



A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR MUSIC THEORY

MTO 28.3 Examples: Nobile, Teleology in Verse–Prechorus–Chorus Form, 1965–2020

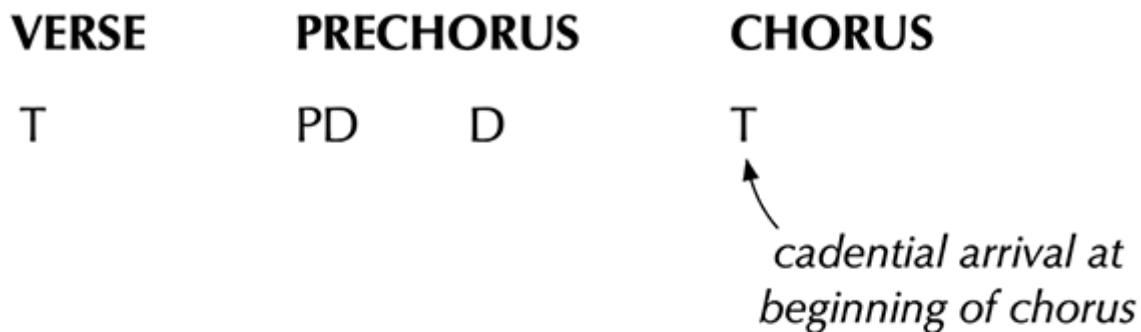
(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

<https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.22.28.3/mto.22.28.3.nobile.html>

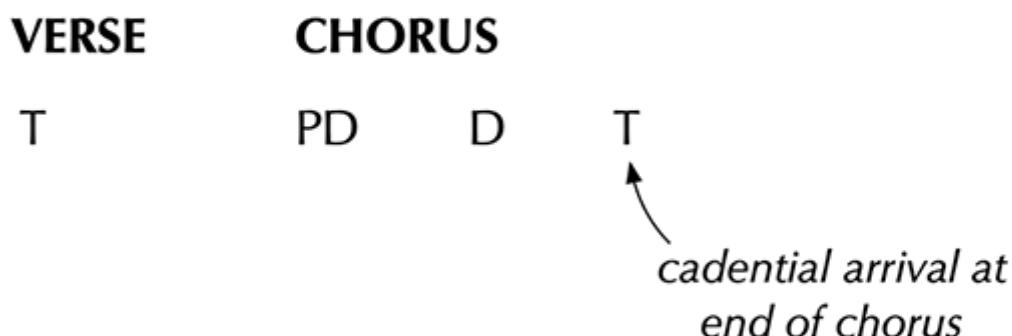
Example 1. Verse–prechorus–chorus form is distinct from other verse–chorus forms by its placement of the structural cadence at the beginning, rather than the end, of the chorus.

(Adapted from Nobile 2020, Example 6.1, p. 149)

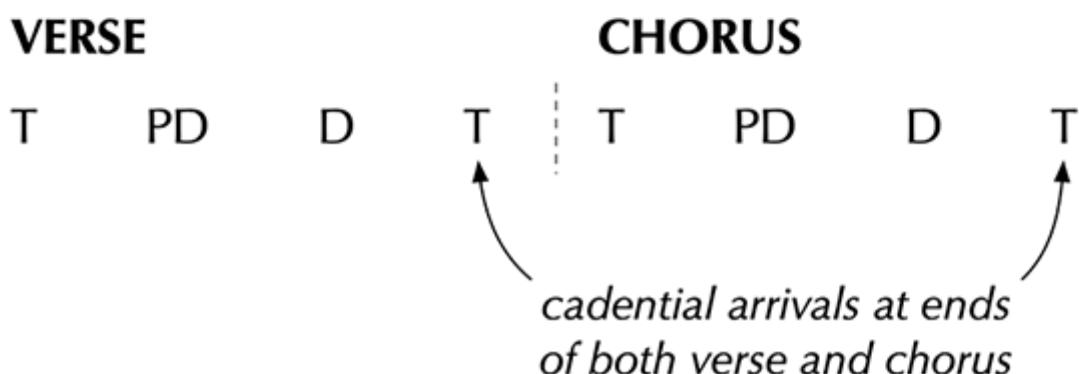
a) Verse–prechorus–chorus form



b) Continuous verse–chorus form

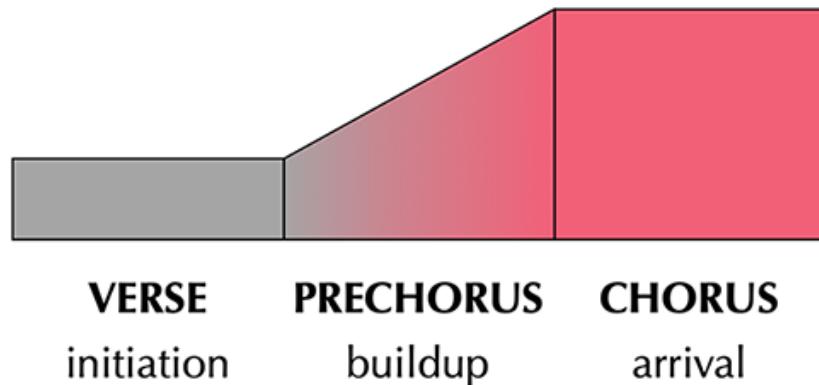


c) Sectional verse–chorus form

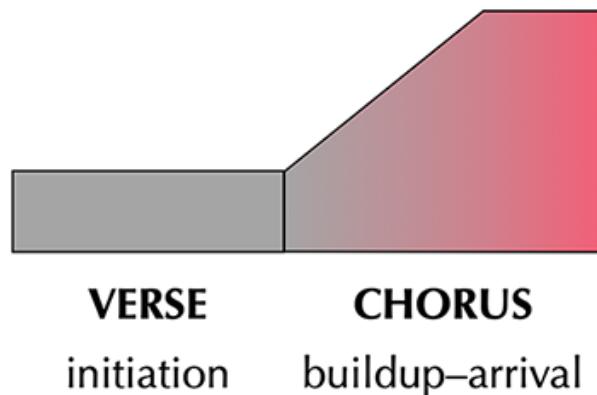


Example 2. Initiation, buildup, and arrival functions across verse–(prechorus)–chorus cycles in the three verse–chorus forms. Verse–prechorus–chorus form exhibits the telos principle with one function per section and an arrival that spans an entire section.

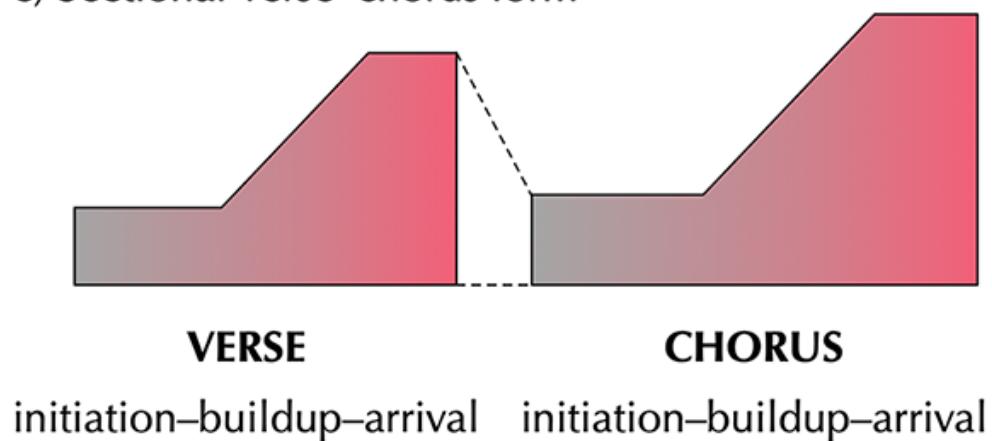
a) Verse–prechorus–chorus form



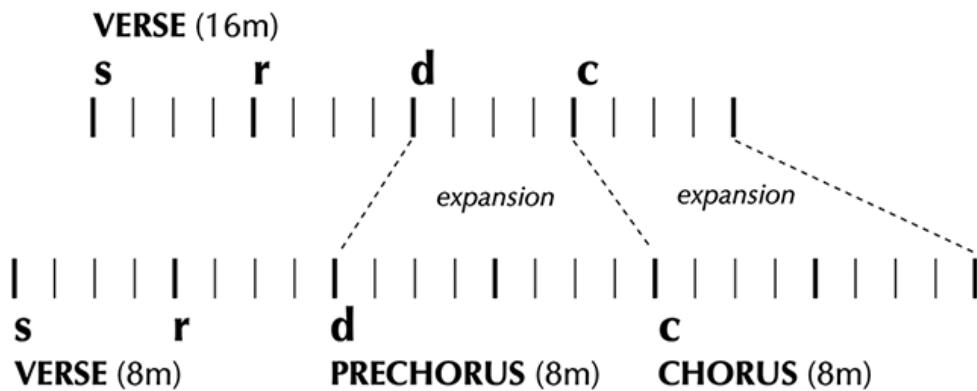
b) Continuous verse–chorus form



c) Sectional verse–chorus form



Example 3. Verse–prechorus–chorus form as an expansion of **srdc** (adapted from Summach 2011)



Mary Wells, "My Guy" (1964): 16-measure **srdc** verse

VERSE (16m)	s (4m)	Nothing you could say can tear me away from my guy.
	r (4m)	Nothing you could do, 'cause I'm stuck like glue to my guy.
	d (2m)	I'm sticking to my guy like a stamp to a letter,
	d (2m)	like birds of a feather we stick together.
	c (4m)	I'm telling you from the start I can't be torn apart from my guy.

Tommy James and the Shondelles, "I Think We're Alone Now" (1967): 24-measure verse–prechorus–chorus cycle

VERSE (8m)	s (4m)	"Children, behave." —that's what they say when we're together
	r (4m)	"And watch how you play." They don't understand, and so we're
PRECHORUS (8m)	d (2m)	running just as fast as we can,
	d (2m)	holding onto one another's hand,
CHORUS (8m)	d (2m)	tryin' to get away into the night.
	c (4m)	And then you put your arms around me as we tumble to the ground, and then you say: "I think we're alone now; there doesn't seem to be anyone around." "I think we're alone now; the beating of our hearts is the only sound."

Example 4. Thematic aspects of verse–prechorus–chorus cycles (adapted from Nobile 2020)

VERSE	PRECHORUS	CHORUS
"Initiating verse"		"Telos chorus"
two or four parallel groups	fragmentation to one- or two-bar groups	anacrusis into downbeat; arrival on $\hat{1}$ at downbeat; repeated melodic motive, sometimes aaab grouping

Example 5. Bob Dylan, "Like a Rolling Stone" (1965): verse–prechorus–chorus cycle

VERSE: two parallel four-bar groups

8 C Dm7 Em F G
Once u-pon a time you dressed so fine, threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you?
I

5 C Dm7 Em F G
People'd call, say, "be-ware, doll, you're bound to fall." You thought they were all kiddin' you.

PRECHORUS: fragmentation to two-bar groups; outlines IV to V

9 F G F G F Em Dm C
You used to laugh a-bout E-very-bo-dy that was hang-in' out. Now you don't talk so loud.
IV ...

15 F Em Dm C Dm7 F G
Now you don't seem so proud a-bout ha-vin' to be scroun-ging your next meal
... IV V

CHORUS: repeated anacrusic melodic idea over chord loop

20 C F G C F G
How does it feel? How does it feel to be with-out a home,
I

25 C F G C F G C F G
like a com-plete un-known, like a rol-ling stone?

Example 6. Heart, “Crazy on You” (1975): verse–prechorus–chorus cycle

VERSE: two parallel four-bar groups over chord loop

4

Am C Dm E7 Am

We may still have time, we might still get by. Every time I think about it, I want to cry. With bombs and the devil, and

i

6 C Dm E7 Am D/A Am D/A

the kids keep comin', nowhere to breathe ea - sy, no time to be young.

transition

But I

Music score for the verse section of "Crazy on You". The first line shows a four-bar chord loop in A minor (Am, C, Dm, E7) with a vocal line. The second line shows a continuation of the loop in C major (C, Dm, E7, Am) with a vocal line. A bracket labeled "transition" covers the change from C major to A minor. The lyrics are written below the notes, corresponding to the chords. Measure numbers 4 and 6 are indicated.

PRECHORUS: fragmentation to two-bar groups; outlines iv to V

13 Dm Em C F Dm E7

tell my - self that I was do - in' al - right, there's nothing left to do to - night but go cra -

iv V

Music score for the prechorus section of "Crazy on You". The score shows a fragmentation of the chords into two-bar groups. The chords are Dm, Em, C, F, Dm, and E7. The lyrics "tell my - self that I was do - in' al - right, there's nothing left to do to - night but go cra -" are written below the notes. Measure number 13 is indicated.

CHORUS: repeated motive and lyric over chord shuttle

17 Am F Am F Am G F

- zy on you. Cra - zy on you. Let me go cra - zy, crazy on you, oh.

i

Music score for the chorus section of "Crazy on You". The score shows a repeated motive over a chord shuttle between Am, F, and G. The lyrics "- zy on you. Cra - zy on you. Let me go cra - zy, crazy on you, oh." are written below the notes. Measure number 17 is indicated.

Example 7. Michael Jackson, "Bad" (1987): verse–prechorus–chorus cycle

VERSE: two parallel four-bar groups over chord shuttle

8 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7
I'm giving you on count of three to show your stuff or let it be. I'm
i

6 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7
telling you just a-watch your mouth I know your game, what you're about. Well, they

PRECHORUS: fragmentation to one-bar groups; outlines ii to V

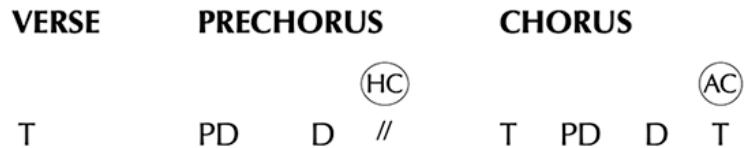
10 Cm7 Dm7 Cm7 Dm7 Cm7 Dm7 F7(9)
say the sky's the li - mit, and to me that's really true. But my friend, you have seen nothing; just-a wait till I get thru,
ii⁷ ... Because I'm
... V

CHORUS: anacrusic melody with repeated lyric over chord shuttle; **aaab** layout

14 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7
bad! I'm bad! Shamone, na. Ya know I'm bad! I'm bad! Ya know it. Ya know I'm bad! I'm bad! Shamone, ya know, and the
8 (Bad, bad!) Really, really bad! Bad, bad! Really, really bad! Bad, bad! Really, really bad!
i

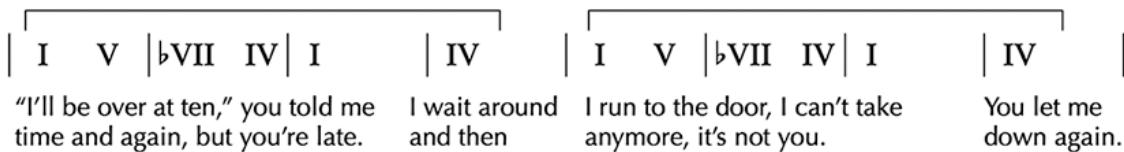
20 Bbm7 Eb7 Bbm7 Eb7
whole world has to an - swer right now just to tell you once a - gain who's bad.

Example 8. Cadence-ending trajectory in a verse–prechorus–chorus cycle

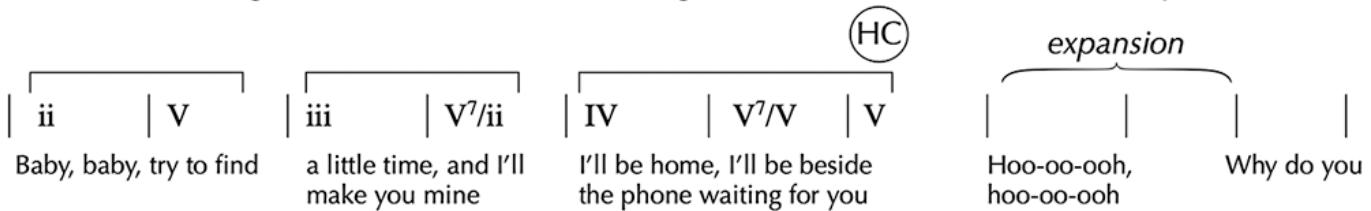


The Foundations, "Build Me Up Buttercup" (1968)

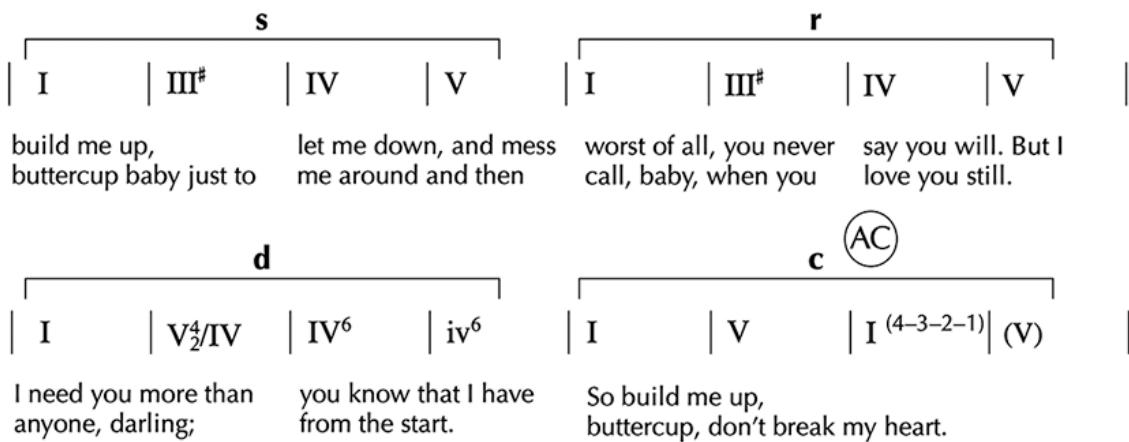
VERSE: two four-measure melodic groups



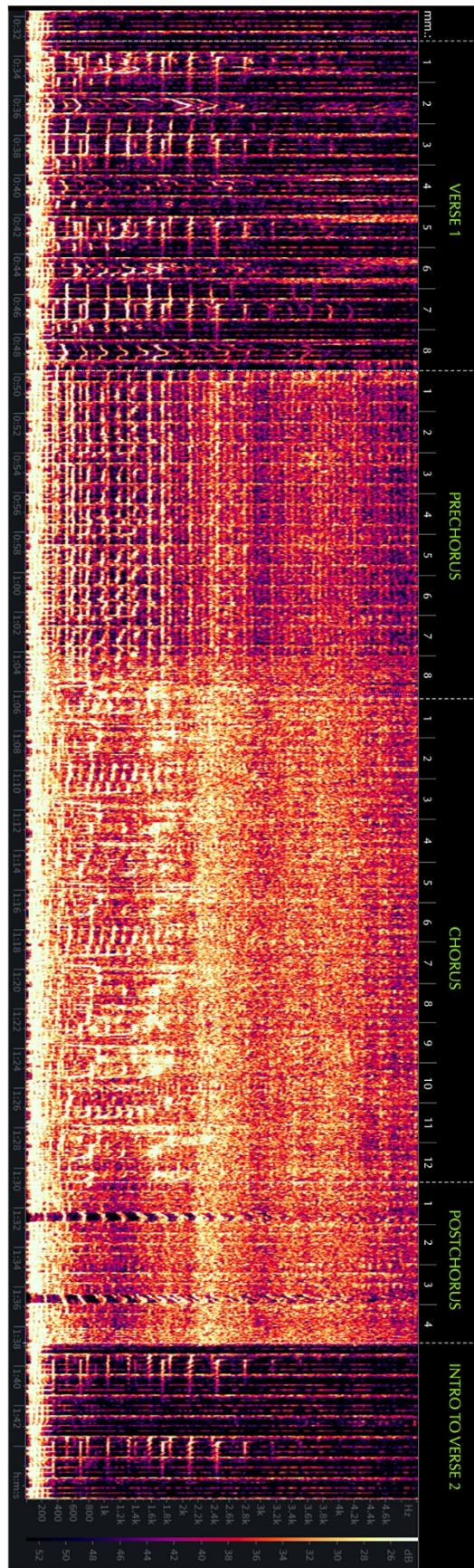
PRECHORUS: fragmentation, ii–V outline, ending with half cadence and two-bar expansion



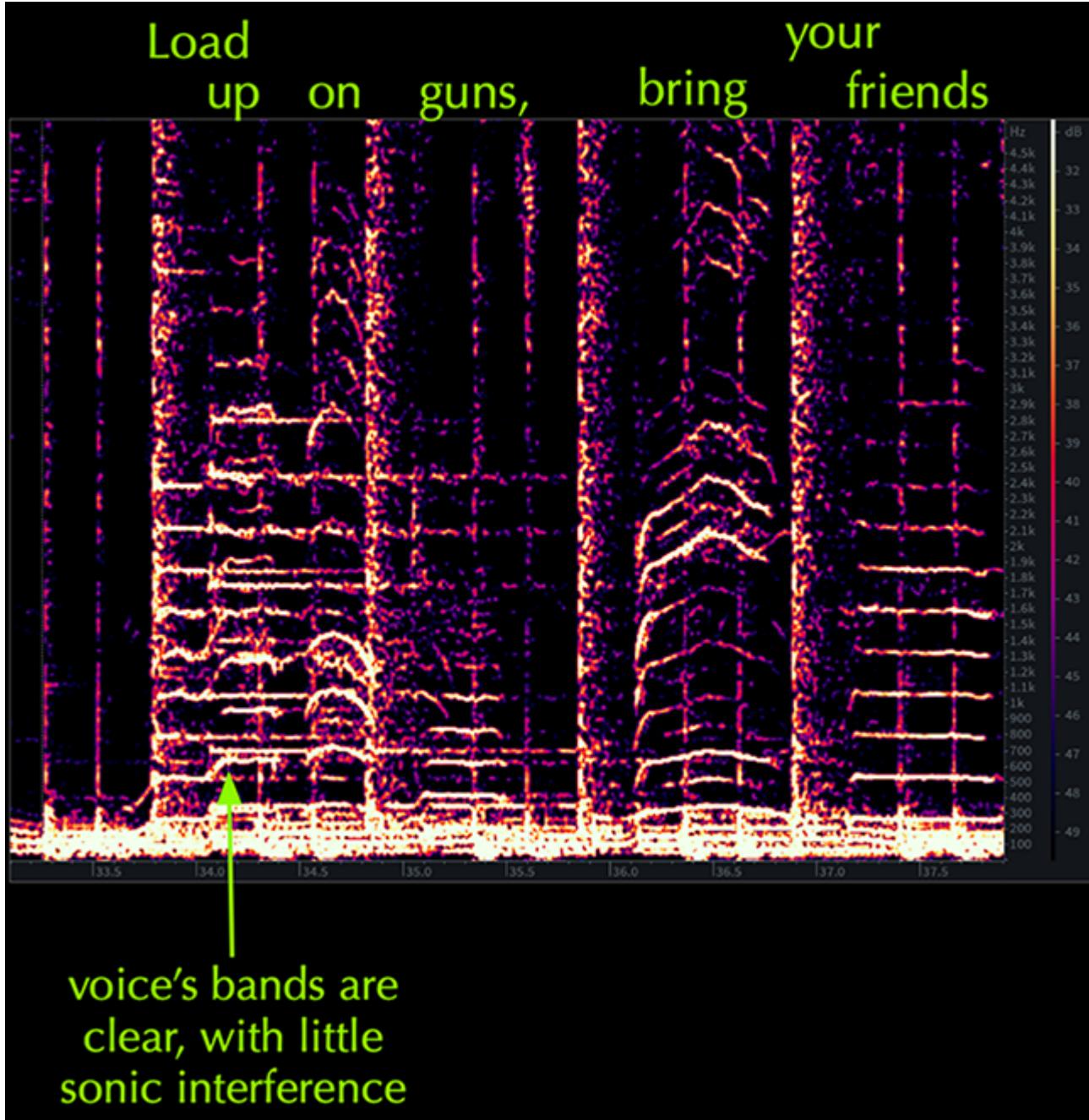
CHORUS: 16-measure **srdc** section ending with authentic cadence



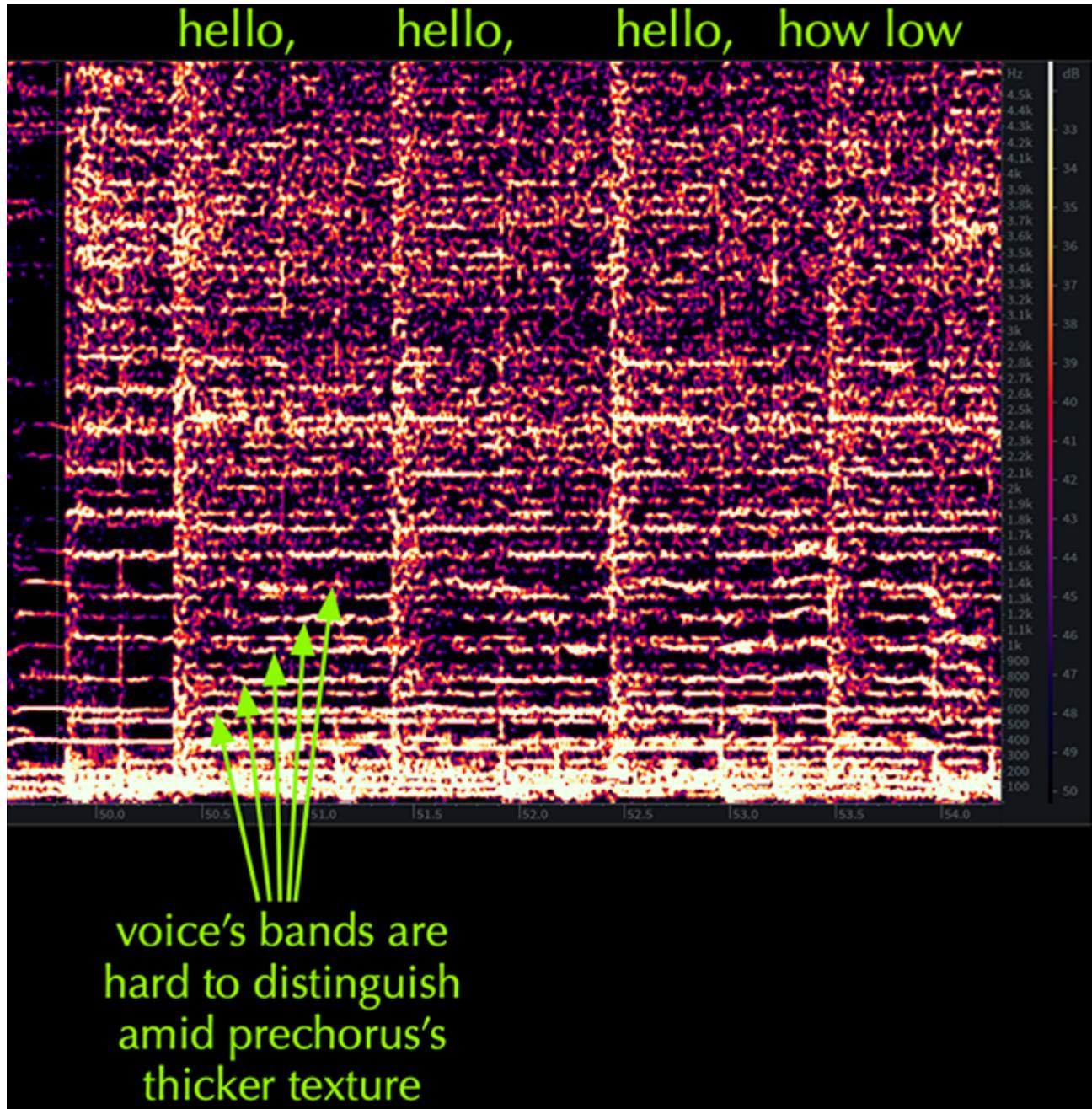
Example 9. Nirvana, “Smells Like Teen Spirit” (1991): spectrogram of first cycle showing terraced textural intensification from section to section.



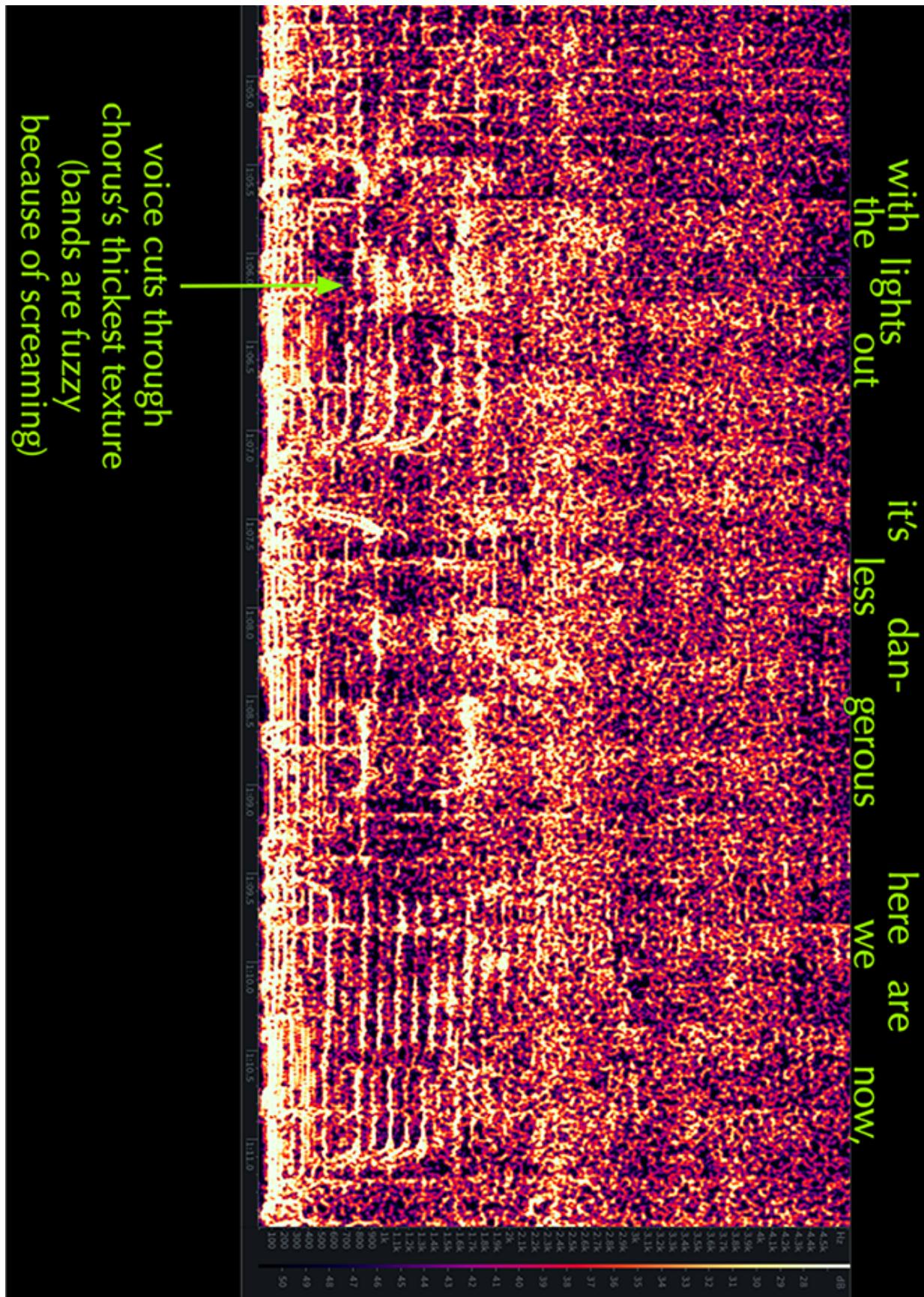
Example 10. In the verse, Kurt Cobain's voice has little sonic competition



Example 11. In the prechorus, Cobain's processed voice begins to be engulfed by the thickening texture



Example 12. In the chorus, Cobain's screaming voice rises above the thickest texture



Example 13. Allan Moore's four "proxemic zones," representing the sonic projection of distance between the listener and the song persona. (Image of Prince's face from vectorportal.com, CC BY.)



Intimate zone

- Persona very close to listener, occludes environment
- Whispered or soft singing style
- Pure/dry vocal production; audible vocal noises (breath, etc.)
- Minimal accompaniment



Personal zone

- Persona close to listener (normal conversational distance), in front of environment
- Comfortable, mid-range singing style
- Possibility of minimal vocal effects (reverb, etc.)
- Accompaniment somewhat active, but still behind singer



Social zone

- Persona somewhat distant from listener, amid environment
- More vocal effort needed to reach listener
- Vocal effects are common (reverb, echo, distortion, double-tracking, etc.)
- Active accompaniment sonically competes with voice



Public zone

- Persona very far from listener, behind environment
- Extreme vocal effort needed to cut through environment
- Significant reverb and other effects very common on voice
- Accompaniment very active, threatens to engulf voice

Example 14. Alanis Morissette, “You Oughta Know” (1995): the cycle goes through all four of Moore’s proxemic zones from the beginning of the verse through the chorus

	Proxemic zone	Voice	Accompaniment
VERSE (part 1): 8m (“zero module”) I want you to know that I’m happy for you I wish nothing but the best for you both	Intimate	Breathy, close-miked F#3–C#4 range	Soft percussion only
VERSE (part 2): 8m An older version of me, is she perverted like me? Would she go down on you in a theater? Does she speak eloquently, and would she have your baby? I’m sure she’d make a really excellent mother.	Personal	Modal voice C#4–G#4 range	Bass, drums, clean guitar
PRECHORUS: 8m Cause the love that you gave that we made wasn’t able to make it enough for you to be open wide, no. And every time you speak her name does she know how you told me you’d hold me until you died, till you died, but you’re still alive,	Social	Double-tracked F#3–F#4 range	Bass, drums, distorted & clean guitars
CHORUS: 9m And I’m here to remind you of the mess you left when you went away. It’s not fair to deny me of the cross I bear that you gave to me. You, you, you oughta know!	Public	Belt, some distortion F#4–B4 range	Bass, drums, distorted guitars

Example 15. Black Eyed Peas, “Let’s Get It Started” (2004)

	Voice	Accompaniment
VERSE (part 1): 4m (“zero module”) In this context, there’s no disrespect. So when I bust my rhyme, you break your necks. We got five minutes for us to disconnect from all intellect, collect the rhythm effect	Rapped	Strummed chords + bass line
VERSE (part 2): 6m To lose your inhibition, follow your intuition, free your inner soul, and break away from tradition. 'Cause when we be out, girlies pull they weave out. You wouldn't believe how we wow shit out. Burn it till it's burned out, turn it till it's turned out, act up from North, West, East, South.	Rapped	Short chords + bass line + drums
PRECHORUS: 4m Everybody (yeah), everybody (yeah) Just get into it (yeah), get stupid (Come on) Get it started, (come on) get it started (Yeah), get it started	Rapped & sung on single-note	Stop-time

CHORUS: 8m

↓

Sung

Strummed
chords + bass
line + drums

Bm D G F# Bm D G F#

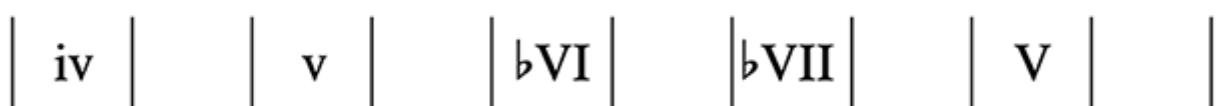
Let's get it star-ted! (ha!) Let's get it star-ted in here. Let's get it star-ted! (ha!) Let's get it star-ted in here, yeah.

Example 16. Ricky Martin, “Livin’ La Vida Loca” (1998), reflecting the harmonic design of pre-1991 verse–prechorus–chorus form with tonic in the verse, pre-dominant to dominant in the prechorus, and a return to tonic on the downbeat of the chorus

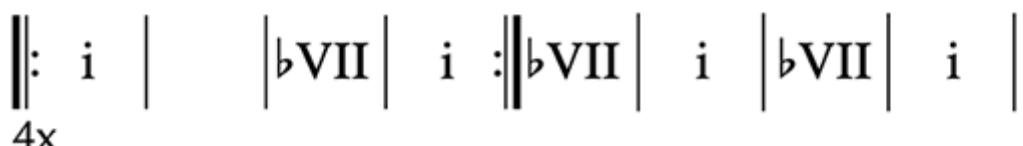
VERSE (8m): tonic



PRECHORUS (10m): pre-dominant to dominant



CHORUS (20m): tonic



Example 17. Boyz II Men, “End of the Road” (1991)

VERSE (16m): embellished doo-wop loop

E♭	E♭sus4	E♭	B♭/C	Cm	A♭	Gm	Fm	A♭/B♭
: 6 I		vi		IV	(iii)	ii	V	

We belong together...

PRECHORUS (8m): chromatic bassline outlining vi–IV–ii–V

Cm	G7/B	E♭/B♭	A♭7	A♭maj7	Gm7	Fm7	A♭/B♭
vi				IV ⁷	(iii ⁷)	ii ⁷	V

When I can't sleep at night...

CHORUS (16m): back to verse's progression under three-part harmony

E♭	E♭sus4	E♭	B♭/C	Cm	A♭	E♭/G	Fm	A♭/B♭
: 6 I		vi		IV	(I ⁶)	ii	V	

Although we've come
to the end of the road...

Example 18. Avril Lavigne, "Complicated" (2002): cadence-ending verse–prechorus–chorus layout with a half-cadential prechorus and an **srdc** structure in the chorus

VERSE: two four-measure groups over I–vi–IV–V chord loop

8 F Dm B \flat sus2 C

Chill out, what you yellin' for? Lay back, it's all been done before. And if you could on - ly let it be, you would see.

I vi IV V

5 F Dm B \flat sus2 C

I like you the way you are when we're driving in your car, and you're talking to me one on one, but you become

I vi IV V

PRECHORUS: fragmentation to half-bar groups; outlines IV–V, suggesting a half cadence

CHORUS: nine-measure **srdc** layout ending with ii–IV–I cadence

12 C Dm B♭ F C
 8 Tell me why d'ya have to go and make things so com - pli - ca - ted? I see the way you're
 V vi IV I V

15 Dm B♭ F C Dm B♭
 8 acting like you're somebody else gets me frus - tra - ted. a-Life's like this, you, a-you fall & u crawl, & u break, & u take
 vi IV I V vi IV

s (axis loop)

r (restatement of s)

d (loop continues with fragmentation)

18 F C Gm B♭ F

 what u get, and u turn it in - to honesty & promise me I'm never gonna find you fake it, no, no, no.
 I V ii IV I

Example 19. Christina Aguilera, “Come On Over Baby (All I Want is You)” (1999): reduced accompaniment in verse–prechorus–chorus cycle showing a cadence-ending harmonic layout

VERSE: sparse groove with a tonic-prolonging chord loop

Hey, boy, don't you know...

I⁷ (IV⁷) I⁷ IV⁷ V^{13sus4})

PRECHORUS: new, more active accompaniment outlining vi–ii–V

3x

I know you know...

Listen to me (All I want is

vi ii⁷ V^{7sus4}

CHORUS: **srdc** structure outlining I–vi–IV–V–I, ending with a cadence

you) Come over here, baby...

Now baby don't be shy...

all I want is you!

I vi IV vii⁹⁷ V^{9sus4} "soul dominant" I

Example 21. Sheryl Crow, “All I Wanna Do” (1994)

VERSE (20m): I – ♫VI – ♫VII loop

“All I wanna do is have a little fun before I die,”
says the man next to me out of nowhere.
It’s apropos of nothing, he says his name is William,
but I’m sure he’s Bill or Billy or Mac or Buddy.
And he’s plain ugly to me,
and I wonder if he’s ever had a day of fun in his whole life.
We are drinking beer at noon on Tuesday
in a bar that faces a giant car wash.
The good people of the world are washing their cars on their lunch break,
hosing and scrubbing as best they can in skirts in suits.

PRECHORUS (6m): IV⁷

They drive their shiny Datsuns and Buicks
back to the phone company, the record store too.
Well, they’re nothing like Billy and me

CHORUS (12m): back to I – ♫VI – ♫VII loop

‘Cause all I wanna do is have some fun
I got a feeling I’m not the only one
All I wanna do is have some fun
I got a feeling I’m not the only one
All I wanna do is have some fun
Until the sun comes up over Santa Monica Boulevard

Example 22. Garbage, "Stupid Girl" (1995): tonic–non-tonic–tonic layout across the verse–prechorus–chorus cycle

VERSE (12m): I–IV chord shuttle implied by bass groove

3x

bass

I⁷ IV⁷ I⁷ IV⁷

You pretend you're high.
You pretend you're bored.
You pretend you're anything
just to be adored.
And what you need
is what you get.

Low, breathy chest voice
Close miking, dry production

PRECHORUS (8m): vi–IV outline

3x

synth

vi (ii?) vi IV

Don't believe in fear
Don't believe in faith
Don't believe in anything
that you can't break

Higher head voice, no breathiness
Echo effect

CHORUS (8m): back to I–IV shuttle, now with some upper voices

2x

synth/guitar

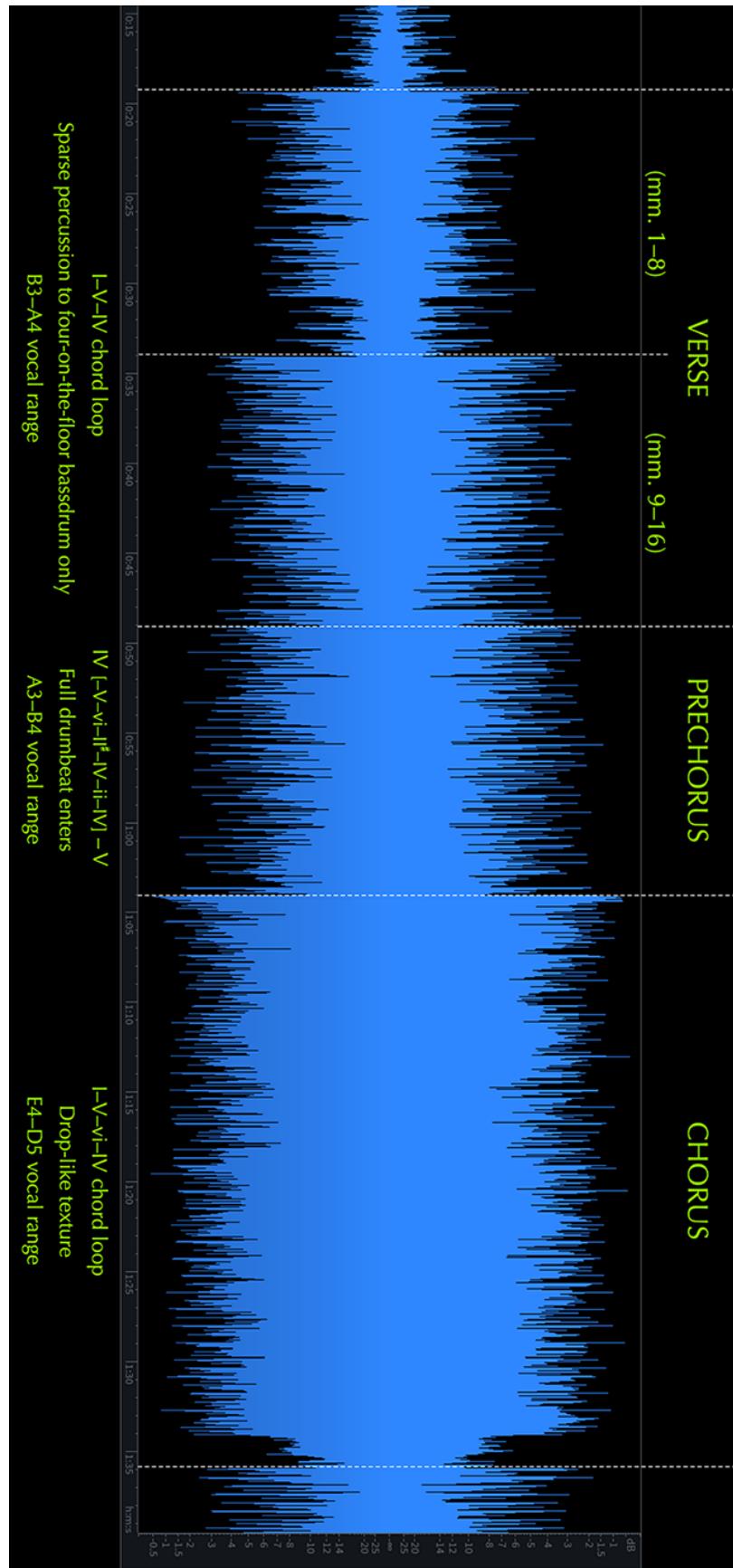
bass

I⁷ IV⁷ I⁷ IV⁷

Stupid girl
Stupid girl
All you had you wasted
All you had you wasted

Low, breathy chest voice
Close miking, dry production

Example 23. Lady Gaga, “The Edge of Glory” (2011): initiation-buildup–arrival trajectory across verse–prechorus–chorus occurs in harmony, texture, voice, and other musical domains



Example 25. Kesha, "Tik Tok" (2009): exaggerated textural break before the chorus arrives

VERSE: 8m

Wake up in the morning feeling like P. Diddy.
Grab my glasses, I'm out the door, I'm gonna hit the city.
Before I leave brush my teeth with a bottle of Jack,
'Cause when I leave for the night I ain't coming back

PRECHORUS: 8m

I'm talking pedicure on our toes, toes;
trying on all our clothes, clothes;
boys blowing up our phones, phones.

Drop top and playing our favorite CDs;
pulling up to the parties;
tryin' to get a little bit tipsy

"Tipsy" record slowdown
as chorus approaches

CHORUS: 16m

Don't stop, make it pop, DJ blow my speakers up.
Tonight I'ma fight till we see the sunlight.
Tick tock on the clock but the party don't stop, no.
Oh-oh whoa-oh; oh-oh whoa-oh.
[repeat]

Telos still materializes
at expected moment

Example 26. Psy, “Gangnam Style” (2012), prechorus: a metrically expanded buildup to chorus ends with a full measure of silence before the beat drops. (Audio file gives the whole cycle; graphic shows only the prechorus, which comes in at 0:31.)

first prechorus phrase (one four-bar hypermeasure)

(3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 4)

4

G A B

bVI bVII I

second prechorus phrase (expected to be another four-bar hypermeasure)

G A F#

bVI bVII V

five-bar extension of second prechorus phrase

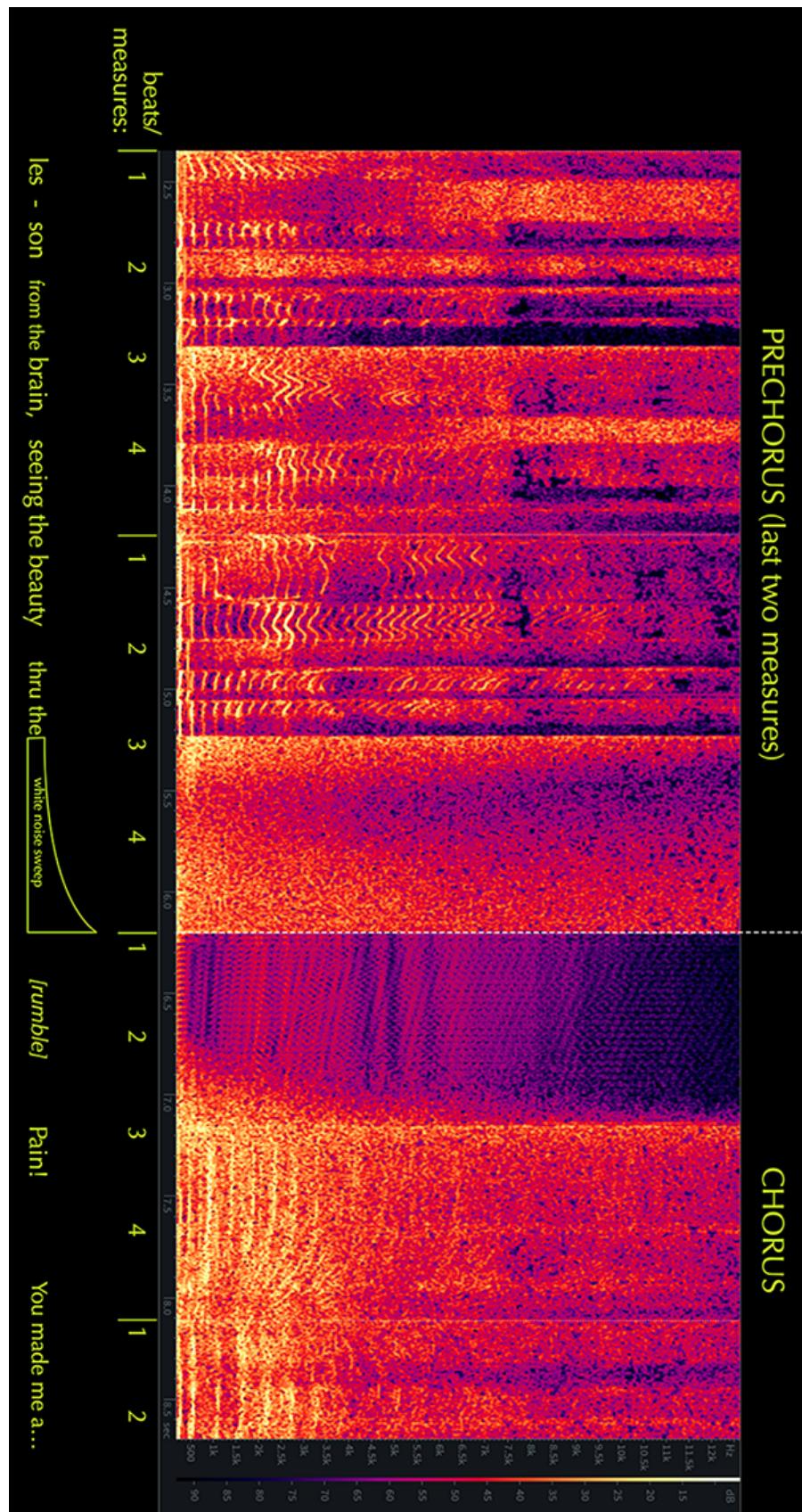
(still V)

G.P.

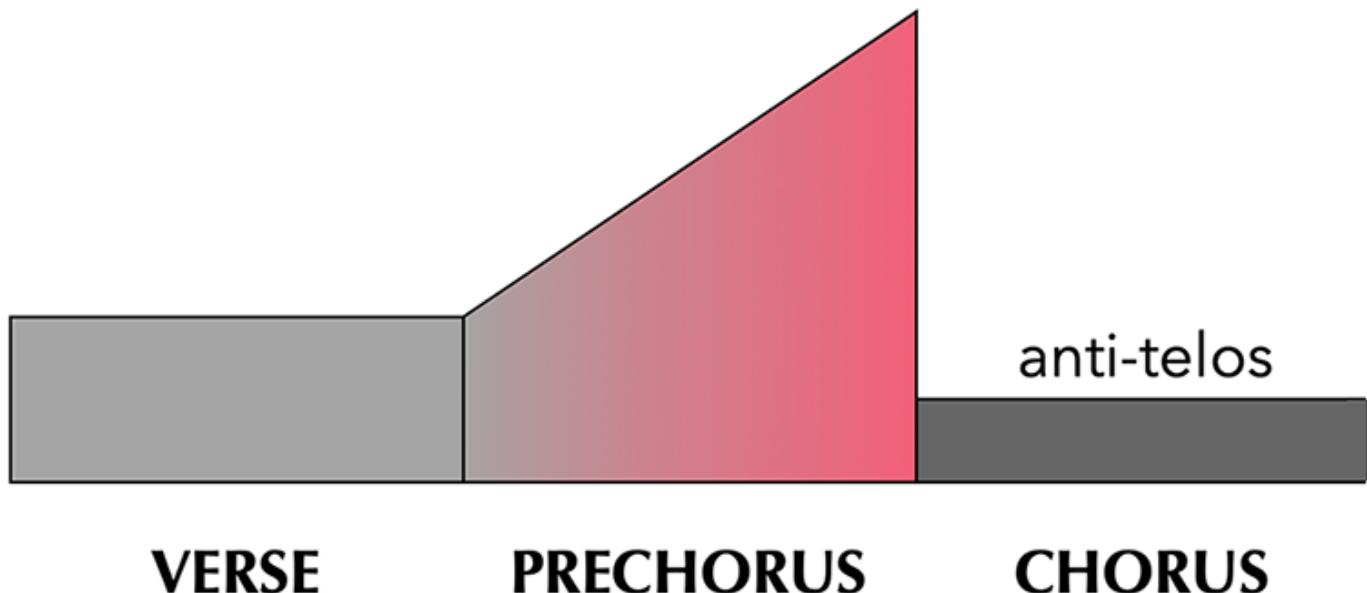
Oppan Gangnam style



Example 27. Imagine Dragons, “Believer” (2017): the telos arrival is delayed by two beats via a surprising break leaving only a low rumble at the beginning of the chorus. (Audio file gives the complete cycle; graphic shows only the transition to chorus, which starts at 0:42.)



Example 28. Anti-telos choruses negate the cycle's teleological imperative with a chorus that acts as the song's point of lowest energy



Example 29. Ariana Grande, “Problem” (2014): anti-telos chorus brought on by abruptly cutting all mid and high frequencies and shifting from a high vocal belt to a low whisper. (Audio file gives the full cycle; example shows only the prechorus through the first measure of the chorus, which begins at 0:18.)

VERSE (8m)

Hey baby, even though I hate you, I wanna love you (I want you-hoo-hoo)
 And even though I can't forgive you, I really want to (I want you-hoo-hoo)
 Tell me, tell me, baby, why can't you leave me?
 'Cause even though I shouldn't want it, I gotta have it (I want you-hoo-hoo)

PRECHORUS

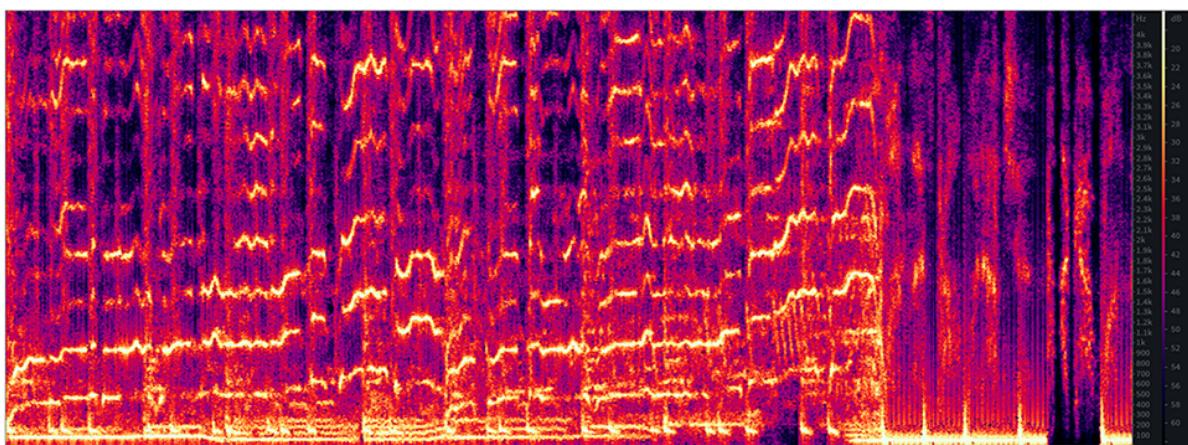


Head in the clouds, got no weight on my shoulder; I should be wiser and realize that I've got

CHORUS

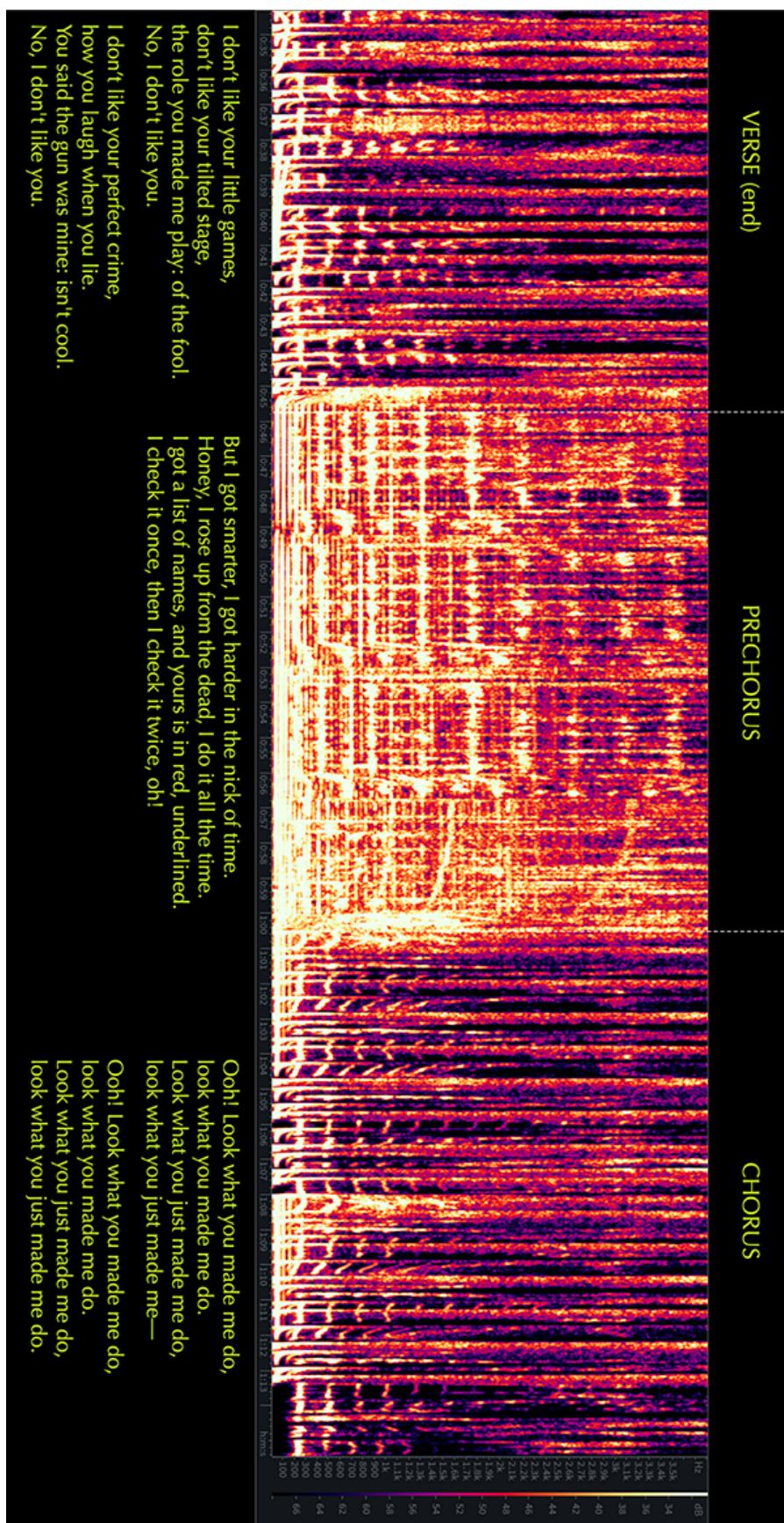
[N.C.]
 (one less prob'l'm without ya)
 just low bass & percussion

texture { sustained bass notes +synth fx +synth chords +laser fx just low bass & active snare rhythm noise sweep... percussion



abrupt drop in all
but low frequencies
at chorus

Example 30. Taylor Swift, “Look What You Made Me Do” (2017): the chorus returns to the verse’s texture with only low-frequency accompaniment and softly delivered voice



Example 31. Ariana Grande, "Problem": the bridge provides a narrative turning point and leads into a quiet prechorus and final, climactic chorus

BRIDGE (Iggy Azalea rap)

Smart money betting I'll be better off without you;
In no time, I'll be forgetting all about you.
You saying that you know, but I really, really doubt you
understand my life is easy when I ain't around you.

Iggy Iggy, too biggie to be here stressing.
I'm thinkin' I love the thought of you more than I love your presence.
And the best thing now is probably for you to exit;
I let you go, let you back, I finally learned my lesson.
No half-stepping: either you want it, or you just playing;
I'm listening to you knowing I can't believe what you're saying.
There's a million yous baby boy, so don't be dumb.
I got 99 problems, but you won't be one, like what.

PRECHORUS (quiet)

(One less, one less problem
One less, one less problem.)

Head in the clouds, got no weight on my shoulder
I should be wiser and realize that I've got

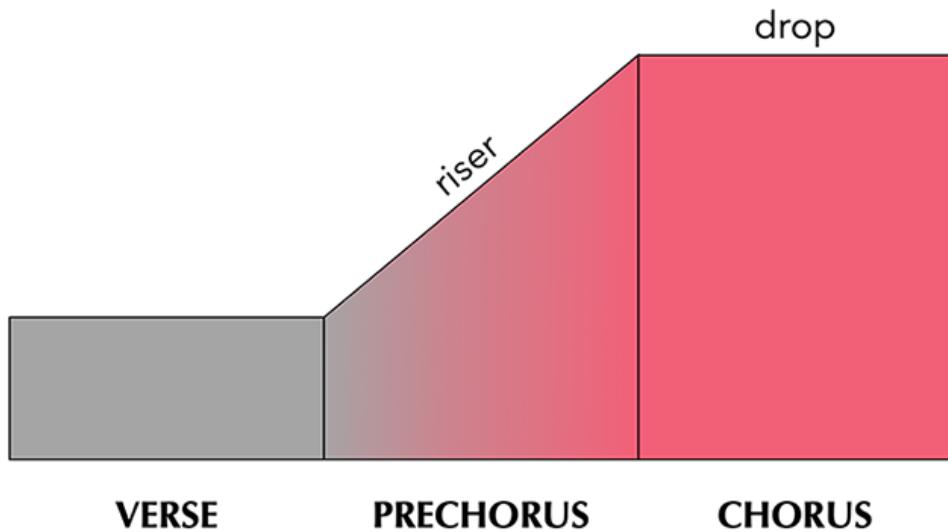
Extra bar with echo
and noise sweep

FINAL CHORUS (climactic, with vocal riffing)

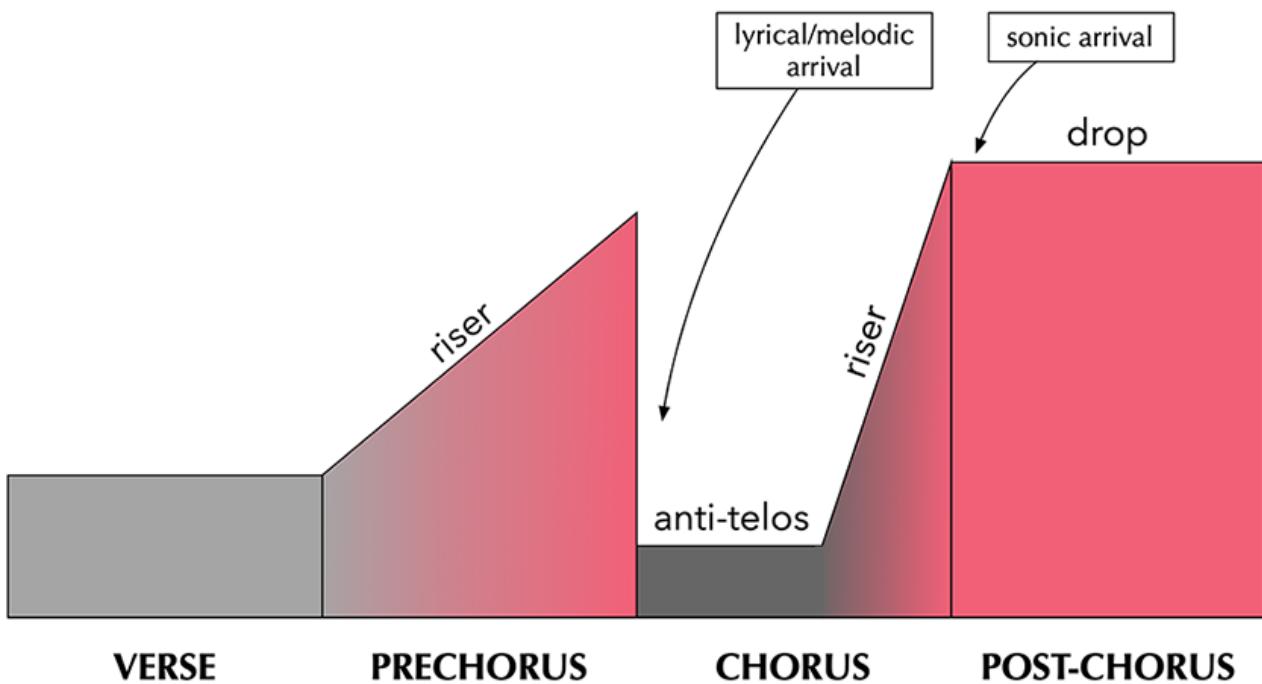
One less problem without you...

Example 32. The EDM-derived riser–drop sequence interacts with formal sections

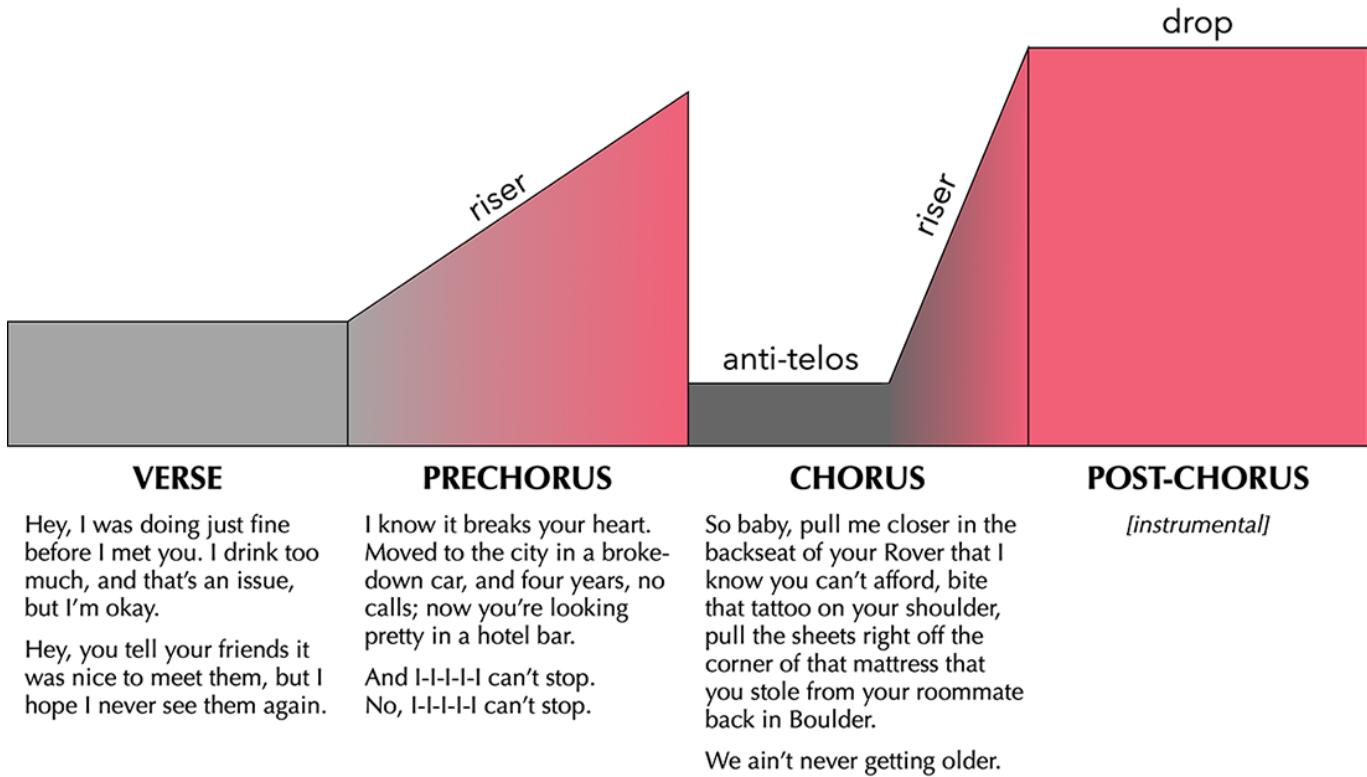
a) Typical post-1991 dance pop aligns riser and drop with prechorus and chorus.



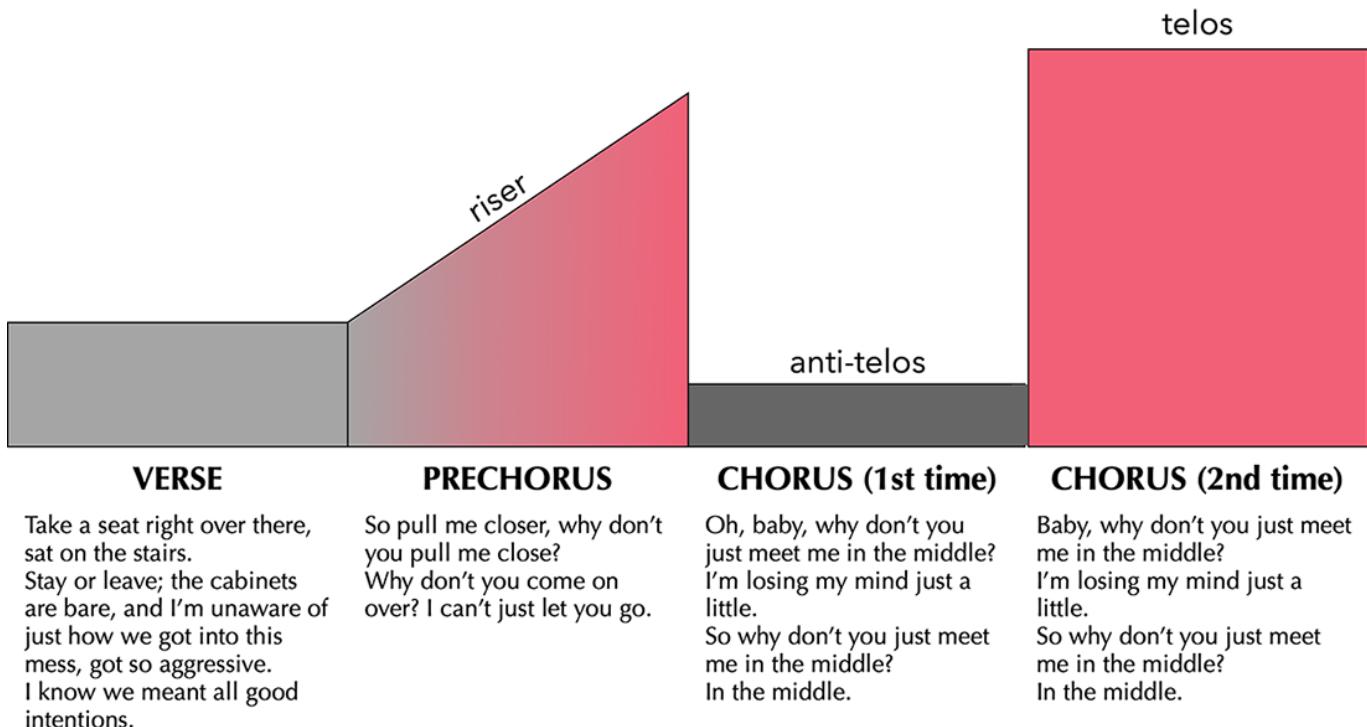
b) After 2010, songs with anti-telos choruses often include a separate drop section in the form of an instrumental post-chorus.



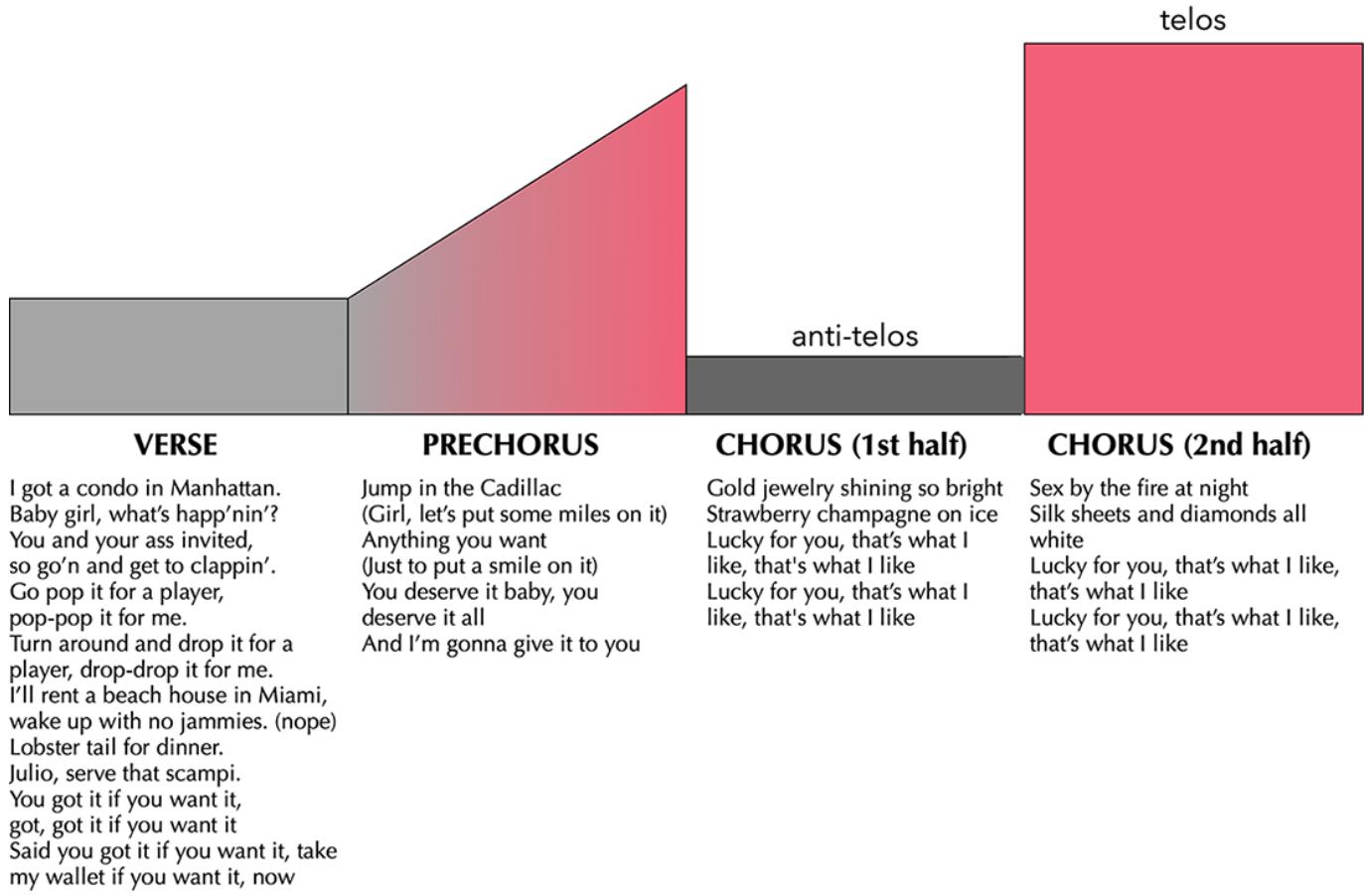
Example 33. The Chainsmokers, “Closer” (2016): verse–prechorus–anti-telos chorus–drop



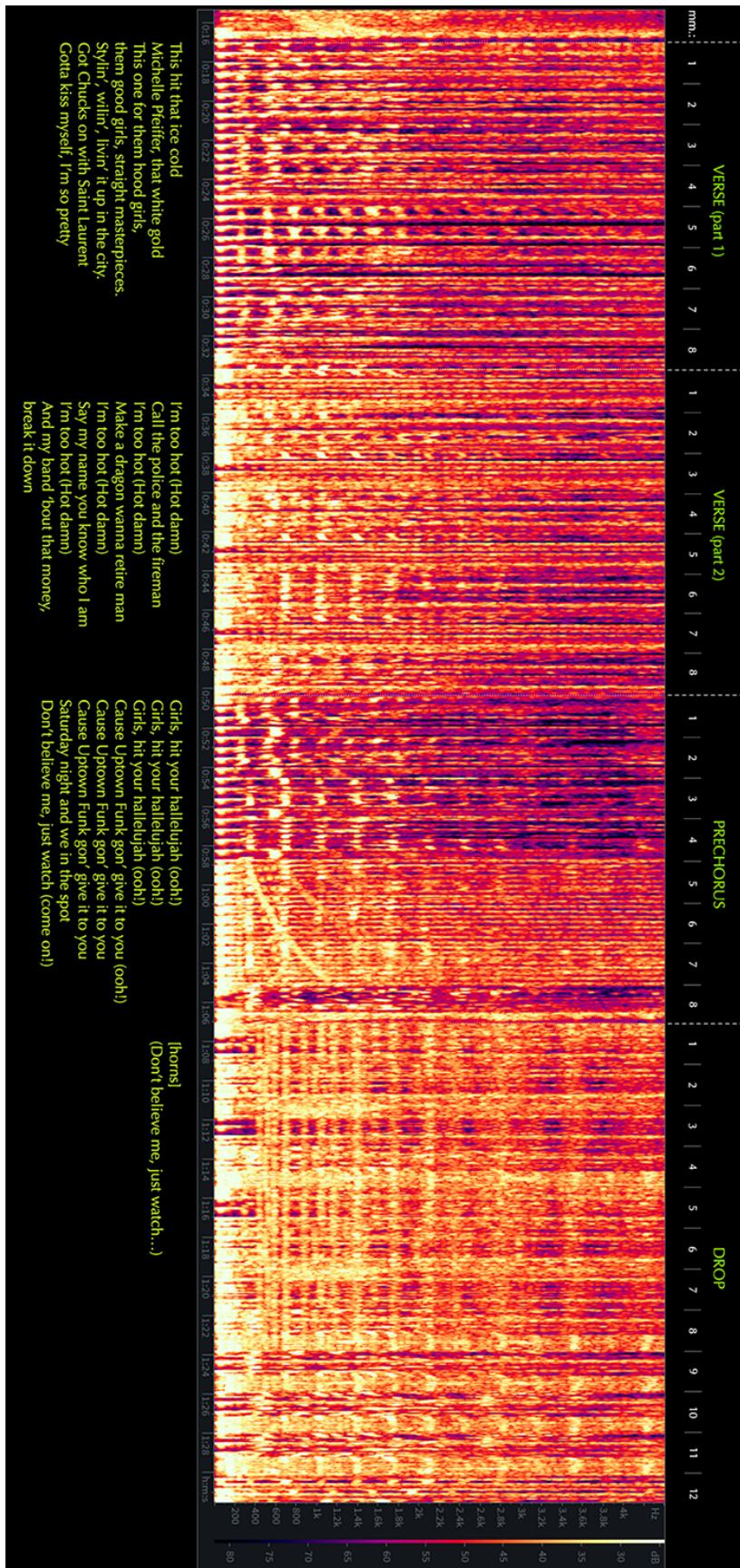
Example 34. Zedd, Maren Morris, and Grey, “The Middle” (2018)



Example 35. Bruno Mars, “That’s What I Like” (2016)



Example 36. Mark Ronson feat. Bruno Mars, "Uptown Funk" (2014)



Example 37. Billie Eilish, “Bad Guy” (2019) and Dua Lipa, “New Rules” (2017)

	“Bad Guy”	“New Rules”
INITIATION (Verse) (16m)	<p>White shirt, now red, my bloody nose Sleeping, you’re on your tippy toes, Creeping around like no one knows, Think you’re so criminal</p> <p>Bruises on both my knees for you Don’t say thank you or please, I do what I want when I’m wanting to, My soul: so cynical.</p>	<p>Talking in my sleep at night, making myself crazy. (Out of my mind, out of my mind.) Wrote it down and read it out, hoping it would save me. (Too many times, too many times.)</p> <p>My love, he makes me feel like nobody else, nobody else. But my love, he doesn’t love me, so I tell myself, I tell myself:</p>
BUILDUP (Prechorus? Chorus?) (8m)	<p>So you’re a tough guy, like-it-really-rough guy, just-can’t-get-enough guy, chest-always-so-puffed guy;</p> <p>I’m that bad type, make-your-mama-sad type, make-your-girlfriend-mad type, might-seduce-your-dad type</p>	<p>One: don’t pick up the phone; you know he’s only calling ‘cause he’s drunk and alone. Two: don’t let him in; you’ll have to kick him out again.</p> <p>Three: don’t be his friend; you know you’re gonna wake up in his bed in the morning. And if you’re under him, you ain’t getting over him.</p>
Title line, a cappella (“Chorus”?) (metrical insertion, ~1m)	<p>I’m the bad guy ... duh!</p>	<p>I got new rules, I count ‘em.</p>
ARRIVAL (Drop? Chorus? Post-chorus?) (8m)	<p><i>[instrumental]</i></p>	<p>I got new rules, I count ‘em. I gotta tell them to myself. I got new rules, I count ‘em. I gotta tell them to myself.</p>