popular, and directed to a mass audience. There are no high art pretensions here. And yet, in terms of subject matter and devices, there are remarkable parallels with what is accepted as modernism. To recall the distinction attempted at the opening to this chapter, I am not for one moment arguing that Jethro Tull's music is stylistically modernist but that, in its concerns, it clearly represents Harvey's 'troubled and fluctuating aesthetic response to conditions of modernity'. As such, it hints at a site wherein contemporary music practices can be conceptualized to accommodate aspects of both modernism and mass culture, enabling them to be viewed, correctly I believe, as sibling expressions of modernity.

9 Pangs of history in late 1970s new-wave rock

JOHN COVACH

In late 1977 Elvis Costello and the Attractions appeared on NBC's Saturday Night Live. At the time, the programme was in its early days, featuring John Belushi, Dan Ackroyd, Gilda Radner, Jane Curtin and Garrett Morris — a cast who pushed at the boundaries of the permissible on US network television. The often-provocative show was well known to many rock listeners, especially since it regularly featured the most interesting current bands as musical guests. Any group appearing on the show during the late 1970s could expect to enjoy the attention of rock culture at least for the evening, and an appearance on the show could be especially beneficial for a new band like Costello's. But this particular appearance was distinctive in many ways. The band began a number and almost immediately broke it off, with Costello announcing that there was no reason to play that song; the group then launched into 'Radio, Radio', a tune strongly critical of the rock radio of the time; and since the show was live, there was no suitable way — short of going to black — for the show's producers to stop the band from switching tunes on the fly.¹

Substituting tunes mid-performance was clearly a rebellious act, and this rebelliousness was underscored that evening by many other aspects of the band's presentation and music. Here was a rock singer who called himself 'Elvis', a clear reference to Elvis Presley, who at the time had only recently died, fat and drugged out, by then more a symbol of Las Vegas decadence

¹ For an account of the history of Saturday Night Live, see Hill and Weingrad (1987). The early days of Costello's career, including the incident described here, are chronicled in Hinton (1999). Hinton gives the date of the performance as 17 December, and notes that the group appeared twice during the show. In his first segment, Costello and the band played 'Watching the Detectives' as planned. The second segment was supposed to feature 'Less Than Zero', which was the song begun but replaced by 'Radio, Radio' (113–14).
than youth rebellion. The band members wore straight-leg pants, narrow ties with tab collars, and sported short hair. Costello himself wore horn-rimmed glasses reminiscent of those worn by Buddy Holly. The musical instruments the group used — always something of a statement in the 1970s — were also unconventional: Costello played a Fender Jazzmaster guitar and keyboard player Steve Nieve employed a Vox combo organ. Both of these instruments were more pawn-shop bargains than music-store trophies. In light of this, what could these musicians be trying to prove, showing up looking this way in the days of bell-bottom jeans and long, shaggy hair, Fender Stratocasters and Hammond B3s, and referring to long discarded rock icons like Presley and Holly?

For US viewers that night, Elvis Costello and the Attractions were the first real taste these rock fans had of either punk or new wave. At the tail end of a long series of Sex Pistols scandals that culminated in the group’s tour of unlikely venues in the American South, the music business had already begun to refashion punk into something less disruptive than what Johnny Rotten and crew had been offering. New wave was more pop-orientated, less angry and aggressive, and markedly ironic in its approach to rock music and culture. This can be gleaned easily from Costello’s appearance here. The group makes clear references to rock music’s past — the look, names and instruments in many ways invoke 1950s and 1960s rock culture. The pronounced irony in these references resides in the fact that new-wave bands like Costello, Police, Blondie, The B-52s, Devo, and Joe Jackson never really seemed to be advocating an actual return to earlier styles and practices; rather, they appeared to be selecting features of these earlier styles precisely because they were so at odds with mid- to late 1970s hippie culture. It was precisely what they weren’t that counted, and in many ways this appropriation of rock’s pre-Sgt. Pepper days — which were romanticized as days of innocence and simplicity — was a blow aimed directly at what had become of the peace-love-and-dope hippie culture of the first part of the decade.²

² Savage (1992) provides a detailed study of the punk scene in the UK, while Heylin (1993) considers the American punk, focusing especially on the New York scene. Far less has been written about new-wave rock, though Joe Jackson’s recent autobiography (1999) provides a good deal of insight into the irony and posturing that were clearly a component in the style; see esp. pp. 272–4.

While new-wave references to earlier pre-psychedelic rock are clear enough in the image-making and packaging of many of the bands, such references are not nearly as clear-cut in the music. One might well wonder if, in the absence of any visual clues, a listener can really hear references to earlier styles: is there an aural irony that parallels the visual one? Such music-stylistic references are indeed present in this music and the general effect of new wave depends on the listener’s awareness of them. Close inspection reveals, however, that these references operate in sometimes conflicted and complicated ways. As a result, the music-stylistic distinction between new wave and the 1970s rock it hoped to replace is not always as clear as the promotional hype surrounding it might lead one to believe. After providing a brief historical introduction to new-wave music, this chapter will explore how musical references to earlier styles occur in new wave, and especially in the music of The Cars — a group that, along with Costello and Blondie, was one of the most successful and influential new-wave acts of the late 1970s. My analysis I will employ an approach to questions of musical style that I refer to as ‘musical worliding’; this notion will provide a theoretical context for understanding how references in new wave create meaning. In order to explore its stylistic distinctiveness, The Cars’ music will be contrasted with that of mainstream-rockers Foreigner, whose music is taken as representative of a style often called ‘corporate rock’. I will argue that despite the many music-stylistic references to pre-psychedelic rock that occur in The Cars’ music, it is also grounded in seventies rock in ways that parallel the music of Foreigner. Far from the return to the perceived simplicity of the mid-sixties that it was often thought to be in the late seventies, new wave instead appropriates a grab-bag of stylistic features drawn from this earlier music, conditioned and skewed by developments in the late sixties and early seventies rock music of the intervening years.

(Post)modern reactions? The rise of new wave

If we understand new wave as primarily a reaction, it is helpful to understand what it is a reaction to. Many of the stylistic features of new wave can be seen as the opposites of what may be found in the music of popular British bands such as Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, Led Zeppelin, and Yes or American
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bands such as The Allman Brothers Band, The Doobie Brothers, and Steely Dan. New wave replaces long songs and extensive instrumental soloing with short, hook-based arrangements. Hippie lyrics engaging big ideas (religion, the state, the future of mankind) or predatory sexuality are out and topics dealing with dating and romantic love (with no threat of sexual conquest) are in. Distorted, bent-string guitar solos and soaring MiniMoog synthesizer lines give way to the clean tones of rockabilly and the mechanical synth sounds of the twenty-first century. One might compare, for instance, Yes’s ‘Awaken’ (1977) with Joe Jackson’s ‘Is She Really Going Out With Him’ (1979): while Jon Anderson refers to ‘high vibrations’ and the ‘workings of man’, Jackson mopes over a girlfriend; and while Anderson and Rick Wakeman exchange melodic lines on the harp and church organ in a meditative central section, Jackson’s spare quartet of bass, drums, guitar and piano complete their entire song in about the same length of time.

As mentioned above, all of this was part of new wave’s return-to-simplicity aesthetic. Growing out of the psychedelic experimentation of the late 1960s, seventies rock had continued to explore combinations of styles and pursue greater technical sophistication, becoming increasingly complex in the process. Sgt. Pepper was recorded on two four-track machines, but technical advances soon made eight-, sixteen-, and twenty-four-track recording possible. Indeed, as the decade wore on recording became a very sophisticated process, with albums taking months to record as care was devoted to every dimension of the multi-layered tracks. Queen’s ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ (1975) – which ended up employing dozens of tracks – is a good example of how studio multi-tracking can turn the three voices into an operatic chorus. Queen’s blending of rock and operetta was only another instance of the fusion of rock and classical music styles that was pioneered by the Beatles. Progressive rock bands like Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Genesis, and Yes made the use of classical-sounding passages part of their trademark styles, as did more pop-orientated groups like the Electric Light Orchestra and The Moody Blues. Combining jazz and rock produced not only horn-orientated bands like Chicago and Blood, Sweat and Tears, but also the chromatically inflected music of Steely Dan and Paul Simon. The use of Eastern musical styles – pioneered by the Kinks, Yardbirds, and Beatles – continued in significant seventies rock tracks such as Led Zeppelin’s ‘Kashmir’, Yes’s ‘Close to the Edge’, and much of the jazz-rock fusion of John McLaughlin’s Mahavishnu Orchestra. The practice of virtuosic guitar soloing developed by Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix in the late sixties was continued by Led Zeppelin’s Jimmy Page, The Allman Brothers’ Duane Allman and Dickie Betts, Carlos Santana, and Yes’s Steve Howe, expanded to the keyboards by Keith Emerson and Rick Wakeman, and even extended to the bass (Yes’s Chris Squire) and drums (almost every rock drummer had his solo). Psychodelic themes of spiritual, intellectual and experiential exploration were taken up in concept albums like the Who’s Tommy and Quadrophения, Jethro Tull’s Thick as A Brick, and Pink Floyd’s The Wall. The development of the synthesizer over the course of the decade, from monophonic to polyphonic and from analogue to digital, made the keyboards an increasingly important component in rock music.

To new-wave sensibilities, rock had become bloated and corporate – a musical style in which the musicians had become too professional and in which the expenses of recording and touring kept everyone out except those with lucrative recording contracts. What was needed, according to new wavers, was a radical stripping down to the basics. This process had already begun by mid-decade among a group of bands performing in a small New York bar called CBGB. The Ramones, Television, Talking Heads, Patti Smith, and Blondie developed a style of music that returned to the garage-band ethos of the mid-1960s. One group, The New York Dolls, became Malcolm McLaren’s inspiration for the formation of the Sex Pistols in Britain. While CBGB was the centre of the New York ‘punk’ scene, the Sex Pistols became the catalyst for UK punk. By the time the group disbanded in January of 1978, ‘punk’ had become a dirty word inside the music business. The idea of

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reducing rock music down to its simplest components, however, continued in the new-wave scene. Costello's performance on Saturday Night Live in late 1977 represents the extent to which new wave had already begun to make its way into rock culture.

As mentioned above, new wave constituted a rejection of the hippie values of the 1967–77 period. What is most interesting in this rejection is the role played by an almost acute awareness of rock's past. In order to perceive the irony so characteristic of new wave, listeners had to be familiar with music from rock's pre-1967 past. While acts like Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Bruce Springsteen, and Dire Straits approached rock's past as traditionalists—they really did think the earlier music was better and thus advocated a return-to-roots aesthetic—new wavers had no such investment in this earlier music. In many ways, references to earlier styles were most valuable for what they were not. Hippie music tended strongly towards a modernist stance in its faith in technology and the teleological development of the style; each new album is better when it is recorded in more sophisticated ways, employs more complex textures and performance mastery, and engages more poetic images in the lyrics. Appropriating (mostly tacitly) interpretive tropes found throughout modernist culture in the West, most bands thought of their music in terms of 'development' and 'evolution'—a path leading from the early days of groping for an individual voice to a later period of mastery and musical maturity. In appropriating the past in an ironic fashion, however, new wavers juxtaposed a postmodern aesthetic stance to the modernist one of the hippies. New-wave music refers freely to a wide range of pre-1967 rock styles, creating stylistic collages that often defeat any sense of teleological development in terms of style. According to this postmodern aesthetic perspective, a band's music doesn't evolve as much as it simply changes, and rock music doesn't spiral upward as much as it simply circles back on itself: progress in rock music is a myth that has lost its ability to create meaning (except by reacting against it). Thus, while new wave follows hippie rock chronologically, it does not develop out of it. But as I will demonstrate below, the situation is not nearly so uncomplicated. New wave never completely sheds the practices of hippie

rock; in some cases, it can be seen to have at least as much in common with the music that followed in the wake of Sgt. Pepper as it does with the 'more innocent' music that preceded it.

Musical worlding

In order to understand how new-wave musicians could invoke other styles in this process of returning to rock simplicity, we can turn to the notion of 'musical worlding.' This approach is founded on the idea that listeners organize new musical experiences in terms of previous ones: any new song is heard in terms of other songs the listener knows or has at least heard. In the simplest cases, a new song that shares many musical characteristics with a number of other already known songs is easily assimilated; one that does not share such characteristics is more difficult to 'understand.' Musical worlding attempts to focus on the fact that while listeners often tend to think of any musical piece as a separate, even self-standing musical object, a closer inspection reveals that pieces are in fact much more like centre points in a web of relationships that lead off in myriad directions to many other pieces. The tendency is thus to suppress the lines that might be thought to form the outline of any given music work, thinking of the work less as an object with fixed boundaries and more as a location, or site, of musical meaning.

While listeners may hear new pieces in terms of ones already known, this process often occurs only tacitly: listeners are frequently not immediately aware of how they are hooking up works to other ones, and often a good deal of effort is required in order to specify where references lead. Sometimes characteristics are held in common among a large number of works, and thus establishing a specific reference is somewhat arbitrary or even fruitless. Such commonly held characteristics are traditionally regarded as central to the identification of musical styles. In many ways, musical worlding offers an approach to the study of musical style that suppresses the notion that pieces are distinct objects and that stylistic characteristics are properties separable from the works in which they occur. Instead, pieces merge with one another

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music-analytical task is thus to tease out the connections to other works in
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to realize that any such analysis is provisional, since each listener's experience
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individual experiences still converge enough for discussions of worbling to
have value among listeners who hold enough musical experience in common.

In light of this discussion of musical worbling, the question in the
case of new-wave rock in the late 1970s is how this music creates meaning
by referring to other works or groups of works. If we can determine how
this is done, we can begin to explore how – and even whether – this music
distinguishes itself from the mainstream rock of the same time. In short, we
can come to some conclusions about whether or not this music refers to rock
music's past in ways we could detect aurally even in the absence of the short
haircuts, narrow ties and naïve lyrics that serve as clear visual and verbal
markers.

**Foreigner**

In order to investigate the musical cues in new wave, it will be helpful
to establish some kind of normative model against which this newer music
sets itself. There are, in fact, many rock styles in the mid- and late 1970s
that represent the kind of rock music modernism described above. Almost
any track from Pink Floyd, Yes, Jethro Tull or Led Zeppelin could serve as
an example, as might the music of Steely Dan, the Doobie Brothers, Peter
Frampton or Supertramp. But even within mainstream rock in the second
half of the decade, there was a marked tendency to scale back the length and
complexity found in the music of only a few years earlier. The resultant radio-
friendly album-orientated rock was sometimes thought to be crafted less for
musical expression than for financial profit, and was dubbed 'corporate rock'
by critics. Indeed, American groups such as Boston, Styx, and Journey were
among those most often thought to have sold their musical souls for more

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10 Jerry McCulloch begins his essay accompanying the Foreigner CD Anthology

  *Jukebox Heroes* with a paragraph that colourfully but accurately summarizes the

  situation:

  Foreigner has long endured two distinctly different, yet hopelessly intertwined,
  legacies. The public at large knows them as a multi-platinum hit machine that
  dominated pop radio for a decade, from the late 70s to the late 80s, with a string
  of successful singles and albums – the stratospheric sales of which were nearly
  without precedent. But to many critics and other self-appointed rock cognoscenti,
  they're the epitome of 'corporate rock', a soulless band of skilled musical
  mercenaries assembled by shadowy figures in some boardroom to plunder
  unsuspecting music fans with machine-tooled guitar riffs and burnished vocal
  hooks. (p. 3)

11 For contemporary reactions to the success of the group's first album, see

  Mendelssohn (1978) and Emonds (1978).

12 Of these albums, *Four* (1981) was the most successful, staying on Billboard's Top

  40 chart for fifty-two weeks, ten in the No. 1 slot; the album hit No. 5 in the UK.

  *Four* also contained the hit singles 'Urgent' (No. 4 US) and 'Waiting for a Girl
  Like You' (No. 2 US/No. 8 UK).
until they are in some sense indistinguishable, and this erasing of boundaries gives rise to stylistic characteristics that are always understood as the result of actual pieces of music that form the basis for a listener's experience. The music-analytical task is thus to tease out the connections to other works in any given work, situating it in the richest possible network of relationships in hopes of coming to terms with how a piece creates meaning. It is important to realize that any such analysis is provisional, since each listener's experience will differ and thus each will situate any given work differently as well (and even the same listener may situate a piece differently at a later time in life); but individual experiences still converge enough for discussions of worlding to have value among listeners who hold enough musical experience in common.

In light of this discussion of musical worlding, the question in the case of new-wave rock in the late 1970s is how this music creates meaning by referring to other works or groups of works. If we can determine how this is done, we can begin to explore how — and even whether — this music distinguishes itself from the mainstream rock of the same time. In short, we can come to some conclusions about whether or not this music refers to rock music's past in ways we could detect aurally even in the absence of the short haircuts, narrow ties and naïve lyrics that serve as clear visual and verbal markers.

**Foreigner**

In order to investigate the musical cues in new wave, it will be helpful to establish some kind of normative model against which this newer music sets itself. There are, in fact, many rock styles in the mid- and late 1970s that represent the kind of rock music modernism described above. Almost any track from Pink Floyd, Yes, Jethro Tull or Led Zeppelin could serve as an example, as might the music of Steely Dan, the Doobie Brothers, Peter Frampton or Supertramp. But even within mainstream rock in the second half of the decade, there was a marked tendency to scale back the length and complexity found in the music of only a few years earlier. The resultant radio-friendly album-orientated rock was sometimes thought to be crafted less for musical expression than for financial profit, and was dubbed 'corporate rock' by critics. Indeed, American groups such as Boston, Styx, and Journey were among those most often thought to have sold their musical souls for more airplay and record sales.10 But whatever critics may have thought at the time, rock fans continue to consider albums by these bands as an important component in the classic-rock style, as evinced by classic-rock format playlists across the United States today.

Despite the disagreements that may arise over the value of late seventies mainstream rock, there is little dispute that Foreigner was one of the most successful of the late seventies/early eighties rock bands.11 In America, the band's first four albums placed within the Top 10, with six singles reaching the Top 10 as well.12 A fresh single by a new-wave band was not likely to have to compete so much for attention with the music of Yes or Led Zeppelin (who were mostly out of the picture by the end of the decade anyway) as much as with bands like Foreigner or Van Halen, who were clearly viewed as continuing to carry the torch for modernist rock music. Thus, Foreigner will be taken as representative of late seventies mainstream rock for the purposes of this discussion; it will serve as the norm in comparison with which the irony and postmodern tendencies of new wave can be sounded out. The band's first hit single, 'Feels Like the First Time', antedates the emergence of new wave and so will serve as a good example of how mainstream rock sounded in the months just before new wave hit the US scene.

Figure 9.1 provides a formal diagram for the tune; the music is organized by sections that are marked by CD timings. The numbers that follow in each case provide a bar count for a section followed by the number of bars

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10 Jerry McCulley begins his essay accompanying the Foreigner CD Anthology *Jukebox Heroes* with a paragraph that colourfully but accurately summarizes the situation: Foreigner has long endured two distinctly different, yet hopelessly intertwined, legacies. The public at large knows them as a multiplatinum hit machine that dominated pop radio for a decade, from the late 70s to the late 80s, with a string of successful singles and albums — the stratospheric sales of which were nearly without precedent. But to many critics and other self-appointed rock cognoscenti, they're the epitome of 'corporate rock', a soulless band of skilled musical mercenaries assembled by shadowy figures in some boardroom to plunder unsuspecting music fans with machine-tooled guitar riffs and burnished vocal hooks. (p. 3)

11 For contemporary reactions to the success of the group's first album, see Crescenti (1977), Mendelsohn (1978) and Emunds (1978).

12 Of these albums, *Four* (1981) was the most successful, staying on Billboard's Top 40 chart for fifty-two weeks, ten in the No. 1 slot; the album hit No. 5 in the UK. *Four* also contained the hit singles 'Urgent' (No. 4 US) and 'Waiting for a Girl Like You' (No. 2 US/No. 8 UK).
JOHN COVACH

0:00–0:27 Introduction 12 bars, 4 + 4 + **4 *synth added, stop time; **full band, in time

0:28–1:02 Verse 1 16 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4
1:03–1:21 Chorus 8 bars, 4 + 4
1:21–1:56 Verse 2 16 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4
(1:56–2:38 Bridge 1 18 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 2 change of key to e minor
2:39–2:56 Chorus 8 bars, 4 + 4
2:56–3:14 Bridge 2 8 bars, 4 + 4 guitar solo
3:14–3:48 Chorus 16 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + **4 *begin fade-out at 3:41

Figure 9.1: Formal diagram for 'Feels Like the First Time'

in the phrases that make up the section. Thus, the twelve-bar introduction is made up of three four-bar phrases, the sixteen-bar verse 1 is comprised of four four-bar phrases, and so on. As can be seen from Figure 9.1, 'Feels Like the First Time' loosely falls into a formal scheme common in rock music, contrasting verse–chorus form. In such a form, the verse and chorus are based on different harmonic and/or melodic materials, and such is the case in this track: the verse is built on a four-bar harmonic progression that moves from I to bVII to ii back to I in G, all over a tonic pedal (see Ex. 9.1). This pattern is repeated once before moving on to an alternation between II and IV/II over a supertonic pedal and III and IV/III over a mediant pedal. A quick move to IV leads back to the tonic chord beginning the first presentation of the chorus, which falls into two four-bar phrases, each articulating the I–bVII–ii–I progression in G that opens the verse.

There are two general types of strategy that may be found in contrasting verse–chorus forms: in the first, the verse(s) and chorus follow one another without any further contrasting material, though sometimes a return to the introduction occurs after at least two verse–chorus units have been heard.

13 For more on typical formal schemes in rock music, see Covach (forthcoming).

FAMOUS HISTORIAN IN LATE 1970s NEW-WAVE ROCK

Example 9.1: Harmonic content in the verse sections

Familiar examples of such verse–chorus schemes are the Beatles' 'Penny Lane' (1967) and the Ronettes' 'Be My Baby' (1963). It was especially common in the early and mid-1970s to offer some kind of musical contrast after the second statement of the chorus, and this could be an instrumental verse (and chorus), or even a contrasting bridge section. Deep Purple's 'Smoke on the Water' (1972) provides an instance of the former, while their 'Woman from Tokyo' (1972) supplies an example of the latter. When a contrasting bridge section occurs after two verse-chorus pairs and is followed by a return of the verse–chorus (or even by the chorus only), such a form is called compound AABA, and these are common in seventies rock as well ('Woman From Tokyo' is one of these, as is Led Zeppelin's 1969 'Whole Lotta Love').

It is in comparison to such seventies practices in musical form that 'Feels Like the First Time' can be seen to provide an interesting and exceptional structural twist. Note that verse 2 begins as if the chorus should follow. But rather than moving to IV to lead back to the chorus at the end, the III is harmonically reinterpreted as V in e minor. What follows is a minor-key version of the chorus, presenting the i–VII–VI–V chaconne bass progression in a four-bar phrase is sounded four times (see Ex. 9.2). After the last iteration of this descending progression, a move to e: VI is reinterpreted as G: IV, leading back to the chorus in G that was expected before this move to the relative minor. Labelled bridge 1 in Figure 9.1, this section provides the kind of musical contrast that typically comes after the second chorus in a compound AABA form, but here it occurs before that chorus. In the way the music moves into bridge 1 via a reinterpretation of III, and emerges from it

14 Both of these songs are considered in more detail in my 'Form in Rock Music'.

182
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formal design in this track is novel, it relies on a conventional model in rock practice to achieve its effect — in other words, this song solves a standard seventies formal problem (adding contrast within a verse—chorus design) in an innovative way.

‘Feels Like the First Time’ can be situated with regard to 1970s rock in a number of other ways. Note the sparkling synthesizer that arrives early in the introduction; the synth timbres here and throughout the piece are similar to the kinds of sounds found in the early to mid-seventies progressive rock of Yes and Emerson, Lake & Palmer. The influence of British blues-rock can be heard in the distorted tone of the guitar and especially in the singing.

Lou Gramm’s powerful and polished tenor voice is filled with bluesy turns and ornaments drawn from the singing of Paul Rogers (Free, Bad Company) and Steve Winwood (Traffic). The back-up vocals are the kind of high, slick post-Beatles male vocals found in much seventies rock, both in the oo-oos that lead out of the verses and in the anthemic choruses. The lyrics play on a double meaning. The phrase ‘feels like the first time’ might well refer to the first time one falls in love, but it is also meant to suggest the first time one has sexual intercourse (during bridge 2, Gramm sings: ‘Open up the door. Won’t you open up the door?’). While there are a number of other Foreigner songs that do not engage issues of sexuality — ‘Starrider’ deals with space travel à la David Bowie’s ‘Space Oddity’ (released in 1969 but a US hit in 1973) for instance – later songs like ‘Hot Blooded’ (1978) and ‘Dirty White Boy’ (1979) clearly exploit the topic. Starting with the rumours that the Rolling Stones’ ‘Satisfaction’ deals with masturbation (and even going back to Big Joe Turner’s ‘Shake, Rattle, and Roll’), sexuality has been a favourite topic for rock lyrics. Led Zeppelin’s ‘Whole Lotta Love’ (1969) and Bad Company’s ‘Can’t Get Enough’ (1974) are other well-known rock numbers that emphasize the male swagger.

The group’s second hit single, ‘Cold as Ice’, provides an additional example of the ways in which the band continues seventies rock practices. As Figure 9.2 shows, the track is a compound AABA structure, with a chorus—verse pair making up the first two A sections, repetitions of the bars of bridge 1 are deleted; (3) the first four bars of bridge 2 are deleted; and (4) the fade begins on the four-bar phrase of the last chorus (at 3'02'' of the edited version).
Example 9.2: Bridge 1 as formal parenthesis

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G:</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>V</td>
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Example 9.3: Harmonic content of bridge 2

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G:</td>
<td>I</td>
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through a reinterpretation of IV, all of bridge 1 might be seen as a kind of formal parenthesis, inserted into the more common contrasting verse–chorus scheme (the brackets in Figure 9.1 reflect this). The second bridge that follows the second chorus is more conventional than the first, formally speaking, and reinforces the sense of compound AABA as the overall design. Bridge 2 is a chromatically inflected version of the g-to-d inner-voice descent found in the chorus progression (compare Exx. 9.1 and 9.3). Virtuosic slurred semiquaver triplets in the guitar fill the minor third from f♯ down to d, transforming a diatonic inner-voice melodic fourth into chromatically descending parallel minor thirds that prolong tonic harmony. A return to the chorus completes the form, and the track fades as the chorus is repeated. While the particular formal design in this track is novel, it relies on a conventional model in rock practice to achieve its effect – in other words, this song solves a standard seventies formal problem (adding contrast within a verse–chorus design) in an innovative way.

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---

15 While the f♯ is chromatic within the context of the traditional major tonality, here the f♯ arises from the use of bVII harmony; this is common enough in rock to count as diatonic, especially if one considers the passage as Mixolydian.
16 The single was released in an edited version. Four changes were made to the song, apparently to trim it down to slightly over three minutes to accommodate hit-radio formats: (1) the first four bars of the intro are deleted; (2) the first four
chorus making up the last one, and a pair of bridge sections making up the contrasting B section. What is somewhat unusual is that the chorus comes before the verse in the pair, and that the lyrics for the chorus change slightly during the first two occurrences, while those for the verse do not change at all. The sections designated as chorus are clearly the focus of the song, however, as the iterations after the two bridge sections make clear. There is another well-known example of the chorus preceding the verse: the Beatles’ ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’ (1967) is organized this way, though the lyrics to the verses do change, unlike those to ‘Cold as Ice’. The chorus employs a harmonic succession that moves from I to VI in eb minor (see Ex. 9.4), a progression perhaps most familiar from its use in the ending section of Led Zeppelin’s ‘Stairway to Heaven’ (1971); the verses are in the relative major of Gb (see Ex. 9.5). Like almost all progressive rock of the seventies, ‘Cold as Ice’ makes references to classical music, especially in the bridge sections. In bridge 1, the guitar solo evokes the melodic virtuosity of a concerto soloist, while the harmonic progression in bridge 2 – eb: I-V4-3-V4 (see Ex. 9.6) – suggests traditional classical practice. The back-up vocals in bridge 2 – and

more generally throughout the track – sound much like those that can be found in late Beatles tracks such as ‘Because’ (1969) or those of later groups like Queen that were also strongly influenced by Beatles vocals.

The preceding discussion securely situates both ‘Cold as Ice’ and ‘Feels Like the First Time’ in the context of 1970s rock, and in the process confers on these songs a representative status for mainstream rock in 1977 (at least for the purposes of the present discussion). We can now turn to the music
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of the Cars and investigate the ways in which it contrasts with the Foreigner tracks.

The Cars
By the summer of 1977 when the first Foreigner album was in heavy rotation on FM rock stations across the US and the Sex Pistols were wreaking havoc in the UK, a Boston disc jockey was playing tracks off a demo tape by a local new-wave band, the Cars.\(^7\) By the end of the year the band had a contract with Elektra records, which released The Cars in the summer of 1978. Because of the enormous critical and commercial success of that and subsequent Cars albums, the group is widely considered to be one of the most important American new-wave bands. The band's first two hit singles were 'Just What I Needed' and the song we will consider first, 'My Best Friend's Girl'.

Similarly to 'Feels Like the First Time,' 'My Best Friend's Girl' begins by featuring chords in the lower register of the guitar (see Fig. 9.3). The two-bar progression moving from I to IV and then V in F already indicates some important differences between the two tracks, however. Rather than the heavy, highly distorted guitar sound that begins the Foreigner track, the Cars opt instead for the clean (and slightly chorused) guitar sound more common in 1950s rockabilly than seventies rock. When the handclaps enter in bar 5, the reference to the Angels' girl group hit, 'My Boyfriend's Back' (early 1963) — and more generally to the Beatles 'I Want to Hold Your Hand' (late 1963) — further distances the song from mainstream seventies rock. Ric Ocasek's lead vocals sound common and almost amateurish in comparison with those of Lou Gramm, and are filled with hiccups drawn straight from Buddy Holly. Rather than focusing on sexuality, the lyrics instead address teenage dating with a kind of faux-naïveté. When the organ enters in the first chorus, the timbre is not that of a Hammond through a Leslie speaker as in the Foreigner track, but rather the simpler sound of some kind of sixties portable organ. This timbral reference is reinforced when the quaver chords played in the organ in the second verse seem to invoke the 1966 song '96 Tears' by ? and the Mysterians. At the link between the chorus and the

\(^7\) Maxanne Santori at WBCN; see Toby Goldstein (1985: 22).
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verse, the rockabilly guitar lick continues the reference to that style set up earlier in the track. To end the song, the final iterations of the chorus are supported by synthetic strings that conjure up aural images of Phil Spector's pre-British invasion Wall of Sound.

There are a number of clear references to pre-hippie music in this track, and in order not to mislead, it is important to stress that not all new-wave tracks are as full of such references as this one. But even in the midst of such references, it is also possible to detect practices derived from 1970s music. The most obvious is the sonic quality of the recording itself. No attempt is made to go back to using older recording equipment or even to emulate the
effects of older recording equipment – this track is recorded employing as much studio technology as the Foreigner track discussed above. In fact, 'My Best Friend's Girl' (and the entire album) is produced by Roy Thomas Baker, who had produced many mainstream 1970s acts, including Queen, and though this would follow after The Cars, Foreigner. However much he may have smoothed out the sonic wrinkles in the Cars' music, Baker had little to do with the actual arrangements the band used on the album. The demo tapes for these tunes reveal that the arrangements were finished before the band even signed with Elektra, and the arrangement of 'My Best Friend's Girl' on the demo is almost identical to the released version.\(^{18}\)

The formal diagram for the song (see Fig. 9.3) reveals that the song is in contrasting verse–chorus form, with an instrumental chorus coming after the second chorus. While contrasting verse–chorus form is a feature of both pre- and post-1967 rock, it is not a design that works to set the song apart from hippie rock. In fact, by 1977, such a design is almost the default formal pattern in rock. A much more 'retro' gesture would have been to employ the kind of simple AABA designs found in so much early Beatles and Brill Building pop like 'I Want To Hold Your Hand', 'From Me to You' (1963), or 'Will You Still Love Me?' (1960), but such designs are rare in new wave. At least in this case, all references to past styles on the surface of the track are attached to a structural scaffolding that does not break with mainstream rock in any significant way. Perhaps the guitar solo is more melodic than might be the case in most mainstream rock of the seventies, and this clearly suggests the kinds of solos found in much Beatles music.\(^{19}\) But at the same time, there's more than a touch of seventies guitar distortion in some of the rhythm playing, and one only has to take the first seconds of 'Just What I Needed' to hear distortion-rich power chords. In fact, the rhythm guitar part

\(^{18}\) These demos are contained on the two-CD, The Cars, Deluxe Edition. A comparison between the two versions of 'My Best Friend's Girl' reveals that on the demo, the group employed more rockabilly-style slap-back echo in the guitars and vocal and that the back-up vocals are much more ragged. The keyboard part in the choruses is different, with keyboardist Greg Hawkes using a synthesizer line that was discarded in favour of the organ part discussed above in the text.

\(^{19}\) Though here again, distinctions are only loose. The harmony solo in 'Can't Get Enough' or many of the solos of Queen's Brian May could be cited as examples from mainstream rock that are just as melodic as the one found in 'My Best Friend's Girl'.

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**Pangs of History in Late 1970s New-Wave Rock**

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<td>8 bars</td>
<td>chord hits on 1</td>
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<td>16 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:09–3:43</td>
<td>Interlude with ending</td>
<td>16 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4</td>
<td>synth, fast harmonic rhythm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9.4: Formal diagram for 'Just What I Needed'*

Throughout 'Just What I Needed' employs an overdriven guitar sound that would fit with most Foreigner numbers.

A formal diagram for 'Just What I Needed' is provided in Figure 9.4: the song is in contrasting verse–chorus form. After an eight-bar introduction featuring guitar strokes on the fourth beat of each bar, the first verse enters. The harmonic structure of the verses consists of a four-bar progression moving between the tonic and dominant, first in E major, then in the relative minor, C\(^\flat\) minor (see Ex. 9.7). Bars 15 and 16 of each verse deviate from the first twelve bars by moving directly to the dominant of C\(^\flat\) and then to a sonority that might be heard either as the VI of C\(^\flat\) minor (creating a deceptive move in the relative) or as IV in E (making the G\(^\flat\)) chord that precedes it seem like III in E). The tonal ambiguity set up here between E and C\(^\flat\) minor returns throughout the song. The harmonic structure of the ten-bar choruses (see Ex. 9.8), for instance, takes up this issue by placing vii unambiguously in E in bars 1–2/5–6, but then undercuts this tonal clarity by
effects of older recording equipment – this track is recorded employing as much studio technology as the Foreigner track discussed above. In fact, ‘My Best Friend’s Girl’ (and the entire album) is produced by Roy Thomas Baker, who had produced many mainstream 1970s acts, including Queen, and though this would follow after The Cars, Foreigner. However much he may have smoothed out the sonic wrinkles in the Cars’ music, Baker had little to do with the actual arrangements the band used on the album. The demo tapes for these tunes reveal that the arrangements were finished before the band even signed with Elektra, and the arrangement of ‘My Best Friend’s Girl’ on the demo is almost identical to the released version.\footnote{These demos are contained on the two-CD, The Cars, Deluxe Edition. A comparison between the two versions of ‘My Best Friend’s Girl’ reveals that on the demo, the group employed more rockabilly-style slap-back echo in the guitars and vocal and that the back-up vocals are much more rugged. The keyboard part in the choruses is different, with keyboardist Greg Hawkes using a synthesizer line that was discarded in favour of the organ part discussed above in the text.}

The formal diagram for the song (see Fig. 9.3) reveals that the song is in contrasting verse–chorus form, with an instrumental chorus coming after the second chorus. While contrasting verse–chorus form is a feature of both pre- and post-1967 rock, it is not a design that works to set the song apart from hippie rock. In fact, by 1977, such a design is almost the default formal pattern in rock. A much more ‘retro’ gesture would have been to employ the kind of simple AABA designs found in so much early Beatles and Brill Building pop like ‘I Want To Hold Your Hand,’ ‘From Me to You’ (1963), or ‘Will You Still Love Me?’ (1960), but such designs are rare in new wave. At least in this case, all references to past styles on the surface of the track are attached to a structural scaffolding that does not break with mainstream rock in any significant way. Perhaps the guitar solo is more melodic than might be the case in most mainstream rock of the seventies, and this clearly suggests the kinds of solos found in much Beatles music.\footnote{Though here again, distinctions are only loose. The harmony solo in ‘Can’t Get Enough’ or many of the solos of Queen’s Brian May could be cited as examples from mainstream rock that are just as melodic as the one found in ‘My Best Friend’s Girl.’} But at the same time, there’s more than a touch of seventies guitar distortion in some of the rhythm playing, and one only has to take the first seconds of ‘Just What I Needed’ to hear distortion-rich power chords. In fact, the rhythm guitar part throughout ‘Just What I Needed’ employs an overdriven guitar sound that would fit with most Foreigner numbers.

A formal diagram for ‘Just What I Needed’ is provided in Figure 9.4: the song is in contrasting verse–chorus form. After an eight-bar introduction featuring guitar strokes on the fourth beat of each bar, the first verse enters. The harmonic structure of the verses consists of a four-bar progression moving between the tonic and dominant, first in E major, then in the relative minor, C\textsuperscript{7} minor (see Ex. 9.7). Bars 15 and 16 of each verse deviate from the first twelve bars by moving directly to the dominant of C\textsuperscript{7} and then to a sonority that might be heard either as the VI of C\textsuperscript{7} minor (creating a deceptive move in the relative) or as IV in E (making the G\textsuperscript{7} chord that precedes it seem like III in E). The tonal ambiguity set up here between E and C\textsuperscript{7} minor returns throughout the song. The harmonic structure of the ten-bar choruses (see Ex. 9.8), for instance, takes up this issue by placing vi unambiguously in E in bars 1–2/5–6, but then undercuts this tonal clarity by

\begin{table}[h]
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Time & Section & Duration & Details \\
\hline
0:00–0:15 & Introduction & 8 bars & chord hits on I \\
\hline
0:16–0:46 & Verse 1 & 16 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 & \\
\hline
0:46–1:01 & Interlude & 8 bars, 4 + 4 & synth, slow harmonic rhythm \\
\hline
1:02–1:31 & Verse 2 & 16 bars & \\
\hline
1:31–1:49 & Chorus & 10 bars, 4 + 4 + 2 & *last bar is 2/4 \\
\hline
1:49–2:04 & Interlude & 8 bars, 4 + 4 & guitar, fast harmonic rhythm \\
\hline
2:04–2:34 & Verse 3 & 16 bars & repeat of verse 1 lyrics \\
\hline
2:34–2:51 & Chorus & 10 bars & \\
\hline
2:51–3:09 & Chorus & 10 bars & \\
\hline
3:09–3:43 & Interlude with ending & 16 bars, 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 & synth, fast harmonic rhythm \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\caption{Figure 9.4: Formal diagram for ‘Just What I Needed’}
\end{figure}
JOHN COVACH

Example 9.7: Harmonic content of verses

Example 9.8: Harmonic content of the choruses

Example 9.9: Harmonic rhythm in the interludes

Example 9.10: Harmonic structure in the final cadence

cadencing on vi in bars 3-4/7-10. A bar of $^2_4$ is injected into the otherwise consistent $^4_4$ time at bar 8, giving a little more rhythmic stress to the arrival of two bars of vi in bars 9-10.

The first chorus introduces a change in harmonic rhythm that becomes an interesting feature of the song. In the two verses and interlude leading up to the first chorus, the harmonic rhythm has stayed at one chord per bar. But beginning with the chorus, the rate of harmonic change becomes quicker. This serves to offer contrast for the chorus, but it also has ramifications for the interlude that follows. Example 9.9 shows the harmonic structure that is used in both of the first two interludes; note that the first interlude proceeds at a one-chord-per-bar rhythm while the second (shown in bar numbers above the first in the example) moves at two-chords-per-bar. This faster harmonic rhythm is a direct result of the change in this domain initiated by the chorus. The final appearance of the interlude blends features of the earlier two as well as addressing the issue of tonal ambiguity set up earlier. The first interlude features a synthesizer melody, while the second features the guitar. This last version employs the synthesizer from the first over the faster harmonic rhythm of the second. As Example 9.10 shows, the last four bars establish a clear cadence in ccf minor, adding a final wrinkle to an issue that is central to the harmonic structure of the song.

While the harmonic structure of 'My Best Friend's Girl' is simple - there are only two chord progressions in the entire song, I-IV-V and IV-V - the structure of 'Just What I Needed' is more complicated. The difference is not so much in an increased chord vocabulary or sophistication in chromatic usage, but rather in the crafting of the simple progressions that make up the song's harmonic structure into a design that engages a compositional issue. In this case, it is the undercutting of the primacy of E major by significant turns to the relative minor. As in 'My Best Friend's Girl', this track emerges from analysis as a mixture of seventies and pre-1967 traits. The simplicity of the harmony is a function of the new-wave return-to-simplicity aesthetic,

20 In a nice touch, the synth melody from first interlude returns to accompany verses 2 and 3; thus, despite the fact that the faster harmonic rhythm in subsequent interludes makes a literal return of this melody impossible in those sections, it continues to play a part in the tune.
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Example 9.9: Harmonic rhythm in the interludes

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but the structural features reflect the modernist bent of seventies rock, as does the contrasting verse–chorus form of the track (discussed above with regard to 'My Best Friend's Girl').

There is one distinctive feature of this track that is markedly anti–hippie but that makes no reference to pre–psychedelic rock, and this is Greg Hawkes's use of the synthesizer. Hawkes opts for very simple tones on the synth, seemingly in an attempt to make the instrument sound plain and unsophisticated. The use of very lush synthesizer settings, with pronounced filter-envelope settings creating harmonic sweeps through the overtone series, was a strong marker of the technological sophistication of seventies rock, and the use of synth in both the Foreigner tracks is representative of this practice. But Hawkes for the most part will have no part of such timbres; under the influence of Kraftwerk's *Autobahn* (1974) and *Trans-Europe Express* (1977) albums, he uses timbres that in their plainness signal their distance from the hippie sounds of Rick Wakeman and Keith Emerson.

**Conclusion**

This discussion is not meant to suggest that 'My Best Friend's Girl', 'Just What I Needed', the Cars' music, or even new wave generally, is basically 1970s rock with a veneer of retro references. Rather, it is to argue that analysis reveals that this song sends mixed stylistic signals; and this more restrictive point can be extended to cover most new wave in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In fact, many younger listeners are more likely to hear the similarities between the Cars and Foreigner than the distinctions upon which new wave depended: for these listeners, new wave is not ironic. The new-wave references to the pre-1967 era would have been easier to recognize in 1978 than they are now, and this is because the similarities between the Foreigner and Cars tunes would have been transparent to late 1970s listeners. We may tend to focus on these similarities now because, in the broader perspective of rock history, these tunes sound more like each other than they sound like other music, earlier or later. Stylistic distinctions in any era are often asserted over features that later generations will consider to be mere details.

It is crucial to understand how the Foreigner and Cars tracks discussed here create meaning; these tracks 'mean' differently because of the ways in which they 'world'. Put more simply, we appreciate these tunes differently because we situate each differently with regard to other music. The key to hearing Foreigner is situating it with regard to the 1970s rock that immediately precedes it. Thus, references in the discussion above have been to Deep Purple, Free, Bad Company, Led Zeppelin, Yes, and ELP. While one can surely make references to other music outside the realm of 1970s rock, such references tend to be viewed as influences and are not considered ironic in any way. But new wave needs to be situated in terms of earlier music—music that is meaningful precisely because it is not the same music that the Foreigner music evokes. The irony arises from the tension between the fact that in some dimensions new wave refuses to return to the past while simultaneously evoking and even celebrating rock's pre–hippie past. The experience of musical wordings thus situates Foreigner in a way that aligns with stylistic boundaries—it is heard within the style of 1970s rock—while the wording of the Cars situates them across stylistic boundaries, and it is the crossing of the boundaries that creates irony and meaning. But when there are enough new-wave songs that cross such boundaries, one tends not to situate each song with regard to earlier music, but rather with regard to each other. Strangely enough, the more new-wave songs one knows, the less ironic they seem; this is because the relationships of these songs to one another begin to override the relationships any single one may have to earlier music. At such a point new wave stops being a reaction to hippie music and culture and becomes a distinct music and culture in its own right.

Despite its mixed signals, new-wave music does parallel the irony of new-wave fashion. There is, in other words, a general parallel between the visual and musical dimensions of new wave. But in retrospect, even new-wave images and fashion have something distinctively 'seventies' about them. Indeed, it would be strange if it were otherwise, considering the fact that most of the musicians who developed new wave grew up as hippies. In both the musical and visual dimensions, then, new wave can be thought of as a romantic vision of pre–hippie music and culture conditioned and made possible—or even necessary—by the hippie experience. The deep irony of new wave is that it is ultimately defined by the very music and culture it rejects.
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