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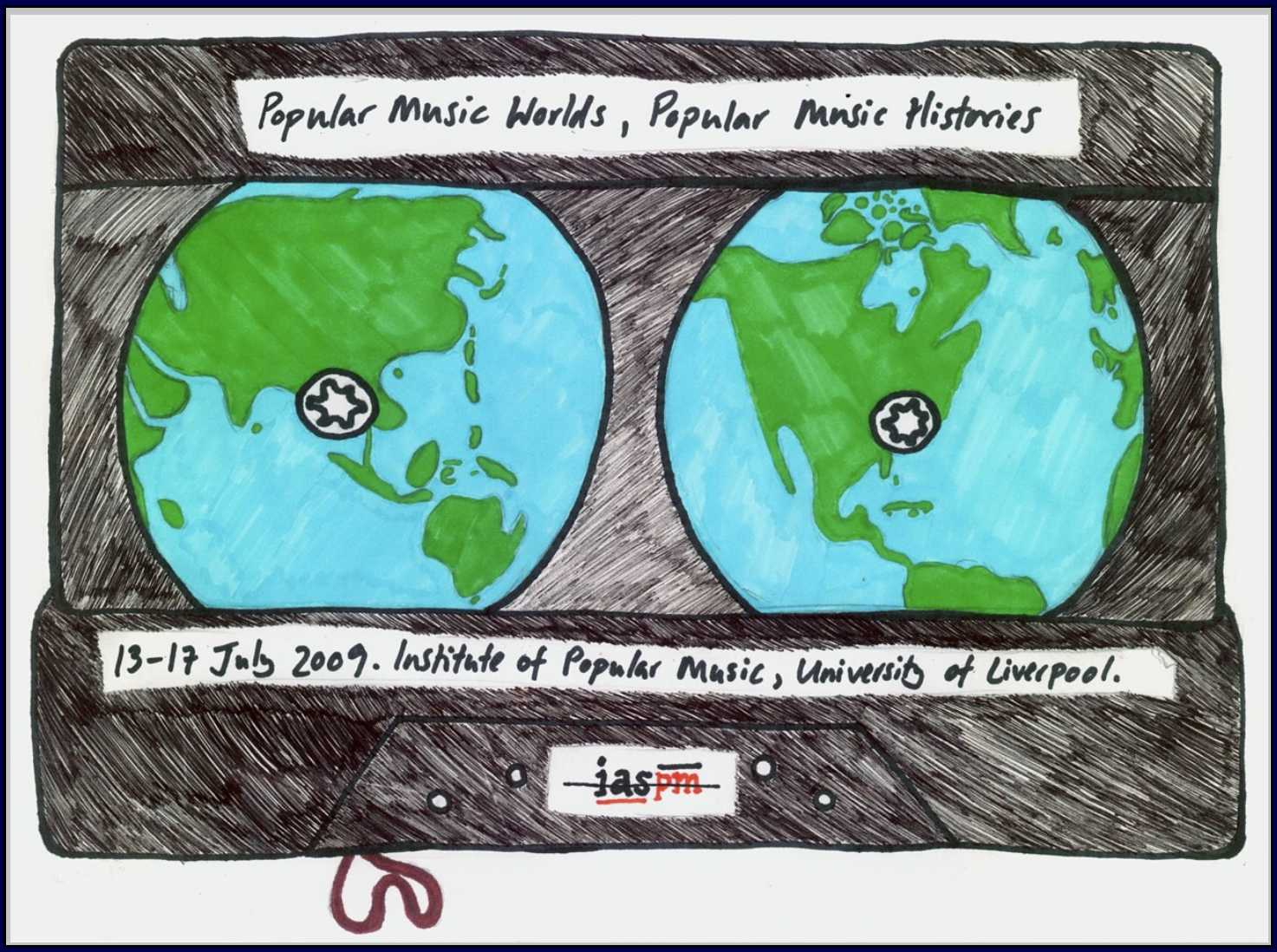
18 April 2024



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Verse, Chorus (Refrain), Bridge: Analysing Formal Structures of the Beatles' Songs

Franco Fabbri

Songs are 'made of' parts, or sections: verses, choruses or refrains, bridges (middle-eights), etc. This is common knowledge in cultures where the concept of a vocal piece like a 'song' exists, and can be seen as an instance of a more general knowledge (in many cultures) that any music piece is made of parts, or sections, that can be named. In fact, for many, this is *the* basic level music competence: knowing that music is made of parts, or sections, assembled one after another, in the flow of time. Like in a path that one is treading, like in the development of a discourse, like in poetry: names that describe sections in a music piece, and in a song, are often metaphors based on other human experiences. Following Gino Stefani's (2007) suggestion of different music competences within a culture, we can find Stefani's 'classic' dualism between 'common competence' (where probably formal units are called 'parts', like the pieces that combined with others form the whole) and 'analytic competence' (where probably these formal units are called 'sections', to distinguish them from 'parts', which in the specialists' lexicon describe other structural units), and also distinguish specific competences in various members of the musical community (that of listeners, of critics, of authors, of performers, of institutions, etc.). This implies that not necessarily the names of song sections have the same meanings for everyone, as they change with the cultural context and in time.

Let's start with a classic example. 'The Man I Love' – a song composed by George and Ira Gershwin in 1924 for the musical comedy *Lady Be Good!*, dropped from this and other musicals and later accepted as one of the best known jazz standards – can be thought of as formed by an introductory verse ('When the yellow moon begins to beam...') followed by a 32-bar chorus (starting with 'Someday he'll come along...'), which can be divided into four 8-bar sections; out of these, the first two and the fourth are musically *almost* identical (and lyrically similar), while the third is different, with a melodically and harmonically contrasting character: that is called the bridge (or middle-eight: 'Maybe he'll be coming Sunday...'), and so the chorus can be described as having an AABA form. However, when the song entered the night-club repertoire, soon it lost the verse, as long introductions like these, fashioned in the way of a *recitativo*, were more apt for the theatrical scene than for dancing. Stephen Citron, author of a guide to the craft of songwriting, comments:

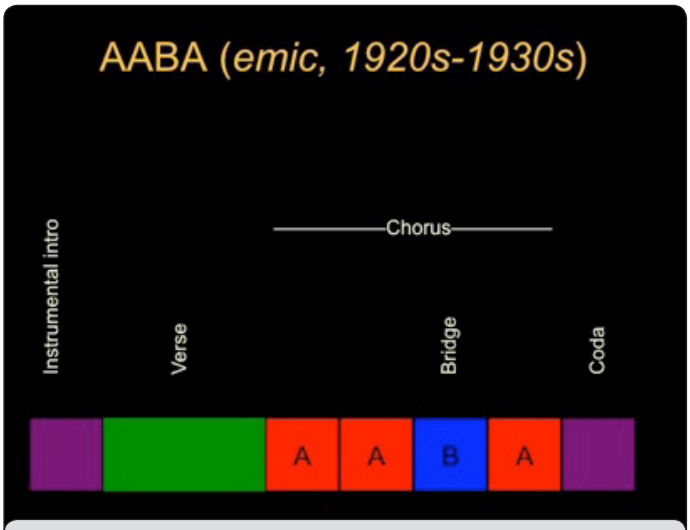

Fig. 1: Graphic representation of the AABA song form, with naming conventions accepted in songwriters' and performers' communities in Tin Pan Alley's 'Golden Age'.

The music of most verses was usually so weak, and the lyric so superfluous, that all but the most sophisticated aficionados of pop song skipped right over them. Sometimes at cocktail parties in New York penthouses you can overhear the tuxedoed pianist playing the 'verse game' with the guests. He plays the first line of a verse by Kern or Rodgers or Porter or even Arlen and the assembled guests try to sing the first line of the chorus. That shows how recherché these verses have become (Citron 1986, p. 36).

But as the verse was skipped, songs like these came to be formed just by the chorus (preceded by an instrumental intro and followed by a coda), and the chorus included the bridge: this may be an explanation why the name 'chorus' came to be used as well to designate any of the A subsections of an AABA form, in a synecdochical relation to the whole. So, 'The Man I Love' could be described as an 'Instrumental intro – (Verse) – Chorus – Coda' song, or as an 'Instrumental intro – (Verse) – Chorus – Chorus – Bridge – Chorus – Coda' song.

It must be noted that in the second instance the lyrics of the chorus are varied (they are never repeated equal), though the title ('The man I love') is repeated at the beginning of the first A section (or first chorus) and at the end of the second, in a way that appears to be rhetorically strategic. It must also be noted that it was then very unlikely that the A sections in the AABA form be named 'verse', as this name was used for the introductory section instead (though that is the way they are now called by many authors: Covach 2005 calls 'sectional verse' what I would call 'verse', calls 'sectional refrain' the full AABA section, that used to be called 'chorus' in the 1930s, and calls 'verse' each of the A sections).

In the same period (from the 1920s to the 1950s) the same name 'chorus' was used to designate the section with repeating lyrics that followed each of the narrative verses in folk songs and, later, in country & western songs. I'd like to point out that the two usages of the same term have completely different meanings, not

only because in the Broadway/standard usage lyrics are never repeated in a chorus (and choruses are never repeated), while in the folk/country usage all choruses have the same lyrics, but also because, as we shall see, the rhetoric strategies implied in these song forms are opposite: the former subtractive, the latter teleological (Fabbri 1996).

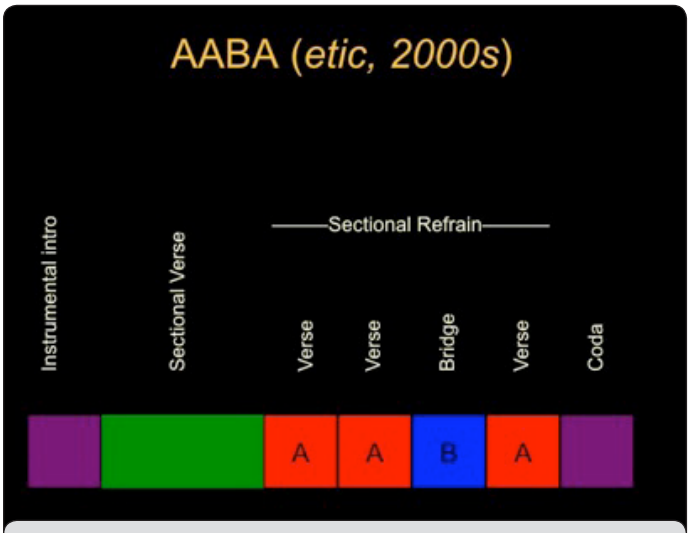

Fig. 2: Graphic representation of the AABA song form, with naming conventions used in current literature.

Today, the usage of 'chorus' to indicate a section where both lyrics and music are repeated, that is, as a synonym of 'refrain', is widespread in the English-speaking world. Some examples: *Songwriting for Dummies* (Peterik, Austin, Bickford 2002), a 'cookbook' for would-be songwriters, similar to Citron 1986; *Revolution in the Head* (MacDonald 1994), the well-known guide to all Beatles' songs; 'Where's The Chorus? A Computational Approach for the Automatic Segmentation of Pop Songs', a paper presented at Iaspm's International Conference, Mexico City, 2007, by Daniel Müllensiefen, David Lewis, Geraint Wiggins (Goldsmiths College, University of London); *Don't Bore Us – Get to the Chorus*, a greatest hits album (1995) by the Swedish group Roxette. As a matter of fact, many popular songs from all over the world, since many decades, include repeating sections of substantial length, where lyrics and music are always the same, and where the main hook and/or the song title is located; such sections (named 'choruses' or 'refrains') are preceded by sections with varying lyrics, often of narrative character (named 'verses'). A typical structure is (Intro) – Verse - (Verse) – Refrain – Verse – Refrain – (Refrain) – (Coda), where parentheses indicate optional sections and/or repetitions. Just to give an example, Intro – Verse – Refrain – Verse – Refrain – Verse – Refrain – Verse – Refrain – Coda can be a description of Bob Dylan's 'Like a Rolling Stone'. 'Substantial length' is a rather weak definition, I admit, but it can be referred to the very origin of the term 'chorus': that is, a section which is usually sung along (I can't refrain from quoting James Taylor, here: 'If you feel like singing along, please don't'...). In this sense, a chorus (or refrain) is a Gestaltic unit, or the segment of a song that people sing when they remember or cite a song. That's why I often feel skeptical when I'm confronted with descriptions of song structures (like in MacDonald 1994) where: 1) the chorus is very

short, often clearly perceivable (by me, at least) as shorter than the singable unit I mentioned above; 2) rhetorically strategic elements, like the song title and/or the main hook are located in other segments, like the verse(s).

This happens almost systematically with songs in AABA form (where B is a bridge or middle-eight), or better in AABABA form, that were especially abundant in the second half of the Fifties and in the Beatles' repertoire, at least until 1965. This song structure seems to me to be derived from 'classic' Tin Pan Alley models, so I think it would be more appropriate to use for it a nomenclature based on the older lexicon.

That's why, since my first approach to the subject in 1995 (first published in 1996), I decided to rely on the following definitions:

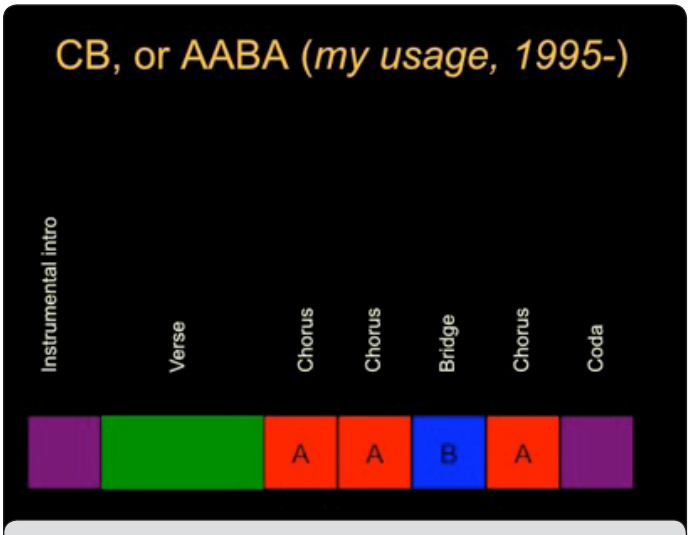

Fig. 3: Graphic representation of the CB, or AABA, song form, with section names suggested by the author in his articles (Fabbri 1996, 2003, 2008).

i) a *refrain* is a song section of substantial length (see above) where music and lyrics are *always* repeated equal in the course of the song, and the lyrics include the song title;

ii) a *chorus* is a song section where music is repeated equal in the course of the song, while the lyrics vary; however, some lines in the lyrics (and especially the song title) are repeated equal, either in the same place or in varying places in the section;

iii) a *verse* is a song section where music is repeated equal in the course of the song (if the verse is repeated, obviously), while the lyrics vary, without exceptions;

iv) a *bridge* (or middle-n, where n is its length in bars) is a song section where music is repeated equal in the course of the song, and the lyrics may vary or not: what defines a bridge is its *position* (quite often after *two* other units, especially choruses) and its contrasting character, especially in terms of melody and harmony.

I don't think that definitions of other sections, like instrumental intro or coda, are needed in this context.

A few observations. First, I don't intend these definitions to be normative. Others are, but many of them are at the

same time anti-historical (as they give names to song sections that were not used at the time some song forms were popular) and contradictory. The above definitions are meant as tools for my own study. Second, it is clear that these definitions are based both on the musical and the lyrical content. They are not assumed to be working if either one or the other is not considered. They are based on a mixture of criteria that apply to a human expression based on music and words. Third, they apply in the first place to songs in the Anglo-American tradition, though in various other geographical and historical contexts they seem to be useful as well.

Here's an example of the application of the above definitions to a song, 'His Latest Flame', that was one of Elvis Presley's hits in 1961 (#4 in Billboard's Top 100, #1 in UK charts).

'[Marie's the Name of] His Latest Flame'
by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman (1961)

A very old friend came by today
'Cause he was telling everyone in town
Of the love that he just found
And Marie's the name of his latest flame

He talked and talked and I heard him say
That she had the longest blackest hair
The prettiest green eyes anywhere
And Marie's the name of his latest flame

Though I smiled the tears inside were a-burnin'
I wished him luck and then he said goodbye
He was gone but still his words kept returnin'
What else was there for me to do but cry

Would you believe that yesterday
This girl was in my arms and swore to me
She'd be mine eternally
And Marie's the name of his latest flame

Though I smiled the tears inside were a-burnin'
I wished him luck and then he said goodbye
He was gone but still his words kept returnin'
What else was there for me to do but cry

Would you believe that yesterday
This girl was in my arms and swore to me
She'd be mine eternally
And Marie's the name of his latest flame
Yeah Marie's the name of his latest flame
Oh Marie's the name of his latest flame.

A description of the formal structure of this song is easy, I think: IAABABAC, where I is the instrumental intro and C is a coda. But if we ask 'Where's the chorus?', and we base on the current (explicit or implied) definition, we might be led to consider that the only section of the song where both music and lyrics are always repeated

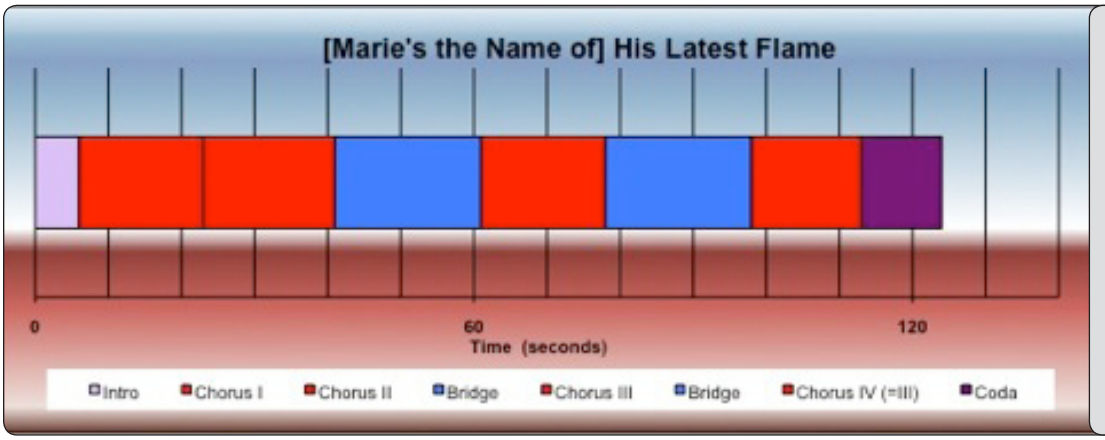

Fig. 4: Graph representing the formal structure of Doc Pomus' and Mort Shuman's '[Marie's the Name of] His Latest Flame', as recorded by Elvis Presley (RCA 47-7908, 1961)

equal is the B section ('Though I smiled the tears...'). But if I said that this is the chorus, I'm sure I would get a choral 'No!' in response, because it is obvious that B is the bridge or middle eight. So, let's look for the song title. It can be found at the end (as the last line of) all A sections, and is repeated in the coda. If we want to stick consequently to the current usage of the term 'chorus', we could say that this line is the chorus, preceded by a verse. So each of the A sections would be a verse-chorus sequence. Or, we might dismiss that repetition, and say that any of the A sections is a verse. In the first instance the song would be a Verse – Chorus – Verse – Chorus – Bridge – Verse – Chorus – Bridge – Verse – Chorus song, in the second it would be a Verse – Verse – Bridge – Verse – Bridge – Verse song (in both cases I ignored the intro and the coda). The latter is, in fact, the most common description of this song structure, that can be found both in 'cookbooks' and in academic studies, like Covach 2005 and 2006. Again, I am not fully satisfied by the idea of a verse that ends or begins systematically with the same line.

According to my definitions, instead, this would be a Chorus – Chorus – Bridge – Chorus – Bridge – Chorus song, or simply a chorus – bridge (CB) song, taking for granted that in this very typical and widespread formal structure (between circa 1956 and circa 1965) there are always two choruses at the beginning of the song.

The analysis of other songs with a similar formal structure (Fabbri 2008, pp. 185-196) shows that:

i) while it is more common that the song title/hook be located at the end of the chorus, so that the chorus can be described as having an internal verse-refrain structure, it also happens that the title/hook be located at the beginning of the chorus (see Buddy Holly's 'Everyday', or the Beatles' 'A Hard Day's Night');

ii) often, like in many Tin Pan Alley 'classics', the first two choruses (AA) appear to be like a whole, where the song title appears here and there, often at the beginning and at the end (see 'The Man I Love', or 'Yesterday');

iii) of course, the choice of a song's title is usually made when both music and lyrics are finished, but listening to songs shaped in this particular form it is difficult to resist to the idea that authors follow a rhetorical scheme and are aware of the varying strength of lyrical and musical content according to their placement in the formal flow of a song. In other words, I'm confident that Paul McCartney knew that whatever word or words would substitute 'scrambled eggs', that would be the song's title.

'Basic' song forms

In my first paper on this subject (Fabbri 1996) I compared two 'basic' song forms, that I called chorus-bridge (CB) and verse-refrain (VR). Actually, the latter was called in the paper *strofa-ritornello* (SR), as it has been a very popular song form in Italy for nearly two centuries, with examples like 'Te voglio bene assaje' (1839), 'Funiculì funiculà' (1880), "O sole mio' (1898) and many other Neapolitan songs, as well as the vast majority of Italian songs presented at the Sanremo Festival every year since 1951. However, as I said, this form can be found in many other music cultures. I would describe its typical structure as follows: V-(V)-R-V-R-V-R-(R), where the optional initial double verse (with different lyrics, of course) is seldom found, while the optional repetition of the last refrain is quite common, often with a modulation or a harmonic transition preparing or accompanying it.

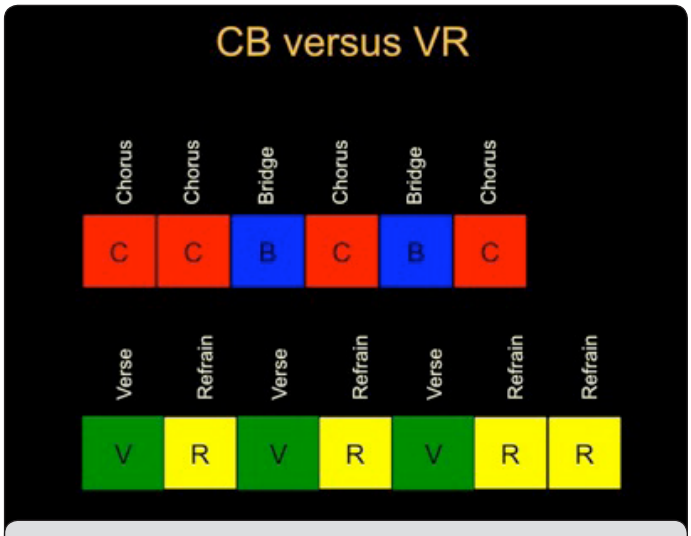

Fig. 5: Confronting two widespread song structures: CB and VR.

If we look at (and especially listen to, of course) the two basic forms:

C-C-B-C-B-C

V-R-V-R-V-R-R

We notice that the repetition of an entire section occurs at the beginning of the CB form, and at the end of the VR form. Also, from the location of the song title and/or main hook in the relevant sections (according to my definitions), that is, the chorus in the former and the refrain in the latter, we notice that the former offers a larger abundance of memorable passages at the beginning of the song, while the opposite is true for the latter. So, if we agree that such memorable passages are often the major source of pleasure in listening to a song (or performing it), the VR form seems to be based on an

additive pleasure strategy, while the CB form is based on a subtractive strategy (in fact, in many recordings of CB songs, the C in between the two bridges is often an instrumental version). As my 1995-6 paper circulated only in Italian and in French (Fabbri 2003), it may be useful to translate a part of it:

The two basic forms use very different attention and fascination strategies. The VR form is discursive, embracing, additive, finalistic; pleasure (that beautiful melody, that intriguing tune, that unforgettable line) is the consequence of a course, it comes at the end of a preliminary phase, it's a prize, Paradise after Purgatory, an orgasm at the end of lovemaking (and choral, therefore simultaneous), victory after a war, a piece of cake after a dull beefsteak with spinach. In psychoanalytic terms, it corresponds to the satisfaction of an oral pleasure; a pleasure that can be reiterated, but which – after having been experienced – doesn't tolerate a long wait, because of its very nature: therefore, just in case, one can jump to a new refrain skipping the verse, intensifying it by modulating, or augmenting the volume or the arrangement's richness.

The CB form is exclamatory, detached, subtractive, oriented to the beginning rather than to the end of a song; pleasure is instant, but its source, after having been exhibited, revealed in all of its aspects, repeated for better assimilation, is subtracted and substituted by the grey tones, by the discipline, geometry and logic of the bridge (Paradise is on this Earth, but what really counts in life is tough work). It isn't a narration, but the staging of a drama. The chorus is repeated again, but the number of repetitions diminishes, as the song proceeds [...]. Often the full chorus, with its full battery of hooks, can only be listened at the beginning; later, the pleasure mechanism is bound to deprivation and memory, to the contrasting middle-eights, to shorter resurfacings of the chorus; somehow, the formal acceleration that leads rapidly to the end produces a crescendo, an accumulation of small frustrations. An anal-retentive pleasure, as a psychoanalyst would probably see it, or a salesman strategy: after exhibiting a suitcase full of brushes, the salesman closes the lid, knowing that, if the prospective customer asks to see them again, the sale is made; or, maybe, a tickling of our perceptive resources, of our attention and memory, based on an anthropological background that seems to be shared by the acceleration of the sonata form, by the inexorable proceeding of a fugue towards the stretti, by the visual illusions offered

by the usage of the golden section in architecture (Fabbri 2008, pp. 168-169).

A final point to be added, before I move to considering the formal structures of the Beatles' songs, is that different song sections appear quite often to be composed according to consistent strategies: choruses usually include melodic, harmonic, rhythmic 'hooks', and are more varied, with a curvilinear melodic shape based on frequent leaps and changes of direction, while bridges are more geometric and repetitive, based on melodic and harmonic progressions (in the strict grammatical sense). Choruses are the figure, or the picture, bridges are the ground, or the frame; choruses are coloured, bridges are grey; for a more detailed discussion of the subject, see again my older papers.

The Beatles' choruses and bridges

In his controversial biography of John Lennon, Albert Goldman reports:

> *Reckoning that the young John Lennon had a shrewd sense of the current pop scene, Gentle demonstrated for him his latest song, 'I've Just Fallen for Someone,' which he was about to record. Lennon said, 'I don't care for the middle eight,' and then improvised the words and music for a new bridge. (This was precisely the sort of thing that John did time and again in later years for Paul McCartney.) When the song was released as the B-side of a Johnny Gentle single on Parlophone in 1962, John Lennon received no credit for his contribution–but he had the pleasure of hearing eight bars of his music on a commercial record before the Beatles had cut one of their own songs. (p. 110)*

The episode suggests that Lennon had (already in 1962) a kind of 'middle eight aesthetics', or, to put it simply, an idea about how a B section should work in an AABA(BA) form (or, in my terms, about the function of a bridge in a CB form). But the episode also suggests that Lennon was probably particularly gifted as a composer of bridges, due to his inclination to compose geometric melodic lines (sometimes limited to very few notes, even two or one, like in ample stretches of the melodies of 'I'm Only Sleeping' or 'I Am The Walrus'), and so his collaboration with Paul McCartney was particularly fruitful also due to their complementary melodic talent, so to speak. It is true that this kind of collaboration was reciprocal, as demonstrated by this passage by Walter Everett:

> *A more common method of their collaboration was for one to present a song's principal section, a verse or a chorus, and the other to suggest*

a contrasting bridge – the 'middle eight' as they would usually refer to it, regardless of the passage's metrical length or phrase construction. At some times the partner's response would be solved as a 'homework' project. So, later, McCartney would offer the verse for 'Michelle' or 'We Can Work It Out' and Lennon would come back with the bridge. 'Wait' and 'I've Got A Feeling', on the other hand, were begun by Lennon and completed with bridges by McCartney (Everett 2001, p. 32)

And it is also obvious that Paul McCartney knew perfectly the different functions of song sections, and was able to compose bridges as repetitive, based on few notes, geometric, grey and functionally dull as those composed by his colleague. At least, this demonstrates that the AABA(BA) form (or CB form) was an excellent ground for John's and Paul's collaboration.

Since my first academic approach to the subject, I tried to find ways to visualize song structures offering a synthetic and direct contact with the object of study, without recurring to music notation. I wanted something more detailed (that is, able to carry more information) than the usual letters (AABA, AAA, etc.), but more compact than a full transcription; I also wanted something that would enable me or others to compare the structures of different songs more easily. Finally, I decided to measure the duration (in seconds) of various sections, obtaining the relevant information either from a cd player's counter (or, later, from an mp3 reader's counter) or, when more detail was needed, from sound editors. The data would then be displayed graphically. After some time, I found that Microsoft Excel's graphic functions offered what was needed; I designed a standard spreadsheet and graphic, that I used consistently (and gave to students for their work). The method, of course, implies the definition of segmentation rules, and is far from producing univocal results: there are various possible levels of segmentation (this feature was often used to analyze sub-segments of previously identified sections), and – as usual in this musicological job – sometimes there are ambiguities that make the task of separating sections a very problematic one (should one stick to the phrasal structure or to accents, chord changes, bar divisions?). But my aim wasn't to find a substitute for other more traditional approaches, but to find a quick tool to compare song structures; some colleagues, however, told me they would use it for arias, Lieder, etc. In fact, nothing prevents the usage of these graphs for the formal analysis of any piece of music, but the emphasis on the lyrics for assigning specific functions to sections, and the graphic complexity that would be created by long articulated pieces, make it more easily adaptable to popular songs. Here are some examples:

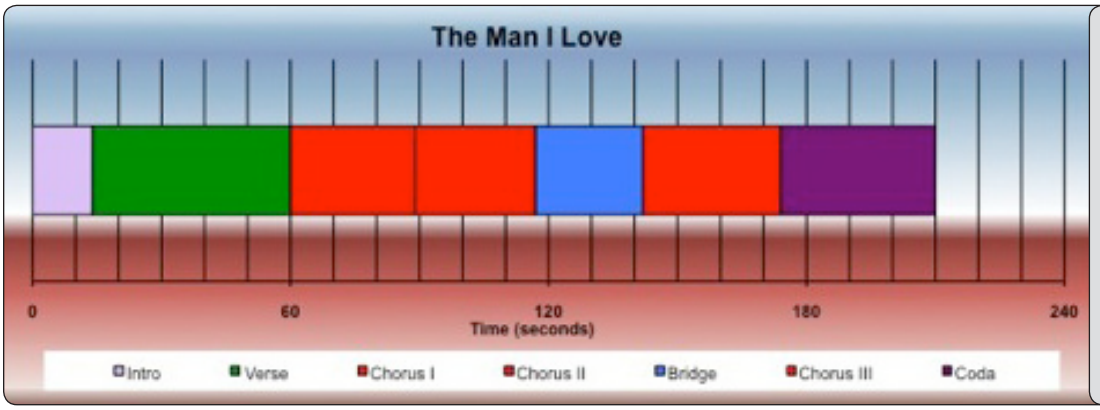

Fig. 6: Ira Gershwin – George Gershwin, 'The Man I Love', as recorded by Marion Harris (Victor 21116-B, 1927)

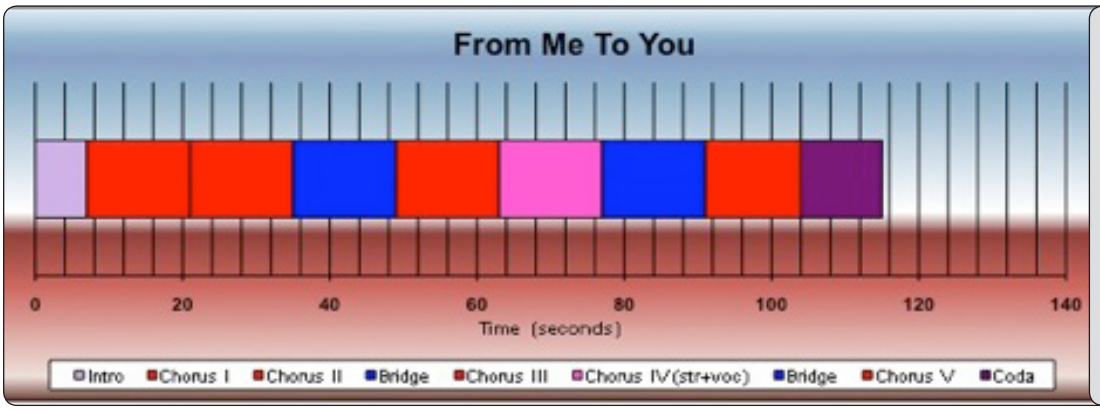

Fig. 7: Paul McCartney – John Lennon, 'From Me To You', as recorded by the Beatles (Parlophone R5015, 1963)

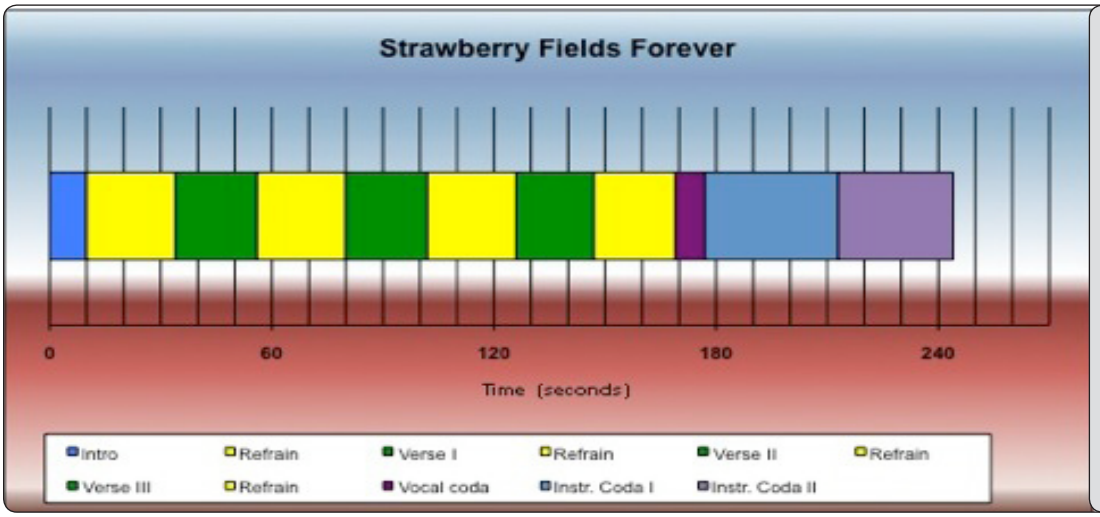

Fig. 8: Paul McCartney – John Lennon, 'Strawberry Fields Forever', as recorded by the Beatles (Parlophone R 5570, 1967)

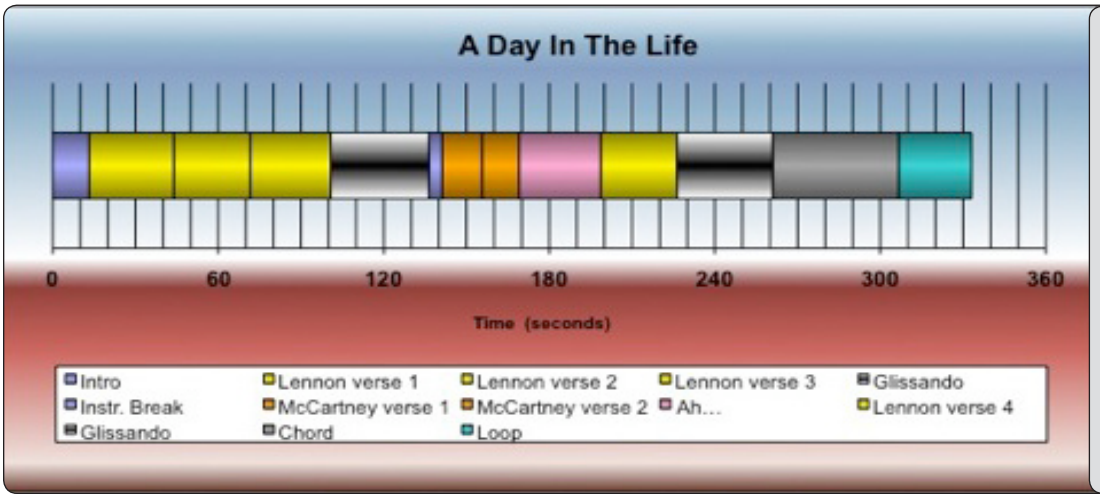

Fig. 9: John Lennon – Paul McCartney, 'A Day In The Life', as recorded by the Beatles (Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Parlophone PCS 7027, 1967, timings from cd version)

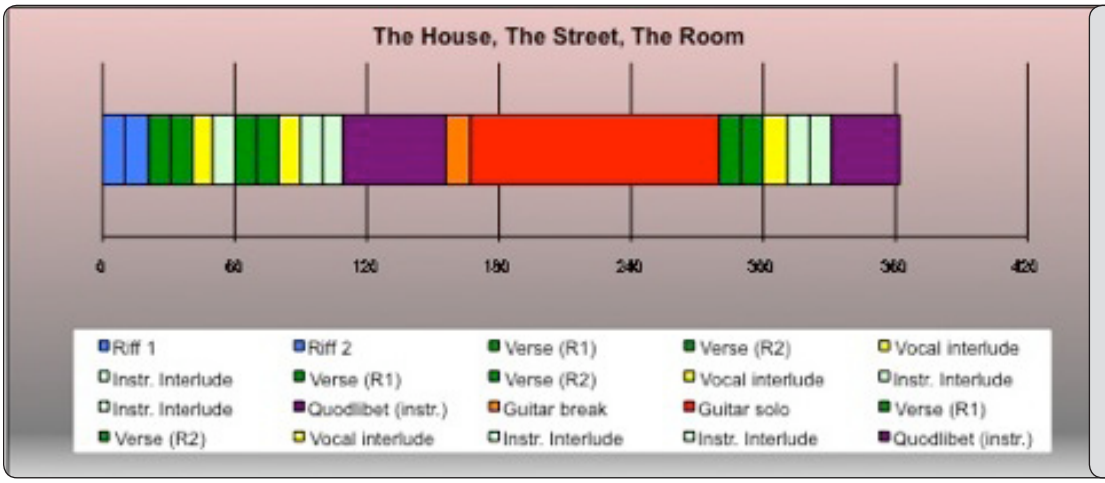

Fig. 10: Shulman – Shulman – Shulman – Minnear, 'The House, The Street, The Room', as recorded by Gentle Giant (Acquiring The Taste, Vertigo VE 1005, 1971)

When I started drawing these graphs, I knew what I was looking for, as the Beatles' albums and singles date back to the beginning of my career as a performing musician and songwriter, first as an amateur, later as a professional: I had played many of those songs with my guitar and/or band (especially until 1966) hundreds of times, before I turned to writing on popular music. So I expected many songs to reveal what I now call a CB form, because I had sung and played them, and I had to communicate with other band members referring to song sections. Whatever we called them (I'm sure it was in Italian), we knew how they were put into order and how many repetitions of a section the audience would tolerate; we knew that at some point (circa *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper's*) things had become a bit awkward.

But I didn't suspect what later became a firm piece of knowledge in my studies: first, that the CB form, or AABA(BA), was overwhelmingly abundant in the Beatles' production until 1965, and second, that nothing similar could be said about the form of songs composed and performed by all other British groups in the same years. Recently a student at Turin University, under my supervision, analyzed the formal structure of all songs in the Beatles' 'official' discography, for his final dissertation (Scarpa 2009). Some of his results will be presented at the end of this paper, but I can anticipate that they confirm my basic assumptions, even if the student and I disagreed on some controversial or ambiguous song structures.

Before moving to these data, however, I'd like to summarize a few of the questions raised by them: 1) why did Lennon, McCartney and Harrison composed predominantly songs in CB form between 1962 and 1965? 2) Why did they change after 1965? 3) Why did they 'get back' to CB in their last albums? Here are my tentative answers.

1) The CB form was widespread in US pop in the years that preceded the Beatles: Buddy Holly, Paul Anka, the Everly Brothers, Neil Sedaka and many Brill Building authors in the late Fifties and early Sixties, including those who wrote for Elvis Presley (think of songs like

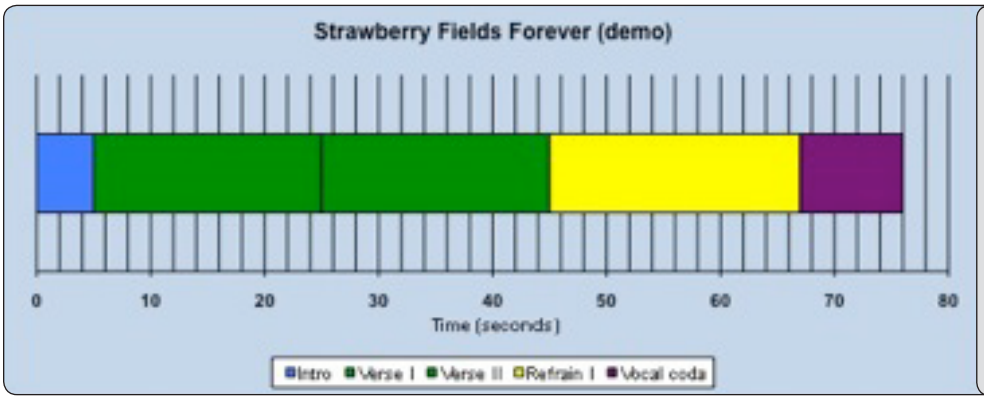

Fig. 11: Paul McCartney – John Lennon, 'Strawberry Fields Forever (Demo Sequence)', demo tape recorded by John Lennon (Anthology 2, Disc 2, Apple PCSP 728, 1996)

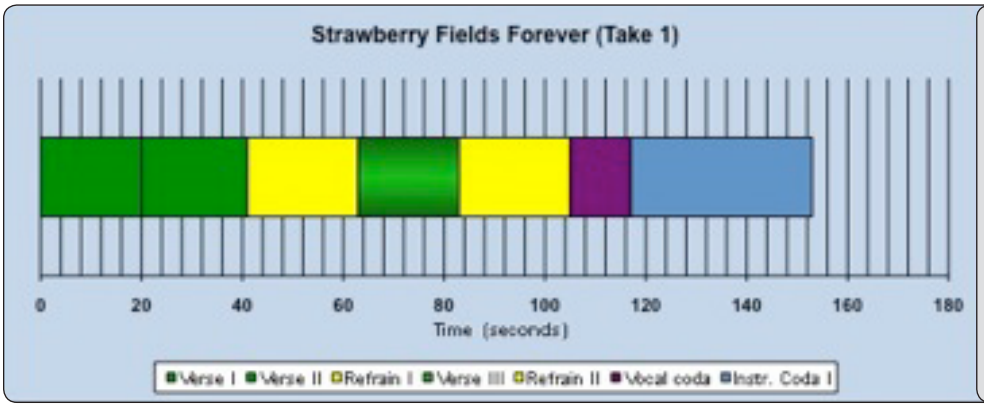

Fig. 12: Paul McCartney – John Lennon, 'Strawberry Fields Forever (Take 1)', as recorded by the Beatles (Anthology 2, Disc 2, Apple PCSP 728, 1996)

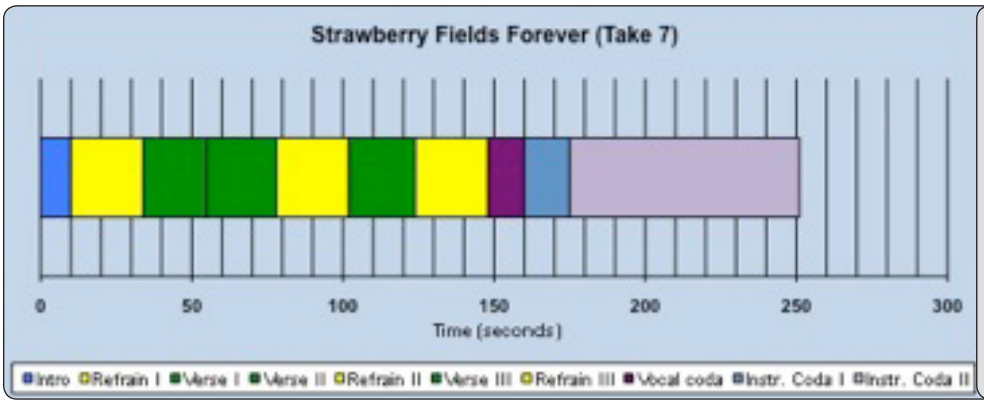

Fig. 13: Paul McCartney – John Lennon, 'Strawberry Fields Forever (Take 7 & Edit Piece)', as recorded by the Beatles (Anthology 2, Disc 2, Apple PCSP 728, 1996)

'Return to Sender', 'The Girl Of My Best Friend', etc.), composed using that form extensively. Some of these songwriters influenced the Beatles more, others less. Though it is known that the repertoire the Beatles performed in clubs was more rock'n'roll oriented, when they started composing their own songs they recurred to a standard tool of the trade for pop songs. In fact, the r&b or rock'n'roll part of their early albums was based on covers. As we've already seen, the CB form was also well suited for Lennon's and McCartney's collaboration, and benefited of their respective melodic talents. And finally, the theatrical origin of the song form and its implied rhetoric strategies were perfect for 'staging' the short teenage stories at the base of most early Beatles' songs.

2) In fact, the number of CB songs started decreasing when Lennon and McCartney, under Dylan's influence,

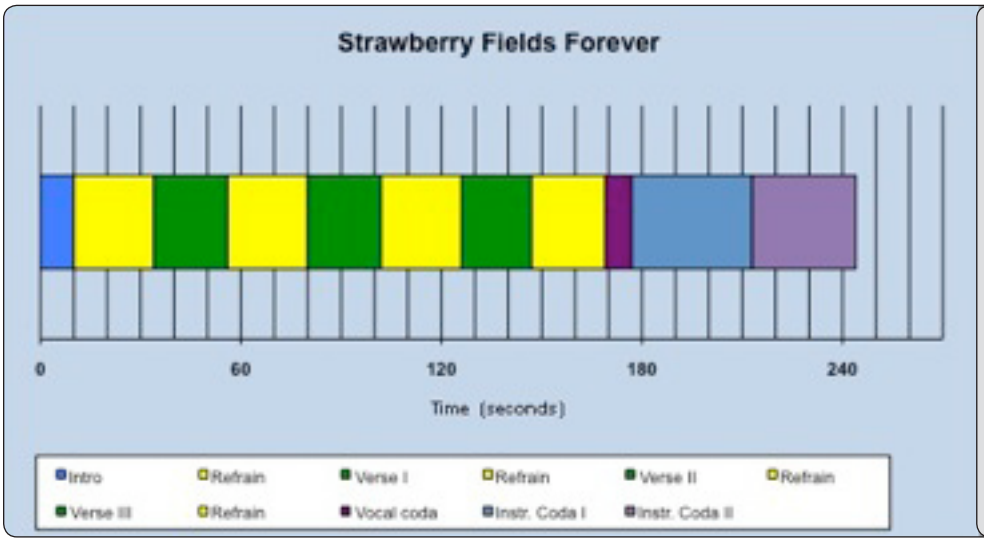

Fig. 14: Paul McCartney – John Lennon, 'Strawberry Fields Forever', as recorded by the Beatles (Parlophone R 5570, 1967)

begun to write more 'personal' lyrics. Talking about own experiences and emotions needs more space and time, and doesn't necessarily fit into the pre-cooked rhetoric strategies (tensions and releases, colours and grey tones) of the CB form. Songs became longer, the climax-building potential of the VR form became more appealing. Paradoxically, the idea of 'comedy songs', that the Beatles started contemplating at some point, had very little to do with theatre, and much more with storytelling. In the year of the British Invasion, the most shocking song as form is concerned (and not only that, of course) was 'Like A Rolling Stone', a seemingly never-ending succession of extra-long verses and lacerating refrains (in the first version thirty, according to sources). And 'Eve Of Destruction' was another VR hit of 1965. Also, the development of instrument and studio technology allowed bands to create hooks and rhetoric strategies without necessarily relying on traditional melodic, harmonic, rhythmic resources; editing became a major tool for creating song structures. The process wasn't sudden, however, and some resistance occurred: see, for example, how 'Strawberry Fields Forever' (which is known for the crucial role of an edit) was gradually transformed – as takes progressed – from a folk-style VVR form into an unusual RVRVRVRV, where the initial refrain echoes the initial chorus of so many earlier Beatles' songs.

Anyway, the end of the band's live performances and the almost unlimited availability of studio time of course encouraged new composing techniques, where laying down tracks, freely editing and assembling replaced the closed forms of songs brought to the studio by the author(s) as almost finished products (just compare how 'Yesterday' and 'Strawberry Fields Forever' were recorded, less than a year and a half apart). Psychedelic drugs, also, may have been a factor.

3) The CB form was one of the founding elements of the early Beatles' idiolect, and certainly the band's

Table 1: Numbers and percentages of songs in main forms recorded and released by the Beatles, 1962-1970

Year	CB		VR		Other		Total
1962	3	75%	0	0%	1	25%	4
1963	11	61%	3	17%	4	22%	18
1964	15	65%	5	22%	3	13%	23
1965	14	44%	8	25%	10	31%	32
1966	4	24%	5	29%	8	47%	17
1967	5	22%	7	30%	11	48%	23
1968	12	35%	5	15%	17	50%	34
1969	9	31%	6	21%	14	48%	29
1970	1	33%	1	33%	1	33%	3
Total	74	40%	40	22%	69	38%	183

members were aware of this. So not only the *Get Back* album project (later 'Spectorized' and released as *Let It Be*) was partly based on songs composed in the group's pre-history, but also the whole idea of returning to the 'roots' implied short songs, performed live, without edits and overdubbing, etc. However, it must be said that at least in one case, 'The Long And Winding Road' (that wasn't thought as a part of that project, but as a demo aimed at some crooner), the CB form seems to be used explicitly as a genre marker. This also applies to 'Something', in *Abbey Road*: the (partial) return to the CB form in the later Beatles is more a stylistic quotation than a necessity.

Forms in figures

According to Scarpa (2009) song structures in the Beatles' official discography are represented in the table above. 'Year' is the final recording year; when the recording of a song was started in one year and finalized later, the second date is used: so, the three songs in 1970 are 'I Me Mine', actually recorded in 1970, 'Let It Be' and 'The Long And Winding Road', both laid down initially in 1969 but completed in 1970. Reasonably, 'Flying', 'Revolution 9' and 'Wild Honey Pie' are not included in the list, and this explains the total of 183 (Ian MacDonald counts 186 pieces).

Data is plotted in the graph over page (Figure 15).

As I said, I don't agree with some of Scarpa's analyses (for example, I think that 'Eleanor Rigby' is an almost exemplary verse-refrain song, opened by the refrain, and not a chorus-refrain song as Scarpa suggests, based on the presence of the song title in two of the occurrences of what I would call the verse), but the overall trend is clear and can't be substantially varied by a few adjustments. If we look at percentages, rather

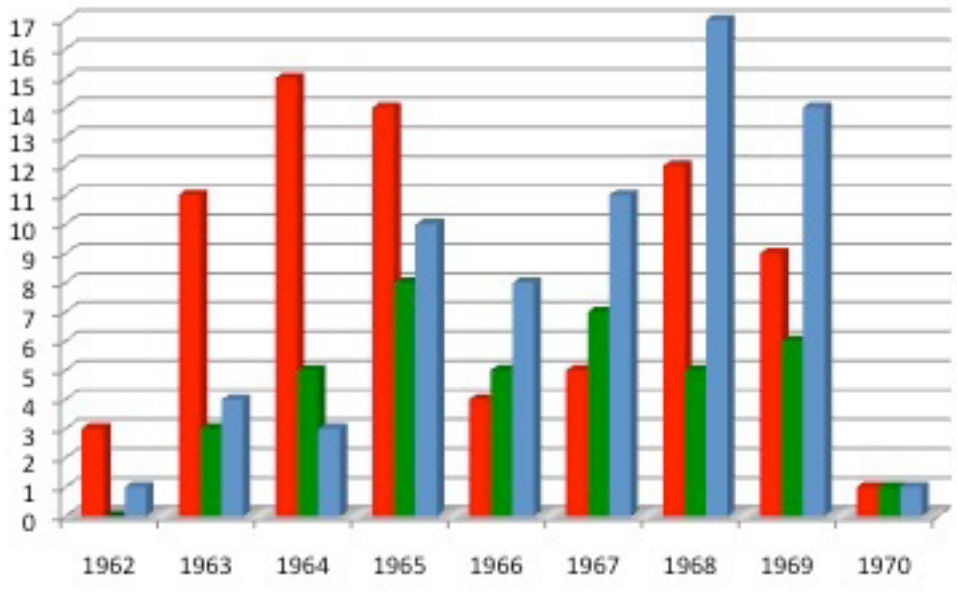

Fig. 15: Main song forms in Beatles' records: number of songs / year.

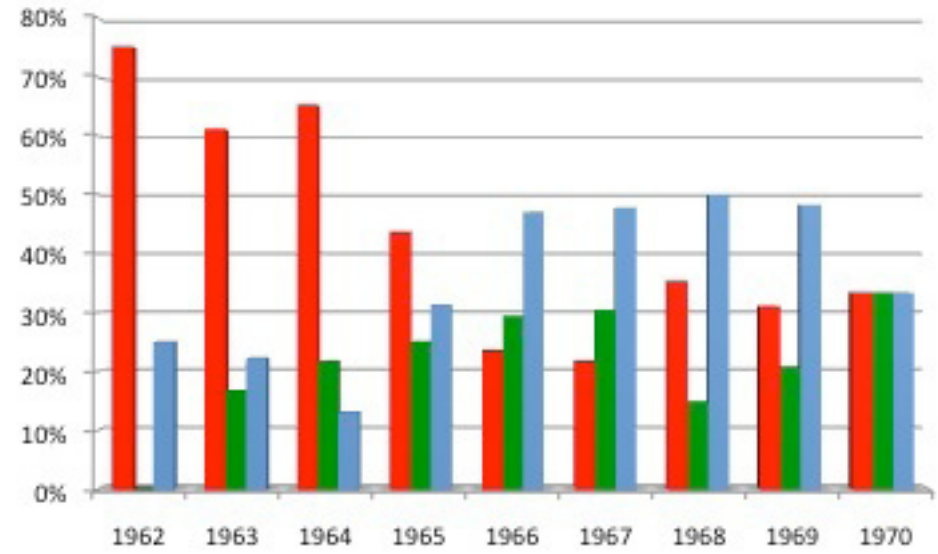

Fig. 16: Main song forms in Beatles' records: percentages / year.

than at absolute numbers, the history of the presence of the CB form in the Beatles' idiolect is even clearer (Figure 16).

Conclusions

Song structure is a fascinating subject, and many more things could be said about its importance in the study of the Beatles' songwriting; in this paper I concentrated on the CB form, but of course song forms that I labelled as 'Other' are equally or more interesting. Similar analyses could be made of the repertoires of other songwriters: remaining close to the subject of this paper, an analysis of other bands' songs in the same period, or of the production of later bands that for various reasons were compared to the Beatles, could be a rewarding task. And some might like to investigate how songs like 'A Day In The Life' influenced the development of the

complex structures of progressive rock pieces. I hope that the simple procedure I designed for displaying song structures quickly can be useful to others: relevant Excel files can be downloaded from my website (http://www.francofabbri.net/pagine/Uni_Download.htm).

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