

Implicature in Radiohead's Album *OK Computer's* Lyrics

Muhamad Khatami Rahmat,^{1*} Ahmad Mahesa Fadil,² Unpris Yastanti³

¹Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, Jakarta, Indonesia

²Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, Jakarta, Indonesia

³Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: muhammadkhatami42@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of implicature in the lyrics of Radiohead's album *OK Computer* within the broader field of pragmatics, emphasizing how meaning is constructed beyond literal interpretation in artistic discourse. The study aims to identify the types of implicature present in the album and to explain how implied meanings are generated through linguistic choices in song lyrics. Grounded in H. P. Grice's theory of conversational implicature and the Cooperative Principle, this qualitative research analyzes eight selected songs from *OK Computer*: "Airbag," "Paranoid Android," "Subterranean Homesick Alien," "Let Down," "Karma Police," "No Surprises," "Climbing Up the Walls," and "Lucky." The analysis focuses on the observance and flouting of Grice's maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner to uncover implicit meanings embedded in the lyrics. The findings reveal a total of 85 implicatures, consisting of 83 conversational implicatures and 2 conventional implicatures, indicating that conversational implicature is the dominant strategy employed throughout the album. Songs such as "Climbing Up the Walls," "Airbag," and "Let Down" show a high frequency of implicature, reflecting themes of fear, alienation, technological anxiety, and emotional vulnerability. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that implicature functions as a central pragmatic device in *OK Computer*, enabling Radiohead to communicate complex emotional and social meanings while maintaining poetic subtlety and interpretive openness.

Keywords: *implicature; pragmatics; Radiohead; song lyrics analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is the scientific study of language its structure, meaning, and use. It aims to describe and explain how languages are formed, how they function, and how they are used by speakers in various contexts. Linguistics provides a systematic and objective way of studying human language, allowing us to describe and understand its universal principles and specific features.

According to Fromkin et al. (2018), linguistics is concerned with discovering the unconscious knowledge that humans have about language and

how they acquire and use it. In other words, linguistics studies the nature of human language both as a cognitive system and as a social tool.

Within the English linguistics study exist the branch of Semantics and Pragmatics. Pragmatics is a major branch of linguistics that studies how language is used in context to convey meaning beyond the literal interpretation of words. In simple terms, while semantics focuses on what words and sentences mean, pragmatics examines what speakers actually intend and how listeners interpret those intentions in real communication. The ability to understand another speaker's intended meaning is called pragmatic competence.

Implicature is a concept in pragmatics that refers to what a speaker *implies* or *suggests* in conversation without directly stating it. The term was introduced by philosopher (Grice, 1975) who argued that meaning in communication goes beyond literal sentence meaning. Understanding implicature is central to the study of pragmatics because it reveals how meaning depends on context, culture, and shared knowledge. It also explains how speakers can communicate indirectly, be polite, or convey irony and sarcasm. Scholars such as Amrullah (2015) describes implicature as "a part of meaning that is not directly expressed but can be inferred from the context of conversation," while other researchers have noted that implicatures are "defeasible"—they can be canceled or modified depending on the situation (e.g., "I have some of the cookies—maybe all of them").

This research aims to analyze the implicature found in Radiohead's song lyrics in the OK Computer album through a pragmatic perspective. Implicature, a concept introduced by philosopher H. P. Grice, refers to the implied meaning that arises from an utterance beyond its literal expression, relying on context, shared knowledge, and conversational inference. This study seeks to identify how Radiohead employs indirectness, metaphor, and ambiguity to communicate deeper emotional and social meanings within their lyrics.

Previous studies related to this was made by (Sutrisno et al., 2025) where the authors identify instances of four types of implicature: conventional implicature, generalized conversational implicature, particularized conversational implicature, and scalar implicature. Each type is catalogued within selected lyrical lines to uncover how implicit meaning enriches textual interpretation. In "She Used to Be Mine," the analysis finds a prevalence of conventional and scalar implicatures, which align with the song's introspective and reflective character. In contrast, "Brave" shows higher instances of generalized and particularized conversational implicatures, which reinforce its motivational and empowering thematic frame. In sum, the authors argue that implicature functions not merely as an abstract pragmatic construct, but as a mechanism that co-creates emotional nuance and thematic resonance within musical discourse.

(Rizki Putri, 2023) also did some research that focuses on conversational implicature within the song lyrics of Brandi Carlile, analyzing lyric excerpts to reveal how implicit messages are communicated. The findings identify three main types: general conversational implicature, particularized conversational implicature, and scalar implicature. Among

these, particularized conversational implicature appears most frequently, indicating that many of the implied meanings depend heavily on contextual information and listener inference. The article concludes that conversational implicature is a common phenomenon in song lyrics, embedded purposefully by the lyricist to convey deeper meaning that listeners must infer rather than simply read. The study emphasizes that such implicatures exemplify how linguistic expression and context interact to create interpretive depth in artistic texts.

Taken together, these two articles contribute to a pragmatic understanding of how implicit meaning operates in song lyrics. They demonstrate that implicature — whether conventional or conversational — is a persistent and meaningful feature of lyrical text that helps convey emotional, thematic, and contextual nuance. By identifying specific implicature types and explaining how they function within music discourse, both studies affirm the value of pragmatic analysis for interpreting artistic language, and highlight how lyrics invite listeners to engage actively in meaning construction beyond literal text.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Taken together, the reviewed literature demonstrates a well-established theoretical foundation for implicature and pragmatics, largely grounded in Grice's Cooperative Principle and subsequent elaborations (Grice, 1975; Amrullah, 2015; Eragamreddy, 2024). These studies consistently emphasize that meaning in communication is inferred through context, shared knowledge, and the strategic observance or flouting of conversational maxims. However, much of this work remains predominantly conceptual or illustrative, with limited systematic linkage between theoretical claims and clearly delineated empirical procedures.

Even studies that draw on authentic data, such as (Ugwu, 2021) and (Yusrina et al., 2024), tend to privilege interpretive explanation over explicit criteria for validating implicature identification, leaving room for analytical subjectivity. Research on song lyrics as discourse further expands understanding of how language functions as a vehicle for emotional, cultural, and ideological meaning (Basundoro & Afdholi, 2023; Pratama & Sofyaningrum, 2025; Simbolon et al., 2025; Yuningsih, 2018). These studies convincingly show that lyrics operate beyond aesthetic expression, functioning as social, historical, and interpersonal texts. Nevertheless, most lyrical analyses rely on discourse-based or functional frameworks, such as appraisal theory, systemic functional linguistics, or critical discourse analysis, rather than pragmatic models of implicature. As a result, indirect meaning is often discussed implicitly, without a clear distinction between what the linguistic data explicitly supports and what is inferred through broader cultural or ideological interpretation.

Empirical and pedagogical studies on pragmatics highlight the importance of implicature comprehension for communicative competence and academic success (Bunrueng, 2021; Namdari & Bonyadi, 2024; Puri & Baskara, 2023). While these studies confirm the relevance of implicature across learning, cultural, and multimodal contexts, they rarely extend their

analysis to artistic or literary texts, particularly song lyrics. Moreover, several studies acknowledge contextual and multimodal influences on meaning but do not operationalize these insights within a focused, text-based implicature analysis. Overall, a clear research gap emerges at the intersection of pragmatic theory and song lyric analysis. Existing studies either emphasize implicature theory without applying it rigorously to artistic discourse, or analyze song lyrics without systematically employing implicature as an analytical framework.

Few studies explicitly differentiate between interpretive claims and linguistically observable evidence when identifying implied meaning in lyrics. Therefore, there is a need for research that applies Gricean implicature theory in a methodologically transparent way to song lyrics, using explicit criteria grounded in conversational maxims and textual context. The present study addresses this gap by synthesizing insights from pragmatic theory, empirical pragmatics, and lyrical discourse studies, and by systematically analyzing implicature in Radiohead's *OK Computer* album based on observable linguistic features and Grice's maxims.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics

Bunrueng (2021) argues that pragmatic competence is essential for language learners, particularly in interpreting implied meaning. The article draws on pedagogical observation rather than controlled empirical data. While the interpretation aligns with pragmatic theory, the lack of quantitative or corpus-based evidence weakens the empirical foundation of the claims. (Yusrina et al., 2024) study investigates how context functions as an active, dynamic force in pragmatic interpretation rather than as a passive backdrop to language use. Employing a qualitative approach based on real-life interaction data, observations, and interviews, the authors show that speakers and listeners co-construct meaning through continuous negotiation of contextual cues. These include explicit linguistic signals as well as implicit factors such as shared background knowledge, social roles, and situational elements like deixis, implicature, and presuppositions. The research demonstrates that accurate interpretation often depends on integrating these cues, and misunderstandings frequently arise when contextual information is absent or misread. The findings underscore that pragmatic meaning is deeply shaped by context in both cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions, with implications for language teaching, intercultural communication, and the development of artificial intelligence systems that handle human-language interaction.

Maxamadaminovna (2025) defines pragmatics as the branch of linguistics that explains how meaning is shaped by context, speaker intention, and shared knowledge, distinguishing it from traditional semantics, which focuses on static word meanings in isolation. It argues that understanding modern English requires acknowledging how situational factors, such as cultural norms and discourse context, influence interpretation, so that meanings extend beyond dictionary definitions. Drawing on examples like the

phrase “Can you go up to the window?”, the study illustrates how literal semantic interpretation often fails without pragmatic analysis, since such expressions function as polite requests rather than queries about ability. The author emphasizes that pragmatics investigates how interlocutors use collective knowledge, social norms, and conversational implicature to derive inferred or ambiguous meanings, and concludes that a full account of contemporary English word meaning cannot be achieved without incorporating pragmatic perspectives.

Namdari and Bonyadi (2024) explains that implicature competence is positively correlated with English academic success among EFL learners, suggesting that learners who more effectively infer implied meanings also tend to perform better academically. Namdari & Bonyadi (2024) report that both male and female students show this positive relationship, though it is somewhat stronger for male participants. Align their findings with prior research indicating that pragmatic skills such as implicature comprehension are associated with broader language proficiency and academic achievement, including reading comprehension and overall pragmatics competence (Namdari & Bonyadi, 2024). The discussion further underscores that explicit instruction in pragmatic features including implicature recognition and use should be integrated into EFL curricula, teaching materials, and classroom activities to strengthen learners' communicative competence and academic outcomes, noting implications for teachers, curriculum designers, and textbook authors.

Puri & Baskara (2023) highlights that conversational implicatures vary significantly across cultural and communicative contexts, influenced not just by verbal exchanges but by multimodal features such as visual and auditory cues. By synthesizing research from American, Indonesian, and Chinese pragmatic studies, (Puri & Baskara, 2023) argue that understanding implicature requires attention to both verbal and non-verbal modalities, as gestures, facial expressions, and contextual signals interact with language to shape implied meanings. Puri & Baskara (2023) emphasizes that cultural norms and communication styles affect how implicatures are generated and interpreted, suggesting that pragmatic competence involves sensitivity to these multimodal and cross-cultural nuances. It concludes with pedagogical recommendations advocating for the use of multimodal materials and authentic communicative activities to foster better comprehension of implied meanings in diverse pragmatic settings.

Pragmatics is conceptualized as a branch of linguistics that examines how contextual factors shape the interpretation of meaning beyond the literal semantic content of utterances (Yunita Siregar et al., 2024). The study emphasizes that pragmatic analysis investigates not only what is said explicitly but also the implied intentions, social cues, and background knowledge that interlocutors draw on in everyday interaction. Key theoretical constructs such as implicature, presupposition, and deixis are used to demonstrate how speakers and listeners negotiate meaning in casual, professional, and public settings, revealing that pragmatic competence is essential for achieving coherence and mutual understanding. The article highlights those pragmatic strategies such as indirect speech acts and

politeness mechanisms play a central role in managing social relationships and achieving communicative goals, illustrating that effective communication depends on the ability to interpret language in light of context, cultural norms, and relational dynamics. This framing underscores the importance of pragmatics for understanding both explicit and implicit aspects of human language use in real-world interactions.

Implicature

Grice (1975) theory of implicature provides the foundational framework for pragmatic analysis by proposing that meaning in communication extends beyond literal expressions through the Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims. Grice's theoretical contribution lies in clearly distinguishing between what is said and what is implied, offering a systematic explanation of indirect meaning. However, Grice's work is primarily philosophical and illustrative rather than empirical; the examples used are constructed rather than data-driven. As a result, while the theory is conceptually robust, its applicability depends heavily on how later researchers operationalize it in real discourse contexts.

Amrullah (2015) builds on Grice's framework by clarifying the distinction between conversational and conventional implicature. His interpretation emphasizes the efficiency and subtlety of indirect communication in everyday interaction. Although (Amrullah, 2015) provides explanatory examples, the article largely reiterates Gricean concepts without presenting original empirical data. Consequently, the conclusions rely more on theoretical interpretation than on systematic evidence, limiting their generalizability.

Ugwu (2021) extends conversational implicature into digital discourse, particularly social media interactions. Ugwu (2021) interprets implicature as a predictable yet hidden layer of meaning shaped by shared norms and online context. Unlike purely theoretical accounts, this study draws on naturally occurring data from social media exchanges. However, while the examples illustrate implicature effectively, the analysis tends to generalize user intentions without consistently demonstrating how alternative interpretations are ruled out, leaving some inferential claims theoretically suggestive rather than empirically conclusive.

Eragamreddy (2024) defines pragmatics as a dynamic and context-sensitive dimension of linguistic meaning that interacts with semantics and cultural norms to shape how language is used and understood in real communication. It argues that while semantics focuses on the literal meanings of words, pragmatics is essential for interpreting speaker intentions, contextual cues, and cultural influences that underpin communicative meaning beyond mere lexical content. The review emphasizes that pragmatic analysis accounts for how context (including societal, emotional, and nonverbal cues) and speaker intent interact with linguistic forms to produce meaningful discourse, and highlights the complementary roles of semantics and pragmatics in facilitating effective communication.

Moreover, it highlights the influence of culture on language interpretation, noting that nonverbal behavior, humor, and manners can change meaning across cultural contexts, and calls for further research on

cross-cultural pragmatics, language change, and digital communication to deepen understanding of pragmatic processes.

Song Lyrics as Discourse

Basundoro & Afdholi (2023) interpret song lyrics as historical and cultural documents that reflect social realities. Their argument is grounded in qualitative textual analysis linked to historical context. While the authors persuasively demonstrate how lyrics encode social values, their interpretation occasionally extends beyond the textual evidence by attributing broad societal significance to limited lyrical data, which may overstate representativeness.

Yuningsih (2018) approaches lyrics as interpersonal discourse using appraisal theory. The study presents systematic linguistic evidence to support claims about affect, judgment, and appreciation. Yuningsih (2018) offers a clearer methodological link between theory and data. However, the interpretive nature of appraisal analysis means that conclusions still depend on the analyst's subjective categorization of evaluative language.

Simbolon et al., (2025) analysis grounded largely in Systemic Functional Linguistics, highlights how linguistic mechanisms such as transitivity, mental and relational processes, and figurative language (e.g., metaphor, personification) work together to encode subjective experiences, emotions, and cultural narratives within lyrics. The review demonstrates that song lyrics not only convey individual emotions but also reflect broader socio-cultural themes like identity, gender, and power dynamics, emphasizing the intricate interplay between grammatical structure, stylistic devices, and cultural context in meaning-making. The authors also identify gaps in existing research, particularly the need for more cross-cultural and listener reception studies, and propose integrating multimodal and interdisciplinary approaches in future work.

Pratama & Sofyaningrum (2025) critical discourse analysis of song lyrics illustrates how songs can function as socially engaged discourse that critiques real-world ecological problems. Focusing on themes such as deforestation, pollution, and environmental degradation, the study finds that the band's use of plain, metaphorical, and ironic language not only represents environmental crises but also actively challenges unsustainable policies and concepts like green capitalism. The analysis shows that these lyrics operate beyond artistic expression: they act as advocacy tools that foster collective ecological awareness and promote social action. The study thus positions song lyrics as discursive practice capable of shaping public discourse, raising consciousness, and contributing to educational strategies for environmental issues.

METHOD

This research uses the descriptive qualitative research method analyze the implicature within the lyrics of Radiohead's songs in their album "OK Computer". Aspers & Corte (2019) describe qualitative research as "an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from

getting closer to the phenomenon studied," emphasizing the process of deep engagement with the subject matter to generate meaningful insights.

OK Computer is the third studio album by the English alternative rock band Radiohead, consisting of Thom Yorke (vocals, guitar), Jonny Greenwood (lead guitar, keyboards), Ed O'Brien (guitar, backing vocals), Colin Greenwood (bass), and Philip Selway (drums). The album was released on 21 May 1997 by Parlophone Records. Widely regarded as one of the most influential albums in popular music, OK Computer marked a stylistic shift for Radiohead from conventional alternative rock toward more experimental, layered, and conceptually complex music.

The album is thematically unified by concerns about modern alienation, technological anxiety, consumerism, political power, and psychological fragmentation. These themes are conveyed through abstract, often non-linear lyrics that resist straightforward interpretation, making the album particularly suitable for pragmatic and implicature-based analysis. Thom Yorke's lyricism frequently avoids explicit statements, instead relying on implication, ambiguity, and contextual inference features that align closely with (Grice, 1975) theory of conversational implicature.

The song lyrics analyzed in this study were obtained from official and widely recognized lyric databases, such as the album's liner notes and reputable lyric websites (e.g., Genius and AZLyrics), which compile lyrics based on officially released recordings and published materials. Cross-checking was conducted to ensure textual accuracy. These sources are commonly used in linguistic and literary research and provide reliable access to the lyrical content necessary for pragmatic analysis.

This album was selected because OK Computer demonstrates a high density of implied meaning, indirect expression, and pragmatic deviation, all of which are central to Grice's theory. Many of the lyrics appear to flout or exploit Gricean maxims, particularly the maxims of Relation, Quantity, and Manner to prompt listeners to infer deeper meanings beyond the literal text. As such, the album offers rich data for analyzing how implicature functions in artistic discourse, especially within song lyrics that blur the boundary between conversation and poetic expression.

Although OK Computer contains twelve tracks, this study did not analyze all songs on the album. Instead, this study selected eight songs such as Airbag, Paranoid Android, Subterranean Homesick Alien, Let Down, Karma Police, Climbing Up the Walls, No Surprises, and Lucky, based on their thematic prominence, lyrical complexity, and frequency of implied meaning. These songs most clearly exhibit indirectness, metaphorical language, and contextual ambiguity, which are essential for identifying conversational implicatures.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings on the types of implicature identified in selected songs from Radiohead's OK Computer album. The analysis classifies implicatures into conversational implicature and conventional implicature based on their occurrence in the song lyrics, drawing on (Grice, 1975) theory of implicature

Table 1. Classification of Implicature in Radiohead “ok computer” album

Song Title	Conversational Implicatures	Conventional Implicatures
Airbag	12	0
Paranoid Android	8	0
Subterranean Homesick Alien	12	0
Let Down	12	0
Karma Police	7	0
No Surprises	8	0
Climbing Up the Walls	16	1
Lucky	8	1
Total	83	2

Table 1 show that conversational implicature dominates the album, with a total of 83 occurrences, while conventional implicature appears only twice. Conversational implicatures are present in all eight songs, whereas conventional implicatures occur only in Climbing Up the Walls and Lucky. Among the songs, Climbing Up the Walls contains the highest number of conversational implicatures (16), followed by Airbag, Subterranean Homesick Alien, and Let Down, each with 12 occurrences. In contrast, Karma Police and Lucky have the lowest number of conversational implicatures, with 8 occurrences each.

According to Grice (1975), conversational implicature arises when speakers intentionally flout, violate, or exploit the Cooperative Principle and its maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner) to convey meanings indirectly. This type of implicature is highly context-dependent, cancellable, and inferred rather than explicitly stated.

Radiohead’s OK Computer is thematically concerned with: alienation, anxiety, technological domination, emotional repression, and social disconnection. These themes are not conveyed through direct, literal statements, but rather through: ambiguity, metaphor, irony, fragmented narratives, and indirect emotional expressions.

Such stylistic choices naturally encourage conversational implicatures, because listeners must infer the intended meanings by interpreting the lyrics beyond their literal content. For example: vague or incomplete statements flout the Maxim of Quantity, surreal imagery and exaggeration may flout the Maxim of Quality, abrupt thematic shifts can flout the Maxim of Relation, and obscure phrasing violates the Maxim of Manner. Thus, the overwhelming presence of conversational implicature (83 cases) reflects Radiohead’s reliance on implicit communication to engage listeners cognitively and emotionally.

By contrast, conventional implicature is tied to specific linguistic items (e.g., but, even, therefore) and does not rely on context or inference. Because song lyrics, especially alternative and experimental rock, tend to avoid overt logical connectors and explicit contrast markers, conventional implicatures appear rarely.

Putri (2023) similarly found that conversational implicature overwhelmingly dominated the data. She argues that songwriters often: express emotions indirectly, leave meanings open to interpretation, and rely on listeners' background knowledge and emotional engagement. Like Radiohead, Brandi Carlile uses implicit meaning to evoke personal reflection, supporting the idea that conversational implicature is particularly suitable for lyrical expression.

Sutrisno et al., (2025) also reports a higher frequency of conversational implicature, though with slightly more conventional implicature due to Bareilles' more narrative and motivational style. Compared to Sara Bareilles: Bareilles' lyrics are more direct and explanatory, which allows for some conventional implicature. Radiohead's lyrics are more abstract, fragmented, and metaphorical, resulting in even fewer conventional implicatures.

In summary, conversational implicature dominates OK Computer for several interconnected reasons. From a theoretical perspective, Grice's concept of conversational implicature is particularly suited to explaining indirect and non-literal communication, which is a defining characteristic of song lyrics. Stylistically, Radiohead's abstract, metaphor-rich songwriting deliberately flouts Gricean maxims, allowing the band to express complex emotions, psychological tension, and social critique without stating meanings explicitly. From a genre-related standpoint, alternative rock tends to privilege ambiguity and active listener interpretation rather than straightforward or literal messages, further encouraging the use of conversational implicature. Empirically, these findings are consistent with previous studies, which similarly identify conversational implicature as the dominant type of implicature in song lyrics across different artists and genres.

Findings

This section presents the findings of implicature analysis in Radiohead's OK Computer album based on H. P. Grice's theory of implicature, particularly the Cooperative Principle and its four conversational maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. The analysis focuses on identifying conversational and conventional implicatures embedded in the lyrics and examining how meaning is conveyed implicitly through maxim observance and flouting.

A total of eight songs were analyzed: Airbag, Paranoid Android, Subterranean Homesick Alien, Let Down, Karma Police, No Surprises, Climbing Up the Walls, and Lucky. The data were qualitatively examined to determine the type of implicature, its lyrical position, and its pragmatic function within each song.

Table 2. Classification of Implicature and Maxims in Radiohead "ok computer" album

Airbag verse 1

Type of Implicature	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The lyric gives no explicit explanation of how or why the speaker is “born again,” withholding emotional and contextual detail.	Flouted	Rebirth must be inferred as survival through trauma rather than literal rebirth
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	“I am born again” is not meant spiritually or literally but metaphorically and ironically.	Flouted	Modern rebirth is mechanical and existential, not religious
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	The juxtaposition of war imagery, industrial disaster, and rebirth is relevant only through inference.	Observed (indirectly)	Renewal emerges directly from destruction and chaos
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The imagery is fragmented, symbolic, and opaque rather than clear and orderly.	Flouted	Identity is unstable and reconstructed within technological modernity
Total				4 Maxims / 4 Implicatures
Airbag verse 2				
Type of Implicature	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of Use	Implicature Generated

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker gives only sparse narrative details (sleep, car, survival) and omits emotional or reflective explanation.	Flouted	Rebirth follows trauma; awakening occurs through near-death experience
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	"I am born again" is not intended literally or religiously, but metaphorically as existential awakening.	Flouted	Rebirth is existential rather than spiritual
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	The connection between innocence, sleep, violent survival, and rebirth must be inferred by the listener.	Observed (indirectly)	Innocence is intertwined with danger; survival produces renewal
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The imagery is poetic, indirect, and ambiguous rather than explicit or orderly.	Flouted	Technology (airbag) as artificial salvation; awakening is alienating
Total				4 Maxims / 4 Implicatures

Airbag chorus

Type of Implicature	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of Use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The chorus is extremely brief and offers no explanation for the	Flouted	Survival feels cosmically significant; meaning is

		cosmic claims, leaving large interpretive gaps.		constructed by the listener
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The claim "I am back to save the universe" is clearly hyperbolic and not literally true.	Flouted	Exaggeration critiques destiny and inflated ego after survival
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	The cosmic imagery is indirectly connected to earlier themes of rebirth and survival.	Observed (indirectly)	Near-death experience expands perception of existence
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The language is metaphorical and grand rather than clear or literal.	Flouted	Trauma induces transcendence; modern meaning is filtered through spectacle
Total				4 Maxims / 4 Implicatures

Paranoid Android verse 1

Type of Implicature	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of Use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker offers very limited explanation for the "noise," giving no explicit account of its cause or emotional impact.	Flouted	The noise represents mental chaos; rest is unattainable
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The phrase "unborn chicken voices" is clearly not literal	Flouted	Unformed, disturbing thoughts

		and signals metaphorical, surreal meaning.		dominate the mind
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	The polite request for silence is indirectly related to internal psychological distress rather than an external situation.	Flouted / Bent	The struggle is psychological, not situational
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The imagery is bizarre, opaque, and indirect instead of clear or orderly.	Flouted	Politeness masks desperation; the mind is fragmented
Total				4 Maxims / 4 Implicatures
Paranoid Android verse 2				
Type of Implicature	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The verse is concise and provides only what is necessary to assert threat and dismissal, without explanation or justification.	Observed	Authority is asserted absolutely; power does not require reasoning
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The threat of execution ("first against the wall") is exaggerated and not intended literally.	Flouted	The threat is metaphorical; imagined authority masks insecurity

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Each line directly reinforces the theme of dominance, silencing, and contempt.	Observed	Disdain for others' opinions reflects ideological and psychological violence
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The language is clear, direct, and unambiguous, mirroring authoritarian control and rigidity.	Observed	Domination is presented as cold, efficient, and deliberate
Total				4 Maxims / 4 Implicatures
Subterranean Homesick Alien verse 1				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	Enough sensory detail is given to imply dissatisfaction without stating it explicitly.	Observed (understated)	The town represents alienation
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	Sensory descriptions are sincere and grounded in experience.	Observed	Emotional numbness is reflected through sensory deprivation
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Each image coherently reinforces the contrast between nature and stagnation.	Observed	Nature symbolizes freedom and authenticity

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Clear, literal language emphasizes routine and restraint.	Observed	"Watching your feet" signals psychological caution and disconnection
Total				4 conversational implicatures
Subterranean Homesick Alien verse 2				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker provides vivid but selective details of the alien observation without explicit social commentary.	Observed (measured)	The scene functions as social critique rather than literal description
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The existence of "aliens" filming humans is clearly not intended as literal truth.	Flouted	"Aliens" symbolize detached, outsider observation
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Every image contributes to a unified critique of repression, secrecy, and conformity.	Observed	Humans have become alien to themselves
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The language is vivid yet surreal, guiding interpretation through metaphor rather than direct statement.	Flouted (figurative)	Modern life is defined by self-repression, secrecy, and self-inflicted harm

Total				4 conversational implicatures
Subterranean Homesick Alien verse 3				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker gives just enough detail to imply longing without explicitly stating dissatisfaction.	Observed	The wish for alien rescue masks discontent with human existence
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The alien abduction scenario is clearly not intended literally.	Flouted	Transformation requires a shift in perception rather than literal escape
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	The fantasy coheres with earlier critiques of monotony and alienation.	Observed	Imagination offers escape from sterile modern life
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Imagery is vivid, emotionally clear, and easy to visualize.	Observed	Beauty and meaning are accessed through transcendence of the ordinary
Total				4 conversational implicatures
Let Down verse 1				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker lists concrete details of movement and people without explicitly stating an evaluative judgment about life.	Observed	Life is monotonous and emotionally empty
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The descriptions are largely literal, though emotionally intensified for effect.	Observed (heightened)	Human experiences repeatedly fall short of expectation
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Each image contributes to the shared theme of disillusionment and routine.	Observed	Everyday actions are underpinned by existential dissatisfaction
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The language is clear, repetitive, and orderly, mirroring cyclical routine.	Observed	“Clinging onto bottles” symbolizes attempts to cope with disappointment
Total				4 conversational implicatures
Let Down chorus				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The chorus is minimal and repetitive, offering no explanation for the emotional state described.	Flouted (under-informative)	Emotional disappointment leads to paralysis and passivity

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The simile “crushed like a bug” is figurative rather than literal.	Flouted	Modern life renders the individual fragile and insignificant
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Physical imagery of being crushed is linked to emotional disillusionment.	Observed	Disappointment manifests as overwhelming yet muted suffering
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Repetition and vagueness replace clarity and progression.	Flouted	Cyclical repetition symbolizes entrapment and monotony
Total				4 conversational implicatures

Let Down verse 2

Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The verse presents intense, vivid imagery without explicitly explaining its emotional or existential meaning.	Observed	Life is chaotic and violent beneath ordinary experience
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	Statements like “I am gonna grow wings” and “chemical reaction” are clearly metaphorical rather than literal.	Flouted	The speaker longs for transformation or liberation

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Images of destruction, aspiration, and emotion all contribute to a single theme of frustrated growth.	Observed	Personal change is desired but not yet achieved
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The phrasing is fragmented, abrupt, and repetitive ("hysterical and useless").	Flouted	Emotional responses feel overwhelming, chaotic, and ineffective
Total				4 conversational implicatures
Karma Police verse 1				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker lists odd behaviors without explaining why they justify "arrest."	Observed (understated)	The man's behavior is socially irritating and disruptive
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	"Arrest this man" and the mechanical comparisons are exaggerated and not literal.	Flouted	The call for punishment is figurative, not legal or real
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	All descriptions serve to characterize the same individual as annoying and alienating.	Observed	Mechanical, incoherent traits warrant social critique

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The metaphors are clear, concrete, and easy to visualize despite being figurative.	Observed	The person is perceived as unintelligible, repetitive, and dehumanized
Total				4 conversational implicatures
Karma Police verse 2				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker calls for “arrest” without giving any real justification or context.	Flouted (under-informative)	Moral judgment disguises personal discomfort or prejudice
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The claim that a hairstyle causes illness and warrants arrest is exaggerated and not literal.	Flouted	Moral outrage is performative rather than sincere
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Trivial irritation is framed as a moral offense under “karma.”	Observed (ironically)	Authority and morality are conflated for superficial reasons
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The language is blunt and provocative, using shocking imagery (“Hitler hairdo”) to force interpretation.	Flouted	Self-righteousness masks insecurity and projection

Total				4 conversationa l implicatures
No Surprises verse 1				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversation al implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker gives only three brief images, offering no explicit emotional explanation.	Observ ed (minim al)	The speaker is emotionally exhausted and overwhelmed
Conversation al implicature	Maxim of Quality	A heart as a “landfill” and a job that “kills” are clearly metaphorical, not literal.	Floute d	Emotional overload and spiritual depletion define the speaker’s life
Conversation al implicature	Maxim of Relation	All images point toward the same theme of quiet despair and suffering.	Observ ed	Daily life causes ongoing psychological harm
Conversation al implicature	Maxim of Manner	The language is stark, simple, and direct, avoiding ambiguity.	Observ ed	Lingering trauma exists beneath ordinary routines
Total				4 conversationa l implicatures
No Surprises verse 2				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	The shift from personal observation to political command appears abrupt and forces inferential linkage.	Flouted	Personal unhappiness mirrors broader social and political decay
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	No explanation is given for why the government should be overthrown.	Flouted (under-informative)	Political authority has lost legitimacy and needs no justification
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Simple, repetitive phrasing ("they don't, they don't") replaces structured argument.	Flouted	Emotional exhaustion produces raw, unpolished resistance
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The imperative "Bring down the government" functions as expressive exaggeration rather than literal instruction.	Flouted (figurative)	Resistance is symbolic, born from shared frustration rather than organized revolt
Total				4 conversational implicatures
Climbing of The Walls verse 1				
Type of Implicature	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker gives partial, suggestive imagery without explicit explanation	Flouted	The speaker symbolizes access to inner secrets rather

		of meaning or intention.		than literal control
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	The speaker claims to be a “key” and to appear as a “reflection,” which cannot be literally true.	Flouted	Meaning is metaphorical, pointing to psychological rather than physical access
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	All imagery consistently relates to access, boundaries, and inward exploration.	Observed	Entering another’s inner space leads toward self-examination
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	The verse is clear in structure but deliberately enigmatic and symbolic.	Flouted	Deep introspection is disorienting and has interpretive limits
Conventional implicature	Lexical item (“but”)	“But” introduces an encoded contrast between expectation and outcome.	Observed (lexical)	Discovering others’ secrets gives way to confronting oneself
Total				4 conversational implicatures + 1 conventional implicature

Climbing of The Walls verse 2

Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	Sparse, fragmented lines with no explicit explanation	Flouted (under)	The boundary between safety and danger is

		of events or relationships.	- informative)	fragile and unstable
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Intimate phrases are juxtaposed with violent or threatening imagery.	Flouted	Harm and control can emerge from familiar or intimate contexts
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Ambiguous, calm phrasing contrasts with disturbing content.	Flouted	Silence reflects fear, paralysis, and psychological entrapment
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	Statements of friendship and protection conflict with implied threat.	Flouted (ironic /figurative)	Love or friendship can conceal domination and coercion
Total	4 conversational implicatures			

Climbing of The Walls verse 3

Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Calm, almost domestic statements about darkness are juxtaposed with explicit violence.	Flouted	Avoidance and concealment enable psychological harm to intensify
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	No explanation is given for the violence or its source.	Flouted (under -)	The pain is internalized, cyclical, and psychologically driven

			informative)	
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Flat tone and repetition contrast with brutal imagery.	Flouted (ambiguity and monotony)	Emotional numbness and dissociation accompany sustained trauma
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	"Blows to the mind" exaggerate physical violence into mental assault.	Flouted (figurative)	Psychological suffering can be as violent as physical attack
Total				4 conversational implicatures

Climbing of The Walls verse 4

Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	Domestic protection ("lock the kids up") is juxtaposed with a vague, lonely adult presence.	Flouted	Danger is implied to exist within familiar, everyday environments
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	No explanation is given for the threat or for "the eyes in the cupboard."	Flouted (under-informative)	The menace is hidden, unspeakable, and psychologically inferred
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Obscure, elliptical phrases ("shut the eyes in the cupboard," "smell of a local man").	Flouted (ambiguity)	Threat is indirect, unsettling, and difficult to articulate

Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	Sensory claims ("I've got the smell of a local man") are exaggerated and symbolic.	Flouted (figurative)	Loneliness and alienation are sensed as predatory or invasive forces
Total				4 conversational implicatures
Lucky verse 1				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	Expressions like "kill me with love" and "it's gonna be a glorious day" are clearly figurative and exaggerated.	Flouted	Love is overwhelming and emotionally transformative
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	The speaker gives just enough information about emotional change without explicit explanation.	Observed	The speaker feels a shift away from past misfortune
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	All lines consistently focus on luck, love, and emotional momentum.	Observed	Hope and optimism dominate the speaker's emotional state
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Repetition ("I'm on a roll") and simple, emphatic phrasing convey clarity and confidence.	Observed	Emotional intensity feels immediate and sincere
Total				4 conversational implicatures

Lucky verse 1				
Implicature Type	Gricean Maxim	How It Operates in the Lyric	Type of use	Implicature Generated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quality	“The head of state has called for me by name” is exaggerated and metaphorical rather than literally true.	Flouted	The speaker feels unusually important or empowered
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Quantity	No explanation is given for why the call is refused or how the luck will change.	Underfilled	Confidence and self-assurance are implied, not stated
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Relation	References to authority and optimism align with the theme of personal renewal.	Observed	The speaker prioritizes personal transformation over external power
Conversational implicature	Maxim of Manner	Direct, ironic phrasing (“I don’t have time for him”) conveys calm defiance.	Observed	Rejection of authority is effortless and self-assured
Conventional implicature	Lexical item “but”	“But” encodes contrast between expectation (answering authority) and action (refusal).	Encoded	Defiance against authority regardless of context
Total				4 conversational implicatures, 1

				conventional implicature
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Discussion

This study set out to examine how implicature functions in Radiohead's *OK Computer* lyrics by applying (Grice, 1975) theory of conversational and conventional implicature. The findings clearly address the research objectives by demonstrating that implicature particularly conversational implicature is a central pragmatic mechanism through which the album conveys meaning beyond literal interpretation. The dominance of conversational implicature across all eight songs indicates that Radiohead systematically relies on contextual inference and maxim flouting to communicate complex psychological, social, and political themes. Thus, the results confirm the study's initial assumption that indirect meaning, rather than explicit statement, is the primary mode of meaning construction in the album. From a theoretical perspective, the prevalence of conversational implicature can be interpreted as a deliberate exploitation of Grice's Cooperative Principle, especially the maxims of Quality and Manner.

Examples of analysis:

Subterranean Homesick Alien

[Verse 1]

The breath of the morning, I keep forgettin'
The smell of the warm summer air
I live in a town where you can't smell a thing
You watch your feet for cracks in the pavement

The lines "The breath of the morning, I keep forgettin' / The smell of the warm summer air / I live in a town where you can't smell a thing / You watch your feet for cracks in the pavement" juxtapose vivid sensory recollection with lifeless modern existence. Literally, the speaker contrasts the freshness of morning and summer air with the dull, odorless reality of their current environment. Figuratively, these lines evoke alienation and sensory deprivation — the speaker longs for connection with the natural world, yet finds themselves trapped in a sterile, artificial setting. The act of "watching your feet for cracks in the pavement" encapsulates monotony and cautious detachment, suggesting a life reduced to routine observation rather than genuine experience. Through this imagery, the verse constructs a world stripped of vitality and spontaneity, where sensory and emotional numbness prevail.

Drawing on Grice's conversational implicature framework, the lyric's deeper meaning emerges through subtle manipulation of the maxims. The Maxim of Quantity is observed yet understated: the speaker provides enough descriptive contrast to imply dissatisfaction without ever explicitly declaring it. The Maxim of Quality is maintained, as the observations feel sincere and grounded in lived experience. The Maxim of Relation ensures coherence — each image builds upon the preceding one to reinforce the contrast between

remembered vitality and present stagnation. The Maxim of Manner contributes to the lyric's clarity and mood; the straightforward, sensory language heightens the emotional resonance of loss and nostalgia. These cooperative yet poetic choices create a particularized conversational implicature, requiring the listener to infer that the speaker's world has lost its sensory and emotional depth.

Ultimately, the verse implies that modern life, symbolized by the lifeless town, numbs both perception and feeling. The speaker's longing for the "breath of the morning" and the "warm summer air" represents a yearning for authenticity and renewal in a mechanized, emotionally barren world. Within this verse, there are four implicatures: that the town symbolizes alienation; that sensory deprivation reflects emotional emptiness; that the remembered natural world embodies freedom and vitality; and that cautious movement ("watch your feet") signifies psychological restraint and disconnection from life's spontaneity

Climbing Up the Walls

[Verse 1]

I am the key to the lock in your house
 That keeps your toys in the basement
 But if you get too far inside
 You'll only see my reflection

The literal meaning describes a surreal scenario: the speaker claims to be a key controlling access to someone's toys in a basement, and going too far inside results in seeing the speaker's reflection instead of the toys. On the surface, it presents a strange, metaphorical scene rather than a literal one. The verse relies heavily on conversational implicature, as the listener must infer deeper meaning from the imagery. Using Grice's maxims, the speaker provides enough detail to suggest mystery and introspection (Quantity), exaggerates or flouts literal truth (Quality), stays relevant to themes of access, boundaries, and self-discovery (Relation), and presents the imagery clearly yet enigmatically (Manner).

The implicature is that the speaker represents access to someone's inner world or secrets, but delving too deeply into another person ultimately leads to self-reflection rather than uncovering hidden truths. This reflects limits of understanding others and the mirroring effect of deep introspection. Most of the verse demonstrates particularized conversational implicature, as its meaning depends on context and metaphor, with figurative implicature present in the "key" and "reflection" representing access and self-awareness. Additionally, the word "but" signals contrast between expectation (finding toys) and reality (seeing reflection), producing conventional implicature, since the contrast is lexically encoded and understood independently of context. Overall, the verse blends one conventional implicature with four conversational implicatures, creating a layered exploration of boundaries, introspection, and the limits of understanding.

Frequent metaphor, ambiguity, and non-literal expressions encourage listeners to infer meanings related to alienation, fear, technological anxiety, and emotional vulnerability. This finding is consistent with pragmatic studies emphasizing that implicature is particularly productive in contexts where speakers or lyricists intend to evoke reflection rather than transmit direct information (Amrullah, 2015; Eragamreddy, 2024). The findings also align with previous research that conceptualizes song lyrics as socially and culturally embedded discourse. Studies by (Basundoro & Afdholi, 2023) and (Pratama & Sofyaningrum, 2025) argue that lyrics operate as vehicles for social critique and ideological positioning, a claim supported by the high frequency of implicature identified in songs such as *Climbing Up the Walls* and *Let Down*. However, unlike discourse-analytic or systemic functional approaches, the present study provides a more explicit pragmatic explanation of *how* such meanings are inferred, thereby extending earlier work that often-treated implied meaning implicitly rather than analytically. At the same time, some differences emerge when this study is compared with broader pragmatic research. Empirical studies on implicature in everyday or digital discourse often report a more balanced distribution between conventional and conversational implicature (Puri & Baskara, 2023; Ugwu, 2021). The minimal presence of conventional implicature in this corpus may reflect genre-specific stylistic choices in alternative rock lyrics, where ambiguity and interpretive openness are prioritized over lexicalized meaning. Alternatively, this discrepancy may also point to a methodological limitation: reliance solely on Grice's framework may underrepresent meanings that could be captured through relevance theory or cognitive-pragmatic models. Several gaps and limitations should therefore be acknowledged. First, the analysis is text-based and does not account for multimodal factors such as melody, vocal delivery, or listener reception, which previous studies have shown to influence pragmatic interpretation (Puri & Baskara, 2023). Second, implicature identification inevitably involves interpretive judgment, and although Grice's maxims provide analytical guidance, alternative readings remain possible. These limitations suggest that future research should triangulate pragmatic analysis with audience-response studies, multimodal frameworks, or comparative analyses across genres and albums. Such approaches would strengthen the empirical robustness of implicature research in musical discourse. In sum, the findings support and extend existing pragmatic and lyrical discourse studies by showing that implicature is not merely an aesthetic feature but a systematic communicative strategy in *OK Computer*. By situating the results within established theory and prior research, this study highlights the broader relevance of implicature for understanding how popular music encodes complex social and emotional meanings, while also identifying clear directions for further investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study achieves its research objectives by demonstrating how implicature functions as a core pragmatic mechanism in Radiohead's *OK*

Computer album, revealing how meaning is systematically constructed beyond literal interpretation through indirect language and contextual inference. More importantly, the study shows that implicature in song lyrics is not merely a stylistic feature but a communicative resource that enhances emotional depth and ideological expression, reinforcing the relevance of pragmatic analysis in literary and musical texts. While the findings contribute to pragmatic and discourse studies by extending implicature analysis into contemporary song lyrics, the research also highlights the need for broader methodological perspectives. Future studies may build on this work by examining listener interpretation, comparing implicature use across different albums or musical genres, or integrating multimodal elements such as melody and performance to capture meaning construction more comprehensively. Ongoing research in pragmatics and discourse analysis continues to explore how implied meaning operates across digital media and popular culture, and the present study offers a foundation for such inquiries by showing how implicature bridges linguistic form, artistic expression, and social commentary in modern music.

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