

The semantic shifts of the Beatles' chords

by Ger Tillekens



Every typical Beatles' song has at least one rather unconventional chord progression. Often there are more and sometimes the chord sequences even come close to endangering the songs' musical comprehensibility. There is, however, some kind of harmonic structure beneath these remarkable chord progressions, preventing this to happen. In the Beatles' songs each of the basic chords can be replaced by several other types of chords. Separated by minor third intervals, the tones of these stand-in chords show a diagonal relationship. This principle of diagonal substitution helps the listeners to understand the songs musically. Closer study of the early Beatles' songs reveals yet another point of support. In each song there is a tight relation between the clusters of these stand-in chords and the semantics of the lyrics. As the meaning of the words in a song does shift along two dimensions, the chords will shift along the same lines. This correlation between words and chords offers a flexible way to shift emotional meanings in conversational contexts.



"The best songs the Beatles write add dimensions of experience and imagination to our lives, revealing new realms into which we might not have entered without a little help."
(Greil Marcus, 1969: 131)

1

A cultural awakening? On first hearing the Beatles' records, rock critic Greil Marcus (1969) reports to have experienced the sensation of a cultural awakening. He certainly was not the only one to do so. One just has to look at some old film fragments of Beatlemania to see the Beatles' fans of those days, though less intellectually, responding in a similar way. In oral history reports on the cultural revolution of the 1960s one can easily find the same kind of reflections. Remembering their first Beatles' song, many baby boomers heard and interpreted the sound of the Beatles as a signal for social and cultural change (Tillekens, 1990). Indeed, there seems to exist a close connection between the cultural revolution of the sixties and the Beatles' music. Was the coalition of this particular kind of music and the uprising, autonomous youth culture just a coincidence? Was it the result of a historical contingency, or did the songs themselves really have to say something new to their listeners?

The youth culture of the 1960s promoted its own language, the egalitarian idiom of the peer group, as a general and valid model for civil conversation. In this paper we will advance the thesis that this model also underlies the remarkable chord progressions of the Beatles' songs and therefore it is no small wonder these songs could articulate the vocabulary of the rising youth culture so well. First we will argue that the main musical innovation of the Beatles circles around their willingness to sidestep conventional chord progressions by importing chords from unorthodox chord clusters. With this trick they ran the risk of getting out of key and sounding false. As a second step we will show how this risk was countered by adhering strictly to a new diagonal tone structure where distinct chord clusters each find their appropriate place. Next, as the third step in our reasoning, we will address the question of peer group conversation by discussing its semantic structure and dimensions. Finally, on the basis of some examples of the early Beatles' songs, we will demonstrate how the semantic meaning of the lyrics corresponds to the choice of chords clusters along these dimensions.

2

The new things about the Beatles' songs. At first glance the things that were really new to the Beatles' songs, were the rhythm and the volume. However, though it was called beat music, the rhythm was rather simple. In the early British beat music the swing of earlier forms of popular music and the rhythmic complexities of rhythm and blues were replaced by a fixed accent on the backbeat. According to Heinz Bamberg (1989: 59) this simplification served to push other musical aspects to the foreground — most and for all to heighten the songs' intensity. For the same purpose and following the example of Chuck Berry, the volume of the backing instruments was increased at the expense of the singing voices. The more equal role of backing and vocals did indicate a departure from the ways of Tin Pan Alley and the Classical Style. Intensity, however, cannot fully explain the sense of freshness of the Beatles' songs. Moreover, the high level of intensity and the thickness of sound was not only an effect of just pumping up the volume and revamping the beat. Adding to the intensity was also some kind of harshness, coming from other musical elements.

Are the words of the songs responsible? Simon Frith (1987) has argued convincingly that the words of Pop Rock songs are not very important in themselves. They are just there to provide young people with some elementary emotion words for their first love affairs. In their publication of the Beatles' lyrics the sociologists Colin Campbell and Allan Murphy (1980) arrive at the same conclusion in respect to the Beatles' canon. The main theme of the songs is romance. Compared with the idiom of earlier popular music, the songs' lyrics do show some innovations. The male protagonists address their girls, for instance, in a more egalitarian way as "friends." With a more detailed analysis, one easily can find more inventive elements like this. Despite these innovations, pinpointing the actual character of most of these textual differences is difficult. Definitely, in this respect, the early Beatles' songs show too few deviations to account for their sense of uniqueness.

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If not the rhythm or the lyrics, was it the melody? On this point the answer undeniably must be positive. Most melodies of the Beatles came as a surprise for those who heard them for the first time. Even experienced cover bands often had hard times to replicate them to the same effect. There are several reasons for that. First, the Beatles frequently treated blue notes in a "British," "Northern" way, resolving them to adjacent notes rather than jumping toward flat-thirds according to "Blues" conventions (Tillekens, 1998: 211-213). Secondly, and more important, the Beatles always seemed to enjoy importing some unusual notes into their melodies. These special notes clearly are related to their harmonies. Regarding "I Want To Hold Your Hand," Ian MacDonald (1994: 78) aptly observes: "So much of its melody line is disguised harmony that singing it without chordal support makes for comic results (...)" Alan Pollack (1989, 4) makes a similar remark regarding the song "Day Tripper": "The melody of the voice parts is very difficult to sing, particularly without the underlying chords to keep you oriented; have you tried singing this song in the shower lately?"

So, at last, we arrive at the harmony. Here we find the most obvious innovations of the Beatles. Most of the times, though, they used just simple chords, at least more simple than those of the songs that served them as an inspiration. With their songs, the Beatles set the clear example, that you do not have to be a guitar virtuoso to make good music (Mutsaers, 1990; Hammond, 1999). It is not the chords themselves, but the chord sequences that are at the core of the sound of the Beatles. Their unorthodoxy on this point made it so difficult for other groups — especially for those with a blues background — to cover their songs. It still is responsible for the ongoing debate on which chord is which in a specific Beatles' song. Nowadays, to our trained ears the songs may sound less raucously than they did before. In the early days, though, these unusual chord combinations undoubtedly did attribute to the intensity and harshness of the typical Beatles' sound.

Many Beatles' experts have pointed at these chord sequences as the key to the group's musical innovations. Most of them, though, refrain from analyzing these progressions for their structural correspondences. Often the successful harmonic ventures of the Beatles are treated as isolated feats and features which can be traced back to their European roots (Porter, 1983; Villinger, 1983), attributed to the inimitable genius of the four collaborating individuals (MacDonald, 1994; Moore, 1997), or subtly dissected for their details (Mellers, 1976; O'Grady, 1983; Riley, 1983; Pollack, 1989-2000; Everett, 1999). If one piles the outcomes of all these analyses together, however, the harmonic peculiarities of the individual Beatles' songs crystalize into some kind of structure (Tillekens, 1998). As we shall see, in this structure the elements of harmony, melody and lyrics come together to form a new synthesis.

3

Crumbling cadences. In the Beatles' songs we find more than just the occasional trick chord of rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues. Disregarding the fences between these and other styles of American popular music, the Beatles managed to combine the harmonic conventions of all these styles in one and the same song (Heinonen & Eerola, 2000). As a result the chords in their songs add up to incredible numbers — at least in respect to conventional musicological theory. On average there are 8.24 chords per song for the forty-six early originals the Beatles performed on record from 1962 till the end of 1964. For all the songs of the Beatles' canon Harry Klaassen and Piet Schreuders (1997) estimate a mean of 9 chords, peaking at a maximum of 21 chords for McCartney's "You Never Give Me Your Money." From a musicological perspective such an overload of chords threatens to make a song sound false by endangering the key.

On this point almost any Beatles' song can serve as an example. Let's take a quick look at "I Want To Hold Your Hand," the song that introduced young people in the USA to the British appropriation of rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues. It is the same song that evoked Roger McGuinn to say: "The words weren't so meaningful but the chord changes really had magic in them" (Muni, Somach & Somach, 1989: 168). Bob Dylan reacted in a similar way, by remarking: "They were doing things nobody was doing. Their chords were outrageous, just outrageous, and their harmonies made it all valid ..." (Scaduto, 1973: 203-204).

6 G:	I	V	vi	iii	
	Oh, yeah I'll,—	tell you some — thing,	I think you'll un — der stand.	When	
10 G:	I	V	vi	iii	
	I —	say that some — thing.	I want to hold your hand —		
14 G:	IV	V	I	vi	
	I want to hold your	hand,—	I want to hold your	hand.	

Example 1: *I Want To Hold Your Hand* (verse)

"I Want To Hold Your Hand" is exemplary in showing the accumulation of harmonic tricks in the early Beatles' songs. There is the downward modulation in the middle eight, where the home key of G is shifted to C by pivoting on the minor fifth (v7) — a feat the Beatles successfully had performed earlier on in "From Me To You" (Kramarz, 1983: 132; Tillekens, 1999). Next, there is the abrupt return from this modulation to the original key by a sudden introduction of its dominant at the end of the middle eight: C -> D (-> G). By repeating these C -> D ostinato's the Beatles empower the inherent strain of this forced return to the original key. These same ostinato's open the song and this, of course, adds its spice to the whole ensemble of harmonic surprises. Last but not least, there is the minor third in the fourth measure of our example which, according to Lennon himself, "made" the song (Sheff & Olson, 1981: 17).

Many years after the fact, this chord still comes as a surprise for most Beatles' experts. The transcription of Tetsuya Fujita, Yuji Hagino, Hajime Kubo and Goro Sato in "The Beatles Complete Scores" (1983) presents this triad as a Major third with an added seventh. Terence O'Grady (1983: 42) and Pollack (1991: 43) perceive the chord as a B Major. They characterize it as an aborted modulation or a deceptive cadence. MacDonald (1994: 76) rightly chooses the minor chord iii, but also experiences the introduction of this chord as a "plunge from the home key of G Major onto an unstable

B minor." It bends, he adds, the harmony toward the key of E minor, leading the listener to expect an E minor chord as the next one. O'Grady too explains the chord as a secondary dominant (V-of-vi) and Pollack arrives at the same conclusion. Volkert Kramarz (1983) and Tim Riley (1988: 86) both are less impressed. To them the trick is effective but only more of the same, as the Beatles had introduced their easy use of relative minor chords already in their previous songs.

As Kramarz (1983) observes, the use of incidental chords in popular music is not new in itself. The unusual amount of these chords, however, certainly is innovative, as are the chord sequences themselves. Earlier on the style of popular music found some support in cadences, standard chord progressions like the turnaround [I -> vi -> IV -> V] and its many variants, and the chain of fifths or turn-back [VI7 -> II7 -> V7 -> I] (Van der Merwe, 1989). In the first few years of their career the Beatles discarded the support of these cadences (Kramarz, 1983: 132). At the start of their career as songwriters their favorite way of doing this, was by inserting unexpected chords. Later on, as a result, in their hands the cadences crumbled into pieces. Sometimes by turning into unpredictable chord sequences; sometimes to the effect of becoming "harmonic ostinato's," repeated combinations of just two chords (Middleton, 1990: 282). At the end of 1964, the songs on the album "Beatles for Sale" show that the Beatles could do without the support of these cadences. Piecing chords together seemed their way of composing. Or, as MacDonald (1994: 10) says: "In short, they had no preconceptions about the next chord, an openness which they consciously exploited (...)."

4

A diagonal tone grid. Improvising on what they had done before and adding new variations the Beatles' next chord always seemed to be arbitrary. Their choice of chords, of course, did not taper away totally at random, as this would have made their songs incomprehensible to their listeners. Every style of music needs some underlying structure and here the Beatles' songs are no exception. The first outlines of their style of composition are indicated by the very relative minors we've observed in "I Want To Hold Your Hand." The mutual relations between the tones of the basic chords (IV, I, V) and these relative minors (ii, vi, iii) show a diagonal structure (figure 1).

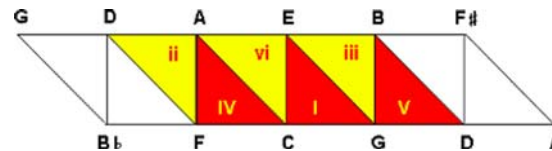


Figure 1: Tone grid of the three basic chords

Other favorite kinds of Beatles' chords can be added to this grid. The parallel minors (iv, i, v) form another cluster of chords the Beatles, seemingly arbitrarily, interjected into their chord progressions. A further conspicuous feature of their songs is the lavish use of relative (II, VI, III) and parallel (flat-VI, flat-III, flat-VII) Majors, which according to O'Grady (1983: 63-64) can be regarded as the most obvious harmonic innovation of the Beatles' compositions. Next to these, we sometimes even hear the relative minors (vii, #iv, #i) of the parallel Majors themselves. To this, of course, we can add the seventh chords, so popular in blues, country and rhythm and blues. Except for the last one, all these chord clusters can be fitted into a diagram by adding them to the diagonal structure. As a result a grid emerges in which chords sharing two tones with each other can be substituted for each other (figure 2).

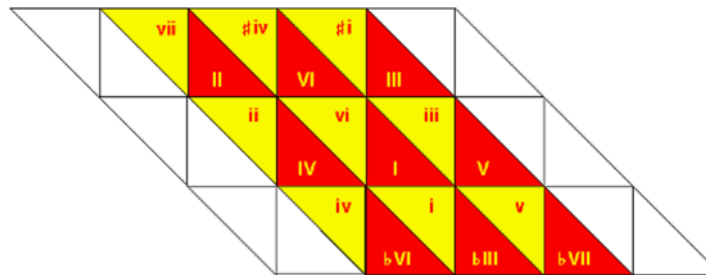


Figure 2: The diagonal tone grid of the Beatles' chord progressions

Basically chords are built out of pure thirds and fifths. The greater their distance from the tone center or key, the more these pure tones do deviate from their counterparts in even temperament. That is why the key is so important in harmonic music, as is a restricted use of chordal material. Too sudden transitions summon the danger of sounding false. Therefore conventional harmonic music is usually restricted to the three basic chords, whose tone material can be expanded by means of standard cadences and more or less conventional modulations. The Beatles showed it could be done otherwise. By arranging their chord clusters into a diagonal relationship, they effectuated an equivocal positioning of chords and tonal material. As a premium the stock of chords in the diagonal grid offered the composers no less than 24 different tones for their melodies (see figure 3).

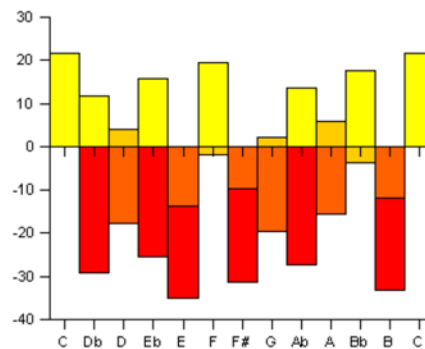


Figure 3: Deviations of tone material from even temperament in cents
 [yellow: tones on lower line of diagonal grid (3-flat);
 dark yellow: tones on second line of diagonal grid (5);
 orange: tones on third line of diagonal grid (6);
 red: tones on upper line of diagonal grid (4-sharp)]

In their songs the Beatles make proper use of their expanded chordal and tonal material. The new chords are employed for bewildering enharmonic changes or innovative modulations, like the minor fifth we encountered in "I Want To Hold Your Hand." Also the expanded tonal material is taken to advantage in the Beatles' compositions. In their melodies the Beatles liked to use note repetition (Flender & Heuger, 1996). These notes, however, were not always exactly the same. Often they jump through the tone grid to their enharmonic equivalents, causing subtle tonal differences. The expanded tonal material also accounts for the many false relations between adjacent chords in the Beatles' chord sequences by offering unsuspected, but fine leading notes. As an example, Pollack (1989, 2) points at the plagal cadence opening of "Eight Days A Week" [I -> II -> IV -> I]. In the transition of II -> IV the third of the E triad (G#) offers an unorthodox but excellent leading tone to the root (G) of the G triad. The difference between both tones amounts to 71 cent, less than three quarters of a tonal distance.

As Kramarz (1983: 137) observes in his analysis of "Help!," the Beatles catch these notes of their expanded tonal material perfectly in their harmony singing, thereby glueing their unusual chords together in their melodies and reducing the tension between harmony and melody — a characteristic mark of the Beatles' songs (Wicke, 1982: 224).

5

A model of peer group conversation. Next to more undefinable characteristics like form and tone color, the three main aspects of each musical composition are rhythm, melody, and harmony. Maybe it is too simple to take music apart into just these three constituents, like George Martin (1996) did in his recent television documentary "The Rhythm of Life," equating rhythm with the movements of the body, melody with the speaking voice, and harmony with the surrounding context.

This splitting up of musical components may seem to miss what a specific composition makes into an excellent piece of music, but there are many text books and theoretical studies putting this distinction to good use. The sociologist Max Weber (1921) and, following his footsteps, the philosopher and musicologist Theodor W. Adorno (1949) based much of their best analyses of musical evolution on these distinctions. For Martin — extracting his examples out of the whole history of music, including classical and folk music — harmony refers to context as a human universal. But, as both Weber and Adorno indicated, social contexts do change historically and so does the language of music. Moreover, not all styles of music refer to the same contexts.

The idiom of popular music mainly is conversational and therefore the harmonic context of popular songs can be equated to the context of conversation between peers. In this respect the songs of the Beatles are no exception. Most of them are designed as conversations and dialogues. This makes it difficult to analyze them, because as elements of conversation, the words of a conversation acquire their meaning by their position in the context in which they are uttered.

According to the psychologist Rom Harré (1983) the context of conversation can be divided along three dimensions, called agency, display and realization. The first dimension, agency, refers to the self image of an actor as capable of deciding between alternatives. It concerns the process of making personal choices. The second dimension, display, covers the divide between public and private spaces as the locations in which these choices are deliberated, discussed with others and in which commitments are made. The third dimension, realization, covers the aspect of warrantability, the readiness to commit oneself to one's choices.

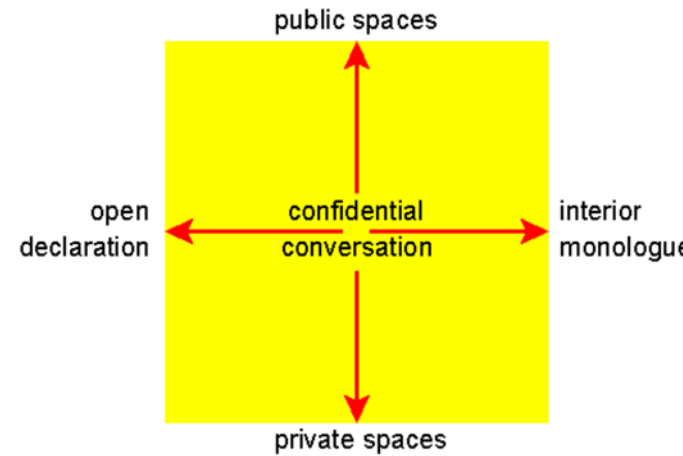


Figure 4: The semantic matrix of conversation (Harré, 1983)

As Harré argues, in conversations the participants can be analyzed as moving along the lines of these dimensions, changing their positions within the matrix depending on the outcomes of the ongoing dialogue and the decisions they make.

The movements on the dimension of agency shift between the poles of thinking or acting, between being passive — still in the process of thinking choices over — or being active — declaring or interrogating a decision. On the dimension of display in the private context opinions can be voiced in a more emotional and direct way. In the anonymous context of the public domain on the other hand conversations have to conform to the rules of a more polite discourse. On the dimension of realization the actor moves, according to Harré, between the poles of the individual and the collective. At the individual level the speaker defines his speech acts as private utterances, just meant for one self as an interior monologue. At the collective level — in the company of peers and outsiders — the speaker is obliged to phrase outspoken and clear-voiced opinions. Voicing his/her decisions within the collective a speaker commits him/herself to realization, while at the individual side there is more room for doubts.

All three dimensions imply a movement from inner to outer voices. Of course this interacting of dimensions will strengthen their characteristics. Combinations of "passive" agency, "private" display and "individual" realization will sound uncensored by permitting the expression of personal and intimate feelings and doubts. Combinations of "active" agency, "collective" realization and "public" display will be sounding more censored by being the result of personal legitimations, the restrictions of a polite discourse and the necessity of positioning oneself in the company of peers.

- 6 **Words and chords.** Semantically, in short, conversations develop along the lines of three dimensions, indicating the context which give words their meanings. If harmony really does refer to the contexts of conversation, one should expect a correspondence between these dimensions and the use of chord material. For the first dimension, "agency," such a correspondence can easily be shown to exist.

As we have seen "agency" regards the personal aspects of conversation. Here three basic acts can be identified: thinking things over in the back of your mind, grounding a decision within your self, and acting on it. For most popular music these three acts can be equated with the subsequent positions of the subdominant, the tonic and the dominant. In the songs of the Beatles these chords generally serve the same purpose. Look, for instance at the simple cadence of the last two lines of the verse of "Hey Jude." Here the chords move from subdominant to tonic, onto the dominant and back to the tonic again [IV -> I -> V -> I]. At the same time the Beatles sing: "Remember to let her into your heart, and then you can start to make it better," following a process of thinking, grounding, acting and grounding again. It is just one example, but almost any Beatles' song will show the same pattern concerning the relation between dominant, tonic and subdominant.

To demonstrate the role of the specific chord clusters we have to turn our attention to the other two dimensions (figure 5).

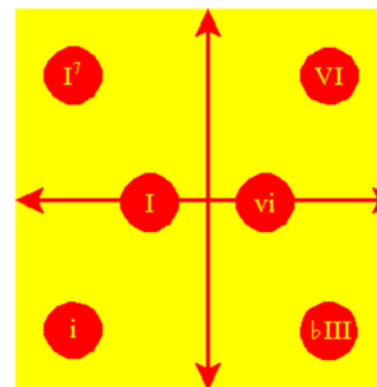


Figure 5: Permutations of the tonic in the semantic matrix of conversation

In their songs the Beatles make ample use of the free interplay of basic chords and their relative minors. For that reason their songs often are called "modal" songs. An excellent example of their way with these chords can be found in the quoted twelve measures above from "I Want To Hold Your Hand," where Lennon and McCartney sing the lines: "Yeah, I'll tell you something, I think you'll understand. When I say that

something: "I want to hold your hand." The first part of both sentences is accompanied by Major chords, the last part by relative minors. Hearing the lyrics, one can easily imagine the boy and the girl walking together outside, but at the same time guarding their own personal universe. This positions the context of conversation midway between the private and the public. The dialogue itself moves from the left to the right on the dimension of realization, where our protagonist starts saying something neutral, that everyone around them may hear and next addresses his girl friend in a more confidential way, confiding her in his personal feelings. Also note that the song's title words get a different meaning, depending on being accompanied by relative minors or Major chords, as in the concluding lines of the verse. Here the confidential message "I want to hold your hand" turns into an open confession for everybody out there to hear.

5	E: I ⁷	-	IV ⁷	I ⁷	
	Well, she		and you	know what I mean	And the
	was just	sev- en- teen,			
9	E: -	-	V ⁷	-	
	way she looked	was way	be- yond com- pan-		So
13	E: I	I ⁷	IV	bVI	
	how	could I dance	with- an- oth- er,	woo,	When I

Example 2: I Saw Her Standing There (verse)

In the Beatles' songs each of the basic chords can be adorned with added sevenths. The role of these chords in the matrix of conversation is to create a public, collective context for the song's words. The verse of "I Saw Her Standing There," an early composition of McCartney offers a good illustration (example 2). The song's protagonist is in the public location of a dancing, voicing his admiration amidst the collective of his peers. His message may be heard by everybody in the public and is phrased in polite wordings. In this case the words sound cheerful as the sevenths mostly are natural sevenths. In many of their songs the Beatles play an intricate play with these added sevenths, changing them into other kinds of blue notes as for instance in "I Wanna Be Your Man." The context however, always seems the same: public as well as collective. The most surprising chord in "I Saw Her Standing There," of course, is the flat-VI, underscoring the exclamation "Ooh!"

1	E: ii		V ⁷	I	vi	
	Close your eyes		and I'll kiss	— you —	To — mor — row — I'll miss	— you —
						Re —
5	E: IV		ii		bVII	
	mem — ber, —		I'll al — ways	— be true, —		—

Example 3: All My Loving (verse)

The flat-VI, a real Beatles' favorite, has often been called the Buddy Holly chord, though Buck Owens also has been honored as the main source of inspiration. This chord belongs to the cluster of parallel Majors: flat-VI, flat-III and flat-VII — sometimes also referred to as Neapolitan chords. In the abundance of these chords in the Beatles' songs Steven Porter (1983: 72) finds evidence for a strong Classical influence on the group's compositions. He has to admit, however, the flat-VI is behaving quite otherwise — indeed, according to its role in the diagonal grid, as a substitute for the iv. "All My Loving," a composition of McCartney, showing a free combination of turnaround and turnback, offers another good example of these chords, the flat-VII (example 3). Just like the flat-VI in "I Saw Her Standing There," this chord turns the context of the lyrics toward the private side of display and the individual side of realization, thereby making the word "true" coming from deep within, sounding sincere and privately voiced.

33	F: vi		II	I	III	
	In my mind there's no		sor — row —		Don't you know that it's	so?

Example 4: There's A Place (bridge)

The next cluster of chords consists of the relative Major chords — the supertonic II, the submediant VI and the mediant III. These chords supply their own surplus of meaning to the lyrics. We already observed the supertonic in "I Want To Hold Your Hand" — the first time the Beatles applied this particular chord in their compositions. In "Eight Days A Week" the Beatles use this same chord more boldly, taking a direct step from the tonic to the supertonic at the start of a song. For once they were not the first ones to introduce an harmonic novelty. By a few months they were overtaken by the Rolling Stones' composition "As Tears Go By." For the Beatles the supertonic completed the cluster of relative Major chords. The Lennon' composition "There's A Place" shows how these relative Majors were applied semantically in the Beatles' songs, underlining an individual utterance, that's being felt so strong that it escapes from the confines of the private into the openness of the public, for everybody out there to hear (example 4).

1	E:		vi		I	
			When- ever I —		— want you a — round, yeah,	
5	E:		vi		ii	
			all I got — ta do —		is call you on the phone and	
9	E:		iv		I	
			you'll come running home, yeah — that's all I —		— got — ta do —	And when

Example 5: All I Got To Do (verse)

Our last example, the verse of "All I Got To Do" with its exceptional length of 11 measures, is again a Lennon' composition (example 5). It illustrates the function of parallel minors in locating a semantic position in the matrix of conversation. In this particular case the work is done by the minor subdominant. Semantically this chord has the same function as the minor fifth that's facilitating the modulation in "I Want To Hold Your Hand." It is important to notice that these minor chords do not sound sad. The "sadness" of parallel minor keys is still a standard in music theory. It does apply to the work of Mahler or Schubert, often referred to in this context. In the Beatles' songs — and Pop Rock music in general — another feeling, however, is attached to these chords. With the parallel Major chords the parallel minors share the location of private space, making utterances sound sincere and deeply felt. As these minor chords point toward the collective side of realization they give the lyrics a more convinced and determined sound.

7

Giving a voice to youth culture. Speaking about the compository qualities of Lennon and McCartney, MacDonald (1994: 62) writes: "Much of the pair's musical originality derived from their self-taught willingness to let their fingers discover chord-sequences by exploring the architecture of their guitars rather than following orthodox progressions, of which they knew little." To that observation, we now can add another one. With their harmonic experiments the Beatles created a space for changing the meaning of words and accentuating the grain of voice. Above we have seen just a few examples. However, looking at the Beatles' songs from this perspective, one can easily find more. It even is difficult to find any exceptions to the rule (Tillekens, 1998). The close semantical connection between words and chords certainly is one of the strengths of the Beatles' compositions.

All our examples date from around the time of "She Loves You." This may seem a restriction, as these compositions count as the early songs in the Beatles' catalogue (Eerola, 1998). At the end of 1964, however, the new musical structure already seemed fully completed. With the release of "Beatles For Sale" the Beatles' song repertoire did incorporate all clusters of chords. The chord sequences themselves did not need the support of conventional cadences. The Beatles already had shown that their extended diagonal structure could incorporate other styles as well as rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues. They now stood ready to explore their new style of music to its full potential. The initial sense of freshness of the Beatles' sound, however, seems correlated to their earlier harmonic experiments and the resulting correspondence between words and chords.

The Beatles' lyrics, as Cynthia Whissell (1996) has shown, encompass the whole range of emotions. In a similar way, we now can add, their chord material covers the whole range of conversational spaces. Moreover, this is accomplished in a very flexible way as the substitutes of each chord cluster can be addressed almost instantly. This also may explain why the songs evoked a sense of awakening, as they were articulating and promoting the open and reciprocal idiom of the peer group as a model for civil conversation. With their songs, in short, the Beatles gave a full voice to youth culture. It seems fit to conclude this paper quoting Greil Marcus again. The significance and meaning of Pop Rock music, Marcus (1969: 136) wrote, does not lie in the specifics of its lyrics. Referring to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, he added, the relevance of their songs was that they offered a way to get a feeling for the "spaces we might happen to occupy at any particular time. Rock 'n' roll music and a rock 'n' roll song — a record — keeps those spaces open."



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