POPULAR SONG ON THE DANCEFLOOR: WAYS OF HEARING DISCLOSURE'S »HOLDING ON« FEATURING GREGORY PORTER

Lorenz Gilli, Alex Harden, Bianca Ludewig, Patrick Pahner & Jeff Wragg

INTRODUCTION

The importance of subjectivity in popular song interpretations is often acknowledged, yet few publications actively explore the junctions between different subjective listenings. In their discussion of musical meaning, von Appen et. al. (2015: 1) suggest that »[n]o two listeners will have the same impressions, associations and emotions—although, due to cultural conditions, their reactions might resemble each other or, at times, partly overlap.« Meanwhile, Keith Negus (2012) has highlighted a reluctance of musicologists to account for the influence of their subjectivities upon interpretation.[1] To address this perceived reluctance, Negus supports what he refers to as an ›inter-contextual‹, ›inter-subjective‹ model of meaning which highlights the way in which personal interpretations are culturally and socially mediated. Several years earlier, Chris Kennett also critiqued the quasi-objectivity of published music analyses, noting »the analytical text or object of study itself may be a more volatile, mutable object than has previously been accepted« (2003: 197). As Kennett and others have argued, analytically informed discussions of musical meaning tend to begin from a particular personal hear-

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1   This is echoed by Helms (2014: 116), who similarly advocates more clearly expressed subjectivity in the historiography of popular music.

ing of a track, yet in this article, we would like to follow Negus' advocacy for inter-subjective analysis in order to problematise the coherence of an initial analysis which forms the basis of song interpretation.[2] Therefore, we hope to show how working as a group of analysts invites new topics of discussion and different manners of engaging with songs. This was particularly pertinent to our experiences of Disclosure's ›Holding On‹, featuring Gregory Porter, as we discuss shortly.

Although we as authors are all active researchers in popular music, coming from a range of both different academic and musical backgrounds, we were faced on first listening to the recording with several different impressions, some complementary, and some conflicting. In discussions regarding our typical listening strategies, those of us who are studio-based creative practitioners and DJs highlighted a keen interest in production aesthetics, issues of texture, and stylistic referencing. Popular musicologists were particularly attentive to issues of narrative and persona, whereas social science researchers were more attentive to broader social, cultural and historical considerations than to the analysis of music itself. Accordingly, as we became more familiar with the recording, a number of questions arose regarding its relationship with other repertoire and the personal understandings which developed through personal negotiation with the track and also with one-another. In this account, we share our encounters with the recording, develop a methodological framework for addressing our discursive interpretations and discuss areas of friction—that is, aspects which deviate from the expectations of musical styles.

AFFORDANCE

In the context of group analysis, it is helpful to adopt a position in which musical meaning is modelled as the results of a negotiation with—rather than an encoded property of—the music at hand. With this in mind, our theoretical approach is informed by the concept of affordance, a term derived from theories in ecological perception and particularly the work of James J. Gibson (1966, 1979) in the field of visual perception, which has since been incorporated by several musicologists (Clarke 2005; Moore 2012; Windsor and de Bézenac 2012). Gibson's original description of affordance delineates it as a possible interaction which the properties of an environment suggest to a perceiving organism. In this respect, Gibson explains affordance as a »substitute for values, a term which carries an old burden of philosophical

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2   Cf. Moore (2012, 2013) or von Appen et. al (2015), who similarly refuse an idea of objective truth and advocate for an inter-subjective analysis.

meaning. I mean simply what things furnish, for good or ill« (Gibson 1966: 285). Hence, it holds that affordances are not strictly a property of an environment, nor its perceiver, but rather the result of interactions between them. Throughout Norman's (1998; 1999) application of the concept to industrial and interface design, he explicitly refers to ›perceived affordances‹ to further stress the subjective nature of affordances.

Clarke's application of affordance to music discusses it in terms of action consequences, such that a »chair affords sitting, a stick affords throwing, raspberries afford eating, a sharp pencil affords writing« (2005: 38). He further emphasises that these affordances are also specific to the perceiver or circumstance, such that the same chair might, according to Clarke (ibid.: 37) afford self-defence to a person in need of a weapon, or eating to a hungry termite. Due to this distinction between affordances to different perceivers, the concept of affordance shows great promise in a range of fields concerned with human interaction, and offers a helpful basis to discussions of meaning in music, for affordance models meaning as contingent upon details of both the environment and its perceiver. Hence, it acknowledges the important roles of both the text and perceiver. We are particularly interested in what Mark Reybrouck (2014: 17) refers to as receptive aspects of musical affordances, which accounts for »aspects of sense-making, emotional experience, aesthetic experience, entrainment and judgments of value« (ibid.).[3]

FRICTION

As Moore (2012: 163) highlights, musical interpretation necessitates comparison with other repertoire to account for how a given recording[4] corresponds with our expectations based on the musical norms of the style. Changes in meter, for instance, are uncommon in popular music, but occur often enough so as not to surprise most listeners. Conversely, popular song is customarily relayed from the perspective of a character who expresses a state of mind or situation, highlighting the less common examples which instead tell a story over a longer span of time. With this in mind, we would reasonably expect particular experiences of friction to be informed by one's knowledge of the style or genre. A listener with a high degree of familiarity with a given

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3   For a fuller discussion of affordance in the context of music analysis, see Clarke (2010), Zeiner-Henriksen (2010), Danielsen (2015) and Zagorski-Thomas (2015).

4   Moore calls the concrete realisation or performance of a song (i.e. the basic characteristics like a certain metric and harmonic structure) a *track*: »combining both song and performance gives us what I define as the track« (2012: 15). As we use ›track‹ in a different way (see section ›Track vs. Song‹), we avoid this terminology here.

style will likely approach the recording with additional, more specific expectations than an unfamiliar listener, therefore deviations from those expectations are likely to play a larger role in determining the song's meaning.

In our discussion below, we take friction to refer to moments at which the track afforded different ways of hearing to the group. Indeed, the implications of friction are influenced by the experiences of the listener, and as no two listeners have the same experiences they cannot be guaranteed to interpret a record's meaning in the same way. To some extent, the impact of this sort of friction on a recording's meaning depends on the degree of deviation from stylistic norms of harmony, rhythm, melody, production, instrumentation, and so on. Certain instances are perhaps easily perceived, such as uncharacteristic dissonance, while others will only be apparent to more attentive listeners, or those who benefit from greater training or musical experience. In the case of *Holding On*, issues of form and production were also important factors, as we discuss later. Following Moore's (2012) attitude to hermeneutical interpretation, our interest in relation to friction, then, is not to determine *what* a record means, but rather to determine *how* friction contributes to perceived meanings and inter-subjective analysis.

»HOLDING ON«

Disclosure is a duo of Guy and Howard Lawrence, brothers born in 1991 and 1994 in Surrey, UK. They first achieved commercial and critical success with their debut album *Settle* (2013), which reached #1 on the UK album charts and was nominated for Best Dance/Electronica album at the 2014 Grammy awards. *Holding On* appears on their second album *Caracal* (2015) and features American jazz singer/songwriter Gregory Porter, who co-wrote the song with the two and the UK producer James Napier. The collaboration reached #1 on the Billboard Dance Club chart. While this positions them in the context of dance genres such as house and UK garage, Disclosure eagerly note a point of overlap with influences of soul, funk and singer/songwriter music in *Caracal*. As they report: »[w]e wanted to ... explore the songwriting over keeping our signature sounds—the warm pads, the drum sounds that we like to use« (qtd. in Amarca 2015).

Disclosure's comments in interviews reveal an important fusion between forms of electronic dance music and lyrically-led songs. When discussing their production process, the pair explain that they »write with the vocalist around a piano and then ... take it away and turn it into a beat« (qtd. in Amarca 2015). Accordingly, Disclosure describe their music as both »pop-

structured songs, like a mix of verse-chorus kind of songs with vocals on them, and then instrumental club tracks, all written in the style of, and influenced by, house and garage from the 90s« (qtd. in Cliff 2013). As apparent in this quote, it is common to use the term »track« rather than »song« to refer to Electronic Dance Music (EDM)[5] recordings, this being the production of »music with the expectation that it will be played on the floor, where the crowd's response will determine its success or failure« (Butler 2006: 34). Poschardt expands on this understanding when he states that »alongside its relative autonomy as a song, its [the track's] final aesthetic destination is being part of a DJ-Mix« (1995: 242, own translation).

Disclosure's combination of EDM and lyric-led practices offers considerable opportunity for friction, and for multiple ways of hearing the recording. In this chapter, we would like to discuss several of the questions which arose from our experiences with it, such as: where oppositions or crossings of musical form occur in the sounding material of *Holding On*; whether these allow for multiple interpretations simultaneously or are perceived as irritating; the challenges this poses for musical analysis, if a piece combines seemingly different musical styles and offers multiple ›ways of hearing‹; and, how interpersonal listening prompted further reflection and discussion on these different ways of hearing. We would like firstly to offer an overview of the various formal sections and an outline of the lyrics, before we address points in which the recording afforded multiple ways of hearing.

With the exception of the opening material, the recording is constructed from repeating 8-bar sections, which we have tentatively sketched below:

Table 1: Formal Sketch of »Holding On«

Bars	Length	Time	Section	Formal role	Lyrical guide
1–4	4	8"[6]	I	intro	n/a
5–21	17	15"	II	build-up	»shake it…«
22–37	16	48"	III	build-up	»shake it…«
38–45	8	1'17"	IV	build-up	»weight of love…«

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5   We use the term Electronic Dance Music and its acronym EDM as an umbrella term for many genres such as techno, house, trance, drum'n'bass and many more (cf. Rietveld 2013, Butler 2006).

6   Because of a vocal gesture without clear pulse or meter, bar one begins at the introduction of the kick drum (8") and the establishment of a clear pulse. Between the group, there were multiple hearings of the form. In its form presented here, bar 21 is counted as a bar of 2/4 (this metrical ambiguity is discussed in the following section).

Bars	Length	Time	Section	Formal role	Lyrical guide
46–53	8	1'33"	V	build-up	»though my past...«
54–62	8	1'48"	VI	breakdown	»but its holding on...«
63–69	8	2'03	VII	build-up	»but its holding on...«
70–77	8	2'19"	VIII	drop & build-up	»shake it...«
78–85	8	2'33"	IX	core	»it keeps holding on...«
86–93	8	2'50"	IV	breakdown	»I've seen times...«
94–101	8	3'05"	V	build-up	»though my past...«
102–109	8	3'20"	VI	breakdown	»but its holding on...«
110–117	8	3'36"	VII	build-up	»but its holding on...«
118–125	8	3'52"	VIII	drop & build-up	»shake it...«
126–133	8	4'06"	IX	core	»it keeps holding on...«
134–141	8	4'23"	X	build-up'	»shake it...«
142–149	8	4'38"	XI	core'	»it keeps holding on...« & »shake it ...«
150–159	8	4'54"	XII	outro	»but it ...« & »e-ah«

The recording begins with an extended vocal gesture lasting 8". In an EDM context this is unusual, for as Butler observes, it is »rhythmically oriented music« (Butler 2006: 138).[7] Nevertheless, it provides an evocative opening due to the conspicuous reverberation, the powerful timbre of the voice and its artificial extension, which together afford a sense of transcendence and a vast space.[8] However, this is rapidly disrupted by the prominent kick drum, mixed without reverb to punctuate the mix, as the intro begins.

Figure 1 visualizes the impact of the kick drum. The ellipse on the left side highlights the »gaps« in the vocal layer which result from heavy sidechain

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7   Furthermore, without including rhythmic material at the opening of the song, it becomes complicated for a DJ to ›beat match‹ or align the beats between two recordings within a DJ set.

8   A reference to a sacral context was also noted by other commentators: »This song feels like a Larry Levan remix of an old gospel track« (Schnipper 2015), and could be drawn from the lyrics.

compression.[9] As this so called ›ducking effect‹ occurs in regular intervals, the vocal layer also takes on a rhythmic function that, according to Zeiner-Henriksen (2010: 128), contrasts the kick drum's low frequencies and provides an interplay that immediately affords and promotes »an undulating body movement«. Although sidechain compression is often used in current EDM productions—in some cases even called »quintessential« (Weiss 2015)—, it is rarely so conspicuous on vocals and indeed, occurs most prominently here as the vocals act in a textural capacity rather than a lyrical one.
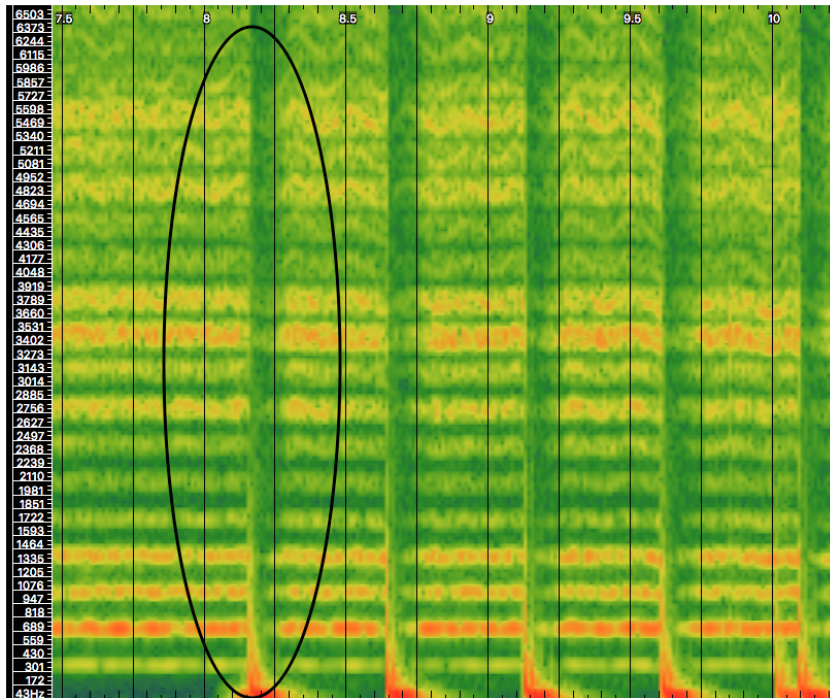

Figure 1: Kick drum entering at 8"

The kick drum plays four equally spaced attacks with an additional attack just before beat five. This provides the pulse of the track with the additional attack also suggesting a 4/4 meter. This pattern references the four-on-the-floor style that is ubiquitous in EDM as it offers a predictable rhythmic framework for dancing.[10] The fifth attack is played as a swung 16th note, however as the kick drum is the only rhythmic element at this point, a swing feel is difficult to perceive. Instead, the kick drum appears to ›stumble‹ over itself at the end of the bar. This quality might initially resist the typical expectations one has from a style of music that is, above all, made to dance

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9   I.e. the attenuation of one layer commensurate with the amplitude of another, typically applied on midrange or bass synthesizers to allow the kick to penetrate the mix more effectively.

10 Within a club environment, the repeating kick drum not only offers a predictable rhythmic framework in which to improvise dance moves, it also heightens the dancers' pleasure when a predicted occurrence arrives as expected (Huron 2006).

»for hours on end« (Rietveld 2013: 3), yet affords new opportunities of movement once understood by the dancer. The initial kick drum pattern repeats for a total of three bars, suggesting a one-bar loop, but in the fourth bar the pattern varies and an additional sixteenth note is added on the last offbeat.

The lack of a repetitive rhythmic loop continues in the following ›build-up‹, which adds instruments and layers to increase intensity (Butler 2006: 224), in this case: a vocal layer (»shake it«), a crackling sound reminiscent of vinyl (which will be taken into further consideration on page 9) being played and syncopated hi-hats. During the build-up, a further variation is added to the kick in bar 7, followed quickly by another in bar 8. In an environment less conducive to musical analysis, such as a dance floor, one is unlikely to make such explicit observations, rather is more likely to perceive a general feeling of irregularity or unpredictability.

At bar 38 (1'18"), the overall character of the recording changes when lyrics are incorporated and a bassline also enters. During this section, the protagonist begins to express his struggle to meet his expectations of romantic love, describing it as a »weight« on his shoulders as his heart grows cold. The lyrics continue through sections VI and VII, which presents for the first time the central lyrical theme and the title hook (»holding on«). By this point, the kick uses a regular four-on-the-floor pattern, although the remaining percussive layers are highly syncopated, suggesting a breakbeat-driven style of EDM. The hi-hat plays a syncopated 16th note pattern that clearly articulates the swing feel, whilst a second hi-hat and handclaps fall on metrically weak points and add an additional layer of syncopation. The snare drum, rather than explicitly accenting beats two and four, alternates between articulations on the beat and a swung 16th note in anticipation.

Figure 2: rhythmic transcription of the groove

Although much of the recording involves repeated loops, it makes clear use of electronic effects to shape sounds. Figure 3 shows how the parameters of effects, including the cutoff frequency of high- and low-cut-filters (HCt/LCt), and the amount of reverberation (rvrb) are manipulated around the breakdown, build-up and drop. Here, the gestural sound-shaping also seems to be done live in the studio, without the use of automation, thus offering a sense of performativity—and indeed, the limited overlap between gestures (circled in figure 3) is typical of live DJ performances.[11]
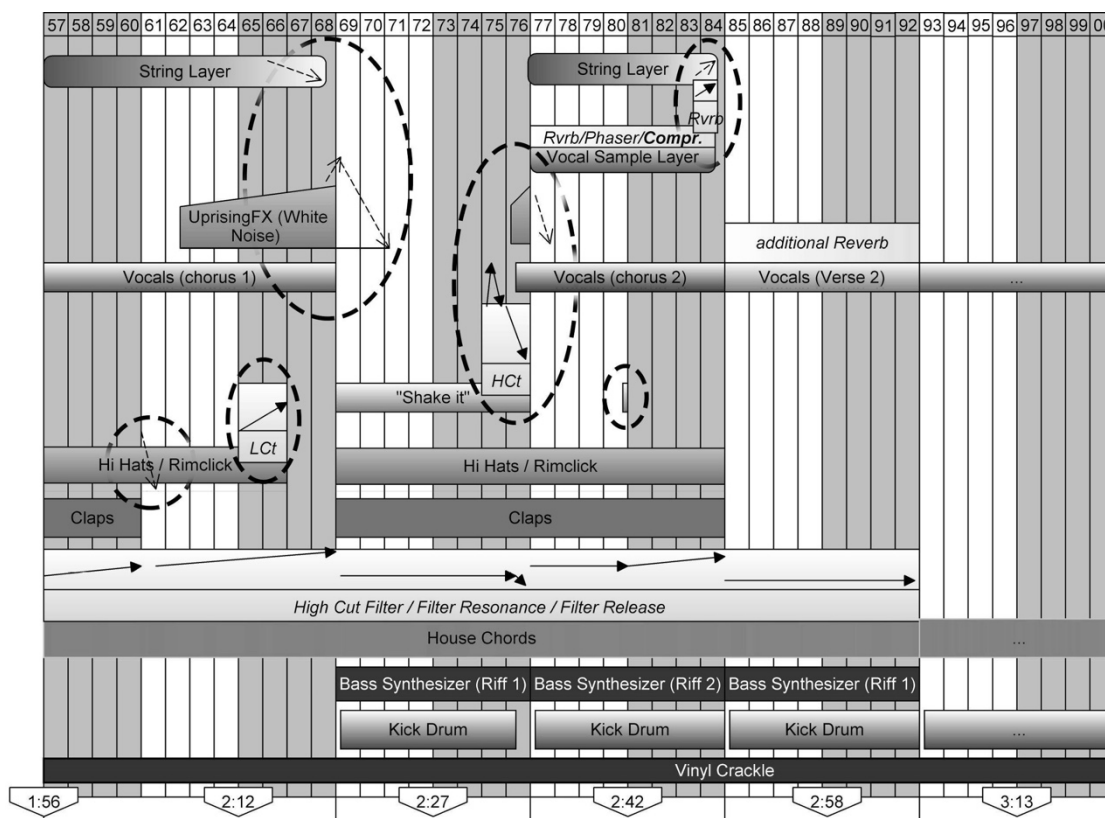

Figure 3: Textural graph, starting at 1'56''. The arrows indicate the filter-movement

The gestural sound shaping—i.e. the manipulation of filters and reverb effects—notably corresponds with the lyrics at this point in the recording; during the build-up the protagonist appears to describe how he attempts to hide from the reality of his past, which by implication from the breakdown »keeps holding on« to him. As this hook loops, the amount of reverberated signal increases whilst the amplitude of the voice diminishes, making it appear to move away from the listener in the acoustical space. Yet, it culminates in a sudden return to his previous proximity (corresponding with the

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11   Bennett (2016) describes such changes as ›gestures‹, which can straightforwardly be programmed within the studio, but are derived historically from a live music practice (cf. Butler 2006: 33). In general, Paine (2009) and Veal (2007: 42-44) state that studio practices of sound manipulation were performed with a live audience in mind.

drop), which enacts a metaphor of springing back, unable to break from his troubles.

Following this section, the kick drum, bass and percussive layers are re-introduced in section VIII at 2'19". In contrast to sections IV through VII, the voice here is sampled and looped and simply sings »shake it«. In section IX (beginning at 2'35"), the lyrical hook »it keeps holding on« coincides with the fullest texture of the music as the strings (absent since bar 70) and the long vocal gesture from the beginning of the track (absent since bar 37) return.

From 2'51" onward the arrangement repeats in a similar manner, although with different sound-shaping gestures and, initially, a thinner texture than the previous hearing of section IV (bars 38-45); the bassline and percussion are absent except for the attenuated kick drum. At this point, the lyrical protagonist asks a father for help to fall into the love he misses, yet it remains unclear whether this addresses the father of a fictional protagonist enacted by the persona, a religious father, or if this references the absent father in Gregory Porter's upbringing (reported in Moreton 2014), thus suggesting a sense of autobiography and with it, »emotional authenticity« (von Appen 2013: 45)[12].

After the repetition of the complete arrangement, at 4'23" until 4'54" two sections appear that are similar to VIII and IX, but the arrangement of the sonic layers is reasonably different, and therefore they are labelled X and XI. As mentioned, the synth chord is taken out of the mix, thus lowering the textural intensity. Yet these two sections appear more intense due to higher presence of small vocal utterances (»e-ah« and »but it«) and a more syncopated and therefore more »stumbling« bassline. During the outro the textural layers are reduced one-by-one (section XII). It is only at this point that the vinyl crackle is again audible on the textural surface, and is the last sound to disappear after the percussive layers and vocal utterances.

By adding the sound of crackling vinyl, Disclosure refer to early DJ-practices of sampling instrumental or vocal parts from vinyl recordings and integrating them in the production of a track or in a DJ performance (Katz 2010). In explaining their production process, Disclosure highlight the importance of samples from old soul tracks for the aesthetic and success of early garage and house records. In their production process, they did not sample from vinyl but they did »write a soul song [their]selves and then sample[d] that« (H. Lawrence in Schnipper 2013). By doing so, they link themselves to

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12 Von Appen (2013) identifies four types of authenticity in popular musics: personal, socio-cultural, of craftsmanship and emotional. The latter means the expectation, that emotional intense music should be rooted in the personal experiences of the author/musician.

the history of garage and house, but without »citing« seminal tracks by sampling them. Their reference is thus not a material one, but purely a symbolic one.

When »Holding On« is used within a DJ set, the overlaying of the next track would likely drown out the vinyl sound. Only by listening to it in its entirety—a hearing-practice traditionally associated with songs than with tracks and therefore possibly evoking a bourgeois listening strategy centered around the autonomy of the »work«—is the vinyl crackle audible. Hence, it not only refers to sampling as a practice of DJs and producers, but also to listening to songs both in a historical and—in the last few years—resurrected mode; that of a vinyl record on a home stereo.

WAYS OF HEARING »HOLDING ON«

In our outline above we discussed areas of the track that could be generally agreed upon by the group. Yet our group discussions found that this cannot satisfactorily account for the processual nature of analysis and interpretation, nor the extent to which meaning can be negotiated between individuals. In our case, the group brings together scholars with backgrounds in EDM and others with very different listening experience and expectations. For those who do not actively listen to EDM, a general awareness was noted of some stylistic conventions, particularly its repetitive and metronomic nature, which in turn set particular expectations. However, those familiar with EDM could confidently identify distinctive stylistic aspects of the song's production.

Throughout a series of joint listening sessions, the track afforded different ways of hearing in several aspects, demonstrating a degree of friction evoked by the track in this intersubjective context. In some cases, this offered considerable scope for discussion, and outright disagreement in others. With the outline above in mind, therefore, we would like to consider in greater detail three of the most fundamental points of friction which we encountered. These relate to meter, structure, and situating the recording in relation to other repertoire.

PLACING OF DOWNBEAT

Possibly the most remarkable point where the different affordances of the recording were exhibited concerned the location of the downbeat, due to contradictory interpretations of the way the metrical structure unfolds.

While Butler (2006) notes that metrical ambiguity is common within EDM, these ambiguities are typically resolved as a track progresses, leading to a definitive understanding at the track's conclusion. »Holding On,« however, presents a different type of ambiguity in that different interpretations of the downbeat remain unresolved. These contradictory ways of hearing can, at least in part, be attributed to our different musical backgrounds and listening habits, and offer a powerful example of the benefits of group analysis. During the analysis sessions, it was not until numerous listenings had occurred that this discrepancy was realised, as each member of the group assumed that their own interpretation was the only one possible. It was not until the meter was counted aloud that the discrepancy became apparent.

The opening kick drum pattern suggests a 4/4 meter with a clearly expressed downbeat. Indeed, the addition of the vocal sample on beat one of bar five, and the hi-hat and handclap loop beginning on beat one of bar 13, reinforce this interpretation. Accordingly, both the meter and location of beat one are clear, as well as an implied four-bar hypermeasure. However, in bar 21 (46") two additional instruments are introduced that can potentially displace the downbeat. The first is an opening synth chord, which presents the first harmonic material of the track and implies the beginning of a harmonic progression. Unexpectedly, though, it enters in anticipation of beat three. Secondly, the snare drum enters on the following beat and continues to play on beats two and four in order to establish the backbeat.

The synth plays a four-bar chord progression, with each chord lasting exactly four beats. For those listeners that hold on to the downbeat suggested by the kick drum opening, each chord change occurs partway through the bar in anticipation of beat three, rather than occurring at the beginning of the bar in anticipation of beat one. As the chord progression is four bars long and continues throughout the track, each new hypermeasure and successive section will likewise begin part way through the bar. When the vocal narrative begins at the start of the verse, the melodic phrases are highly aligned with the four bar hypermeasure, and as such will similarly begin in anticipation of beat three. An alternate way of hearing this moment reinterprets beat three of bar 21 as a new downbeat, effectively »turning the bar around,« similar to Butler's (2006: 141) discussion of turning the beat around, such that bar 21 would be considered a bar of 2/4 and the first synth chord would anticipate beat one of the following bar, followed by the remaining three chords which would also anticipate beat one of each successive bar to complete the four bar hypermeasure. The two interpretations are notated in figure 4.

When one compares these interpretations, the meter, pulse, and relationship between the melodic and harmonic layers are the same, yet the way in which these layers relate to the downbeat is open to interpretation. Both interpretations are valid, and the way in which one hears the position of the downbeat has a significant influence over the feel of the track. A listener who interprets a steady 4/4 meter throughout the piece will hear the onset of melodic phrases, harmonic changes, and sectional changes occurring halfway through the bar, possibly leading to a slightly less stable (though potentially more interesting) listening environment.

Figure 4: two hearings of bar 21

Those that interpret bar 21 as a bar of 2/4 will hear these occurrences on beat one, resulting in a square sense of phrasing and a potentially more stable listening environment. How one interprets this pattern can depend on their listening approach as well as their previous musical experience and listening habits. Imbrie (1973) identifies a distinction between ›conservative‹ and ›radical‹ listeners. A conservative listener will hold on to the initial metrical interpretation as long as possible, therefore would maintain the downbeat suggested by the opening kick drum pattern and hear the harmonic progression begin on beat three. This interpretation would continue for the remainder of the track so that the onset of vocal phrases and sectional changes would similarly occur on beat three. A radical listener is more likely to move on to new interpretations, therefore would hear bar 21 in 2/4, allowing the harmonic progression to begin on beat one. After this initial adjustment, this interpretation would continue for the remainder of the track. Whereas most metrical ambiguity in EDM is eventually resolved as the track progresses, these varying interpretations will continue to hold for the remainder of the song, and indeed remain with repeated listenings.

STRUCTURE

The structure of the recording also resisted unanimous agreement as the group discussed how to label or categorise each section. The first notable

points of friction in this respect occur at section IV (1'17"-1'33") following the build-up. Build-ups are often followed by ›core-sections,‹ that is, »the track's main groove, representing the core of the track« (Solberg, 2014: 70) or ›body-sections‹, which, according to Snoman (2009: 227-228) are »signified by all of the previous instruments playing together, creating a crescendo of emotion«. Yet there is no significant increase in intensity, which we would expect following the prototypical EDM structure proposed by several authors (Butler, 2006; Snoman 2009; Solberg, 2014; Doehring, 2015). Instead, with the addition of lyrics at 1'18", the following eight bars (section IV) function as a verse. Similarly, section V (1'33"-1'48") offered different and disputed interpretations: as a pre-chorus, due to the buildup of tension and higher vocal register; or as a continuation to the verse, due to the consistent texture and harmonic progression.[13]

At 1'48", the texture thins out, which is typical of an EDM breakdown. Rather than a sudden drop to a thinner texture, as one might expect in EDM, though, the texture gradually thins out over the course of the section. However, a new textural layer of strings is introduced which softens these sections, as is common during breakdowns, to give them a more atmospheric feeling. At the same time, this section was heard as a chorus by some listeners because of the appearance of the central lyrical theme and the title hook (»Holding On«). However, it seems atypical for a chorus to have such a thin texture, yet it is also atypical for an EDM breakdown to thin out only gradually. By doing so, Disclosure preclude a straightforward identification as »chorus« or »breakdown«, rather they leave it open to the listeners to apply their own ways of hearing.

This section is followed by what is called ›the drop‹ in EDM parlance (2'19"); the kick drum, bass and percussive layers are re-introduced following a suspenseful absence to heighten emotional intensity (Butler 2006: 4; Solberg 2014: 65).[14] Whilst the drop conventionally represents the introduction of the core section, or emotional peak of the track, this is not the case here. The interplay with the lyrics at this point is remarkable because the voice is edited to produce a repeated and stuttered »shake it«. In trying to label this

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13 Depending on the way of hearing of section V, the interpretation of sections VI and VII are interpreted accordingly in order to place them into a verse-chorus-scheme. If V was heard as pre-chorus, VI and VII were accordingly heard as a chorus. For those who heard V as an extension or equal part of the verse, heard VI and VII as pre-chorus and pointed to the increase of intensity typical for a pre-chorus.

14 While most scholars, fans and producers use the term to indicate the powerful return of the kick drum after the breakdown (e. g. Lepa et. al 2013; Solberg 2014: 65), Snoman (2009: 225-228) uses the term for a drop in the texture, similar to a breakdown. See Solberg (2014) for a thorough discussion.

section, the interpretation as a bridge was discussed, because of its contrasting characteristic to both adjacent sections, but a bridge in this sense would not be repeated (von Appen/Frei-Hauenschild 2015: 6). It therefore appears as a »connector« between those sections. Yet we could alternatively also hear this as a chorus.[15]

It is only half-way through the song (2'33", section IX) that the lyrical hook »it keeps holding on« is reconciled with the emotional intensity and full texture of the music. At this point the strings and the long vocal gesture from the beginning of the track are brought back into the texture, therefore from an EDM perspective we might call this the »core« section again. The central role of this section reaffirms the interpretation of it as a chorus—depending on the hearing of the previous sections it is either chorus 1 or chorus 2. The repetitive nature of the lyrics, melody and harmony and the use of the title hook certainly suggests a hearing as chorus (von Appen/Frei-Hauenschild 2015: 4), but other interpretations are still possible.

Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild (2015: 79) describe the appearance of a second chorus in recent years and list examples of Contemporary RnB and Mainstream-EDM.[16] In these cases, second choruses are mostly shorter and function as an appendix to the (main) chorus. In »Holding On« however, all sections possibly identified as choruses have an equal length and appear as independent sections. Thus, the attribution of these formal elements seems more open to interpretation. But while an individual listener constructs a consistent formal structure and is in no doubt about what he/she refers to as chorus, our group discussions revealed different opinions on this topic.

In these instances, friction arose from the conflicting affordances perceived by the group. Those of us who placed the emphasis on lyrics may hear section VI and VII as the definitive chorus due to the developed lyrical narrative, regardless of the thinning texture. Conversely, those with a background in EDM heard section VIII (»connector«) as the definitive chorus, due to the significance of the drop, the short lyrical lines requesting bodily actions, and the possible interpretation as a »core« section. An alternate interpretation may perceive only the last section IX as the definitive chorus, as it is at this point that the full texture of the track reconciles with the lyrical hook. Furthermore, depending on the various interpretations of the chorus, other sections appear as chorus 2, pre-chorus or as an extension to the cho-

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15 This view is echoed by some commentators on YouTube, which point to this section and the vocal utterance »shake it« as the most succinct section.

16 Examples include among others: Rihanna ft. Jay-Z »Umbrella« (2007), Lady Gaga »Pokerface« (2008), Katy Perry »Roar« (2013) and Clean Bandit »Rather Be« (2014).

rus. The following table lists the discussed interpretations of the various sections (other interpretations might still occur):

Table 2: Ways of hearing form in »Holding On«

Time	Sect.	Track-view	Song-view 1	Song-view 2	Lyrical guide
8"[17]	I	intro	intro	intro	n/a
15"	II	build-up	intro	intro	»shake it…«
48"	III	build-up	intro	intro	»shake it…«
1'17"	IV	build-up	verse 1	verse 1	»weight of love…«
1'33"	V	build-up	prechorus	extension/2nd part to verse 1	»though my past…«
1'48"	VI	breakdown	chorus 1	prechorus	»but its holding on…«
2'03	VII	build-up	chorus 1	prechorus	»but its holding on…«
2'19"	VIII	drop & build-up	»connector«	»connector«	»shake it…«
2'33"	IX	core	chorus 2	chorus 1	»it keeps holding on…«
2'50"	IV	breakdown	verse 2	verse 2	»I've seen times…«
3'05"	V	build-up	prechorus	extension /2nd part to verse 2	»though my past…«
3'20"	VI	breakdown	chorus 1	prechorus	»but its holding on…«
3'36"	VII	build-up	chorus 1	prechorus	»but its holding on…«
3'52"	VIII	drop & build-up	»connector«	»connector«	»shake it…«
4'06"	IX	core	chorus 2	chorus 1	»it keeps holding on…«
4'23"	X	build-up'	»connector«	»connector«	»shake it…«

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17 Because of a vocal gesture without clear pulse or meter, bar one begins at the introduction of the kick drum (8") and the establishment of a clear pulse. Between the group, there were multiple hearings of the form. In its form presented here, bar 21 is counted as a bar of 2/4 (this metrical ambiguity is discussed in the following section).

4'38"	XI	core'	chorus 2	chorus 1	»it keeps holding on...« & »shake it ...«
4'54"	XII	outro	outro	coda	»but it ...« & »e-ah«

THE ROLE OF THE VOICE

To the group, a degree of friction was also found concerning the function of the voice. In several moments during the track the vocal is sampled and edited, seemingly used for a textural effect. This can be heard from the outset in the opening vocal gesture, which is artificially time-stretched, and the looped »shake it« sample which Porter surely could not achieve without the use of technological mediation. EDM is typically instrumental, and vocals do not play an essential part. When used, they often consist of short phrases or single words repeated at regular intervals (Tagg, 1994). Yet here we are faced with several extended vocal phrases which enact a character communicating his experiences to the listener, something not commonly found in EDM.

The use of vocal samples in »Holding On« can be grouped into three categories:[18] Firstly, as a textural element which contributes to the mood and is of no clear rhythmic character, such as the vocal utterance in the beginning or from section IX onward. Secondly, to articulate longer phrases of lyrics in which lexical meaning is conveyed and which are typically with less conspicuous sound processing. Finally, short fragmentary samples like »shake it« or »but it ...« & »e-ah« have more rhythmic than melodic functions and are extensively repeated.

The three uses of the voice in »Holding On« (and the relative weighting between them) prompted discussion of how the role of the voice influenced our understanding of the recording. Within popular musicology, it has been acknowledged that the personality of a singer as reflected through a recorded song is mediated, most particularly in terms of the lyrics, performance and production. Hence, Moore (2012: 179-188) advocates the term ›persona‹ to describe the mimetic projection of the singer in a recording and ›protagonist‹ to describe the character which the persona enacts. For Moore, personae are constructed in songs through lyrics, performance style, melodic contour and verbal space, which operate in the context of a musical environment. Hence, in EDM we can rarely speak of a persona due to the rarity

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18   Butler (2006: 180) highlights three sound categories to describe the sounds of EDM: rhythmic, articulative and atmospheric. Here, we focus on vocal samples only.

of extended vocal material. Instead, we might favour Serge Lacasse's (2010) term ›phonographic voice‹, which fittingly shifts attention from the character represented by a voice to its timbral and formal features.

To the group, friction was found in both the possibility of hearing the voice as a protagonist or as a primarily textural layer, and in the way in which the track appears to segue between the two. For Auner (2003: passim), technological extension of the human voice amounts to »posthuman ventriloquism«, a term which he coins to draw attention to the reduced impression of human agency which thus further compromises the ability of this material to construct a persona. This thinking also appears in Eshun's earlier writing which considers two simultaneous, opposing musical trends at the end of the Twentieth Century, »the Soulful and the Postsoul« (1998: -006).[19] Eshun's understanding of postsoul incorporates a technological approach to music-making which contrasts the more organic production of Soul and Funk. This technological mediation becomes clearly audible in the rhythmic vocal samples identified above and in the sidechain-compression on the vocal layer (see above). Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen describes such a foregrounding of technological mediation as »opaque mediation« (Brøvig-Hanssen 2010). This is also pertinent in Disclosure's incorporation of melodic house elements and vocals rooted in soul and disco music alongside syncopated breakbeat structures and »opaque« vocal manipulation.

TRACK VS. SONG

Conflicting impressions of the voice and the difficulty in describing the form of the recording both contribute particularly to a final enduring point of debate amongst the group, that is, how to categorise the recording. On one hand it demonstrates several aspects of EDM tracks (in the sense of chiefly instrumental recordings intended for consumption on the dancefloor), whereas on the other hand the presence of extended lyrics reward situating the recording in popular song traditions.

In order to describe the form of the recording, figure 5 sketches the emotional intensity of the different sections, particularly in response to textural development. This arrangement resembles Snoman's model of a typical EDM arrangement in Figure 6, which features a gradual rise of emotional intensity interrupted by two breakdowns and subsequent drops until the outro.

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19 Here, ›postsoul‹ describes post-human and techno-centric styles emerging from afrofuturist genres and the incorporation of technological devices and aesthetics into their music.

Whilst Snoman's model of EDM with its precise number of bars for the different sections is not met in detail by »Holding On,« the recording matches the general outline of the model, although it does not account for the insertion of another build-up (section V). Nevertheless, several sections of the recording also function in ways which resemble the communicative functions found in songs.
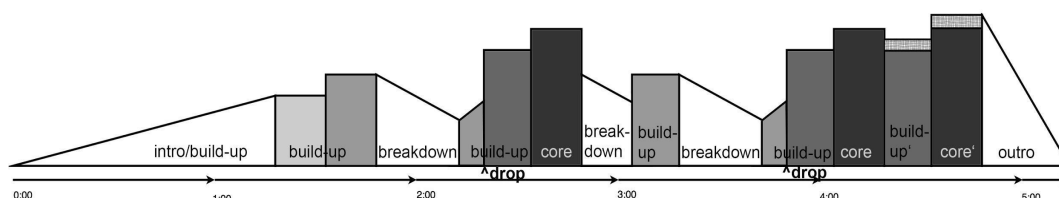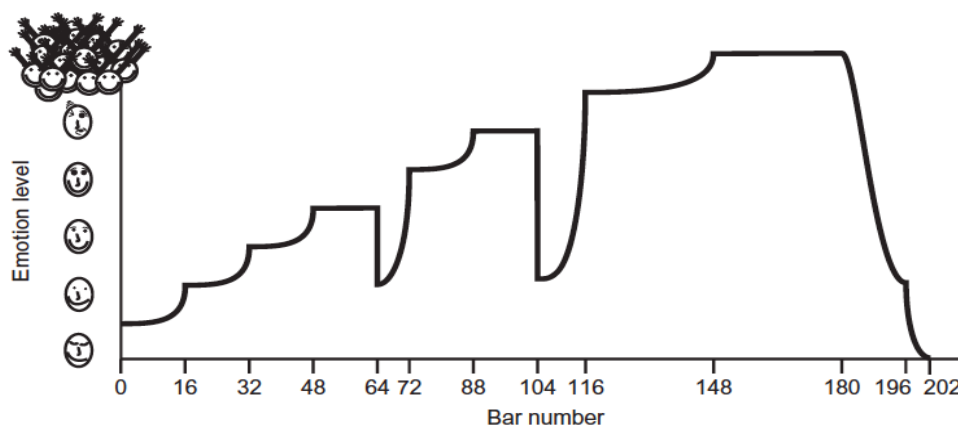

Figure 5: formal scheme of »Holding On«

Figure 6: typical arrangement of Dance Music (Snoman 2009: 225)

Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild (2015: 3) identify three basic song form models: the »simple verse« form (AAA), consisting of three identical A sections that repeat with varied lyrics and include the title hook at the beginning or end; the »American popular song form« (AABA), in which the A section, containing the title-hook, is repeated, then contrasted with the B section and reprised once again; and, various »verse-chorus« forms which alternate between a chorus, repeated several times throughout the song, and verses that are also repeated but with different lyrics. Although certain sections of »Holding On« can be assigned partly to such forms (see table 2), none of these models apply neatly. These established forms and their elements have been combined rather freely since the 1960s, as von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild (2015: 77) observed, (for example, Motown songwriters dis-

missed harmonic changes to distinguish formal sections and instead relied on changes in vocal and instrumental layers). Although mainly conceived as songs, the authors consider these recordings as precursors to many dance styles and the form of EDM tracks (ibid.). In »Holding On,« aspects of both song and EDM models appear in the recording, thus blurring the lines between the two. Doehring (2015: 144-6) discovered a similar interplay between the stylistic behaviours of house music and song forms in his analysis of Andrés' »New For U«.

The uncertainty in labelling the recording is not only a question of formal elements and arrangement but also introduces opportunity to consider the broader cultural context. The already mentioned characteristic of the track as an open form destined to integrate itself into a DJ set led the German cultural scientist Jochen Bonz (2008) to describe EDM culture as ›track cultures‹, with their potential to give way to spaces of transition and rites of passage. He interprets the club as the place of pleasure, melancholy, contemplation, immersion and resolution of identity.

Prior to our knowledge of Disclosure's interview and their reference to musical traditions of soul and house (Schnipper 2013), similar links have been expressed by some of the group members in the listening sessions. This was spurred by the strong emphasis on rhythm, the importance of sound and texture, and especially by connotations to gospel music found in the voice and lyrical content. These references also led some of our group to locate »Holding On« in the tradition of house music, whose historical background lies in the music of African American exiles and the musical culture of gospel, funk and soul.[20] These findings could then be located in the sounding material of the recording by addressing aspects of ›post-soul‹ in the manipulation of the voice and the formal arrangement resembling Motown soul. Hence, this broader cultural approach should be interpreted as another way of hearing the recording as it is equally spurred by musical and socio-cultural characteristics. Finally, these different—or rather ›open‹—ways of hearing, suggest that the presence of various affordances within a single recording is an integral element of such contemporary »popular song on the dancefloor«.

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20 This history has been addressed by Paul Gilroy (1993) with his concept of »Black Atlantic« and can similarly be found in the work of Simon Reynolds (2013) and his concept of »Hardcore Continuum«.

CONCLUSION

We began this chapter by considering arguments from several scholars, particularly Kennett who suggests that different listeners or listening contexts inform the meanings drawn from music and the way in which one hears it. As an individual listener, the way one hears music is highly informed by listening background and expectations toward what the music has to offer. Moving from this subjective consideration of musical meaning to an intersubjective one through group analysis makes it possible to highlight some of the ways in which listenings might differ from one individual to another. In the first instance, we have set out to recognise this by considering the sorts of hearings that the music *affords* to members of the group, emphasising the importance of negotiation between the listener and the characteristics of the recording.

When we consider the multiple ways of hearing experienced by members of the group, »Holding On« offers an example in which we can observe several points of friction wherein affordances conflict between different listeners. Although various details could be agreed on, as sketched above, the degree of friction became more apparent following repeated listening and discussion amongst the group. One aspect of this concerned the way members labelled sections of the track, for example the presence of repeated and memorable vocal material afforded labelling it a chorus because of the way in which it »anchored« listening. Even after members of the group articulated their way of hearing to others, they seldomly altered their original interpretation. This suggests that even though affordances can be explained to and acknowledged by others, they remain rather stable.

More broadly, focusing on lyrics, melody and harmony affords an interpretation as song, while a focus on texture and rhythm affords interpretation as track. Doehring (2015: 146) reveals in his encounter with »New For U« that his understanding of the track and its sections is the result of a process of exchange and highly prone to subjective expectations.[21] In our encounter with »Holding On«, such expectations were put into question by different views of other members. Hence, group analysis allowed for a quick revelation of both approaches from a song-perspective as well as track-perspective. Additionally, »Holding On« catalyses different interpretations of the for-

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21 Specifically, he notes that his first expectations was to hear only intro—breakdown—build-up—breakdown—build-up because of his expectations of »New For U« being »just« an EDM-track (2015:146).

mal song-elements (verse, pre-chorus, chorus and second chorus), and this would not have been revealed without different approaches by a group of analysts. Additionally, the group found disagreement in points as funda-mental as the placement of the downbeat, the role of the voice and the way in which it is manipulated, and whether we would classify it as an EDM track or a recording which draws on song traditions, reflecting Eshun's distinction between the post-soul and the soulful.

The friction then emerges from the different ways of hearing, which the track afforded to the group's members. In the context of group analysis, by being able to express and compare our different hearings, an intersubjec-tive approach offered the opportunity for a richer discussion which recog-nised areas of general agreement, in which perceived affordances generally cohere between listeners, and disagreement in which perceived affordan-ces conflicted. In areas of incoherence between different ways of hearing, we have set out to illustrate ways in which the recording affords multiple interpretations.

In order to account for the differences between ways of hearing »Hold-ing On«, it may be helpful to briefly return to Butler/Imbrie's discussion of conservative or radical listening habits. How a listener interprets the down-beat, for instance, can depend on their previous musical experience and lis-tening habits. Those whose primary listening experience is with the lyrical narrative of popular song, where vocal phrases and harmonic changes are commonly aligned with the downbeat, may perceive an area of friction when these occurrences do not coincide. Therefore, they may seek out an alternate interpretation in order to reconcile the perceived friction. Con-versely, those whose primary listening experience is EDM, where lyrical phrases and harmonic progressions are not primary musical elements, may have less expectation that changes in these elements should coincide with the downbeat, and may therefore not perceive any friction at all. Further-more, how one approaches the track from the onset, whether as a dance track or as a lyrical narrative, can also carry preconceptions regarding the relationship of melody, harmony, and form to the downbeat.

Our hearings of the recording highlight the influence of our own subjec-tive positions resulting from our previous consumption of music. Indeed, by approaching listening as a shared task, the environment of listening could be normalised. When considering details of the track itself, it is possible to identify areas that afforded friction as a result of our different backgrounds. If, as we have experienced, our ways of hearing a recording differ from one another, we are placed in a situation in which the meanings we draw from the recording begin from different starting points. Nevertheless, these dif-

ferent meanings are all grounded in the same musical recording, which in itself holds various ways to encounter—or various *affordances*—for different listeners. Hence, this opportunity for group analysis and discussion has offered a rare chance to explore and discuss different ways of hearing a track and an appreciation of the multiple perspectives this offers.

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