathedral, then, unconscious, brought across the Atlantic, fed intravenously during the crossing so as not to notice any physical difference when he is reawakened (with the corresponding RapidEye™ counter-potion) in a similarly reconstructed back-alley in Duluth. One can do that in examples like this, I've been told.

Could I have some rice and beans, please

where “I” refers back to himself. Occasionally, this person may also sit at his desk with a pen and write things down. He may for instance write:

Could I have some rice and beans, please.

Here, “I” no longer refers to the person *Bob Dylan*, but to the speaker in the text – we may call him “Bob Dylan”. If *Bob Dylan* wanted to be clear about this, he might have written:

Could “I” have some rice and beans, please

to accentuate the difference between him and this other person “Bob Dylan”, who only exists in the text. But usually, this distinction is not made explicit – on the contrary: it is easier to assume, by default, that they are one and the same; seeing “I” written seduces us into thinking that someone is talking to us, that we are hearing *Bob Dylan’s* voice, when in fact we are reading “Bob Dylan”’s.

If *Bob Dylan* wanted to be extra mean, he could write,

Bob Dylan sat at the end of the table and suddenly asked, “Could I have some rice and beans, please.”

This brings in yet another character, another bearer of the “I”, whom we might call “‘Bob Dylan’ ”.³ Within the text, “‘Bob Dylan’ ” is created by “Bob Dylan”, but since *Bob Dylan* has created them both, this also means that in reality – i.e. in the world outside the text – there is no hierarchical relationship between the two: “Bob Dylan” the creator and “‘Bob Dylan’ ” the created are on the same level.

Thus, in this little text, we have the three roles lined up:

- *Bob Dylan* as the author-person,
- “Bob Dylan” as the author-persona, i.e. the (literary) character who (or in this case perhaps “which”) poses as *I* disguised as “I”, and
- “‘Bob Dylan’ ” as the author-personatus, i.e. the speaker who appears to have been given life by the author-persona.

³ This problematic will be familiar to anyone who has seen *Dylan’s* movie *Renaldo and Clara*, where Ronnie Hawkins appears as some version of Bob Dylan (although it is hard to decide exactly which version: he certainly is “Bob Dylan”, to some extent also “‘Bob Dylan’ ”, but for the *lady in the hotel lobby*, who acts as the “lady in the hotel lobby”, he may actually have played the part of *Bob Dylan*).

And the chain can be extended indefinitely – as e.g. in this text, where *Eyolf Østrem* and “Eyolf Østrem” both force themselves in front of the many Bob Dylans.

When Roland Barthes in 1967 declared the “Death of the Author”, it was partly to avoid the confusion between the two main authors: the person and the persona.⁴ Barthes sides with the persona: his aim is to liberate the text (and hence the author-persona) from the interpretive tyranny of the author-person: too much emphasis on the intention of the author-person limits the text and prevents us from taking advantage of the full range of interpretive possibilities and the many layers of meaning that it may (nay: does) contain.

Quite in accordance with Barthes (but not necessarily in agreement with him; see below), I have always shied away from any kind of argument which involved considerations about what Dylan might have been thinking, what his intentions have been, how he has thought that this or that might be received, what message he has wanted to send and to whom (to fans? “fans”? critics? dylanologists? his ex-wife/-ves?), etc. This is not because I consider it uninteresting *per se*, only uninteresting *for me*. If someone discovered that the first letters of every quotation on *Modern Times* formed the sentence “I can do whatever I want – screw all you petty critics” – that might have been funny, but it would neither add to nor, for that matter, subtract from my appreciation of the album. Or, to take a slightly less contrived example: if Dylan revealed that “Idiot Wind” was written after a row he had with Sara in the supermarket, March 1975, it wouldn’t change my “version” of the song the least bit.

Even if not a single line in Dylan’s entire corpus of lyrics had had any basis in his own life – if he has never in his life has felt the empowering frailty of belonging – the image he makes out of it in “When the Deal Goes Down” is still clear and strong enough to be meaningful to me, regardless of whether it is authentically founded in a true experience in Dylan’s life or not. I truly don’t care about Dylan’s life, here or on any other record. When *Blood on the Tracks* works for me, it’s because he has put together some words which make something click in my mind, not because I imagine Dylan and Sara and then identify with them. And if it’s all fake, he’s at least damn good at faking it.

⁴ Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author”, *Aspen*, 1967, available online at . “My” presentation of Barthes’ position is unforgivably simplified, but I forgive “myself”, since *my* aim is not to discuss Barthes. “I” also note with a certain presumptuous pleasure that the “death of the Author” coincides with the birth of *this* author-person.

The point, taken from Barthes, is that the songs and the texts can stand as communicative acts of several kinds at the same time, and they can be studied as literary/musical objects within those discourses, regardless of what authorial or personal intention Dylan has had other than the literary one – i.e. the one which is expressed *in* the text, by “Bob Dylan”. That is an important lesson to be taken from Barthes (who, by the way, died in 1980).⁵

THE AUTHOR RESURRECTED

That said . . . I’m still not quite happy. Barthes’ killing off the author is not a murder, nor a mystical animation of the illusionary author-persona, but primarily an empowering of the *reader* and the reader’s access to and control over the text. The text becomes a sign system which is open to any interpretations the reader wishes to make, and these may be completely different from those the author-persona had in mind. They may also be different from the ones the author-persona presents, but as soon as we make the distinction between different authors, this is already self-evident: already in gaining an awareness of the difference between person and persona, between *Bob Dylan* and “Bob Dylan”, we have assumed control of the persona, since he exists nowhere but in the text, and – since he is nothing but an element in the text – the reader is free to do with him as he pleases.

This is the sense in which the author is dead, and in this sense, he may rest in peace. But what is the cost, what is the gain, and whose gain is it exactly? Which reader is it that is empowered?

For there are just as many readers as there are authors. There is the actual, physical reader-person, and there is the implied reader – the reader which the author has in mind – but one might even here distinguish between the reader implied by the author-*person* and the one implied by the author-*persona*.

As a reader-person, I greatly enjoy the freedom to rule over the text as I wish. But I’m not sure that it would have been necessary to kill the poor author-person to acquire this freedom, or, even, that it accomplishes what it was supposed to do. In fact, I think this murder is just as dubious on aesthetic grounds as it would have been out of its metaphorical bounds. I can understand the historical reason for the urge to sever the bonds between person and persona, but I also resent it.

⁵ “Barthes”, on the other hand, is still alive and kicking, and so is “Barthes”.

When I interact with a “sign system”, whether I hear a piece of music, read a text, or visit a cathedral, I am only secondarily interested in the signs and the sign system themselves. I either want an immediate kick, something that makes me want to laugh or cry or dance (in the widest sense of the words), or I want wisdom: something which makes me better equipped to navigate in the rough waters of cultural codes, and to communicate (again in the widest sense of the word) with the people who use these codes; tools to better understand others, the world, and myself. I like to think of it as the double path to the same goal: to make my world a better place to live in, and the difference between the paths being that of instant and delayed gratification.

My main objection against the semiotic emphasis on the text and the reduction of it to a sign system, free to be used by the reader as he pleases, is that it severs the *meaning* from the *meaner*, the person who has meant something and expressed it. It emphasises the *functions* involved in the communicative *process*, rather than the *persons* involved in the communicative *act*.

I’m not interested in texts *as* texts, music *as* sound, nor in the communicative process as such – they only interest me as kinds of communication, as acts: a processing of someone’s experience of life through a medium which is apt for the transformation and re-formation of such experiences. Machine poetry or a stone – anything which is not produced with an artistic intention – is uninteresting *as* art.

In other words: I want a person there, on the other side: the sense that there is a person behind the text. I expect the text to have come into being against a background which is similar to the one I have when I read it, and to which I can relate – that what I take out of the text, by putting the words together to form images and connections that are meaningful to me, somehow has been put into the text against a similar background of human experience.

Fundamentally, the text is there only as an intermediary between me and this other person, and since it’s *my* reality, it’s not good enough if the other person is implied, created, killed, or nonexistent. The author has to be real too. The author-persona won’t do, fictitious as he is. If the author is dead, he has to be resurrected.

And the freedom I have, as a reader, is the freedom to disregard the separation between the authors, and to create my own implied author, so to speak: the person I wish to see on the other side of the divide, who is neither *Bob Dylan* nor “Bob Dylan”. To make it simple, let’s just call him Bob Dylan. He is just as fictitious as any of the other authors, but he is no longer *in* the text, and he is *my* creation, as a reader. *Bob Dylan’s* only role in this, is to produce that text through which I can create Bob Dylan.

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS

Since there are now two *real* people surrounding the text (“real” in the sense of belonging to my reality; the fact that I have created one of them does not mean that he is less real, in this particular reality – the only reality I know), the text can no longer be regarded exclusively on aesthetic grounds: since the text functions as an intermediary between two people, interacting with the text also involves ethical questions, just as interacting directly with the other person would.

We then have to take into account – whether we like it or not – the huge area of ethics and morals. In order not to confuse things more than necessary, let’s condense it to “Do right unto others”.⁶ But what is morally right in a song lyric? And who are the “others”? More specifically: does the eighth Commandment apply here, and if so: how? Can one steal an idea? A phrase? What is this thing called “intellectual property”?

“Property” and “propriety” – they are speciously similar-sounding words, and for that reason apt to invite confusion. *Properties* of a text make them someone’s “intellectual *property*”, and going against this is a breach with *propriety* – aesthetics become a moral issue.

Writing a song text is a way of using language, which is fundamentally the area where the inalienable meets the alien, the Self meets the Other. Thought is the only inalienable domain we have, only it isn’t really our own, since we have it on loan from community, through language.

I’ve used two different words about the literary technique Dylan has used in his later works: theft and appropriation, and although they appear as synonyms with only a stylistic difference – one being direct and blunt, the other more subtle and euphemistic – they are oceans apart when language is the object.

“Appropriation” literally means “to make something one’s own”, and if it refers to a car the activity would be morally suspect and a synonym would be car thief. But appropriating an *expression*, making it one’s own, is a necessary condition for using the expression and thus for understanding it in the first place, and therefore, if we want to condemn someone for this, it must be grounded in something other than the act of appropriation itself. By “taking”

⁶ A more extended version is the “Cardamom Law” from the Norwegian Childrens’ book *People and robbers in Cardamom City*: “One should not treat others badly, one should be good and kind, and apart from that, one can do what one likes.”

a combination of words, we don't take anything away from anyone. "Die Gedanken sind frei" as the Germans say – thoughts are free.

There are some circumstances under which this freedom is curbed. Artists have a right to make a living off their work, writers to have their opinions correctly quoted, either in order not to be misrepresented, or in order to reap whatever benefits society is willing to bestow on them for their work, and so forth.⁷ These limitations are fair and good, but they are also deeply problematic since they limit that which is our one fundamental area of freedom: the right to think and the right to speak our mind. This limitation is not a natural right that some people (such as: authors and poets, scholars and singers) possess – it is a convention: a contractual agreement between the members of a society that certain limitations are necessary in order for the society to work in a way that we want it to work. We *want* to have people around who can dazzle us with song, dance, and play, who can tell us stories about others who are better or worse off than ourselves or about gruesome murders in the neighbour town; who can spend their time looking at the stars to ensure that the harvest yields more or the space-ships may land safely. It would be a dreadful society which did *not* find space for such limitations, but yet: only in relation to socio-cultural contracts such as these does it make any sense to apply the word "steal" to language or ideas: "intellectual" and "property" are words that belong together only through such a contract: a society's self-imposed limitation to freedom of speech.

In short: the right to think and speak are inalienable and natural, the right to charge money for this is not. Words can be commoditified when they are used in the various interactions with society that the individual can take part in, but it is a price-tagging that comes at a price, and every such limitations of the right to appropriate and reprocess should be motivated.

Since this is a contract, it can also be re-negotiated, and various such re-negotiations have been undertaken. The development of legal copyrights is one such line of negotiation. The nice version of the story goes that it was the result of the recognition that it would be beneficial for the functioning of this

⁷ I will not go into the debate about the limitation grounded in respect for other people's beliefs, recently brought to the fore by twelve Danish cartoons and a German Pope – I do have things to say about it, but since it is a slightly different, although related, problem area, I will leave it aside here, with the qualification that I consider the Caradmom Law's "do not treat others badly" to apply to direct actions towards fellow human beings, not to actions that someone may feel obliged to take offense of on behalf of super-human beings, prophets, gods, or poets.

aspect of societal life to give some kind of explicit and formalized acknowledgment to authors of their right to control the distribution of their work. The not-so-nice version might instead point out that copyright became an issue only when printers' control over their material was no longer regulated through royal privileges, and that rather than protecting the rights of *authors*, it continued to be a protection of the right of the printing-trade to secure its income.

The staunchest defenders of "intellectual property" today are not the artists, the authors, and the performers whose work it is that is allegedly protected, but the publishers, the recording industry, the billion-dollar software companies, who all seek new ways of extending their rights to turn ideas into profit.

I consider such a materialistic view on language to be more harmful than the opposite: if in doubt about the freedom to appropriate a word, a phrase, or a poetic structure, I would *as a starting point* go with the freedom. I also believe in the conceptual separation of the notions of literary and legal copyright, because even though they certainly meet in a gray area in the middle, the first field covers the ground from "thought/language" to "community", but the second takes it from there to commerce, which is where the freedom to think is sacrificed for the freedom to sell. Even though there is room for noble ideals in the copyright legislation, the driving force is not noble.⁸

But it is also interesting how artists themselves have taken part in such re-negotiations, and, with the authority that their status as artists gives them, have spoken strongly against that very authority. Many examples can be – and have been – mentioned (Andy Warhol's pop-art is among them), but we really only need to discuss the one case which stated the point once and for all – every new work in this vein will only be re-statements of the initial question.

I am of course talking about Marcel Duchamp's (1887–1968) sculpture *Fountain* (see figure 1), which was first exhibited in 1917. It consists of a shining white urinal, signed (with the fake signature "R. Mutt", a variation of the name of the porcelain factory, Mott Works), turned on the side and displayed on a pedestal. By taking a mundane object, as far removed from traditional notions of aesthetic quality as possible, and exhibiting it as the equal of Mona Lisa, Duchamp declared a complete renunciation of the right of the author to be treated in any special way.

⁸ For an alternative, see the work of Lawrence Lessig with the "Creative Commons" licence, which attempts – hopefully with some success – to uphold the authors' right to control the distribution of their work, without stifling creativity and the communal benefit of a free exchange of ideas.



FIGURE 29.1 A picture of the Artist as a young thief – M. Duchamp: *Fountain* (1917)

Andy Warhol's pop-art does more of the same. Concerning the status of the work of art, Warhol's statement is the same as Duchamp's; the only difference is that where Duchamp chose a useful but vulgar every-day object for his demonstration that *any* object is as good as the work of the divinely inspired artist, Warhol is more specifically interested in the visual objects of a commercial mass culture.

Duchamp's and Warhol's contributions are all in the field of the arts, with its long heritage and roots into philosophy, church rituals, secular power, and notions of the divinity, be it God's or man's. But there are many areas where the role of the *author* is either irrelevant or questioned. One, which lies close at hand, is the so-called folk-process. In simplified form, one might say that there the *authorial* voice is secondary to the *performative* voice. What's of importance is not so much *what* one says, but *how* one does it.⁹

⁹ One literary example is Tahar Ben Jelloun's novel *L'enfant de sable* from 1985, where one of the main characters is a professional story-teller who travels the villages of Morocco telling stories that everybody already knows – again, it's all about *how* it's done.

It's also about the recognition of precursors, which particular shoulders one is standing on. While this is fairly straightforward on the village scene (even the Greewhich variety), where people can be counted on to know a model when they hear it and the guy who wrote a tune may still be around to feel honoured by the upshoot who finds his tune worth working more with, in the "global village" this is more problematic. And even though the folk scene may be a context where a legalistic approach to authorship may be less relevant than in other contexts, or at least require an interpretation in the light of practice, it still remains a question if a multi-million seller can be compared to the swapping, sharing, reworking, and, for that matter, stealing of songs in coffee-houses or dance halls. The liberties of the folk may be used to increase the common good, or as an excuse for gathering an extra royalty check.

DYLAN'S DEEDS

What has happened in the *Modern Times* debate is that the confused field of intellectual property and propriety has been used also as a justification for a certain judgement about quality, about artistic merit: since Dylan has stolen lines and tunes, the album's artistic quality suffers. This is not necessarily wrong – it is just a field where many different discourses are involved, and therefore, the questions need to be phrased carefully, to avoid, as much as possible, this confusion.

One possible specification is: What are the obligations the artist should fulfill in order to merit the special treatment that this contract allows him? And: Has Dylan fulfilled his part of the contract?

The first question goes in two different directions: it both concerns the internal, aesthetic part – Dylan's responsibility as an author/lyricist, to deliver the goods: to produce a text which allows me to create him in a sensible way, so that the product is able to make the world a better place, for me (first) and (thereby) for my fellow human beings; and the societal part – his responsibility as a human being in a society which is governed by certain rules and principles, such as: give due credits (either out of "decency" – a word with such a foreign feel to it that I have to quote it – or out of fear of someone else's lawyers). Thus, *which* function(s) a text fulfills is a moral issue, whereas *how* it fulfills these functions (by which means, according to which art discourse), and whether or not it does, is for the aesthetic judgement to decide.

Or we could say, simply: *what* is it that Dylan has done? *why* has he done it? And: Is it ok?

The “what” part can perhaps be done away with quickly: he has borrowed expressions – ranging from simple word combinations to whole lines – from authors such as Timrod, Ovid, Proust, and many others, and set this to music which in several cases is also borrowed wholesale from other musicians.

But this answer is too quick, because the *interesting* part of the answer depends on *why*, just as a statement: “X hit Y” could be a short version of “X prevented a robbery by hitting Y” or “X killed his arch-enemy Y by hitting him”. “Why” is of course a much more difficult question to answer. We might of course ask Dylan himself, but not only would he probably never give an answer – he might not even have one – but the previous discussion about the many authors in a text should have shown that the answer we’re after is not *Bob Dylan’s* but the one we would get from the one we have called Bob Dylan – the one we have created. So when we ask, “Why has Bob Dylan done it”, what we really are after is: what are the possible reasons someone in Dylan’s position might have had for incorporating text and music from other sources to the extent that we see on *Modern Times* and “*Love and Theft*”? What can he have meant? What is his message?

DYLAN’S MESSAGE/“MESSAGE”/MESSAGE?/MESSAGE?!

Message?

“Message? What message? There is no message in the use of quotations – I just used them, it just fit in.”

This answer is the simplest, and probably the most likely. It covers a lot of different scenarios: that he is a lazy, thieving scoundrel who takes what he wants; that he’s a washed-out, uninspired icon-poet who takes what he *needs*; that he is driven by greed and takes whatever can get him a quick buck; that he is a poet with a remarkably active and retentive subconscious; or that he is doing what he always has: taking in, filtering, and putting out again – nothing remarkable in that.

Whatever the reason, this answer means that there is nothing the texts as literary objects can do to help us decide about the moral issues. The various answers connect with different aspects of Dylan’s activities as a human being in a society, who cares about money, work, food, honour, and not specifically with his activities as a poet. A literary analysis is futile if what we want to know is whether he is a skilled craftsman or a spineless crook.

Message!

“Of course there is a message! Look carefully how the quotations are ordered, and you will see a pattern.”

This answer is the dylanologist’s dream. A hidden meaning, a larger picture, formed from small tiles which are meaningless in isolation but which seen together as a mosaic present an over-arching narrative about the South, or about love, or the conditions of life. Or something else.

The ridicule of the dylanologist hunting for meanings in garbage bins and lyrics is fully justified, but it stems from his failure to distinguish between *Bob Dylan* and Bob Dylan, and not from his seeing meaningful connections between seemingly unrelated aspects of a song. In fact, the latter is what we always do when we interpret a text, and it is “wrong” only if we expect to have found the author-person behind it.

To take “Floater” as an example: lyrically speaking, it is an absolute favorite of mine on “*Love and Theft*”, even though – or perhaps precisely because – it is the song with the most borrowings from Yunichi Saga’s *Memories of a Yakuza*. I can’t help forming a pattern: the amount of lines from a Japanese gangster novel in a song about reconciliated life by a river (an image which I somehow associate with Eastern, zen-like calm and paradox), with tender childhood memories (the “grandparents” line is the most beautiful and bitter-sweet line Dylan has ever written – if he has, that is . . .), uncompromisingly mixed with sudden outbursts of violence – knowing the source of those bits of lyrics just adds to my appreciation of the song.

Bob Dylan may not have meant any of this, but with the assistance of *my* Bob Dylan he certainly has – he has created a text which becomes meaningful even on this level, where the borrowing does carry a meaning, and the verdict must be: “Yes, he has fulfilled his literary obligation.”

“Message”

“There is a message, not directly, in what the words express, but indirectly, concerning the relationship between texts; the quotations are there to question the role of the author. I’m not divine, I just put words to music, and any words will do.”

This is the most exciting version of the answer, because it involves the author’s active rejection of his own cultural privilege – not the announcement of the death of the author, but the suicide of the author, so to speak.

But as I hinted at in the little dialog in the epigraph of this chapter, there's a twist: the author can only make this point by using his authority, thereby either annulling his own statement or undermining it. Duchamp may have changed our conception of what art is, but he was still an artist (until he gave up art in favour of chess – the only consistent critique of the authorial role).

The “Any words will do” part of the answer is not the same as saying: “words are meaningless (so any word will do)”, but rather: “Words *are* meaningful, that's what they do: convey meaning (so any words will do)”.

But if the technique that Dylan has used in his latest works is one of appropriation of what others have said, how does that affect my ability to create the Other?

The answer, which Dylan has actually given excellently, if not explicitly, through his *Chronicles* is that it may be impossible to distinguish between all the things that the author has been inspired by on the one hand, and the artist's “own” creations on the other – that there *is* no such thing as the artist's own creation that can be separated from his influences. In that sense, *Chronicles* is the long version of the liner notes to *World Gone Wrong*, one of the greatest pieces of (self-)interpretation ever written.

Message?!

“Waddayamean message?!”

The most radical version of the answer, not just denying that there is a specific message, but that there is any message at all, since messages are either dubious or impossible. I don't for a second think that Dylan belongs in this category, but some remarks are nevertheless worth making, because he does seem to stand closer to this position than he appears to do.

If there is a trend in Dylan's attitude towards the public in later years, it is this: a constant hammering on the image of him as a spokesman for anything or the “Voice of a Generation”; the bickering about today's music; the war on modern technology, both in the field of music (“CDs can't reproduce the character of my music” etc.) and in society at large (“Internet? I would never go there!”); and the singleminded promotion of the good ol' music – music of the thirties, forties, and fifties, which has been emphasised again and again in interviews and now also in his own radio show, *Theme Time Radio*.

Taken together, this could easily translate into a statement like: “It's meaningless for me to try to communicate anything special, and especially in these Modern Times.” This is no longer a questioning of the author's special privileges in doing what he does, but a questioning of the point in doing that

which the author does in the first place: communicate through certain established means and media. And whereas I have no problem regarding the former as a positive, constructive message, I see the latter as the negative version of it: to point out the futility of communication is the ultimate defeat.

This holds regardless of the reason for the cop-out: whether it stems from a feeling that everything has already been said, that everything will always be misunderstood anyway, that technology overwhelms and kills everything, that society is a cold place, or that it was better in the 50s; or a combination of the two: that whatever message one has will drown in the chaos of modern times and technology and over-communication, etc.

In Norwegian, the postmodern position (no, wait, it's not postmodern to have a position; "the postmodern pose" is what I meant to say) is sometimes summarized in the phrase, "Alt er like gyldig" – Everything is equally valid. Remove a space, and the sentence instead becomes: "Alt er likegyldig" – everything is indifferent, nothing matters.

I have earlier mentioned my suspicion that this, to some extent, is Dylan's position and that it is also the reason why the quality of his live music making has dropped so markedly during the (very modern) twenty-first century. I may be wrong, and I both hope and think so, but should it be the case that indifference is his the main emotion and that *this* is Dylan's message ("message!?!"), it is my contention that he has failed in making use of the borrowed lines in a way which justifies the borrowing – in which case he might just as well not have bothered in the first place.

Again, this is not necessarily a criticism of *Bob Dylan*, but of the Bob Dylan that I have pieced together after following him closely for a number of years, listening attentively and with great reward – until that reward has eventually started to shrink.

FLOWERS AND FAILINGS

Can a nazi write edifying literature? Can a plagiarist communicate? Can a poet whose well has run dry pose as a Warholian and pretend there is a message where there isn't? Can a conscious poet use a Warholian pose to present the message that there is no message? And, for all the questions, the crucial follow-up question is: does the knowledge that the author is immoral or dishonest change our perception of his work? Is the life's work of Günther Grass null and void because we now know that he was a member of the SS at seventeen? Does Dylan's working methods make *Modern Times* a bad album?

In one sense, it's really very simple: Dylan's only transgression is to have put – or allowed someone else to put – the line “All songs written by Bob Dylan” on the album sleeve.

I have serious doubts that Dylan himself has had anything to do with that line. I don't believe that Dylan has had the intention of plagiarizing, hiding his influences, fooling and deceiving his audience or giving winks or fingers to his fans and scrutinizers. For all I know, all the writing royalties for those songs may go to a support fund for blind harmonica players. So even though the act seems like a wrongdoing, it is not obvious that Dylan is acting unethically, although it would have looked better and felt better if he had given due credits.

It's not either down to sloppiness – he has in fact talked freely about his working methods on many occasions, both in general and more specifically in connection with *Modern Times*. In the interview with Robert Hilburn of the Los Angeles Times in 2004, Dylan described his methods in a way which is immediately recognizable for anyone who has listened to both *Modern Times* and its sources:

My songs are either based on old Protestant hymns or Carter Family songs or variations of the blues form. What happens is, I'll take a song I know and simply start playing it in my head. That's the way I meditate. A lot of people will look at a crack on the wall and meditate, or count sheep or angels or money or something, and it's a proven fact that it'll help them relax. I don't meditate on any of that stuff. I meditate on a song. I'll be playing Bob Nolan's “Tumbling Tumbleweeds”, for instance, in my head constantly – while I'm driving a car or talking to a person or sitting around or whatever. People will think they are talking to me and I'm talking back, but I'm not. I'm listening to a song in my head. At a certain point, some words will change and I'll start writing a song.

And concerning “When the Deal goes Down” he has told the interviewer David Gates that “he's written a song based on the melody from a Bing Crosby song, ‘Where the Blue of the Night (Meets the Gold of the Day)’”.¹⁰ There is no secret here.

Thus, I blame his record company more than Dylan himself for the line “All songs written by Bob Dylan”. Lawyers, publishers, the money-mongers who run the machinery; who couldn't care less if Dylan sang “Darkness at the break of noon” or “Oops, I did it again!”, as long as it makes money (and who would have looked the other way when he sings “Money doesn't talk it

¹⁰ From <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6099027/site/newsweek/>. Thanks to Jörgen Lindström for directing my attention to this.

swears”, if they had any decency). The San Diego Union-Tribune have given the following short report from a conversation with one of them:

When questioned how Dylan could take credit for a song first recorded in the late 1920s, Dylan’s publicist responded that “Rollin’ and Tumblin’” is in the public domain. While this may be true, for Dylan to not give just due here is spurious.

If this brief snippet is a reliable witness to what was said, and *if* the further interpretation is correct: that Dylan (i.e. in this case: his publishers) *have* indeed taken credits for the writing, not just by putting a label on the CD, but by actually cashing in royalties for it; and *if* they do this in the knowledge that Dylan hasn’t written the tune, but with the pure conscience only a lawyer or a capitalist pig can have, knowing that it’s not illegal since the song is public domain – *then* it’s utterly dishonest, in a way which makes me want to scream out. Not because Dylan or Sony make a few extra bucks, but because they do so by stealing – not from Timrod, but from us all: It may not be against the law, but it violates *my* standards for righteousness and good conduct. What it tells me, is that money rules, even over the law; that there is a discrepancy between “legal” and “right”. They are stealing that distinction, and it makes me sick.

But even though I don’t hold Dylan “literarily” responsible for this, he is still the central character in that circus, and whether he wants it or not, or cares or not, he obviously has a responsibility for the way he is being used. In that sense, I do charge even him of fraud and unjust behaviour. This is a responsibility he has failed to fulfill, regardless of anyone’s verdict about the literary merits of his technique; whether or not one thinks that Timrod is well-known enough for the borrowings to be recognizable as allusions, or if one instead holds that “well-known” is too unsharp a criterion, and that the examples of Joyce and Eliot make unknown allusions a legitimate technique, well established in the canon.

In any case, I couldn’t get too irate about the recycling of a few lines of Timrod here and there. On the other hand, I can hardly listen to “Rollin’ and Tumblin’” anymore with anything but a detached sigh of “oh well”, “why?”, or “next, please”. For me, that track is tinged with indecency – ethical considerations influence the aesthetic perception of the work.

Conversely, it can be maintained that some of the lyrical borrowings do so little to contribute to the whole that the act of borrowing itself seems unjustified – aesthetical considerations influence the ethical judgement.

The failing, in both cases, is the violation of the simple principle, “Play by the rules, and break them *only* if necessary” – or with a borrowed phrase: “to live outside the law, you must be honest.”

Honesty, righteousness, decency – this is where the possibility to give general answers to the question of Dylan’s guilt ends, because they depend on our perception of this Bob Dylan character as a human being with whom we would interact just as with any other human being, and react to in the same ways. And although *Bob Dylan* is the same person for all of us, Bob Dylan isn’t. We all have created him differently and have different relationships with him. For many, this is a personal relationship, and just as we are disappointed if our children are caught cheating at school, so we are if we think Bob Dylan has cheated.

My take on this whole matter has been to try to figure out what kind of literary technique he has used here, then to see if he has been successful in applying it, and for what ends. Whether we think the technique is a legitimate one, or to what extent we find him to have succeeded, are open for individual judgement, but they are in any case isolated from questions about ethics, or about Dylan’s personal intentions. *De gustibus disputandum est*, which does not simply mean that there is *room* for dispute over taste, but that one *should* dispute over it – it is healthy.

Some of the points that I’ve tried to develop in this article have matured in the (surprisingly) friendly interaction with some of the people at the dylanpool (pool.dylantree.com). My sincere gratitude goes to Frank, angry crow puking, Frankeee Lee, kasper, toilandblood546, Poor_Howard, RR, Zedro, 1880 or so, mac, and – despite his unfaltering efforts to lead the discussion to usual levels of pooldom – nick manho.

Did Dylan steal 'Dignity'?

THERE WAS A RUMOR that Dylan had stolen the song 'Dignity', his only hit from the early 90s. The story goes as follows: Singer/songwriter James Damiano claims to have brought a number of songs of his to Dylan's organization, among them 'Steel Guitars'. Shortly after that, Dylan releases the song 'Dignity', which Damiano recognized as his own 'Steel Guitars'.

I first thought there was something to the story, and I was about to write a note about it, in Damiano's favour, when Damiano himself started his 'spamming' campaign (fall 1999), where he distributed documents from his case to just about every newsgroup on the Usenet.¹ Among the items distributed was the following graph, which was supposed to demonstrate the similarities between the two melodies:

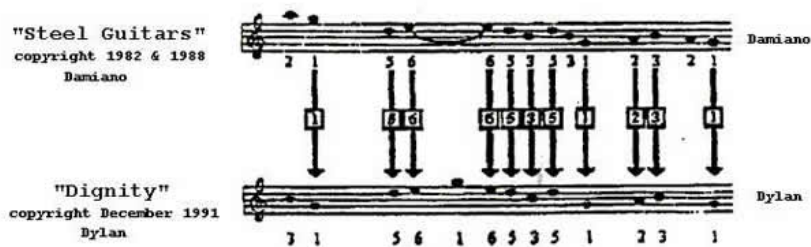


FIGURE 30.1 Exhibit A: Reduction of *Steel Bars* and *Dignity* (from Damiano's court documents.)

The graph is a strong reduction of the songs, to a relatively small number of structural pitches, without regard for rhythm, meter, phrasing etc. 'Dignity' is reduced to the tones *b g | d' e' g' e' d' b d' | g a b g* – only vaguely recognizable as the end of the first line (*b g*) and the rest of the verse. The following figure

¹The campaign is reopened at regular intervals, with longer and longer and more and more incoherent files, in bad html at that – I know, I've read through it all.

shows the Damiano/Green graph together with a transcription of the first verse of Dylan's 'Dignity'.

Fat man lookin' in a blade of steel Thin man lookin' at his last meal

Hollow man look-in' in a cot-ton - field For dig-ni - ty

FIGURE 30.2 Exhibit A illustrated: The actual tones of 'Dignity', and the Damiano graph

These tones are then related to a similar reduced graph of the tune 'Steel Guitars'. The graph was accompanied by the following comment:

Doctor Green who graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard University explains in his analysis that 'The melodic arc found in both Bob Dylan's 'Dignity' and James Damiano's 'Steel Guitars' is more than a collection of shared pitches. It seems to embody the melodic shape or character of both songs. When played on it's own it is reminiscent of both compositions' Yet Judge Simandle writes 'To the ear of this court, there is no substantial similarity in the melody of the two songs.' The record reflects that Judge Simandle has no formal musical education. The record also reflects that James Damiano's first copyright filing for 'Steel Guitars' was filed in 1982, nine years before Bob Dylan's filing for a copyright registration with the Library of Congress. Bob Dylan's copyright filing for 'Dignity' was filed in 1991 James Damiano's 1982 copyright registration included the melody line of Bob Dylan's 'Dignity' and also the lyrical hook of, 'Dignity' Bob Dylan's copyright filing for 'Dignity' was filed in 1991.

To this I replied:

Nice to finally get to see the analysis itself – which doesn't give much support to the infringement case, I'm afraid: A reduced diagram of a melody, stripped of both harmony and rhythm, doesn't prove anything, because it doesn't say very much about the music (not even about the original melody, in fact), especially not in a musical language that is based on a formulaic melodic style, such as rock/blues. The statement that '(2) and (3) can be considered the same note when they precede

(1)' is pure nonsense (and misspelt too). There is no such general law or principle in harmonic analysis – the wider context will be more decisive.

As for the similarity of the melodies (judging from the reduced graph, that is) – they are not as similar as the mathematician has it. The most distinctive features of this little snippet of Dylan's song (which is the one I know) is the high g', the descending fifth towards the end of the selection, and the descending third (coupled with the lack of a dominant chord where it would have been expected) at the very end. None of these elements are present in the Damiano song.

This is not to say that Dylan may not have been influenced by Damiano's song – I haven't heard it – only that that this piece of evidence in isolation is hardly worth the bytes that the jpg-file occupy.

Damiano countered:

To those people who have seen the above newsgroup post may I say that Mr. Eyolf Ostrem claims to be a musicologist however he left no e-mail address or contact information. One can conclude from that fact that Mr. Ostrem does not even exist.

I was of course relieved:

Nice to finally get an authoritative opinion concerning my existence. In fact, I had serious suspicions yesterday when I woke up and looked in the mirror and I couldn't see anybody there. (then I realized: that wasn't me, that was John Lennon, and besides, it wasn't a mirror after all, it was a window (but not the one that leads to the future)). As for 'Mr Ostrem', I don't know. He may not exist.

But Damiano continued:

Bob Dylan spent 3 million dollars on this litigation and produced one so called 'musicologist' in which this experts credentials were never disclosed. Through investigation I was told that Dylan's music expert did not even have a degree and was only a musician.

Mr. Ostrem also is incorrect when he stated 'especially not in a musical language that is based on a formulaic melodic style, such as rock/blues.' What Mr. Ostrem does not know is that a study was done on the very melody line and Doctor Green stated in his analysis that 'the melody line is not common in the corpus of popular music'. Mr Ostrem also did not cite his credentials. Nor did he define musicologist. We only know that he is a memeber of the Bob Dylan web ring 'Edlis' and his name apperas on an Edlis Bob Dylan page at the following address: <http://hem.passagen.se/obrecht/backpages/>

I think it is only fair to ask Mr. Østrem to kindly list his credentials concerning music theory.

Well, either Dylan (or his office; I seriously doubt that Dylan himself has ever concerned himself with this case) is stupid or he has more contacts in the music business than among musicologists. Which is fair enough – that's where he's supposed to be anyway.

As for Damiano's counter-arguments, I could only reply:

The analysis quoted in the attached jpg file, is based on a reduction of the melody to what the analyst considers the essential scale steps of the melody. This method of analysis, at least as utilized in this case, draws on what is called Schenker analysis, which is taught ad nauseam at every american musicological department. One of the main problems with Schenker analysis is that it favors pitch content, and that it tends to conceal details of the music belonging to other parameters, such as rhythm, phrasing etc. The late Bo Alphonse, former professor in musicology at the McGill University in Montreal, has lucidly demonstrated the consequences of this bias, by showing that two pieces that sound completely different (a Chopin prelude and a Beethoven movement, I think it was), are virtually identical already on the first level of reduction (i.e. the level that corresponds most closely to Dr Green's line).

The lesson learned from this, is that all reductive analysis runs the risk of concealing important elements by considering them as surface ornament. The 'surface' is, after all, the only place where the music is actually sounding; the rest is analysis.

As for the melody, in its reduced form it is basically broken g major triad with a sixth added for pentatonic spice. If this isn't formulaic and common in popular music, I don't know what is. The broken triad is old as the rocks, and the figure 5-6-1 [g-a-d'] is, I would say, one of the more common clichés. Then again, that particular figure is not found in Damiano's song, judging from the graph. One can hardly say that it is incorrect that the melody at this point is highly formulaic.

I welcome comments on my other points, concerning the alleged similarity of the melody, which still disregards some of the most distinct features of Dylan's melody, and the analytical methods used to monkey-wrench the two melodies into the same mold. I also welcome a serious discussion concerning the content of all this, which I consider more important than titles (which I haven't acquired yet) and credentials (I am a doctoral student, soon-to-be doctor, in musicology at Uppsala University, Sweden).²

BTW, I've been looking for this Doctor Green in periodicals of musicology, but I haven't been able to find him anywhere. What is his full name? Does he even exist . . . ?

For a discussion of what a musicologist is, I refer to my article 'Music and the Wor(l)d – Musicology and Mankind: How we Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In', co-written with Lars Berglund and published in the Swedish Journal of Musicology, 2001.

* * *

As a final note, I'd like to say that – despite the tone of my replies, which was a result of the weird experience of suddenly not existing – I have nothing against Damiano, and if Dylan actually has stolen his song, I think Damiano should

² In the meantime I have aquired some credentials – I'm now a doctor in Musicology – and some titles – assistant professor at the Danish National Research Foundation: Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals.

get his due credits. My point was mainly a musicological one, concerning reductive analysis, and that in my view, based on the arguments above, the analysis does not support his claims. I have never heard his song, though, nor seen the sheet music; that would give a much better basis for a comparison.³

³ In the footage which is available in Damiano's new assault on the net, there is still no chance to hear 'Steel Bars'. What we get, is Dr. Green playing the melody line of 'Steel Bars' on top of the accompaniment of 'Dignity'. This does – of course – make them sound strikingly similar; not, however because of the melody.

V

I'll See Him In Anything

About Guitars and Kissing

NOT A CONCERT REVIEW OF SOME FALL SHOWS, 2003

Stockholm and Karlstad

I 'VE SPENT SOME TIME thinking (and talking) badly about Larry lately. Before the current tour, and especially after the Stockholm show. I heard about this great version of 'Boots of Spanish Leather' from Helsinki, and had some expectations, which were all thrashed after hearing it in Stockholm. Usually, I welcome a new arrangement, but this? A dull run of parallel thirds and sixths, with some dubious part writing (yeah, well, music analysis is what I do for a living, so what can you expect?), and my guess is it comes from Larry – he's the one playing it, and it fits well in with what I consider to be his style: very professional, very stylized, pretty, pretty, but, hey, there's something missing in there, isn't there? He probably has a bag of tricks 'n' licks bigger than most guitar players alive, and he is capable of piecing them together in a way that both works musically in their own right and holds the back-bone of the song. But still – his playing is a musical reflection of his clothes style: impeccable, elegant, in style, but where is the deep involvement with the world, with experience, blood, guts, love, dirt under finger nails? Larry has no dirt under his finger nails.

Cue to the other guy, the scruffy little bum standing on the left, the slightly old, slightly bald punk who looks like he slept in his suit. His playing is unpredictable. Not that he doesn't repeat himself – he has his bag of tricks as well, and it wouldn't surprise me if Dylan will get bored by them after a while: the asymmetrical rhythms, the quick pull-off ornaments, the odd sustained notes. But still, they are subversive rather than conservative. Here's a transcript from the brainwave recorder placed on Koella's skull:

Wonder what happens if I put my finger somewhere around here on the fretboard and strike the string now?

Hm. Interesting sound.
 What if I just move the finger up and down a little? Yeah, I'll do that.
 Wow! That was cool! I'll do it some more.
 Hey, there's a thick string way up here on my guitar, wonder what kind of sound that produces.
 Fascinating! It's really dark! Once more!

Etc. Something like that. Sometimes it doesn't work and falls flat. But surprisingly often, one is left with a wide grin on one's face, and a bewildered feeling of what-on-earth-just-happened?

Cue back to the tall guy with the fancy beard again. Transcript again:

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“ C      Dm      C      C#o      Dm      G      F      G
  : . . . . : . . . . : . . . . : . . . . : . . . . : . . . . : . . . .
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|-5--3--1-----|-1-----|-3--3-----|-3--3--1--3--|
|-5--4--2--2---|-0-----0---|-2--0-----|-4--4--2--4---|
|-----3---|-2--3--2--2---|-3--2--3--2---|-5--5--3--5---| | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

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[Looks to the right:] Why is he moving his finger up and down like that? Odd. Bob seems to like it, though. Well, it sounds just like Bob too – jeez, I thought we would be spared that ploink ploink when he decided to buy this toy piano (how long will we have to tour before he can afford a music stand too? I want my steel guitar back), and then he brings in a guitarist who plays in the same way. [Sigh . . .]

OK, my turn again, I have to play some notes. Don't I have just the perfect lick for this particular situation? Let's see: key of A, going to Bm, square time, tempo 124 bpm – OK, got it, lick A-214b-J897678-(1978).

I cannot reveal my source for these brain transcripts, but they are accurate. An important point is that they were made in Stockholm. Karlstad was a completely different thing, for several reasons. Strangely enough (given my assessment above), the show was superior to Stockholm on all or most songs, but Koella could hardly be heard, owing to a bad mix and him taking only a few solos. I can't judge quite how bad the mix was, because I was standing up front, right in front of Larry – and Larry's monitors, which was all I heard during the second half of the show. This of course made the musical experience (as opposed to the concert experience) slightly odd, but I must admit that it was fascinating to hear exactly what Larry did all the time. Tweedly Dum, for example – he's really at work throughout the whole song, and the way he keeps the riff going, while at the same time playing solos – impressive. It was also interesting to hear how many different things he does during Watchtower, not in his solos, but in his rhythm playing.

OSLO

OK. So Larry was the star of the Karlstad show, guitarwise (even though the greatness of the show did not lie in the guitar playing). Oslo was something else again. Significantly enough, the three string-players wore identical suits, and it's hard to tell which of the two guitarists 'won'. Not that that was an issue. The word 'concert' has often been mistranslated as a concourse, a competition, while the real meaning is more in the direction of concord, playing together, and that's what they did in Oslo. (I sadly had to skip Gothenburg, but according to reports, the interplay between Freddie and Larry was the special thing about that show.)

The special occasion in Oslo was that during the darkness before the encore, somehow a third guitar player had materialized on stage – a long, blond, slightly nervous-looking character, who turned out to be Mason Ruffner who plays on some tracks on *Oh Mercy*. I wouldn't say that his playing made whole lot of a difference, but his presence did. Whether it was, as has been suggested, that Koella's ego made him step forth just a little bit more frequently (and just happened to be stopping right in front of Ruffner, not taking the extra step towards centre stage that he usually does), or that the presence of another music maker on stage sharpened everyone's attention and concentration, or simply that the extra sound source called for a different approach (I personally like the idea that the reason Tony changed from upright to electric bass during *Summer Days*, was musical – because the way the music developed called for a more forceful bass sound – and not something as trivial as a broken string). Be that as it may, it was the best encore set I've witnessed, for these reasons.

COPENHAGEN

I should perhaps say something about tonight's show too. I must admit it is slightly difficult, since I've been having *Desolation Row* from Karlstad on auto-repeat, so that my face occasionally contracts into what feels like what I used to do when I was four and ran barefoot through grass that was greener (and warmer – this was in the summertime) than anything I've seen ever since; or my stomach feels like a stone that reminds me of a cat that has curled up like a stone, just as weightless and deprived (liberated) of meaning as a stone. That kind of a stone.

Copenhagen, as I was about to say, was for me the best show so far. Thereby, I intend to say that there was not a single low point, all the way through it was

wonderful, in the same way as in Beethoven's first string quartet (I'm sorry, I don't have anything better to compare with, and this is a compliment both to Dylan and Mr. Beety), where the tension that is generated from the first motif, keeps one floating/airborne right through the half (or two) hour(s) the quartet (or the show) lasts.

I don't know how the rest of you feel, but me myself, I have to confess to often thinking, when the intro to *Forever Young* or *LARS* is intoned, that, shit, I could do without this – if I exchange the \$5 that these minutes have cost me, I might afford one of those fast-forward buttons.

Not tonight.

Every minute mattered. Even during *LARS* (or, as a matter of fact, especially during *LARS*, which was treated by Koella just like a 40-years-old antique should be treated: hard and lovingly), I had no other thought than that this could go on forever.

And yet, lo and behold, never have I welcom'd more / the cut of one encore. (neat shakespearean internal rhyme, eh?) than when I heard the Highlander-intro to *AATW*, where *Forever Young* would have ruined everything, but where *Watchtower* was perfect as a Beethovenian final theme. Sometimes it's right to descend into the quiet compound right before the end – sometimes it's not. Tonight it was not, and Dylan did the right thing. So it goes.

I haven't mentioned any highlights yet. I could do that, of course. *HWY61*. *AATW*. *Love-o* was wonderfully slow. *Summer Days* was as good as I ever heard it. Even *Memphis Blues*, which I otherwise can hardly stand, was extremely enjoyable, almost incredibly good.

I could go on, but that would just ruin my point (which I've already indicated): that it was a brilliant *concert*. Fair enough, we didn't get any D-Row, and I can't really point to places where Dylan proved himself to be the demi-god, the descendant of Orpheus and Terpsichore, of Jubal and Erato, of Zeus and some cow in Gallup, New Mexico, that he certainly is, and where he, by way of a phrase or a plonk from his divine piano, turned it into an unforgettable evening; that it still turned out that way, was a happy coincidence involving a highly human icon (who had one too many harmonicas to keep track of); two guitar players who just keep on exciting with their differences; a rhythm section who somehow uphold both tact and tone; a magnificent sound on the 56th row; and great company.

* * *

My conclusion, whether it conforms with what I've written or not, is that I enjoy Koella tremendously – in Stockholm he was the only thing I really enjoyed – and the moral of this story is that there's got to be some spit in a kiss, in order for the beauty of it to work.

Postscript: This is probably not a concert review; I haven't listed all the song and the solos and the lyric variations, or the instruments (heck, there were instruments there that I don't even know the name of; there was a huge pile of things that looked like kettles and pots, with a guy with a funny hat beating on them like they were a beast, CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?!? – and another huge wooden construction with some kind of metal cords attached to it, which this other strange guy kept PLUCKING in a strange way; – hey, it was a genuine wax cabinet, man) – so it can't be a concert review. Take it for what it is, whatever that is.

Genius, Guitars, and Goodbyes

I MISS FREDDY!

SO, I BROKE THE promise-to-self, to let Dylan tour on his own, without my help. I decided, after the last Scandinavian tour, that this was it; the shows were decent enough, but nothing more. I hyped myself up to enjoying them, liking them even, perhaps loving them, and moments like Desolation Row in Karlstad (best Desolation Row ever? Best Desolation Row ever!) made it a whole lot easier, but I also knew that I wouldn't follow another tour again. Enough singsong, enough mumbles, no more days at the office for me. NeverEndingTour-Dylan never got better than 1995.

But things have changed, and for reasons more related to Wedding Song than to Desolation Row I had to give him another chance. Since he decided not to play Copenhagen this time, it had to be Gothenburg, and I was on the road again.

For the first time in a very long time, I was quite unprepared too. I haven't heard a new show in two years, and I was looking forward to the closest thing to a virginal experience that I would ever get again. I knew there were some new band members, but I didn't even know their names, let alone their faces.

I was ready. C'mon, Bob, surprise me.

And man, was I surprised.

It was a time-stopping experience. Two years just vanished, everything was just as I had left it. Given that that was two years ago, and that the man has been out there doing it all that time, that was not a good experience. One would expect that *something* had happened, but if it had, I don't know what it was.

Call me Mr. Jones, call me Judas, but honestly, I had hoped for some development.

And the band... The band... Some years ago, even though I couldn't always say the shows were great, inspired, etc., at least one could stand proud and claim that Dylan was backed by the best and tightest rock combo in the world, who played Brown Sugar better than the Stones themselves did.

Not anymore.
Tight? Nah.
Exciting? Nope.
Hard? Hardly.

I don't want to sound negative; the steel guitar player was quite good – at times he made his instrument sound like something Bucky Baxter might have handled. The guitarist behind Dylan – I think it was Stu Kimball – had his moments too. I guess *someone* likes the new guy's solos (that must be Denny Freeman, then) but don't count me among them. Melodic in the bland, cover-band style that you might hear in light entertainment TV shows; and a repertoire of licks so vast that they reappeared every other song.

After a couple of songs, every taste bud in my aesthetic body yelled: 'We miss Freddy!' Initially, I just had to agree, and joined the choir. After all, I summed up my last concert experience (at least I believed it would be my last), writing 'About Guitars and Kissing', my eulogy to Freddy Koella, the guy who plays in Dylan's style, but actually knows how to play.

But being the rational academic I am paid to be, I had to pass beyond that kind of populist clamour from the lowly senses – I had to think about it. Why has Dylan let Freddy go (or kicked him out?!) and replaced him with this? Images flash by: Michael Bloomfield – savage (and dead, of course). Robbie Robertson – there is a second-and-a-half scene in *Eat the Document*, just a soundcheck, where Robbie plays a few tones in E major and proves what a tremendous guitarist he was. Fred Tackett – he may wear glasses (so do I), but don't let that fool you; he could be mean too. G. E. Smith – not my favorite guitarist, but there certainly was a bite there, some rough edges which we haven't heard again before the days of Koella, paired with a certain dexterity which could become quite furious. J. J. Jackson – probably my favorite NeverEndingTour guitarist before Koella.

And now . . . ! Where in this lineage does the current band belong? Why is it that I suddenly came to think of *Hearts of Fire* in the middle of the show?

Again: Why does he do it? He used to say, about the mid-eighties, that he didn't know what his songs meant any longer. Well, he doesn't seem to now either. 'Leledi-laaay', 'painting the passports *brown*', 'justlikea *woman*' – all sung to the same melody, with the same emotional character. He might as well have sung 'two litres of *milk*', or 'upmg kfadl ksdfie *ewok*' – it wouldn't have mattered more, or less.

I'm not going to analyse him or his motives – is he just doing it for the money? is it just this pact with the Commander-in-Chief? *Is* it, perhaps, just another day at the office? – but my impression is that he is no longer hungry,

he is no longer nervous, he is tired and content. It may be a very long time since he last went to the beach and danced with one hand waving free, but up until recently he has sounded like he wanted to. Not anymore. He'd be afraid of getting dirt on his boots, he'd be repulsed by the fish, he'd be too tired to walk through the dunes. He was so much younger then. That bothers me, much more than the lack of melodic variety.

That Dylan never sings the same way twice is the most persistent myth about Dylan, but that doesn't make it more true. Of course, there is a reason why I have all those boxes of concert tapes: because of a nuance here (which wasn't there the day before, and which adds a whole dimension to the word or the song), and a rearrangement here (which transforms the songs in ways which makes the phrase 'for better or for worse' meaningless). But my experience this time – and, with few but honourable exceptions, for the past few years – was that not only does he sing exactly the same way as two years ago, he also sings every single song exactly the same way. (Take 'exactly' with a pinch of salt, or take it to mean 'with exactly the same emotional investment').

I'm not talking about age here, but about guts and hunger, interest and desire. (Prague, March 10, 1995: Dylan was sick and exhausted, and produced one of my favorite shows.) If he doesn't know what it's like on the beach any more and by the way doesn't want to either, then why on earth does he have to sing about it? Why doesn't he give us something he's interested in? He obviously loves old music, the kind of songs he rips off and records with new lyric collages, the kind of stuff he sings when he's all by himself. That's what he does amazingly well, so why not do it more? How about ditching the war-horses – they're as tired as him – and playing a show once in a while, with Doc Boggs, Gene Austin, Johnny and Jack, Charles Aznavour, stuff we know he loves?

Why not? Well, because if he did, he probably wouldn't fill the halls he plays in now. The popular response, which he finally seems to embrace and enjoy after years of resisting it and trying to destroy it, has become too pleasant, it seems.¹

I don't have the time for that: I have boxes upon boxes of old tapes full of flame and nervous energy that I have to listen through again.

¹ It seems that my wish has been granted – albeit not in concert form. His weekly radio show in XM Radio, Theme Time, is exactly that: a selection of songs he likes, interspersed with hilarious, deadpan comments, interesting insights, floating in and out of quotation and commentary, the way he does it on the sleeve notes to *World Gone Wrong* and, in a different way, all through *Love and Theft*. Way to go, Bobby!

If this is it, then: Bye, Bob.

* * *

Those were my initial reactions. After some more time to think,² I found there was more to say, because the issue has wider implications, encompassing culture, communication, and art.

There are some things I'm *not* intending to do:

- To disrespect Dylan's artistic integrity. I'm not attacking it – on the contrary: I'm craving it.
- To claim that Dylan is too old to be good.
- To profit economically from his work.
- To say that all Dylan does now is to go through the motions and profit economically from his past work.
- To take away the enjoyment of anyone who goes to a show and enjoys it, or to say that whoever like what they hear are stupid and ignorant.

What I did intend was to urge people to think about what they do, and what that does to the performance situation.

OK, Dylan's an icon, OK, he has a charisma which pours off the stage in gallons, even today, but still?

It is amazing that he can still do it. And I can understand that people want it to be good – because it's Dylan, because there's a legend up there, because they've waited for this for twenty years, because they've paid (un-)fairly large amounts of money for those two hours. But how can he ever get anything like a clear perception of when what he's doing is good – how can he possibly develop criteria for judging this – when the feedback he gets is uncritical adoration? When stepping over the amp next to his piano and moving slightly closer to the centre-stage and blowing some 'tut-tut-tut' thing on the same note in his harp, will harvest the same ovations every night, and when saying 'thank you' – once, at best – brings down the house?

Part of Dylan's greatness lies in his integrity, his unwavering confidence that what he's doing is right. Take the '65/66 tour: night after night with cat-calls, Judas!, the English leftists' organized clapping ('If you only wouldn't clap so hard'), the boos, the reviews – enough to break anyone's back, but Dylan sucked energy out of it and produced classic performance art. Or the gospel tours. Again: boos, ridicule, and audiences numbering 2,000 rather than

² And some discussions on the message board of the blog, the importance of which I hereby acknowledge.

20,000 or 200,000 – and again: brilliant shows filled with fire and brimstone, and not only coming from the texts. Even the self-inflicted nadir around 1990 could be seen in this light: perhaps the ultimate act of artistic integrity: to self-destruct in order to rebuild.

But when was the last time Dylan was booed? Even when he put out a bad performance? When was he last given that opportunity for a reality check which an honest audience reaction is?

If an artist puts out a performance which is sub-par, he should be greeted with boos, regardless of what he has done in the past, or will do the following night. He should not be deprived of the chance of a reaction which is based on what he *does, now*, and not to what he *has done* or *has been*, which is in effect the same thing as treating him as a *has-been*.

It's not necessarily the booing I'm after (although that *would* probably bring out some long-lost fire and brimstone in Mr. D), but a nuanced response from the audience, where the audience is able to see beyond the god-like iconicity of the man up there, and hear what they hear, instead of first passing it through the 'he's a genius, so this must be good'-filter.³

I think this would do us, the audience, good, but it is also our responsibility towards the artist: if what he is doing is to engage in an act of communication (and not just sound production), and if the response is the same no matter what he communicates, what good does that response do him – what kind of respect towards him is that?

One of the most puzzling – perhaps saddest, but I'm not really sure about this – moments in my Dylan career was the first time I was up front and was able to see him at ten feet's distance. The show was great, but the look on his face . . . It seemed to lie somewhere between complete unemotionality

³ So why didn't I boo? The short answer is: Good question – you got me there. A slightly longer answer is: because I'm brought up to be polite and not make noises while other people make noises which other people again want to hear. The full answer is: I did – I do, by writing about it, by applying a critical perspective (not in the sense of 'being negative', but in the wider sense of 'involving careful evaluation and judgment') to Dylan's production, and communicating this. Granted, this calls for a modification of my statement above in order to count as 'booing', to something like:

'If an artist consistently puts out sub-par performances, an explicitly critical response – which for the sake of argument and historical connections might be called "boos" (also in the cases where no audible sounds are uttered from the members of the audience at the time, individually or as a collective) – would be a more honest reaction than "it was a great concert: he smiled twice!!", and it would in the end also be beneficial for the artist'.

Something like that. If this is cheating, then I admit: I didn't boo.

and some kind of bemused superiority. Whatever it was, it looked like a mask. At the time I thought: He is not taking us, this, himself, seriously. He doesn't have to, of course, and again: that he does not succumb to that kind of emotional interaction with the audience which is so commonly seen, is to me the strongest sign of his integrity. But on the other hand: how can it be otherwise, when he is greeted with hoorays whatever he's doing? Mustn't he be thinking, either: 'Why on earth are they cheering – that solo wasn't really *that* successful, was it?' or 'Hey, that must really have been a great solo I played there – look at how they're cheering!' In any case, it might be time for another 'If you just wouldn't clap so hard.'

A fundamental premise for what I'm saying is that art does not and cannot live in a vacuum in the artist's oh so brilliant head: it is an act of communication, which involves *two* actors, with a shared responsibility for making it work: the artist and the audience. If the audience is content with 'intensity gone', 'not exactly half bad', and 'Merle was better', but still make it sound like it was the best show ever – every time – that's not taking that responsibility. And if Dylan is content with playing not half bad, perhaps because that's all it takes to fill the venues with enthusiasm – every time – that's not taking his.

Being a 'genius' is no excuse. Genius is not an inherent quality of an artist, but something that's constantly in the making. If an artist produces something of inherent beauty, profound expression, coming from a sharp eye on the human condition, a gaze which transcends everyday thoughts, then that expression might be called genius, but to call the artist himself a genius would be to subscribe to a concept of divine inspiration which Dylan may or may not embrace, but I don't. Genius isn't what you are, but what you do.

I take 'Art' to be a label we have put upon a particular kind of communication, and whereas communication, just as any other human activity, as a matter of course comes from the subject, which thus is the beginning and end of the act of communication, the tools with which the subject is able to make sense of this communication, are available to the subject only through the rules for correct use (and interpretation) that a language community constitutes (or an art-reception community in this case).⁴

Thus, if one sees art as a system for conveying a certain gaze on existence (whether in its entirety or in the tiniest aspect of it, such as a stone or a car

⁴ This is based on Wittgenstein and his notion in the *Philosophical Investigations* that 'the meaning of a word is its (correct) use', and his rejection of the possibility of a private language.

passing by on the street while one is on one's way to work or to meet a lover whose current partner is blissfully unaware of the liaison, but murderously [in the literal sense] jealous, and who also happens to be your own best childhood friend at that – small things like that), the gaze itself may (or may not) be completely subjective, but the *communication* of it is (1) meaningless as a completely subjective exercise, even in the cases where the artist counts himself as his main or only audience, and (2) inconceivable without the patterns for generation and organization of meaning which can never be entirely subjective – on the contrary. Even when the artist communicates primarily with himself, the communication will take place in this channel, as an exchange between the self and the other.

This is, in the end, why it bothers me so much when the communication seems to be broken. I know *he* is capable of it. This book is my attempt to take my part of the responsibility.