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Insistency:
A New Methodology for Lyrical Analysis

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Abstract

This study proposes and demonstrates "insistency-based analysis" as a research tool for the study of popular music lyrics. Insistency analysis supports content analysis by considering lyrical repetition (motifs) over time as significant of artistic intent within a given body (population) of lyrics, in this case, those of Tom Waits. Literary review shows this study among a minority using computer-aided analytics in content analyses, while indicating the unrealized potential of structuralist literary analysis for studying popular lyrics. The method is a two-stage design in which the study sample (high frequency lyrics with strong distribution) provides rich content for structural analysis (qualitative). Opposing paradigms signify core issues such as "emptiness" or "solitude" whose particular, diachronic articulation across the discography may be studied for consistencies or developments in artistic expression. A practical demonstration of the method uses insistent lyrics and motifs to both signify artistic preoccupation and ultimately to test hypotheses regarding the development of Waits' lyrical style.

Keywords: lyrical analysis, popular music, songwriting, Tom Waits, content analysis, structuralism, insistency, recording industry, research methodology

Introduction

Germaine to the effort of integrating the study of the popular music industry into academia is a need for academic models and methods derived from supporting disciplines. The current triad of disciplines to which the study of the recording industry is appended includes mass communication, music, and business. Whereas the academic study of business is interested in effective models of management, marketing, and finance, schools of music offer a complementary viewpoint typically treating the creative aspect of the music business from a fine arts or arts administration perspective. Approaching the music business from the perspective of mass communication is an effective median given that it often focuses on both

production and promotional skills—those required to capture the creative performance and package it for commercial exploitation. Mass communication also offers an effective lens for looking at the deliberate establishment of music business studies within the academy. It was only within the last fifty years that mass communication itself was forging the boundaries of its own academic territory.[1] This process required the formulation of a theoretical corpus as well as a research methodology. Just as that discipline borrowed from established disciplines like literary criticism and sociology among others, the study of the popular music industry is likewise in need of research models. Unlike mass communication however, this emerging discipline requires a very wide set of such models and theories due to the breadth of its endeavor (including composition, performance, production, and promotion among others). The current paper responds to this need in part, by demonstrating how music industry scholars and students may perform lyrical analysis. The model we will reveal supplements traditional literary analysis with a quantitative component helpful for increasing accuracy and reducing speculative arguments.

As an example of this research procedure, which I am calling insistency-based analysis, I will offer as an academic point of access the notoriously prolific and often slippery lyrical corpus of Tom Waits.

Tom Waits' status among the upper echelon of American singer songwriters is evident on many levels of evaluation. His list of awards, major label contracts, sales figures, longevity, international appeal, and continued relevance are a few indicators used to fete his artistic prowess. Waits is also a deeply unique artist with a chameleon-like style that is as unpredictable as it is hard to define. In comparison to his fellow Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees, we might refer to Howlin' Wolf, Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Frank Zappa, Miles Davis, and still fall short in an effort to effectively describe Waits' style. Rock critics and scholars of contemporary popular music (cf. Steve Huey, Barney Hoskyns, and David Yaffe) use terms like "experimental," "avant-garde," and "abstract" to describe his relationship to convention, yet many of his other releases coincide beautifully with their record label billing as "jazz," "rock," "blues," or other codified genres. There is something deeply puzzling about his work that compels listeners to pay attention in a way that few other artists can achieve. Perhaps this ability to move in and out of popular musical form speaks to Waits' longevity and relevance. As a result, the question of what fundamental messages lay at the heart of Tom Waits' oeuvre may seem

like an intimidating one. This study will demonstrate an approach to this artistic body of work by way of lyrical analysis that enables researchers to locate core issues addressed by Waits and to assess his particular articulation and evaluation of those issues.

The conceptual framework chosen for this study is based on the idea that artistic media, such as music or poetry, are media of communication. The ability to derive any message or messages from such media depends heavily on the level of specificity or vagueness endemic to its own signifying system. For example, instrumental music has a wider semantic field of interpretation than does poetry due to the fact that words are far more precise than tones with respect to the communication of a given message. In our effort to identify issues at the core of a diverse artistic body, we are thus better served by a lyrical analysis than by a musicological one. The interrelated ideas of repetition and artistic development are fundamental to the interpretation of art because they do not depend on contextual analyses such as historical, biographical, comparative, or other interdisciplinary readings that bring external information to illuminate the artistic object of interpretation. Instead, the idea of insistency signifies artistic intent by providing a methodological framework in which certain artistic terms self-select as more significant than others. In sum, our theoretical framework posits the idea of lyrical repetition (motifs) over time (diachronic) in the service of distilling a vast linguistic body to its most insistent terms. Our study is therefore a demonstration of a proposed method designed for content analyses of larger, text-based bodies of work—such as the lyrics of a given artist.

Literature: Content Analyses Among the Study of Popular Music Media

The serious study of popular music is relatively young, intensifying over the last seventy-five years due in large part to the works of cultural theorists like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. These scholars provided a theoretical entry point for interdisciplinary scholarship to address popular music, notably that of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, socio-musicologist Simon Frith, and "new" musicologist Keith Negus. Most of these entry points preclude musicological argument by looking at popular culture from the perspectives of aesthetics and social identity. In fact, traditional musicology has been of limited benefit to the study of popular music because of the high culture-low culture debate as

well as the interdisciplinary orientation of the study of popular music in comparison to the more conservative, inward-looking orientation of musicology. Nonetheless, there have been some studies of pop culture luminaries like the Beatles that have been based on more narrow musicological concerns like melody, composition, and music theory.[2] Another contributing factor is that there has been greater interdisciplinary symbiosis between poetic analysis and the study of popular music lyrics in academia. This is reflected by the large-scale integration of creative writing programs in comparison to the limited and more rigid study of musical composition and performance.

The content analyses of popular music consulted for this study consist of three primary types: musicological analyses of songs, textual analyses of songs, and the more recent study of popular music videos. The chronology of this area of research shows an initial period of interest in the study of popular music lyrics informed by both traditional literary analysis (mostly qualitative, thematic analysis) as well as the more recent study of popular culture from a mass media perspective. The influence of the latter includes an increasingly quantitative approach and a marked interest in media effects—especially that of television, music, video games, and advertising. As a result, the study of pop music videos has developed into a means of analyzing popular music that is of comparable viability to the more traditional literary approach. Despite the decline of the pop music video as a required promotional vehicle in today's recording industry, there remains a body of scholarship from the MTV era that includes a group of content analyses.

Our research has benefited from a number of studies analyzing the content of popular music. The relative youth of popular music or music business as an academic discipline has practical implications on this group of works. First of all, the studies tend to have a general or exploratory perspective that one would expect when surveying a less well-known academic terrain. Secondly, an interdisciplinary methodology is typically claimed but not always applied in a rigorous or exhaustive manner. For example, the majority of the works consulted for this study are oriented towards a thematic understanding of the basic semantic structures of popular music. As such they are concerned with the general or most apparent ways popular music conveys meaning. Therefore, the distinction between studies based on music videos versus those based on lyrical analysis is diminished by the larger goal of identifying themes and semantic struc-

tures—often in relation to issues of race, gender, genre, or the work of well-known artists.

One common theme in the selected literature is gender. The relationship between popular music and the representation of women is an area of research showing the importance of gender as a confounding factor with respect to stereotype. In "Female Body Image as a Function of Themes in Rap Music Videos: A Content Analysis," Yuanyuan Zhang, Travis L. Dixon, and Kate Conrad sample 258 female characters from MTV, BET, and VH1 year-end video countdown programming for measurement in relation to themes of sex, violence, materialism, and political awareness.[3] Stereotypical gender roles for men and women were also verified in Cara Wallis' "Performing Gender: A Content Analysis of Gender Display in Music Videos."[4] These studies confirmed existing stereotypes concerning the objectification and subservience of women compared to the leadership and aggressiveness of men. On the other hand, Janelle Wilson's "Women in Country Music Videos," along with Julie Andsager and Kimberly Roe's "Country Music Video in Country's Year of the Woman," look at the representation of women in country music videos to find a modified version of the stereotypical version upheld in rap and R&B videos.[5] These studies find that, while women are cast as minorities, they hold a stronger threat to the status quo. Women take on greater agency and power in the country videos, a difference signifying an area for further research. John Tapper, Esther Thorson and David Black's "Variations in Music Videos as a Function of Their Musical Genre" is an important step in this direction because it subjects a wide selection of popular music genres to comparison.[6] The comparison is based on a wide array of variables including race and gender, as well as sex, violence, politics, and a selection of extra-diegetic video production techniques they term as "structural variables." Due to the breadth of this study however, the findings are unable to convey much depth or detail. The methodology of these studies typically benefits from national broadcast channels with music video programming (i.e., MTV, VH1, CMT, BET, etc.) to derive their samples in various means, sometimes purposive, sometimes random, or even census.

The wider thematic spectrum of the Tapper article (above) is also representative of studies analyzing the lyrical content of artistic works. In his book, *Top Songs In The Sixties: A Content Analysis Of Popular Lyrics*, Richard Cole looks at the one hundred top songs of the 1960s for their participation in very general thematic categories including love, sex,

violence, and protest. There is no statistical analysis performed, and the qualitative interpretation Cole performs is imported from literary analysis. A subset of these studies includes works purposively chosen due to some specific attribute (like their genre or a commonality of their production). Beth Messner, Art Jipson, Paul Becker and Bryan Byers' "The Hardest Hate: A Sociological Analysis of Country Hate Music," Shannon Stirman and James Pennebaker's "Word Use in the Poetry of Suicidal and Non-Suicidal Poets," and Alan West and Colin Martindale's "Creative Trends in the Content of Beatles Lyrics" represent this subset and they provide another example of the literary heritage of popular music studies.[7] Each study focuses on lyrics: those of suicidal poets, those of a famous artist, or those of an esoteric genre. In Messner's case, the sample was determined by the authors' ability to locate these rare recordings, as well as by the paucity of their distribution. Beyond this, Messner's hermeneutic method is not unlike Cole's: it is a qualitative assessment of predominant thematic categories including white power and unity, black dehumanization, and black infantilization.

In the other cases, as exemplified by the works of Stirman and Pennebaker as well as West and Martindale, the sample was a comprehensive "census" sample that was then subject to computer manipulation. In comparison to the rest of the studies in this review, this is a key difference resulting in a more rigorous quantitative method of measurement. Stirman used Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) computer software while West and Martindale used COUNT and LEXSTAT. These important tools allowed the authors to precisely measure the participation of various keywords relative to categories derived from their theoretical perspectives. Consequently, the authors were able to test their hypotheses in an efficient and direct manner. These latter two studies are decidedly quantitative, thereby depending more on descriptions of how the programs and experiments are set up rather than lengthy arguments to make their points.

The two articles dedicated to Tom Waits' music provide an excellent demonstration of the wide range of interdisciplinary orientations informing popular music analysis. In Stephan Wackwitz and Nina Sonenberg's "The Flying Slaves: An Essay on Tom Waits," and James Peterson's "The Depth of the Hole: Intertextuality and Tom Waits' 'Way Down in the Hole,'" the popular song is linked to other forms of media as well as other academic disciplines.[8] Wackwitz and Sonenberg show the influence of early African American oral mythologies in Waits' lyrics, thereby lending

the weight and historical orientation of African American studies to that of popular music studies. On the other hand, Peterson's article focuses on a single composition of Waits ("Way Down in the Hole") as a paratext for the cable television series *The Wire*. Despite serving as a historical component to Peterson's argument, its primary function is to show how the song works to frame issues raised in the television show. While the Wackwitz and Sonenberg article loosely examines some content of Waits' lyrics, neither of these studies on Waits' songwriting have a quantitative component.

Research Questions, Hypothesis

Given that this is the first study of its kind with respect to the study of Tom Waits' lyrics, we draw greater benefit from research questions to reveal some contours of this new terrain. Rather than imposing a specific area of inquiry on the corpus of Waits' lyrics, our study is interested in listening to what Waits' art is telling us. Despite the high academic currency of studying stereotype or gender inequality in the media (both fine areas of research to be sure), our first question has to do with identifying the most insistent messages in the overall corpus. Following the example of Stirman as well as that of Martindale and West, can we not also find a correlation between word frequency and comprehension of aspects pertaining to the overall artistic gesture?

- RQ 1: What are the most frequent lyrics used by Tom Waits across his entire work?
- RQ 2: What sorts of basic issues or preoccupations are revealed by these frequent words?
- RQ 3: What sorts of trends do these basic issues exhibit when assessed both across the career (diachronically) and within a given period (synchronically)?
- H1: The lyrical development from early to recent career will proceed from favoring concrete referents to abstract language.

The single hypothesis carried by this study will be used to test a bit of "accepted wisdom" regarding the music business. Namely, that early-career artists have less creative liberty than those with a proven name. This logic favors a conservative approach to songwriting that is less experimental and more inclined to simple, clear, and easy to understand artistic

messages that are less challenging for listeners. Implicit in this argument is the opposition between concrete language (for more palatable, mimetic, and representational forms of art) and abstract language (for more experimental form, less oriented towards mainstream consumption).

Method

From an objective perspective, the application of the theoretical framework outlined above has important methodological implications. First of all, the design of the study draws on both quantitative measures (what are the core issues? how much ink is consecrated to core issues or motifs?) as well as qualitative ones (how does the way these issues are addressed make this art unique in its articulation of the issues, motifs?). The design is therefore a combination of these approaches, also known as triangulation. Our study benefits from a two-stage design in which an initial quantitative experiment will yield seminal information to then serve a second, qualitative interpretation. Like many of the studies in our review of literature, the qualitative interpretation is thematically oriented. The high frequency (i.e., "insistent") lyrics are grouped into diametrically opposed paradigms that refer to primary themes (i.e., "core issues"). Unlike these earlier studies however, the current essay will subject the quantitatively determined core issues to textual analysis by relocating the salient terms into the body of the songs and reading for specific evaluation and personalized treatment. These discrete instances are then available for assessment in terms of semantic shifts across the various stages of Waits' career.

The collected data includes lyrics from all of Tom Waits' studio record releases. We excluded live shows and bootlegs as well as guest appearances, compilations, or records with duplicate material. This yielded a total of twenty albums released from 1973 through 2011. The rationale for exclusivity is that the attempt to capture the core artistic messages gained more benefit from the full-length studio album than from the live show, guest appearance, or compilation (collective work) style of record. It is the opinion of the author that studio records traditionally require a greater amount of focus on the part of the artist, musicians, and producers (and associated players) in order to craft a very intentional work that proceeds from specific artistic ideas and messages. The other types of recordings may lose that focus based on the improvisational spirit of a live show or the dilution of creative authority from other players vested in the release of guest albums, compilation albums, and the like.

The lyrics from these twenty full-length studio albums were gathered via an initial census sample from www.tomwaitslibrary.com. The total songs from these twenty albums number 299. Lyrics from each of the songs were downloaded into Microsoft Word documents, one for each album. These documents were then used to verify accuracy of the lyric entries by reading along to the studio records and correcting for spelling. As nearly as possible, documented lyrics correspond to what the listener hears. Titles were included and nonsense words were omitted. A few songs have extremely repetitive endings, considered to have been appended to the essential lyrics; these endings were reduced to about half of the actual recorded amount. The total word count for the twenty albums selected for the study is 64,454. The full corpus of lyrics was then entered into a word frequency software program (AntConc). The computer program was pre-loaded with lemma word lists to consolidate the results into derivative word forms removing variations due to conjugation, tense, and similar lexical shifts. AntConc functions include a word list ranking terms in order of frequency, a "concordance" function that reveals selected words in their original context as well as a "concordance plot" showing the distribution of words as they sequentially occur (based on albums as well as location within each album).

The master word list was generated, providing a restructuring of the initial census sample. After filtering 43 non-salient entries (specific parts of speech including articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and subject pronouns), the total number of entries was 4,728. From this refined list, we derived a secondary sample by selecting lyrics that occur at least ten times. This resulted in a "high frequency" sample of 740 words or the top 15.65% of the most frequent salient terms. In order to avoid entries that spike due to localized repetition (i.e., a song that repeats a few words for a long time), our list was then measured for distribution. Distribution is assessed on a 1:1 ratio vis-à-vis appearance on an album. Terms that appear 12 times in the corpus but are limited to 2 albums have a frequency of 12 and a distribution of 2. The resulting term of "insistency" is derived through multiplication: 12 x 2 = 24. A word with a frequency of 12 but with a distribution of 10 would be considered as more insistent, as the multiplication shows (12 x 10 = 120). Therefore, the final distillation of lyrics is based on their insistency.

A sample of lyrics with an insistency rating of 200 or above yielded 260 terms, or 35% of the high frequency sample. These terms make up the

study sample. They are noteworthy for being used frequently and across multiple records. Each term was then coded with a three-digit numeric in the example of i, ii, iii to indicate the insistency score (i), the frequency (ii), and the distribution (iii). See Appendix 1 for the alpha list of these insistent lyrics. All three figures are placed next to the given terms according to the following example: "*fell* 204, 17, 12." This indicates a total score of 204 as the product of 17 total occurrences distributed over 12 albums (17 x 12 = 204).

Results

   The quantitative component yielded a list of 260 words representing the top 35% of the most frequent and well-distributed lyrics in the Waits lexicon. The range of scores for our final list of salient lyrics starts at a minimum of 200 (*trouble*) and ranges up to 4,392 (*say*). The score totals include 5 terms above 4,000, 13 terms from 3,000-3,999, 11 terms from 2,000-2,999, 40 terms from 1,000-1,999, 69 terms from 500-999 and 122 terms from 200-499. The full results list has been organized by salience (below) and alphabetically (see Appendix 1). Significant themes include strong paradigmatic insistence on the relationships between body and spirit as well as that between nature and civilization. There is a particular insistence on the natural world that warrants further study. With respect to our initial research questions, regarding the most frequent lyrics used by Tom Waits across his entire work, we find the most complete and direct statement in Table 3. In summary however, the tropes of desire, affection, and urgency are most directly implicated by a selection of the most insistent lyrics such as *want* (3971, 209, 19), *love* (4220, 211, 20), and *now* (3720, 186, 20). The predominance of the word *no* (4280, 214, 20) is also noteworthy in its potential relation to this group. The second research question concerns basic issues or preoccupations that are revealed by these frequent words. The research provides a list of eight representative paradigms including a set of four belonging to a master-trope of lack or powerlessness ("emptiness," "breaking down," "confusion," and "isolation") as well as an opposing four belonging to a master-trope of plenitude or strength ("fullness," "building up," "knowledge," and "togetherness"). Sample opposing paradigms are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Union	Solitude
come	lonely/alone
us	goodbye
meet	bye
everyone	miss
give	leave
two	away
hold	one
along	nobody

Table 1. Union vs. Solitude.

Emptiness	Fullness
miss	fill
need	whole
without	full
nothing	keep
only	heaven
take	bring
want	much
hole	top

Table 2. Emptiness vs. Fullness.

Table 3. Insistency Results for Tom Waits Lyrics.

200-299 (62)

cut 299, 23, 13
should.......... 299, 23, 13
win 294, 42, 7
lonely/alone. 294, 42, 7
shot 290, 29, 10
ice 288, 24, 12
other........... 286, 26, 11
while 286, 26, 11
song 286, 22, 13
river 280, 28, 10
joe............... 280, 35, 8
young.......... 279, 31, 9
crack 276, 23, 12
any 275, 25, 11
bullet 272, 34, 8
kid 270, 30, 9
once............ 270, 27, 10
far 264, 24, 11
goodbye....... 261, 29, 9
against 260, 20, 13
Saturday 260, 26, 10
sweet 260, 26, 10
bottle 253, 23, 11
listen........... 253, 23, 11
mind 253, 23, 11
glass............ 252, 21, 12
foot 252, 21, 12
sin 252, 42, 6
ask 250, 25, 10
much........... 250, 25, 10
bye.............. 245, 35, 7
got to 245, 35, 7
drive 243, 27, 9
jack 243, 27, 9
sign 243, 27, 9
hat 242, 22, 11
smoke 242, 22, 11
kill 240, 24, 10
stick 240, 24, 10
tomorrow 238, 34, 7
mean 234, 26, 9
shake 230, 46, 5
strip 230, 46, 5

nail.............. 230, 23, 10
please 230, 23, 10
small 230, 23, 10
wild.............. 230, 23, 10
believe 225, 25, 9
gold............. 225, 25, 9
cross 220, 20, 11
care............. 216, 24, 9
blow............ 210, 42, 5
fill................ 210, 21, 10
miss 210, 21, 10
outside........ 210, 21, 10
thought....... 210, 21, 10
wing............ 209, 19, 11
wrong 209, 19, 11
hill............... 204, 34, 6
fell............... 204, 17, 12
trouble........ 200, 25, 8
us................ 200, 20, 10

300-399 (39)

hang............ 396, 44, 9
talk.............. 396, 33, 12
remember.... 396, 36, 11
shine 390, 26, 15
gun.............. 390, 39, 10
change 390, 39, 10
ground 387, 43, 9
end 384, 32, 12
show 377, 29, 13
run 374, 34, 11
inside 372, 31, 12
throw 370, 37, 10
drink 364, 52, 7
whole.......... 364, 28, 13
close 363, 33, 11
own............. 360, 30, 12
yellow 360, 30, 12
shoe............ 360, 40, 9
along........... 348, 29, 12
dig............... 342, 38, 9
pay.............. 341, 31, 11
star 330, 30, 11
bed 324, 27, 12

stranger 320, 32, 10
crow............ 319, 29, 11
alone........... 319, 29, 11
open 312, 26, 12
sea 315, 35, 9
business....... 315, 35, 9
woman........ 312, 39, 8
catch 310, 31, 10
cry............... 310, 31, 10
meet 310, 31, 10
burn 308, 28, 11
diamond 308, 28, 11
green 308, 28, 11
stone........... 306, 34, 9
heaven........ 306, 34, 9
buy.............. 300, 30, 10

400-499 (21)

devil 494, 38, 13
bird 490, 35, 14
life............... 490, 35, 14
bring 484, 44, 11
water 481, 37, 13
arm 468, 36, 13
blood 462, 33, 14
must 448, 32, 14
try 440, 40, 11
watch........... 440, 40, 11
would.......... 435, 29, 15
two 434, 31, 14
grow 430, 43, 10
better.......... 429, 33, 13
everyone...... 429, 33, 13
tear 423, 47, 9
high............. 420, 35, 12
late.............. 420, 35, 12
start 407, 37, 11
Jesus 403, 31, 13
hole 400, 40, 10

500-599 (30)

walk 590, 59, 10
another........ 588, 42, 14
dollar 588, 42, 14

Table 3. Insistency Results for Tom Waits Lyrics. (Cont.)

ring 588, 42, 14
bone 576, 48, 12
true............. 576, 48, 12
wear 576, 48, 12
rose............. 570, 57, 10
dance........... 561, 51, 11
need 560, 40, 14
sun.............. 555, 37, 15
pull.............. 552, 46, 12
again 552, 46, 12
kind............. 550, 55, 10
play 550, 55, 10
hard 532, 38, 14
still 532, 38, 14
without 528, 33, 16
car............... 528, 44, 12
same 520, 52, 10
window........ 520, 40, 13
bad 517, 47, 11
everything ... 516, 43, 12
sing 516, 43, 12
stand........... 516, 43, 12
top 516, 43, 12
could........... 510, 34, 15
side 507, 39, 13
line.............. 504, 36, 14
wait............. 504, 42, 12

600-699 (14)
ride 693, 63, 11
kiss.............. 672, 48, 14
found 645, 43, 15
place 644, 46, 14
ever 644, 46, 14
die............... 624, 52, 12
coming........ 616, 44, 14
roll 616, 44, 14
stop............. 616, 56, 11
nobody 611, 47, 13
feel.............. 602, 43, 14
money 602, 43, 14
wish 602, 43, 14
fire 600, 40, 15

700-799 (8)
hair 784, 49, 16
hell.............. 770, 55, 14
last 768, 48, 16
too 765, 45, 17
tree............. 756, 54, 14
blind 744, 62, 12
give 732, 61, 12
call 702, 54, 13

800-899 (11)
live 885, 59, 15
stay 885, 59, 15
full 880, 55, 16
god.............. 880, 80, 11
hear 871, 67, 13
fall............... 858, 66, 13
think 854, 61, 14
face............. 848, 53, 16
new............. 848, 53, 16
lost.............. 840, 56, 15
house.......... 806, 62, 13

900-999 (6)
light 990, 66, 15
someone...... 969, 57, 17
turn............. 938, 67, 14
sleep 928, 58, 16
morning....... 923, 71, 13
girl 915, 61, 15

1000-1099 (6)
hold 1095, 73, 15
wind............ 1056, 66, 16
tonight........ 1027, 79, 13
boy.............. 1022, 73, 14
hand 1020, 68, 15
name 1008, 56, 18

1100-1199 (4)
street 1185, 79, 15
break 1185, 79, 15
sky 1122, 66, 17
find 1120, 56, 20

1200-1299 (5)
head............ 1292, 76, 17
long............ 1280, 80, 16
until/till........ 1280, 80, 16
black 1245, 83, 15
dead............ 1207, 71, 17

1300-1399 (2)
town 1380, 69, 20
some........... 1360, 80, 17

1400-1499 (5)
red 1496, 88, 17
look............. 1485, 99, 15
day.............. 1428, 84, 17
more 1425, 75, 19
keep............ 1424, 89, 16

1500-1599 (3)
lose 1575, 105, 15
blue............. 1558, 82, 19
every........... 1540, 77, 20

1600-1699 (5)
good 1692, 94, 18
train 1680, 105, 16
let 1674, 93, 18
road 1615, 95, 17
nothing 1600, 80, 20

1700-1799 (3)
cold............. 1722, 123, 14
big............... 1717, 101, 17
always.......... 1710, 95, 18

1800-1899 (3)
world 1890, 126, 15
heart........... 1820, 91, 20
eye............... 1800, 100, 18

1900-1999 (4)
right 1989, 117, 17
moon 1962, 109, 18

Table 3. Insistency Results for Tom Waits Lyrics. (Cont.)

dog.............. 1900, 95, 20
over 1900, 100, 19

2000-2099 (0)

2100-2199 (1)
gonna........... 2196, 122, 18

2200-2299 (2)
only............. 2299, 121, 19
off 2280, 114, 20

2300-2399 (2)
little 2394, 126, 19
way 2376, 132, 18

2400-2499 (2)
rain 2432, 128, 19
tell 2413, 127, 19

2500-2599 (2)
dream 2592, 144, 18
make........... 2538, 141, 18

2600-2699 (1)
home 2664, 148, 18

2700-2799 (0)

2800-2899 (0)

2900-2999 (1)
leave 2988, 166, 18

3000-3099 (2)
away 3026, 178, 17
one 3024, 168, 18

3100-3199 (1)
see 3162, 186, 17

3200-3299 (1)
old 3287, 173, 19

3300-3399 (1)
man 3380, 169, 20

3400-3499 (1)
back 3400, 170, 20

3500-3599 (0)

3600-3699 (3)
take............. 3667, 193, 19

here 3660, 183, 20
come........... 3610, 190, 19

3700-3799 (2)
now............. 3720, 186, 20
time 3700, 185, 20

3800-3899 (1)
her 3840, 192, 20

3900-3999 (1)
want 3971, 209, 19

4000-4099 (0)

4100-4199 (1)
night 4180, 209, 20

4200-4299 (2)
no 4280, 214, 20
love............. 4220, 211, 20

4300-4399 (2)
say 4392, 244, 18
will.............. 4320, 216, 20

Qualitative Analysis

Scanning the most insistent terms on the list provides a number of potential themes like love, desire, urgency, solitude, sensation, and speech, among others. This gesture is qualitative and therefore subjective in nature. As such, its results reflect a greater degree of what the researcher deems as important. Nonetheless, the themes suggested by the list accrue further significance when grouped into paradigms listing similar insistent words under a rubric that tries to comprehend some basic meaning shared by the group. For example, the theme of "solitude" is suggested by a group of terms including *lonely, goodbye/bye, leave, away, nobody, one*. Such a grouping is one of the first steps in the method of literary analysis known as structuralism. This is one—but not the only—interpretive system that

our insistency measure can fuel. To follow the typical method of structuralism, the paradigm of solitude should be countered with an opposing paradigm. Our list of insistent terms provides support for such a paradigm under the rubric of "togetherness." This paradigm is fleshed out by terms like *come, meet, everyone, two, hold, give* and *love*.

The above structure of opposing paradigms is not a heavily interpretive process—it is a qualitative analog of data collection in quantitative analysis. It provides a point of reference to both micro-level analysis and macro-level analysis. On the first hand, this structure enables qualitative interpretation through close reading of the salient terms in the context of the songs from which they had already been isolated. On the other hand, the structure may be compared to other such structures. When similarities are found, the structures themselves may be arranged into larger meta-paradigms signifying philosophical or epistemological orientations at the core of the lyrical work.

To exemplify this latter process, we may note similar paradigmatic opposition between "emptiness" (*need, without, nothing, only, want*) and "fullness" (*fill, whole, full, keep, heaven*), another between "breaking down" (*cut, crack, break, fire, burn, strip, gun/bullet*) and "building up" (*grow, hold, more, much, remember, make*), and yet another between "ignorance" (*blind, lost, lose, stranger, fall*) and "knowledge" (*find, know, road, hold, way*). When the rubrics themselves are gathered into lists, the meta-paradigm that results signifies a second-order opposition. In this case, "emptiness," "breaking down," "ignorance," and "isolation" belong to a common meta-theme of lack, or powerlessness, while the opposing list ("fullness," "building up," "knowledge," and "togetherness") belong to an opposing meta-theme such as plenitude or strength. In turn, this second-order opposition signifies basic philosophical issues at the core of the lexical system. In this case, the issues may be identified as "to have (or not)" or "to be able (or unable)." Here, the increasingly abstract, conceptual orientation of the macro-movement is reflected by the infinitive verbs.

In contrast to this movement toward abstraction, micro-level analysis proceeds from the same paradigms down to the level of the text to support more intimate observation of how these lexical families are deployed. The value of this gesture of close reading is that it allows us to witness the impact of these salient terms within the context of the songs from which they have been isolated. To exemplify this process, let us return to the initial opposition of paradigms with rubrics "solitude" versus "togetherness." The

micro-level (or "close reading") approach is motivated by the questions "how" and "with what evaluation" does the author frame the issues signified by the paradigm. To accomplish this analysis and answer these leading questions, it is necessary to study the use of the terms in their original contexts. Initial consultation of *alone* as a leading term in the "solitude" paradigm is a telling example. Initial use in the *Heart of Saturday Night* album (1973) includes a gesture of self-affirmation through the experience of solitude: "*Don't follow me, I'm traveling alone.*" This evaluation is reaffirmed in the subsequent release, *Nighthawks at the Diner* (1974): "*…you must be strong to go it alone*," as well as by mid-career, "*there's nothing wrong with a lady drinking alone*," (*Rain Dogs* 1985). By recent career however, there is a change in the evaluation of solitude conveyed through the use of the lyric *alone*: it begins to signify vulnerability. In the *Orphans* trilogy (2006), we find the lyric, "*and he was all alone, and he sat down and cried*." Likewise, in the 2011 release *Bad As Me*, we find "*I'm not alone, I'm not afraid, this bird has flown*." These micro-level analyses are significant of the particular treatment accorded by Waits to the salient issues provided by the quantitative analysis.

Word frequency programs like AntConc provide a concordance plot function visually depicting the distribution of specific lyrics across the albums. Such a function has empowered our study to filter the lexical corpus for terms with greater distribution. It may also be used to observe diachronic trends in distribution. For example, the most insistent abstract term is *love* (4220, 211, 20). The concordance plot shows that the number of uses of this term in the first half of Waits' career is 95, while it is used 116 times over the second half. This observation offers tenuous support to the idea that Waits' lyrics tend toward abstraction over time. On the other hand, *rain* (2432, 128, 19) is an insistent concrete term whose use on the earlier albums (53 occurrences) is 29% less than that observed during the more recent albums (75 occurrences). This observation helps to contradict the assertion that Waits' early work uses more concrete language than his later work. Certainly, this type of observation provides little more than a hypothesis that must then be tested by closely reading the contexts provided by the individual songs, albums, and periods. For the purposes of our study, the value of this example lies in its illustration of the method at hand.

The qualitative element of our research enables us to respond to the remaining research questions and hypothesis posed above. The third re-

search question regards any trends exhibited by these basic issues when assessed in relation to time. Our analysis selected one such trend in the evaluative treatment of the use of the term *alone* in the "solitude" paradigm. It demonstrated a shift from a positive evaluation of solitude as strength and independence to a negative evaluation of solitude in association with sadness and fear. Our hypothesis, that we would find more concrete lyrics early in Waits' career and more abstract lyrics on the more recent albums was not supported by the demonstration examples we provided with *love* and *rain* representing abstract and concrete language types respectively.

As a demonstration of a research method designed for the analysis of popular music lyrics, this study is very limited. Due to limitation of space, it provides only the most cursory deductions and exploration of Tom Waits lyrics. The relationship between his treatment of the human body and the natural world as intertwined, physical domains provides a compelling direction for future explorations into the work of Tom Waits in particular. The method presented is limited in terms of its ability to extrapolate and generalize. Moving from lexical instance, to paradigms and then to meta-paradigms tends toward greater abstraction and removes us from the determining and evaluative substance that is the context in which the lyrics are used. The method is perhaps best used to help guide researchers of lyrics to rich semantic domains in the larger landscape of the artist's total corpus.

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate a hybrid methodology for the analysis of lyrics. The particular import of this study speaks to the persistent concern over the value of popular music. The ambivalence of this issue—its particular urgency—comes in large part from the diverse ways popular music is assessed. Like the variety of disciplines supporting the way it is understood in the academy, there is a divergent report on the value of popular music from the perspectives of economics, musicology, sociology, and mass media; the first two showing devaluation and the latter two showing increases in value. The current study responds to this quandary with a research methodology useful for allowing scholars to speak to the poetic value of popular music. Clearly, not all lyrics will stand up to this type of analysis, just as there are variations in the quality of any art form. The works that do withstand the proposed research methodology are powerful and compelling examples that validate the industry

in which they circulate against claims of vacuousness. The implication of this research demonstration is therefore important with respect to the study of popular music because it represents a means for the validation, celebration, and exemplification of high quality in a less opinion-based fashion. Sales figures also work in this way, with the exception being that plenty of money is made from popular music with little artistic substance.

To resume the hybrid nature of this method, it brings together modern, computer-assisted quantified analysis to strengthen a specific form of modern literary interpretation. The initial move is to digitize the body of discourse for study. In our case, it was the entire corpus of lyrics from Tom Waits' studio discography. The digitized files should be verified for accuracy and prepared for computer-aided analysis (usually by eliminating meaningless or highly repetitive addenda). The files are then entered into a word-counting computer program (AntConc is the one used for this study). The functions of the program allow for the entire lexicon to be rated by frequency. From this list, we took the words in the top fifteen percent of frequency. This list was then checked for distribution by using the concordance plot function on AntConc. This displayed the amount of albums using each of the high-frequency terms. Multiplying frequency by distribution number (1-20 based on how many of the 20 albums used the terms) resulted in an insistency score. We selected terms with a score of 200 and above, resulting in 260 terms.

At this point, the qualitative gesture began to come into evidence. The 260 terms were consulted for association and grouped into paradigms where possible. Based on the similarities binding the terms in the paradigm, a rubric or title would be assigned. An antonym would then be derived as the header for an opposing paradigm, and the list would be consulted to locate terms for the structurally opposing paradigm. This revealed central issues addressed in the artistic work and the paradigms then served as reference points for close readings of individual songs. This gesture allowed for the truly qualitative assessment of authorial intention by determining the values placed by the author on the insistent terms and the larger issues to which they belong. From these analyses, a deeper sense of the artistic message may begin to emerge.

Appendix 1. Alphabetical Insistency List.

again 552, 46, 12	crack 276, 23, 12	good 1692, 94, 18
against 260, 20, 13	cross 220, 20, 11	goodbye 261, 29, 9
alone 319, 29, 11	crow 319, 29, 11	gotta 245, 35, 7
along 348, 29, 12	cry 310, 31, 10	green 308, 28, 11
always 1710, 95, 18	cut 299, 23, 13	ground 387, 43, 9
another 588, 42, 14		grow 430, 43, 10
any 275, 25, 11	dance 561, 51, 11	gun 390, 39, 10
arm 468, 36, 13	day 1428, 84, 17	
ask 250, 25, 10	dead 1207, 71, 17	hair 784, 49, 16
away 3026, 178, 17	devil 494, 38, 13	hand 1020, 68, 15
	diamond 308, 28, 11	hang 396, 44, 9
back 3400, 170, 20	die 624, 52, 12	hard 532, 38, 14
bad 517, 47, 11	dig 342, 38, 9	hat 242, 22, 11
bed 324, 27, 12	dog 1900, 95, 20	head 1292, 76, 17
believe 225, 25, 9	dollar 588, 42, 14	hear 871, 67, 13
better 429, 33, 13	dream 2592, 144, 18	heart 1820, 91, 20
big 1717, 101, 17	drink 364, 52, 7	heaven 306, 34, 9
bird 490, 35, 14	drive 243, 27, 9	hell 770, 55, 14
black 1245, 83, 15		her 3840, 192, 20
blind 744, 62, 12	end 384, 32, 12	here 3660, 183, 20
blood 462, 33, 14	ever 644, 46, 14	high 420, 35, 12
blow 210, 42, 5	every 1540, 77, 20	hill 204, 34, 6
blue 1558, 82, 19	everyone 429, 33, 13	hold 1095, 73, 15
bone 576, 48, 12	everything ... 516, 43, 12	hole 400, 40, 10
bottle 253, 23, 11	eye 1800, 100, 18	home 2664, 148, 18
boy 1022, 73, 14		house 806, 62, 13
break 1185, 79, 15	face 848, 53, 16	
bring 484, 44, 11	fall 858, 66, 13	ice 288, 24, 12
bullet 272, 34, 8	far 264, 24, 11	inside 372, 31, 12
burn 308, 28, 11	feel 602, 43, 14	
business 315, 35, 9	fell 204, 17, 12	jack 243, 27, 9
buy 300, 30, 10	fill 210, 21, 10	Jesus 403, 31, 13
bye 245, 35, 7	find 1120, 56, 20	joe 280, 35, 8
	fire 600, 40, 15	
call 702, 54, 13	foot 252, 21, 12	keep 1424, 89, 16
car 528, 44, 12	found 645, 43, 15	kid 270, 30, 9
care 216, 24, 9	full 880, 55, 16	kill 240, 24, 10
catch 310, 31, 10		kind 550, 55, 10
change 390, 39, 10	girl 915, 61, 15	kiss 672, 48, 14
close 363, 33, 11	give 732, 61, 12	
cold 1722, 123, 14	glass 252, 21, 12	last 768, 48, 16
come 3610, 190, 19	god 880, 80, 11	late 420, 35, 12
coming 616, 44, 14	gold 225, 25, 9	leave 2988, 166, 18
could 510, 34, 15	gonna 2196, 122, 18	let 1674, 93, 18

life............... 490, 35, 14
light 990, 66, 15
little 2394, 126, 19
line.............. 504, 36, 14
listen........... 253, 23, 11
live 885, 59, 15
lonely/alone 294, 42, 7
long............. 1280, 80, 16
look............. 1485, 99, 15
lose 1575, 105, 15
lost.............. 840, 56, 15
love 4220, 211, 20

make........... 2538, 141, 18
man 3380, 169, 20
mean 234, 26, 9
meet 310, 31, 10
mind 253, 23, 11
miss 210, 21, 10
money 602, 43, 14
moon 1962, 109, 18
more 1425, 75, 19
morning 923, 71, 13
much........... 250, 25, 10
must 448, 32, 14

nail.............. 230, 23, 10
name 1008, 56, 18
need 560, 40, 14
new.............. 848, 53, 16
night 4180, 209, 20
no 4280, 214, 20
nobody 611, 47, 13
nothing 1600, 80, 20
now............. 3720, 186, 20

off 2280, 114, 20
old 3287, 173, 19
once........... 270, 27, 10
one 3024, 168, 18
only............. 2299, 121, 19
open 312, 26, 12
other........... 286, 26, 11
outside........ 210, 21, 10

over 1900, 100, 19
own.............. 360, 30, 12

pay 341, 31, 11
place 644, 46, 14
play.............. 550, 55, 10
please 220, 22, 10
pull.............. 552, 46, 12

rain 2432, 128, 19
red 1496, 88, 17
remember.... 396, 36, 11
ride 693, 63, 11
right 1989, 117, 17
ring 588, 42, 14
river 280, 28, 10
road 1615, 95, 17
roll 616, 44, 14
rose............. 570, 57, 10
run 374, 34, 11

same 520, 52, 10
Saturday 260, 26, 10
say 4392, 244, 18
sea 315, 35, 9
see 3162, 186, 17
shake 230, 46, 5
shine 390, 26, 15
shoe 360, 40, 9
shot 290, 29, 10
should......... 299, 23, 13
show 377, 29, 13
side 507, 39, 13
sign 243, 27, 9
sin 252, 42, 6
sing 516, 43, 12
sky 1122, 66, 17
sleep 928, 58, 16
small 230, 23, 10
smoke 242, 22, 11
some........... 1360, 80, 17
someone...... 969, 57, 17
song............ 286, 22, 13
stand........... 516, 43, 12

star 330, 30, 11
start 407, 37, 11
stay 885, 59, 15
stick 240, 24, 10
still 532, 38, 14
stone........... 306, 34, 9
stop............. 616, 56, 11
stranger 320, 32, 10
street 1185, 79, 15
strip 230, 46, 5
sun............... 555, 37, 15
sweet 260, 26, 10

take............. 3667, 193, 19
talk.............. 396, 33, 12
tear 423, 47, 9
tell 2413, 127, 19
think 854, 61, 14
thought........ 210, 21, 10
throw 370, 37, 10
time 3700, 185, 20
tomorrow 238, 34, 7
tonight 1027, 79, 13
too 765, 45, 17
top 516, 43, 12
town 1380, 69, 20
train 1680, 105, 16
tree 756, 54, 14
trouble......... 200, 25, 8
true............. 576, 48, 12
try 440, 40, 11
turn............. 938, 67, 14
two 434, 31, 14

until/till........ 1280, 16, 80
us................. 200, 20, 10

wait............. 504, 42, 12
walk 590, 59, 10
want 3971, 209, 19
watch........... 440, 40, 11
water 481, 37, 13
way 2376, 132, 18
wear 576, 48, 12

Appendix 1. Alphabetical Insistency List. (Cont.)

while............ 286, 26, 11
whole........... 364, 28, 13
wild............. 230, 23, 10
will 4320, 216, 20
win.............. 294, 42, 7
wind............. 1056, 66, 16
window........ 520, 40, 13
wing............. 209, 19, 11
wish 602, 43, 14
without........ 528, 33, 16
woman......... 312, 39, 8
world 1890, 126, 15
would........... 435, 29, 15
wrong 209, 19, 11

yellow 360, 30, 12
young........... 279, 31, 9

Endnotes

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2. See, for example, Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Peter Lavezzoli, "Structural Elements of George Harrison's 'Love You To,'" *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society* 40 (2009): 76-83.

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