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READING ROCK-VIDEO:

A STUDY IN THE OPEN SIGN

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READING ROCK-VIDEO: A STUDY IN THE OPEN SIGN

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Music-video owes its genesis to three existing media forms of communication: film, television and advertising. In the opening chapter, a brief overview is offered of the interdependence of these four "literatures" and how "cross-fertilization" occurs, in addition to which the productive phase of promo-video is discussed. From film, music-video draws much of its stylistic richness (often aping famous scenes or performances in hommage), but evinces practical differences in its material of expression, in duration, in punctuation and in the importance placed on the soundtrack. At the level of ideology, the two differ in regard to the obligation to 'realism', the decoding of the open sign (reception theory), and in the functional aspect of product versus publicity. From television, music-video has learned certain practicalities of production (specifically with regard to the visual presentation of sound and vocals), since TV is the medium on which most videos are shown. However, the thesis shows that despite the analogies to be drawn in terms of collaborative efforts and the material aspects of production, there is a vital difference in the narrative function assigned to the soundtrack. From advertising, music-video finds its motivation (it has a

commercial function) and also constructs its open sign in an identical manner.

The question of what music-video sells, the thesis argues, should not be rashly concluded. On an ideological level, the clip promotes the artist - and becomes a marketing tool to launch, sustain or regenerate an artist's image. The notion of "image" - and its central importance in music-video - leads us to examine the concept of myth (as posited by Roland Barthes). On a practical level, the music-video sells itself in the sense that most promo clips are compiled into a longform package which becomes a consumer item in its own right, the so-called "fourth format".

The thesis identifies a cycle of five recurring themes of artist presentation: the Artist as Deity, Everyman, Double, Object of Scrutiny and Performer, before drawing parallels between the world of music-video and the dreamscape. A later chapter examines the reality of music-video, both in its approximation of real life events and situations, as well as artists' distortion of their reality in order to make themselves more believable - and more appealing - to different target markets.

In conclusion, the thesis examines the career trajectory of Madonna, specifically through her canon of video performances, thus explicating how an artist with a superb grasp of music-video can exploit the connotative values of the open sign to reinvent him or herself.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.



Marcus Allan Brewster

1st day of July 1991.

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And to Sheena, who saw me through the night.

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THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC-VIDEO

Music-video: it blasts us from our television sets, from giant screens in nightclubs, even when we go to the cinema it sometimes appears masquerading as a trailor for a forthcoming attraction. Yet quite what music-video is eludes a categoric definition. Music-video (or rock-video or promo-video) seems to owe much to so many different media inputs. It fuses commerce and creativity, and blurs the line (in its own words) between what is "hip" and what is "hype": what is truly contemporary and what is a simulation of the contemporary. It is such a complex blend of pop cultures that it demands to be studied - and ultimately to be taken seriously.

Music-video is a product of the cinema just as much as it is a product of television, so much so in fact that one could argue the case that The Jazz Singer (1929) was extraordinary not only insofar as it was the first film to have sound (the original talking picture), but that it also, in retrospect, contained the first seeds of the music-video. As one monitors the progress of promo-video (which pays increasingly direct hommage to old Hollywood) and of the most recent outcrop of movie-musicals (all heavily indebted to video technique), this argument appears quite credible. From Busby Berkely in the Thirties to the Beatles films in the Sixties, right up to Flashdance and Footloose in the Eighties, the evolution of the musical has been tied to the revolution of rock-video. In fact the all-pervading influence of music-video has made itself known in movie genres apart from that

of the movie-musical. 1990's action thriller, "Total Recall", is being hailed as a cinematic breakthrough. Critic Richard Corliss calls the film "big budget movie-making at its most inventive. It zaps out beguiling images so quickly that viewers may want to see the film over again right away, just to catch what they missed. Verhoeven [the director] seems to have assumed that today's movie-goers have a megabyte media intelligence; then he worked like crazy to overload it. When 'Total Recall' is cooking, it induces visual vertigo."[1] Inventive this may be for a film, but it is pretty much a standard description of what we have come to expect from music-video. Rapidity of editing, unusual camera shots, cannibalization of existing media forms: these are the basic tenets of rock-video. It is fascinating to see that the medium of music-video which has so long laboured under the critical disdain of being overly derivative, has proved itself a creative frontrunner.

It is important to follow the threads of the development of music-video in the Hollywood heyday of the movie-musical. The earliest of these movies were often no more than a series of brilliantly executed song and dance show pieces held tenuously together by the tritest of story lines. The visual spectacle was more important than the plot, form eclipsed content. Not surprising then that video directors have been drawn to this era for their inspiration. Certain promo-videos (eg. Culture Club's) have all the trademarks of old M-G-M musicals* which especially suit their lyrical

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* These and other cinematic classics, once a staple of prime-time television, have since vanished from the small screen. Instead of the late late movie, students of film now hone their critical talents on music-video.

material (which has little or no evident narrative content).

But video is not a parasitic medium, it gives as well as it takes. The film Flashdance, for instance, was quite revolutionary in its day because it was conceived as having a modular structure. Segments could be shifted around with no visible damage to the film's construction. Flashdance took its cue from music-video in format as well as directorial style and editing. It appeared as a clever collection of hit tunes with matching videos which had, as most musicals and music-videos do, plenty of imaginative dance sequences.

Dessa Fox refers to this inter-influence of American entertainments as cross-fertilization[2]: "A film looks like a music-video, music-videos are lengthening themselves into TV shows, and the adverts are full of Siouxsie* clones. Americans are the people whose party political broadcasts are starting to look like 'sincere' pop promos. Sometimes the same people manufacture both."[3] If campaign spots on television and rock-video can be compared, then it is because they are both technically and spiritually indebted to Madison Avenue. If politics tries to sell us a president, then it is encumbent upon us to ask ourselves what music-video tries to sell. Is it an artist and/or the record of the song performed?

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* Bizarre looking lead-singer of punk-group "Siouxsie and the Banshees".

Billboard magazine estimates that in 1984 the music industry spent sixty million dollars on over one thousand five hundred four-minute promotional devices. In the first half of that year, more videos were produced and sold than in the history of the genre. Now, half a dozen years later, the figures have all but doubled.

The watershed year for music-video is generally considered to be 1975, for that was the year that witnessed the airing of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" on "Top of the Pops". Up till then, all footage of artists performing their songs was presented live (either before television or concert audiences), that is to say they were seen much as if one were sitting in the BBC studios or in Wembley arena. Queen's video, directed by Jon Roseman, was the first to move imaginatively outside of these constraints. Although simple by today's standards, it helped keep the record in the chart for sixteen weeks. As the interest in promo videos grew, so did the techniques and the technology. In this regard, the Jackson Five's video for their 1978 smash "Blame it on the Boogie" has also been recognized as a landmark development in the history of the medium, as it is the first promo-video to utilise Quantel. Quantel is a sophisticated, digital, computer-linked apparatus which creates a myriad of special effects such as spin, tumble, ooze, freeze, compression, expansion, position, adding coloured borders, rotation and more. In "Blame it on the Boogie", the Jacksons blazed their various ways across the screen with a comet tail effect trailing after them. There was not much of a plot, but it was hypnotic and mesmerizing nonetheless, especially for 1978, and effective enough to generate a Top 10 hit. For this

reason, record companies have continued to invest in music-video because the returns are so rewarding. Quite apart from the profits to be made in the video retail market, these companies can save money on touring costs by exporting stop-gap product (a rock-video can have a hologrammatic effect, creating an awareness of the artist in several countries simultaneously without them actually being there) to far-flung territories and, most importantly, there is still a rich correlation between heavy rotation on MTV* and increased record sales.

With this in mind, it is perhaps worthwhile to ask who is actually involved in the production of the clips? In fact the answer is fivefold:

1) the record companies who provide the finance, and whose commisioners farm out the clips to the best bids from producers.
2) the production houses who, with the expertise of their producers, set designers etc., manufacture the videos.
3) the editors and all those involved with the post-production facilities.

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* Music Television (MTV) is a Warner-Amex owned cable network broadcasting 24 hours a day and reaching more than 20 million American homes. Nearly 85% of the nation's young adults (18-34) watch it regularly. Among MTV's competitors are "The Jukebox Network" (which also offers continuous programming) and NBC's "Friday Night Videos" (with access to over 50 million viewers). The 34 to 45 year olds have their own three more conservative channels featuring artists like Julio Iglesias, and the under 12's are served with Michael Jackson on Disney T.V. There are also innumerable local stations and subscription-T.V. services (eg. Playboy's "Hot Rocks") playing videos or video variants (recent movies). MTV's American success has spurred the arrival of MTV Europe, and its major rival, Sky Television.

4) the musicians.

5) the directors whose vision mostly shapes the music-video.

Promo-video, as these facts show, means business, but is it a simple case of commerce before creativity? Or even technology before creativity? In this latter case certainly, the parameters of creativity are often extended by the advent of technical developments. These open up new vistas, suggest new ideas, even inspire new trends. And by constant reinforcement, these innovations lose their novelty for directors and through habituation become, in a sense, invisible to the viewer. Creativity, after having exploited the resources of the new technology, turns its attention elsewhere.

Much invention and imagination goes into the making of rock-videos, and the medium has attracted several highly esteemed directors. Whether they are attracted by the creative freedom offered or by an enticing salary is debatable, but it is unlikely that people of the ilk of Stephen Spielberg, Lindsay Anderson, David Bailey, Anton Corbijn and the late John Frankenheimer would be enticed by questions of finance alone. Budgets are large: common practice accords a single by a new band a promo budget of between ten and fifteen thousand pounds; a middle-level band can expect to receive between fifteen and twenty thousand pounds. Bands that chart regularly in the Top Ten are given sums that range from the large to the ridiculous, and inflationary costs are swelling budgets every year. Of course, equating big budget with video success is not always correct. One of the biggest hit

videos of 1989 was Tone Loc's "Wild Thing" which was delivered for four hundred dollars.*

There are many constraints involved in the complex process of making a promo-video that are peculiar to the medium. The short time span (usually three days at most) allowed for the shoot poses a challenge to the performers and technicians alike. The sense of urgency with which the entire record industry is imbued insists on a creative realization of a project which, in other mediums would enjoy a period of grace. A song is a fashionable commodity that will appeal and be consumed within a matter of months, if not weeks. The entire marketing package, of which the video is an integral part, has to be slick and up-to-the-minute. Furthermore, in terms of sheer timing, a video can only be made once the song is completed, and on completion the song is already a marketable commodity which should be released immediately to benefit from the currency of its sound.

Music-video is not only a commercial product, it is a cultural product too: in watching it we subscribe to a package of images, dreams and ideal ways of life. Any definition of music-video must therefore be couched in terms of the relations between its

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* Consider some other figures: "You Might Think" by The Cars:- £256 000 and 5000 man hours; "When The Rain Begins To Fall" by Jermaine Jackson and Pia Zadora:- £448 000; and the most extravagent of them all, "Thriller" by Michael Jackson:- in excess of $1 000 000 spent, and a contender for an Academy Award nomination. Directed by John Landis (American Werewolf in London) and lasting 14 minutes, "Thriller" owes too much to Hollywood production values to be called a simple music-video.

material conditions of existence as well as its work as a representation which produces meanings.

Up to this point I have traced the history of music-video, from the germination of The Jazz Singer and the cross-fertilization of the various entertainment media, to the paramount importance of the new technology of special effects. I have also considered in some detail the productive phase of promo-video, indicating the various parties involved in the production of the clips, as well as emphasizing certain constraints such as timing and budget. Of necessity, this chapter has been of a practical nature. In later chapters I shall concern myself with matters of ideology, and more specifically, the modes of signification of rock-video.

Before further venturing into a comparison between music-video and film, it is important to define the relevant critical vocabulary. For instance: film and music-video, although obviously diverse enterprises and activities, are collective products. They are both forms of "symbolic communication". More importantly, perhaps, film, literature, television, painting, pop music and pop-video can all, in some sense, be seen as repositories of cultural meaning, as well as systems of signification. In this sense, they are all part of, in Janet Wolfi's terms, "a generic sociology of the arts"[4] which should be sensitive to diversity in art. Every artform, indeed every communicational system has a specific material of expression which marks it off from other systems. We distinguish between cinema and painting, for instance, not on the basis of the kinds of signification each customarily transmits but on the basis of the material through which any signification is possible in each.

By film, I understand a distinct mode of film practice with its own cinematic style and industrial conditions of existence. Christian Metz distinguishes between film and cinema as follows: the filmic is that illimitable area of questions dealing with film's relations to other activities. This would naturally comprehend all the basics that go into the making of a film (technology, director's biographies) as well as the by-products of the existence of film (banning and censorship, the star system). The cinematographic is the narrower subject of the films

themselves, removed from both the complexities which brought them into being as well as the complexities which result from them. Thus, semiology leaves the study of the filmic, the externals of film, to other related disciplines such as sociology, economics, and social psychology, whilst concentrating its attentions on the cinematographic, the inner mechanics of films themselves. At the heart of the field of film is the cinematographic fact and at the core of the cinematographic fact is the process of signification.

For Metz, the raw material of cinema is by no means reality itself or a particular means of signification. For him, quite simply, the raw materials are the channels of information to which we pay attention when we watch a film. These include:

1) images which are photographic, moving and multiple
2) graphic traces which include all written material which we read off the screen
3) recorded speech
4) recorded music
5) recorded sound effects.

The film semiotician is the analyst interested in signification coming from this combination of material.

The semiotics of the cinema, like the study of all systems of signification, takes its point of departure directly from linguistics. The user of language must be able to operate at two levels, comprehending the function of sounds (phonemes, the units of the signifier) and meaning (monemes, the units of the signified). This power of double articulation, whilst it is endemic to certain

other languages, in no way applies to cinema. Its signifiers are too closely tied to their signifieds since images are realistic representations and sounds are exact reproductions of what they refer to. (Later, Metz was to revise this view, urging that we go beyond the image instead of being caught up in its fascinating likeness to reality. We must examine two sorts of codes: those which are added to the image and those which allow us to see the image in the first place. No image is pure: all signification is the product of culture, convention and work.) Turning to the other visible characteristic of language, Metz argues that the cinema can hardly even lay claim to a grammar. We are unnable to tell an ungrammatical film construction from a grammatical one. Finally, film is a language in which "every use must be poetic or inventive"[5]. Put somewhat more technically, in verbal language the connotative level of signification exists quite separately from the denotative level. In film, the connotation comes in the same door as the denotation. Film, then, remains a medium of expression more than a system of communication. It seems more like a <u>place</u> of signification, rather than a <u>means</u> of it.

This dissertation focusses, as a filmic fact, fairly narrowly on the cinematographic products of Hollywood. This is neither as limiting nor as facile as it would appear at first glance. By specifying Hollywood film, I am presuming some differentiation between films made on the Western coast of the United States, and those made across the Atlantic in Britain, on the Continent, Central Europe, and even in the Far East. It is the structural and stylistic differences that concern us here, as well as the

underlying cultural distinctions that inform them. Traditionally, for example, England has a different notion of what is considered comic, and Orientals have a very different idea of what in the female form is considered attractive.

This contention is entirely in line with reception theory (the work of Hans Robert Jauss, for instance), which claims that the nature of particular interpretations by readers can only be understood in the context of the historical (and geographical I would argue) conditions of reading. According to reception theory, all texts become works through the mediation of the act of reading (the aesthetic response). "The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader"[6]. This interpretative imprecision, constantly vacillating from reader to reader, and dependent on his or her disposition, mode of reading, general historical situation, and the broader structures of social division, is a succint explanation for the divergence of individual critical opinion. However, reception aesthetics are so fixated on the primacy of unique interpretations and their underlying causes (social, historical, etc.), that they neglect to appreciate that these underlying causes can be unifying as well. People of Oriental extraction will find the notion of what is considered sexually attractive different to Westerners, precisely because they are unified by the tenets of their Oriental culture. Reception theory neglects to posit a functional model which can

understand a mass audience reading.

Although I have distanced myself from the theories of Hirsch (who argues for the priority of authorial meaning), I agree with him that there is an enormous difference between the naive reader and the analyst looking for a "correct" interpretation. "Reading is theoretically innocent and analytically naive."[7] For this reason, it is a mediation, or fusion of horizons, in the simplest sense. The products of mass entertainment media could be referred to as mass-produced fantasy, summoning up the spectre of millions of viewers or readers passively sharing in the same homogenised thoughts, images and dreams. If this statement initially appears irreconcilable with reception aethetics, then it must be re-examined. Whilst not disputing the fact that each individual reader has their own particular anomolies which will influence their understanding of the text, I am arguing that there is some common ground amongst readers which produces the same "work" when read by all readers, and certainly those of the same culture. This broad, underlying meaning of a text (which produces a unifying and common work) is not a function of authorial omnipotence however. The author is, I would argue, merely a conduit for a series of themes, symbols, icons and myths, which subconsciouly he transmits. This is not necessarily to be read as a validation of the Barthean perpective of authorial death, although I would agree that "A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination"[8] (the reader). However, in flagrant opposition to Barthes, I contend that a text is a line of words releasing a "theological" message, not in the sense of Author/God, but in the

sense of some higher knowledge which informs the text. The body corporate of viewers and readers assimilates the texts offered up for its consumption by a variety of authors, and stores the set of residual images in a collective unconscious. It becomes a common heritage, a pool of reference in which we may all gaze with perfect understanding. For instance, the hot air vent sequence that had Marilyn Monroe's skirt billowing around her in "The Seven Year Itch" is such a residual image. When a similar situation occurs in "The Woman in Red", Kelly Le Brock does not appear to be embarrassed, inconvenienced, or unattractive. The viewer reconciles the two images, Le Brock-Monroe, and because of their obvious similarity, imputes to the Le Brock image the "sex-symbol" mythology that is consonant with Marilyn.

The medium which most often offers us texts for assimilation is, of course, television. Due to its widespread availability and acceptance (ease of access), its materials of expression which allow film to be transmitted, as opposed to reflected (McLuhan sees this a material difference; I, like Metz, do not), as well as its voracious appetite for material which sometimes leads to re-screening (an extension of Eco's theme of "redundance"[9] - the repetition of the message both over time and within the message), television is ideally suited to hold the "pool of reference".

Video directors and video viewers share a common viewing heritage, inculcated by years of watching late night movies on television. Music-video, wedded as it is to the homogenised package of thoughts, images and dreams that Hollywood conjures up, also

fishes in the "pool of reference". This marriage of mass entertainment media has historical and geographical roots. The record industry, as a world wide force, is predominantly American, likewise the film industry. As an extension of this territorial fact, it becomes increasingly apparent why mass readings are plausible. Popular songs, videos and movies have a common referent in that they are the strands that are woven to produce the tapestry of American pop-culture. Whilst not denying the existence of several regionalised sub-cultures, the effect of technology is that of rationalisation, and the formation of a homogeneous culture. The sophistication of the electronic media can promulgate the artistic message with a far greater efficiency in terms of speed, quality and the number of readers/decoders reached. Whatever differences exist between the cinema of Hollywood and that say of Pinewood, are rapidly being swamped by the ease and facility of international communication, a la McLuhan's "global village".

A 'mode of film practice', and here I am indebted to Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson[10] for their work on Hollywood cinema, should be defined as a context consisting of a set of widely held stylistic norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production. These norms constitute a determinate set of assumptions about how a movie should behave, about what stories it tells properly and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique, and about the activities of the spectator. The classical American cinema, for this is what concerns us here, takes its shape from certain specific devices. To begin with, it relies heavily upon story causality and

motivation, using various formal elements and combinations of these elements to connect visual time and space in narrative. For the sake of convenience, we should posit the concept of 'systems', by which I mean the relationships which govern the use of combinations of the elements of the first level.

The classical Hollywood film contains three systems: narrative logic, cinematic time, and cinematic space. Any given cinematic device or element, such as the combination of individual shots that we call "continuity editing", may operate within any or all of the above three systems, depending on the "function" or purpose conventionally assigned it. Noel Burch, in his Theory of Film Practice[11], doesn't simply mention cinema's startling ability to vary time and space relations; he actually computes and spells out the fifteen possible relationships between succeeding shots. Burch can show that Hollywood cinema, in its search to tell "representational" stories, has relied on only 3 or 4 of the fifteen kinds of continuity.

Lastly, the third level of investigation of classical Hollywood style looks at the principles of relations among the available systems and devices.

A valid definition of what constituted the classical style in Hollywood depends upon an integration of all three levels of their analytic scheme. From a semiotic viewpoint, we can best understand this by introducing the term "code". A "code" is nothing other than "the logical relationship which allows a message to be

understood."[12] Codes do not exist in films, they are the rules which allow the messages of a film. Codes are the opposite of the materials of expression in that they are the logical forms pressed onto this material to generate messages or meaning. Hollywood film chose to become, along with other popular mass forms of communication, a system of narration. Most narrative techniques, such as flashbacks or stories told within other stories, can be found in literature as well as in cinema, and are thus non-specific codes. With the decision to opt for narration came certain "limitations" on a film's construction so that spectators could read it with the same ease they used in attending to other popular narrative forms. In short, in making narrative causal, Hollywood chose the manipulation of time over space. For example, much of the early cinema thrives on "deadlines" as the most common device specifying the limit within which the cause and effect narrative can operate.

If film were to compete for the amusement market with other narrative forms, it would have to offer - or convince viewers that it did offer - something distinct from other narrative forms of amusement. To make such work profitable meant devising standardized procedures of manufacture and marketing. Thus, two general profit goals - differentiation and standardization - were instrumental frames surrounding the growth of movies from early days to the solidification of the 'classical" paradigm.

If Hollywood film has evolved sufficiently for there to be a classical paradigm, and indeed whether this is not only

international but therefore generalisable, then it it is not certain whether music-video has travelled the same road to the same extent. From a semiotic viewpoint, music-video shares the same five materials of expression as film, although 'recorded speech' is not as prevalent in the former as it is in the latter. If music-video is somehow new, as every critic has suggested, its newness lies not in some mystical absence of a storyteller, or reduction of spectacle, or any other formula of new freedom which has been advanced. Its newness must lie in the devlopment of new subcodes, especially of the grande syntagmatique[13] (the shot sequence, the alternating syntagm, the scene) and of punctuation (fades, dissolves, wipes, cuts, etc.).

From this appraisal of the very practical subcodes, let us now examine the ideological component of the cinematic message. Militant critics accuse the conventional narrative cinema of supporting the dominant ideology of a modern repressive culture. While everyone realises that ideology plays its part in the financing, production, distribution, censorship, and criticism of films, these critics are the first to claim that the very basis of cinematic signification is corrupted by a lie which destroys every possibility of meaning except for the neurotic repetition of the dominant ideology. This lie is the product of our culture's insistence on the representation of the real. It insists first that reality is visible; second that the scientific instrument of the camera can capture it. For Marxist-Leninist critics, the real is the 'work' by which we transform matter into significance. Far from hiding this work, cinema should expose it at every level. We

should see the struggle to attain an image, instead of falling under the hypnosis of the narrative and the ideological message.

Certainly there are standardized procedures of manufacture that unite film and music-video, but that is where the analogy ends. To discuss the marketing of films would, of necessity, lead us to a sociological study which would be inappropriate at this stage. However, let it be noted that movie advertising, whether on radio or in the printed media, is targeted towards specific audiences, specific market segments. Music-video does not advertise, and the only new release knowledge we have comes from reading the small print in trade publications. This variance highlights a fundamental distinction between the film and music-video: film is the product, music-video is a publicity for a product, namely the record. Yet, even as emphatic as this statement stands, it has become increasingly open to contention. For a more balanced discussion on music-video as a (publicity for a) product, please refer to a later chapter entitled "Music-video - the Fourth Format".

Music-video, being the rebel media child that it is, has no particular scruples about making itself as easy to read as other popular narrative forms. There are no "limitations" on its construction, and certainly no particular reason to assume that it is obligated to be a system of narration. Certainly, some music-videos have assumed a narrative mantle in that they are imitating existing popular mass forms of communication, but these videos are consciously derivative. Other rock-videos, for example, which

have infinitely less defined narrative structures may be said to obey a system of "amorcelization", a visual and logical fragmentation that only produces meaning as a montage. Screen time need not necessarily bear any relation to either actual time (as four minutes, the average clip length, can do in film) nor to a second level 'system' such as cinematic time which relies on our implicit understanding of certain specific devices. Music-video, although very different from cinematic texts, presupposes an intimate knowledge of how to read film. It employs virtually all of the systems that we interpret in the classical cinema and then invents a few more of its own.

The concept of time and the way it is related to the viewer deserves closer study at this point. Classical cinema has a considerably extended duration (approximately 100 minutes) when compared to the average music video (approximately four minutes). Classical films usually have complete stories to tell, and considerable leeway to convey them to the viewer. The passage of 2000 years can be conveyed as simply and as succinctly as cutting from a shot of a hurled bone's trajectory to one of a spac raft speeding across the universe (as in Kubrick's "2001: A .pace Odyssey"). If a few seconds is all it takes to convey massive time shifts, then this variety of editorial legerdemain is not confined exclusively to the cinema. Such brevity is useful in the sphere of music-video too. The extended filmic timespan allows for the establishment of cohesive narrative logic in even the most convoluted of tales, something which is denied to music-video which really only does justice to the simplest and shortest story

lines. Sub-plots suffer simply from the lack of time available for their exposition.

Perhaps the most important difference between the two media, as a direct index of the difference in duration, is the establishment of character. Classical film can show in great detail and at great length the evolution of personalities through the passage of time and events. They have a three dimensional value, and we identify with them through the reactions and behaviour they exhibit in response to various external stimuli. Not only does music-video not have the time at its disposal to picture these external stimuli, but it can never realistically invoke the transformations that are effected on its players with any subtlety. Characters in music-video tend to be stereotyped, or at least are presented in certain reccurring thematic roles which we shall examine in a later chapter.

It should be remembered that in the classical cinema our understanding of a concept such as cinematic time is embedded in a simultaneous understanding of other systems such as narrative logic and cinematic space. It is this interdependence that informs the third level of classical style. Music-video, although no stranger to any of these three systems, can employ them in new combinations and formulations that shock the viewer. In effect, the signification of the sequence is, more often than not, lost in the foregrounding of the continuity editing. The grande syntagmatique, the application of a code of interrelationships between shots, is very different to that found in Hollywood cinematic

texts. The techniques emplcyed in rock-video are so radical that the viewer does not see through the visual prestidigitation and concentrates instead on the act of sleight of hand itself. "Punctuation" is used so liberally, and with such resolute abandon, that it ceases to engender the video's narrative capacity, and becomes an end in itself. Ideologically, Marxists could consider music-video a variety of critical cinema in that it deconstructs itself at every moment. Instead of fabricating an illusion, rock-video lets its viewers see beneath the images and the story to the process of creation itself.

One of the most enduring and popular film genres, and one to which pop-video is obviously indebted, is the musical - whose principal raison d'etre is song and dance. As with opera and ballet, the narrative and dramatic elements of a musical are usually mere pretexts for the production numbers (though some musicals are also exceptionally sophisticated dramatically). Even musicals can be divided into two basic types: realistic (motivated) and expressionistic (unmotivated). The production numbers in realistic musicals are generally presented as dramatically probable, making this film type virtually drama with music. Expressionist musicals make no such pretence at verisimilitude. Characters burst out in song and dance in the middle of a scene without a realistic, plausible pretext. This convention must be accepted as a basic premise of such musicals, otherwise the entire film will strike the viewer as absurd.

Though musicals have been produced in many countries, the genre is

dominated by Americans, perhaps because it's so intimately related to the American studio system. It is only really when one understands the developmental difficulties of a genre such as the Hollywood Musical, that one comes to understand the freedom which today's video directors have. Among the major challenges in the conversion to sound that the early directors laboured under were the cumbersome and stationary camera and the poor quality of the sound recording. Before the camera became more mobile, dancing could not really be conceived spatially and most dance routines seemed flat and lifeless. Singers had fewer problems in that they could just stand still and sing, and hope that the sensitive recording equipment would survive their high notes. As well as the technical difficulties, there were contextual problems. What worked on the musical stage (for, remember, the screen musical partially owed its genesis to operetta and the musical comedy) would not work in the musical film, so a new aesthetic had to be conceived. The realistic eye of the camera through which the subjective eye of the director stared, demanded more than simply filmed theatre. Musical numbers, if they were to break from their stage conventions, had to be structured in the cutting room. Dance directors needed to be more than choreographers: they had to possess an understanding of the visual demands of film, while directors needed a definite musical sensibility. This is especially true, of course, of music-video directors. Few film makers, however, realised that the musical numbers, no matter how good, ought to grow naturally out of the texture of the work. It was Rouben Mamoulian and Ernst Lubitsch who first recognised that the film musical could have a freedom and flexibility unacceptable

in most other 'realistic' genres. Their European backgrounds helped bring a much needed sophistication to Hollywood and, being well versed in the tradition of operetta, they knew that characters did not need a naturalistic excuse to burst into song. Music-video directors (like Mamoulian and Lubitsch) do not search for that 'naturalistic excuse'. Their audience expect to 'see the music' and accept it in whatever guise it comes. Most film makers, however, felt that the only way to introduce song and dance numbers into the narrative was in the context of a show - a belief which led to the popularity and profusion of the backstage musical and the show-within-a-show format. Needless to say, these formats do not inspire many music-videos simply because there is no obligation to realism.

By 1930, four distinct types of movie-musical were emerging: the backstage musical, the film revue, the operetta, and the campus musical. The singular genre of the forties was the biopic, usually of a composer or musical performer. They were, however, little more than a feeble excuse for a series of song and dance numbers which often lacked an appropriate sense of period; and although the music was generally distinguished, the lives depicted were almost interchangeable, most of them adopting a cliched, rags-to-riches format, and often mercilessly bending or distorting the facts. In 1947, as the presence of television began to loom large over film production, the musical suffered a decline both in quality and quantity. As the decade drew to an end, TV's continuing grip on audiences resulted in a sharp decline in cinema attendances. The situation was aggravated by the McCarthy

communist witch hunts which did nothing to help the prestige of an industry already humiliated by television and battered about the ears by numerous economic upheavals within the movie colony itself. In 1956, the world of film and popular music was revolutionized by the advent of rock 'n roll. Columbia Pictures made "Rock Around The Clock" starring Bill Haley and his Comets, and Elvis Presley, Hollywood's latest money-making acquisition, launched his career with "Love Me Tender" followed in 1957 with the popular and profitable "Jailhouse Rock". The sixties offered very little to sing about. Elvis swivelled his hips through a cycle of innocuous vehicles, and there was a wave of inane "beach party" musicals aimed primarily at the teenage market. The socio-economic relevance of this trend cannot be dismissed - for the first time, teenagers had become a major part of the ticketbuying public and a viable econo ce.

The recognition of a separate socioeconomic class - the teenager - has important applications for music-video as well. As author, the director has no pre-ordained mandate in terms of the legitimacy of his interpretation. He can but hope that the passage of time, and successive re-readings of his video text, will have ennabled the adolescent viewer to assimilate enough knowledge to come up with a work which is closer to the director's in intention (presuming, of course, that the results of the decoding are very dissimilar). However, due to the time constraints mentioned in the previous chapter relating to the productive phase of rock-video, it is highly unlikely that the music-video would be reviewed even three months after its debut flighting.

In 1970, "Woodstock" ushered in a decade of documentary musicals and filmed pop concerts such as "Elvis, That's The Way It Is", "Gimme Shelter", "The Song Remains The Same" and "Medicine Ball Caravan" to name only a handful. The documentary musical has influenced its fair share of promo videos. The concept of showing a performer live in concert has the advantage of displaying his or her raw energy, popularity (as a function of audience size), entertaining skills, or even sheer musicianship away from the tricks of the recording studio. In other words, the format has definite advantages, not to mention the cost saving as opposed to a storyboarded video. Meanwhile, Broadway blockbusters such as "Jesus Christ Superstar" and "The Wiz" did good business at both the box office and the pop charts. Other oases in the wastelands of the genre were the Streisand remake of "A Star Is Born", Martin Scorcese's "New York, New York" and "The Rose" starring Bette Midler, all of which yielded enormously popular and succesful hit songs.

Music is a highly abstract medium, tending towards pure form. It's very difficult, for instance, to speak of the "content" of a musical phrase. When paired with lyrics, music acquires more concrete meaning, for words, of course, have more specific referents than musical sounds alone. Both words and musical notes convey meanings, but each in a different manner. With or without lyrics, music can be more specific when juxtaposed with film images. Indeed, many musicians have complained that images tend to rob music of its beauty and ambiguity precisely because visuals have a way of anchoring musical tones to specific ideas and

emotions. For instance, to quote an earlier example, few people can listen to Strauss's "Thus Spake Zarathustra" without being reminded of Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey".

Most film music has not progressed much beyond the silent movie days: it is used for atmospheric effects, or merely as a background filler. However, director/innovators such as Pudovkin and Eisenstein insisted that music in film must never serve merely as accompaniment: they felt that music ought to preserve its own line, its own integrity. The film critic Paul Rotha claimed that music must even be allowed to dominate the image on occasion. The use of music in film is surprisingly varied. Many directors still use it as an intensifier of the image. Others insist on purely descriptive music - a practice referred to as "mickeymousing". If there are no hard and fast rules, at least, as Aaron Copland has pointed out, a director must know what he wants from music dramatically. Film directors and composers work in a variety of ways. Most composers begin after they have seen a rough cut of the film, and some composers don't begin until the film has been totally completed except for the music.

In the realm of music-video, the priorities are completely inverted. Music-video begins with the music, that is to say that the song is the starting point of the creative exercise. Visual images are created to complement the soundtrack which, in a sense, is the script. Interestingly enough, as the power of music-video develops, it becomes increasingly self-perpetuating. A band such as Belbivdevoe claim to have written their songs with videos in

mind. Thus the video producer does not approach their material as a tabula rasa, instead it comes to him, replete with intrinsic visual imagery. Any music-video director worth his salt would employ a double headed approach to the creation of a new video. Firstly, a perusal of the lyrics of the song would probably suggest an outline for the storyboard if the lyrics made particularly specific references*. Admittedly this sort of song is rare, for most often the subject matter is concerned with abstractions and emotions (love, jealousy, heartbreak). Also, if one could draw the analogy between the words of a song and a poem, then one would notice that both are ostensibly characterised by lyricism and stylistic effects. In fact, both song words and poetry owe much of their richness and appeal to the way in which they relate their content, rather than to the content itself. In an analogous fashion, much of the richness of both music-video and film comes not from a documentary-styled graphic representation of reality, but from the employment of certain cinematographic effects.

As early as 1948, Alexandre Astruc in his essay "La Camera-Stylo" observed that one of the traditional problems of film had been its difficulty in expressing ideas. The invention of sound, of

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* Sheena Easton's "Modern Girl" is a case in point: the verse
It looks like rain again
She takes the train again
She's on her way again through London town
Where she eats a tangerine
Flips through a magazine
Until it's time to leave her dreams on the Underground
enjoys a concrete realisation.

course, was an enormous advantage to the filmmaker, for with spoken language, he could express virtually any kind of abstract thought. But film makers also wanted to explore the possibility of the image as a convoyor of abstract ideas. Indeed even before the sound era, filmmakers had devised a number of nonverbal figurative techniques. By figurative technique, I understand an artistic device in which an object suggests abstract ideas and emotions over and above what the object actually means. There are a number of these techniques in both literature and cinema, but perhaps the most common are motifs, symbols, allegory and allusion. In actual practice, there is a considerable amount of overlapping among these terms. All of these are "symbolic" devices since they impute a significance to an object or event beyond its limited denotative meaning.

To better understand the figurative techniques mentioned above, let us briefly turn our attention to Roland Barthes' theory of "myth"[14]. Working on the base of the accepted triad of verbal signification - concept (or signified) + accoustic signifier (or image) = linguistic sign (the word) - Barthes explains the construction of cultural statements as a second order semiological system built upon this first-level system of differences. In all evaluative or cultural statemets we observe an elaboration of this first-level system of signs. This occurs through what Barthes calls a 'lateral shift'. This lateral shift, as I understand it, involves the stripping of the sign of its denotative or referential potential, in order to pour into its empty form (now a signifier) a whole new range of signifieds (connotations). The

sign becomes "myth" (the third level) when it is used to absorb a new and highly selective 'concept'. Such a highly encoded sign then functions, by its selective exploitation of the first-level meaning, to propose as 'real' an interested position. By immobilising speech, Barthes would contend, such a strategy 'drains' language of history.

Figurative techniques never quite get into the realm of "myth", simply because they do not present themselves as real. They only function in counterpoint to the 'sign', not as a replacement for it. These symbolic devices, therefore, bring additional meaning - not exclusively new meaning.

Motifs are so totally integrated within the realistic texture of a film that they become 'submerged' or 'invisible' symbols. Often they are systematically repeated yet seldom call attention to themselves, whether they be musical, kinetic, verbal or aural. A symbol doesn't have to be repeated to suggest ideas because its significance is usually clear from its specific dramatic context. Like motifs, symbols can be palpable objects, but there is additional meaning implied. In allegory, a one-to-one correspondence exists between a character or situation and a broad or rather apparent symbolic idea. An allusion is an implied reference, usually to a well-known event, person, or work of art. In the cinema, an overt reference or allusion to another movie, director or memorable shot is sometimes called a hommage. The cinematic hommage is not only a kind of "quote", but the director's tribute to a previous cinematic master or a contemporary

colleague. The oeuvre of music-video is littered with hommages, those not-so-subtle nods to the cinema's most glorious moments. A case in point is Whitney Houston's video for her 1990 hit "I'm Your Baby Tonight". Whitney appears in a number of guises, including those of Marlene Dietrich and Audrey Hepburn. The imitations are not wholly convincing - and how could they be since Whitney is black - but they are instantly recognizable if the viewer has seen the original filmic texts. Nobody wore a white tuxedo in a 30's nightclub like Dietrich, and nobody tossed a pony tail so lithely whilst dressed in a black turtleneck and leggings in a Parisienne beatnik club as Audrey Hepburn in "Funny Face". However, just because hommages are not always recognised does not negate the validity of the collective unconscious of residual images. There are deeper and more resonant references fished from the pool that the viewer may recognise, symbols which have a mythic dimension (a Jungian dimension) that transcends education. It is this mythic dimension of symbols which I shall be examining in a later chapter entitled "The Semiotics of Idolatry".

The point was made earlier that a video director employs a dual approach in the creation of his video. Quite apart from the guide lines that a song's lyrics can lay down, there is one other major consideration that can format the video - the music itself. Quite simply, the sound of a song can influence the video's look. A song's rhythm can affect the pacing of the video, the instrumentation can influence the background setting, the arrangement can dictate whether a live/documentary approach or a concept/storyboard approach is followed. The permutations are endless.

Furthermore, the particular genre of the music, whether it be country, MOR, high-energy, house, hip hop, jazz, fusion, soul, funk, rare groove, underground, alternative, crossover, mainstream dance, rap, rhythm and blues, heavy metal, rock or reggae, can exert a major influence on the video's styling. Certain genres of music traditionally produce certain kinds of videos. Keyan Tomaselli[15], in commenting on genre movies, makes some equally valid comments: "Genre movies are very rarely disturbing, innovative, or openly deviant.". By playing with the viewer's expectations and preconceptions, the video director can create something that is both appropriate and alarming.

Although heavily indebted to the cinema of Hollywood, and specifically to its mythology, music-video evinces distinct practical and ideological differences. On a practical level, even though we have linked the two media at the level of materials of expression, McLuhan would argue that this description of the image is too general and does not take into account the fact that in one case (film) the image is refelected whilst in the other case (music-video on television) the image is projected directly at the viewer. Secondly, music (the soundtrack) is employed in different ways: in film it can be used for atmospheric effect, as a background filler, as an intensifier of the image (all facets of "mickeymousing"), whilst in rock-video music has a primal function as the given of the creative exercise. The type of music can also dictate the genre of music-video produced. Thirdly, the duration of film is considerably more extended than that of promo-video, allowing for the establishment of character and cohesive narrative

logic (a hallmark of the classical Hollywood cinema). The final major difference is at the level of "punctuation"; in cinematic texts, it is a specific code of visual signals between large units of film, in video texts, punctuation is not a means to an end but an end in itself.

Ideologically, punctuation has important ramifications. Music-video with its manic punctuation, makes the viewer struggle with the building of new significations, and makes him or her unable to use the normal (and ideology-infested) codes of vision. Unlike Hollywood film, rock-video has no obligation to realism. Music-video is an open sign and therefore capble of being read in numerous varying ways (reception theory), although there are images which must occur in virtually all readers' works. These "theological" images, or messages, do not impute absolute meaning to the author, but rather to the readers (mass audience) who share a common pool of reference. These images in the collective unconscious can be either learned (the hommage), or simply a given (a deep sub stratum of myth). Finally, on a motivational level, music-video is at variance with film: the former is a publicity for a product whilst the latter is the product itself.

MUSIC-VIDEO AND TELEVISION

I have spoken about the relationship between film and music-video, and I would now like to characterise the relationship between rock-video and television. Much of what I shall discuss with reference to the stylistics of television has an equal validity vis a vis cinematic conventions of conveying meaning in the visual arts.

The degree of hybridization involved in rock-video offers an especially favourable opportunity for the scrutiny of the structural components of various visual genres which combine in such a product. For instance, an obvious distinction could be made concerning duration: promo videos are much shorter* than normal television fare, but longer than a television commercial. This suits the hybrid status that music-videos possess: they do provide entertainment (normal television fare) yet they directly serve financial interests in that they are selling a song and promoting a product (television commercial). Quite what the promoted product is (song, single, album, artist or video) need not concern us now, suffice to say that there is a definite commercial

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* Most recorded songs are approximtely three and a half minutes. The video single will usually be slightly longer to accomodate dramatic demands if a narrative is being followed. David Bowie's "Jazzing for Blue Jean", directed by Julian Temple, pushes definition to the limit. At 19 minutes, it is clearly a crossover entertainment between a rock-video and a televised one-act play. Similarly, Janet Jackson's award winning "Rhythm Nation 1814", which runs for half an hour, is extraordinarily long and is perhaps the precursor of a new breed of longform music-video programming.

motivation. However, whereas advertisers pay networks for the screening of their commercials, record companies have notpaid in the past to have their promo-videos shown*. In Europe, especially Germany, the latest trend is for the network to offer the record company a nominal payment. America, not to be outdone, is rapidly following suit.

Another essential difference between music-video and TV is the role played by the soundtrack. In normal television programming (sitcom, soap opera etc.), characters act and speak. This is the viewers' primary interest. There is also a strict logical correlation between what we see and what is said i.e. when we hear a character talk we expect to see him moving his mouth in the act of speech. When this does not occur it usually implies the convention of first person thought, commonly known as voice-over (or else the soundtrack is out of sync). Audiences expect a one-to-one relationship between the visuals and natural sound (i.e. natural in everyday life) where one necessarily implies the other. More specifically, when we hear tyres screeching and horns honking, we expect to see a car chase. These vehicular noises are motivated signs; they arouse our expectations because in real life we have established the "tyres + horn = chase" equation which has been extensively reinforced by our television viewing.

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1 The understanding is that video clips used as promotional material are provided gratis, but that when used as programming material (eg. a syndicated clip show), a small fee is charged. The distinction between promotional and programming is a very fine one and often ruthlessly exploited.

Television also makes frequent use of unnatural sound, the best example being background music. This kind of sound works by internalised convention and is thus an aural metaphor. We associate soft melodic strains with lovers silhouetted at sunset. Such music is used "to clarify and sometimes create the connotative meaning of a shot."[16] The sound is unnatural because it is imposed on reality (edited on in the post-production stages) and it is not what we would expect to find in our day to day existence. When walking down a darkened hallway late at night we expect to hear creaking floorboards (natural sound)*, but we certainly do not expect to hear screeching violins (unnatural sound).

What makes music-video different, indeed revolutionary, is that it breaks every one of these conventions. If we attempt to read it as we would conventional televisual texts, we are doomed to failure. Much of what we see on television operates in a dimension of reality, due to an abundance of "live" programming: sport, special occasions, etc. There are even shows (eg. "Revue Plus") which purport to be 'live' but are not. This is indicative of the very high premium which is placed on 'live' which has become synonomous televisually with 'real'. As concluded in the previous chapter, music-video has no obligations to realism. Due to this tenet of its ideology, the language of rock-video and that of television are radically different and should never be confused.

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16. TV would probably boost this for heightened effect.

Incomprehension of rock-video has four major sources:

1) one is so accustomed to reading televisual texts on the TV medium that the language and the medium become indelibly associated. This rigidity of expectation is challenged by music-video texts.
2) one is so naturalized to TV conventions (eg. realism) that one is unnable to accomodate the variant stylistics of music-video (which often seeks to expose the cliches of televisual texts).
3) one cannot understand the appeal of the video soundtrack (loud rock music) or the video performers (all usually under forty and wearing outlandish garb and/or make-up).
4) the video has been edited and the narrative sequence becomes confusing.

What is important to note here, especially with regard to (1) and (2), is that the medium of television evinces what Kenneth Boulding calls a "break boundary", that is to say "the system [of television] suddenly changes into another or passes some point of no return in its dynamic processes"[17]. Not surprisingly, one of the most common causes of breaks in any system is the cross-fertilization with another system, such as happened with the 7-single and television that yielded the promo-video.

Whereas normal TV production begins with the script, music-video begins with the soundtrack (i.e. the song). Whereas a TV director can cut, change, delete, or add scenes and dialogue to accomodate the demands of finance, logic, pace, suspense, etc., the music-video director cannot tamper in any way with his soundtrack.

Whatever happens, the song remains the same. As an a priori truth, the video is driven by the soundtrack.

Where music-video differs quite drastically again from TV is in the portrayal of the soundtrack's origins. In normal television we assume a correlation, as I have stated above, between visuals and natural sound. The voice will always belong to the person whose mouth is moving. In promo-video this assumption does not always hold true. Often the artist whose voice we hear appears on the screen with his mouth very firmly shut, at other times the same artist will be furiously lip-synching. To further confuse matters, there are even videos like "Cry" by Godley and Creme where numerous characters are shown individually singing/synching, but where the vocal soundtrack remains the same.

Sometimes the music will appear as natural sound in that the band will be seen performing, whilst at other times the music will be unnatural because the visuals will show no discernable genesis for the sound. The unusualness of this phenomenon must not be underestimated: in televisual discourse it is certainly possible to hear natural sound/noise and never be shown its cause (a gunshot could indicate that the depressed man has killed himself, or that the convicted prisoner has been executed by the firing squad), although we are expected to predict the course of events without the benefit of visual explanation. In music-video terms, sound is stripped of its narrative weight, it does not necessarily aid our comprehension of what we see on the screen, despite the fact that the sound/song is the driving force behind the music-video. We

can therefore catalogue the rock-video soundtrack as follows:

1) motivated (natural) vocals and motivated (natural) music (eg. "Glory Days", "Everything She Wants").
2) motivated vocals and unmotivated music (eg. "Soul Kiss", "Shy Boy")
3) Unmotivated vocals* and unmotivated music (eg. "I'm on Fire", "Into the Groove")
4) mixed vocals and unmotivated music (eg. "Machinery", "In My House")
5) Imageless (unmotivated) vocals and unmotivated music (eg. "Paisley Park", "Freedom '90")

In this last category neither the performer nor the musicians are ever seen. I call this kind of video imageless because it is virtually impossible for an act to convey an image# if they are not seen.

It is vital to note that in a discourse where the soundtrack is supposedly of paramount and primary importance, four out of the five soundtrack categories use unmotivated music, analagous to background music. There is a physiological reason for this, of course. Anyone watching a music-video pays persistent attention

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* To give promo-video the benefit of the doubt, we can posit that motivated and mixed vocals are intended to convey first person thought and are therefore meaningful.

\# The only imageless videos I have seen are by artists who are already superstars with well-defined images (which certainly lightens the workload of the video). Such supersuccessful acts may decline to make videos for several reasons (eg. a lack of time due to recording or touring committments) and they wield such financial muscle that their record company cannot force them to appear.

to the moving pictures, and only a fraction to sound because, according to Dessa Fox, "close to seventy-five percent of sensory information comes in through the retina"[18]. This whole phenomenon seems to me to be indicative of the fact that music-video has less to do with music (and showing artists to be musicians) than with image making and the promotion of performers as "mythical"# figures. Of course, 1990's scandalous debacle of Milli Vanilli only lends credence to my contention.$

According to Fiske and Hartley, "the more 'realistic' a programme is thought to be, the more trusted, enjoyable - and therefore the more popular - it becomes."[19] The notion of realism in itself is a complex and challenging one, yet whatever the definition in conventional televisual terms, the statement would not hold an equal validity in music-video terms. Promo-video prides itself on its novelty, its newness, its originality, its creativity. Often, but not always, the music-video assumes a Brechtian candour or a Kafkaesque confusion in its capacity to contradict the 'naturalistic fiction' of realism. The video deliberately refrains from utilising its considerable energies in the production of sense in its various messages; instead it vacillates, holds back, and thereby shatters, and reforms the established real-seeming. Its hesitancy "defamiliarises the conventions of the genre, putting

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I use the word in its Barthean sense.

$ The Grammy-winning duo Milli Vanilli had their award for Best New Artist withdrawn when it was revealed that the two performers didn't even sing on their album. Clearly not musicians at all, but great persona's on which to hang a pop career - literally and figuratively.

into crisis the way in which sense passes into the realm of the natural-seeming."[20] The effect of defamiliarization, it is suggested, is to produce in the audience an awareness of the radical inadequacies of the established norms (particularly as these have established an apparent monopoly in ways of seeing). Realism in rock-video, however, is a two-edged sword. Not only should we take into account the personas of the video's performers, but also the commercial strategies in producing an action that looks real (real/natural/normal in everyday life) as opposed to one that is real (that actually occurs or occured in real life). Bruce Springsteen as a garage mechanic or a crane operator (guises which he has assumed in his videos) might look real/common/down to earth, but is it a real and accurate presentation of the man? I merely touch on the point at this stage, but it is an important one which I will return to in the later analyses of rock-videos where I suggest that this forms part of a marketing strategy to give the artist "street appeal" or "credibility".

Although music-video can be viewed in discos, shopping malls, bowling alleys, laundromats etc, they are most often seen on television. Often, whole shows are devoted to them (and overseas whole channels). Such shows are justified by TV chiefs because they generate advertising revenue, generated in turn by large audience figures that are neatly delineated into specific demographic patterns. The young market that tunes into "Fast Forward" is a recognizably lucrative one. In programming terms therefore, there is a bizarre situation where advertisers are

paying to place their product in the backwash surrounding record company's commercials (i.e. music-videos). Or let there be no doubt, no matter how creative or artistic a video is, it has been made for a purpose - to promote an act and their song. This is in line with critical studies by researchers such as Janet Wolff[21] which differ from the Marxist sociological study of art and literature in paying more attention to the very material (and therefore less ideological) aspects of the social production of art. Without limiting this discussion to questions of finance and ownership, I contend that purely ideological analyses are insufficient if they are not supplemented by an understanding of groups, pressures, hierarchies and power relations within organisations involved in the general process of the production of culture.

The Marxist aesthetic is extremely important with regard to music-video as representative of art in general because it foregrounds the notion of art-as-ideology, but the emphasis on this aspect of art has as its corollary a curious lack of interest in institutional factors involved in the rock-video's production. Since music-video is clearly, as I have shown, a collaborative and non-individual production of cultural work, it necessitates the recognition and study of mediating influences and organisational constraints.

The two points which I am making here are (i) that we be aware of the very real financial determinants of the content of a cultural product such as rock-video, and (ii) that the production of music-video is "a collaborative affair"[22]. For example although

rock-videos tend to be known as their directors' product, clearly there is crucial work involved by producers, camera crews, performers, storyboard writers, editors and many others, just at the production stage. But art is not just a collaborative affair because it depends for its creation on "support personnel"[23], it is a collective product because it refers to aspects of cultural production which do not feature in the immediate making of the work, but are necessary preconditions for it - certain technological prerequisites, and particular aesthetic codes or genres on which a new work will call and which it will, to some extent, even in innovating employ.

Up till this point, I have been emphasising the extent to which TV uses a constructed semiotic system to communicate culturally agreed, conventional meanings. If its signs are all artifice, and in the final analysis all abitrary, how then does the world outside presented nightly appear so real. Fiske and Hartley argue that "realism is the mode in which our particular culture prefers its ritual condensations to be cast"[24]. In the light of music-video this would appear to be too much of a sweeping generalization. The fact of rock-video's existence, not to mention its widespread acceptance, gives the lie to their statement. They do, however, quite rightly point out that reality is always experienced through the mediating structures of language. Furthermore, they touch on the catalyst for deconstruction in stating that "language does not draw much attention to its own artifice: it is in some ways self-effacing"[25]. Although I will not cover deconstructionist theory in this dissertation, I will briefly

paraphrase Hillis Miller who quotes Georges Poulet that "language at its most expressive is a perfectly transparent medium".[26]

Music-video, as we have noted, rejects a realistic portrayal of events that places the viewer/consumer in a subjectified consumer role. By preferring to cast its messages in other modes apart from "realism", rock-video does not rely on the transparency of its medium. Instead it possesses an implicit grasp of its own rhetorical strategies. It is avowedly post-structuralist in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given, or objectively 'there' in the text. Music-video cheerfully plays with its ability to contradict realism, always insinuating new ways of seeing on the viewer.

Throughout the course of this chapter, I have attempted to delineate the structural parameters of music-video which reconcile it with conventional televisual discourse (collaborative efforts, material aspects of production) and differentiate it from televisual discourse (duration, realism as preferred mode). Other variances occur at the level of sound which, in music-video, is stripped of its narrative weight because, unlike televisual conventions of natural and unnatural sound, it does not necessarily aid our comprehension. Also, the soundtrack in rock-video is the genesis of the entire enterprise and should, theoretically, never be tampered with. Yet, despite the centrality of the soundtrack, it rates a poor physiological second to the sense of sight (our predominant sensory input) which, combined with rock-video's overwhelming use of unmotivated music/vocals, leads one to

question what the function of a music-video really is. Finally, music-video differs from televisual discourse in that, unlike the latter, it doesn't prefer realism as a broadcast mode, but instead draws attention to itself, forcing the viewer to readjust his critical perspective. The conclusion to be drawn is that music-video, although often viewed on television, is not the same discourse as TV and has evinced a "break-boundary".

The main intention of this chapter is to show the dual relationship enjoyed by music-video and commercials; firstly on a practical level, and secondly on the level of intention. On a practical level, we shall be examining their common ground in respect of duration, pacing, editing etc. On the level of intention, we shall occupy ourselves with questions relating to motivation, the conveyance of the advertising message, hard sell and soft sell etc.

Conventional television advertising is generally referred to as spots. By implication, a television spot refers to a particular time span, bought and paid for by the advertiser, in which a commercial is flighted on a specified television channel. The financial transaction involved here has important ramifications: TV time costs money, the longer the commercial the more the advertiser has to pay. Secondly, the advertiser is able to target a particular audience by choosing when he wishes to flight his commercial. Not only can he select the time of the month or the day of the week, but he can also refine his selection to such a degree as to specify which television programme should carry his advertisement. Naturally, some time channels are more expensive than others, depending on the average measured audience size. The advertiser is therefore responsible for a certain monetary outlay: initially in the manufacture of his television commercial (production handled by his advertising agency), subsequently booking a spot of a certain period of seconds at a particular time

on a particular television channel.

The only link with music-video at this level is in the financial outlay for the manufacture of the commercial. Record companies do not pay to have their music-videos flighted, and in fact in some cases the television stations actually pay for using the clip. To reverse the analogy completely, A.S.A.M.I. (the Association of South African Music Industries) recently signed a deal with the South African Broadcasting Corporation that entails payment by the latter organisation per every 30 seconds (or fraction thereof) of music-video screened. The rationale behind this is that music-video is entertainment (on much the same lines as a sit-com or mini-series is), and that it therefore attracts viewers to the channel and thereby becomes a means for attracting conventional advertising rands. Certainly, music-videos often have star appeal (where the performer is an established entertainer), but this should not blind us to its intrinsic function as a selling tool. Star endorsements are a recognised marketing ploy, and, at the end of the day, what is the difference between Brenda Fassie extolling the praises of a feminine hygiene product in a tv commercial and Brenda Fassie singing her latest hit in a video, especially when both portray her as a concert entertainer?

Of course, the similarities between a Brenda endorsement commercial and a Brenda music-video do not merely rest on the fact that Brenda's presence is an intrinsic part of both enterprises. On a level of pacing and editing, the two texts share common ground. A certain rapidity of cuts (the "punctuation"), creating a sense of

momentum and velocity, is to be found in both the commercial and the music- video. Rapidity of editing is certainly a hallmark of certain commercials. This is not surprising when one looks at the time factor involved and the ensuing costs involved for the advertiser. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that of all the various visual inputs that music-video has cannibalised, noteably film, television and advertising, it should be the world of advertising which has proved to be the most influential - in terms of pacing. Music-video runs on a manic energy; like its parent commercial it has so much to communicate before its time is up.

The interrelationship between advertising and music-video is not merely uni-directional. For every Joko tea commercial that yields an extended clone (Brenda Fassie's "Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu"), there is a commercial that draws on a pungent set of images from the realm of music-video. Perhaps this phenomenon is not as stylistically unusual as it may seem. Most commercial directors are video directors and vice versa. The disciplines are so similar that the same personnel seem to double up, making commercials for the money and making music-videos for the creative kick it imparts.

I have already stated that the length of an average music-video is dictated by the length of the song itself, usually about four minutes. Interestingly enough, the average duration of a song is dictated by CHR (commercial hit radio), but quite what their criterion of selection is escapes definition. Suffice to say that the average length of song has increased dramatically in

approximately two and a half minutes a generation ago to its current timing. Music-video is always as long if not longer than the song, depending on what dramatic prologues or epilogues are used to flesh out the narrative structure. In fact it is not unheard of for a video to come in long and short versions (e.g. Tina Turner's "Private Dancer"), or even in different formats for different territories (Sheena Easton's "Eternity" in international and U.K. versions).

Music-video cannot, of course, choose its moment. By this I mean that it cannot dictate just when and where it wishes to be flighted. Most often it is limited to shows that have a particular time allocation for music-videos, or else it is used as a filler item. Either way, it is at the discretion of a producer or programmer as to when a music-video will be broadcast. And, of course, the sheer length of a music-video makes it exhorbitantly impractical to buy time to screen it as a commercial.

In a sense, the aforementioned discussion of practical financial considerations begs the question of the level of intention of music-video as opposed to television advertising. The transaction of monies implies some commercial motivation, a point which I would like to stress. No matter the production values, the star appeal, the credibility factor of a music-video, it is much, much more than a simple entertainment. It is being screened (and has been manufactured) with the express intention of promoting a certain product. What we now have to ask ourselves, is just what that product is.

In a later chapter ("Music-Video: The Fourth Format"), I suggest that the answer to this question could be the video itself, but for now we could say that an immediate answer would be "the song", which we could take to mean "the record" whether it be album or single. An important distinction should be led at this stage - that between album and single - for the profitability factor of each is very different. As a rule of thumb, record companies do not make money on singles, only on albums (and then handsomely). In fact so little money is made on singles that production has halted internationally except for the most major of markets. South Africa, for instance, no longer has a 7-single trade. The problem is that to sell an album successfully, a record company really needs a hit single (i.e. a radio hit). Thus the seven-inch scrap of vinyl has become a loss leader item overseas that fosters increased album sales. If music-video is viewed to be promoting the single, then it must be understood that that is merely one link in the chain that seemingly ends with the paramount success of the album.

Interestingly enough, music-video rarely exploits its considerable airtime in a direct and blatant plug for the record. In Morrissey's "Everyday is Like Sunday", record buyers are glimpsed in a queue, all clutching copies of the maxi version of the song. In Heart's "Who Will You Run To", the video is filled with the animated beasts that form the album sleeve artwork (subtle reinforcement), but also finishes with a shot of the crumpled album sleeve (blatant). These are isolated examples, but they point to an interesting phenomenon: why is it that music-videos are not

liberally peppered with shots of album sleeves, or happy consumers enjoying their musical purchase?

One could excuse this anomaly on the grounds that the music-video treads on such a fine line with television networks as to who should be paying whom for what, that it makes it look less like a commercial if the blatant product plug is left out. But this attributes to music-video (and by this I mean the producers and record companies) a greater sensitivity and integrity than they really enjoy. I would argue that music-video is not trying to sell the song (i.e. single i.e. album) as it is actually trying to "sell" the artist.

Selling the artist? By this I mean part of an ongoing marketing campaign to promote the artist through his <u>visual</u> identity (remembering Dessa Fox's contention that 75% of all sensory information comes from the retina). In effect, the chain that started with the video, now actually ends with the artist. The financial ramifications of selling the artist are obviously much more extensive than selling the latest record. Immediately we have to take into account back catalogue (all the artist's previous albums), not to mention increased anticipation for forthcoming product. Also, the whole look of an artist has become an arena open to considerable commercial exploitation (T-shirts, badges and all forms of merchandising bearing the <u>image</u> of the performer) from which the record company benefits considerably. One has only to look at the phenomenon of New Kids On The Block whose remarkable success on the pop charts has been completely eclipsed by the

merchandising enterprise which has sprung up around them.

Music-video and commercials share much common ground in regard to the 'sign' of Barthes' third-level semiology of myth, as defined in a previous chapter. At the second-level, the final term of the first triad (the 'sign') is stripped of its concreteness, its referential or denotative potential, and becomes merely a new 'signifier', an empty form. As such it is used as the first link in a new, second-order chain of meaning. As this process is enacted, an important ambiguity exists. The concreteness and history of the second-level 'sign' is held in check. The richness of concrete meaning is held at one's disposal and can be called on or dismissed at will to fuel the third-level sign - 'myth'. 'Myth' uses the referential aspect of a sign to 'innoculate' reality, admitting just enough referential truth to provide a respectable 'alibi' for its own interests. For this reason it is important to the mythmaker (say the advertiser) that his message be read innocently, as a first-order inductive system of meaning, where signifier and signified have a 'natural' relationship, that is as a system of facts.

Through the procedures I have resumed above, the encoders of myth (in our case the advertisers) present the norms of a dominant sector of society as evident laws of the natural order. In advertising, the quantitative and cumulative effect of such presentations of preferred ethics, standards, and life-styles is certainly a force to be reckoned with in culture. We attempt to dismantle the structural procedures which ennable the dominant

norms to assert themselves, slowly but surely, as the 'natural' or 'obvious' reality as dreamed or imagined (vide Althusser), if not lived by the majority of society: "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"[27]. It is this process of turning History into Nature, interest into common-sense, and in the process, historical man into universal, eternal bourgeois, that indexes the passage from the real to the ideological.

The difference between the open sign of music-video and that of advertising lies in its field of application. Although the 'myth' of the third-level is constructed in identical ways in both instances, music-video 'myth' does not expect its ideology to be accepted and lived by the viewer. Instead it attempts to differentiate, in many instances, its own world-view from that of the decoder. Rock-video alienates itself from advertising 'myth' at the stage of the second-level 'signified' by preferring an alternative set of connotations. The 'myth' of music-video is also universal - but it is universal only to the performers who inhabit its universe, not to the eternal bourgeois.

What I have attempted to show in this chapter are the very real links which exist between pop-video and commercials. At the level of the open sign of myth, the two are <u>constructed</u> identically, but differ in the generalised <u>application</u> of the cultural world-view proposed. In terms of their form (pacing, editing etc.) and their intention (selling a <u>product</u>), rock-video and commercials have obvious similarities. This product is not necessarily physical (a

slab of vinyl) but something much more valuable and intangible (an artist's image). As an addendum, I must note that recent developments would seem to indicate that the music-video is also selling itself. In the Nineties, the video clip has become a consumer item, found not just on television screens, but on supermarket shelves. In this regard, it must now be considered as an extension of the merchandising thrust that propels entertainers into icons. And so it is to the development of artist identity - or idolatry - that we must now turn our attention.

VIDEO IDOLATRY

One of the prime functions of the music-industry has always been the elevation of personalities into Personalities, the transformation of arbitrary individuals with some small modicum of musical talent into objects of veneration. In earlier years, the record industry relied almost entirely on iconic formulations such as record covers and posters to convey an artist's particular image to his public. With the advent of music-video (and by its very nature), the arena of image creation has become open to increasingly greater exploitation. The staticity of the single instant posed photograph is lamentably ineffective when compared with the four minute rock-video. Because the video is not limited by a necessity to interpret the lyrical material in visual form, that is to say to concretely realise the words of the song, those four minutes of screening time are available for the dissemination of whatever message the video chooses to convey. By imputing human agency to the music-video, I am not trying to be obfuscatory in terms of creative responsibility. It should be clear by now that there are financial interests which demand to be served, and that these interests are from within the industry itself. The messages which are "encoded" may seem idolatrous (and in virtually all respects they are) but they obey a higher master - commerce.

The concept of "encoding" (and its supposed mirror-image "decoding") are theoretical tools used in the study of semiology - the science of signs and codes. In semiotic terminology, messages and meanings are encoded in cultural products (music-video would

be such a cultural product), to be decoded by audiences. The televisual discourse which we read (such as the "realistic" documentary programme) operates in the domain of denotation, that is to say the literal transcription of reality in language. In marked contrast, I would argue, the texts of music-video make extensive and perpetual use of connotation, that is to say "more conventionalised and changeable, associative meanings, which ... must depend on the intervention of codes"[28] (which we shall be examining later in this chapter). Although Hall does not utilise the distinction between denotation and connotation this way, claiming that it is merely analytic, I find it a useful criterion of analysis. Though by no means denying the validity of Hall's conclusion that most signs combine both connotative and denotative aspects, I contend that rock-video draws almost all of its stylistic richness from the symbolic possibilities inherent in connotation. Meanings are not fixed in natural perception, not wholly naturalised, and their fluidity of signification can be more fully exploited and transformed. Quite clearly, as Hall indicates, the level of connotation of the visual sign is the point where already coded signs intersect with the deep semantic codes of a culture and take on additional, more active ideological dimensions - myth. Thus, in music-video, we are shown numerous examples of mythical figures (as opposed to mere pop stars), figures which we recognise since they form part of our cultural inheritance, firmly entrenched and neccesary. They are, as Barthes puts it, the "fragments of ideology"[29].

The extension and application of Barthean myth in the

entertainment paradigm is deftly explored in Gore Vidal's Myra Breckinridge.[30] In this novel, the eponymous character tells fellow show-business agent, Letitia Von Allen, of the peculiar nature of the work with which they are involved. Although dealing specifically with film actors and actresses, Myra's words are an admirable expression of music-video lore:

> "Talent is not what Uncle Buck and I deal in, Miss Van Allen," I said, lightly clenching my hand on Buck's clenched fist. We deal in myths. At any given moment the world requires one full-bodied blonde Aphrodite (Jean Harlow), one dark siren of flawless beauty (Hedy Lamarr), one powerful inarticulate brute of a man (John Wayne), one smooth debonair charmer (Melvyn Douglas)*,... and so on. Olympus supports many gods and goddesses and they are truly eternal#, since whenever one fades or falls another promptly takes his place, for the race requires that the pantheon be always filled. So what we are looking for - and what you, Miss Von Allen, have found time and again - are those mythic figures who, at the right moment, can be placed upon their proper pedestal.... In fact, as in any other business, we must begin with market research. This means carefuly analysing Olympus to find out which archetypal roles are temporarily vacant and who are the contendors... At this very moment, perhaps in this very room, there are unknown boys and girls destined to be - for the length of a career - like gods.... And so, ... we must constantly test and analyse the young men and women of America in order to find the glittering few who are immortal, who are the old, the permanent gods of our race reborn."

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* The appellations are precise and therefore equally valid and applicable in music-video terms:
   a) one full bodied blonde Aphrodite:- Olivia Newton-John
   b) one dark siren of flawless beauty:- Diana Ross, whose "Eaten Alive" even features the singer in a tropical setting and pareo as a metonym for Lamarr
   c) one powerful, inarticulate brute of a man:- Bruce Springsteen
   d) one smooth debonair charmer:- Robert Palmer

\# "Certainly not: one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things." (Barthes, p.110). Myra actually means that our need for them is eternal.

This is not the place to discuss how or where these specific "deities" came into being; it should be enough to note that they exist, and that they are promoted through media such as rock-video. As McLuhan puts it (in a chapter subtitled Narcissus as Narcosis), to behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to embrace it, and by continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. "That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions."[31]

Just as advertisers seek to differentiate between generic objects, to create a "product identity", so too must the music industry. What makes the average record listener particularly enamoured of a Madonna, and not of the numerous struggling artistes with better vocal claims to his attention? The answer must surely be that Madonna has a better visual image, more striking, more recognizable, more memorable, and presumably with a greater mythical resonance. I do not mean to denigrate those artists who have achieved success by denying that their musical talents have any bearing on the acclaim with which they are received, but I do feel that their g(o)od looks and 'videogenic' appeal have come to play a more substantial role than they ever did in the past. We watch music-videos rather than merely listen to them. Today's video stars must not only look like their divine reincarnations, they must act like them too.

It is not idle chance or mere hyberbole that makes Myra speak of

the god-like characteristics of the Olympian figures she is bent on (re)discovering. Music artists in their videos, rarely behave like mere mortals; they are gifted with incredible powers beyond the capacities of normal human beings, powers made possible by a controlled and pre-planned storyboard, and by the extraordinary special effects that are utilised.

Earlier in this chapter, I touched on the concept of codes and their implementation as a precursor to meaning. Reading rock-video is interpretative work since it involves what semiologists call performative rules, rules of application and competence. Since there is no neccesary correlation between encoding and decoding, the former cannot guarantee the latter. All too often, wildly aberrant readings occur. Hall, for instance, posits three hypothetical positions (or codes) from which the decoding of televisual discourse may be constructed. The first of these, the dominant-hegemonic position, would appear to be a case of perfectly transparent communication, because the message's frame of reference is so nearly allied to the social order. It appears to be coterminous because dominant definitions are totalisations, they have a global flavour.

Hall's second position is the negotiated code, so named because of an interactive awareness at its core. Its mixture of accepting and conflicting elements surround a position that accepts the validity of a hegemonic viewpoint while reserving the right to adapt that viewpoint to accomodate personal beliefs or to serve personal interests.

Finally, the oppositional code has the reader decoding the message in a globally contrary way. This is not a self-preservational de-totalisation grounded in self-interest, but constitutes a seemingly genuine communication breakdown.

Hall's postulated decoding positions, as briefly outlined above, seem invalid - or rather imprecise - in dealing with rock-video. For a start, his theory is intended to be useful in 'reading' political messages in television newscasts or current affairs programmes. I say political because so much of what constitutes news (whether it be actuality or documentary) is actually concerned with the discourse of power. Within these parameters, it becomes important to decode messages with an awareness of the encoder's orientation.

For video decoding, I would propose two positions: mechanistic and interactive. The teenage fan who blithely accepts video literature without questioning its genesis (market forces), is perhaps guilty of skim-reading. Rock-video is programmed to please which makes it easy to succumb to the sensory gratification of the language (the aesthetically pleasing visuals, the stirring soundtrack) without considering the ideological levels of the text. I use the word "ideological" very warily - and in fact refrained from using it to label my second postulated decoding position - simply because it has been used too often and too widely. Also, any reading is bound to be ideological to some degree, even the mechanistic, because it entails the selection (possibly subconsciously) of a dec ing stance. Similarly, a feminist reading is

equally mechanistic (and ideological) in that it operates according to the mechanics of a feminist perspecitve - what Hall would call an oppositional reading. The viewer who operates within the interactive code, however, recognises the sugar coated pill for what it is. From being a passive consumer he becomes an active participant in the communication exchange. By a conscious deconstruction of the text, the interactive decoder (or critic) will separate the sordidly commercial from the artistic, the mythic from the stereotypic, and he will enjoy acute recognition of everything that the mechanistic decoder subconsciously assimilates.

In summation, we have seen how music-video uses the iconic formulation of the sign to convey its message - the "deification" of the musical performer. By creating gods out of these mortals, the video is propogating a mythology (Barthes). The process by which music-video enacts the process of signification, is a system called semiology. Semiology's key terms, "denotation" and "connotation", are especially practicable with regard to rock-video which makes extensive and perpetual use of connotation. Depending on the viewer's level of competence, he decodes according to a particular hypothetical stance. I suggest that viewers operate either within a "mechanistic" or an "interactive" code which can either limit or enhance th r understanding and enjoyment of the video text.

In the chapter, "Music-video and Television", I referred to promo-video as a product which was born from the cross-fertilization of television and the 7-single. This hybridization, the meeting of two media, is "a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born."[32] Yet if the televisual sign is considered complex ("the television message...is a particularly complex set of codes, where the act of decoding is therefore a more complicated matter"[33]), then its "enfant terrible", rock-video, must be even more difficult.

Both television and rock-video are constituted by two types of sensory input, visual and aural. These inputs transmute, as Umberto Eco has shown, into three separate codes: the iconic (visual), the sound (aural) and the linguistic (aural). Each of these, moreover, contains a number of sub-codes. For example the iconic code includes an erotic sub-code, whilst the linguistic code includes a sub-code of specialised jargon. The <u>television</u> message operates on the level of all these codes (through which meanings are both denoted and connoted). However, the <u>music-video</u> message does not transmit meaning equally through the operation of all three codes. My feeling is that the iconic code has a pre-eminent importance in rock-video (which relates to our recognition of, for instance, Hollywood mythology). Even deprived of any aural sensory input, the video should be conveying meaning (refer to my later analysis of Madonna's "Material Girl"). Contrast this, for example, with a televised panel discussion with

the sound turned off.

The hallowed status of the iconic code in music-video, comes at the expense of the linguistic and sound codes. We have already considered this fact, albeit from a different perspective, in our examination of the motivated and unmotivated music/vocals in rock-video where we finished by concluding that, in pop video, sound is stripped of its narrative weight. However, for both television and music-video, all these codes and sub-codes are applied to the message in the light of "a general framework of cultural references".[34] In other words, the way in which the message is read depends on the receiver's own cultural codes. There is nothing absolute about coded meanings.

Eco's "general framework of cultural references" quoted above, has also been termed the "significance system"[35] of the addressee. Stuart Hall suggested that different audiences read or decode television messages differently according to their decoding positions (dominant-hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional), a triptique of options which I rationalised for music-video into mechanistic and interactive. The polysemic nature of the televisual discourse makes it an open sign which implies that a single meaning cannot be fixed to a particular message or event, although a preferred meaning or reading may be suggested by other elements in the discourse and by the code in general. However, depending on their own "situated logics"[36], certain groups of people may still decode in a different way.

Or in a similar way. Levi-Strauss rests his analyses of myth and ritual on the conviction that, behind all the surface varieties thrown up by the world's different cultures, there exist certain deep regularities and patterns which reveal themselves to structural investigation. It is a matter of looking beyond their manifest content to the structures of symbolic opposition and sequence which organise these various narratives. At a certain level of abstraction, he argues, it is possible to make out patterns of development and formal relations which cut right across all distinctions of culture and nationality.

Myth is probably the most visible (and yet due to its very nature, ironically, the most hidden) determinant of music-video as opposed to televisual discourse. The myths presented in rock-video have both an encompassing and a delimiting value. They are all-encompassing in a global perspective in that they refer to the great abiding issues of human existence - mainly the structures of law and taboo surrounding such institutions as the family, tribal identity, and so forth. Myths have a delimiting value in the sense that music-video has propogated its own internal world-view - there are certain patterns of presentation that are peculiar to rock-video. The mythicalization or presentation of the artist in music-video is constructed, almost invariably, around five major themes, and the interactions thereof. These are:

1) <u>The Artist as Deity</u>:- (a) the performer is shown to be superhuman, capable of the execution of magical deeds, gifted with extraordinary powers. The artist is therefore an object of veneration, somebody whom we revere.

(b) we perceive a *recognised* equivalence between the performer and a cultural/ mythical/ historical figure of divinity, authority or legend.

2) The Artist as Everyman:- standing in direct contrast to the preceding category, this sort of video reduces its performer to the lowest common denominator. Deprived of his/her own personality and individuality, he/she will supposedly appeal to the largest mass audience because he/she is indistinguishable from them. The performer is an imitator rather than an innovator, as evidenced by his/her music and appearance. Because he/she has no apparent airs and graces, no gimmicks or flashy pyrotechnics, this kind of performer (of which Bruce Springsteen is an excellent example) has tremendous "credibility"* and is perceived as an honest musician and a decent hardworking guy.

3) The Artist as Double:- the performer is capable of twin manifestations, most often seen in the act of watching himself. Linked invariably to the notions of public persona and private person, this is an example of music-video focusing on itself (for it is largely responsible for the creation of that persona) in an act of visual cannibalism. By giving literal value to the dissociation of personality, this theme raises

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* Not for nothing did General Motors offer Springsteen $12 000 000 to do TV commercials for their range of trucks. In an age where even Presidents cannot be trusted to tell the truth, Springsteen's integrity is a marketer's dream. He did, however, turn the offer down.

fascinating points about Indivi-Duality.

4) The Artist as Object of Scrutiny:- by providing us with frequent views of the paraphernalia of image retention, preservation and dissemination, we are made conscious of the performer as a creation of the media and of our own role as consumers of the message. Acting as a reaffirmation of the audience's role as decoder in the exchange of communication, this variety of video shows us life on the other side of the camera. Seeing is in the eye of the beholder.

5) The Artist as Performer:- although I have used the terms interchangeably up to this point, a distinction remains to be made. The artist is a maker of music, the performer is someone who 'acts' or 'entertains'. The medium of the performer is inevitably the stage/theatre, and this is often shown to be the centre of make believe all is not what it would seem to be. By raising fundamental questions about the nature of illusion and reality, this sort of video brings to issue our placid acceptance of the television medium as an objective arbiter of 'the real world'.

To read rock-video does not necessarily presuppose a conscious familiarity with the five themes which I have just proposed. Indeed the majority of viewers who regularly read and enjoy the texts of this language have not found their pleasure diminished by the lack of a specific video education. A modicum of televisual, cinematic and commercial viewing provides a sturdily mechanistic,

if somewhat incomplete comprehension of the new literature of rock-video texts. For those viewers attracted by the novelty and energy (and this is almost invariably the pre-adolescent audience), rock-video offers role models, excitement and glamour. This is a mechanistic reading and is very closely allied to the dominant-hegemonic postition proposed by Hall. For the other viewers, those who read with their minds as well as their senses, rock-video offers a perturbing Pandora's Box of ambiguity. Pre-adolescent readers (operating within the mechanistic code) are attracted by the <u>form</u> of the language - the rock soundtrack, interesting camera angles, rapidity of editing, unusual cutting techniques, etc. Everything, in short, that makes it so different. Adolescents are innately drawn to that which is at variance with the status quo, that which they can adopt as part of their own statement of identity which is incongruous with the trappings of an older generation. They are drawn by the deviance of the language, even if they cannot technically specify its stylistics. Critical viewers (operating within the interactive code) see beyond the creativity of the form to the <u>motivation</u> of the literature. Whereas the former (the creativity) is revolutionary, the latter (the motivation) is perceived to be sordidly commercial and, by extension, sadly conservative. This conservatism of Hall's hegemonic decoding position, is what the interactive decoder perceives.

Reading rock-video (likewise television) is based on two sensory inputs which are constituted by three types of codes: iconic, sound and linguistic. Rock-video actively prefers the iconic code

as a transmitter of meaning. Each code (and its attendant sub-codes) denotate and connotate meanings based on the viewer's situated logic. As varied as these significance systems may be, there are still certain deep, underlying patterns - myths - which unite cultures and nationalities. Rock-video chooses to present its performers in five thematic roles (the Artist as Deity, Everyman, Double, Object of Scrutiny, Performer) which, I contend, have created a specific sub-mythology of music-video.

As varied and intangible as music-video is, is its complex relationship to dream as a signifying metaphor. Rooted as it is in the non-physical, dream defies accurate definition, yet serves a useful purpose for providing analogies for music-videos. As a working definition of dreams I quote from Hilgard and Atkinson's "Introduction to Psychology": "Dreams are products of the imagination in which memories or fantasies are temporarily confused with external reality. Dreams have a spontaneous, non-voluntary quality that distinguishes them from ordered rational thinking. The processes that control dreaming are hidden. For this reason dreams represent a familiar form of divided consciousness, or dissociation."[37] On examination, this definition could be used with equal applicability for music- video, but we shall pursue the analogy further as we progress. Of the major theoretical works on dreams and dreaming, I shall only examine those postulated by Freud and Jung from the point of view of a non-specialist semiotician.

Because of the spontaneity of dreams, we are inclined to think that they are trying to communicate something to us. Freud wrote that dreams are influenced by innate drives - drives (or even forbidden desires) which assume different mantles to make them more acceptable to the mind. Hence the dream - much like the televisual discourse of rock-video - has a <u>manifest</u> content (the actually experienced dream) as well as a <u>latent</u> content (the deeper darker motives which the dream disguises). In these terms,

the dream must be viewed as a displacement activity.

A parallel can be drawn at this level with music-video in that dream also rejects overt narrative logic. As with dream analysis, we are not reading the given at face value. Instead we are probing beneath the surface, peeling away layers of subterfuge and psychological deception to reveal the true text. In a sense, the dream has an intrinsically metaphoric function. The drives/desires that motivate Freudian dream theory are the organism's quest to redress the balance between the acknowledged and the unexpressed and to remedy any deficit in the system. One such deficit in the system that fits into that category is the sex drive. Sex and aggression were, for Freud, the two motivational impulses of human behaviour which, through societal taboos, are often repressed at an early age. As unconscious motives, they find expression in disguised forms - such as dreams.

Other system defaults which need to be addressed are those that go to make up the Maslovian hierarchy of motives. Abraham Maslow, a leader in the development of humanistic psychology, proposed an interesting way of classifying human motives. He assumed a hierarchy of motives, ascending from the basic biological needs present at birth to more complex psychological motives that become important only after the more basic needs have been satisfied. The needs at one level must be at least partially satisfied before those at the next level become important determiners of action. These needs range from the primal ones such as hunger and thirst, through security, esteem, cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, right

up to self actualization.

To equate dream-needs with video-needs requires, firstly, a distinction to be made between the video viewer and the video producer/creator and their separate experiences of the video text. Although the viewer may well recognise the video as having a dream quality, or a dream-like lack of logical narrative, he is unlikely to be able to decipher it. It is, after all, the video producer/creator who is perhaps using the medium to exorcise his personal demons, and probably only he who would be able to read beyond the manifest to the latent content.

Only a few of Maslow's motives would seem to be applicable to video: of the physiological needs (hunger, thirst), only sex appears to be relevant. Certainly the presentation of sexuality (or its veiled cousin, sensuality) is especially prevalent in music-video, as it is in advertising. Rock and roll in the Eighties has yielded more than its fair share of temptresses, vamps and sluts (eg. Madonna), whilst the male side has been represented by some some very potent symbols (eg. Prince). This is not to say that a prerequisite of superstardom is heterosexual appeal, for there are far too many faces of sexuality. Indeed one would be hard pressed to find Boy George's appearance sexually attractive, whilst mega-star Michael Jackson is remarkable for his almost clinical neuter-ness. Sexuality in music-video could be a product of the producer's drive, but it is just as likely to be him pandering to the easily awakened desires of his largely youthful, highly sex-motivated audience. And, as advertisers have

known and exploited for decades in the dominant-hegemonic totality, sex sells. Nobody knows this better than Madonna, or expresses it more effectively in music-video.

Maslow's safety needs are too far down the scale to hold much relevance for either the producer or the viewer. This need, to be secure and out of danger, is unlikely to be determining the behaviour and thought patterns of a trained and creative producer, let alone a television owning surburban viewer. This said, there are certainly music-videos that use violence versus safety as a structural element. One artist who has traded on this particular element is Michael Jackson whose numerous street gang pop-videos pay hommage to West Side Story. In "Beat It", Jackson acts as a healing catalyst, unifying two very aggressive gangs. Although Jackson himself doesn't appear to be endangered, we certainly feel the menace of the gang members, as connotated by their chains, knuckle-dusters and switchblades. Similarly in "Bad", the tension in the air is almost tangible, and we are very conscious of the bristling anger of the gang members. In "The Way You Make Me Feel", it is the heroine of the video our feelings go out to. Walking down a deserted alley, she is accosted by some young delinquents, one of whom turns out to be Michael. He pursues his suit of her down the alleyway, and we feel safer on her behalf. After all, imagining Jackson capable of physical harrassment is a virtual impossibility because of his asexuality. I find it highly revealing that so many of Michael Jackson's music-videos are street gang opuses where the violence/safety dynamic is brought into play. Revealing because Jackson's persona is so bleached of

animal magnetism that it is not feasible to cast him as a sex symbol. This negates the possibility of trading on the primal drive of sexuality - only aggression remains.

The next step up the hierarchy is the belongingness and love need, which certainly is an integr l part of music-video fare, if not of all our lives. This need is also likely to be expressed as an integral part of the song itself, as most songs seem to be composed about true love and broken hearts. This is not intended to be glib or perfunctory. The structures of human relationships have proved to be an enduring source of inspiration for composers in the rock era. Thus, from both the producer and viewer sides, the love need could well be responsive to a dream desire.

Further up are the esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization needs, needs which are ar so ephemeral that if they are actualised in music-video would almost certainly be in response to the producer rather than the viewer. When we look at the work of intelligent and creative video producers, the video text can have a cinematic density and complexity. From the producer's chair, it is easy to understand how esteem, cognitive and aesthetic needs can be satisfied in the making of a music-video. Esteem needs can be resolved by the recognition of one's peers, cognitive needs in the self-satisfaction of having created a well thought out video text, and aesthetic needs in the perusal of a cinematographically excellent and artistically pleasing work. Much of what we have discussed centres on the producer's input as opposed to the viewer. The latter, however, could almost

certainly validate the video in terms of his/her aesthetic needs, if he/ she was at a level to require the satiation of those needs. It must be noted at this stage that this class of needs does not often find an expression in music video terms because one risks losing an audience that is at a lower level of need fulfilment, and therefore oblivious to the more abstract motivations.

Let us now turn our attention to a Jungian approach to dream/video analysis. Jung (1968) developed his own theory of dreams, central to which is the concept of "archetypes", that is to say fundamental notions such as God, Mother, Wise Old Man, which he believed exist in a collective unconscious shared by each individual. In dreams, according to Jungian theory, these archetypes emerge interaction between the conscious and the unconscious parts of the personality. The archetypes often appear in symbolic quartenary form in the dream, that is to say four people representing different parts of the personality, or various aspects of masculinity and femininity, good and evil, and so forth. Although theoretically interesting, Jung's theory does not appear to have widespread applicability in music-video texts. There are instances of video performers assuming multiple roles (Madonna in "Vogue", Whitney Houston in "I'm Your Baby Tonight") but these roles are consonant only with Hollywood mythology. Whitney approximates Marlene Dietrich, Diana Ross and the Supremes, and Audrey Hepburn in a video sequence that is redolent of dream imagery (the transformation of Whitney's world from black and white to colour, the sensation of entering and leaving another world by passing through a mirror).

Jung's archetypes make plenty of sense, even if the quartenary division does not, especially in light of previous chapters where we referred to today's video performers as "mythical figures on their pedestals" (the analogy coming, of course, from Gore Vidal). This would seem to justify our attraction, if not compulsion, towards watching music-video, a text which mostly defies logical explanation. Instead, it now seems very probable that we watch music-video, not with the cold clear logic of a rational consciousness, but through the swirling mists of a subconscious. Rock-video plugs into an unconscious socket, and feeds the tableau that we all view but can never remember to acknowledge.

Roger Cronenberg, the avant-garde film director, explored a similar theme in his brutal futuristic expose of cable-TV, "VIDEODROME". In the film, the lead character finds himself waking up in front of his television, having dreamt of interaction in the programme (in this case, violence, torture and snuff movies). Eventually, through his impending insanity, he does get "plugged in" to his favourite network, both by entering his television set head first, and by having video cassettes manually inserted in his stomach. Cronenberg's insights are simultaneously terrible and brilliant, as "VIDEODROME" shows a televisual world gone mad, a world where the boundaries between reality, dream and television programming are so blurred as to be completely obliterated.

The application of Jungian theory to music-video seems to be supported by Pat Aufderheide who speaks of "classic story lines" and "fairy tale themes"[38] both of which skirt around the

phraseology of archetypes: "While the fantasies of music videos are open-ended, they do play on classic story lines, such as boy-meets-loses-wins girl, and child is menaced by monster and conquers it. Some weave fairy tale themes - in which the protagonist is either a preschooler (Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love Of All") or is infantilized - into the dream. For example, Kool and the Gang's "Misled" begins with a band member in his bedroom, launching into a dream adventure in which he is both himself and a small Third World boy, threatend by a glamorous female ghost and engaged in a Raiders of the Lost Ark styled adventure. In a music-video/ dream world, performers easily switch identities (Madonna's "Like A Virgin"), magical transportations occur (Billy Joel's "Keeping the Faith" where a judge's bench becomes a giant jukebox), and sets are expressionalistically large [Madonna's "Oh Father"] or small [The Cure's "Never Enough"]."[39] The aforementioned "Oh Father" video is particularly insightful in terms of Jungian archetypes, specifically with reference to the father figure. Not surprisingly, this evolves out of the lyrical substance of the song - supposedly detailing the love/ hate relationship between Madonna and her father - which plays on the earthly and divine father configurations. The video has a much deeper level of significance than the similarly themed "Papa Don't Preach" which restricts itself to a very literal depiction of a young girl revealing to her father that she has become another statistic for teenage pregnancy.

Music-videos appear distinctive because they imitate dreams or manufacured fantasies. Even the usually thin narrative threads in

song lyrics rarely provide the basis for a video's look and action. Marsha Kinder[40] has noted five strong parallels between dreams and rock-video. Firstly, at the level of continuous access there is a strong connection. American networks such as MTV, or Europe's SKY channel have a continuous format (MTV's slogan "25 hours a day") which correllates with people's ability to both sleep and daydream. Secondly, abrupt scene shifts in both the dream and video world make them accountable to charges of structural discontinuity. Thirdly, a common link between music-video and dream is the concept of decentering, that is to say a loosely connected flow of action around a theme. Fourthly, Kinder makes reference to a structual reliance on memory retrieval by claiming that both videos and dreams trigger blocks of associations with pungent images. Finally, the fifth parallel between the two, exists at the level of the omnipresence of the spectator (which neatly brings us back to the fourth postulater artist theme - artist as object of scrutiny). Margaret Morse[41] notes many of the same features, particularly the absence of reliance on narrative; she focuses on the magical quality of the word as lipsynched by the performer, who can appear anywhere in the video without being linked with the images or events, as if a dreamer who could create a world.

The parallels that are implied between dream structure and music-video structure lead to some fascinating conclusions. Rock-video presents the reader with a ready-made alternative to social life. With no clear starting point and no finite finishing point there can be no history, and this creates a nightmarish instability,

even horror. Aufderheide goes as far as to say "there can be no tragedy, which is rooted in the tension between an individual and society"[42]. If this is true, then there can be no comedy either, for comedy provokes laughter with sharp, unexpected shifts of context, making solemnity slip on a banana skin. Dreams, by contrast, create gestalts, in which sensations build and dissolve. And so they nicely match the promise and threat of consumer constructed identity, endlessly flexible, depending on income and taste. Obsolescence is built in. Like fashion, identity can change with a switch of scene, a change in the beat. The good news is that you can be anything, anywhere. That is also the bad news - which whets you appetite for more news, more dreams.

This chapter has attempted to show the complex relationship between music-video and dream, specifically how the former acts as a signifying metaphor for the latter. Freudian dream theory, with its references to innate drives and desires, yields a parallel with music-video in terms of the rejection of overt narrative logic, and the analytical concepts of displacement and latent/ manifest content. A Maslovian hierarchy of needs (which I have equated with Freudian drives) was used as a basis for understanding the video's motives as determined by the creator/producer and as read by the viewer. Jungian dream theory yields the concepts of "archetypes" which dovetails neatly with the concept of myth as discussed in an earlier chapter on video idolatry. Other critical work by Aufderheide, Kinder and Morse support the music-video/ dream analogy with a series of parallels (eg. classic story lines, fairy tale themes, decentering, etc.).

Having established the premise of an alternative dream world of music-video, a sort of gestalt universe entered at the flick of a button, it now seems expedient for us to further delve the parameters of such a universe, and compare its world view with the one which we have come to accept as reality.

The main ingredient in music-video programming on TV consists of the video-records or videos, three to five-minute vignettes that illustrate popular recordings. The videos are separated by celebrity interviews, features, links, and the patter of presenters (known, obnoxiously, as vee-jays in America). Immediately, then, music-video programming involves a complex pattern of reassessment and readjustment as it swings from dream-video to presenter-reality and back again, presuming that is that the distinction is being made in the viewer's head.

We have already noted the existence of one variety of rock-video, the "performance" video, which purports to be a realistic portrayl of the artist in a studio or concert setting. The manipulation of this 'reality' in many subtle forms projects the artist into two of the thematic presentations discussed in an earlier chapter, the Artist as Object of Scrutiny and the Artist as Performer. If read intelligently (operating within the framework of an "interactive" decoding position), "performance" videos implicitly show their own deconstruction. In the category of Artist as Object of Scrutiny, we are constantly made aware of the performer as a creation of the

media (through recurring visuals of the paraphenalia of image retention, preservation and dissemination) and thus, by extension, of the viewer's own role as a decoder in the exchange of communication. Instead of there being a perceived equivalence between the 'real' and what television shows, the text is framed and thereby alienated from its claims to reality. Shots of lighting cameramen, viewfinders, editing tables, video monitors and director's chairs, must of necessity prove an inteference of some authorial voice. How much is casual and cluttered reality, and how much is the director subtly insisting on his right as auteur to reposition events by drawing attention to his presence?

With the Artist as Performer, videos invariably are set in a concert or stage/theatre setting which is often shown to be the lieu of make-believe. By raising issues about the nature of illusion and reality, th video must insist on a denial of our placid acceptance of the television medium as an objective arbiter of the real world. These two thematic presentations of the artist within the framework of "performance" videos already sow the seeds of their own estrangement from the real.

Any video that is not considered "performance" is generally considered to be "concept" in that it interprets or embellishes a song. These concept videos have been variously described as "video minimovies"[43], "surrealistic visual riffs on the song... production numbers soaked in blotter acid"[44], "three minute visual fantasies"[45], "complex and surreal passion plays"[46], "hyper-hybrid of commercials, cartoons, concerts and selected

short subjects"[47] and "narrative mini-melodramas"[48].

Noticeably absent from this list of definitions are the words 'documentary realism' or their equivalent. And anyone who has watched music-videos knows of the exotic and bizarre situations which are regularly flighted, this perhaps being the motivational factor for viewing. It is the thrill of the unexpected, the exciting, the different, that makes for attractive viewing. Who really wants to watch the ordinary, the mundane, the quotidien, especially when so many viewers live this as their daily experience?

We have explored the cross-referenc y of 'reality' with two thematic artist presentation categories (Artist as Object of Scrutiny, Artist as Performer) which loosely correlate with performance videos. Let us now examine the remaining three thematic artist presentation categories in light of reality cross-referencing.

By its very nature, the Artist as Deity category elevates the artist to the realm of the superhuman or magical. No deed is performed without it being extra-ordinary and therefore beyond real. This video category has less to do with ordinary people (therefore realistic) in extraordinary settings, but with extra-ordinary people exhibiting their differences in either real or surreal settings.

In the category of the .tist as Double, the videos are, by

definition, unrealistic. Here the artist is capable of twin manifestations, most often seen in the act of watching himself. This visual cannibalism gives a literal value to the dissociation of personality, and by extension disassociation from the real.

The fifth category is an interesting one - the Artist as Everyman. Here every attempt is made to make the artist as normal and as realistic as possible. He is shown in workday gear, doing conventional tasks, in short, an eye-level hero. But there is a vicious contradiction inherent in this category: what is realistic, and who defines the terms? Bruce Springsteen as a blue collar worker is realistic in the eyes of all his fans because he seems to be one of them, because he appears to mirror their existence. But is this portrayl realistic in terms of Bruce Springsteen himself, Springsteen multi-millionaire, recluse? The answer, of course, is no. Artists such as Springsteen cloak themselves in a persona which might well reflect their origins, but which does no service to their current status. In fact, the lack of a perceived image (such as wild hair, boots, sequins etc) is just as much an image in itself.

Having established that music-video posits an alternative world, and that there seems to be not one category of thematic artist presentation that accurately reflects reality (although there is one which fakes a certain reality), it is perhaps the moment to examine the world view which is postulated and, utilizing some quantitative American research, see in what respects it distorts realism. This established, we shall look at the various

strategies employed by artists to counteract the effects of the video distortion or to make themselves more compatible with the new world view.

If music-video bears any correlation to the real world, it is not in the range of male and female images shown. Aufderheide's contention that 'these images are drawn not from life or even myth, but from old movies, ads, and other pop culture cliches"[49] is only partly misguided. This thesis has shown in numerous instances how powerful an antecedent myth is, and in how many cases it has fueled both the success of an artist and the way in which he is presented in his videos. But Aufderheide is right on target when he asserts that the male and female images are not drawn from life. What must be said then is that if music-video is guilty of misrepresentation, then it is because it indulges in stereotyping. We shall need to examine the notion of stereotyping in more detail later, but let us note initially the cross currents which must eddy around stereotyping, myth and realistic portrayls. If stereotyping is the averaging of qualities associated with a particular group of people, then surely this is at odds with the individualistic drive of artists who must seek to differentiate themselves from their contemporaries. In terms of mythology, there is only place for one artist on each pedestal, and each is quantifiably at variance with the next. In short, what this thesis asserts is that artists abandon their personal identity - or at least modify it - in order to assume more readily identifiable personas, so that their audiences can recognize the stereotypes offered, and thereby have a belief in their reality.

Brown and Campbell[50] have made extensive analyses of the presentation of blacks and women in music-video. A sample observation: blacks were much more likely than whites to be shown in optimistic scenarios as helpful and caring individuals but almost exclusively in videos on a black channel. Peterson-Lewis and Chennault[51] have taken these findings one step further by concentrating on how black artists present themselves. Starting from a socio-historical perspective, the authors note that the most popular and pioneering music-video channel, MTV, has a longstanding resistance to broadcasting videos by black artists. MTV contends in its defence that its policy is to "narrowcast"[52] giving air time to rock artists. Presumably because of its predominantly white, middle-to-upper income group cable audience, MTV can find enough white rock icons that will keep its audience satisfied, but the consequences for black artists are frightening. Without MTV support, record companies might be less keen to provide black artists with video budgets, which in turn would down spiral the success of the artist's record sales, which would lead, in turn, to fewer black artists being signed to recording contracts.

Despite this pessimistic scenario, several black artists do get heavy rotation on MTV, and this is not neccesarily due to their sacrificing their particular black musical sound for a rock edge. Instead it appears that these black artists have adopted strategies to make them more accesible to that particular viewing audience. These strategies of viewer acceptability have come to be known, in psychological terms, as impression management.

Impression management is defined as "the strategies and tactics individuals use to control the images they project to and the impressions they make upon others."[53] One aspect of impression management is self-presentation, otherwise known as the strategic display or manipulation of verbal and nonverbal behaviours - from clothing, physical appearance, personal behaviour, to the selection of one's associates - in order to relay particular information about oneself. According to the theory of situated identities, "individuals have a vast array of different 'selves' that they can and do present in different situations so as to put forth the most favourable image and garner the greatest degree of social approval."[54] This successful impression management requires that the artist analyse his audience and decide upon a set of characteristics most likely to be perceived as attractive, and thereby rewarded.

One of the most powerful antecedents of attraction is similarity, and those artists that can show themselves to be similar to their audiences in certain respects have a decided advantage over those that cannot. This particular approach we have already detailed under the thematic category of The Artist as Everyman. By reducing him or herself to the lowest common denominator, the artist approximates his/her audience by averaging him or herself out. Naturally, if artists lack a relevant basis of similarity, they can associate with persons who bear a similarity to the target market as extensions of themselves, and thus bask in an appendage's reflected glory.

The perception of association is vital, as existing research shows. White characters in the company of a predominantly black group are often presented as being in psychological and perhaps physical danger[55], whilst blacks in all black settings are perceived by general audiences to be racially clannish and as not having adapted to the larger society[56]. To override these racial preconceptions, black artists explore the options presented by three different self-presentational patterns.*

The first of these is "accumulation of new associations". Here the artist is seen interacting with people who are highly compatible with the white rock music culture. Whether they be in an audience situation (the Artist as Performer), or as dancers or as part of the supporting cast, they move, look, act and dress like the audience that is being wooed. Furthermore, the artist's old-style acquaintances are shown integrating with the the new associates. The message seems clear: the artist and the viewer have come to be unified with regard to their personal lifestyles. In addition, the unspoken resonance of such self-presentation is that the audience members of the artist are supportive of each other and that the artist's music has a unifying power. If by the power of his persona, as shown in the video, he can reconcile two previously discrepant ethnic or ideological groups, then the artist also assumes the mantle of the Artist as Deity.

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* I am indebted to Petersen-Lewis and Chennault for their categorisation of the patterns of self-presentation.

In terms of examples, no better could be found than in Michael Jackson. Contracted to the famed black label, Motown, Jackson broke sales records and pioneered the emergence of the pop/crossover* artist with his mega-selling release "Thriller". In his award-winning video "Beat It", Jackson encounters two rival street gangs (allegedly including real gang members), diffuses the hostility and leads the fighters in a dazzling dance routine. The group members (who are predominantly white and Hispanic) come together through Michael Jackson's music which binds them together in dance. In a similar process, Lionel Richie leads an antagonistic black group into a white wedding reception, joining them literally and symbolically (the marriage ceremony) on the dance floor, to the strains of his massive crossover hit "Running with the Night". Both Richie and Jackson employ the "accumulation of new associations" pattern to consummate effect.

The second of the three self-presentational patterns is denial of association, or "neutering". Neutering provides the artist with a blank artistic slate on which to design an image for viewers. It may also set the stage for the artist's complete disassociation from a previous audience as a prelude to creating a new image.

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* Records are usually categorised according to the preferred musical format of the radio station which would be playing them (eg. rock, dance, country, black, pop etc). "Crossover" is a term used to signify a record that transcends its clannish orientation, and makes the transition to a new radio format and thereby a new audience. If specified (as in "country crossover"), it refers to a record which has made it through to pop radio. If unspecified (simply "crossover") it refers to a record that appeals to both black and pop radio formats.

Basically what neutering does is to remove the artist completely from a human setting, and surround him instead with some combination of graphics, scenery, or cartoonlike characters with or without the presence of the artist. Once again, Michael Jackson immediately springs to mind. In the Bob Giraldi directed clip for "Billie Jean", Jackson is the only performer for virtually the entire duration of the video. The fact that he can carry it off almost entirely on his own, is testament to his superbly slick dance routines, as well as his innate charisma and talent. However, Jackson while dancing down the street, causes the pavement blocks to light up as he passes over them. These luminous flagstones also heighten our perception of the Artist as Deity, gifted with superhuman powers. Once again, it is not so much an ordinary person in an extraordinary setting (as it appeared in the open sign of advertising discourse) that characterises this brand of thematic artist presentation, but rather the extraordinary artist in a mundane setting - in this case, a deserted street. Jackson does it again (but this time in an extraordinary setting) in his computer animated video for "Leave Me Alone". Through the carnival ride of his (?) imagination, Jackson's mini rocket ship travels through the shrine to Liz Taylor and all the other rumoured artefacts of his bizarre lifestyle. In the end, Jackson breaks loose from the bonds pinning him to the ground of the mini fun-fair. The analogy to Gulliver is unmistakable, and further confirms Michael Jackson's status as the Artist as Deity, because of the recognized equivalence between him and a cultural/ hical/ historical figure of divinity, authority or legend.

The third and final pattern of self-presentation is "disassociation from the old. This variety of video will exorcise the black performer entirely from his black supporting cast, and transplant him into a white setting instead. This is not a frequently recurring pattern, simply because most artists do not want to be seen to be turning their back on their original supporters.

One of the most fascinating examples of "disassociation" - and of the general strategies employed in music-video making - is Whitney Houston's recent opus "I'm Your Baby Tonight". After Whitney's unparalleled string of 7 consecutive number-one hits, her track record stalled. Her comeback single, "It Isn't, It Wasn't, It Ain't Ever Gonna Be" (a duet with Aretha Franklin), more than lived up to its title. Worried Arista (her record label) executives had to rethink the strategies. Three years after her last album (an inordinately long time for a pop artist like Whitney), Arista released "I'm Your Baby Tonight".

The video follows a dream-like storyline as Whitney passes through the looking glass into other scenarios. The first of these is a 30's nightclub, where Whitney performs dressed in a white satin suit as a metonym for Marlene Dietrich. In another dream sequence (and all the dream sequences are redolent of Hollywood mythology), Whitney appears in a 50's Parisian beatnik club. With her black turtleneck sweater, black leggings, dark hair swept off the face in a classic ponytail, Whitney looks strangely un-black. And yet, not so strange - the entire interlude is lifted from the film "Funny Face", and Whitney is playing Audrey Hepburn. Clearly an

attempt is being made to associate Miss Houston with some of the goddesses of Anglo-Saxon Hollywood.

The video gets even craftier with a musical hommage. Whitney appears, in triptique, as Diana Ross and the Supremes. This is ironic because Whitney's success has been at the expense of Ross. After all, according to the theory which this thesis offers, there is only room on the pedestal for one goddess of a particular type, and Houston wishes to usurp the throne reserved for "one dark siren of flawless beauty", as Gore Vidal has put it. This is a clear indication that Whitney is being readied to take the title of pop crossover queen.

One can understand the pattern better if it is viewed in reverse. Let us look at the case of Diana Ross who is a crossover superstar. Prior to her latest "Workin' Overtime" album, single and video, Ross' videos had diligently exemplified the self-presentational patterns discussed earlier. 'Dirty Looks" had Diana singing in the clouds with black and white dancers (a bit of neutering, a bit of accumulation), whilst "Eaten Alive" had Diana ...ging - literally - a hapless white man who was shipwrecked on her island (a clear example of disassociation). Not the largest hits of her career, the feeling was that Ross had lost her black fan base (which had established her in her Motown days) and wasn't gaining significant white sales to compensate, having been fully accepted by and integrated within the white pop fraternity. After her recent marriage to a Swedish shipping magnate, I can imagine that Ross needed to rework her black fans, for fear of being

perceived as a complete sellout. From there, with her earliest supporters back on board, she could then take on the pretenders to her throne, like Whitney Houston.

Ross's "Workin' Overtime" is an entirely black affair. Produced by a young Harlem based video production company, shot in a black club, peopled by black hip-hop dancers, and filmed in a suitable grainy street credible manner, with Ross dispensing for once with shoulder pads and sequins in favour of ripped denims, it proves to be a valiant attempt to find favour with the black community. The iconography of sequined evening gowns connotes glamour certainly, but it has unfortunate connotations of wealth and a rich-bitch attitude, unfortunate because it alienates the wearer from the struggling black working class of the ghettos. "Workin' Overtime" is a clear example of disassociation from the old. Interestingly enough, the song was a hit on black radio, but stalled completely on the white radio and television fronts.

The pursuit of realism in music-video proves to be a double edged sword. More often than not, realism is a strategy being employed to appear more realistic to an audience of viewers. It does not actually represent the artist's experience, but rather his need to appear conciliatory with the viewer's experience.

As I have attempted to indicate in this chapter, even "realistic" rock-videos are constructed texts. The "performance" video, which employs the themes of Artist as Object of Scrutiny and Artist as Performer, sows the seeds of its own estrangement from the real,

whilst the "concept" videos, by their very nature, do not cross-reference with reality. The marketing strategies employed by black artists to assist the "crossover" success of their music - impression management - was also discussed. The three self-presentational patterns (accumulation of new associations, neutering and disassociation) utilised in impression management all rely on the connotative values of the iconic codes in operation. Thus, when "the real" is shown in music-video, it generally represents a viewer and not an artist reality.

MUSIC VIDEO - THE FOURTH FORMAT

The growth and development of music-video over the last fifteen years has been nothing short of remarkable. From the first promo reels of 16 mm film to the television standard Betamax and 1" tapes which are broadcast today, the physical format has changed almost as much as the promo content itself. In the Nineties, the most astute and lucid media journalists are referring to music-video as "the fourth format"[57] (with vinyl, cassette and CD being the other three configurations).

From an historical viewpoint, the emergence of music-video as a format to be reckoned with, coincides with the decline of vinyl records - the first format. However, although the gains of the fourth format have occured at much the same time as the decline in album production, the two are not necessarily interlinked. In fact, it seems as if the phenomenal growth rate in the CD market has been at the expense of vinyl pressings. The technological revolution of the last decade that brought us compact disc (the third format) all but nailed the coffin shut on vinyl production. Certainly in the field of classical music, new releases are now only available on CD and cassette (the second format). Certain pop acts have found themselves falling victim to a similar release pattern.

It has not only been the technological advances of the last few years that have been responsible for the breakthrough of music-video, but also a drastic change in the social and cultural

expectations and patterns of a new generation of consumers. The explosion of the home entertainment industry in First World countries has ensured that most homes now have a video machine. In fact, the VCR is all but considered standard equipment alongside the television set and the hi-fi. The acceptance of this hardware into most surburban households has also facilitated the arrival of music-video in its longform package as an expected addendum to any household, especially those with teenagers in it.

Longform video, as a generic term, refers to a retail commodity. Longform video really came into its own with the phenomenal success of the health and fitness videos (Jane Fonda et al), but now encompasses everything from Hollywood movies to sporting events to educational programmes. Specifically with reference to music-video, longform video is the name given to the video package comprising anything from fifteen to sixty minutes of pre-recorded music-video material. Longform video is usually of two sorts, either live concert material or a collection of video clips centering around a particular artist or a particular theme. For instance, you could be watching anything from "The Prince's Trust Concert", to a Kylie Minogue video retrospective, to a Hard and Heavy Video Magazine* (a visual equivalent of reading a heavy

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* Analagous to a magazine programme on television, video magazines are literally texts that, unlike conventional television transmission, viewers can watch and "re-read". Normally linked by a talking head (or in the most adventurous instances simply by voiceover), video magazines are blurring the distinctions between conventional literature and televisual texts.

metal magazine). The latter instance begs the question entirely of the decline of literacy and the emergence of a new "literature", the collected texts of music-video.

Longform video is also known as "sell-thru video", a title that switches the semantic focus from durational format to consumer accesibility. It also indicates just how long a road music-video has travelled down, from its earliest days as a purely promotional tool only visible as part of television programming to its current status as a consumer durable.

The emergence of music-video as a fourth format also adds another level to earlier parallels drawn between music-video and film. The home entertainment industry has created a market for video rental movies that is larger and globally more lucrative than their 4-waller release. In fact the development of video rental as a successful format has boosted the film industry because film studios can afford to (a) take chances on otherwise marginal projects and (b) increase budgets on other projects so that they assume blockbuster status. Even if a film bombs on the commercial circuit, chances are that it will more than recoup its costs on the home-video circuit.

The obvious parallel to be drawn with the film industry scenario, is the hope that the development of sell-thru video will similarly encourage the music-video industry. Certainly, in terms of average budgets accorded to artists, it would be justifiable to surmise that the budgets for music-video production would

increase. Record companies could look to a real return on their investment, and not just take a gamble on the fickleness of the pop charts to justify their video expenditure. In fact, so lucrative has the "sell-thru video" market become that many record companies now have their own longform video departments.

A longform video department does much more than simply package together the promo video clips of various artists. In other words they do not play second fiddle to record company A+R (artists and repertoire) and marketing departments who choose which singles will be culled from an album, and, traditionally, dictate which tracks will have video support. Instead, longform video departments (such as EMI's Picture Music International [PMI]) have responsibility for creating a product that has its own integrity, and its own unique selling point. Thus most sell-thru videos today feature "rare, never-before-seen footage" such as artist interviews, rehearsal shots, backstage antics and the like.

Earlier on in this chapter, mention was made of the three groupings of longform video, namely clip compilations (Kylie Minogue), thematic compilations (video magazines), and live concert footage ("Prince's Trust"). It is to this latter grouping that we must now turn our attention. A music concert or pop show which has been filmed in its entirety is closer to documentary than to art. However creative the camera work, however inventive the lighting, however novel the staging, these are aspects of technical performance that do not add, I contend, to the revolutionary artistic impact of music-video. What is portrayed is a

real event, not some imaginative distortion or escapist fantasy, and is thus closer to the conventionally 'naturalised' texts of television discourse. I raise this point because it is interesting to consider it in its historical perspective. The earliest music-videos were almost always live clips. It was only much later that the wild flights of fancy which we associate with music-video today liberated the medium, and created interesting and entertaining television programming. In its clip form, however, a live performance could be either art or documentary, as we shall see.

Since the early days, the documentary-styled performance music-video has fallen into creative disrepute, except where it makes a particular statement - as in the case of thematic artist presentations such as the Artist as Performer. Even though we speak of performance videos as "documentary-styled", we must be aware of the malleability of the format, and that such videos can be styled to suit varying requirements. Most often, as we saw in the previous chapter, these videos sow their own estrangement from the real. The longform performance video is not susceptible to being exploited creatively due, simply, to its inordinate length. On the other hand, a standard video clip - in performance style - can be harnessed to convey a ritualised set of expectations.

To concretise this, let me give the example of Janet Jackson and her "live concert" video for "Black Cat". Over a two album span of videos, Jackson has succeeded in crossing over into numerous target markets. I use the phrase 'target' not merely to indicate

racial groupi.gs, but far more specifically in terms of radio formats. Thus young Janet moved from her r+b (rhythm and blues) base (which was more of a family legacy than anything else) into the club charts (assisted by some very tight dance moves in videos such as "Nasty" and "What Have You Done For Me Lately" from then-choreographer Paula Abdul). These two formats sewn up, it was a mere formality to achieve major hit parade success on the pop charts. A syrupy ballad ("Let's Wait Awhile") created a niche for Jackson on the adult contemporary charts. In all these instances, Janet Jackson's video image was perfectly cohesive with her musical identity. The only major format left unconquered for Janet was rock radio. The obvious impression-management strategy was 'accumulation of new associations', and the only genre video answer to reinforce this new identity was the concert video piece, the staple of hard rock artists. Admittedly, the song chosen to realise this strategy, "Black Cat", is, musically, a heavy guitar driven track. But how interesting to see how Janet's pop/dance/r+b stance which has been so assiduously cultivated and developed over a ten video curriculum vitae, has been sacrificed for every cliche of the heavy metal video genre. Gone are the tight choreographed set pieces that had Janet dancing effortlessly through fantasy land. Instead, "Black Cat" has Jackson dripping in rock-star sweat, fist raised, sliding along stage on her knees before a crowd of loud rowdy fans. The video assumes its rock colours when it is compared alongside Janet's only other performance video, that for "Control". Whereas "Control" has severely choreographed dance moves, "Black Cat" is an altogether looser, wilder animal. Not even Joan Jett could have done it better. In fact, so

complete was Janet Jackson's video transformation, that she earned herself a nomination at the 33rd Grammy Awards for Best Rock Vocal Performance (a category which is seemingly incompatible with her r+b nominations). In performance video clips, therefore, live is not necessarily real, but un-real can still be highly convincing.

The other major variety of sell-thru video is the clip compilation package. This obviously only comes into its own when the video artist has a sufficiently large oeuvre to justify such a collection. However, it is not unheard of for a single video clip to be retailed - and successfully at that. Recently, Madonna's "Justify My Love" was issued, and soon scaled the top of the video sales charts. Be that as it may, the bulk of video compilations offer a startlingly revealing overview of an artist's development, not only musically but image-wise as well.

The second grouping of longform video, the thematic "sell-thru video" caters to special interest groups. Whether it be a retrospective of Hits from the 1960's to a Best of Motown package, it will normally feature a mixture of performance and concept material, depending on how historical the footage is.

The concert longform video, the third category, is far from being a rarity, nor is it purely associated with rock acts. Most of the major chart-topping pop acts such as Madonna or New Kids On The Block have mega-selling concert videos on the shelves. Obviously their shows vary greatly from their rock counterparts (seldom any guitar solos), but showcase instead the act's often phenomenal

choreography and audience rapport. The live performance piece, once the staple of video clips, has come full circle to renewed acceptance in "sell-thru video" terms. And, as can be seen, longform video has not only defined a market and created a format, but it has also had an a priori effect on music marketing. Most importantly, from a semioticians perspective, the concert longform video no longer operates at the level of the open sign. Being a 'documentary-styled' record of a performance, the concert longform video is categorised with the "special occasions" programming of television which reinforces the 'reality' dimension because so much of the broadcast is live.

In conclusion, the emergence of music-video as the fourth format is indicative of its retail importance in a longform or "sell-thru video" configuration. Expectations are that this consumer phenomenon will foster the music-video industry and encourage record companies to invest more heavily in making promo clips. Even though the concert-video has come full circle, I have attempted to show that, in its clip form, it is more often used as a vehicle for impression management, than as a 'documentary-styled' performance piece. However, in its longform, the concert-video is no longer an open sign, but rather a denotative discourse.

To fully appreciate the extent of image creation (that is to say the formation of a persona) in music-video, it is necessary to examine a large body of texts, and to this end I have selected several representative samples which exemplify the points I have made in the preceding chapters. The videos I have selected are of chart-topping songs, that is to say they are:

1) videos which were so effective in themselves that they facilitated a successful run on the charts for the record
2) videos which received the most airplay because they were on the charts longer, and which therefore promoted their message to more people more often
3) videos which (if I may beg indulgence at this point) I enjoyed artistically and musically enough to sustain me through the repeated viewings necessary for analysis.

Pop music, like fashion, is of the moment. It is transient, and its moment of popularity is brief, on average 16 weeks. Every season, the realm of haute couture produces a new name. A designer achieves new fame for an interesting line, a clever use of colour, or a preference for a certain fabric. The music world is no different. Each season sees the instant prominence of a mere handful of performers whose music becomes the sountrack of a generation, and whose pictures adorn many a bedroom wall. Why these select few? Why did Tina Turner only achieve superstar status after decades in the business? Why did Madonna achieve overnight success and how has she kept from being a one-hit

wonder. Why is Whitney Houston being touted as the next Diana Ross? It would be jumping the gun to claim that music-video was the unifying answer to all these questions, but it is certainly a major part of the equation. Also, an artist will always require good material to work with, but more importantly will always require good management to work with them. An artist's manager is often extremely underrated in his importance, but it is often he who dictates the look and strategises the image which we see expressed in the music-videos.

Tina Turner is a case in point. After years of professional neglect and semi-obscurity, Tina signed to Roger Davies Management (the mastermind behind Olivia Newton-John's "Physical" transformation). The very first thing Davies did after analysing her performances was to scrap Tina's two backing dancer-vocalists. Unfair that Tina should compete visually with women half her age, and unfair to reinforce the Ikettes image which had tagged Tina, albeit subconsciously, as belonging to a previous generation. Davies obviously realised that Tina needed "impression management" and implemented the "disassociation from the old" self-presentational pattern. As defined earlier, this variety of video exorcises the black performer entirely from his or her black supporting cast (Tina's backing dancers). These were purely visual changes, changes that would be remarked in concert attendance and music-video. Tina's very next single (and clip) which expressed this new look, "What's Love Got To Do With It", went to number one, and a whole new career was launched. Visually, Tina is a remarkable woman, made for the video screen. Her legs have a

language of their own, her hair has an identity of its own. In all cultural or evaluative statements, we observe an elaboration of the first-level system of signs. As this process is enacted, the concreteness and history of the first-order sign, say "hair", is held in check (all the known qualities of hair - physical and chemical composition, colour, cut). The iconic sign "hair" becomes myth when it is used to absorb a new concept. The 'hair-like' qualities of the denotative first-order sign are selectively employed and the iconic sign connotes 'lion mane' with its resonances of power, commanding authority, wildness and regality. In an analogous fashion, Tina's legs connote beauty, sexuality and vitality. The fact that Turner is at least twice the age of her rivals in the pop charts, is probably in her favour. There is an ageless, perennial quality to her image.

Another case in point, and an artist whose canon of video performances we shall be examining in considerable depth and detail, is Madonna. Quite simply, no artist in the last decade has attracted the amount of media and public hysteria that Madonna has. Her trajectory into superstardom has been so complete, so cannily contrived and controlled, that one is implicitly aware that the people who have made Madonna what she is (this presupposes that there are other interested intelligences apart from her own), understand how the pop machine works, and what media there are to be exploited - like music-video. In the accompanying analyses, I have dispensed with a syntagmatic scan in most instances, in order to concentrate on a paradigmatic reading of the video text.

MADONNA - THE RELIGION OF SEX

In a career that has spanned a decade, Madonna Ciccone has 20-plus music-videos, eight albums, seven feature films and three world tours under her belt. "Serious feminist scholars defend her intelligent womanliness. Bluenoses sniff at her every bump and grind. The Vatican has denounced her. Academics spin doctoral dissertations based on her canon".[58] Unphased by all the attention she receives, Madonna produces hit after hit, and re-invents herself boldly time and again. We shall be examining this process of reinvention in Madonna's music-videos by seeing how she exploits the connotative values at the second level of signification in order to tailor a suitable myth for her enterprise.

In September 1983, The Face magazine devoted a double page spread to the then unknown Ms Ciccone. A quote from that issue reads as follows: "We expect her to cross over big. Fred DeMann and I. Fred DeMann is her new manager. His only other client is Michael Jackson". Within weeks of Madonna signing her management deal, the remnants of her first album 'inexplicably' struck the American Top 10 (the first and supposedly best three tracks having been pre-released into oblivion). The disparity between those three videos, and the new persona unleashed on the "Like A Virgin" album bears noting.

Madonna's adventures in the pop game began in October 1982 when Sire Records released a 12-inch of "Everybody". Musically, the song was nothing more than pleasant, and Madonna was without an

image, a video or a manager. This record precedes the Madonna that we know today, and its success was limited to the club floors of America. Interesting to note that Madonna's picture did not even appear on the record sleeve, thus no iconography. It wasn't until almost a year later that Madonna really "broke", but by then the pieces were in place.

In the pop spectrum of 1983, John Cougar and Culture Club were hot, the Police and Abba were cooling, and the marriage of New Wave and disco, hastily arranged by England's New Romantics was on the rocks. Into this musical palette, came Madonna's colourful entry with "Lucky Star". The video introduces Madonna as a young and somewhat rebellious girl. Rebellion, by its very nature of being a concept, can only be expressed connotatively, and this the video accomplishes [illegible] presentation of Madonna's appearance. Her hair, as an index of this, is dyed blonde with a good inch of regrowth. Unlike the example of Tina Turner's hairstyle which had resonances of regality, commanding authority and wildness, Madonna's coiffure connotes a lack of discipline, a confrontational attitude and, of course, rebellion. In fact, the very concept of formalising one's video image as blonde hair with dark roots clearly visible has enormous signification at the level of the open sign. Here is a girl, the conceptual signified of the second level seems to be saying, who has been around the block a few times. She has shaken off her innocence by dying her hair, and has not attempted to mask her act of rebellion by covering (redying) the traces of her fall from grace.

A similar process is enacted with Madonna's garb. The outfit is street-smart: black boots and socks, and a layered look of cut-off sweats and string vests (which, even at the first-level of the signified denote masculine apparel). Personal touches include the fingerless lace gloves (signifying femininity) and the ubiquitous Madonna iconography of crucifixes (symbolising religion) and other baubles of accesorised Catholicism.* Wrenched as they are from their customary setting, Madonna's crucifixes lose their culturally approved connotations, and become a form into which Madonna selects new signifieds - and new value.

Nothing much happens superficially in the video of "Lucky Star". Madonna dances in a great big white studio with two male dancers (also dressed in black). However, the deeper surfaces of the video are more revealing as it plays with colour symbolism. Against the purity of the white backdrop, a black figure. Contrast the unbesmirched, unmarked and unremarkable cocoon-like setting with the all-black (corrupted) garb of Madonna. In fact, the very knowing aura that Madonna projects is compounded by the fact that she winks at something/somebody just to the left of camera at one stage of the video. This implies an immediate awareness of an audience, and is thus an early and somewhat naive presentation of the Artist as Object of Scrutiny (I say naive

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* "My idea is to take these iconographic symbols that are held away from everybody in glass cases and say, here is another way of looking at it. I can hang this around my neck. I can have this coming out of my crotch if I want. The idea is to somehow bring it down to a level that everyone can relate to."
Madonna

because we never actually see the camera, Madonna's misdirection of gaze implies its existence). The combination of masculine and feminine clothing that Madonna wears is an index of her fashionability (very stylish for 1982), but also, I would argue, prefigures her ability to change identities (Madonna's reinvention).

Madonna's next video venture is "Borderline". Already, the image is being fine-tuned from street-smart to star. In the first of many nods to Hollywood that will characterise much of her video opus, "Borderline" has a shot of Madonna touching her lips and looking over the top of her glasses that is the quintessential Lolita (a hommage to Sue Lyon). Composed of two separate identities, "Borderline" pitches Madonna as a street-level heroine on the one hand, and as a star on the other. The two identities are clearly distinct: whilst the Madonna-next-door is filmed in colour striding the streets (closer to the 'real' naturalized sign), the Madonna-star is pictured being lit and photographed in reverent black and white cinematography. The use of monochrome serves to alienate the star Madonna from the 'real' as it has connotations of a bygone age of Hollywood cinema. Also, for the most part, Madonna's natural vocal is only carried in the black and white segments of the video, clearly differentiating it from the unnatural vocal of the street scenes. Following the text's logic, the singer is the star.

Not only is the photographer and his studio clearly evident, but Madonna is also shown contemplating the various publicity shots that have been taken of her. Though not quite the perfect example

of "The Artist As Double" because we have no sense of the two Madonna identities being aware of each other, "Borderline" is a clear example of "The Artist As Object of Scrutiny", due to the constant visual references to the photo shoot. This aside, however, the dichotamy of presentation of the two Madonnas is the most interesting feature of "Borderline". In her colourful pavement scenes, Madonna introduces a behavioral interest that will come to characterise much of her early work - boys.* Flirting with boys, chatting to boys, petting with boys - these are all hallmarks of the Madonna character, because despite the sacred connotations of her name, Madonna evinces a more than healthy interest in sex. In her monochrome star scenes, Madonna's examination of her photo shoot and rearranging of the pictures, foreshadow the hotly debated issue of Madonna's control of her own image.

"Borderline" hit the Top 10 on the pop charts and was the last of her singles not to go Top 5 for many years. It was also the last single released off her eponymous debut album which had been recorded prior to the De Mann management deal. Madonna's second album was a much richer, more polished and market-targeted affair. Songs were written especially with Madonna in mind, the

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* In fact, her next album sleeve shows Madonna wearing a belt buckle emblazoned with the words "Boy Toy". The "Boy Toy" concept is strikingly anti-feminist because it implies that women are purely frivolous and have no value but as playthings for man. Madonna came under a lot of criticism for this particular accesory, but later insisted it was all a joke anyway.

image had crystallised, and the management push was on for real. The lead-off single, which became her first number one smash, was also the album's title track - "Like A Virgin".

Like A Virgin. Semantically one would have to admit that there was a tautology in evidence. One is either a virgin or one is not, and because the state of virginity implies an absolute innocence, it is impossible to have been deflowered and yet retain that state of non-sexual grace. Also, there is something about the word "virgin" that, even though it expresses the absolute lack of, cannot help but bring to mind the very thought of sex, its natural opposite. In fact, the definition of "virgin" has to be couched in terms of sexuality, whilst the reverse is not true at all. The very name Madonna has obvious religious overtones, thus on the level of appellation she is already an object of veneration. This nominal deification finds further expression in the song "Like A Virgin" whose lyric proclaims her to be nothing of the sort. She is a woman at one with her own sexuality. If the title's simile proclaims Madonna to be pure no longer (she merely <u>feels</u> like a virgin), then it also reaffirms her ecclesiastical status, for everything connected with her image proposes that she is 'Like <u>the</u> Virgin (Mary)'. The paradox between virginal innocence and carnal knowledge is striking and borders on the blasphemous, and as such has great titillatory value.

The video of "Like A Virgin" is an excellent example of the themes of the "Artist as Double" and the "Artist as Deity". From a structuralist viewpoint, the "Artist as Double" theme is

particularly ripe for critical analysis. Briefly, the implication of structuralism is that there is an a priori 'transcendental subject' in a text. Critical strategies arise from the reader's desire to maximize the interest or significance of the text by discovering its manifold patterns of meaning (eg. binary oppositions). Structuralism, with its emphasis on distinctive features and significant contrasts, becomes in effect a legitimating theory of what it is properly to read a text. In "Like A Virgin" we witness two Madonnas, one in a black mini-dress writhing on a gondola, and the other as the virginal bride complete with wedding gown. These are the two halves of the Madonna paradox which is constituted by a series of dichotamies: black dress versus white dress, mini versus gown, Dionysian dancing versus Appollonion movement (whose regal elegance is emphasised by the slow motion photography), abandon of hair versus an immaculate coiffure, out-of-doors liberty versus walled-in constraint, etc. The tartish Madonna, dripping with cheap jewellery, is not entirely without religious connotation; the adornments she favours are redolent of ecclesiastical iconography (the crucifixes for instance). What we worship in her, however, is her sexuality - her vice rather than her virtue.

The video is filmed on location in Venice, for very good reasons. Firstly, there is always a certain amount of superficial gloss to be obtained when shooting in exotic locations, and thus the video is pretty to look at. Far more importantly, however, the setting has various cultural and mythical resonances. Italy is the home of the Vatican, the Pope, the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore

also the home of the sacred Madonna. Watching Ms Ciccone cavorting in this milieu, cannot help but bring to mind these associations. More importantly, Venice, with its Bridge of Sighs, has the reputation of being a City of Love. For Madonna, love means sex rather than romance, although both these postures are explored in the video by the double persona.

"Like a Virgin" seems to posit a definite moral about human sexuality and the relation between the sexes. The lion that wanders around the piazza is man, confident in his superiority, literally the King of the jungle. The following shots show us Madonna the tramp striding freely through the city, similarly confident, and basking in her persuasive sensuality.

The cut to Madonna the virgin is striking. Swathed in veils, she glides in a slow-motion world of serenity and sculptured calm that is far removed from the chaotic vibrancy of Madonna, the tramp. An interesting interaction occurs between the bride and the snowy-white drapes that furnish the room. Madonna the virgin engages in actions of cloaking and covering. She pulls the sheets around herself, the same sheets that shrouded the unused furniture of a lifeless room. Her action is one of closure and withdrawal, analagous the video seems to be saying, to the consequences of her married state. The brief shot of the bride outside (the tramp's domain), reveals her moulded to a column, capable only of this quick external excursion through recourse to the structures of conventionality, unable to even support herself without relying on the priapic pillar. We watch the lion (man) move towards her and

the scene cuts back to indoors. The bride is being carried through her empty chambers by a handsome male (whose very action proclaims his symbolic value of 'husband'). The gentleman is dressed in period costume, thus denoting that his chivalrous behaviour is 'old-fashioned', if not 'out-of-date'.

Just as we have seen two Madonnas, so we have witnessed two male figures, the gallant bride-carrier and the lion. This latter male has a second incarnation of equal value, the man in the lion mask. He represents the male animal, man in touch with his primal (read sexual) instincts. Each of these masculine polarities is drawn to the requisite Madonna polarity. Thus the mask man, when approached by the pure bride, divests himself of his animal identity. The virgin has brought out the gentleman in him. The following sequence shows a closeup of the mask man, aroused not by the preceding virgin, but by the emancipated Madonna on her gondola. She literally brings out the beast in him.*

The video has thus far presented thesis and antithesis. It has shown the theoretical advantages and disadvantages of masculine reaction to two models of female behaviour. Nice girls get married to men who treat them courteously but they get forgotten by life itself, left to an ordered existence of masculine imposition, opting away from the fast lane for slow-motion

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* "On one hand you could say I am turning men into swine, But I also have this other side of my head that is saying that I a forcing men - not forcing, asking men - to behave in ways that they are not supposed to have in society." - Madonna, commenting on the Circe allusion.

romanticism which ends up as stiltedness. Liberated girls lead vigourous lives, but the male attention they receive is sexual, use or be used (the lore of the jungle). It is a life of motion without stability (the metaphor of a boat/gondola on water immediately springs to mind), adrift on a sexual sea.

From the presentation of opposing points of view, the video now contents itself with a synthesis of these variant positions. We see a different Madonna: her dress is long (virgin) but it is also black (tramp), her hair is up (virgin) but her jewellry is excessive (tramp) etc. This ultimate Madonna is being escorted to a gondola (gentleman reacting to a virgin), but her companion is the mask-man (sexually attentive to the tramp). A compromise solution is being proposed, one that is supposedly enduring from time to place. A close up of the third Madonna's face is superimposed with a shot of the New York skyline, thus signifying that whatever works in the distant realms of old Venice will work just as well in our contemporary urban society (for which the Manhattan skyline stands as metonym). According to "Like A Virgin", you can have your gentleman and eat him too.

"Like a Virgin" shocked some, intrigued others and succeeded so thoroughly (6 weeks at #1 on the pop chart) that it immediately confirmed Madonna's superstar status. From now on, this "shiny and new" coolly understated single announced, Madonna records would confound all expectations, including those set by previous Madonna records. Like "Material Girl", The infectious, neo-Blue Beat romp resembles no other Madonna music before or since. Here

she represents a persona at once coquettish and self determined, and even if lyrically remaining true to her 'essence', the "Material Girl" video is the catalyst for an iconic reinvention.

Having so completely mined the religious resources of her name, Madonna's "Material Girl" video pays hommage to the other female object of veneration - Marilyn Monroe. The greatest and most famous of all the figures (both literally and figuratively) that the star system produced, Marilyn Monroe has passed into folklore as part of our cultural inheritance. To this day, her very name conjures up the term "sex symbol". It is therefore fittingly obvious that Madonna should seek to establish an equivalence between herself and Monroe, in the hope that some of the latter's lustre will be transferred to her. In the "Material Girl" video we no longer see Madonna as Madonna, but rather Madonna as Monroe. Thus the entire musical sequence which the video portrays is a replica of Monroe's "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend" number from "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes". Here the video preys directly on old Hollywood, using it for enlightened inspiration. Without this foreknowledge, this cinematic education, the video loses much of its mythic dimension and is interesting only on a denotative rather than a connotative level.

The video for "Material Girl" is remarkable if only for its blatant mythologization of Madonna as Marilyn Monroe. Starting with a short dramatic prologue set in a screening room, the video shows two men watching rushes. Soundlessly, we see Madonna dancing. Or is it? Film and fashion fundis will immediately

recognise the fuschia-pink sheath as being Monroe's from the "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" sequence in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes". In fact, as the video progresses, we see that this resemblance is more than just passing. Madonna mimics Marilyn quite convincingly. In the chapter, "The Semiotics of Idolatry", I referred to the primacy of the iconic code in music-video, which conveys meaning in a preferred fashion to either the sound or the linguistic codes. The Marilyn Monroe hommage is pictured without reference to any aural code, its message is conveyed within 5 seconds. The rest of the video is 'redundance'. Not only does the dance routine emphasize the analogy, but the rest of the "Material Girl" video, set in the Hollywood studio lot, attempts to establish Madonna as the essential '50's star. I will not analyse the balance of the video which shows how David Carradine (playing the movie director) presses his suit on Madonna, as this is not immediately relevant for our purposes. What is relevant, however, is the thematic presentation of "The Artist as Deity" where Marilyn Monroe, the ultimate sex goddess of her generation, is clearly and unambiguously invoked. To show that this is not just an isolated instance, let us now turn our attention to Madonna's next video foray, "Into The Groove".

"Into The Groove" belongs to an interesting subcategory of music-video in that is a theme song for a film (in this case "Desperately Seeking Susan"). The advantages of this are twofold:

(a) the video maker has a wealth of relevant cinematic footage which is available at a fraction of the cost of shooting it himself

(b) the video does double duty as a film trailor.

"Desperately Seeking Susan" is a perfect example of "cross fertilisation" because, thematically, it has much in common with promo-video (the artist as double, deity and object of scrutiny). Madonna and alterego, Rosanna Arquette, are both seen in the video with identical clothes and hairstyles (and are indeed mistaken for each other in the film). Madonna is brash and sassy, full of public confidence; Rosanna, however, is shy and retiring - a model of private inhibition. Together they represent, in video terms at least, the distinction between media persona and natural person. Further indication of their differentiation is Madonna's presence both before and behind the camera. She becomes the object of scrutiny, a media darling hounded by photographers. But Madonna also takes snapshots of herself, an index of self-referentiality. By setting the parameters of her exposure - the frame of the photograph - Madonna has complete control of the way she presents herself to the camera (as metonym for her public). the implication of this is that Madonna plays a part in the creation of her own image. If this sounds familiar it is, a similar conclusion was reached in the discussion of the "Borderline" video. In "Into The Groove", Madonna's Polaroid pictures move with a life of their own, making her a figure of potency if not divinity. The animation with which Madonna's snapshots are imbued also reference, in a denotative way, the concept of re-invention. She formalises an image (by photographing it), examines it, approves it and finally vivifies it. The mythicalization of Madonna finds its ultimate expression in the superimposition of her face against the night sky: she literally

becomes one of the stars in the firmament. In accordance with Madonna's visual reference to the solar/star system, there is a clever updated pastiche of Marilyn Monroe's subway vent adventure in "Busstop" which serves to reinforce Madonna's mythical status. Although it is possible to read the video mechanically as a series of arbitrary shots from the film, it also makes for a cohesive ideological text in video discourse.

Madonna's startling next video was for her absolutely classic single "Papa Don't Preach", the first track taken off her mega-selling "True Blue" album. One of the first Madonna songs to tell a story, "Papa Don't Preach" is about a young woman who finds out she is pregnant, decides she wants to carry until full term and marry the father of her unborn baby, and who has to relay all these momentous decisions to her father. Due to the contemporary social welfare angle of the song's lyrics, as well as its very specific references, the video assumes a very different mantle to that displayed by previous Madonna video clips. Here is Madonna as Every(wo)man, the young restless streetwise daughter. We see girl-Madonna meeting her boyfriend, dating him, visiting him, all interspersed with shots of Madonna at home with Papa summing up the courage to tell him everything. Interestingly enough, there is no maternal figure in "Papa Don't Preach" - Madonna cooks and serves dinner - so one gets a very definite sense of Madonna needing her father's blessing on her antics.

We are presented with yet another Madonna in the video, a star-Madonna very clearly distinct from the pregnant teenager

(analogous to the Madonna dichotamy discussed previously with reference to the "Borderline" video). Dancing on a simply lit black studio set, the star-Madonna sings the narrative that the girl-Madonna acts out. Whilst the girl-Madonna wears jeans and T-shirts and has a bristly boyish haircut, the star-Madonna has a 50's hairstyle, and is wearing a revealing little black bustier. Once again, it is the star-Madonna who carries the natural vocal in the video. This has two functions: firstly it creates for Madonna a separate star identity which has a clear denotative focus, and insists on the fact that Madonna, the singer, is the star; secondly, it insists that because there are two Madonna's - a real one (in jeans and t-shirt) and an "other" (the star), the other is a constructed formulation. Because there is a 'real', the 'other' must be, in some sense, arbitrary as the signified of the open sign enjoys a selective employment of concepts.

What makes "Papa Don't Preach" such a superb video is the intensity of Madonna's performance as the pregnant teenager. She is so real in the part that one has the feeling that art is imitating reality.* The incredibly personal flavour of her interpretation prefigures the highly autobiographical nature of Madonna's next album, "Like A Prayer". This being understood, we must never forget that Madonna's supremacy in the video field is linked to her musical supremacy. The fact that lyrically she is challenging

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* "But because this is Madonna, the video transcends its function as a marketing tool and becomes something closer to a statement....Her videos are at one with her music and her personality". Jay Cocks: Madonna Draws a Line, Time (December 17, 1990, p. 63).

the boundaries of what constitutes suitable hit parade material, liberates her in the realm of music-video too.

Madonna's next single, "Open Your Heart", returned to more traditional territory musically, but unleashed a number of Madonna video epics that shocked and scandalised. It was as if she felt immorally obliged to exceed and outdo herself with each succeeding music-video. In "Open Your Heart", Madonna is a dancer in a peep-show. Although she never strips off completely (in fact the most she takes off is her wig), the very concept of a red-light club is ultimately seedy. Yet, despite the less than salubrious venue in which "Open Your Heart" is set, one never feels that Madonna is degrading herself. There is something all too pristinely smart and neat about the milieu to start fearing for her moral safety*. In fact, the innate theatricality of the event is emphasised by the shot of a curtain being raised before the action begins. Yet again, Madonna becomes an Object of Scrutiny as we see one of her customers/voyeurs taking pictures of her. The sense of watching which pervades the video (the constant visual references to her male clientele in their little booths), is expressed both internally and externally. By this I mean that the concept of watching is so heavily stressed that one starts to feel sweaty-palmed oneself. "Open Your Heart" operates with an

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* Jay Cocks writes, in his article "Madonna Draws a Line" (Time, December 17, 1990) that Madonna videos "are all, in a figurative way, about safe sex. The deliberate artfulness of her various personas stresses artificiality above all. The common coolness of each role she plays keeps everything at a safe distance, stylizing all the sensuality out of passion until only the appearance remains".

implicit understanding that ideology resides precisely in the way 'reality' is constructed in the media - in its signs or 'chains of signification'. Things like camera angles, conventions of representation, lighting, editing - all techniques which are seen as 'natural' - act as codes of meaning to construct a particular reality. Any 'oppositional' medium (and certainly rock-video serves as an example) attempts the deconstruction of codes.* Thus the video tries to break the realist illusion of film by using camera focus in an unconventional and disruptive way. The shot of the Chinaman with the distortedly thick glasses becomes us as Madonna's face swims into focus through what we perceive initially to be the Oriental's spectacle frames, but which in reality is the back of the chair. The video audience is being drawn into a voyeristic mode, internal becomes external. If, as we now realise, Madonna has cast us as participants in her passion play, it is type casting indeed. We, the video audience, are the same as the habituees of the peep show parlour. Thematically, Madonna is also presented as Artist as Deity, through the perceived equivalence of herself and Marlene Dietrich in "Blue Angel".

The second part of "Open Your Heart" is Madonna's outrageous nod to her "BoyToy" image. Her stage-door Johnny in the video is a twelve year old boy whom she kisses most passionately on the lips. This is particularly bizarre because it is made quite clear that

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* For example, see the interview with Laura Mulvey about her films, and particularly "Riddles of the Sphinx" (Mulvey, 1978).

he is underage and therefore denied admittance to the peep-show. To me, it seems pretty clear that Madonna is standing her "BoyToy" image on its head, and turning it into a 'Toy Boy'. By inverting the 'BoyToy' label which had followed her since its appearance on her previous album sleeve, Madonna defuses this inflammatory situation. In the void, however, she sets up another controversy. The Toy Boy situation never reappears in her videos, so I would argue that it is not a major preoccupation in Madonna . .

"La Isla Bonita" was Madonna's next pop offering, and as different as it was musically to its predecessors, so it mined the same themes visually. Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose. Yet again, we are presented with two Madonna figures. The first is a plain short-haired girl, dressed only in her slip. Her apartment is clearly the dwelling of a very religious woman. Crucifixes and graphic representations of the Christ figure adorn the walls. The second Madonna figure is an altogether more exotic affair. Dressed in the flamboyant costume of the traditional Spanish dancer, her long hair pulled off her face in a chignon, this is the dream Madonna. As clearly as we can distinguish between the two Madonnas, so we can distinguish between the two milieus in which they operate. The devout Madonna's apartment is sparse and open, shaded in ascetic blue. The dream Madonna dances in a blood red room lit by the light of hundreds of candles. In a broader setting, the blue room is the Big City, overlooking a run down street. The red room i presumably San Pedro, the oft-mentioned town which presumably houses the church which we glimpse briefly at the video's commencement. Having established this dichotamy,

let us now analyse the video itself.

Opening on an urban street scene, "La Isla Bonita" lets the bongo drums introduce themselves both visually and aurally. Street musicians are playing and dancing in the midday sunlight. Madonna's incantations are heard on the soundtrack, and by the guitarist who looks up to her first floor apartment. Inside the flat we see the devout Madonna pensive and in prayer. Perhaps she is praying to be taken away from the griminess of her tenement setting, or perhaps she is daydreaming of a pleasing holiday experience, or most likely of her previous tropical life before emmigrating to America. Whatever rationale we choose is not important, although it must be stated that the song's lyrics read "Last night I dreamed of San Pedro", which would discount the first interpretation offered. A magnificent sunset is seen and Madonna's face is superimposed thereon. The fade in and fade out of Madonna's face on the setting sun also lend the video a gentle dream like quality.

The devout Madonna moves to her apartment window where, semi-hidden by a lace curtain, she spies out on the gaiety of the street scene below her. Tears stream down her pale face as, presumably, the music brings back memories of San Pedro. Within moments we see the dream Madonna - passionate, alluring and lively. Decked out in her red ruffled Spanish gown, the dream Madonna dances to the strains of the music. Before long, the dream Madonna is splayed on the richly baroque floor, her hands irresistably drawn to her upper thighs in joyous and sensual

exuberance. As the camera whirls around her, the dream Madonna is replaced by the devout, watching from the window. Two of the street performers call up to her with their eyes, but she remains mutely resolute behind her curtain. Such an invitation cannot pass unheeded by the dream Madonna and we see her rushing down the stairs and into the street below. Dream becomes truth, fantasy turns to reality.

Interestingly enough, although we are shown contrasting shots of the dream Madonna dancing in the streets and the devout Madonna in her room, the latter is never shown to be aware of the former. At no time does the religious girl acknowledge the pleasure experienced by her exotic counterpart. In fact, as the dream Madonna dances away into the finale, the final shot is reserved for the ascetic Madonna with her head bowed in prayer.

The presentation of the Artist as Double in this video, although not strictly accurate, is the closest thematic tool that we have at our disposal. It is not strictly accurate becuase, as mentioned in relation to "Borderline" and "Like a Virgin", the two Madonna personae seem oblivious to each other. At the crucial juncture of the video's closing moments, the devout is never actually seen watching the dream Madonna, unless it could be argued that the entire tableau is being played out in her head. But two Madonnas there certainly are, and just as in "Like A Virgin" where two distinct models of appropriate social behaviour were being presented, so it is in "La Isla Bonita". The religious Madonna in her icy-blue apartment hides from the world behind her

lace curtain, and refuses to leave the sanctity of her flat to experience the sun and the music - in short, life itself. The spirited Madonna, completely at one with her physicality, moves from her passionately red room into the real world of the street muso's. The fact that the two perspectives are not reconciled (as they were in "Like A Virgin") presages a genuine angst on Madonna's part as her blatantly (self-)exploited sexuality drives her further away from her deeply religious background and childhood identity. This genuine existential torment finds its expression in Madonna's next album, the highly autobiographical and extremely controversial (even by Madonna standards) "Like A Prayer".

It is entirely appropriate that "La Isla Bonita" should end with a shot of Madonna deep in prayer, considering the overtly religious nature of her next single and video "Like A Prayer". On an historical note, "Like A Prayer" was the video that Pepsi payed $5 000 000 towards, in the hope of using much of the footage as a television commercial. On viewing the finished product, aghast Pepsi executives had to shelve their idea. Their key money, however, was non-recoupable. Needless to say, the publicity that this little fiasco received confirmed Madonna's reputation as mistress of her own media destiny.

From "Like A Virgin" to "Like A Prayer". From the religion of sex to the sex of religion, this is the path that Madonna dances down. In "Like A Prayer", Madonna doesn't even look like Madonna: her long dark tresses and startling blue eyes are nowhere near the

blonde cipher that we equate with Madonna. Yet so startling is the video, so shocking in its flagrant flauntings of religious decency, so complete in its involvement in all the aspects of Ms Ciccone's persona, that it is the consumate Madonna video.

The video begins on an unusually dramatic note. Madonna runs across a wasteland towards the camera. It is evening, a wind whips her coat around as the sound of sirens prick the air. Madonna collapses before the camera. In quick succession we are treated to the sight of a door (vault door?) being slammed shut, and immediately thereafter a burning cross. A street gang assaults and stabs a woman, a church glows with an inward light, a black man is led away in police custody. Although the chronology is a trifle confused, the storyline is clear. Madonna has witnessed a gang's attack on a woman, as well as the police's false arrest of a black man who happens to walk into the fray. Her presence has been noticed by the gang and thus she flees, presumably to find sanctuary in the church which glows like a beacon in the dark. Once inside the church, Madonna is immediately drawn to a life-size plaster effigy of a black Christ-like figure which is placed behind a grille gate. As Madonna stares at the black Christ, recognizing perhaps the extraordinary resemblance between the effigy and the wrongly-arrested black passer-by, the statue comes to life. We see the hands attain animation, and the eyes crying. Clearly, something miraculous is happening here. Madonna lies down before the Christ statue, and immediately seems to be falling through the sky in a gentle slow-motion way, only to be caught by a smiling gospel

singer. Back in the church again, Madonna kisses the feet of the black Christ, and sees the grille gate being opened. Most chastely, the black Christ kisses Madonna and walks out of the church. Seeing a fallen knife on the floor, Madonna stoops to pick it up, cutting both hands in the process. As Madonna flips her palms over for our benefit, we see that it is not so much cuts which have appeared, but stigmata. Blood is welling from two holes in the palms of her hands. As the music wells up we see a whole gospel choir in full throat. They trade vocal passages with Madonna, who dances with the lady singer who caught her in her sky fall. We are then treated to a chronologically perfect replaying of the crime perpetrated earlier - Madonna witnessing the assault and stabbing of the young woman and the false arrest of the young black man. Madonna's natural vocals are presented in front of a field of burning crosses and then again before the gospel choir in the church. At the height of all this religious fervour we are treated to a close-up of the horizontal Madonna kissing and being kissed by the black Christ, not in the devout way shown earlier, but in an intensely erotic way. Assuming his position on the pedestal, the Christ figure reverts back into a statue as the grille gate shuts over him. Madonna rises from her recumbent position before the effigy. The next scene is in the police station where Madonna clears the name of the black accused. As his cell is unlocked, a red velvet curtain falls. The cast take their bows whilst "The End" is written across the screen.

It is not difficult to understand why why there was such a furore about the "Like A Prayer" video. Audiences were shocked by the

blazing crosses, the concept of Jesus Christ being black, Madonna's aspirational stigmata, and by her implied carnal union with Christ (let alone the fact that he is black). All in all, there is something to offend just about every taste in "Like A Prayer". But controversy aside, it is one of the crispest and most intelligent examples of music-video making, and is thus most deserving of closer study.

The chronological jumble of the opening montage conveys, I would argue, the panicky out-of-breath quality of Madonna in the dramatic situation in which she is presented. Fleeing from the scene of the crime and fearing for her own safety, it is not surprising that her chain of thought would be haphazard. Madonna enters the church, her place of sanctuary, and is immediately struck by the uncanny resemblance between the Christ effigy and black prisoner. Both are behind bars. As the Christ figure starts weeping, presumably for the innocent unjustly accused, Madonna lies down. From this point on, most of the video occurs in the Madonna character's dream. This would explain her slow-motion sky-fall, as well as a host of other perturbing visual images which colour the rest of the video. For instance, a religious icon that weeps is an acceptable miracle (it has been known to happpen in real life), whilst a statue that comes to life and walks out of the church is an unchartered miracle. These all fall under the "decentering" strategy, as proposed by Marsha Kinder, who defines the term as a loosely connected flow of action around a theme.

The deep religious resonances of Madonna's stigmata are not as

blasphemous if considered as part of her dream experience as opposed to a waking state. Even within the dream state, the viewer should differentiate between the manifest and the latent content of the dream experience. Whether the viewer perceives the distinction between the dream/awake worlds (or even the manifest/ latent content) or not, the connotative value of the stigmata is still powerful. At its simplest, it reveals a preoccupation on the Madonna character's part with the rituals of Catholicism (the latent content), at its most complex it is illustrative of the theme of the Artist as Deity. Madonna is either presenting herself as a saint - if not a female Christ figure - or else in her dream state she is being prodded into realising her redemptive power.* Only she holds the key to the black prisoner's release - her eyewitness testimony.

In a similar vein, the blazing crosses lose their power to offend if viewed within the dream state. By withholding her testimony, Madonna would be destroying the very values of Christianity (as symbolised by the cross - the manifest contentof the dream). Also, there is something very Klu Klux Klannish about burning crosses, not to mention the Klannish predilection for capturing and "punishing" innocent blacks.

It is significant for me that when Madonna awakes from her resting

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* "I am much more conscious of my masochism than any m[illegible] anifeelings I may have." - Madonna

place before the Christ figure, he is back in place in statue form as he was on her arrival at the Church. There is no sense of mystery as there would have been if she had awoken to find the altar empty. Then, yes, meaningful debate could be entered into as to whether we had watched a video of a dream or a sacreligious miracle.

To the critical viewer, operating within the interactive code, what is most shocking in the video is not the shape of things seen (bleeding palms, burning crosses) on screen but the substance that informs them - the latent not the manifest content. "Like A Prayer" is blatant, it flaunts its overt religious content in the same way that Madonna used to flaunt her sexuality. Where she started earlier in her career as sexuality incarnate, dressed up with a few religious baubles like crucifixes, she now reverses the process, signifying all religion before ascending/descending into sexuality. The passion of her kiss is an all encompassing possession of the Christ figure - religion is not just spiritual it has become deeply physical too.* In an analogous fashion, Madonna's mytholization is not reliant on the ephemeral (spiritual), it is grounded in the conscious (physical) knowledge of the tenets of Christianity.

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71. "Then all of a sudden 'Like A Prayer' begins ... and the cross descends. It's like here comes the Catholic Church saying 'Sex goes here, and spirituality goes there.' And I say - but I say, NO THEY GO TOGETHER! I am supposed to pray, right? But my praying gets so frenzied and passionate and frenetic that by the end, I am flailing my body all over the place, and it becomes a masturbatorysexualpassionate thing" - Madonna on her live stage rendition of "Like A Prayer".

The second truly startling thing about "Like A Prayer" is its ending. As if it is not enough that we have criss-crossed from reality into a dream state and back out again, we now have to radically reajust our perspective to accomodate the theatrical finale with which we are presented. Is "Like A Prayer" a Passion play (literally), or is the ending a cowardly cop-out that distances everything that has preceded it from being perceived realistically and thereby frees Madonna from charges of blasphemy? As much as the answer could be drawn from any of these postulations, I would argue for a far subtler resolution knowing that this is a Madonna video.*

Here, clearly, is a video that utilises the Artist as Performer theme to magnificent effect. As defined in an earlier chapter, the Artist as Performer theme is characterised as follows: the artist is a maker of music, the performer is someone who "acts". The medium of the performer is inevitably the stage/theatre, and this is often shown to be the centre of make-believe where all is not what it would seem to be. By raising fundamental questions about the nature of illusion and reality, this sort of video brings to issue our placid acceptance of the television medium as an objective arbiter of 'the real world'. The happy endings which we constantly see in televisual texts (such as Madonna freeing the black prisoner) are patently untrue to life. This is

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72. "I am able to express myself in many ways....I am lucky to be in the position of power that I am in and to be intelligent." - Madonna

expressed in "Like A Prayer" by the deliberately stagey feel of the police station scene (the large open expanse of the room). There is, in fact, no way that anything that precedes this scene could be construed as being staged - some shots (the burning crosses) are clearly filmed out of doors. With this in mind, it is obvious to me that Madonna wants her viewing audience to accept the religious scenes at face value, and not to negate them due to the theatrical ending. The curtain call that finishes the video is merely meant to remind us that Madonna is a performer, and that perhaps events in real life do not always run as smoothly and as fairly as one could hope for.

By stripping the video down to its various levels of illusion and reality, we can posit the following: Madonna witnesses an assault and is herself seen in the process by the perpetrators. Madonna watches a black bystander being wrongly arrested, and flees to a church for sanctuary. She falls asleep in the church and dreams of a black Christ figure who comes to life. In her dream state an equivalence is perceived between the bystander and the Christ figure. Assorted odd dream-like things (decentering) happen: she falls through clouds, she dances before a field of burning cross , she aquires stigmata. Finally, Madonna embraces (in every sense of the word) the Christ figure as her Saviour. As he returns to his moulded form, Madonna awakes. We are then presented with the theatrical happy ending which is also a cinematic happy ending (viz. the words "The End" which are written on the screen as if it were a 1940's Hollywood product). From an unhappy reality, Madonna escapes into a dream world. Her dream gives her

answers and solutions (as dreams are wont to do). Finally she gets to "act" - literally - on the direction garnered from her dream.

That, if anything, is the message of "Like a Prayer - Madonna acts out her dreams.

Messages seem to play an important part in Madonna's next oeuvre of videos, "Express Yourself" being a case in point. Far removed from the religious excesses of "Like a Prayer", "Express Yourself" has a theme which is entirely appropriate for Madonna - female emancipation. Set underneath a rainy city (which bears more than a passing resemblance to "Metropolis"), the video portrays the inhuman and soulless existence of the workers who toil beneath the metropolis. All the workers, in true music-video form, are exquisitely muscled, brooding and unshaven. In contrast to their aesthetically grimy and rigid work ethic (lots of shots of cogs grinding), Madonna is presented as a more sinuous and colourful figure. Radiantly lit, made-up, dressed and undressed, Madonna is the visual counterpoint to the grey and rained upon work-force who labour in captivity. And yet, Madonna is as much a prisoner as the other characters in "Express Yourself".

What happens narratively in the video is not of major importance, in fact very little actually happens in "Express Yourself". In a nutshell, Madonna's singing voice travels through the underground speaker system and ravishes the mind of a young, exquisitely muscled, brooding and unshaven man. At the end of the video he

enters her bed chamber and they romp happily ever after. Yet everything that happens inbetween is both striking and of thematic relevance.

Starting from her superbly vogued poses that are reminiscent of the heyday of Hollywood glamour (a fleeting series of hommages), Madonna is seen clutching a small black cat. Although not immediately apparent on first viewing, the cat is of enormous significance in "Express Yourself" where it plays the role of spiritual repository of the Madonna character. Flitting through various scenes, sometimes in shadow, the cat is Madonna's alterego.

The theoretical constructs posited in an earlier chapter concerning music-video and dream, find a complete expression in "Express Yourself". Unlike "Like A Prayer", which played itself out in the Madonna character's dream, "Express Yourself" is the dream fantasy of the brooding and equisitely unshaven worker. About a third of the way into the video, we see him reclining horizontally on his bunk with his eyes closed, thus denoting his sleeping state. In a sudden burst of cloud, a close-up of Madonna's penetrating gaze is superimposed over his semi-recumbent form (omnipresence of the spectator). Immediately, we are witness to a new Madonna incarnation - the Dietrich Madonna (so named because of the 40's styling of her trouser suit). Now positioned down in the cavernous workers section, the Dietrich Madonna "bumps and grinds". Still within the context of the dream sequence, the worker projects a vision of his boss, a bald and evil-looking "Goldfinger" character. With a touch of his remote control,

"Goldfinger" makes musician mannequins come to life and perform.

The dream continues with the by now notorious scene of the naked Madonna chained to her bed. Feminists around the world were up in arms over this scene, but Madonna herself termed it a pro-feminist statement, claiming that it was she who had enslaved herself.* Whether this is a valid remark or not is debateable, I myself side with the feminists. Madonna might have made a conscious decision as a video artiste to chain herself up in "Express Yourself", yet at no stage of the video do we see the Madonna character locking the steel collar around her own neck. In fact, by implication, we perceive the Madonna character as being the mistress - or love slave - of the bald "Goldfinger" character. "Goldfinger" has the air of a deranged collector. The musicians that play their instruments in the glass cylinder are like insects trapped in amber. They perform only for him - he is their captor. In an analogous fashion, it is surely not farfetched to presume that "Goldfinger" has chained his mistress to the bed. Why, on earth, would any woman chain herself. What possible gratification, apart from masochism, could there be in it for her?

I did not find the chain scene as degrading and/or humiliating as many others did, but in fact found another scene to be far worse and more shocking. The scene where Madonna stalks on all fours, cat-like, across the room and under the table is for me incredibly

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73. "Yeah, well ... I am a masochist." - Madonna

brazen. As if it is not enough that Madonna dehumanises herself with her pet-like behaviour, she flagrantly revels in it. When lapping up the saucer of milk, Madonna equates herself with the cat (read: pussy) that we saw earlier running through her living quarters. The fact that Madonna is dripping wet merely adds insult to injury. In the narrative structure of the plot, there is no reason for Madonna to be so drenched and no rationale is offered for this meteorological displacement. All the justification, however, comes from the fact that the cat had darted off down to the worker, and that it had become drenched - as had he - due to the strange in-house sprinkler system. In this visually lewd assimilation of the concept of Madonna-cat and wet-Madonna, we are being subjected to a visceral play on words which I consider to be infinitely more objectionable than the chain scene.

As the wet-Madonna stalks across the floor after the saucer of milk, she is watched by the Dietrich Madonna (who is seated on the couch), and by a silver framed photograph of Madonna that carries the natural vocal. Clearly, we are dealing not so much with the "Artist as Double" theme, but with varying perceptions of the fragmentation of the Madonna character. Is she slut, liberated woman, or as much a prisoner of our perceptions as the singing photo is within the confines of its frame?

Towards the end of the video, the worker finds his way through to Madonna's bedchamber. He brings the cat with him, thus bringing a facet of Madonna's personality back to her. Presumably a whole woman again, the video ends happily with the two lovers lost in

each others clinches.

Thematically, Madonna is presented in the video as a woman with extraordinary powers, thus Artist as Deity. It is her sepulchrally sweet singing tones that captivate the young hero when heard through the public address system. Interesting to note that not all the workers react to the voice - only the chosen one. This has certain biblical parallels in that visions or religious manifestations of whatever form only appeared to a few, and not the general populace. Madonna also evinces the facility of being able to change form - from female to animal and back again. Finally, the video finishes with Madonna's eyes, in an omnipresent, unblinking gaze superimposed over the night sky above the metropolis. Like an omnipotent goddess, she watches from the heavens - and penetrates our dreams.

Although the song is clearly about female emancipation, nothing appears to consolidate this visually in the video. However, true to form, Madonna has chosen to 'express herself'* in a sexual and controversial fashion.

The video's punchline is delivered in the form of a quote: "Without the heart, there can be no understanding between the hand and the mind". Intellectually, ideologically and inspirationally,

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* "The provocation slaps you in the face and makes you take notice, and the ambiguity thing makes you say, Well, is it that or is it that? You are forced to have a discourse about it in your mind." - Madonna

I would argue that Madonna is speculating on the barreness of the relationship between labour (the hand) and the owner/employer (the mind) as personified by the worker and "Goldfinger". Without the passion (the heart) of Madonna, the video, like life, would be nothing.

Madonna's follow-up, the captivating "Cherish", is a departure from her video norm. With no sex, no nudity, no religion and no colour, the video is far and away the "safest" that Madonna has ever delivered. Shot on a beach, "Cherish" presents us with Madonna and the mer-people. The fact that they are predominantly mer-men (the only exception being a small mer-boy), is the only nod to Madonna's preoccupation with the male sex. The little mer-boy is significant in only because he is the sole featured youth performer since the toyboy scandal of "Open Your Heart". The difference between the two is obvious: whereas the "Heart" boy had a definite sexual interest in Madonna (as evidenced by his leering at the semi-nude photo's outside the peep show), the "Cherish" child is steeped in innocence.

If "Cherish" is to be read on a personal level* (which I believe that all the videos to be culled from the "Like A Prayer" album should be) then it shows us an altogether more human Madonna, a woman with strong maternal and nurturing instincts. The sweetness and spontaneity of her interaction with the mer-boy is truly delightful to witness.

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* "I present my view of life in my work" - Madonna.

Madonna's next video opus received enormous critical acclaim, ar even garnered a 1991 Grammy nomination for Best Music Video Shortform. The song, "Oh Father", was not the biggest hit of Madonna's career, but did manage to reach the Top 20. Sticking very closely to the lyric of the song, the video is an autobiographical retelling of Madonna's early years after the death of her natural mother. The time scale of the video is set from its closing frames which show Madonna and her ageing father at the grave of her mother. The remainder of the video is a series of flashbacks, daydreams and memory traces of Madonna as a little girl.

The video begins with a shot of a small girl (Madonna) in a snow-filled field. As the camera sweeps downwards over the snow, the field turns into an expanse of white pillows - Madonna lying in bed, next to a young man (her father). The nearest thematic tool we have in our armoury of theoretic constructs of video analysis is the "Artist as Double". During the course of the video it becomes apparent that the small child is Madonna. There is, for instance, a scene near the end of the video where Madonna and her ageing father face up to each other, yet the shadows they project on the wall are those of the little girl and the young father. Interestingly enough, within the context of the video, the Madonna/girl character identification travels in a reverse direction. By this I mean that normally the theme is characterised by two manifestations of the artist - one as a performer, and the other as a watcher/audience figure. The latter, removed from the trappings of the performer's arena (the stage), contemplates the

persona that the performer has cultivated and projects. In "Oh Father", the act of contemplation does not run from the innocent to the star, but vice versa: Madonna the star contemplates the way she used to be as a child. The analogy between music-video and dream, as discussed in an earlier chapter with reference to Pat Aufderheide's work, finds a full expression in "Oh Father". In this video, "the protagonist is either a preschooler or is infantilised ... and sets are expressionalistically large or small"[59], such as the huge door which the little girl struggles to open.

Back in the bedroom, the young father gets up and, as he walks past the adult Madonna, slaps her in the face. The video next shows us the young father and girl in the snow-filled graveyard, followed by other scenes of father and daughter, a mother (both alive and in her casket), snow and the cemetery. The rest of the video progresses with similar themes and preoccupations. We see the young father asleep on the couch in his vest with a whiskey bottle at his side. Upon awakening, he knocks it over; the liquor streams across the floorboard in a cascade of pearls that reinforce the violence against Madonna (the shot of her powdering her facial bruise is intercut with a shot of pearls scattering on her dressing table). Madonna in the confessional (her words "oh father" are both an invocation to her confessor, and an appeal to her dad) is followed by a shot of the young father praying to a wall crucifix. The themes of redemption, forgiveness and Catholic guilt fall as pervasively and as softly as the snowflakes in the cemetary.

It is very clear from "Oh Father" that Madonna has had a very troubled relationship* with her father. Accepting the fact that he drank and became violent and abusive, her little-girl love for her Daddy became tortured and confused. The endless snow drifts that tumble down pervade the video with an icy coldness undisturbed by any human warmth between father and daughter. She is perennially shut out (viz. the scene with the giant door). The shot of Madonna in bed with her father hints of a desire for a consummation of her love as an ultimate expression of her need to be wanted and loved. Within the context of the daydream, Madonna has turned "Oh Father" into a brave and disturbingly personal exorcism.

Madonna's next video adventure, "Vogue", continues the black and white cinematography of her two preceding clips. Taking its format, visual style and inspiration from its title, "Vogue" is one of Madonna's most watchable music-videos. Dance historians will make reference to the late eighties as the era of a new dance craze, 'voguing'. Deriving its name from the influential fashion magazine, the dance consists of a series of model-like poses to be struck, reminiscent of those seen in the pages of Vogue. The object of this dance is to project oneself into the stylings of the beautiful and glamorous, thereby assuming a different persona.

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* "Warren's [Beatty] point of view about all of this is that he thinks I have to humiliate men publicly. That is is his overall simplification of what I do, that I am living out my hatred of my father for leaving me for my stepmother after my mother died. That is true, but it is too much of an oversimplification. If that were all I was doing, it would be a lot less interesting" - Madonna

Vogueing is an intensely selfish dance as there is no necessary physical connection with one's partner.

In Madonna's "Vogue", there is no serious narrative structure. In keeping with the nature of the dance, the video is composed of a series of vignettes (hommages), concisely structured flashes that illustrate Madonna's transformation into the leading ladies of Hollywood. The Hollywood aura of "Vogue" is as much a connotative product of the phosphorescent monochrome styling of the cinematography as it is of the nuances such as the Busby-Berkely styled feather fans covering the screen in the video's final moments. Exorting the listener to "Strike a pose!", Madonna invokes the entire list of Golden Age movie queens from Garbo to Dietrich, Hepburn, Monroe, Grace Kelly, Jean Harlow, Rita Hayworth, Lauren Bacall, Ginger Rogers, Lana Turner and Bette Davis. Madonna then does a series of very passable hommages. Framed by her own butterfly hands, batting weary lashes at the adoring lens, she is Greta Garbo in "Grand Hotel", ascending a staircase in a black velvet gown against dark trellice work, she is Garbo as Queen Christina. Taking the song's lyric "You're a superstar/ That's who you are" to heart, Madonna reinforces the "Artist as Deity" theme by reincarnating the celluloid goddesses of a previous generation.

Gus Silber, in an incisive article "Pop Go the Movies", sees Madonna's role-playing in her videos as symptomatic of a desire for a much larger movie career. "Trouble is, people like Madonna are rarely satisfied with three minutes of synchronised celluloid, where all they are really required to do is pretend they're

singing while they pretend they're acting. People like Madonna want the real thing, the whole picture, the captive audience and the silver screen that is larger than life. And so, at the frenzied peak of their careers as pop stars and cultural icons, people like Madonna become part-time movie stars"[60]. Silber goes on to discuss the failure of Madonna's film career, but neglects to offer an explanation therefore, apart from saying that "the charisma and sex appeal of an idol of the pop charts loses a little in the translation to the big screen"[61]. This is, of course, patently untrue, as Madonna's charisma and sex appeal is actually enhanced and enlarged in its transition from the video screen. Richard Corliss, referencing her 'reinventive' faculty, calls Madonna "a great performer....More than Julia Roberts or Meryl Streep, Madonna is <u>the</u> modern movie star because she has created her own roles: boy toy, Marilyn Monroe avatar, <u>Penthouse</u> pin-up, sly feminist, scandal magnet.... Despite some fine screen work, she has never quite made it in Hollywood, a failure of the moguls, who haven't figured out how to channel her charisma"[62]. Madonna's music-video success is based on a complete understanding of the potential of the medium, a medium which she has cannily and comprehensively exploited by plugging into a series of archetypes and mythologies. The extended structure of film, and its different parameters of plot and pacing, have been Madonna's biggest problem. Her best movie near-misses are those roles which most closely approximate those reprised in her videos, namely "Desperately Seeking Susan" ("Artist as Double") and "Dick Tracy" ("Artist as Deity").

Madonna's next sortie in music-video, and the last text we shall be discussing, is "Justify My Love". Decidedly Madonna's most controversial video yet, "Justify My Love" had the unique distinction of being banned from MTV because of its graphic sexual content. Arrington describes Madonna's role as "an O-like character drifting through a hypnagogic sexscape worthy of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch"[63], whilst Cocks describes it as "sleek, fairly harmless stuff"[64]. "Justify My Love", shot at the Royal Monceau Hotel in Paris, has the high-gloss, fashion-magaine look of a Helmut Newton layout. Directed by video expert Jean-Baptiste Mondino, the clip borrows imagery from cinema sources as various as "The Night Porter" and "The Blue Angel", then spices the proceedings with suggestions of bondage, voyeurism and multiple couplings among various partners, and genders.

Rock critics suggest that Mondino has an uncanny knack for making his images stand out in the look-alike world of music-videos. "The typical Mondino production is a rapidly paced pastiche of the outlandish and the sexual"[65], a spinning demimonde of street toughs and transsexual hussies. He blurs the camera to illustrate delirium, zooms in on strange faces, flashes from one scene to the next, conveying a kinetic sense of urgency. In "Justify My Love", Madonna simulates copulation with her real-life boyfriend, Tony Ward, only to have it slide into a love scene with another man, who turns out to be a woman. Mondino also incorporates his own imagist mascots, like the brief backlit silhouette of a black male dancer ressembling the one who appeared in a recent video for Neneh Cherry.

As steamy as the video purports to be, I personally find it far from arousing. Madonna stylizes all the sensuality out of passion until only the appearance remains. As "Justify My Love" exemplifies, Madonna ritualises rather than embodies sexuality. By this I mean that Madonna is so concerned with imitation (eg. hommages) and so willing to acknowledge the essential artifice of her enterprise, that the reader is hard-pressed to decipher whether the eroticism he sees is endemic to Madonna or merely to the role she portrays. More shocking to me than the purported couplings that the video shows, is Madonna's reaction at the end of "Justify My Love". Having given expression to a free range of sexual fantasy, she lopes down the hotel corridor, rumpled and laughing, satisfied and triumphant. I find it disturbing because I feel that this is the real Madonna brazenly enjoying herself and not some character role being played. To be confronted with Madonna's libido in such an unapologetic fashion is to be confronted with the essence of Madonna herself.

"Justify My Love", like "[illegible] Father" before it, represent a quantum leap in Madonna's video development. Instead of creating a video in the image of another (eg. Mor Madonna has become an idol in her own right. Madonna has established her own iconography, her own subculture, her own distinctive language. In both these two videos, Madonna plays herself. "She has now learned the craft of spinning autocinematic tapestries out of the yarn of her own private anguish"[66]. No longer, I predict, will Madonna harp in her videos on pre-existing themes and icons, nor will she necessarily be playing clearly defined roles from Hollywood history.

Madonna has created such a massive hysteria about her life and her pre-occupations, that she has created her own niche on the parthenon of 'goddesses'. We can now look forward to a host of video imitators, all paying hommage to scenes from Madonna clips. From here onwards, Madonna videos will revolve around Madonna's concerns: she has become the subtext of her own video literature.

Madonna is an exceptional case, certainly, but she proves to what extent the power of music-video can be harnessed. Also, she is fortunate that her career has lasted a decade - not all pop careers do - but, based on her pre-eminence in promo-video, I see no end in sight for her. In a very real sense, Madonna is music-video incarnate. Like the process of reading rock-video, she is a study in the open sign. The icon that we recognise as Madonna, is simply a receptacle for a variety of different characters, personalities and roles which Ms Ciccone chooses to adopt. We make sense of these differing personas by assimilating the varying concepts expressed at the second-level of the signifying process, the level where *signifier* and *signified* fuse - and become "myth". As this thesis has attempted to show, the 'mythmaking' potential of music-video is its most salient characterisitc, a process which can be laid bare by semiotic analysis. Yet, part of the act of reading/decoding is dependent on a decoding position, and it is in this sense as well, that rock-video (as an index of the non-exclusivity of decoding positions) is truly an open sign.

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