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## Comment on Colin Campbell/2. "My Head Is Filled with Things to Say." How Can Those Words that Slipped Away Explain the Popularity of The Beatles?

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## Comment on Colin Campbell/2.

### “My Head Is Filled with Things to Say.” How Can Those Words that Slipped Away Explain the Popularity of The Beatles?

by Mats Trondman

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The words  
shaped their own presuppositions  
made a world out of “the world”  
Inger Christensen, *Scenen*

#### 1. Introduction

I wish to thank the editor Marco Santoro for inviting me to read Colin Campbell’s intriguing paper “*All Those Words They Seem to Slip Away*”: *How the Intentional Fallacy Prevents Serious Study of The Beatles’ Lyrics* [2016]. Obviously, the main title comes from the George Harrison’s song “*I Want to Tell You*” released on the album *Revolver* in 1966. How, then, can I resist doing what Campbell did? Picking another line from the same song for my own title, namely, “*My Head Is Filled with Things to Say.*” And then extending it with a more precise paraphrasing of the question that preoccupies my reading: How can those words that slipped away explain the popularity of The Beatles? This how-question comes with a double meaning. First, how does Campbell himself reason concerning the answer to this question? Second, how can he believe that the answer he provides us – that is, the words that slipped away – will be satisfying? I believe his answer is necessary, but not sufficient. Hence, I think that some work to deepen and extend his analysis is needed. Nonetheless, my critical examination of Campbell’s how-answer is at heart a positive one. It is, I will argue, a fitting and highly necessary approach to laying the foundation for a truly cultural sociological understanding that can explain the popularity of The Beatles, and do so by construing the weight of their art so as to place it at the very core of that explanation. I will thus need to do what is both expected and necessary. I begin by reconstructing what Campbell is saying or, rather, arguing, and end by bringing his stance into the territory of critical examination.

## **2. The Two Guiding Questions and Their Relationship: Genius and Popularity**

Two questions, I wish to assert, drive Campbell's paper. Let me call them his guiding questions. The first question, which I consider to be the foundational one, concerns the genius of The Beatles. What is, this question goes, that very genius? This provocative question, however, conceals two other questions. Why has this genius thus far not been explored? And, given that the discovery of this particular genius is required, how can we possibly detect it? Here I can do nothing but emphasize the "how", because we will not find out, at least not in Campbell's actual paper, what actually constitutes the genius of The Beatles. Thus, this first foundational question will not receive a full answer, although some hints, as I will show, are given. So what we do find out is why we need to know it and how we can get to know it. The second guiding question, then, concerns the popularity of The Beatles. Why, Campbell wonders, are they loved by so many? Accordingly, the first question concerns the art of The Beatles, because it is their songs that are the foci of Campbell's endeavor, while the second one refers to the people who are deeply affected by their artistic work, that is to their listeners, or even fans. We have thus two, somehow related questions. One is about genius: Why is the art of The Beatles so great? While the other concerns popularity: Why is the art of The Beatles so popular? Furthermore, it is Campbell's conviction that the answer to the first question is also the answer to the second. In other words, if we are correct in our knowledge of how we can know what constitutes the genius of the art of The Beatles, we will also know why their music is loved by so many. Hence, it is the high artistic value of The Beatles' songs that explains their greatness. Genius, then, explains popularity. The explanandum, that is, the phenomenon that is to be explained, then, is the popularity of The Beatles. The answer to why The Beatles are loved by so many, that is, the explanation for their popularity, or its explanans, is the genius of their art. Consequently, this is how we can understand why we need to know how to discover the genius of The Beatles' songs. If there is an aim in all this, it is to argue why we need to know and how we can discover the geniality of The Beatles, so that their genius can explain their popularity. If there is an additional aim, which by necessity precedes the first one, it is to reveal the inadequateness of other explanations. My struggle, of course, is to construe the outcomes of both aims.

### **3. From Sociology of Culture to Cultural Sociology: the Explanatory Turn**

The answer to the question of the geniality of The Beatles, then, is not going to be found by studying who their listeners think they are, what they believe in or what they think they are up to in relation to more or less determining socio-material circumstances and conflicting meaning systems embedded in the zeitgeist of their time. Neither is it to be found by investigating the biographies, dynamics, or intentions of the members of the group when the songs were written. On the contrary, along with Campbell we are in search of the intrinsic quality of The Beatles' songs themselves. It is exactly there and nowhere else that their genius is to be found. We are thus expected to take the art of The Beatles so seriously that it is the brilliance of their songs that explains their popularity. To use the ideal-type-like distinction from the strong program in cultural sociology, as it is laid out by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith [2003], we are going to move away from a sociology of culture – that is, a sociology that explains culture, for instance, aesthetic expressions, in relation to forms of social and material circumstances – toward a cultural sociology, that is, a sociology that takes culture, or in this case The Beatles' songs, so seriously that they are analytically ascribed the autonomy of causal power. This explanatory turn, as I will call it henceforth, enables us to bring art out of the territory of explanandum and into the territory of explanans. And to turn these songs, or, rather, as will be laid out, their lyrics, into that which can explain, we need to get to know their genius. Because it is the latter, as Campbell argues, that explains their popularity.

### **4. Campbell's Tasks**

In his reasoning concerning how we can get to know the genius of The Beatles' songs as explanans Campbell takes on three related tasks. He begins by giving us an account of the existing research on the actual songs. What are the scholars up to? What ideas and perspectives predominate? What is lacking? He then wants us to know the reason why the geniality of The Beatles, or, rather, the secret behind it, has not yet been discovered, at least not within the area of academic research targeting the lyrics. Fittingly, then, Campbell has to end by letting us know how the very genius of their art – more specifically, the brilliance of their lyrics – can be found. And, indeed, again, we really do need to understand this, because according to Campbell, it will properly explain The Beatles' popularity. In summary, then, he sets out to show us how to discover that very genius as explanans against the backdrop of existing, biased focal points and fault lines. I will thus try to reconstruct these related tasks.

The purpose of doing so is, of course, to lay a foundation for my critical examination of Campbell's stance and statements.

## **5. Previous Research: a Starting Point**

From Campbell's review of previous research on The Beatles' songs, we learn that the study of their lyrics is lagging behind the study of their music. Moreover, we learn that this lag is twofold. First, the music is more often studied than the lyrics. Second, the studies of The Beatles' lyrics that do exist within the humanities are not as properly as the studies of their music. I will need, then, to return to what Campbell thinks can be learned from the musicologists. But to conclude for now, we need, as a focal point, more and better studies of The Beatles' lyrics. Hence, we are left with two related questions that will be put to work in the two remaining associated tasks. First, why should the existing studies of The Beatles' lyrics not be considered adequate? This is Campbell's critique of two different but strongly related fault lines within the existing scholarly work on The Beatles' lyrics. Second, and accordingly, how can the lyrics be properly researched, and why should they be? The most basic answer to the second question will of course bring us back to the relations between the two guiding questions and the explanatory turn. Because, once again, we need to know how to know the genius of The Beatles' lyrics, so that this very genius can be construed as an explanation for The Beatles' popularity. But first we need to understand the fault lines that stand in the way of a proper solution, at least if we see things from Campbell's perspective.

## **6. The First Fault Line: The Inadequate Focal Point**

According to my reading, Campbell brings two fault lines to the fore in his critical examination. The first concerns scholars who study the content of The Beatles' lyrics, foremost those who count and categorize words in an attempt to identify basic themes or narratives in the songs, for instance classless ambition, tormented self-doubt, or political protest. Such scholars might also arrange the lyrics in chronological order and compare them to explore how different themes have come and gone or changed over time. What, then, according to Campbell, is wrong with this focal point and its analytic procedures and outcomes? Here I perceive three closely related lines of argument. First, there is no true, close textual analysis. Hence, we find no detailed and specified examinations of the lyrics. Principally, there is no attention paid, whatsoever, to the artistic use of language. We learn that a certain song refers

to childhood memories, betrayal, or lonely people, but we learn nothing about the way in which the representations of such memories, betrayals or people are aesthetically shaped into an art form. Thus, according to Campbell, the creative art of The Beatles' lyrics is in the end reduced to the themes that are revealed. Consequently, and second, this sort of analysis cannot address The Beatles' lyrics *per se*, that is, the quality they express in and for themselves as works of art. It has nothing, then, to tell us about the possible artistic brilliance of the lyrics, and, alas, if Campbell is right, it cannot explain the popularity of The Beatles. This is because such an analysis cannot construe, that which explains it, that is, the genius of The Beatles' lyrics. To Campbell, then, The Beatles are not great because their lyrics display certain themes. The lyrics are possibly a case of genius, *par excellence*, owing to The Beatles' artistic ability: how they creatively choose and use words and cleverly bring them into phrases that molds verses, bridges, and refrains into affective pop songs that, *in toto*, create great art. Accordingly, I cannot understand Campbell's stance as meaning anything other than that The Beatles' lyrics have the very quality that explains their popularity. And, yes, this is the explanatory turn and the cultural sociology that move the secret art of The Beatles' lyrics out of the territory of *explanandum* and into the territory of *explanans*. Because, and third, if we do not construe the genius of The Beatles, we cannot explain their obvious popularity.

## 7. The Second Fault Line: The Inadequate Explanation

Now, if the first fault line concerns the inadequate study of the content of The Beatles' lyrics, the second concerns the inadequate attempt to explain the content analysis that Campbell refutes. The second fault line, then, is demonstrated as a double error: it explains that which ought to be the explanation, that is, if the lyrics had been properly construed in the first place as art with intrinsic quality. But despite this accurate conclusion let us untangle some of the various types of inadequate explanations for the inadequate focal point. One type tries to explain the song themes by relating them to the life of the actual Beatles' lyricist, for instance to his unfolding biography within lived and changing historical circumstances, be they construed as economical, social or cultural. Alternatively, this first type of explanation may emphasize the analytical relevance of particular meaning-carrying events and encounters that the lyricist was part of. Lived experiences and forms of self-understanding of these wider influential forces or particular events and encounters might also be utilized as explanations. Another type of explanation may refer to the internal dynamics and changing relationships within The Beatles. Still another zooms in on the intention

behind a particular song theme as used by a specific lyricist. I will soon have more to say about this below.

All three types of explanations can of course be more or less interrelated and, hence, part of a varied enacting mix. For now, if not otherwise explicitly stated, I will place all of them under one umbrella by borrowing a labeling phrase from Campbell himself, namely, “the story behind the lyrics.” With such a story, then, the study of lyrics reduced to themes turns into an investigation of the circumstantial lives, situated interactions, or varyingly pure intentions of the lyric-writing members of The Beatles. Thus, “*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*,” for example, comes from a painting by John Lennon’s son Julian. Or, “*Hey Jude*” is actually “*Hey Jule*,” that is, a song about the same Julian who did the painting. This is what Campbell himself concludes regarding what he designates as a “sad outcome”:

The story *in* the lyrics becomes largely indistinguishable from the story *behind* the lyrics [2016, 4]

Such an analytic practice, of course, turns endeavors on their head. Instead of letting the artistic brilliance of lyrics, that is, genius, explain the popularity of The Beatles, the story behind the lyrics is allowed to explain their life-based theme content in terms of that very life. What we have are, therefore, two inadequate deeds in one move. Thus, with the second fault line, the lyrics become the explanandum, that is, that which needs to be explained, whereas the story behind the lyrics becomes the explanans, that which explains. Consequently, there cannot be any secret genius to be discovered. There can only be song themes explained by the profanity of everyday life in a particular society. That is how “*Norwegian Wood*” becomes a song dealing with a love affair that the mother of the boy who painted “*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*” and who was sung about by Paul McCartney in “*Hey Jude*” should not know about. In conclusion, there is no art and, consequently, no influence of art, here, there or anywhere. What we would really like to know, then, is how an artistic genius could be construed that can explain the popularity of The Beatles. But before going there, we are, following Campbell, in need of an analytically productive detour. Appropriately enough, we have reached the very heart of his critique of the existing research on The Beatles’ lyrics – a critique that is emphasized in the title of his paper, namely, the phenomenon of intentional fallacy. When we properly comprehend this fallacy, we can, if we agree with Campbell, properly discover how to know the genius of The Beatles lyrics’ as explanans.

## 8. A More Targeted Critique of The Fault Lines: The Intentional Fallacy

Let us, then, take a closer look at Campbell's more detailed critique of the actual fault lines, – a critique that pertains to the problems of trying to understand and judge a work of art by focusing on the story behind it, primarily the intention(s) of the artist who created it. This actual critique is to a certain extent influenced by a particular movement within American literary criticism, first eventually formulated by John Crowe Ransom in his book *The New Criticism* in 1941. Let me try to explain what I consider to be the core meaning of this New Criticism in terms of what I will call its three pillars. I will begin, and stay awhile, with the two first pillars. The reason for this, I will argue, is that Campbell explicitly embraces the first two pillars, but implicitly rejects the third. With that I will see no problem at all.

The first pillar concerns the strongly defined focus on the intrinsic quality of written art works rather than on the story behind them. Therefore we need to understand and judge the quality of The Beatles' lyrics in their own right. Their presumed quality is thus not explained by the possible intention(s) of the lyricist, but, again, by their own quality as autonomous works of art. Explaining the genius of The Beatles, then, taking the song "*A Day in the Life*" as an example, is not a matter of focusing on whether the song is about a particular drug, or the limitations of everyday life perception, or a newspaper article on rutted roads in Blackburn, Lancashire, or the death of a rich women, at the time a well-known follower of London underground pop and fashion, or the alienating effects of the media, or people watching a movie about someone who won a war, or that dreams actually can make life beautiful, or about all of these things at the same time [see MacDonald 1994]. Thus, once again, the artist's intentions cannot explain the geniality of the artwork. Fittingly, then, the second pillar concerns attempts to overcome the distinction between what are conventionally known as "form" and "content." Doing art involves searching for a form through which a particular content, like a lot of holes in a road in Blackburn, Lancashire, can be aesthetically and, hence, artistically expressed. Thus, it is the task of scholarly work to, once again, understand and judge the intrinsic quality of, as an example, how the generation gap between the young woman and her parents in "*She's Leaving Home*" is aesthetically expressed and thus becomes not only a theme, or issue, but a representation of art as quality. Thus, the intention behind the John Lennon song "*Norwegian Wood*," which may be to tell about a betrayal without revealing it, is not what renders its lyric an art form. Accordingly, with these two closely associated pillars in place, we are in complete harmony with Campbell's own line of argument, inasmuch as the New Criticism rejects an analysis that is reduced to thematic content only. It also rejects the notion that the story behind the lyrics, for instance intentions,



can provide a thorough explanation of works of art. Fittingly, then, this school of criticism rejects both the first and second fault line.

Now, before moving on to the third pillar of the New Criticism, I need to say something more about Campbell's core critique concerning the possible intentions underlying the lyrics.

So what, then, more precisely, are the intentional fallacies found in explanations for lyrics? Here are three significant ones. First, it is not possible to know the intention(s) of an individual Beatles member when he wrote the lyric to a particular song. What we may get is a report on possible intentions, that is, if the lyricist is aware of and can remember what his intentions were during the process through which the song supposedly came into being. Thus, can the intention of "*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*" really be reduced to a representation of a picture painted by John Lennon's son Julian? Second, The Beatles' lyrics may not necessarily be an outcome of intentions, and even if they are, the dramatic speaker, that is, the one telling the story in the song, for instance in "*I Should Have Known Better*," is not the same person with the same intention as the one who wrote the lyrics. Hence, and third, even if we do have more or less knowable intentions, we must not confuse them with what they turn out to be in terms of artistic expressions. Why? Because artistic license is also at play here, that is, the desire to select words and phrases to create artistic effects, which is not the same thing as a true account of the lyricist's intentions or life story. To summarize: Intentions may not be possible to know but even if we could know them, the outcome is not reducible to them because artists actually strive for artistic effects. We could also add, of course, that most listeners do not like songs because the intentions behind them may be graspable. In other words, the fact that so many people love The Beatles may not best be explained by the fact that a real Eleanor Rigby is buried in a real churchyard in Liverpool. Thus, we must not lose sight of the fact that each and every Beatles' song, when recorded and released, comes with a life of its own as a text, that is, a song made out of sounds we call music and lyrics. And, hence, an understanding of these particular sounds as art cannot be reduced to the possible intentions or other stories behind their creation. Nor can these possible stories explain the genius of the lyrics. And isn't it insulting to The Beatles as artists to reduce their songs to something other than the songs themselves? I can do nothing but concur with the worth of treating their songs as valuable forms of art that can enact something, or move us, even if we know nothing about the real Eleanor Rigby or the intentions, or affections, that might have been at work in Paul McCartney's mind and body at the time the song came into being as the pop masterpiece it undeniably is. But if we dare to make such an interpretative judgment, we also need to dare to

try to discover how to know what that genius might consist of. If we are prepared to agree on the need for this explanatory turn, we are still on track with Campbell.

## 9. The Third Pillar: The Affective Fallacy

The New Criticism, as the reader knows, also comes with a third pillar: there should be no attention paid whatsoever to the eventually effects, or rather affects, of the piece of art under study. Hence, the intrinsic quality of the aesthetic form should be explored and valued without suggesting any bonds to extrinsic meanings and outcomes. The New Criticism, then, not only rejects the search for the story behind a particular piece of written art, that is, why and how it came into being, but also the artwork's affects, that is, why and how it eventually came to be so well loved by so many, in other words, the story behind its popularity. Accordingly, there is not only an *intentional* fallacy but also an *affective* one [Baldick 2001, 225]. An advocate of the New Criticism would thus be completely content while seeking out the intrinsic aesthetic quality of a particular lyric through a close reading of it. In other words, there is a complete lack of interest in both the production and reception of culture and art. No "art world" [Becker 1984], then, and no "art experiences" [Gadamer 1989]. However, this is not to argue that processes of becoming and affects do not exist. It is rather to argue that such analytic practices do not help in understanding and judging the aesthetic quality inherent in an actual piece of art. Thus, it is the text and nothing but the text that needs to be taken into account. Close readings of The Beatles' lyrics, then, would of course require that the advocate of the New Criticism finds the lyrics' intrinsic aesthetic quality worthy of such an analytic procedure. But here we do not need to hesitate, because Campbell himself appears to embody a seemingly unshakable faith in the outcome of such an enterprise.

Nevertheless, the third pillar actually puts Campbell in a somewhat *contradictory position* visa-à-vis the advocates of the New Criticism. On the one hand, he rejects the notion that the story behind the lyrics can provide a proper explanation of the popularity of the Beatles. The reason, as we know, is that the underlying story has nothing to say about the intrinsic quality of aesthetic forms. It does not care about art and it cannot analytically demonstrate artistic quality. Here, then, it is unquestionably the case that Campbell is on the side of the New Criticism. In other words, he is in full agreement with, and hence embraces, the critique of the intentional fallacy. Indeed, he wants us to seek out the intrinsic quality of The Beatles' lyrics. On the other hand, he also wants to properly explain why The Beatles are loved by the many, that is, their popularity. Thus, he also manages to embrace what the advocates of the

New Criticism would refute as the affective fallacy. But, of course, this is exactly what Campbell needs to do, because, as we have seen, he wants to explain popularity in relation to genius. He is thus a cultural sociologist inspired by the conviction that culture or, in this case, the art of The Beatles, actually can explain an affect such as love for The Beatles. So many people's love of The Beatles, then, is caused by The Beatles themselves, because not everyone who writes a song about a son's painting, a husband's betrayal, a young woman leaving her childhood home or, for that matter, the ruts in the road in Blackburn, Lancashire, is by necessity a member of a pop group as successful as The Beatles. Consequently, there must be something special about The Beatles themselves. To Campbell, this something special is, as we know, the inherent aesthetic quality of their art or, in his view, not only their music but also their lyrics. To make this argument, he needs, as we have seen, to stage two strongly associated moves. He will first have to demonstrate the intrinsic quality of The Beatles' lyrics, which is what determines their genius: How do we know what constitutes that genius? He will then have to demonstrate that this established genius actually is able to explain the group's popularity: How can genius explain popularity? In other words, he needs to construe that very genius that is able to explain why The Beatles are loved by so many. The answer to the why-question that aims at explaining the popularity of The Beatles, then, requires answers to two how-questions: How can we demonstrate the intrinsic quality of The Beatles' lyrics that determines their genius and how can we demonstrate the particular genius that determines their popularity? This, of course, brings us back to the notion of the explanatory turn and a truly cultural sociology, that is, not to let the story behind the lyrics explain the thematic content of the lyrics, but to let the intrinsic quality of the lyrics, that is, their genius, explain their popularity. Accordingly, then, because Campbell cannot get any satisfaction out of sticking to a close reading of The Beatles' geniality, he also needs to willingly embrace what advocates of the New Criticism would reject as the affective fallacy. In other words, by accepting the first two pillars of the New Criticism, that is, by rejecting the story behind the lyrics and focusing on the intrinsic quality of the written artwork, he has convinced himself that he can properly explain The Beatles' popularity by embracing the affective fallacy. Here we end up with what seems to be a paradox. The affective fallacy Campbell embraces turns out to be the *explanandum*, while the *explanans* is that genius finds its legitimate foundation in the demonstration of intrinsic quality, which can be discovered if one avoids getting caught up in the logic of the intentional fallacy. Campbell, then, who turns out to be a double-dealing heretic, at least as the advocates of the New Criticism would see it, would have fallen out with these scholars, inasmuch as he blends the sacred – intrinsic quality – with

the secular – listener affect – by letting the former explain the latter. I cannot but quote Mary Douglas from *Purity and Danger*, where she writes that

we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place [2002, 44]

which, in turn,

implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order [*Ibidem*].

In using this logic we can know that

where there is dirt there is a system [*Ibidem*],

but, so far, so good, because in this struggle we are, at least for now, on Campbell's side.

## 10. Answers to The How-Questions

We are now back to where we started, that is, with the question that preoccupies my reading of Campbell's paper: How can the words that slipped away explain the popularity of The Beatles? To answer this question, we need to know two things, namely, the answers to my guiding questions. First, how can Campbell detect, or even explain, the genius of The Beatles? Because there is no doubt that what constitutes their genius will also explain their popularity. Thus, it would seem that we really do need to know what it is *in* The Beatles' lyrics that makes them loved by so many people. But, as we already know, we do not really get to know what that is. Rather, we can learn something about "how" this particular "what" that constitutes the "why" can be understood. However, I will share some thoughts about what that "what" might be. Second, how can the quality of The Beatles' lyrics explain their popularity? To answer this question, we may not only need to know what constitutes the genius of The Beatles, but also what those who like The Beatles like about The Beatles. Do they care about the lyrics? And, if they do, do they like the lyrics so much that these concatenations of words provide *the* answer to the band's popularity? Or, if these fans do not care about the lyrics, or do not really know what they think, is it still possible to say that it is the lyrics that explain the band's popularity – given that these loving listeners may not be able to express what it is that constitutes the "genius-what" of the "popularity-why"? Do we not need to know the adoring listeners' answer, even if they give us the stories behind the lyrics or interpretations of themselves as self-explanations for their love of Beatles? I will return to these issues, but for now, let us start with the answer that Campbell provides to my first guiding question. Keep

in mind, then, that he does not explicitly tell us what it is. What we get instead are suggestions for how to go about finding the answer. And, actually – I will not deny it – Campbell does provide some hints as to what might constitute that genius. I will thus briefly look into this question as well, but also as promised, share some of my own thoughts on what The Beatles' genius might be, that is, if I properly try to understand what Campbell is trying to accomplish.

How, then, against the backdrop of inadequateness of previous research, can we get to know the genius of The Beatles? First and foremost, Campbell's answer goes, by conducting a close study of the lyrics in their own right. The lyrics and nothing but the lyrics should thus be the source of meaning in our search for understanding what constitutes this genius. There should be no reference to anything whatsoever outside lyrics. For the lyrics have their own merits, that is, their own intrinsic qualities, and it is on the basis of these very qualities that the genius of the lyrics should be judged. Accordingly, getting to know what this particular genius is entails detecting these qualities. Because, as we know, it is thus precisely these qualities that can explain why The Beatles gained so much popularity. So far, I believe I understand what Campbell is getting at. But can we possibly get more out of Campbell's ideas that will help us grasp what may constitute The Beatles' genius? Moreover, what kind of scholarly work is required to capture the intrinsic quality that defines this genius? Indeed, Campbell does make some suggestions in his paper, and I will briefly consider them below.

First, Campbell suggests that quite a bit could be learned from another discipline, namely musicology. The reason for this is that musicologists study the music, and not the story behind it. We are thus expected to see the parallel, that is, that we should focus on the lyrics and not, as we know by this time, on the story behind them. Accordingly, musicologists focus on things such as the nature of the vocal line, the rhythm, the harmony and the contributions of different instruments working together. What, then, does this kind of work look like when it is at its best? In this connection, Campbell presents a quote aimed at didactically displaying the genius of The Beatles music *par excellence*. This quote reflects musicologist Wilfrid Mellers' understanding of a part of The Beatles' song "*For No One*":

The bass descends evenly slowly down the scale from the tonic to subdominant, but then rises to flat seventh to approach the cadence [1973].

And, as Campbell knows well and mentions several times, these kinds of analyses are frequently found in Ian MacDonald's seminal work *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties* [1994]. But for me the question is: Are these kinds of close readings of the music for trained close readers only, or are they meant

to explain why The Beatles are loved by so many? In other words, do they purposefully practice the affective fallacy? Or, do these kind analyses of such phenomena as descending bass lines really explain why The Beatles are loved by a lot of people? Honestly, for reductive reasons, I hesitate, but do not really know. Nevertheless, the interesting thing here is what these kinds of music analyses imply for close readings of the lyrics. Obviously, they mean that the genius of The Beatles' lyrics should be sought by conducting close readings of phenomena such as word choice, phrasing, and the structure of the lyrics, emphasizing in particular the aesthetic and, hence, the artist side of this kind of language usage, because, as we know, we should not restrict ourselves to brief descriptions of thematic content. We are not satisfied, then, with explaining the genius of The Beatles by saying that "*Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite*" is about an old poster for a Victorian circus of acrobats that John Lennon happened to see in Sevenoaks in Kent while doing a promotion film for another Beatles' song, namely "*Strawberry Fields Forever*." However, in the end he did not like the song because he felt no personal suffering in writing it. No, indeed, we are not interested in the story behind John Lennon's self-imposed agony; we are interested solely in the intrinsic quality of the lyrics. I cannot, then, help but think that Campbell's search for The Beatles' geniality might be, to use the title of a book by language wizard Mark Forsyth, about *The Elements of Eloquence: How to Turn the Perfect English Phrase* [2013]. One would think, of course, that a book with such a title is about language usage in the plays of William Shakespeare. And, indeed, it partly is, but it is also, at least on some occasions, about the lyrics of The Beatles. When Forsyth explains *polyptoton* as "one of the lesser known rhetorical tricks," because it is supposed to have "no glamour" and "isn't taught to schoolchildren" [*Ibidem*, 14], he uses the lyrics of a Beatles' song as his key example. So, what, then, is a *polyptoton*? It "involves," Forsyth writes,

the repeated use of one word as different parts of speech or in different grammatical forms [*Ibidem*].

It "remains", he adds, and I cannot imagine for anything but ironic reasons, "incurably unsexy" [*Ibidem*]. For it turns out to be that, again in Forsyth's own words, "one of the best known examples of *polyptoton* is a song that is sometimes said to be about" – yes, thematic content yet again – "oral sex" [*Ibidem*]. The actual example is "*Please Please Me*," written mainly by John Lennon. This is how Forsyth puts it:

The first *please* is please the interjection, as in "Please mind the gap." The second *please* is a verb meaning to give pleasure, as in "This pleases me." Same word: two different parts of speech [*Ibidem*].

Forsyth then points out that he really does not know whether the song is about oral sex or not. However, its lyric is an example *par excellance* of a true *polyptoton*. Did John Lennon know, Forsyth wonders, about such things? This is his answer:

All that we know about John Lennon's motivations for writing it is that he had a specific interest in polyptoton (even if he may not have known the name). When Lennon was a child, his mother used to sing him a Bing Crosby song called "Please." The lyrics went like this:

"Oh please,  
Lend your little ear to my pleas  
Lend a ray of cheer to my pleas" [*Ibidem*, 14-15].

Did John Lennon offer an explanation of his own? Yes, in fact he did.

"I was always intrigued", he once said, "by the double use of the word 'Please'" [*Ibidem*, 15].

Thus, he knew of and liked *polyptotons*, albeit without knowing the term. And he used the same rhetorical device on several occasions. For instance in "*All You Need Is Love*":

Nothing you can do that can't be done/Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.

To return to Mary Douglas's understanding of dirt and order, then, I have just used the sacred and the profane at the same time. The sacred, of course, exhibits how we can know what the genius of The Beatles may be, that is, the clever and artistic mastery of the rhetorical device of the polyptoton. And, yes, this is what I think Campbell might be after. If this is so he could then read Forsyth's entire book, that is, *The Elements of Eloquence: How to Turn the Perfect English Phrase*, and learn not only about polyptotons, but also about many other rhetorical devices such as alliteration, antithesis, merism, the blazon, synesthesia, aposiopesis, hyperbaton, anadiplosis, hypotaxis, parataxis, epistrophe and another nearly thirty tricks concerning how to turn a perfect phrase. And, then, by doing exactly that, he would be able to detect the intrinsic qualities in the lyrics that prove the geniality of The Beatles. Whether or not they knew about these devices, then, hardly matters, because we are not in search of any intentions or any other story behind their lyrics. If such devices simply exist in the lyrics, we can – informed by these elementary forms of eloquence – know exactly what may constitute The Beatles' genius. "*Please Please Me*," then, may be just such a paradigmatic *exemplar*. Just as "*Love Me Do*". But admittedly, I have also been highly profane, because I have been talking about the content of the song "*Please Please Me*" and the story behind it. But perhaps I can be excused, as I was only quoting Forsyth who obviously deals in both the sacred and the profane. Nonetheless, I think

I have given the reader a pertinent answer to the question of how Campbell might go about getting to know what the intrinsic qualities that make up the genius of The Beatles' lyrics actually are. Indeed, he himself, and rightly so, I think, calls for a sort of technical language that can do the job for him, so that he himself can avoid to be the subjective *illuminati* of the intrinsic quality of The Beatles' lyrics. The elementary forms of eloquence, then, may be the answer Campbell is looking for, and thus one might be tempted to suggest that he read Forsyth and detect this genius by studying The Beatles' use of rhetorical devices. In this way, we might come to know the "what" of the genius that explains their popularity.

If one approach to figuring out the genius of The Beatles' lyrics is to heuristically learn from musicology, Campbell also provides two more how-suggestions. The first one, again, concerns the intrinsic qualities of the lyrics, but with a different emphasis, and the second refers to the use of comparison to detect the geniality of The Beatles.

As I comprehend Campbell's stance, he feels we should carry out close readings of all of The Beatles' songs, but he also feels we need to discover the intrinsic quality of their "total body of work." This is because, according to him, these songs make up a *collective unity*, and that unity has "somehow been lost." The risk, then – to use Campbell's own metaphor – is that we will fail to see the forest for the trees. But what is the solution to being able to see the forest? Is the intrinsic quality of the collective unity an expression of the elementary forms of eloquence that run through the entire Beatles *oeuvre*? Basically, I do not know and, hence, I'm merely guessing. But maybe the outcome of the analyses of separate songs, grasped together, needs to be synthesized in search of a common ground, that is, a possible core quality of the Beatles collective work.

Campbell also argues for the need for comparison. He thinks it may be a good idea to compare the intrinsic quality of The Beatles' lyrics with the possible intrinsic quality of other music groups from that era. I suppose this means that he wants to compare with lyrics from groups like The Kinks, The Hollies, The Small Faces and The Rolling Stones. Do they achieve the same level of cleverness and artistic and aesthetic outpouring as The Beatles did? I suppose that is an empirical question, but it can really only be answered if we know the theoretical criteria used on the judgment day. And, indeed, I would like Campbell to tell us more about that. Will Forsyth's rhetorical devices be of any help in this judging endeavor?

Finally, if we actually do hold on to Campbell's strivings, how can the "what" of the Beatles genius, detected, as suggested, by rhetorical devices from a particular form of Literary Criticism, explain the popularity of the Beatles? I suppose the answer will be along the same lines as John Lennon's cleverly use of *polyptotons* without knowing



about the concept. Hence, the listeners who love the Beatles do not necessarily know devices such as the *polyptoton*, but they do feel that it sounds good to hear them sing the word play “*Please Please Me*.” And so we also have some clue as to what the answer to the second how-question might be. The listeners love the Beatles because they somehow know what Lennon did though without being able to give it a name – just as Lennon himself did not know what the device he was using was called, namely *polyptoton*. But “*Please Please Me*,” he sang, and “*Please*,” the fans responded, “*Please Me*.” Clearly, more or less unconsciously, probably due to the fact that this *polyptoton* might work as a cultural trope, that is, culture, the Beatles did please them, and, hence, thereby winning their love. This is, basically, how I understand Campbell’s conviction in action, at least if I believe him to be one of the objective *illuminati* of the Beatles’ genius, as *explanans*, and their popularity, as *explanandum*. But as the reader knows from the main title of my paper, there is still one section left, because “*My head is filled with things to say*”.

## 11. Consensus and Critical Examination

My critical examination of Campbell’s stance is deeply rooted in a threefold consensus. First, trying to be a *cultural* sociologist, I fully agree with Campbell on the need to take the art of The Beatles seriously. Accordingly, and second, I appreciate his recognition of the need for what I have called the explanatory turn, which entails thinking of The Beatles’ songs as *explanans*, that is, as something that can be attributed the power to explain why so many people love The Beatles, that is, popularity as *explanandum*. Third, we then need to know what constitutes their particular genius and how it can explain popularity.

In my reading of Campbell’s paper, I have, so far, tried to reconstruct how I comprehend his answers to what I have called the two guiding questions, namely, *what* is this genius with the power to explain and *how* can it explain *why* The Beatles are loved by so many people. But I have also tried to suggest how this can be done without using what he would consider to be an inadequate focal point, such as song themes or narratives, and without falling victim to the intentional fallacy of the stories behind the lyrics. At the same time, I have tried to answer the call for affects in the affirmative, that is, exactly what the school of New Criticism rejected as the affective fallacy. How serious, then, should we consider the school of New Criticism to be? Unquestionably, it too is enacted by a sharply outlined intention (not to study intentions or any story behind) and from the early 1930s and onwards it gained great popularity among many scholars. Its prime movers and carrier groups must have en-

joyed the affect it created, though such things, of course, is nothing but a fallacy, and, hence, should be completely rejected. Or, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz's cultural understanding of a country's politics in his essay *The Politics of Meaning: How the logic of the movement of the New Criticism*

reflects the design of its culture [1993a, 311].

The intriguing puzzle for Geertz, then, was

how it is that every people gets the politics it imagines [*Ibidem*].

Now, with this threefold consensus established as my bottom line, I move into the territory of critical examination, which concerns three interlaced areas of critique. These areas should be understood as remarks, questions and suggestions for further development. They are *not*, then, a designed program for a cultural sociology of the geniality and popularity of The Beatles.

## 12. What is Geniality and Popularity?

First, we have not really understood what the intrinsic quality of The Beatles' lyrics is that is supposed to constitute the geniality of their songs. Nor do we know how that genius can be detected. Yet we do get some hints, upon which I have elaborated a bit in relation to what I called "the elementary forms of eloquence". But I do not find this my own answer altogether adequate. I have also struggled with the meaning of the concept and dubious phenomenon of genius, which, to my knowledge, has meant very different things historically, such as the guiding spirit of a person or a place, an innate disposition or a talent, a measure of intelligence, trusted intuition, originality or even a person disconnected from society. The same, I think, applies to the meaning of popularity defined as being loved by many people. It would seem, then, that we need to know more about the core concepts and phenomena: What is genius and what is popularity? Both in terms of how these phenomena are being construed and, again, what they turn out to be about. In such endeavors we have to remember that whatever comes before us as concepts and phenomena, as Paul Franco puts it in his reading of Michael Oakeshott, "already belongs to a specific world of meaning" [2004, 47]. Accordingly, what seems to be given "facts' are not fixed and inviolable; they are completely dependent on the whole world to which they belong" [*Ibidem*]. Or, as Oakeshott himself formulates it in *Experience and Its Modes*:

The truth of each facts depends upon the truth of the worlds of facts to which it belongs, and the truth of the world of facts lies in the coherence of the facts which compose it [1933, 113].

Nevertheless, I still believe that it is possible to talk about some sort of autonomy of the art, and, hence, also the art of the Beatles, because it is not only an art of the world, it is also an art in the world that is not totally reducible to it. Just as when Stephen Greenblatt tries to explain how the unknown boy William Shakespeare became the well-known dramatist William Shakespeare, would we not want to know how four lads from Liverpool became the Beatles. Why would we not like to, to paraphrase Greenblatt, thread the shadowy path that leads from the life they lived into the music and lyrics they created [2004, 12]? And with this forbidden fruit in hand would we not want to know how they developed and used their imaginations and artistic skills to transform their and other people's lives into expressions of pop songs as art? But also, and, predominantly so, would we not like to know how they allowed that extrinsic world to come into their art, so that the intrinsic quality of their art could affectively move so many listeners? Accordingly, then, as scholars we need to use our own imagination to understand the quality and affects of that Beatles' *oeuvre*. Or, how did they manage the world to come into their art, so that their art became a world of art that move itself from *explanandum* to *explanans*? This is how Greenblatt puts it in his book *Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare*:

To understand how he did it so effectively, it is important to look carefully at his verbal artistry – his command of rhetoric, his uncanny ventriloquism, his virtual obsession with language [2004, 14].

Yes, I think we need to do the very same thing with the understanding of the genius and popularity of The Beatles. And, hence, to develop a well-needed interest in the world and the *zeitgeist* out of which The Beatles came, which is not the same thing as forgetting their art as *explanans*. Rather, we cannot get hold of the power of their art without an understanding of the world out of which its artistry came, an artistry that in turn contributed to change the world it came out of without ending up in marginality, since their newness, or, rather, strangeness, to borrow from Greenblatt's writing on Shakespeare,

hides within the boundaries of the everyday [*Ibidem*, 390].

We are, then, I would argue, in need of some intentional fallacies to get hold of the affective-ness of the genius and the popularity of the Beatles. Just as the art of Shakespeare, as Greenblatt puts it,

is a highly social art, not a game of bloodless abstractions [*Ibidem*, 11],

so it is, I believe, with the art of The Beatles. Hence, both Shakespeare and The Beatles are vivid expressions of art of an actual, lived experience in and, possibly, out

of time and place, and both contributed, I would like to think, to the invention of new forms of art and of being human. But, indeed, I am now running ahead of my line of arguments. I will thus take a step back and, then, move from hence.

### 13. How Is The Genius Related to Popularity?

Second, we would also need to know more about the relationships between genius as explanans and popularity as explanandum: That is, how can genius explain popularity? And from this follows, I believe, a great many issues to deal with. What is it about the intrinsic quality of the lyrics that explains popularity? Does each and every listener really care about the lyrics? Do they even understand them? Myself, I fell in love with The Beatles in my hometown of Kalmar in Sweden in the early 1960s. At that time, I did not know a single word of English, a language that I unfortunately still grapple with. To me, as I comprehend it now, after the fact, The Beatles were more like a sign of the times that somehow told you what you could become and not end up like your mother and father. It was that very thing that was blowing in the wind, and you just followed, since it was the right thing to do. And it felt marvelous. Nowadays, as I approach retirement, the sound of The Beatles' songs is there as a sort of "afterward-ness" of the soundtrack of my life, and as such makes up the distance between the "then" – of doing the right thing – and the "now" – of looking back and seeing how The Beatles also became a part of my increasing social mobility. This mobility was enacted by the promise of the pop culture art of the 1960s, which even allowed a working-class boy like me to freely listen to alternative music, read poetry, look at paintings and watch quirky movies. Popular culture, I think, is an underestimated causal power for that which in Sweden has become known as "class travelling" [Trondman 1994]. And the "afterwardness", as James Wood understands it in *The Nearest Thing to Life*, is that

it is too late to do anything about it now, and too late to know what should have been done. And that may be all right [2015, 115].

So how, then, should we deal with all the variations? Obviously, not everyone who listens to the music of The Beatles will automatically become a Beatles fan. I am also thinking about history in terms of times and zeitgeists that are constantly, as Bob Dylan sang, "a-changin'" while new young generations will emerge and grow up. I am not saying that young people of today could not acquire a taste for The Beatles; I am only saying that they will have to do so under very different circumstances, and within new landscapes of meanings [Reed 2011; Trondman forth.]. They will not create a new original "collective memory" out of being there when it happened for the first

time. Rather, they will be among those who connects with a “cultural memory”, that is, in the words of Oona Frawley, writing about novelist Colm Tóibín,

that which stretches beyond the limited horizon of several generations and functions instead as a repository for the narratives, records and symbols on which culture draws its shape and identity [2008, 71].

Tóibín’s work, Frawley argues,

functions as an exploration of such repository, and confronts this repository through a combination of factual and fictional approaches” [*Ibidem*].

I believe the Beatles did so too when creating their sound art as explanans. It also means, as in Tóibín’s work, that their power of imaginations – as a sort of sounding meaning system – came to enact our history as biographies and collective memories. That is how the Beatles, I think, became a living inside of those who came to love them, that is, as Wilhelm Dilthey once formulated it in his *Fragments for a Poetics*, “a lived experiences” as

a distinctive and characteristic mode in which reality is there-for-me”, and “only in thought does it become objective [1985, 313].

#### **14. Is There a Need for a Musicality of Meaning?**

This takes me to my third area of examination. I believe, as has already been hinted above, that the explanatory turn, informed by a cultural sociology, needs a broader outlook. It cannot stop with the lyrics and the music, that is, the songs, only. I fully support locating the art of The Beatles at the very center of explanation. This is definitely needed, but it is, I would argue, not enough to explain the popularity of the Beatles. It is not even enough to explain the genius of the lyrics by looking only at the lyrics, because what is considered the intrinsic quality of the lyrics also needs to be understood from, for example, a hermeneutical, rhetorical or linguistic perspective, in which art becomes art per se in context and art experience, at least in hermeneutics, is acquired as a whole structure of feeling in particular circumstances. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*:

Thus our concern is to view the experience of art in such a way that it is understood as experience [Erfahrung]. The experience of art should not be falsified by being turned into a possession of aesthetic culture, thus neutralizing its special claims. We will see that this involves a far-reaching hermeneutical consequence, for all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of that event. This is what must be emphasized against the aesthetic consciousness and its neutralization of the question of truth. [1989, 99].

Hence, as I conceive of it, we need to construe the art and the art experience both as a value judgment of the art and as an understanding of popularity. Accordingly, if we are to follow Gadamer, the work of art and art experience, as Donatella Di Cesare puts it in *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*,

“unfolds through the theme of play”, and it is this very play that “unites art and language” [2007, 48].

We need, then, to think about the play between the Beatles lyrics and the world and between The Beatles and the listeners, and, to figure out that very double play within more or less shared enacting landscapes of meanings [Reed 2011]. Because, as Erving Goffman once put it:

Life itself is a dramatically enacted thing [quoted from Alexander 2006, iix].

We can also borrow insights from Richard Toye’s introduction to *Rhetoric*:

[...] that the “meaning” of a given set of words cannot be derived purely from an analysis of the text, in isolation from an examination of the circumstances in which the text was delivered, mediated, and received. [2013, 4]

Or, we can move to general linguistics and quote Ferdinand de Saussure from *Course in General Linguistics*. Here linguistics is to be conceived of as that

which studies the role of signs as part of social life [1983, 18].

Determining what constitutes a word requires that one analyze this word in relation to other words. But the word itself does not result from the analysis of the sentence [in which it appears]. This is because a sentence only exists in discourse, whenever words are used. The word itself is a unit that lives outside discourse, in the mental treasure that is the system of language [quoted from Bouissac 2010, 145].

My main point, then, is that it is very difficult to understand the genius of the Beatles lyrics as explanans per se. We need to know how those words that seem to slip away can serve as causal power, but then we also need to know how it is possible for lyrics to have such powers. What are the circumstances under which they enact popularity? The best way to try to understand precisely this, I believe, is to first establish the autonomy of The Beatles’ songs as texts. In other words, we have to construe the lyrics of the Beatles as autonomous art, that is, as explanans. But when we begin explaining how these songs can tell us why the Beatles are loved by so many, we need to see how they work as explanans in relation to many other important and enacting aspects of living a meaningful social life in society. Inevitably, I think, we need to put the insight from hermeneutics, rhetoric, and linguistics to analytic work. It is of course not a bad idea to compare their work with lyrics from other pop groups from the same era and to see all the songs as a sort of work in toto, but I don’t think even

that would be enough. Just to give the reader an idea of what this actually can mean, I suggest a heuristic use of cultural sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander's "performance theory" as it is presented in the anthology *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* [2006]. So let us thus put the "text," that is The Beatles' songs, at the very epicenter of the analysis, and then try to explain its effects, or, again, rather affects, on popularity by trying to understand precisely these structure of feelings in relation to aspects such as a "system of collective representations," that is background symbols and foreground scripts, means of symbolic production, social power, actors, or artists, and audience and the *mise-en-scène* where they all come to life, or happen, as, if we like, play, in the moment and embedded in all other related aspects. Indeed, it would be inadequate not to show our interest in the art of The Beatles when explaining their popularity, but to really explain how the songs explain why and how The Beatles are loved by the many, we need to put to analytical work all the aspects, or elementary forms, of such a suggested performance theory. This does not, to remind the reader of Forsyth, take away the affective force of "*Please Please Me*" as a polyptoton, but it does allow us to know how it is possible for this song, as a piece of art, to work in a much wider and deeper meaning system in relation to power, artists, audiences and the concrete happening, when everything comes together to create the moment when a recorded song hits the listener under particular circumstances, experienced and interpreted in particular ways in time and place. And doing that I think, unavoidably so, we need to be informed by the following insights by Walter Kaufmann writing about drama in his seminal *Tragedy and Philosophy*:

Tragedies and comedies present symbolic actions, which is to say that they involve make-believe that is experienced as make-believe, that they are highly stylized in accordance with conventions that differ from age to age, and that the story chosen and handle with an eye to its effects, which is meant to be, for example, tragic, comic, or tragicomic. A playwright who does not know weather the intention of his play is to evoke tears or terror, gales of heedless laughter, or the kind of laughter that is close to tears ought to make up his mind before he finish the final version" [1992, 83].

Accordingly, I do not think that interest in the stories behind a text necessarily destroys the possibility to construe art as explanans. Rather it is often, for all the reasons given needed, not the least for tightening the stretch from words in and for themselves to the affects of, as in this case, The Beatles.

Let me give yet another reason for the need of the story behind, within enacting landscapes of meaning, without losing out on the affective-ness of art. Say that you except that listening to music arouse emotions and that these emotions can be considered to involve thoughts too. Hence, you listen, and, then, you feel and think. Why? I

am here briefly following a line of arguments from Martha C. Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. First, she argues, that emotions will be

about something: they have an object [2001, 27].

Let say a Beatles' song about a young women leaving her home. Did their parents not give her everything? Second, Nussbaum continues, this object, that is, for us, the actual Beatles' song, is

an intentional object [*Ibidem*].

The meaning of this is that

it figures in the emotions as it is seen or interpreted by the person whose emotion it is [*Ibidem*],

that is me, listen to "*She's Leaving Home*." Emotions, then, are

not about their objects merely in the sense of being pointed at them and let go, they way an arrow is released towards its target" [*Ibidem*].

No, the "about-ness" of these emotions is more internal, and embodies "a way of seeing" [*Ibidem*]. Third, the actual emotions are not only about an object and seeing that object, it is also unavoidably about "beliefs – often very complex – about the object", that is, in our case, the song "*She is Leaving Home*" while listening to it. To me, then, in this context, this emotional liking of "*She's Leaving Home*", which might actually be my favorite Beatles' song, is also thought. It could be thoughts about it as a great song but also thoughts about the meaning of leaving home, particularly so, at least for me, about leaving my own home, and identifying with a life in which being a part of pop and rock culture and playing music and buying records made my life utterly meaningful. And all this meaningfulness of lived youth culture and its signs, such as the lyrics and sounds of The Beatles, as well their shoes, their haircuts, their LP covers or their instruments, microphones, or amplifiers, is part of a wider enacting meaning system. Hence, my love of the Beatles' cannot be understood without all these deeply meaning-carrying complexities. And, indeed, expression of art they are, and an art that is not wholly determined by the world but actually depending on it in becoming an art in its on right. Yes, I do think that a lot of Beatles' songs do carry certain "objective possibility" [Willis 2014; Trondman *et al.* 2011] for being experienced as an act of genius that makes extra-ordinary popularity possible. Maybe it is possible here to paraphrase Emile Durkheim's on the science of education [1961]: "a science of the Beatles is possible, but Beatles is not that science." One need, of course, also to add that without the genial artistry of The Beatles there would not



be such well-needed demand for a cultural sociology of the Beatles as real art and deep appreciation.

I also think that scholarly work on art content, and, hence, not on form only, is of great and inescapable significance. Just before I started to work on these comments on Campbell's paper I read some of the essays from *When the Facts Change* [2015] by Tony Judt. I was particularly moved, both in thought and feeling, by his essay on the novel *The Plague* by Albert Camus [1948]. Now, Judt's essay has basically nothing to say, at least not explicitly, about the intrinsic artistic quality of the actual novel. I can only find one sentence were Judt comments on the artistry of Camus's work. This is how Judt puts it:

Camus's descriptions of the plague and on the pain of loneliness are exceptionally vivid and heartfelt [2015, 171].

Beside that the whole essay concerns

Camus's insistence on placing individual moral responsibility at the heart of public choices [*Ibidem*].

Accordingly, his understanding of heroism concerns

ordinary people doing extraordinary things out of simple decency [*Ibidem*].

And to display this he used

a biological epidemic to illustrate the dilemmas of moral contagion [*Ibidem*].

The book, then, as an allegory, is basically a moral tale about dogma, political murder and ethical responsibilities. It is thus about compliance and cowardice in all possible public forms. The plague, in this meaning of it, could be everywhere, even amongst ourselves in the academic institutions where we spend a great part of our lives. And to be a hero is not be a carrier of that plague. Well, I stop here, but my basic point is that it would, I believe, not have been satisfactory enough to read Camus's novel or Judt's review of it if it had "only" been about choices of words and the constructions of sentences. However, I do think that Camus's actual novel is a piece of art, and, hence, should also be read as such. Hence, "*She's Leaving Home*", is to be both about an experience that makes me heartfelt and a piece of art that really contributes sublimely in terms of music and lyrics, thoughts and feelings. Indeed, it would be rude, then, to treat it as only a song about leaving home, but to me it would be just as rude to say that is only about a clever use of certain notes in a string quartet and word choices. Fittingly, it is all these things coming to gether in the body of one song that makes it a great piece of art. Here Tia DeNora's stance in *Beethoven*

*and the Construction of Genius* [1995] comes handy. This is how she presents what I would call her analytical lens:

To understand Beethoven's success, we need to view it in the context of a wider reorientation of musical taste, as this reorientation occurred in a specific social and geographical setting. Furthermore, we need to consider how Beethoven's success affected the settings within which he operated. [...]. Doing so illustrates some of the ways music history does not simply evolve or develop, but is rather articulated "from the inside" by real individuals with reference to institutional, cultural, and practical contexts and in light of local contingencies. By following the way that particular individuals "made" music history, we can extend our understanding of the relationship between musical forms and social life [1995, 4].

DeNora's intention is thus by no means, as she puts it herself, "to debunk Beethoven" [*Ibidem*, xiii]. Perhaps genius, then, is the originality of artists who achieved what Beethoven, Shakespeare and The Beatles did. Indeed, all men in times when only men were allowed becoming such geniuses in classical music, drama or pop. But maybe George Elliot said it best:

Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. [quoted from Wood 2015, 1].

I think The Beatles did that: as art.

## 15. To End: *Annus Mirabilis*

Now, at the end of this paper, I am thinking about the famous and somewhat ironic piece of poetry by the English poet Philip Larkin named "*Annus Mirabilis*" [1988], that is, "the year of miracles", which starts like this:

Sexual intercourse began  
In Nineteen Sixty-Three  
(Which was rather late for me) –  
Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban  
And the Beatles' first LP.

And ends as follows:

So life was never better than  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(Though just too late for me) –  
Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban  
And the Beatles' first LP.

My end point is simple. To understand affects such as those ambiguously hinted at in the poem, we need the explanatory turn of a truly cultural sociology, and indeed, we need to begin construing the quality of the Beatles' art as a possible and significant *explanans*. But if we are to truly understand how such an autonomous body of artistic work can explain things, then, moving directly from the intrinsic quality of the lyrics to the listener affect will provide a much too thin description. We need thus a much tickier description of how the art of The Beatles can explain their popularity [Geertz 1993b]. In making such a description, we would lose neither the meaning of geniality nor that of popularity. Rather, we would actually be able to construe their meaning and quality more accurately and, hence, make further progress in the study of the Beatles' lyrics, preferably in relation to the music, so we can see, or detect, the affects of that, yes, sound and content, that is, the art sound, the reason, the emotion, the tragic beauty, the possible upcoming reconciliation, or not, of, let say, someone leaving their home. Because there is nothing you can see that cannot be shown. And there is nothing you can do that cannot be done. I picked that up from The Beatles, and though I do not know the story behind those words, they do provide me with a story to live my life with. Long after the *Chatterley* ban and the Beatles' first LP, which actually was a bit early for me, too. Nonetheless, it has not been my intention to leave Campbell's embryo of a program behind, but rather to advocate for the expansion I think it is in need of and to do exactly that without losing its belief in the power of the art of The Beatles. Indeed, to that very particular art and its affects, I feel profoundly loyal. I only ask for meaningful culture, that is, that something within which the art of the Beatles as *explanans* can be, as Geertz once put it in *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*,

intelligibly, that is, thickly – described [1993b, 14].

Perhaps, then, meaning, as a form of analytical musicality, is now moving into the heart of the study of The Beatles? Because I believe that the imaginative art of the Beatles can contribute to the cultural sociological imagination. Or, as Harold Bloom ends the introduction to his new book *The Daemons Knows*:

“Poems, novels, stories, plays matter only if we matter. They give us the blessing of more life, weather or not they initiate a time beyond boundaries” [2015, 7].

Maybe the Beatles did and still do? But how do we figure that out? So what do you say now Colin Campbell? Indeed, I want to know more from you. Hence, I leave you with a wonderful sentence that I found in an art review of Willem De

Kooning's by poet John Ashbery, *as if*, then, it concerned the sources of the Beatles art work:

*they are curiously independent of it and as it were coexisting with it.* [1989, 181].

That is, then, how genius might operate, also as popularity.

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## **Comment on Colin Campbell/2.**

“My Head Is Filled with Things to Say.”

How Can Those Words that Slipped Away Explain the Popularity of The Beatles?

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Abstract: The paper is an answer to Colin Campbell's intriguing paper “*All Those Words They Seem to Slip Away: How the Intentional Fallacy Prevents Serious Study of the Beatles' Lyrics*”. Two questions, it is argued, drives Campbell's paper. One is about genius: Why is the art of Beatles so great? The other concerns their popularity: Why is the art of Beatles so popular? To Campbell it is the genius of their art, not to forget the lyrics, that explains their popularity. The paper's critical examination of Campbell's explanatory turn, to let art explain popularity, is being conceived of as a well-needed cultural sociological one. However, the paper argues, there is a lot more we need to understand if we want to have the art of the Beatles to explain their popularity. Thus, it is a too thin of a description to move from intrinsic qualities of lyrics to affects of listeners.

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*Keywords: The Beatles; Popular Culture; Cultural Sociology; Meaning of Music; Pop Song Lyrics.*

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