“Reggatta de Blanc”

Analyzing Style in the Music of the Police

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The issue of style in popular music analysis remains a thorny one. For some artists, it might seem that identifying their style is quite straightforward (Nirvana was the consummate “grunge” band, for example), yet for many artists (the Beatles being probably the most obvious example) it is impossible to categorize them within the boundaries of one particular style; indeed, stylistic eclecticim becomes the defining feature of their music.

My intent in this chapter is to confront this very issue of stylistic eclecticim by focusing on a body of work that offers a particularly interesting case study in this regard, namely, the music of the Police. This groundbreaking trio—consisting of drummer Stewart Copeland, bassist, lead vocalist, and main composer Sting (born Gordon Sumner), and guitarist Andy Summers—was formed in London in 1977, an especially turbulent year in the history of British pop. On the one hand, punk, led by bands such as the Sex Pistols and the Clash, was at the height of its popularity; on the other hand, disco, imported mainly from the United States and fueled by the massive transatlantic success of the movie Saturday Night Fever and its accompanying soundtrack album, was all the rage for those (slightly older) young adults who did not relish the idea of dyeing and spiking their hair or piercing their cheeks with safety pins.\(^1\)

Table 6.1 shows a chronology of the five studio albums released by the Police over the course of their relatively brief career together, from their 1978 debut Outlandos d’Amour through their 1983 swan song Syn-
chronicity, by which point the trio had risen to become the most successful pop group in the world. With the title of their second album, Reggatta de Blanc, the Police endorsed a label that the music press was already using to describe their style: literally, “white reggae.” Spearheaded by the crossover success of Bob Marley and the Wailers (a Jamaican group that was cleverly marketed like a rock band to international audiences), reggae had at last shed its novelty status and become a real fixture on the mainstream pop charts in Britain at exactly the same time punk and disco were at their respective heights. The “white reggae” moniker certainly then seemed an apt one for the Police: it was, after all, quite unusual in 1978 to see and hear reggae performed so well by a group of three bleached-blond white guys. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, there is much more to the Police’s music than reggae alone.

Before we proceed with our analysis of the Police’s music, let us pause for a moment to consider more broadly the notion of style, particularly as it pertains to popular music of the past fifty years or so. As Allan Moore has neatly put it, the word style “refers to the manner of articulation of musical gestures, and . . . operates at various hierarchical levels, from the global to the most local.” This top-to-bottom conception of musical style is useful to a certain degree; for example, within the global style of “rock” we can identify myriad subsidiary styles, such as heavy metal and punk, into which we can better situate the music of specific bands such as, in the case of heavy metal, Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden. Following Richard Middleton, Moore prefers the more pointed term idiolect when referring to style characteristics that identify an individual band; for example, as Moore would say, the idiolects of Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden each “carve out spaces” within the style known as heavy metal.

How, then, do we account for those many artists in the post-Beatles...
era, like the Police, whose idiolects seem to resist such classification and carve out spaces within a number of different styles? As a metaphorical starting point for my analysis, I have mapped out in figure 6.1 a provisional “Universe of Style” for the Police’s music (provisional in that I make no claims to it being comprehensive). At the center of this universe we find planet Reggae and its neighboring planet Punk, the two musical worlds where, at least initially, the Police most often resided. As we shall see, sometimes the Police chose to leave these planets behind in order to visit neighboring musical worlds such as jazz, prog, and synth pop. More often than not, however, the Police remained firmly rooted on planet Reggae while allowing visitors from these neighboring worlds, and, indeed, from musical worlds that are even further removed, such as baroque lament and music hall, to interact with them and create unique stylistic hybrids. Identifying the Police’s idiolect, then, will largely be a matter of our navigating this Universe of Style and, in turn, unraveling the various stylistic threads that fed into their music.
Some readers will no doubt recognize the similarity between my notion of a Universe of Style and the so-called Universe of Topic that Kofi Agawu maps out for the classical music of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven in his book *Playing with Signs.* Following Leonard Ratner, Agawu identifies in his universe a number of specific musical signs, or “topics” (topoi), that an informed late-eighteenth-century listener would have immediately recognized as being characteristic of a particular style or affect. He then demonstrates through elegant analyses how a classical piece can be thought of as a kind of “drama of styles” in which an array of style topics are introduced by the composer—perhaps in rapid succession or at times even simultaneously—much as individual characters are made to interact with one another in a novel or play. Although the universe of available topics in pop and rock is quite different from what we might expect of a Mozart opera or Beethoven piano sonata, I would argue (as does Rebecca Leydon in chapter 8 of this volume) that many of the most interesting and stylistically eclectic pop songs forge their musical meaning in much the same way. For our purposes here, however, I would like to make a clearer distinction than Agawu does between what constitutes a “style” and what constitutes a “topic” (since some of the topics listed by Agawu in his universe are actually styles such as “fantasia style” and “learned style”). I prefer instead to think of a style as a musical world that is defined by a family of specific musical devices; in other words, a style can be thought of as a *collection* of topics. This is an important distinction, because sometimes just one little topic can be enough to evoke the essence of a style as a whole.

As with many significant moments in rock history, the Police’s discovery of their “white reggae” formula was largely accidental, but first, to place this story in context, let us look back again to the summer of 1977. Since their formation in January of that year, the original Police lineup—consisting of Stewart Copeland, Sting, and the Corsican guitarist Henri Padovani—had been trying hard to make it on the London scene as a punk band. The group’s first single, “Fall Out/Nothing Achieving”—two Stewart Copeland-penned numbers squarely in the punk style, released in May 1977 on Copeland’s own independent label, Illegal Records—had gone nowhere. Around this same time, Copeland and Sting also became involved with a side project called Strontium 90, a group put together by Mike Howlett (former bass player for the progressive rock band Gong) and featuring none other than Andy Summers on guitar.

Born in 1942, Summers was almost a decade older than his two new
bandmates, a detail that is important only because it helps us to situate historically the range of musical expertise that he would soon bring with him into the Police. In his recent autobiography *One Train Later*, Summers recalls fondly the day he received his first guitar, a gift from his uncle, at the age of thirteen:

> Scratched and dented with a string missing, it isn’t much of an instrument, but I love it instantly and sit at the edge of the bed with it cradled in my arms, holding it in the position that I have seen used by guitarists on TV. I study it and gaze at its dents and scratches, its evidence of a long life, and wonder how many songs have been played on it, where it’s been. It is an immediate bond, and possibly in that moment there is a shift in the universe because this is the moment from which my life unfolds.¹¹

Like countless other aspiring young guitarists growing up in England in the mid-to-late 1950s (including a certain group of lads in Liverpool), Summers first learned how to play by memorizing simple chords by rote and imitating the early rock and roll and rockabilly records of the day, most of which, of course, were imported from the United States (not surprisingly, young Andy’s first band, formed in Bournemouth with four of his school friends, was a skiffle outfit that called themselves the Midnighters). But Summers soon was captivated by American jazz—Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and especially guitar greats such as Wes Montgomery and Kenny Burrell—and sought to expand his technical and harmonic vocabulary by playing along with records and transcribing solos note by note.

By the time he moved to London in the mid-1960s, Summers was an accomplished musician, fluent in a wide range of styles. He quickly made a name for himself as a sought-after session guitarist within the burgeoning electric blues and progressive scenes in London, performing and recording with the likes of Zoot Money and the Big Roll Band and the Soft Machine, as well as his own psychedelic group Dantalian’s Chariot. In 1968, after he was let go by the Softs right in the middle of their first U.S. tour (as the supporting act for the Jimi Hendrix Experience), Summers was invited to join Eric Burdon and the Animals, the veteran U.K. electric blues band now based in Los Angeles. His stint with the “West Coast” Animals also proved to be short-lived, however, since Burdon broke up the band in early 1969, leaving Summers far from home and without a steady gig. But he decided to take a chance and stay in Califor-
nia, eking out a living teaching guitar at a local music shop and ultimately enrolling at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he studied composition and classical guitar for a few years. After moving back to London in late 1973, Summers soon resumed his career as a musical journeyman, playing in progressive bands led by bassists Kevin Ayers (formerly of the Soft Machine) and Kevin Coyne, touring briefly as a sideman for Neil Sedaka, and even subbing for Mike Oldfield in a November 1976 performance of *Tubular Bells* with the Newcastle Symphony Orchestra.

It would have been difficult in 1977 to find a guitarist with a wider range of experience than Summers, making him perhaps the unlikeliest of candidates for membership in an up-and-coming punk group. Punk was, after all, a back-to-basics style that essentially celebrated rank amateurism and was viewed by its practitioners and fans as a deliberate reaction against the sheer virtuosity (and pretentiousness) of progressive rock.\(^{12}\) Truth be told, however, Summers’s new bandmates were only masquerading as punks. The idea of forming a punk trio and calling it the Police was the brainchild of Stewart Copeland, yet Copeland himself had just spent almost two years as the drummer for the “long-hair group” Curved Air (as Copeland described it),\(^{13}\) and Sting, prior to moving to London and joining the Police, was a Newcastle schoolteacher who moonlighted as bassist and vocalist for a jazz-rock fusion group called Last Exit (a band that Mike Howlett described as “sounding a bit like Weather Report with vocals”).\(^{14}\) Within the original Police lineup, then, only Henri Padovani—who had been playing guitar for just a few months when he joined the band—actually jibed with punk’s amateur aesthetic.

Sting, especially, was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the all-punk direction in which the Police had been moving. An aspiring songwriter, he had already composed several songs before joining the band, songs whose lyrics and harmonic complexities were simply a mismatch for the three-chord outrage typical of most punk rock. In the end, it did not take much for Sting to convince Copeland that the Police had the potential to go much farther musically with a “real” guitarist onboard, and so by August 1977 Summers was in and Padovani was out and the trio began searching for the signature sound that would set them apart from the other punk groups.

As the story goes, at the end of 1977 the band took a break from their rehearsals, during which Summers and his wife Kate went to the United States to visit Kate’s parents for the holidays. While Andy was away, and as Paul McCartney’s Wings song “Mull of Kintyre” sat firmly atop the U.K.
singles charts, Sting decided to throw a party for which Copeland loaned him a stack of records that included some albums by Bob Marley and the Wailers. Sting apparently had not paid much serious attention to reggae up to that point, and yet now, with Stewart’s Bob Marley records as his primary tutor, he quickly became fascinated with the style. In a 1979 interview with Melody Maker, Sting explained:

I’d always wanted to make a connection between the energetic music of punk and more sophisticated musical forms. There was this amazingly aggressive music full of energy on the one hand, and I wanted to take it and bridge a gap between interesting chords and harmonic variations and this wild energy. And what eventually allowed me to do it was listening to reggae. Bob Marley especially. I saw a rhythmic connection between the fast bass of punk and the holes in reggae. I got interested in writing songs that combined these apparently diverse styles.15

The Police resumed rehearsing after the holidays and immediately began fusing elements of the reggae style into their sound, honing the songs that they would soon record for their debut album. Another key piece of the sonic puzzle around this time was Summers’s acquisition of an Echoplex, an analog tape-delay device that allows a player to control echo at varying speeds during a live performance, creating, as he put it, “a guitar sound that becomes huge and prismatic, like a rainbow arching over the band.”16 Vividly recalling this experimental period in the band’s development, Summers offered the following capsule description of the Police’s newfound idiolect:

Under the influence of Bob Marley and the groove of reggae, the bass parts move away from the thumping eighth-note pattern into a sexy, loping line that is as much about notes not played as those struck. Over the top of these patterns I begin playing high, cloudy chords that are colored by echo and delay, and Stewart counters this with back-to-front patterns on the hi-hat and snare. From a dense in-your-face assault, the songs now become filled with air and light . . . to bring about a sound that no trio in rock has possessed before. . . . [W]e can take almost any song and, as we say, “policify” it—even a piece of material by Noël Coward or a folk song from the Scottish Isles. From an instinctive and self-conscious journey, we discover a
sound for which there is no previous formula, a space jam meets reggae meets Bartók collage with blue-eyed soul vocals.\textsuperscript{17}

I will now begin putting Summers’s description of the Police’s idiolect to the test through analysis of representative tracks, starting with an identification of those specific musical devices (or topics, if you will) that characterize “the groove of reggae.”\textsuperscript{18} Sting’s composition “The Bed’s Too Big Without You” from \textit{Reggatta de Blanc} is one of the few Police songs to remain exclusively in the reggae style throughout, and it will therefore serve well as our model example (I have transcribed the vamp that underscores the verses to this song in example 6.1).\textsuperscript{19} First of all, the harmonic language of reggae, like much modal rock harmony, tends to favor plain triads rather than seventh chords or larger, and its grooves are often built around short, circular progressions of two or three chords.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{a) Verse groove “normalized”}
\end{itemize}

\begin{example}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{verse_groove_normalized}
\caption{Example 6.1. “The Bed’s Too Big Without You” (Sting)}
\end{example}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{b) Actual verse groove}
\end{itemize}

\begin{example}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{verse_groove_actual}
\caption{Example 6.1. “The Bed’s Too Big Without You” (Sting)}
\end{example}
(in the verse vamp from “The Bed’s Too Big,” for example, the progression is a simple E Aeolian i–iv–v). The chords are played by the guitar and/or keyboard in an offbeat staccato pattern known in reggae parlance as the “skank.” The basic skank pattern emphasizes the second half, or “and,” of each beat in 4/4 time; at faster tempi, two notated 4/4 measures can sometimes represent one “real” measure, in which case the chords of the skank will fall on beats 2 and 4. While this skank pattern tends to be pretty formulaic from one reggae song to the next, the bass line in reggae is usually very distinctive and memorable, what I like to describe as a “rolling” bass. A rolling bass follows the chord progression of the skank very strictly, often oscillating between the root and third or root and fifth of the chord and at times arpeggiating through the whole triad. The rhythmic pattern of a rolling bass is typically very active, employing subdivision of the beat at the sixteenth-note level, and often includes long rests, creating “holes” in the texture that allow other elements of the groove to shine through (we recall Summers’s observation that a reggae bass “is as much about notes not played as those struck”). The rolling bass in the verse vamp of “The Bed’s Too Big” provides a good example of this; notice that the bass riff arpeggiates through the tonic chord in the first measure but drops out entirely during the second measure as the chords move through iv and v.

Probably the key element in defining a reggae groove, however, is its drum pattern. In a 1981 interview with Jools Holland, Stewart Copeland sheds light on the essential differences between rock and reggae drumming styles:

**JH:** Why is your drumming different from another drummer?

**SC:** Longer arms? I play with my feet? I suppose it’s because I’ve stolen all my licks from different sources. You see, all the licks get passed back and forth, most of them, and the trick is to find new ones, turn them around a bit, camouflage them a bit. . . . My source of licks has been South America, and, of course, the West Indies.

**JH:** A lot of people say it’s white man’s reggae.

**SC:** Let’s examine this word *reggae.* In the main rock and roll stuff that everything’s based on, even since the jazz days . . . there’s always a backbeat . . . on two and four. Now reggae turns the whole thing upside down . . . and invented something really different. . . . [T]he bass drum and the snare drum both land on the same place, [three].

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Copeland then proceeds to illustrate for Holland two contrasting grooves at the drum kit, moving back and forth between a stereotypical rock pattern with big snare accents on beats 2 and 4 and a stereotypical reggae pattern with a single snare accent on the third beat of each bar. This latter pattern, known as the “one drop” (immortalized in the 1979 Bob Marley song of the same name), is actually one of several possible drum grooves in reggae. It is also common in reggae drumming to eliminate the big snare hits altogether, instead moving the accents on 2 and 4 to the bass drum, as we see in “The Bed’s Too Big” (hence turning the rock backbeat “upside down,” as Copeland would say). Another favorite reggae pattern, known as “steppers,” features bass drum hits on all four beats of the bar (“four on the floor”), typically complemented by interlocking syncopated rim-shot figures and hi-hat splashes.

Although Copeland freely admits his allegiance to reggae as a crucial factor in shaping his highly idiosyncratic drumming style, he was rarely if ever content with adopting drum licks wholesale; as he says, he would “turn them around a bit, camouflage them a bit.” In light of this, let us look again more carefully at the groove to “The Bed’s Too Big.” Although it is composed of otherwise standard reggae devices, what makes this particular groove special is the metric conflict created by the bass and drums against the guitar skank. If we were to listen to the bass riff alone without the other instruments, we naturally would expect that the riff begins each time on the downbeat. As the notated example shows, however, the bass riff actually begins on the second beat of the measure; the rim shots, likewise, seem to have been displaced by one quarter note compared to the corresponding rhythmic figure in the guitar, an exemplar of Copeland’s “back-to-front patterns . . . on snare” that Summers described. I have illustrated this in example 6.1 by aligning a “normalized” version of the verse vamp above the vamp as it actually occurs in the song. The resulting sensation is one of ever-conflicting downbeats that paint vividly in musical terms the restlessness felt by the protagonist of the song, who tosses and turns nightly in a bed that is “too big” now that his lover has left him.

It turns out that such rhythmic displacement is quite typical of the Police’s unique appropriation of the reggae style and therefore a crucial defining feature of the band’s idiolect. Let us consider another example taken from their breakthrough hit “Roxanne.” In his autobiography Broken Music, Sting describes how the groove for what would become the Police’s trademark song first came together:
While originally written as a jazz-tinged bossa nova, the song will evolve into a hybrid tango through the trial-and-error of the band process. It is Stewart who suggests stressing the second beat of each bar on the bass and bass drum, giving the song its lopsided Argentinian gait.\textsuperscript{22}

Andy Summers, however, has a slightly different take on the evolution of the “Roxanne” groove:

At the moment, it’s a bossa nova. . . . So, how should we play it? We have to heavy it up and give it an edge. We decide to try it with a reggae rhythm, at which point Stewart starts to play a sort of backward hi-hat and tells Sting where to put the bass hits. Once the bass and drums are in place, the right counterpoint for me to play is the four in the bar rhythm part.\textsuperscript{23}

So is the groove for “Roxanne” a “hybrid tango,” as Sting describes it, or in a “reggae rhythm,” as Summers asserts? I would argue that the groove underscoring the verses of “Roxanne” (see example 6.2a) is most definitely reggae in style, but it is by no means a typical reggae rhythm. For one thing, the guitar is playing staccato chords that fall \textit{on} rather than off the beat, effectively displacing the typical skank pattern by one eighth note.\textsuperscript{24} Second, there is no rolling bass. Instead the bass plays a jabbing repeated-note riff that accents the second beat of the bar, in tandem with the bass drum, effectively displacing the typical “one-drop” accent on beat 3 by one quarter note. Above all this (not shown in the example), Sting’s soaring and angular “blue-eyed soul” tenor implores his beloved Roxanne to abandon her career in the world’s oldest profession. The apex of Sting’s vocal line is the top $D$ he sings on the word “sell” in measure seven: this is the flattened-fifth scale degree, a fitting melodic nod to the blues that seems entirely appropriate for the subject matter at hand.

The composite texture created by the guitar and bass here is very clever, evoking the style of a so-called bubble organ—another stereotypical reggae topic—without having to use a keyboard. In example 6.2b, I have written out a hypothetical bubble organ accompaniment for the opening measures of the verse. In a typical bubble pattern, the left hand plays staccato chords in the low register on the “and” of every beat in “fast” skank fashion, while the right hand plays “slow” skank chords in the middle register on beats 2 and 4; the two parts combine to produce
Example 6.2. “Roxanne” (Sting)
the characteristic “oom-chacka” bubble rhythm, as illustrated in parentheses below the staff. Similarly, I have illustrated in parentheses below the actual verse groove in example 6.2a the composite rhythm suggested by the interaction between the guitar and bass, showing the bubble rhythm to be pushed forward by one eighth note (one has to imagine the bass riff sounding also in the second half of each measure, but I think the groove is strongly implied).

In the chorus, the plea to Roxanne becomes more urgent: the modality abruptly shifts to the relative major, and Sting’s high tenor repeats the lyric “put on the red light” again and again, set to a variant of the vocal motive that had ended the verse (with the top D♭ adjusted to become D♮); joining in the plea are two background vocals in close harmony, picking up the syncopated guitar and bass rhythmic figure that ends the verse as a vehicle for chanting Roxanne’s name over and over. But what is most striking about the chorus is the abrupt shift in style: the Police have left planet Reggae behind and entered the neighboring musical world of punk.

What identifies the punk style most strongly is a topic that I have whimsically labeled in example 6.2c as the “safety-pin” riff: a driving accompaniment figure played by the bass (and essentially doubled by the guitar, not shown in the example), consisting of constant eighth notes grouped in fours with three repeated pitches preceded each time by their chromatic lower neighbor. This stock accompaniment figure is, of course, a throwback to early rock and roll and was adopted by the punk rockers as something of a cliché, no doubt because it sounds best when played loud and fast and, perhaps most important, because it is easy to play (one listen to the Sex Pistols’ iconic 1977 album Never Mind the Bollocks . . . will testify to the prevalence of the safety-pin riff in punk). In “Roxanne,” the abrupt shift from reggae in the verses to punk in the choruses is masterful and entirely appropriate, serving only to intensify the song’s message by adding an increased sense of urgency to the lyric. Needless to say, this juxtaposition of reggae and punk would become a hallmark of the Police sound on their early hit singles, ensuring that the group was just punk enough for punk fans to like them. (The Police would follow this same basic formal template of reggae verses starkly juxtaposed against punk choruses on their two other singles from Outlandos d’Amour, “So Lonely” and “Can’t Stand Losing You.”)

With respect to harmonic vocabulary, the verse and chorus of “Roxanne” are also markedly different from one another. The punk chorus, as we might expect, features only plain triads and thirdless power-chord
voicings, while the reggae verse is peppered with seventh and “sus” chords. I mentioned earlier that the harmonic style of reggae tends to favor simple triads over a more extended chord vocabulary, and yet we recall Sting’s comment that he saw reggae as a means of “br[iding] a gap between interesting chords and harmonic variations” and the “wild energy” of punk. Indeed, it is in the realm of harmony that the Police’s jazz and progressive-rock pedigrees can be felt most strongly. In a recent interview for *Guitar Player* magazine, Andy Summers elaborates:

I wanted to exploit the openness of the band’s arrangements, so I couldn’t play Steve Jones-style, punk power chords. . . . I’d seldom play full chords that had a major or minor third in them—which I considered old-fashioned harmony. Instead, I explored a much cooler, sort of disinterested chord style that utilized stacked fifths or an added ninth to get the harmony moving without the obvious sentimental association of major and minor thirds.

As the Police’s primary songwriter, Sting’s working method was quite typical of the era with regard to the way in which he would introduce songs to his fellow band members. By 1979 the Police were touring almost constantly, and so Sting reportedly wrote most of his new songs during snatches of downtime as the band traveled from gig to gig, aided by a four-track Sony tape recorder with a built-in drum machine (which he nicknamed “Dennis”). He would build up a song section by section, recording all of the parts himself, until he had a demo four-track version of the song to present to Stewart and Andy, at which point the full band would begin the process of working out their distinctive “policed” arrangement. While Sting received sole songwriting credit for the majority of the Police’s songs, the contributions of Copeland and Summers to the finished arrangements can hardly be overstated.

With this in mind, let us take a close look now at two of the signature guitar riffs from the *Reggatta de Blanc* album. The first of these is the opening guitar riff to “Message in a Bottle” (example 6.3a), which became the group’s first U.K. number 1 single in September 1979. As I have shown in parentheses below the staff, this arpeggiated riff is based on a simple C-sharp Aeolian progression, i–VI–VII–iv, yet its distinctive “open” sound results from the third being omitted entirely from the first three chords and replaced with an added ninth in the topmost voice. I had long thought that Andy Summers must have come up with this very special riff himself during the full-band arranging process, especially in
light of his comments about favoring chord voicings with missing thirds or built in stacked fifths (both criteria of which apply here). Sting, however, has confirmed that the guitar riff for “Message in a Bottle” was fully intact when he first presented the song to the band and, in fact, was the seed from which the rest of the song developed.  

Example 6.3b shows the signature guitar riff that repeats throughout the verses of the Sting composition “Bring on the Night.” The basic underlying chord progression here is a tried-and-true rock harmonic formula, an Aeolian VI–VII–i, yet Summers plays above this an elaborate series of rolling sixteenth-note arpeggios in a classical *pim* fingering pattern that seems worlds removed from rock, evoking strongly the style of a Villa-Lobos étude. It would take a serious student of the classical guitar to master such a fingering pattern, and so, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I’m convinced—unlike “Message in a Bottle”—that it was Summers and not Sting who came up with the design of this special riff. The chorus for “Bring on the Night” moves into a bouncy reggae groove in which the classical arpeggios are replaced with a more stereotypical guitar skank, yet we should not overlook the reggae influence on the verses as well, for underneath the guitar arpeggios the offbeat skank pattern is played instead by the bass.

Example 6.4 shows a transcription of the opening groove from the Police’s second U.K. number 1 hit, “Walking on the Moon,” a track that has been aptly described by more than one critic as “space reggae.”
Here the signature guitar riff is actually a single chord, a ringing D minor eleventh chord dredged in echo by way of Andy Summers’s Echoplex. In fact, all of the instruments here are soaked in reverb, an effect that is particularly noticeable, for example, in the interlocking “one-drop” rim shots that Stewart Copeland introduces on the third repetition of the four-bar pattern. This brings us to an extremely important aspect of the reggae style that so far has gone unmentioned in this chapter, namely, *dub*. The aesthetics of dub evolved among Jamaican producers and recording engineers in the earlier 1970s and was reflected in their practice of reinventing a preexisting reggae song as a “dub mix” in which the original vocal and instrumental tracks could be freely layered in and out of the texture and treated to any number of studio effects, hence “shattering” the songs, as Michael Veal puts it in the title of his illuminating recent book on the subject. While dub was originally a studio-based practice, allowing, as Veal notes, for “real-time improvisation performed by engineers on the multitrack mixing console,” reggae musicians soon began to incorporate elements of the dub aesthetic into live performances. The Police embraced this practice in their live shows almost from the very beginning, often extending certain songs through improvised “dub-style” instrumental passages where the texture might be reduced down, say, to just the bass drum, rim shots, and fragments of the bass line, colored by splashes of guitar harmonics and all dripping with echo and reverb. One can also hear extended dub-style passages featured on several tracks from the studio albums, such as the aforementioned “The Bed’s Too Big Without You” (3:03–3:44, leading into the final chorus) and the coda to “Voices Inside My Head” from *Zenyatta Mondatta*.

Just prior to the recording sessions for the 1980 *Zenyatta* album, Andy Summers added a formidable new gadget to his arsenal of effects—a Roland GR-330 guitar synthesizer—a device that allowed him to create a

Example 6.4. “Walking on the Moon” (Sting), opening groove
broader range of timbres with his guitar than ever before. Example 6.5 shows the incessant four-bar repeated guitar and bass groove that sounds throughout the verses and choruses of “When the World Is Running Down, You Make the Best of What’s Still Around,” one of the several tracks on *Zenyatta* to feature the Roland. The basic underlying progression, clearly marked by Sting’s bass, is another Aeolian VI–VII–i, but above this Summers has chosen to play huge ringing jazz chords, omitting the thirds and spicing up the harmony again with his trademark added ninths and elevenths. (In the transcribed example, I have notated the echo effect as triplet quarter notes, representing the rhythm of the echoing chords as they actually sound, yet Summers simply strikes each chord on the downbeat.) Underneath all of this, and somewhat surprisingly, Stewart Copeland chooses to lay down what amounts essentially to a meat-and-potatoes rock drum pattern, with heavy snare on the backbeat. From a rhythmic standpoint, there is really nothing about this groove that is overtly reggae in style, and yet the dub aesthetic looms large on this track both in the heavy use of effects on all the parts and, especially, in the use of a “drum and bass” breakdown section (1:51–2:20) to provide sonic relief from the otherwise incessant ringing guitar chords.

So far we have seen how one small topic—such as a distinctive riff, a rhythmic pattern, a chord, or even an effect—can be enough to evoke the essence of a style as a whole. The stylistic references in “Spirits in the Material World,” the opening track from 1981’s *Ghost in the Machine*, reach even farther outward in our Universe of Style (the repeating two-bar vamp that underscores the verses is shown in example 6.6a). The tempo here (quarter note = 140) is considerably faster than what is typical for the reggae grooves on the Police’s earlier albums, perhaps in response to the massive rise in popularity of ska—reggae’s “faster” precursor style—which had occurred in Britain during 1979–80. Also noteworthy is the prominence of the synthesizer, about which I’ll have
Nevertheless, we should by now immediately recognize two of the standard reggae topics at work here: a syncopated skank and a rolling bass.

If we examine the voice-leading and harmonic design of this verse vamp more closely, we find that what rests as the basis for this passage is the model progression shown in example 6.6b. This ostinato progression is grounded on a descending bass tetrachord pointing from the tonic to the dominant in minor, a topic that served as an emblem of lament in countless compositions from the baroque era (the chain of suspensions in the inner voices further marks the “baroqueness” of this progression). Admittedly, the progression as it actually occurs in the song is quite distorted from this normalized version: the harmonic move...
to VI is missing, not to mention the raised leading tone. Also, given the stylistic constraints of the era, what baroque composer would have allowed for such overt parallel fifths between the outer voices? (I should, however, point out that outer-voice parallel fifths such as these are not only quite typical of mode-based rock but also serve here as an important unifying motive throughout the track; witness, for example, the Debussyan melodic planing that characterizes the harmonic texture of the chorus [example 6.6c].) Yet it is precisely these distortions that make “Spirits in the Material World” so unique. What we have here is a bona fide stylistic hybrid: a baroque style—the lament—has been passed through the filter of rock harmony and cloaked in the rhythmic conventions of reggae. Again I would contend that the stylistic reference to the lament is not arbitrary here but rather serves to amplify the underlying message of the song, in which Sting is lamenting nothing less than the decay of society itself.

In all of the Police tracks we have examined thus far, elements of the reggae style have proved to be important in some way, either overtly (through full-blown reggae grooves) or more subtly (through just one or two distinctive reggae topics). But let us now consider a song in which the Police leave behind planet Reggae entirely. “Invisible Sun” was the first single from *Ghost in the Machine* to be released in the United Kingdom, where it peaked at number 2 in October 1981 (the song did not chart in the United States). This had long struck me as an unusual decision on the Police’s part. To be sure, “Invisible Sun” is a great track, but given that this album also contains several more immediately catchy or danceable songs, such as the later singles “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic” (U.K. number 1, U.S. number 3) and “Spirits in the Material World” (U.K. number 12, U.S. number 11), a bleak song about the conflict in Northern Ireland seemed an unlikely choice for the leadoff single. In hindsight, however, I can see that the Police were cleverly responding to the prevailing stylistic trends in British pop at the time. By 1980, punk was all but dead in Britain, and synth pop was surfacing as the next important style. Like punk, synth pop (with a few notable exceptions) was a style largely performed by novices who could barely play their instruments, relying instead on the new wave of affordable synthesizers, sequencers, and drum machines to play much of their parts for them. This resulted in a style of music that was essentially minimalist; synth-pop grooves were typically woven together from simple, repeated riffs, often with no real harmonic “progression” to speak of.

The introduction to “Invisible Sun” (example 6.7a) has a classic
synth-pop texture. After the initial fade-in, the bass oscillates back and forth between $E_b$ and $C$, doubled by a droning synthesizer at the fifth above and, in the second measure, at the fifth and ninth above.\textsuperscript{45} The guitar plays a repeated riff that similarly transposes back and forth between $E_b$ and $C$; there are no drums save for a relentless tom-tom on the backbeat. Given such limited harmonic materials, it is difficult to pinpoint which of the two bass pitches, $E_b$ or $C$, should be heard as the tonic (I tend to hear $C$ as the tonic, although I think it is intentionally left ambiguous). During the first three repetitions of this two-bar pattern, a robotic voice (not shown in the example) counts from one to six on the downbeat of each measure. On the fourth repetition, a unison chant enters (“oh-oh-oh / oh-oh-oh”), reminiscent of the style of chant sung by the fans at U.K. football games.\textsuperscript{46} Example 6.7b shows how the $E_b/C$ harmonic stasis is ultimately relieved at the end of the verse: following a chromatic walkdown ($B_b-A_N-A_b$), the bass settles on $G$, and the texture gives way to a repeated angular $G$ Mixolydian riff, doubled in octaves by

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Example 6.7.} “Invisible Sun” (Sting)
\end{quote}
the bass and guitar, which serves as the undercurrent for the chorus. (This chorus riff reminds me very much of the type of ostinato figures one finds all over the place in classic progressive rock.)

With *Ghost in the Machine*, and even more so with *Synchronicity*, Stewart and Andy found Sting wanting to assert greater control over the band’s arrangements of his compositions. Copeland recalled, “Sting doesn’t bring in half-finished songs anymore. His ideas are brilliant, but more and more we’re stuck with them, and he’s liking it less and less when we mess with them.”

While *Synchronicity* is often viewed as the Police’s crowning achievement, in retrospect one cannot help but think of this album as essentially a Sting solo project (especially side 2), with Summers and Copeland serving as mere sidemen. With the notable exception of three tracks (“Wrapped Around Your Finger,” “Tea in the Sahara,” and, albeit more subtly, “King of Pain”), the “white reggae” that had been so important in defining the Police’s idiolect seems to be largely absent on *Synchronicity*, and yet the record still sounds like no one but the Police.

For our final example, and to conclude this study of style in the Police’s music, I wish to look briefly at the leadoff single from *Synchronicity*, the worldwide number 1 smash “Every Breath You Take.” Admittedly, it is difficult for me to be objective about this iconic song or, indeed, the *Synchronicity* album in general since I was among the legions of young Police fans that purchased the album on the very first day of its release in June 1983 (the same month I graduated from high school), and the record therefore holds a very special place in my heart. Putting aside the fan mentality for a moment, I have transcribed Andy Summers’s signature guitar riff for “Every Breath You Take” in example 6.8.

Unlike his other songs on *Synchronicity*, Sting’s original demo version for “Every Breath You Take” apparently sounded very different in style from how it ended up sounding on the finished album (Summers recalls that Sting’s demo “sounded not unlike the group Yes with a huge rolling synthesizer part”). The song’s main groove is built, as Summers rightly notes, around a “classic pop song chord sequence,” the old doowop formula of I–vi–IV–V–(I). After tinkering with the arrangement in the studio for a couple of weeks, Sting reportedly was unable to come up with a chording part that did not sound like a cliché. Having reached a creative impasse, and with the bass, drums, and vocal tracks already in place, Sting invited Summers to give the song its final, golden touch. I will let Summers continue the story:
It’s a simple chord sequence and shouldn’t prove a problem. . . . What are the criteria? It should sound like the Police—big, brutal barre chords won’t do, too vulgar; it has to be something that says Police but doesn’t get in the way of the vocals; it should exist as music in its own right, universal but with just a hint of irony, be recognized the world over, possibly be picked up by a rapper as the guitar lick to hang a thirty-million-copy song on. . . . The track rolls and I play a sequence of intervals that makes it sound like the Police, root, fifth, second, third, up and down through each chord. It is clean, succinct, immediately identifiable. . . . I play it straight through in one take. There is a brief silence, and then everyone in the control room stands up and cheers. . . . With this lick I realize a dream that maybe I have cherished since first picking up the guitar as a teenager—to at least once in my life make something that would go around the world, create a lick that guitarists everywhere would play[.].

Like so many important bands in rock history, the Police as a unit were always greater than the sum of their individual parts. The signature riff that Summers came up with—apparently on the spot—for “Every Breath You Take” was in the end almost identical in harmonic design to the signature riff that Sting himself had composed for his beloved “Message in a Bottle” almost four years earlier (compare example 6.8 with example...
6.3a). Perhaps, then, Sting’s perspective was already clouded with visions of his impending solo superstardom, and it took his trusty bandmate to remind him just what had made the Police’s style so unique in the first place.

NOTES

An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Toronto, November 2000. I am most grateful to Jay Summach for sharing with me his 2007 unpublished essay on “white reggae” in the Police, which alerted me to some key sources that proved very helpful during my final stages of revision.

1. While the disparate styles of punk and disco were certainly prevalent on British pop radio in 1977, a quick glance at the U.K. singles charts for that year reveals a much broader palette of styles among those songs that reached the Top 20. *Music Week*’s chart of the Top 10 singles for the week of 6 August 1977, for example, included the Sex Pistols’ punk anthem “Pretty Vacant” at number 8 and Donna Summer’s electro-disco smash “I Feel Love” at number 1 but also “You Got What It Takes,” a cover of Marv Johnson’s 1960 early Motown hit from the doo-wop nostalgia group Showaddywaddy at number 9, “We’re All Alone” from country-pop songstress Rita Coolidge at number 6, “Fanfare for the Common Man,” Aaron Copland’s beloved World War II era symphonic fanfare reinvented as a rock instrumental by perennial British progressive rockers Emerson, Lake & Palmer (a track that could well be considered the very antithesis of punk) at number 5, and “Angelo,” the latest hit from 1976 Eurovision Song Contest winners (and “Abba clones”) Brotherhood of Man at number 2. Interestingly, Bob Marley and the Wailers’ reggae single “Exodus”—the group’s first U.K. single to crack the Top 20—was bubbling just outside the Top 10 at number 19 that same week, having peaked at number 14 the week before.

2. *Outlandos d’Amour* went largely unnoticed in the United Kingdom on its initial release in October 1978, but sales of the album were revived in April 1979, sparked by the breakthrough success of the single “Roxanne,” which peaked at number 12 in May (I offer a close analysis of “Roxanne” in example 6.2). The peak chart positions for the five Police albums listed in table 6.1 show that the band’s ascent to megastar status in the United States came about a year later than it had in the United Kingdom, with the 1980 album *Zenyatta Mondatta* and its two U.S. Top 10 singles, “De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da” and “Don’t Stand So Close to Me.”

3. Evolving from the earlier 1960s Jamaican styles known as “ska” and “rock steady,” the term *reggae* has been used widely since the late 1960s as a kind of catchall for describing Jamaican pop generically. The precise origins of the word remain unclear, but its first documented use on a Jamaican recording was Toots and the Maytals’ “Do the Reggay,” produced by Leslie Kong and released on his Beverley’s label in 1968. As Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton have rightly noted, “It’s fitting that the word ‘reggae’ has endured as the favored label for all Ja-
maican popular music, because reggae began in a period of extraordinary experimenta-
tion, in which almost all later styles were prefigured and all previous styles absorbed" (Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton, Reggae: The Rough Guide [Lon-
don: Rough Guides, 1997], 83).

Of course, the Police were not the first white pop and rock musicians to ex-
periment with the reggae style. Some noteworthy earlier examples include the 
Beetles’ “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” (from the “White Album,” 1968), a cover version of 
which the Scottish group Marmalade took to the top of the U.K. singles charts 
in January 1969; Paul Simon’s 1972 U.K. and U.S. Top 5 single “Mother and 
Child Reunion” (his first solo hit following the breakup of Simon and Gar-
funkel), a track produced by Leslie Kong and recorded at Kingston’s Dynamic 
studio with Jamaican backing musicians; Paul McCartney and Wings’ 1973 hit 
“Live and Let Die” (U.K. number 9, U.S. number 2) from the soundtrack of the 
James Bond movie of the same name (much of which, not coincidentally, is set in 
Jamaica), a track that features a decidedly reggae-tinged groove for its bridge; 
Eric Clapton’s cover of the Bob Marley and the Wailers song “I Shot the Sheriff,” 
a number 1 U.S. hit in September 1974; “Watching the Detectives,” the first U.K. 
Top 20 hit for a young Elvis Costello in December 1977; and 10cc’s “Dreadlock 
Holiday,” a number 1 U.K. hit in September 1978. All of these early examples of 
“white reggae,” however (with the exception of Costello’s), represent one-off “novelty” hits within the overall output of that particular artist. What distin-
guished the Police (and also, though to a lesser extent, the Clash) from these 
earlier acts was that they were really the first white musicians to adopt the musi-
cal elements of reggae as a consistent and defining feature of their style.

4. Success outside of their native Jamaica eluded the Wailers until they were 
signed to Chris Blackwell’s U.K. label Island Records in 1972. For an illuminat-
ing study of the group’s subsequent rise to international stardom, see Jason Toyn-
bee, “Authorship Meets Downpression: Translating the Wailers into Rock,” in 
This Is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project (Cambridge: Harvard 

5. In a recent scholarly article devoted to the subject of white reggae, Mike 
Alleyne harshly criticizes the whole phenomenon—and the Police in particu-
lar—as woefully “inauthentic.” See his “White Reggae: Cultural Dilution in the 
puts it, “[P]seudoreggae songs by white pop artists have utilized fragments of the 
music’s syntax while simultaneously divorcing it from the political polemics of 
Rastafari, and reggae culture in general” (15). This is certainly a valid point, al-
though, as I will argue in this chapter, the Police never sought to be an authentic 
reggae band; rather, they sought to sound like no one but themselves.

6. Allan F. Moore, “Categorical Conventions in Music Discourse: Style and 

7. See Allan F. Moore, “Gentle Giant’s Octopus,” in Composition and Experi-
For further discussion of this hierarchy of style and idiolect, and its semiological 
implications, see Richard Middleton, Studying Popular Music (Milton Keynes: 
Open University Press, 1990), 172–246; David Brackett, Interpreting Popular Mu-
sic (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; rpt., Berkeley: University of

8. For Allan Moore, this is precisely the defining characteristic shared by the many so-called progressive bands that arose in the United Kingdom during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He notes that “what defines the progressive ‘moment’ musically is that it marks, chronologically, the moment within the history of modern Anglophone popular music which actualizes the insubordination of idiolect to style” (Moore, “Gentle Giant’s Octopus”). While I would not go so far as to describe the Police as a full-blown progressive rock band (in the same camp as, say, Genesis or Yes), they most definitely shared progressive rock’s experimental impulse and penchant for stylistic eclecticism and virtuosity, the “hippie aesthetic,” as John Covach has coined it; see his What’s That Sound? An Introduction to Rock and Its History, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2009), 310–11. Had the Police emerged on the London scene a couple of years earlier, prior to the punk explosion, I imagine their music would have sounded very different.


10. Although the Strontium 90 project with Mike Howlett quickly fizzled out once Summers officially joined the Police, the group did manage to record a few songs, both live and in the studio, which were eventually released two decades later as the compact disc Strontium 90: Police Academy (Pangea Records, 1997). In addition to being an invaluable document of the first recordings of Copeland, Sting, and Summers playing together, this CD also includes an early (autumn 1976) four-track demo version of Sting performing his then brand new song “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic,” recorded at Mike Howlett’s home studio in Acton (a song that would later be reworked for the Police’s 1981 album Ghost in the Machine), as well as two other Sting compositions, “Visions of the Night” (later re-recorded as the B-side for the 1979 “Walking on the Moon” single) and “3 O’Clock Shot” (the main groove of which Sting would soon recycle for “Be My Girl—Sally” on Outlandos d’Amour and whose lyrics he would revive several years later—set to entirely different music—as the first verse and refrain for “Oh My God” on Synchronicity).

Howlett would go on to enjoy a highly successful career as a producer in the 1980s, working with several important new wave acts such as Blancmange, China Crisis, A Flock of Seagulls, Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD), Tears for Fears, and the Thompson Twins.


12. Looking back on the conditions surrounding the rise of punk in 1976 among disenfranchised British youths, pop impresario and former Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren observed, “They played three chords and it was good enough. It didn’t matter. Everybody was playing the same Chuck Berry chords, putting the new poetry on top” (transcribed from a McLaren interview in “Punk,” episode 9 of the Time-Life documentary series The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll [Warner Home Video, 1995]).

Facing high rates of unemployment and seeing few prospects for their future, many young British punk fans at the time strongly identified with reggae’s mes-
sage of protest and rebellion, and it is therefore not surprising that the two styles ended up largely fueling one another. The complex social and cultural factors that led to this cross-fertilization of punk and reggae in the late 1970s have been well documented by several researchers, beginning with Dick Hebdige’s watershed study of youth subcultures in postwar Britain, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

13. Narrating his own recent documentary film *Everyone Stares: The Police Inside Out* (Crotale, 2006), Stewart Copeland recalled, “The cognoscenti are onto us. They know that we’re just carpetbaggers. I have a dark past with the long-hair group Curved Air, and Andy Summers has consorted for years with the enemy generation.” Copeland also enjoyed modest success outside of the Police in 1978 as his disguised alter ego Klark Kent, singing and playing all the instruments on the two quirky Klark Kent singles, “Don’t Care” (which narrowly missed the U.K. Top 40, peaking at number 48) and “Too Kool to Kalypso.”

14. Mike Howlett, liner notes to *Strontium 90: Police Academy*, 3.


16. Summers, *One Train Later*, 191. Invented by Mike Battle in 1959, the Echoplex, as Summers himself describes it, is “basically a device to create echo by using a piece of quarter-inch tape that revolves in a spool around two tape heads [one play head, one record/erase head]. You can speed up or slow down the number of repeats by sliding a little metal arrow up and down the length of a metal bar that runs along the top of the spool.”

17. Ibid., 190–92.

18. In an attempt to formalize the term for purposes of music analysis, I have elsewhere defined *groove* as “the tapestry of riffs—usually played by the drums, bass, rhythm guitar and/or keyboard in some combination—that work together to create the distinctive rhythmic/harmonic backdrop which identifies a song.” See my “(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music,” *twentieth-century music* 1, no. 1 (2004): 30.

19. The musical examples in this chapter represent my transcriptions of various textures from the original Police studio albums, ranging from individual riffs to complete grooves. (Due to copyright restrictions, excerpts of the actual vocal melody and lyrics are not included in any of the notated examples.) While it is customary for guitarists and bassists automatically to transpose their parts down by octave when reading from notation, I have chosen instead to notate all the guitar and bass parts in the register in which they actually sound, using the transposing treble and bass clefs only when necessary to avoid awkward multiple ledger lines.

20. The Copeland interview is transcribed from the 1981 promotional film *Police in Montserrat* (shot on location during the recording sessions for *Ghost in the Machine*), available as “bonus material” on *The Police: Every Breath You Take—the DVD* (A&M Records, 2003).

21. As a means of illustrating the difference between the one-drop and steppers drum patterns, I invite the reader to listen to Bob Marley and the Wailers’ iconic 1977 album *Exodus* (U.K. number 8, U.S. number 20), which surely was among those Marley records that Copeland reportedly loaned to Sting at the end
of that year. Of the ten tracks on Exodus, seven are built on a one drop (“Natural Mystic,” “So Much Things to Say,” “Guiltiness,” “Waiting in Vain,” “Three Little Birds,” “The Heathen,” and “One Love/People get Ready”), and two on a steppers (the title track and “Jamming”). Curiously, the remaining track, “Turn Your Lights Down Low,” features a decidedly “nonreggae” snare backbeat on beats 2 and 4, which, along with the lush extended harmonies, marks this song as a real stylistic anomaly among the other tracks on the album (to my ears, “Turn Your Lights Down Low” sounds more like a Philadelphia soul number than it does a reggae song).

In its 31 December 1999 issue, Time magazine named Exodus the “best album of the twentieth century.”

22. Sting, Broken Music (New York: Dial Press, 2003), 295. Elsewhere in his autobiography, Sting reveals how his original inspiration for “Roxanne” came from seeing an old poster for Cyrano de Bergerac in the foyer of a Paris hotel where the Police were staying in October 1977. “That night,” he wrote, “I will go to my room and write a song about a girl. I will call her Roxanne. I will conjure her unpaid from the street below the hotel and cloak her in the romance and sadness of Rostand’s play, and her creation will change my life” (286).

23. Summers, One Train Later, 189.

24. Only the upper three voices of the guitar skank are shown in example 6.2a (octave doublings in the lower voices have been omitted for the sake of notational clarity).

25. For examples of reggae songs that feature a bubble organ, I again refer the reader to the Exodus album. The bubble is especially prominent in “Jamming” and “Waiting in Vain.”

26. A so-called suspended chord in jazz and rock parlance is a close-position voicing in which the fourth (most commonly) or second above the chord root substitutes for the third. Unlike suspensions in classical harmony, the dissonant fourths and seconds need not resolve, and two or more “sus” chords may be found in succession (as we can see, for example, in the cadential figure that ends the first phrase of the verse in “Roxanne”).


28. Sting explained his working method—and offered a live demonstration of Dennis in action—in his interview with Jools Holland for the 1981 documentary Police in Montserrat.

29. Sting receives sole songwriting credit for thirty-seven of the fifty-four tracks on the Police’s five studio albums, while Copeland and Summers typically receive sole or joint credit for one or two tracks each per album. The notable exception to this is Reggatta de Blanc, on which Sting receives the sole credit for only five of the eleven songs (although two of these—“Message in a Bottle” and “Walking on the Moon”—were the album’s hit singles). We recall that Stewart Copeland penned both of the songs for the Police’s ill-fated first single, “Fall Out/Nothing Achieving.” Copeland’s contribution as a songwriter was most prominent on Reggatta, where he receives sole credit for three of the six tracks on side 2 (“On Any Other Day,” “Contact,” and the music-hall-tinged “Does Everyone Stare”) and joint credit with Sting for “It’s Alright For You” on side 1. Two of
the tracks on *Reggatta* (the title track and “Deathwish”) originated from group improvisations during their early live performances (see note 36) and remain the only songs among the Police’s recorded output to be credited to the full band.

30. Sting discusses the origins of the “Message” riff in his 1981 interview with Jools Holland for *Police in Montserrat*. When asked by Holland to name his favorite song that he’d written so far, Sting replied, “Probably ‘Message in a Bottle.’ Both lyrically and musically, I think it’s the most unified piece I’ve ever written.” Interestingly, “Message” reverses the “reggae/punk” formal template of the three singles from *Outlandos d’Amour*, featuring instead a hard-driving rock style for the verse (underscored by the signature riff) and prechorus and shifting abruptly to a more subdued reggae groove for the chorus.

31. In the acronym *pim*, *p* stands for the thumb, *i* for the index finger, and *m* for the middle finger. Summers discusses the “Bring on the Night” riff in his June 2007 interview with Michael Molenda for *Guitar Player* (“Harmo-Melodic Spaceman,” 95).


33. Stewart Copeland’s reverb-soaked hi-hat part—which fades in alone to open the track—is surely one of the most memorable components of the “Walking on the Moon” groove. I have simplified the hi-hat part in example 6.4 into a constant pattern of alternating dotted-eighth and sixteenth notes in “shuffle” rhythm, showing its essential rhythmic strata within the groove, but Copeland actually improvises freely around this rhythm (particularly at the opening of the track and during the instrumental breaks), spicing up the basic pattern with random flourishes of repeated thirty-second notes. Copeland’s virtuoso hi-hat playing quickly became legendary and would remain a signature feature of his highly idiosyncratic drumming style. For example, shortly after the Police broke up, Peter Gabriel hired Copeland to play the special hi-hat part spotlighted at the beginning of “Red Rain,” the track that opens side 1 of Gabriel’s 1986 hit album *So* (U.K. number 1, U.S. number 2).

34. Michael E. Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007). Recalling with excitement the first time he heard imported dub remixes from Jamaica played in the punk clubs of London, the late Joe Strummer of the Clash remarked, “Completely destroy the track, and double and triple echo . . . that was dub” (transcribed from a Strummer interview in “Punk,” episode 9 of the Time-Life documentary series *The History of Rock ’n’ Roll*).

35. Veal, *Dub*, 77.

36. For example, a dub-style instrumental jam provided a nifty way for the Police to extend “Can’t Stand Losing You” during live performances, and the resulting improvisation was ultimately reworked and recorded separately as the title track for the *Reggatta de Blanc* album. The “Can’t Stand Losing You/Reggatta de Blanc” medley would become a favorite closer for their live shows. (On the 1995 CD *The Police Live!* one can hear two largely similar versions of the medley from different stages in the band’s career, the first recorded at the Orpheum in Boston in November 1979 and the second recorded at the Omni in Atlanta in
November 1983; indeed, it came as no surprise to me to hear the Police resurrect the medley as one of the closing numbers on the set list for their long-awaited 2007–8 reunion tour.

37. For a detailed analysis of “Voices Inside My Head,” see my “(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music,” 42–44.

38. The Roland guitar synthesizer is featured most prominently on “Don’t Stand So Close to Me,” where Summers uses the device to create those trademark swelling eleventh chords during the dub-style instrumental bridge (2:48–3:15). The Roland also reigns supreme on Summers’s own composition, “Behind My Camel,” a “haunted Middle Eastern theme,” which Sting reportedly hated so much that he refused to play on the track but which garnered Summers a Grammy award for Best Rock Instrumental in 1981 (see Summers, One Train Later, 259). Summers would go on to explore the potential of the Roland guitar synthesizer more fully on his two collaborative albums with King Crimson’s Robert Fripp, I Advance Masked (1982) and Bewitched (1984).

39. I am, of course, referring to bands such as the Specials, the [English] Beat, and Madness, all of which took ska grooves into the U.K. Top 10 in 1979 and 1980. For a useful assessment of the U.K. ska revival written when the style was still fresh, see Simon Frith’s 1980 essay “The Coventry Sound: The Specials,” in his Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop (New York: Routledge, 1988), 77–80. The Police had actually first experimented with a noticeably faster ska groove on two of the tracks from 1980’s Zenyatta Mondatta, “Canary in a Coalmine” and “Man in a Suitcase.”

40. The marked sonic shift of Ghost in the Machine compared to the previous three Police albums can be attributed to a number of factors. For one thing, like its 1983 follow-up, Synchronicity, this album (with the exception of one track, “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic”) was recorded at George Martin’s Associated Independent Recording (AIR) studios on the remote Caribbean island of Montserrat. Also, the Police parted ways with their coproducer Nigel Gray and replaced him with Hugh Padgham, an up-and-coming young sound engineer who had recently scored back-to-back successes with his work on Peter Gabriel’s 1980 self-titled third album and Phil Collins’s 1981 debut solo album Face Value (on which Padgham is credited for capturing Collins’s trademark massive, reverberant drum sound on songs such as “In the Air Tonight”). In general, the arrangements on Ghost in the Machine became much denser, with several of the tracks featuring layers of synthesizers played by keyboardist Jean Roussel (marking the first time a musician from outside the group had been brought in for a Police record). Andy Summers, especially, did not see this as a step forward, telling one interviewer, “All those layers were there because it was a group head trip we went through that wasn’t exactly welcomed by me. I would say, ‘F**k the keyboard part—I can play it all on guitar.’ But these things happened anyway. I’d just try to blend with the synths and keep the guitar part strong” (“Harmon-Melodic Spaceman,” 91).


42. The contrasting grooves for the verse and chorus in “Spirits” are further marked by Stewart Copeland’s drums, where, in trademark Copeland fashion, he...
limits his reggae drum pattern during the verses to just the bass drum and hi-hat and saves the big rock snare hits on the backbeat for the choruses.

43. To be fair, it did require considerable skill to program the synthesizers and sequencers, as evinced, for example, by the pioneering work of Yaz[oo]’s Vince Clarke.

44. See, for example, Allan Moore’s analysis of the Human League’s “Seconds” from Dare (1981) in his Rock: The Primary Text, 2nd ed. (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 153–54. Moore refers to the synth-pop style as “synthesizer rock.”

45. In his interview with Jools Holland for Police in Montserrat, Sting demonstrates a working version of “Invisible Sun” (which, interestingly, he had already singled out as one his favorite songs for the new album), showing how he created the four-track demo with the aid of bass synthesizer pedals set to a patch that automatically doubled each bass pitch a fifth higher. I cannot be certain, since the texture on the finished recording is much thicker, but it sounds to me like these bass synth pedals were also played by Sting in tandem with his electric bass on the final studio version of “Invisible Sun.”

46. Such textless chanting was another hallmark of the Police sound, one that I have yet to mention in this chapter. Compare, for example, the textless vocal melody featured on the earlier track “Reggatta de Blanc.”

47. Stewart Copeland, transcribed from the narration to his documentary film Everyone Stares.

48. Summers and Copeland contributed one song each to the Synchronicity album as sole composers: Summers with his 7/8 bizarro rock of “Mother,” and Copeland with his bouncy world pop of “Miss Gradenko” (a song that, clocking in at exactly two minutes, stands as the shortest track on any of the Police albums). The two non-Sting tracks are positioned back-to-back in the middle of side 1. (Summers receives cowriting credit with Sting for “Murder by Numbers,” on which he composed the jazz-styled music and Sting wrote the lyrics. This track was omitted from the original LP version of Synchronicity, so fans in 1983 who wanted a copy of it had to buy the chromium dioxide audiophile cassette.)

49. In his review of Synchronicity for Rolling Stone, Stephen Holden made the following astute observation: “Though the Police started out as straightforward pop-reggae enthusiasts, they have by now so thoroughly assimilated the latter that all that remains are different varieties of reggae-style syncopation” (Rolling Stone, 23 June 1983, 54).

50. I will focus my discussion here on the song’s signature riff. For a complete formal analysis of “Every Breath You Take,” see John Covach, “Form in Rock Music: A Primer,” in Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis, ed. Deborah Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75. On the song’s form, Covach asserts that “a clear thirty-two-bar AABA form frames a central bridge section . . . making the overall form a compound ABA.”

51. Summers, One Train Later, 323.

52. Ibid., 323–24.