On the Aesthetics of Music Video

Christopher James Emmett

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD.

The University of Leeds, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies.
October 2002

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

The bulk of the many thanks owed by me goes first to the University of Leeds, for the provision of a University Research Scholarship, without which I would have been unable to undertake the studies presented here, and the many library and computing facilities that have been essential to my research. A debt of gratitude is also owed to my supervisor Dr. Barbara Engh, whose encouragement and erudition, in a field of interdisciplinary research that demands a broad range of expertise, and I have frequently demanded it, has been invaluable. Mention here should also be made of Professor Adrian Rifkin, whose input at the earliest stage of my research has done much to steer the course of this work in directions that only a man of his breadth of knowledge could have imagined.

Thanks also to the administrative staff of the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, in particular Gemma Milburn, whose ever available assistance has helped to negotiate the many bureaucratic hurdles of the last four years, and kept me in constant touch with a department that has undergone considerable upheaval during recent years. It is their support that has allowed my studies to proceed with a minimum of distraction.

Finally, thanks to the other research students, especially my fellow 'noise boys' Marcel Swiboda and David Fox, whose own fields of interest have frequently overlapped with my own in productive ways, and who have provided direction both away from dead ends and towards much of what is presented here. And last but in no sense least, many, many thanks to my friends and my parents, without whose unflagging technical and moral(e) support, or 'nagging' as I have occasionally termed it, this piece of work, for good or ill, would never have seen the light of day.

Abstract

This doctorate is an attempt to show how music video presents a challenge to traditional modes of music aesthetics through its resistance to being categorized as an object. I attempt to show how music video, and by extension all music, is better conceived of as Text-event rather than as object, and hence formulate the notion of an aural paradigm based on material presence as opposed to a visual paradigm based on representation. This draws in particular on the writings of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, and the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and also on the very different tradition from which Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy originates.

Within this framework the idea of a 'fragmentary aesthetic' is placed in relation to its nineteenth-century antecedents, and suggested as a possible methodology for future analysis. This theoretical base is then used to re-examine both the arguments surrounding the music aesthetics of Eduard Hanslick and Richard Wagner, and ideas drawn from modern physics, mathematics, and system theory, to develop the ideas of relationality and 'gesture' as a means of comparing different media without compromising the qualities specific to each. Also under discussion in this context are questions of meaning and narrative as they relate to music video and recent musicology, and an engagement with the Critical Theory of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin regarding the role of social mediation in art. Finally the problems of ideological claims upon the realm of the aesthetic, as noted by Terry Eagleton, are considered, and the figure of the 'technological body,' inspired by Brian Massumi's work on the concept of proprioception, is proposed as a means of combining the objective and the subjective realms in a new musical aesthetic.

Introduction

I

> In a society which has not yet found peace, how could art cease being metaphysical, i.e signifying, readable, representative? Fetishist? How long till music, the Text?[1]

My nominal topic of study, the aesthetics of music video, poses two questions: why aesthetics, and why music video? I will return to the relevance of aesthetics later, but with respect to music video, my response does not take the form of a simple 'because it's there,' after Edmund Hillary – I do not seek to 'conquer' music video, bend it to my will – but rather takes the form of the confessional. Something, I knew not what, pricked my consciousness as I encountered music video. The *punctum*, of which Roland Barthes speaks in *Camera Lucida*,[2] caught my eye and my ear; there was, is, a quality of music video that is all its own, beyond the marriage of music and image alone. Music videos don't begin to resemble opera, nor are they quite like films, nor even most television formats. This point was brought home to me in watching the film *Annihilator*,[3] an execrable film in most respects, with the sole redeeming feature (at least for me) of having an entirely

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[1] Barthes, R., 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, trans. Howard, R., (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), p. 97.

[2] Barthes describes the *punctum* as a 'sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).' *Camera Lucida*, trans. Howard, R., (Vintage, London, 2000), p. 27.

[3] *Annihilator*, (1986), dir. Michael Chapman. The music track used here was David Bowie's 'Ashes to Ashes,' itself the subject of a highly experimental music video several years previously.

unexplained and unprepared music video-like section midway through the film. Despite being at least as badly done as the rest of the film, the disjuncture caused by the abrupt change in register, achieved without any use of visual or aural 'cues,' was a vivid demonstration of just how different music video is from film. Indeed, the sensation of watching music video is probably closer to that of silent film, paradoxically, than sound film, in the active engagement of the viewer to make sense of what is presented. (Perhaps the exception to this is the musical number of the Hollywood musical – the imitation of Busby Berkeley style choreography and camera angles is seen relatively often in music videos – but even here the contextual setting of the number within a broader filmic context makes for a similar, but not identical, affective charge.) The visual effects of music video are frequently striking, even experimental, and yet if one compares their effect to the experimental films that Harry Partch set to his music in the 1950s and '60s, the difference between these and music video could not be more apparent.

The only other medium with a comparable aesthetic is that of the advertisement, drawing on similar visual codes, similarly abbreviated with respect to narrative convention, and also having a similarly schizophrenic relationship to the commodity: both advertisements and music videos are promotional tools for commodities (music videos are known as 'promos' in the music industry), and are thus intimately tied to the fetishized commodity form, but are themselves only rarely treated as commodities with exchange value. Music videos are explicitly designed to perform an action upon the world rather than to take on the status of passive object. Even with the degree of crossover seen between music video and advertisements, however, as in the frequent employment of music video directors to make adverts, there remains a clear distinction between the two formats in the prominence given to the music track.[4] (There are of course exceptions – witness the setting of Tony Kaye's Dunlop tyre advertisement to the Velvet Underground's

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[4] See Savan, L., 'Commercials Go Rock,' *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, ed. Frith, S., Goodwin, A. and Grossberg, L., (Routledge, London and New York, 1993), pp. 85-90. Although the practice of directors moving between these mediums has become more common since this was written, the phenomenon of music videos *as* advertisements for non-music products described here was relatively short lived, and thus presumably commercially unsuccessful.

'Venus in Furs' a few years ago, or the occasional success of the music tracks to Levi's adverts – but these are the exceptions that prove the existence of a rule.)

Having been 'hooked' by the *punctum* I perceived in my interaction with music video, I sought to understand the phenomenon, and turned to what literature I could find on the topic. It seemed, however, that my interest in music video was not shared by the many writers that purported to address it: there was no shortage of discussion, at least in the 1980s, but nobody seemed to be particularly concerned with the music video text in itself. Most commentators were more taken with the channel MTV than the videos *per se*,[5] and music videos were an example of this, or a proof of that, but always *constituted*. Rarely, if ever, was it addressed on its own terms, and never in terms of the one thing that marked it apart from other television forms, namely, the music. Many people seemed to be talking about music video, but few of these seemed to be addressing what they actually saw, instead of the ideas it represented, and fewer still were bothering to listen to them. And then, after the initial scholarly intoxication with music video, people stopped even talking about it. Katherine Dieckmann wrote recently:

> Not so very long ago, back in the eighties, or "The Big 80s" as one short-lived video-revival show liked to call them, MTV provided fruitful ground for the pop-minded scholar. The music video was, in fact, often considered the ideal mass cultural artifact. ...My interest in MTV is less theoretical and more pragmatic ... partly because a highly intellectualized approach to the medium feels just about as dated now as Madonna's conical bustier.[6]

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[5] One of the very few book length studies, oft cited in music video research, is E. Ann Kaplan's *Rocking Around the Clock*, and yet in her introduction she explicitly states: 'Let me remind readers that this book addresses itself not to rock videos in general but to their incorporation in the institution that is MTV.' Kaplan, E.A., *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1987), p. 11.

[6] Dieckmann, K., 'MTV killed the music video star,' in Kelly, K. and McDonnell, E. (eds), *Stars don't Stand Still in the Sky*, (Routledge, London, 1999), p. 89.

In the course of this essay, Dieckmann mentions the work of Andrew Goodwin as an example of a 'pop-minded scholar,' but she neglects to mention that Goodwin was arguing precisely *against* the raft of theory produced in the 1980s that treated music video as an exemplar of postmodernism for exactly as long as it failed to address the music. Many of the postmodern traits music video and MTV were said to embody were entirely typical presentations of the experience of live concert performance (for instance, direct address); they only became 'postmodern' when erroneously viewed from the standpoint of mainstream cinema. Music video was not only the 'ideal mass cultural artefact,' but an entirely idealized artefact, a convenient peg upon which to hang theory. At the time of writing it is ten years since Goodwin published *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*,[7] a call for a 'musicology of the image,' outlining the need to re-engage with music video as a musical entity rather than as a branch of film theory, and in the intervening period there has been an almost deafening silence. The most notable effort of the handful that have addressed Goodwin is that of Nicholas Cook, as part of a wider discussion of musical multimedia.[8] Cook brings a welcome musicological perspective to music video, but I would suggest that in one key respect he has replicated the problem identified by Goodwin, and indeed Goodwin himself is also guilty of this, for instead of understanding music video in terms of music, both these media are understood in terms of what they *mean*; a difficult, and very often not a useful concept when applied to music. Again the material qualities of the music video are effaced in deference to an ideal category, and as I hope to demonstrate, this is exactly what a 'musicology of the image' should struggle against. I would contend that the model in which an artefact is regarded as a *representation* of something else, be that another object or an abstract concept, is a profoundly unmusical one, and based upon a visual paradigm. Indeed, the process of abstraction involved in the very notion of the 'idea,' so often unsuited to a discussion of sound, is derived from the visual realm. As Jonathan Rée notes:

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[7] Goodwin, A., *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1992).

[8] Cook, N., *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998).

'Plato's use of the word "Idea" is itself based on its root meaning of "visible form."'[9] A genuinely musicological response to music video must hence develop a means of addressing both image and music, and their combination without constant recourse to the transcendent realm of the ideal: the point is to stop considering entities as representations, and to start addressing their *presence*.

It is for this reason that my concern is for an *aesthetics* of music video: I wish to understand the affect of a music video, and derive social critique from this, rather than analysing the social meaning it offers up, which will of necessity simply be a reflecting back of one's own prejudice. It should be stressed that this is not aesthetics understood as a contemplation of the beautiful in music video, but a return to the original formulation of Baumgarten in his *Aesthetica* of 1750. Aesthetics as 'the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion in the world.'[10] The original purpose of this, however, was not to provide a challenge to the realm of reason: as Terry Eagleton points out (and this is discussed in chapter III), it was precisely in order to separate out and harness the sensuous to Enlightenment reason that the field of aesthetics was born. One sees here the potential risk of ideological capitulation involved in music aesthetics, and the reason why Adorno and modern musicology has been so keen to avoid the 'purely musical' and reveal musical meaning, an ideological product. The aesthetic realm, however, is not so easily ordered as it might seem. As Eagleton writes:

> To lend fresh significance to bodily pleasures and drives, if only for the purpose of colonizing them more efficiently, is always to risk foregrounding and intensifying them beyond one's control. The aesthetic as custom, sentiment, spontaneous impulse may consort well enough with political domination; but these phenomena border embarrassingly on passion, imagination, sensuality, which are not always so easily

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[9] Rée, J., *Philosophical Tales: An Essay on Philosophy and Literature*, (Methuen, London and New York, 1987), p. 65.

[10] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), p. 13.

> incorporable. ... If the aesthetic is a dangerous, ambiguous affair, it is because ... there is something in the body which can revolt against the power which inscribes it.[11]

As I hope to demonstrate in my re-reading of Eduard Hanslick in chapter II, what might be regarded as a move to the 'purely musical' is in fact an attempt to bring out this radical potential of aesthetics, and to uncover the 'signifiance' (to borrow Julia Kristeva's term) at work within signification and the inscription of meaning. A renunciation of the quest for meaning in favour of concentrating upon musical material is not a retreat into the 'purely musical,' because the notion of the 'purely musical' is based upon a fallacy. Both Mikhail Bakhtin, and in a less overt manner, Ludwig Wittgenstein, have shown that any form of enunciation is always already intersected by a range of competing claims and that the word is of necessity a *dialogical* entity:

> Any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist. ... The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically-agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers.[12]

And I believe this is no less true of music than it is of language: every sound, harmony, musical style, is intersected by all its previous instances of usage in precisely the same way as language. An aesthetic approach to musical material need not be a way of ignoring entirely the social dimension of music (although it very often is, in certain analytic practices), but rather a way of approaching meaning from a new direction, sidestepping what I termed above a visual paradigm, predicated upon ideal concepts and a translation of the material into

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[12] Bakhtin, M., 'Discourse in the Novel,' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Emerson, C. and Holmquist, M., (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981), p. 276.

representation. (One sees here a possible reason for the difficulty of discussing musical timbre in traditional analytic terms: as that element of music that is most wedded to the material it resists translation into a representation of something else, and is hence ignored as being non-meaning, insignificant. The value of sonorous activity in music cannot be gauged so easily as its 'meaning.') The key to endowing aesthetics with a social dimension is to consider it as a means of generating analysis through a connection to sensate phenomena, rather than as a set of ideals (unity, symmetry, etc.) to which one might aspire, and for which analysis provides a form of 'proof.' As Ken Hirschkop puts it: 'The points of pleasure and tension in our musical experience should lead to questions, linked to our social experience in general, rather than to aesthetic satisfactions which lead nowhere.'[13] Consequently, this thesis will not take the form of a 'how to' of music video analysis – analytic strategies must be developed in response to the nature of the artefact and the context of its reception – but I do wish to set out some fundaments of methodology, to suggest the ways in which one might interact with music video, and the forms that an understanding of this process might take.

II

What is required is a new conception of aesthetics, and this in turn demands a new way of apprehending the object. Barthes writes: 'Aesthetics is absorbed into an art of living ... hence, it is less a matter of making pictures than furniture, clothes, tablecloths, which will have distilled all the juice of the "fine" arts; the socialist future of art will therefore not be the work (except as a productive game) but the object of use, the site of an *ambiguous* flowering (half functional, half ludic) of the

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[13] Hirschkop, K., 'The Classical and the Popular: Musical Form and Social Context,' in *Music and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Norris, C., (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1989), p. 303.

signifier.'[14] Aesthetics ceases to be a straightforward identification of the quality of an object, and becomes an understanding of the process of interaction between the subject and the object, the point of symbiosis between them. There is a shift from an aesthetics of being to an aesthetics of becoming, an aesthetics not of the work but of the text, and this is something that can only take place within a dialogic framework, such that the materiality of the object bears the imprint of the social, of better, the social-material symbiosis is an ongoing event with a particular affective charge. There is a close analogy with the conception of the wave-particle in quantum physics: the basis of matter is not exactly a particle, nor exactly an energy wave, but exhibits qualities of both at once, entity and enaction in one. It is important to keep this in mind when reintroducing the figure of the body into aesthetic discourse: the body is not to be regarded as a site of anchorage, a stable ground that can function as a benchmark against which everything else might be referenced. The body is itself an activity, a mediation or interaction, unfixed, and it is a working through of the ramifications of this 'technological body' that forms the basis of chapter III below.

What I also hope to show is that the form of this aesthetic response is something demanded by the peculiar nature of the music video artefact, and that this is a way of entering into what might be termed an aural paradigm, that operates in a different plane to the visual paradigm described above. Although he does not explicitly say so, Goodwin implicitly requests a dialogical response to music video, in stating:

> It is important to establish from the outset that pop music is, and always has been, a multidiscursive cultural form, in which no one media site is privileged. The implication of this for music video analysis is that it becomes impossible to understand the meaning of any individual clip without considering its relation to the wider world of pop culture.[15]

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[14] Barthes, R., 'Brecht and Discourse: A Contribution to the Study of Discursivity,' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Howard, R., (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), pp. 221-2.

[15] Goodwin, A., *op. cit.*, p. 25.

It may not be the case that any one medium is pushed to the fore, but what does take place, as Goodwin notes several times, is that music video 'makes television *musical*.'[16] The nature of the object demands, in contradistinction to the normal hierarchy, that one understands the image according to the criteria of music rather than *vice versa*, or to put it in the terms defined above, one apprehends the image track in terms of an aural paradigm rather than applying a visual paradigm to the sound track. In a dialogical aesthetic, the qualities of the image that are important are not questions of what is represented or what it 'means,' so much as what are its material, affective qualities, *how* does it impact upon the body; the image is made *sensuous*, it is musicalized.

This model may be particularly apparent in pop music, and music videos especially, but as Cook has pointed out dialogism can be observed in all instances of music:

> The aesthetic interaction between image and sound is possible only because music possesses an intrinsic openness to semantic completion through the intervention of the image. To the extent that people assimilate what they see and what they hear into a composite experience, the every day reception of music gives the lie to the ideology of musical autonomy, according to which the touchstone of good music is hat it is aesthetically self sufficient.[17]

Both Goodwin and Cook demonstrate how both popular and classical musics are already saturated with image, and bound up more generally with the cultures, or 'forms of life' to use Wittgenstein's terminology, of which they are a part, but what I believe to be new here is the suggestion that the criteria according to which one perceives these images is potentially altered by their musical association. Which is by no means to suggest that this always, or even frequently happens: the representative, meaning-as-product model predominates in appreciation of both the visual and the musical, but music videos enable a point of entry to the

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[16] *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

[17] Cook, N., 'The Domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Record Sleeves and Reception,' in *Composition – Performance – Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, ed. Thomas, W., (Ashgate, Aldershot etc., 1998), p. 115.

alternative – a holding of the image or the sound *en procès*, resisting the temptation to close down the plurality of meaning to an exchange-value. It is not that meaning is renounced, but in the process of making meaning, the activity of understanding, the emphasis is shifted from the meaning to the making.

The model of the object is no longer that of the location, the fixed point, nor any point at all, but rather that of the probability sphere. The possible range of associations, amalgamations, and affective properties are in orbit 'around' the object, but there is no centre to these orbits, nothing to which one might point as 'the object itself.' The object, so far as such a thing might still be usefully said to exist, is the space traced out by the combined loci of these orbits, which can only ever be partially apprehended and are in a constant state of flux. In the same way that one cannot pinpoint the path of an electron particle-wave around a nucleus, or a Baudrillardian event,[18] so one's understanding of one's interaction with the object is uncertain, probabilistic; the process of comprehension is a *stochastic* process.

The way in which one might apprehend this process of comprehension, give it an understandable form, is the key to how one begins to relate the very different material affects presented by the different media that make up the music video composite. Chapter II discusses at length the concept of 'gesture' that I have taken from Wittgenstein, and from Paul Johnson's discussion of the 'musicality of language' in Wittgenstein's later thought.[19] Putting it in somewhat reductive terms, gesture is the expression of the trace left by the interaction of the social and the object, a combination of the materiality of the object and the shaping of the realization of this material by the social forces acting on its production. The notion of gesture allows one to reconcile the specificity of each of the media that make up music video with the fact of their mutual influence upon one another, in the moulding of space and time that defines the identity of the object.

What this model does not allow for, however, is explanation. A dialogically conceived object cannot be explained, nor even exactly situated, but only related – a clarification of its place relative to one's form of life. This is not necessarily a bad

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[18] See Baudrillard, J., 'Simulacra and Simulations, ' in *Selected Writings*, ed. Poster, M., pp. 174-7.

[19] Johnson, P., *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1993), especially chapter 4, entitled 'The Musicality of Language.'

thing: Wittgenstein was highly critical of both the anthropologist George Frazer and Sigmund Freud for their attempts to explain rather than clarify the nature of certain phenomena,[20] and Adorno was not concerned with explanation, and the implication of origin and non-contingent 'essence' that underpinned it. As Jay Bernstein puts it: 'Adorno is seeking after historical truth, not the ahistorical, rational essence of phenomena. Historical truth is "shown" in fragmentary writing, which does not then explicitly aim to demonstrate of to explain. Explaining and demonstrating neutralize the phenomena in question; to explain is to explain away.'[21] This echoes well with Wittgenstein's belief that essence is expressed in the 'grammar' of a form of life,[22] and that this is not something that can be 'said,' but merely 'shown.'[23]

III

Music video has scarcely begun to be adequately theorized. In part this is due to problems in musical analysis more generally, and in the analysis of popular music in particular. The fault lines that run through musicology, and the difficulties of straddling sociological and musical analysis may be narrowing, but have not yet closed, and with a genuinely interdisciplinary object such as music video these problems are multiplied. The eclectic nature of the theories I have brought to bear on music video in the following study has been in part necessitated by the paucity of existing literature (with a few well-thumbed cited exceptions), and in part inspired by the formal and disciplinary eclecticism of music video itself. I have

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[20] See Cioffi, F., *Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998) for details of his criticisms.

[21] Bernstein, J.M., Introduction to *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1991), p. 7.

[22] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Anscombe, G.E.M., (Blackwell, Oxford, 1967), §§371 and 373.

[23] Gier, N., *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology*, (State University of New York Press, New York, 1981), p. 110.

already mentioned many of the theoretical works that betray their presence in my own writing – Barthes, Bakhtin, Wittgenstein. Academic discourse perhaps more than any other takes the form of a 'collective assemblage of enunciation.'[24] It is in this spirit, and I freely admit to following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in this respect, that I begin each of the three chapters with 'the prompting of an ancestral voice.'[25] Each of these quotations is the expression of a particular historical juncture, a moment of intensity, an activity that effects what Deleuze and Guattari term an 'incorporeal transformation,' a point in which the set of relations that marked a specific mode of being is changed in such a way as to change the object itself without altering its corporeal form. It is the intersection of the social and the material, the moment in which the subject-object symbiosis is broken and reset from within.

Music video is a varied medium, encompassing many different styles and codes of music, word, and image, each of which, as suggested above, should be treated according to its specific requirements. I cannot claim to have deliberately set out to discuss as wide a range of these as possible; I have instead focussed upon those few that caught my eye and my ear, and which time and again prompted me to rethink what it was that so appealed to me. My interest in music video is not that of the catalogue compiler, but of the aesthete, perhaps even the dilettante. One might query whether this is a responsible attitude to have taken, given both the political nature of my conclusions, and the typically uncritical and ideologically questionable nature of the vast majority of music videos, at least in terms of their overt content, but it is my belief that all music videos, with very few (if any) exceptions, embody a form of relationship between sound and image that contains an incipient critique of the sign-system itself. One can scarcely overstate the extent to which this critique is held in abeyance, but there is nevertheless a potency here that may occasionally be perceived, however momentary or personalized that occasion might be. Whatever the weight of theoretical knowledge I have brought to the artefact, however, all the conclusions I have

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[24] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Massumi, B., (Athlone Press, London, 1988). p. 80.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

drawn have been drawn directly from the encounter with the artefact and the way in which they have impacted upon me.

Much of the following takes the form of a discussion of music aesthetics rather than explicitly addressing music video, but as I have tried to show in this introduction, there are sound reasons (no pun intended) for this; what is true of music is very often true of music video also. The concept of the 'aural paradigm:' dialogistic, material, affective, and its distinction from the 'visual paradigm:' monologistic, representative, idealized, should not be read as meaning that each is in any way bound to its corresponding medium. The point is precisely that music video is a demonstration that these modes of apprehension can be extended across differing media, and co-exist in the same artefact in different planes. Whether they are of more general use to musicology as a whole I must leave for others to decide, but it is my belief that the attempt to combine the sociological and the 'purely musical' within a single theoretical framework, as begun by Adorno, and proposed in both the concept of 'gesture' and the figure of the 'technological body' here, would be of both theoretical and practical use. Music video as an art may not have entirely ceased to be metaphysical, but it does, to my mind, enable access to music, and the Text.

Fragments

I

27th February 1854, Dusseldorf

> Robert got up, but he was more profoundly melancholy than words can say. If I so much as touched him, he said: "Ah! Clara, I am not worthy of your love." He said this, he whom I always look up to with the greatest, the most profound reverence ... ah! and all that I could say was of no use. He made a fair copy of the variations, and as he was at the last he suddenly left the room and went sighing into his bedroom – I had left the room only for a few minutes, in order to say something to Dr. Hasenclever in the next room, and had left Mariechen sitting with him (for ten days I had never left him alone for a minute). Marie thought he would come back in a minute, but he did not come, but ran out into the most dreadful rain, in nothing but his coat, with no boots and no waistcoat. Bertha suddenly burst in and told me that he had gone – no words can describe my feelings, only I knew that I felt as if my heart had ceased to beat.[1]

Robert's body, on the other hand, as Barthes will point out, continued to beat strongly, and in a variety of remarkable patterns, on its journey through the streets of Dusseldorf. If only Clara had the benefit of Barthes' hindsight, she might have known: 'the Schumannian body does not *stay in place* (a major rhetorical transgression). It is not a meditative body. It sometimes makes a meditative gesture, but does not assume meditation's bearing. ... This is a pulsional body, one which pushes itself back and forth, turns to something else – thinks of

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[1] Extract from Clara Schumann's diary, quoted in Chisell, J., *Robert Schumann*, from Master Musician's series, ed. Westrup, J., (Dent, London, 1948), pp. 75-6.

something else.'[2] This unsettled (and unsettling) movement, ceaseless flitting, butterfly-like (Papillon?), is the aesthetic of the fragment – not the much-loved model of a Romantic composer's descent into madness, the mental edifice of genius disintegrating into a thousand pieces, like the shards of a mirror, nor any kind of construction at all. Rather it is a coherence, a collectivity, an amalgamation, a ceaselessly productive *corps morcelé* forever in flux, reconstituting itself as new parts are thrown into the mix. Certainly it is the mind of Freud, divided against itself, the fragmented decentred subject of modernism, but it is a great deal more besides, loosely woven into a totality-yet-to-come, a dynamic matrix of identity, both distinct from, and utterly embedded in the world.

Consider for a moment the American suburban party scene of the video to R.E.M.'s 'Imitation of Life.' It takes the form of a conspicuously everyday (if somewhat wealthy) 'slice o' life,' in the setting of a poolside gathering, and it is also very much a momentary slice, consisting as it does of a mere twenty seconds of footage repeated backwards and forwards some eleven times in the course of the video, with the addition of a short conclusion (backwards footage of a small girl blowing out cake candles). The scene is quite literally composed, in the etymological sense of placing things together as a composite, being made up of a series of distinct groupings that cover the social demographic one might expect. All human life – that is, all American suburban human life – is here: an elderly couple, a group of young adults dancing, men gathered around a barbeque, parents with younger children, to name but a few, as well as several solitary figures, including the three members of R.E.M., all of whom remain as distinct and identifiable entities throughout. A partial overview of the entire party scene is available only for brief instances, as the camera zooms in and out of the picture to pick up enigmatic events and poses. I am reminded of a scene in the film *Bladerunner* (and it would not surprise me if this was also true of the director of the video, Garth Jennings), where Harrison Ford's Dekker uses a machine to closely examine a photograph, zooming in and examining minute details of the photograph that he seemed able to sense but not accurately comprehend without clarification, (and with a corresponding problem of picture quality that gives this video an

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[2] Barthes, R., 'Rasch,' in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Howard, R., (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), p. 300.

unusual grainy character). This is the phenomenon that Barthes mentions in a brief aside in 'The Rhetoric of the Image,' when he describes 'Continuing to explore the image (which is not to say that it is not entirely clear at the first glance.)'[3] Although one may physically apprehend everything the music video has to offer, both its aural and visual affect, instantaneously, this is more than can be consciously understood in that instant – one knows more than one can say. Thus the task of the analyst is not to explain, but to *clarify* the experience, for as Wittgenstein puts it, 'Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain.'[4] One must extrapolate the instant affect into the dimension of time, such that the analytical process becomes a fundamentally nostalgic activity.

There is an important difference, however, for where Dekker starts with an entire photograph, the world beyond the frames unconsidered (insofar as this is ever true), in this video the holistic picture may never be glimpsed – one understands it through the dynamism and interaction of the distinct elements from which it is comprised. Through a clarification of the fragmentary components of an image, a thorough understanding of the detail available – and there is no end to the depths of this detail – one is encouraged to look beyond the confines of the frame, since there is more detail within the frame than it can comfortably contain. A dialogic relationship between music video and wider world is established. There is a simultaneous appeal to the particular and the holistic, and an establishment of a dynamic synergy between them both; looking, Janus-like, both inwards and outwards, is the aesthetic of the fragment. Indeed, many of these concepts are bound up with the field of aesthetics in general. As Eagleton notes:

> This fusion of general and particular, in which one shares in the whole at no risk to one's unique specificity, resembles the very form of the aesthetic artefact. ... For the mystery of the aesthetic object is that each of its sensuous parts, while appearing wholly autonomous, incarnate the "law" of the totality. Each aesthetic particular, in the

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[3] Barthes, R., 'Rhetoric of the Image,' in *Image Music Text*, trans. Heath, S., (Fontana, London, 1977), p. 34.

[4] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Anscombe, G.E.M., (Blackwell, Oxford, 1967), §126.

> very act of determining itself, regulates and is regulated by all other self-determining particulars.[5]

Which is to say, it is not the 'parts' that constitute this model, so much as the set of relations between them, and as such, the foremost problem of the 'aesthetic artefact' is also its greatest strength: the object becomes impossible to fix, its boundaries forever fluid, since it is collapsing in on itself at the same time that it is exploding outwards into the world.

Perhaps more so than any other format, the music video simultaneously proclaims its autonomy and fails to fulfil that promise. As the supplementation of the 'pop' single with an image track, it might be regarded as the ultimate fetishized commodity, replete in itself as object, but this is far from being the case. The presentation of spectacle in the music video is almost entirely unique, comparable only to the television channel 'ident' (that is, the short segments between programmes designed to establish the character of the channel) in the way the image is presented. (Music videos are also unusual in that, as a collective enterprise, subject reception is already embodied in the poietic process.) Their commodity status, as promotional tools, is uncertain like that of advertisements; unlike most advertisements, however, music videos reject most of the strategies of mainstream film: in the near permanent use of direct address to camera, a conspicuous absence of narrative, and a privileging of the striking image (what Barthes terms a 'pregnant moment'[6]) over any commitment to continuity that might denote a sense of self-containment. Music video is above all a parasitic medium, constantly looking outside itself for contextualization and any sense of meaning; a music video rarely, if ever, offers meaning – one must always *make* meaning from it, or not, as will be discussed later. What I hope to demonstrate is that, as Andrew Goodwin suggests, music video performs a musicalization of the image, an

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[5] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), p. 25.

[6] Barthes, R., 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' in *The Responsibility of Forms*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93ff.

extension of an aural paradigm into the visual realm (in a reversal of the usual hierarchy), as is frequently suggested in Barthes' discussion of 'the text.'[7]

This process, however, will not take place without first examining historical precedent; as Barthes notes: 'To criticize ... is to put into crisis, something which is not possible without evaluating the conditions of the crisis (its limits), without considering its historical moment.'[8] In order to explicate the fragmentary qualities of the music video, it is necessary to first explore the aesthetic of the fragment as it first appeared in the late eighteenth century. The historical proximity of the development of the field of aesthetics, and that of the literary form of the 'fragment' in the late eighteenth century was not mere serendipity. The potency and flexibility of thought this mode of *Weltverständnis* enables generated a range of analytical possibilities, adopted into artistic formats by the Jena circle around the likes of Friedrich Schlegel and Jean Paul, beloved by Schumann. When Schlegel famously wrote that: 'A fragment should be like a little work of art, complete in itself and separated from the rest of the universe like a hedgehog,'[9] he clearly meant this to say as much about the nature of the work of art as about the fragment. This should not be taken as an argument in favour of the separation of art and world, at least not in the sense of a straightforward autonomy – a hedgehog is no more separate from the universe than the sun or the moon; rather it is constitutive of that universe, in however small a way, and the same is true of the artwork, with a similarly ill-defined boundary point. A frequently cited musical example of this is Schumann's 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,' the opening song from the *Dichterliebe* cycle, which in terms of functional harmony begins with the sequence: $ii7^{4-3}$, V7 in F# minor, before resolving into A major on the entry of the voice, and

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[7] One might offer as examples, passages of *S/Z*, the statement that 'listening bears within it that metaphor best suited to the 'textual,' (footnote in 'The Third Meaning,' in *Image Music Text*, *op. cit.*, p. 53), or the close of 'Diderot. Brecht, Eisenstein,' *op. cit.*, 'How long till music, the Text?' (p. 97).

[8] Barthes, R., 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers,' in *Image Music Text*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[9] Quoted in Rosen, C., *The Romantic Generation*, (HarperCollins, London, 1996), p. 48. The following reading and discussion owes much to Rosen's chapter 'Fragments' in this book.

concludes with the same sequence, finishing on the dominant seventh chord. The effect in performance is one of profound ambiguity, and serves to project the song both forwards and backwards in time by implying both an unheard prologue and a continuation of the song. Although this is a particularly impressive and beautiful example, the same effect is produced less artfully in innumerable pop songs that employ the familiar fade-out of a repeated chord sequence. A better example is that of the video to Basement Jaxx's 'Jus' 1 Kiss,' which opens as if 'cutting in' on a held synthesizer chord, and a black screen with a disembodied head moving slowly around the very edge of it, moves to a muffled introduction with 'home video' footage of Basement Jaxx before the song proper. (N.B. There is a disjunction between sound and image here, the image track 'proper' starting several seconds before the sound track 'proper.') Then to close there is more 'home video' footage of Felix Jaxx starting up the beginning of the song again on a portable stereo. As with 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' the music video is projected both backward into its own pre-existence, and forwards, continuing in another realm after its cessation in this world. This example also illustrates well a further technique common to the Romantic fragment, that of its disjunction from reality, or at least the problematizing of this relation. Time and again in Romantic literature one sees either points of self-referentiality and overt situating of the author/narrator, or else the text is consciously other-worldly, as in that most famous of literary fragments, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, subtitled as 'a fragment' and preceded by the story of the caller from Porlock.[10] The poem is ruptured both internally, by its constant shifting of metre, and physically by the break at line 37 ('A damsel with a dulcimer ...') that marks a shift in tone from story-telling to personal (dream) recollection, and externally, 'from the rest of the universe,' by its fantastical content and its conscious labelling as 'a fragment.' The artefact is fragmented both at the level of its context and at the level of the work, and no doubt a close reading would reveal further disjunctions amongst the words themselves.

This multiple layering of fragmentation could be achieved musically in a single gesture via a technique employed repeatedly by Schumann, that of musical

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[10] The introduction was prefixed in its 1816 publication. See *Coleridge: Poetry and Prose*, ed. Garrod, H.W., (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1925), pp. 180-1 for details.

quotation. Of course musical quotation did not originate with Schumann – the *cantus firmi* of medieval polyphony were frequently based on popular melodies; there are dozens based upon 'L'Homme Armé' alone.[11] However, whereas earlier quotation was integrated into the structure of the new piece – disguised, in effect – Schumann's use of it goes to some lengths to mark it out, both by shifts of rhythm and of texture, as in the insertion of a section of one of his own earlier works, *Papillon*, into the 'Florestan' section of *Carnaval.* As Rosen states: 'What is revolutionary here is not the introduction of a quotation from another work but the way it is made to sound like a quotation. If Schumann's directions are faithfully carried out, the phrase will appear to be an intruder from somewhere else, even to those who have never heard another work by Schumann.'[12] Both the form of the piece 'Florestan,' and its musical status as an autonomous work are thrown into doubt, but the way in which Schumann introduces the quotation, first as a momentary, hesitant, one bar fragment, then as a more completely recalled melody, and finally absorbed into the texture of the piece, throws the relationship between sound and world, music and listener, into an even more complex relief. The use of this quotation, and even its labelling with a question mark in the score, is clearly a model of musical recollection, and the way in which that memory is then incorporated into the context of its recollection. The scraps of memory that float into consciousness are clarified and then recontextualized in relation to current circumstance – the dialogical relationship between past and present that is essential to all musical appreciation is here made flesh, or rather, tone. As Rosen demonstrates this technique is used again on a larger scale and with greater facility in Schumann's *Phantasie*, which works and reworks a melodic fragment from Beethoven's *An die Ferne Geliebte* into a complex hierarchy of memories, and concludes: 'The phrase of Beethoven is made to seem like an involuntary memory, not consciously recalled, but inevitably produced by the music we have just heard. A memory becomes a fragment when it is felt as both alien and

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[11] See, for example, Lockwood, L., 'Aspects of the 'L'Homme Armé' Tradition,' *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 100, (1974), pp. 97-122.

[12] Rosen, C., *op cit.*, p. 99.

intimate, when we are aware that it is as much a sign of the present as of the past.'[13]

Carolyn Abbate has stated that 'Music has no past tense,'[14] in that it flattens everything out onto the level of discourse, but I would suggest that music is nothing *but* past tense. Music involves a temporal displacement, like the *Bedingnis* of Heidegger: 'The sounding, ringing, vibrating of language that goes on in excess of explanation,'[15] the reverberation of history from which one constructs understanding. All experience of music is an experience of pastness, and takes the form of recollection, in that one apprehends music as the impact of sound waves upon the body, as vibration and resonance, as the affective trace of an event that has already taken place. As Björk puts it, 'I miss you, but I haven't met you yet, I remember, but it hasn't happened yet.'[16] Hence, listening to music is an exercise in nostalgia, trying to hold still what has already passed, a continual construction of what has been, that puts the subject into temporal flux, and undoes the notion of presence. This is perhaps somewhat ironic, since it was suggested in the Introduction that the application of an 'aural paradigm' was supposed to focus attention precisely on the issue of presence, rather than representation. 'Musicalization' simultaneously poses the question of presence and effaces it – it focusses attention there only to disappoint. But in so doing, it refines the notion of affect, which with music is inherently a communal phenomenon, transgressive of spatial boundaries, and also inextricably bound up with the formation of memory. Thus the memorization of the musical fragment takes on a Proustian quality, that of the *mémoire involontaire*, as an infolding of the sensory impact of air molecules in motion, that is shared by all who have had the same experience. One might compare this to a passage of Asafiev, in which he discusses the memorization of melodic fragments by a community as a whole, such that they:

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[14] Quoted in Nattiez, J.-J., 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 115:2, (1990), p. 244.

[15] Bruns, G.L., 'The Otherness of Words: Joyce, Bakhtin, Heidegger,' in *Postmodernism – Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. Silverman, H.J., (Routledge, New York and London, 1990), p. 136.

[16] Gudmundsdottir, B., 'I miss you,' on the *Post* album.

> Enter into oral tradition as living intonations. ... Beyond the compositions themselves lies the world of music as the activity of the mass public consciousness, from little more than sound interjections, at times simply rhythmic intonations, and from characteristic universally loved melodic figures, to more developed melodic shoots and harmonic turns.[17]

The idea that there is a corpus of musical fragments that constitute some form of cultural memory, one that must inevitably interact with the experience of both old and new music, is a powerful one, and is something to which I will return in chapter III. For now, however, it is sufficient to state that the dialectic between the experience of music and musical experience, consciously exploited and rendered overt by Schumann, is already bound up in the phenomenology of music, and that the format of this phenomenology is necessarily a fragmentary one.

An attempt to combine world and music, although to rather different ends, is not unfamiliar to musicologists. The field of musical biography feeds upon the presumption that connections can be drawn between the two, and in its most disreputable form will demonstrate the precise parallels between the situation and disposition of the composer, and the musical works that flow ineluctably from this state of being. The intention is to provide both a narrative framework and unifying creed to an often disparate corpus of work, as well as to explain the organic genesis of each individual piece, and given the nature and type of Schumann's output it is unsurprising that he has been particularly prone to such treatment. And Schumann himself did little to dissuade anyone from trying their hand at a little amateur psychology; the works are peppered with biographical details, to such an extent that the simplistic, one-to-one mapping, unidirectional (which is to say a passage from life to work) model becomes difficult to sustain. If we return to *Carnaval* for a moment, which in the words of Lawrence Kramer 'approaches an ideal subject precisely through a kind of fragmentation,' there is a superabundance of biographical material provided freely by Schumann, insofar as all of 'the miniatures that make up this collection are either character sketches or dances,

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[17] Asafiev, B., quoted in Monelle, R., *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music*, (Harwood Academic Publishers, Chur etc., 1992), p. 277.

that is, personal or social images.'[18] Not only do we have the divided self-image of the composer expressed in the 'Florestan' and 'Eusebius' sections of the piece, but the former of these, as mentioned above, quotes from one of his own earlier works. Sections continually run into one another, complete one another harmonically, making a mockery of the idea of a stable and chronologically ordered identity. The usual musicological solution to this thorny problem is to seek refuge in the cryptic 'Sphinxes,' a set of three pitch motifs derived from the lettering of his own name, and from two alternate musical 'spellings' of his then fiancée's home town, which are used to convey unity upon the *Carnaval* set. This conveniently overlooks, however, both the parts of the set unrelated to the Sphinxes, and more obviously the fact that there are three Sphinxes, which although related in pitch content are clearly distinct. To portray this as being a unity of sorts is to wilfully ignore a much simpler explanation; it is what Julia Kristeva terms a 'plural totality,'[19] a multiplicity of interacting fragments, coherent but not coterminous.

It is a paradox that probably would have delighted the Jena circle, that the idea of the fragment as an important mode of expression coincided with the emergence of the aesthetic principles of organicism and unity. This in part explains the unique position of Schumann in music history, at once admired and derided, who as primary inheritor of the ideas of the Jena circle in the field of music produced work of undeniable quality, while failing utterly to conform to the criteria that would later become the yardstick of compositional ability, that is, the Schenkerian ideal of large-scale compositional direction and unity. Schumann not only appears to fail according to this standard, but at times seems almost hostile to the idea, and yet his music has a formal brilliance all of its own, a status that stands outside the box of the autonomous art work. Rosen writes:

> The Romantic fragment is a closed structure, but its closure is a formality: it may be separated from the rest of the universe, but it implies the existence of what is outside itself not by reference but by its instability. The form is not fixed but is torn apart or

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[18] Kramer, L., *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990), p. 210.

[19] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Waller, M., (Columbia University Press, New York, 1984), p. 101.

> exploded by paradox, by ambiguity, just as the opening song of *Dichterliebe* is a closed, circular form in which beginning and end are unstable – implying a past before the song begins and a future after its final chord.[20]

This ability to generate a formal alternative, a means of resistance, if you will, to the dominant musical aesthetic of the time has not won Schumann a great many friends, but his contribution to theory has not gone unnoticed: it is surely more than coincidence that leads Barthes to note that Gilles Deleuze and himself are among 'the only Schumannians I know.'[21]

And yet there is a danger in the model of the fragment put forward by Rosen, or rather there is a temptation. The ambiguity between art and world so carefully created and nurtured is under constant threat – Rosen at one point describes the fragment as 'incomplete' in content, the suggestion being that the world might enter in to complete it, that the fragment only projects outside itself so that the world might endow it with meaning, permit it a *raison d'être*. In Deleuzean terms, the fragment no sooner performs a deterritorialization than it invites a reterritorialization upon a new content. I do not regard this model of analysis as either useful or desirable. My aim is not to 'establish the truth of the text, but its plurality (however parsimonious); the units of meaning (the connotations) ... will not then be regrouped, provided with a meta-meaning which would be the ultimate construction to be given them.'[22] In the words of Friedrich Schlegel's namesake Margaret, 'Only connect.'[23] The fragmentary text is above all a generative text, a cue to recollection and reflection, and the key qualities of the Romantic fragment are its ambiguity and playfulness, as described by Novalis in his manifesto for a new kind of literature:

> Narratives, without connectedness, but with associations, like dreams. Poems – just sounding well and full of beautiful words – but also without any sense or connectedness – at most a single strophe that is understandable – like so many

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[20] Rosen, C., *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[21] Barthes, R., 'Loving Schumann,' in *The Responsibility of Forms*, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

[22] Barthes, R., *S/Z*, trans. Miller, R., (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), p. 14.

[23] Forster, E.M., *Howards End*, (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1941).

> fragments of the most different kinds of things. True poetry can, at most, have an overall allegorical sense, and make an indirect effect, like music.[24]

> Erzählung, ohne Zusammenhang, jedoch mit Association, wie Träume. Gedichte – bloss wohlklingend und voll schöner Worte – aber auch ohne allen Sinn und Zusammenhang – höchtens einzelne Strofen verständlich – sie müssen, wie lauter Brauchstücke aus den verschiedenartigen Dingen seyn. Höchstens kann wahren Poësie einen allegorischen Sinn im Grossen haben und eine indirecte Wirkung wie Musik etc.[25]

(It should be noted that the German *Zusammenhang* implies a considerably more tightly bound relationship than the English 'connectedness;' Rosen translates it as 'logic.') And it is this model of the fragment, formulated by Novalis in response to the dreamlike qualities of fragmentation and association he perceived in music, that is taken up by and realized in the format of music video.

II

The recruiting of music as an art form to varying aesthetic banners has a long and ignoble history that spans the nineteenth century, and which must act as a framework of understanding for Novalis's manifesto. There is little to choose between Hegel's assertion that music could not express concepts and was therefore essentially worthless, and the stance of Hoffman *et al* which formed a rather too easy connection between music's indecipherability and 'the ineffable,' thus granting music the status of the art to which others might aspire, and all this before one even begins to address the concept of the 'purely musical.' Amongst the fog and smoke of philosophical war, in which the aim of all parties seemed to

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[24] Translation taken from Treitler, L., 'Mozart and the Idea of Absolute Music,' in *Music and the Historical Imagination*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 184.

[25] Original German taken from Rosen, C., *op. cit.*, p. 76.

be the claiming of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to each's own standard, there are any number of contradictory positions, the complexities of which would form a lengthy book in its own right (for an overview of these issues, see Carl Dahlhaus's *The Idea of Absolute Music*[26]), but a few key points do emerge. Prime among these are the questions of meaning and music, and narrative and music.

The issue of locating meaning in music is sufficiently troublesome to have been almost entirely avoided by traditional musicological analysis; one can't help but suspect that Schenkerian analysis is as much about studiously ignoring the social complexity of music as with constructing something genuinely immanent to its material qualities. Even the Baroque period's interest with 'the affections' or the Enlightenment's 'passions,' while interesting in themselves, are clearly means of substitution for the category of meaning, deliberate or not. One possible conclusion which might be drawn from this is that the concept of meaning is simply not a particularly useful or relevant one in relation to music, and there is a sense in which this view has some merit, but the problem that needs to be explicated here lies in the use of the blanket term 'meaning.' The concept of 'musical meaning' covers a sufficiently broad range of competing arguments as to require a distinction between different sorts of 'meaning:' is the reference to denoted or connoted meaning, semiotic or semantic meaning, 'extra-musical' meaning, or even a Barthesian 'third meaning' (the obtuse, as opposed to the obvious[27]). The concept of music as directly denoting meaning, as language does, is impossible to sustain, and as such analysis of the 'purely musical,' be it Schenkerian, paradigmatic analysis, or pitch-set theory (although as Robert Snarrenberg has suggested, in Schenker's case this is due to a deliberate stripping down of Schenker's thought to its positivistic aspects alone[28]), has fought shy of even addressing the question of meaning. But this is not to say that it lacks any sense

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[26] Dahlhaus, C., *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Lustig, R., (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1989).

[27] These terms are discussed and defined in Barthes' essay 'The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills,' *Image Music Text*, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-68.

[28] Snarrenberg, R., 'Competing myths: the American abandonment of Schenker's organicism,' in *Theory, analysis and meaning in music*, ed. Pople, A., (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), pp. 29-56.

of meaning – as Raymond Monelle suggests, 'Music never seems meaningless'[29] – simply that they have given up trying to say what it is. Whether 'seeming' to have meaning is the same as being meaningful is not something that Monelle elaborates on, however.

The notion of connotative meaning in music, which is to say an *implied* meaning, is much more readily accepted, and forms the basis of most musical criticism. This places musical meaning in orbit around the object, rather than at its heart, such that meaning is not something immanent to the object, but 'extra-musical.' It might be suggested, however, that this is due to a flawed model of the musical object and the concept of immanence, rather than the implied impoverishment and 'second handness' of extra-musical meaning. There is a strain of music theory that attempts to combine musical analysis with the so-called 'extra-musical,' by treating music as a semantic system. As with connoted meaning, music is understood in relation to its social background, such that 'meaning ... arises as a function of context,'[30] but rather than simply reflecting the social qualities of its reception in some way, it also becomes a direct expression of the set of social relations that are involved in its forming. Many writers in this field have arrived at similar conclusions having started out from differing stances: Boris Asafiev's outlook was so radically social as to almost cross over into phenomenology, in that he believed musical comprehension was fundamentally rooted in cultural experience, so that 'Each listener ... begins an auditory acquaintance new to him [*sic.*] through recognition and comparison as to whether there are elements in it of intonations familiar to his consciousness,' or as Monelle puts it: 'The comprehension of music can only begin with the familiar. ... No work can be wholly new, or it would be wholly incomprehensible.'[31] David Osmond-Smith and Robert Hatten converge on the same point from opposite sides, the former beginning with an iconic understanding of musical representation, and acknowledging the cultural and historical basis of this, and the other showing how musically expressive devices may become ossified into cultural units, respectively,

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[29] Monelle, R., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[30] Tomlinson, G., 'The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology,' *Nineteenth Century Music*, 7, (1984), p. 355.

[31] Monelle, R., *op. cit.*, p. 278.

to the extent that 'there seems no difference in identifying established cultural content in a musical gesture, from recognizing the "meaning" of a linguistic morpheme.'[32] In terms of musical analysis, the net effect of this is to change the question 'what does this mean?' into 'how does this mean?,' as is suggested by Kofi Agawu. However, this shift brings into play a range of other forces that Agawu's analytic system seems to have difficulty coping with.

One of the most obvious consequences of a semantic approach to analysing musical meaning is the proliferation of a multiplicity of meanings; meaning is so utterly underdetermined in the musical text that any attempt to restrain the resulting semantic promiscuity is doomed to failure. Agawu notes this tendency, stating: 'It seems more useful, in the face of the multiplicity of potential meanings of any single work, to frame the analytical question in terms of the dimensions that make meaning possible.'[33] Rather than celebrate this multiplicity, however, Agawu seeks to curtail it, continuing: 'Only then can we hope to reduce away the fanciful meanings that are likely to crop up in an unbridled discussion of the phenomenon, and to approach the preferred meanings dictated by both historical and theoretical limitations.'[34] This 'reduced' meaning is derived from an observation of a dialectic between the 'inner workings' (p. 72) of the piece (the 'purely' musical, which is no less so for Agawu's use of scare quotes (p. 51)), and hermeneutically constructed 'topics' of the classical period, which are broadly speaking, 'extra-musical.' There are several dubious assumptions here – there is a whiff of 'telling it as it really was' hanging over the set of topics he arranges, but more important is his failure to ask by whom were these meanings preferred, and why, and the lack of a dialectical relationship of the piece to the socialization of reception. One might compare Agawu's shift from the 'what' to the 'how' of musical meaning with Nicholas Cook's statement that: 'Instead of talking about meaning as something that the music *has*, we should be talking about it as something the music *does* (and has done to it).'[35] The notion of music as process

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

[33] Agawu, K., *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1991), p. 5.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[35] Cook, N., *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 9.

implicit in Agawu's 'how does it mean' is invoked only to tie down music all the more securely, and without reflection on what this meaning *means*. Understanding meaning in music was clearly untenable and unanswerable in the form of a 'what' question, but having moved to a 'how' question Agawu shies away from its ramifications.

Music ceases to be a thing, *ein Ding*, in Heidegger's terms, and becomes an event, *Bedingnis*, and the consequences of this for meaning are potentially dire, or liberating, depending upon one's standpoint. Both Cook and Chris Small effect the change from musical object to musical event, or 'musicking,' as Chris Small terms it,[36] and both choose to reinstate meaning as a function of the interactions that are set in place, rather than attempt 'to escape the tyranny of meaning.'[37] The tendency of meaning is always to become *product* rather than *process*, an idealizing and fixing of something that is in flux. To make a sound event *mean* something is to stop it being a sound and make it into something else, an ideal category, stripped of its materiality and ontologized. As Adorno states in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'The movement toward the negation of meaning was exactly what meaning deserved,'[38] (and I shall return to Adorno and the status of meaning in chapter III). And in a system where musical meaning can be convincingly compared with the exercise of social power, as Jacques Attali has shown,[39] the resistance to fixing meaning, and of remaining *en procès*, is one of political engagement through a form of refusal to play the game that has been set out in advance: 'It is a political task ... to undertake to reduce communication theoretically to the mercantile level of human relations and to integrate it, as a simple fluctuating level, to significance, to the text, an apparatus outside of

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[36] Small, C., *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, (Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, 1998).

[37] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' in *Image Music Text*, p. 185.

[38] Quoted in Bruns, G.L., 'The Otherness of Words: Joyce, Bakhtin, Heidegger,' *op. cit.*, p. 120.

[39] Attali, J., *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Massumi, B., (University of Manchester Press, Manchester, 1985).

meaning.'[40] An understanding of music as event, as Text, is thus not based upon a model of representation, which involves making music into something other than sound, idealized, but a stochastic process: one apprehends in parts, fragments, which when taken together will trace out the space (and time) the event inhabits, resonates in, and which is in a constant state of flux. Meaning is not destroyed, but cut adrift of its moorings, pluralized, such that there exists a 'theatrical state of meaning ... organized in associative fields, paradigmatic articulations.'[41]

Indeed, it is perhaps this very quality of fecundity, allied to the reticence to address meaning in music, which might explain the dearth of many practical examples of the use of this mode of analysis in music. This atomization of the idea of the musical work, a double move, inward to the scraps of sound that constitute the work, and outward into the web of association woven around each of these, creates a considerable problem when it comes to the compiling of practical analyses. Perhaps the best attempt, certainly the most complete, at getting to grips with this is seen in Phillip Tagg's analysis of the 'Kojak' television theme tune, in which he devoted an entire doctorate to the workings of a fifty second-long piece of music. His technique of 'interobjective comparison' (IOC) was undoubtedly labour intensive, requiring the collating of evidence from across the musical spectrum to back up his assertion of what were basically cultural 'truths' (e.g., the connection between rising horn calls and heroic status), but it nevertheless demonstrates the awesome scope of potential in even the shortest extract of sound material. Consequently, I would suggest that any working out of practical examples of musical meaning will be more likely to take the simple form of Simon Frith's 'Accordions played in a certain way 'mean' France, bamboo flutes, China'[42] [quotation marks on 'mean' added] following the model that Cook suggests in stating that a musical object 'attracts referents in the same sense that a magnet

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[40] Barthes, R., 'Kristeva's *Semeiotike*,' in *The Rustle of Language*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), p. 170.

[41] Barthes, R., 'The Rhetoric of the Image,' *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[42] Frith, S., 'Towards an aesthetic of popular music' in *Music and Society: the politics of composition, performance and reception*, ed. Leppert, R., and McClary, S., (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), p. 148.

attracts iron filings,'[43] than to Tagg's tortuously complex methodological paradigm.[44]

The question of narrative in music follows on from that of meaning, and is similarly complicated by the variety of different claims that have been made in its name. The division between traditional and 'new' musicology that took place in the late 1980s confused the issue still further, since 'narrativists' tended to fall into the 'new' camp and were hence grouped together, regardless of the ways in which their ideas contradicted one another. Relating music to narrative can take the form of a wide range of different practices, some of which are more enlightening than others, but all of which I believe to involve treating music in a profoundly unmusical way. Which is not to say, however, that I regard all uses of the term narrative in music as being necessarily incorrect, and even a very tight proscription of what constitutes narrative can prove illuminating when applied to music in particular ways. The use of 'narrative' in discussions of music became a means by which musicologists might set themselves apart from the 'purely musical' style of analysis, and much of this work provided a welcome alternative that gave fresh insight to analysis. Lawrence Kramer's comparison between the multiplicity of voices in Beethoven and Schumann (and Freud) and narrative effects in literature of the same period, cited above, is a case in point,[45] and the nineteenth century approach to music criticism often means that there are sound hermeneutic reasons to include a consideration of narrative in any analysis. One must be careful, however, to make the distinction between something that *narrates*, and something that *narrativizes*, after Hayden White[46] - much of the work in this area is involved not in analysing music *as* narrative, but music as *like* narrative; it shows the ways in which narratives and music are *formally* analogous, but ignores their material

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[43] Cook, N., 'The Domestic Gesamtkunstwerk, or Record Sleeves and Reception,' in *Composition Performance Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, ed. Thomas, W., (Ashgate, Aldershot etc., 1998), p. 115.

[44] Given in Tagg, P., 'Analysing Popular Music,' *Popular Music*, 2, (1983), p. 46.

[45] Kramer, L., *op. cit.*, pp. 176ff.

[46] White, H., 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,' in *On Narrative*, ed. Mitchell, W.J.T., (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1981), pp. 1-23.

incompatibility. Indeed, discussing music in terms of narrative (and even Barthes' remarkable attempt to discuss narrative in terms of music[47]), never goes beyond analogy, and leaves us none the wiser as to the narrative capabilities of musical material.

To state that a given piece of music *is* a narrative is to imply several things, and not simply that there is some form of story attached. Firstly, there is the suggestion that we have some form of teleology here, that there is a directed goal, a product, at the end of a chain of linked events. Clearly in a model that has fragmented the musical object into a series of associative webs that may be tenuously, if at all connected, this is a difficult idea to sustain. If one privileges the paradigmatic over the syntagmatic, the fragment over the totality (although the equivalence paradigm/fragment – syntagm/totality is only a provisional one; one cannot separate the individual fragment from the totality to the same extent that a paradigm might be viewed apart from the syntagm in which it is immersed), one immediately makes the idea of any kind of coherent narrative problematic. Secondly, one implies the existence of a distinction between what is variously termed 'fabula' or story, and its expression, 'syuzhet' or *discours*. Since the denotative qualities of music are so vague as to be non-existent it is difficult to maintain a separate musical story and an order of narration, music's 'story' *is* its means of expression, its content-plane and expression-plane are indivisible (although not indistinguishable). Furthermore, most theories of narrative rely on the receiver being able to reference some kind of verisimilitude, in order to gauge the relation between 'story' and 'discourse,' but however well bound into the world music might be by reference, the occasions on which it represents that world, cuckoo calls, onomatopoeic sounds, are vanishingly rare, making the concept of verisimilitude in music nonsensical. If music is to be regarded as narration, and go beyond being analogous, it must fulfil the rules outlined above, namely, that it engenders an interaction between a represented actuality and a discursive practice. Leo Treitler is somewhat cagey on the fine distinction between narration and narrativity, but acknowledges the bipartite model and agrees that it is interaction between the two aspects that creates narrative, writing: 'Central to the functioning of narrativity is the interplay between two intersecting patterns: the

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[47] Barthes, R., *S/Z*, pp. 28-30.

chronological sequence of the events' occurrence, and the order of their unfolding in the telling.'[48] However, I believe that in distilling the complexities involved in representing reality down to the simple matter of chronological time, Treitler has misrepresented the full scope of narrative. Thus when he states

> The apprehension of a musical work depends, in quite similar ways, on two intertwined processes: on the one hand the underlying patterns of conventional genres and implicit constraints arising from the grammar of style (harmony, voice-leading, and so on), and on the other the progressive interpretation of these determinants through the unfolding of the work in time. The first dimension is not exactly like the chronological sequence of the events of a story, but it is the counterpart in being the dimension of the determinants that are more or less fixed prior to the unfolding.[49]

one might be forgiven for not taking this as proof of music's narrativity. Indeed, as stated above, music's affect confuses and complicates the linearity of the temporal. The problem, if it might be termed so, for music is its inability to reformulate the real, to represent, in any recognizable form, a reality outside of itself.

Both Carolyn Abbate and Jean-Jacques Nattiez take a different tack, focussing on the ability of music to 'narrativize' rather than to 'narrate,' and at times explicitly distance themselves from other approaches: 'When music is explained as the direct *enactment* of what might be called "promusical objects," then it is denied discursive latitude, for it is read as *being* events, and not reformulating or recounting them.'[50] And Abbate explicitly states: 'The fact that music thus lends itself to description as such a "narrative" *does not actually constitute immanent narrativity*.'[51] As with Cook and Small with regard to musical meaning, Nattiez and Abbate recognize that the musical object is in fact not only object but act: 'I

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[48] Treitler, L., *Music and the Historical Imagination*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1989), p. 186.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[50] Abbate, C., *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1991), p. 27.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

propose that we understand musical narration not as an omnipresent phenomenon, not as a sonorous encoding of human events or psychological states, but rather as a rare and peculiar *act*.'[52] This act, however, is not permitted by Abbate and Nattiez to remain as sonorous acting for any length of time, and is instead returned to the system of communication as musical 'discourse.' Nattiez states: 'The narrative, strictly speaking, is not *in* the music, but *in the plot imagined and constructed by the listeners* from functional objects. ... For the listener, any "narrative" instrumental work is not *in itself* a narrative, but *the structural analyses in music of an absent narrative*.'[53] Once again, music is reconceived as activity simply to become a different product, a translation of 'the idea.' To understand music as narrative, whether that be as 'narration' or as 'narrativizing,' is to tie it in place, so that it becomes just another way of inscribing a pre-existing social order, a place where the subject might enter in to complete production, but never say anything new.

> Music does not lie, because of necessity the task of linking these phantoms of characters to suggestions of action will fall to me, the listener: it is not within the semiological possibilities of music to link a subject to a predicate. ... If, in listening to music, I am tempted by the "narrative impulse," it is indeed because, on the level of the strictly musical discourse, I recognize returns, expectations and resolutions, but of what I do not know. Thus I have a wish to complete through words what the music does not say because it is not in its semiological nature to say it to me.[54]

Thus, through narrative, the word is invited in to fulfil what sound alone could, or perhaps would, not – the formation of a product, the completion of communication, the constitution of the subject. 'The predicate is always the bulwark with which the subject's imaginary protects itself from the loss which threatens it.'[55] Nattiez recognizes the misapplication of predication to music, the refusal of sound to transfer directly the subjectivity of the composer in the poietic process, but then

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[52] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[53] Nattiez, J.-J., 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?,' *op. cit.*, p. 249.

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 244-5.

[55] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' *op. cit.*, p. 179.

reinstates this in the aesthesic realm, rejecting the aural paradigm, signifiance, in favour of the visual.

If music is so readily co-opted to a 'visual' model, by which I mean one based upon secure representation, so as to enable clear meaning-product to be communicated, it might be thought that the medium of music video would accomplish this all the more readily. What I wish to argue, though, is that this is precisely what does not happen; certainly they are an invitation to narrativize, perhaps more so than music alone, and some are more susceptible to this than others, but in the main it is remarkable how resistant music videos are to narrative and any sort of secured meaning. Images, like sounds, are held *en procès*, instead of being communicative of product. Music videos enable one to resist the temptation of the 'narrative impulse.' (It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that pop music's resistance to narrativization is in an explicitly anti-narrative stance. as certain post-modernists would have it: the work of Kaplan,[56] amongst others, misrepresents music just as much as those that would 'read' a musical text like a newspaper.) Perhaps this is less surprising if one acknowledges the type of music that music videos are typically formed around, which is to say, the three minute pop song; this immediately prevents the development of any kind of extended story. As Richard Middleton notes: 'If pop songs are "little plays," as has been suggested, they are mostly sketches of situations rather than lengthy dramatic narratives.'[57]

The raising of the status of music to dominant partner in the music video composite is prompted not only by aesthetics, but also by practicalities of music video production, where the soundtrack precedes the image track in all but a minute number of cases. As such, sound provides the template to which the image must be accommodated. Furthermore, this process binds the act of music reception into the poietic process itself, so that the making of the image takes the form of a response to the music, and the music video is collectivized at the level of its incipience. One might compare this to Theodor Adorno's criticism of the

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[56] See Kaplan, E.A., *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1987).

[57] Middleton, R., *Studying Popular Music*, (Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1990), p. 224.

Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* on the grounds that 'the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is founded on the bourgeois "individual" with his soul,'[58] which he contrasted with a model not wedded to the concept of individual 'genius.' 'A valid *Gesamtkunstwerk*, purged of its false identity, would have required a collective of specialist planners ... in which each person would take up the work at the point where another has to give it up.'[59] Although I would be wary of applying the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with its considerable theoretical 'baggage,' to the music video format (a point discussed in detail in chapter II), it certainly approaches the model that Adorno puts forward here. All of which serves to demonstrate that if one wishes to understand music video, or start to analyse it, one would do well to begin by adopting an aural, rather than a visual paradigm: issues of representation and narrative should be rejected in favour of affect and spatio-temporal relation. Above all, the prompting of material selection and analytic strategy should come first from the video artefact itself, rather than the importing of analytical techniques from elsewhere.

In contrast to the connections that were frequently drawn in discussions in the 1980s, music videos are not little films,[60] and as Andrew Goodwin and many others have noted, the imposition of film theory upon music video analysis has tended to conclude that music videos are failed narratives.[61] For example, even Kobena Mercer's analysis of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller,' a video' almost unique in the lengths it goes to in order to appear 'filmic,' (running to fifteen minutes,

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[58] Adorno, T.W., *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Livingstone, R., (Verso, London and New York, 1991), p. 110.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[60] There are any number of examples, but a good one is Lawrence Grossberg's comparison of the stylistics of 1980s 'brat-pack' films to music video, in 'The Media Economy of Rock Culture: Cinema, Post-modernism and Authenticity,' in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, ed. Frith, S., Goodwin, A., and Grossberg, L., (Routledge, London and New York, 1993), pp. 185-209.

[61] Goodwin, A., *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, (University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis, 1992). Goodwin is particularly critical of Kaplan and Fiske for misinterpreting video events under the rubric of postmodernism when they can be explained straightforwardly by attention to musical practice.

complete with opening and closing credits, and made by an established film director), eventually 'acknowledges that there is no "plot" as such: the narrative code that structures the story has no story to tell. Rather it creates a simulacrum of a story, a parody of a story, in its stylistic send-up of genre conventions.'[62] Notably, in his attempt to identify the narrative of this video, Mercer, in common with Kaplan *et al*, almost entirely avoids any mention of the actual music, referring only to its lyric (word) content. Conversely, if one approaches the music video as a 'making musical of the television image,'[63] any consideration of narrative becomes largely incidental. In Carol Vernallis's words: 'The use of the musical section as the fundamental unit places an emphasis upon varied repetition of materials over linear development.'[64] It is not that the idea of narrative is entirely absent from the world of pop; just that it is not located at the level of the music video artefact. Quoting Goodwin once more: 'characterization, fiction, and perhaps even narrative itself exist in popular music at the point of narration, outside the diegesis of individual songs, live performances, or video clips, through the persona of the pop star.'[65] This phenomenon is not limited to music video – Barry King has written on the existence of the same process at work in cinema,[66] and the refocussing of identity upon the 'personality' of the star constitutes what Benjamin terms 'false aura.'[67] However, in music video, unlike in film, it provides a mechanism by which a visual paradigm might be reasserted, and confers a unity that is not present at the level of music video text.

In order to understand music video analytically, then, first one must generate and identify, both materially and relationally, a set of fragments that can

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[62] Mercer, K., 'Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's Thriller,' in *Sound and Vision: the Music Video Reader*, ed. Frith, S., Goodwin, A., and Grossberg, L., (Routledge, London and New York, 1993).

[63] Goodwin, A., *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, p. 70.

[64] Vernallis, C., 'The Aesthetics of Music Video: An analysis of Madonna's 'Cherish,'' *Popular Music*, 17, (1998), p. 169.

[65] Goodwin, A., *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[66] King, B., 'Articulating Stardom,' in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Gledhill, C., (Routledge, London and New York, 1991), pp. 167-182.

[67] This point is made by Middleton, R., *op. cit.*, p. 66.

be observed paradigmatically and, where relevant, syntagmatically, to produce a clarification of 'metonymic residues:'[68] not simply to cut up and compare. One should also bear in mind the ideologically charged nature of music video reception: it is important that the fragments are genuinely generative of something new, and not merely a reproduction of the 'star-text' from which they were derived.

Quite apart from the issue of a 'musicalization' of the television image, which is at least potentially contentious, there is a further reason to suppose that the discussion of meaning and narrative in music above is directly transferable to a theorization of music video analysis. The rejection of the autonomous musical object as outlined above, and its replacement with the concept of music-in-the-world, is contingent upon the idea that music is always-already bound up with a set of 'non-musical' entities, to the extent that the distinction musical/extra-musical becomes impossible to draw clearly. In short, the range of extra-musical ideas and objects brought into play by the conjunction of music and image in a music video is more properly an amplification of a process already at work than a qualitative shift in the way that music is perceived, particularly so in the field of pop music. As Goodwin notes: '[It] is not a case of video imagery transforming pop meanings so much as an example of a video clip building on the visual codes already in play. It is an important point for the argument about "fixing" meaning, because such a phenomenon would be significant only if it could be shown that video routinely offers a closing off of the potential readings of songs.'[69] It is frequently stated that 'a picture is worth a thousand words,' but the truth of this statement is just as often missed, for it is equally true to say that a word might be worth a thousand pictures, and a sound worth more again. The process of translation between specific art forms is always inexact and accompanied by polysemy, so that a composite art form such as music video has the potential for almost unlimited interpretation. In practice many of these possibilities are closed off, others are amplified and brought to the fore, but like Terry Eagleton's description of the Hegelian dialectical system, the music video 'never leaves anything entirely behind.'[70] Of course pop music has always cultivated this process – the musical careers of Elvis Presley and the

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[68] Monelle, R., *op. cit.*, p. 315.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[70] Eagleton, T., *op. cit.*, p. 144.

Beatles are indivisible from their films, press photographs, and record covers in the popular imagination, let alone more recent 'manufactured' pop acts, but this is a feature of all music in Western culture, of the very idea of musical culture. Cook writes:

> Musical cultures are not simply cultures of sounds, nor simply cultures of representations of sounds, but cultures of the relationship between sound and representation. The cohabitation and confrontation of different media are inscribed within the practice of Western classical music (and perhaps of all music), in the relationship between sound and verbal discourse. It is in this sense that music, even "music alone," should properly be seen as a form of multimedia in which all the components but one have been forced to run underground, sublimated or otherwise marginalized.[71]

This is the theoretical framework that one must enter into in order to develop a practical methodology of music video analysis.

What, then, is it that I perceive in the presence of music video? What are the qualities that persist in the memory after I have turned away from the screen? The answer, at once banal and profound, is that I perceive many things in a simultaneity, or rather, a *series* of simultaneities. Not the vertical disjunction of sound, word, and image, but a syntagmatic disjunction of sound/word/image complexes, each satiated and replete with incipient meaning, and yet simultaneously dependent upon its connection with a broader (social) context, for none of these complexes is received in isolation – I perceive a syntagmatic disjunction, but as a precondition of this I perceive also the presence of syntagm, a relationship Vernallis describes as 'the here and now of the video, its moment-to-moment flow.'[72] To rephrase this in terms of my earlier model, as a set of fragments that cohere to form something other (I hesitate to say more, though that is undoubtedly what I mean) than the sum of their collective parts. The fragmented address of the music video necessarily draws one's attention to the social totality

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[71] Cook, N., *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, p. 270.

[72] Vernallis, C., *op. cit.*, p. 175.

of which it is a part: 'Direct discourse is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; but the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice.'[73] Fragments are not joined in a linear relationship, according to the logic of the syntagm, but by an associative process according to the relationships it enables, association without end or beginning, a point discussed in detail in chapter II. Perhaps because of its unusualness, *Befremdung*, this trend is most apparent at the level of the image. I am struck repeatedly by a certain quality of the music video image: a constant desire to exceed itself, a striving for iconic status as if every moment sought to become as exemplar of itself, a poster image summation of the music video and that which it enacts in one.

One of the most extreme examples of this trait, and it is more pronounced in some music videos than in others, is seen in The Strokes' 'Hard to Explain.' The image-track is constituted almost entirely from stock footage, intercut with a few seconds of 'home-movie' rehearsal footage, and 'unnaturally' staged performance footage of the band afloat on a studio lake. These images of the band are then placed in contiguity with footage of B52 carpet bombers, 1980s television shows, a boardroom presentation, cartoon dinosaurs, a close up of the wiring on a silicon chip, an ice-skating chimpanzee in black and white, and a long list of other equally memorable and 'resonant' images, none of which appear for more than a few seconds. Almost all of these are then repeated, speeded-up, in a different order, in the showing of thirty-five different pieces of footage in the last twenty-three seconds of the video. Any one of these images might have been spun out into a longer story, such is their import, but no linking material is provided, no way of connecting these images is offered, but must instead be generated in the act of reception, if at all. Even in those examples of videos where a single image is held throughout, as in the close-up on Sinead O'Connor's head in 'Nothing Compares 2 U,' or the Spike Jonze-directed video of a burning man running down a street in slow motion, held in shot for over three minutes in playing time (only for him to climb onto a bus at the end of the street), the emphasis is firmly placed upon the

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[73] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Massumi, B., (Athlone Press, London, 1988), p. 84.

visual material presented, the 'sensuous image' in Benjamin's terms, rather than any sort of storyline.

One might theorize this as being a visual corollary to the musical concept of the 'hook,' the aural signature of a pop single designed to 'catch' the listener, but it is not, I think, a phenomenon entirely unique to the music video format, even if its specific context and mode of construction are. Compare Barthes' response to the films of Eisenstein: '*no single image is boring*, we are not forced to wait for the next one in order to understand and be delighted: no dialectic (that interval of patience necessary for certain pleasures), but a continuous jubilation, consisting of a summation of perfect moments.'[74] Indeed, Eisenstein's own conception of the audio-visual montage approaches the techniques common to music video: 'the centre of gravity is no longer the element "between shots" – the shock – but the element "inside the shot" – the accentuation within the fragment,'[75] and it seems there is a connection between this perceived quality of music videos, and that quality of film that troubled Barthes, which he labelled the 'obtuse meaning.' Barthes eventually drew this quality from the film still, although it should be noted that 'the still' is rather different to the photograph that the term conjures in the mind's eye: it is defined as 'the fragment of a second text *whose existence never exceeds the fragment*; film and still find themselves in a palimpsest relationship without it being possible to say that one is *on top of* the other or that one is *extracted* from the other.'[76] Given this complex reciprocal relationship, it is fair to say that there is a sense in which the music video more closely resembles a set of stills than it does film: it resembles a set of fragments excised from a film that does not exist. There is, however, an important difference, for whereas the primary aim of Eisenstein's was a representation of an idea, 'the historical meaning of the represented gesture,'[77] *through* the image, from which a third, obtuse, meaning escaped, there is no such aim in music video. The music video fragment is an

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[74] Barthes, R., 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' *op. cit.*, p. 92.

[75] Quoted by Barthes, R., in 'The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills,' *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[77] Barthes, R., 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' *op. cit.*, p. 93.

'anaphoric gesture without significant content ... razed of meaning.'[78] Where Eisenstein's image disrupts the 'Organon of Representation' almost in spite of itself, in music video there is only disruption, instituted by music against representation.[79]

This quality of music video, utterly pervasive but difficult to bring into focus and pin down, may ultimately be the reason why Mercer concludes that the 'Thriller' video is not a true narrative, despite considerable efforts to convince the reader (and perhaps himself) otherwise, and is rather a 'simulacrum of a story.' Indeed, it explains why so many attempts to read videos as film leads inevitably to the conclusion that they are failed narratives. And yet as Mercer also notes, these videos are not without story, devoid of any trace of narrative: in fact very often the reverse is true, the videos brim over with the suggestion of storylines, both internal and external to the artefact, back-stories that remain untold, relationships alluded to but never made clear. In short, an enigmatic and ambiguous character that defiantly underdetermines almost every aspect present. Music videos may lack true narrative, but they are not entirely without narrative, nor are they in any way anti-narrative: rather in place of narrative we have the *gesture* of narrative, a kind of pseudo-narrativity. Vernallis notes: 'Because no parameter comes to the fore to the annihilation of another (although features become submerged or move into the background), multiple storylines can seem to exist simultaneously in the video. The viewer must consider all the visual gestures and all the musical codes in order to understand the connections among these moments.'[80] This radical polyvalency, which music video shares with the musical object, seems to be one of the defining qualities of the music video. There is a barely restrained proliferation and interaction of semes, an absence of any hierarchy that might enable one seme to counteract another, so that the music video does not make sense, it makes senses, always multiple, always pluralized.

At this point, the music video artefact resembles nothing so much as an anarchic mess, and in many respects this is entirely correct. An understanding of

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[78] Barthes, R., in 'The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills,' in *Image Music Text*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[79] See Barthes, R., 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' p. 89.

[80] Vernallis, C., *op. cit.*, p. 176.

the structure(s) of the artefact does not necessarily produce an analytic order, and to do so arbitrarily would be an injustice to the material of investigation. To reduce the play of disorder that characterizes the music video to an explicable linear order would be a pointless exercise, and say little or nothing about the supposed object of investigation: better to enter into that spirit of play, to map out, rather than iron out, the complex weave of meaning and non-meaning. The Romantics, too, struggled with the relationship between chaos and order in the artistic fragment. Schlegel explicitly opposed the chaotic and the fragmentary, while still trying to incorporate the idea of the chaotic, as a metaphor for the disorder of everyday experience, into the symmetrical order of the artistic form, writing: 'Rhyme must be chaotic, and yet as chaotic with symmetry as possible. From this can be inferred the system of Romantic metre.'[81] What the Romantics were unaware of was that the chaotic is not necessarily without order, and it is on this point that my conception of the fragment is markedly different from the Romantic fragment. Modern mathematics has uncovered the way in which simple ordered units can generate apparently chaotic systems, with unpredictable results, or at least results that can be gauged only as probabilities rather than certainties. (This same mathematics has generated the model of the fractal image, of which more elsewhere.) The music video, then, is truly chaotic, in that although its actuality cannot and should not be distorted into order, its mode of construction, the means by which this actuality was arrived at, can be understood and modelled.

The model which most accurately describes the workings of the production of meaning (and non-meaning) is that outlined by Greimas in his *Structural Semantics*,[82] which although directed specifically at the structure of language can be adapted to shed light on a range of other possibilities. His method divides language into the basic linguistic component of the *lexeme*, which might be approximated very broadly to a word or group of words, and which can be further broken down into its constituent elements of meaning, *semes*. Each lexeme is a complex of semes, a 'stylistic constellation,' some of which are 'permanent and invariant' forming a 'semic nucleus,' and others are only contextually related and

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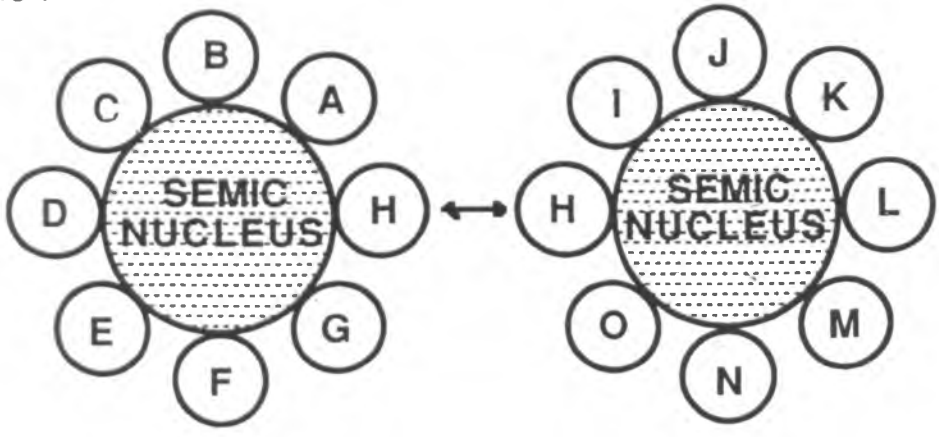
[81] Rosen, C., *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[82] Greimas, A.J., *Structural Semantics: an attempt at a method*, trans. McDowell, D., Schleifer, R. and Velie, A., (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1983).

thus are 'contextual semes.' In any group of lexemes there must be set of semes in common in order for them to be meaningful, but similarly there will be semes that point in other directions outside of the intended meaning, a kind of semic residue that appears to resemble what I have elsewhere termed an associative

Figure 1[83]



complex. In the normal course of affairs certain isolated contextual semes will recur and create what is termed 'redundancy,' while other contextual semes fall away, remaining only as an invisible trace of language, as a necessary condition of intelligibility. 'Redundancy sets in at the moment when a discourse begins to become intelligible; without redundancy language is meaningless nonsense, while too much redundancy creates meaningless repetition.'[84] It is my contention, however, that this process, while fundamentally the same, is somewhat altered in a multimedia instance (using Cook's terminology). In a music video the anchoring 'semic nucleus' is not 'permanent and invariant' to anything like the same degree, whilst the 'contextual semes' are infinitely more numerous, invoking not only the ambiguity of poetic language in the lyrics, but also the polysemy of the rhetorical image and of music. As a result the process of redundancy is much less clear – it is possible that there will be enough recurring semes to enable the multiplicity of 'senses' that one sees emerge – and subsequently the 'invisible trace' of metonymic residue is never repressed to the same extent that it is in everyday

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[83] Diagram taken from Monelle, R., *op. cit.*, p. 234.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

language. This vast array of contradictory information is not eliminated, but held in play as a 'meaningless' backdrop to the plurality of meanings available. Hence the categories of 'meaning' and 'non-meaning' are hopelessly intertwined, dependent upon one another, creating the chaotic structure of the music video outlined above: order, such as there is, must be sought at the level of the music video equivalent of the lexeme, the fragment, the 'stylistic constellation,' while understanding will be found in the warp and the weft of their enmeshment.

III

What, in the meantime, has happened to Robert Schumann? Where has his flight into the rain-soaked streets of Dusseldorf, his head filled with sound (tortured by the music of both angels and demons), taken him? Clara's diary cannot help – she knows only part of the story – but perhaps Barthes can shed some light on his situation.

> Plural, lost, panicked, the Schumannian body knows (at least here) only bifurcations; it does not construct itself, it keeps diverging according to an accumulation of interludes; it has only that *vague* idea (the vague can be a phenomenon of structure) of meaning which we call *signifiance*. ... Music, in short, at this level, is an image, not a language, in that every image is radiant, from the rhythmic incisions of pre-history to the frames of comic strips. The musical text *does not follow* (by contrasts or amplification), it explodes: it is a continuous big bang.[85]

It is at this point that Robert Schumann's body has become musicalized, fragmented, *event*. Physically and mentally he is effecting an incorporeal transformation[86] of himself into the act of fragmentation. Clara's diary and Barthes'

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[85] Barthes, R., 'Rasch,' *op. cit.*, pp. 301-2.

[86] On the notion of incorporeal transformation and its attribution to bodies, see Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *op. cit.*, pp. 80-7, and further discussion in the conclusion below.

'Rasch' have become the speech acts through which Robert Schumann is made music, a set of movements (variations?) in which is expressed divergence, accumulation, radiation, explosion: all of those qualities that are attributed to the musical event and the music video. Schumann's precise line of flight through Dusseldorf, resonating with the involuntary pre-memories of sounds unheard, remains unspoken, however, until the point at which he arrives at the Rhine Bridge, and it is only much later that Clara will learn, in a fragmentary and piecemeal fashion, that the men who returned him to his home were the same fishermen that had dragged him from the water; and it is as this radiant image of a man falling into the water and re-emerging plays through my mind, that it dissolves into a video picture, and I remember (involuntarily) my object of investigation, R.E.M.'s 'Imitation of Life.' Thus forms the 'constellation of voices ... from which I draw my voice,'[87] and in the 'jump-cut' I make from Schumann falling into the Rhine, to a scene from 'Imitation of Life,' I at once strip the image of its obvious meaning, making it sensuous rather than ideal, and reset meaning as activity, 'an intermingling of bodies'[88] *en procès*.

If the music video is a demonstration of fragmentary form, then 'Imitation of Life,' incomplete, plural, vague, and radiant, is Exhibit A. The divergent quality of the music video image track is emphasized here, as described earlier, by a spatial separation of distinct 'types;' the lyrics are deliberately obtuse, peppered with non-sequiturs, and are dispersed amongst the characters in such a way as to problematize and pluralize the notion of 'author;' the music track consists of melodic scraps which cross and recross the traditional structural divide (verse, chorus) of the pop-song form, while superficially maintaining that structure. In short, identity, representation, autonomy, all are called into question during these twenty seconds of video, a fragment that is itself fragmented, reversed and repeated some eleven times during the course of the music video composite. Indeed, the unfolding of the video is such that alongside every moment of congruence between sound, lyric, and image there are also several disjunctures, which will in turn become conjunct in later repetitions, so that as Björk suggests, one remembers, though it hasn't happened yet.

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[87] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

I have discussed the construction of the image track in very general terms earlier in the chapter, but the effect of this is mainly to enable a focussing of attention upon the wealth of detail present, far more than one could hope to comprehensively address. Furthermore, there are a series of possible frameworks for understanding these images: the 'party scene' totality of the video text, the macro-text of R.E.M. as a successful band known for their 'folk-rock' style of music, as well as the lyric and soundtracks, and all or some of these frameworks are being intuitively employed simultaneously in the activity of reception. Several images immediately catch the eye: the burning man diving into the pool (before re-emerging as the video reverses), that first drew me from my Schumannian reverie. This image resembles a film image, wrenched from context, and functions specifically as a metonym of the Hollywood action movie, belonging to the category of 'the stunt-man spectacle.' It is at once somewhat at odds with the suburban setting of the video, and with the 'folksy' aspect of the R.E.M. public image (present here in the tone of the mandolin), and yet also chimes with the repeated phrase of 'that's Hollywood' that forms part of the chorus (although it is not precisely coincident with this utterance), and the more general seme surrounding pop and rock music of 'American entertainment.'[89] Thus there is an immediate setting up of conflicting conceptual realms at play here, which are taken up by another image spatially contiguous with the burning man, that of bass player Mike Mills filling a champagne fountain. This is more a cultural indicator of high living, a sign of plenitude and excess associated with (over-indulgent) rock stars and sport stars (and I am thinking particularly of the oft shown footage of George Best in a similar pose), but is again at odds with the axis suburban/folksy. The image gains further poignancy from the association of R.E.M. with alcoholic excess a relatively short time after a widely reported incident of Peter Buck's being drunk and disorderly on an aeroplane, a 'classic' rock-star moment (and no doubt the reason for its being widely reported, despite his subsequent acquittal). A third striking image is that of guitarist Peter Buck, the only diegetic sound source in the

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[89] It is probable that this combination (or conflict) of 'suburban' values and Hollywood 'glamour,' as well as the video's setting, is drawn from the Douglas Sirk film *Imitation of Life*, one of his so-called 'women's pictures' of the 1950s, which were distinguished by a distinctively Hollywood take on suburban life.

video save for very brief moments of Stipe singing, playing his trademark mandolin. He is focussed on only in passing, although frequently in shot, perhaps echoing the status of his instrument, that provides near constant background arpeggiation, but never comes to the fore of the soundtrack. What is remarkable is his use of dark glasses and slightly stilted and detached deportment, the implication seeming to be that of blindness, which when combined with the witch's familiar he has with him (an ape) conjures the figure of the seer. Once again this is a highly unusual personage to be present at a suburban party, and is suggestive of a position outside the video, an ability to see a 'truth' that is beyond the scene portrayed, perhaps loosely connected with the idea of recognizing the distinction between 'imitation' and 'life' that the title sets in play. All of the images here are resonant, rather than merely representative – they overtly point outside of themselves, functioning as 'texts' rather than simple objects. It is in conjunction with the lyric and sound tracks, however, that the sensuous qualities of these images are put into play.

Like the image track, the lyrics consist of a series of 'radiant' phrases that are without any overarching 'sense' – they exist as a coherence rather than as a unity (see Appendix for complete lyric sheet). The opening stanza immediately puts into play a set of disparate concepts, and even the opening line, 'Charades pop skill,' free from any obvious meaning, sets a whole series of ideas in process. The word 'charades,' referring to a similarity of gestural form, invites one both to reconsider the ungainly backwards dancing with which the video begins, and also to consider the question of representation put into play by the title and following line, 'imitation of life,' as well as suggesting the party game of the same name that involves guessing gestural equivalents. There are points that clearly resonate with the image track – several water references ('water hyacinths,' 'koi in a frozen pond'), and a 'folksiness' to the concise phrasing and grammar of 'that sugar cane, that tasted good,' and the figure of 'this lemonade,' the lemonade stall being the quintessence of suburban Americana, but there is only one brief moment of direct connection, where the 'teenager, cruising in the corner' is directly represented. Equally there are many phrases entirely at odds with the scene: a 'Friday fashion show,' and the set of phrases grouped under the seme 'natural disaster' – hurricane, tidal wave, avalanche, etc. – which are palpably playing against the image track, and pointing elsewhere, i.e. outside the video scene. However, the

sections of the lyrics that are most clearly articulated, and of greatest interest, are those voiced by characters in the video. Some of these are diegetic, the shouting of 'c'mon, c'mon;' some take the form of, admittedly strange, conversations between characters within the video, as with the Italianate woman at the table in the foreground (who to my mind seems to embody the seme 'insufferable' with her overt diction and habit of literally looking down her nose at people); whilst others directly address the viewer in a 'performance' mode, expected of the 'star' Michael Stipe, but more unusual when seen from some of the 'bit' players. This division of lyric text makes the idea of locating a stable and unitary authorial 'voice' ridiculous, especially given that there are two Michael Stipes present – as a character and as a disembodied head on a television screen within the video frame (a further problematization of representation?) – and that the compressed time frame of the image track means people are often talking across one another, the soundtrack selecting each in turn. The question of whose words these are is left completely ambiguous; disconnected phrases are divided amongst the party guests, although all of them speak with Stipe's voice.

Anyone hoping or expecting to find unity and stability at the level of the music, however, (and this is not an uncommon move in musicology), will be somewhat disappointed. It is precisely a musicalization of the image that has prompted this multiplicity of analytic outcomes. Although the song superficially resembles the typical strophic verse/chorus/middle eight format of the pop song, a closer look will show an adaptation of this, and further analysis shows that there is a confusion of both the identity and the structural function of the verse/chorus relationship. The basic structure is:

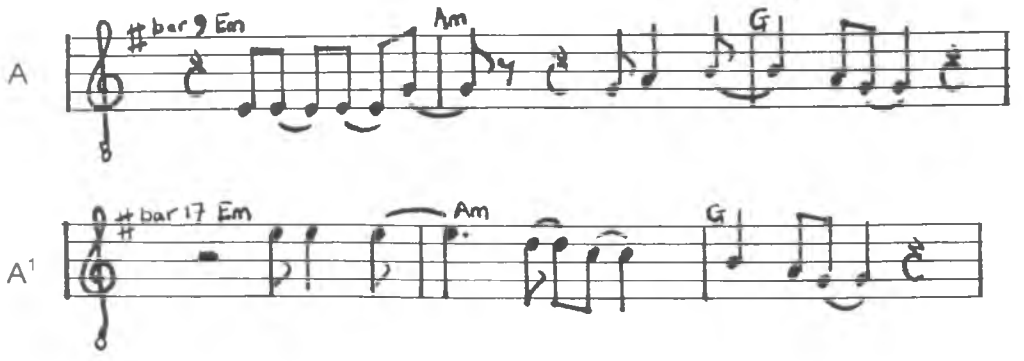
V C V C Int. C C^1 C^1 C C

(where V = Verse, C = Chorus, and Int. = Middle Eight, at bars 9, 26^4, 37, 54^4, 64, 76^4, 86^4, 94^4, 102^4, 110^4 respectively – see transcription in the appendix). The interlude is a middle twelve, rather than a middle eight (in fact it is properly a middle sixteen, but the chorus re-enters four bars before its completion). It can be clearly seen that in the second half of the song the structural function of the verse is replaced by that of a melodically and lyrically altered chorus. While verse and chorus are given distinct tonalities, E minor and its relative major, G, respectively, both of these are very weakly stated: there is no strong cadence in E minor, and

the only IV V I movement, in G major at the close of the chorus, is immediately followed by a return to the tonic key, E minor. There is no sense of forward harmonic drive from verse to chorus and back, and no strong tonal differentiation between the two. Tonality is used as a structurally enabling force instead of functionally, as a structurally determining force, insofar as it enables an admittedly weak and confused distinction between verse and chorus.

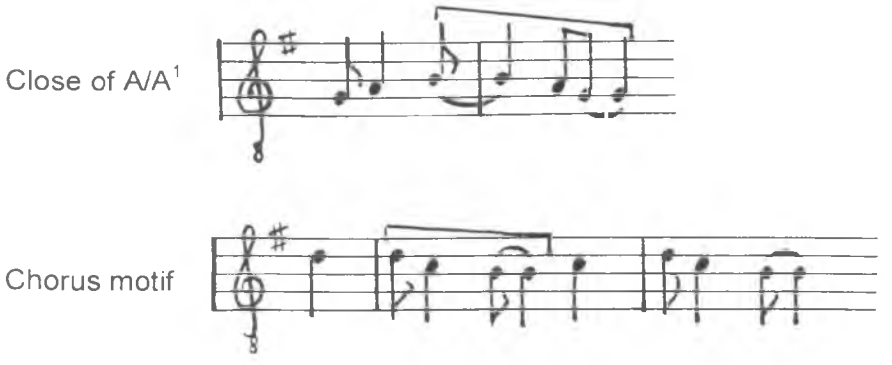
This partially explains why the initial impression is that of a straightforward strophic structure, but if one analyses at the motivic level there is still further confusion. Each verse can be subdivided into the form A B A A^1 B A^1 (melisma), where A^1 inverts the opening of A. The motif of a falling third over a G major chord

Figure 2a



rhythmically syncopated, that forms the close of both A and A^1, is then used as the basis of the chorus melody, which closes with a near identical melismatic flourish

Figure 2b



on the word 'cry'/'try.' It is this close motivic interconnection, and rhythmic and rhetorical similarity, allied to an unconventional structure that causes the confusion between verse and chorus in this piece. The entire song is constructed from a series of melodic fragments that are permutated in such a way as to generate both the verse and the chorus: these repeated figures, like the Schumannian body, 'do not stay in place.' Some might see this motivic reworking as a means of circumventing the structural ambiguity of the song so as to create a greater consistency and unity, but, very much like the 'Sphinxes' of Schumann's *Carnaval*, this rather wilfully ignores the fact that there are several motives present here, which although undermining the distinction between verse and chorus are nevertheless perfectly distinct with respect to one another (to say nothing of the middle eight). There is not a unity here, but again a multiplicity, a plurality of fragments, and the totality they produce, such as it is, is fractured but distinct in its identity. This mode of immanent analysis demonstrates not only the literal, repetition of motivic fragments, performed in such a way as to highlight their material qualities, as is often seen in so-called 'minimalist' works, but also highlights the motility of this repetition *en procès*, its unfixed and evasive relationship to the strictures of typical song format.

As can be seen, a brief examination of a few of the more obvious disjunctions between and within music, word, and image, has generated a considerable weight of analysis, and left a vast swathe of material untouched: poetic metre, instrumental timbre, the large number of 'background' characters. It is, of course, in the interaction of all these various parts that the substance of music video is to be found, and so to conclude this analysis I will perform a brief comparison between two similar moments with quite different affects. The two points I refer to are both moments of 'false' diegesis, that is, other characters voicing Stipe's lyrics: the woman on the rock at the front of the pool, and the 'adulterous woman' at the back left of the scene respectively. Both sing one of the two adapted choruses and thus have very similar texts to sing and identical melodies. However, whereas the former seems to have a poignancy and quality of regret, the latter seems far more upbeat. Since both moments have so many similarities one might think that the stem of this difference might be easy to locate, but it is not. Does the former's wistfulness come from her solitariness, from something in her face, from the fact that the film is running backwards at this point,

or from the qualities I draw out of the specific word 'lemonade' in this context? And does the latter's relatively upbeat quality derive from her yellow dress, her joining with her lover, the fact that the film is now running forwards again, or more probably from the reintroduction of the full instrumental backing, absent from the sparse instrumentation of the first statement of the adapted chorus. The answer is that the distinction resides in all of these facts, and a great many others besides: for instance, 'avalanche' might be linked to the band 'The Avalanches,' makers of upbeat dance music, while 'hurricane' begets 'Hurricane no. 1,' a rather dour rock band, restricting reference to popular music alone. Some facts are naturally more relevant than others, and I suspect that the music's timbre is of key importance in this instance, but none of them are irrelevant, and all contribute, in however small a way, to the overall sense impression that the music video experience generates. I emphasize again that this is an interactive, and not an additive process: these senses are not a mere accumulation of associated properties but an interconnected web. To remove one element, however small, would be to remove its interaction with all the other elements and fundamentally alter the 'wiring' of the object. and it is this point that will be taken up in chapter II. As fragments cohere to form a totality, so associations cohere to form these fragments. Like the chaotic fractal image, however 'deep' one cares to travel into the structuration of the object. the same structure will appear time and again, and as Gerald Bruns writes, after Bakhtin, 'The point to remember is that your descent is not taking you deeper into the inner world of preconscious grammars or, below these, into the body where one hears the warm, undifferentiatied murmur of the mother tongue. On the contrary, you are heading into the outer world of the "social heteroglossia." The deeper you go, the more open things get.'[90]

IV

Before laying claim to the fragment as a systematic mode of analytic organization, it would be wise both to clarify the relationship between fragment and totality, and to historicize my adoption of the fragmentary aesthetic. Middleton writes:

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[90] Bruns, G.L., *op. cit.*, pp. 131-2.

> There seems to be a certain potency in the post-modernist position, which takes the dominant system as given and proposes as method of critique the *fragment*: subversion takes the form of "guerilla activity" which exploits fissures and forgotten spaces *within* the hegemonic structure. An "either/or" (to the extent it existed) is replaced by an "and/and," a confrontation between unitary subjectivity and its destruction by an acceptance of multiples and contradictions.[91]

Middleton formulates this 'postmodern' stance in explicit opposition to the 'modernist' stance of Adorno, and yet Adorno's later writings not only acknowledge, but are founded upon the embracing of a fragmentary aesthetic: '*Aesthetic Theory* ... is an attempt, from what would now be called a "classical modernist" position, to write an aesthetics of modernism which recognizes at the outset the impossibility of any systematic and unified theory of art today in view of the fragmentation and pluralism which have characterized the art of the twentieth century.'[92] Fragmentary structure is both modernist and post-modernist. I shall not attempt to engage the discussion of the relation of modernism to post-modernist thought here – those arguments have been well rehearsed elsewhere[93] – nor to prove that one or the other of these stances is the 'correct' one; (a fragmentary stance would be to declare both right, although not necessarily in the same way). What is of use, however, is to assess the fragment/totality relation in these modes of thought, and also in my own work.

For Adorno, an overarching unity remains the ideal towards which one might strive, but one must be careful not to confuse this with 'the "false totality" of the *status quo*.'[94] Adorno's aesthetics adopts fragmentation only as an

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[91] Middleton, R., *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[92] Paddison, M., *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, (Kahn & Averill, London, 1996), p. 48. See also J.M. Bernstein's introduction to Adorno, T.W., *The Culture Industry: Selected essays on Mass Culture*, ed. Bernstein, J.M., (Routledge, London and New York, 1991), pp. 7ff.

[93] The best known of these being Jameson, F., 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism,' *New Left Review*, 146, (1984), pp. 53-92.

[94] Paddison, M., *op. cit.*, p. 52.

intermediary step against 'mass culture,' so as to reconstitute the totality in another form: it is an attempt 'to evolve structures which can admit chaos, fragmentation and meaninglessness and which at the same time, through "critical consciousness," can transcend such content.'[95] This fragment is a means to an end, whereas the postmodern fragment has become an end in itself, a rejoinder to the 'grand narratives' famously critiqued in Lyotard's *Report on Knowledge*.[96] Both theories are formulated as a refusal of the *status quo*, but where Adorno identifies the existing material relations of the current 'totality' as the problem, postmodernism regards 'totality' as such to be the problem. The weakness of this latter stance, at least in many of its subsequent formulations, is the lack of critical leverage it enables – the fragment cast adrift is easily fetishized and rendered powerless. Individualized multiplicity bears no danger for late capitalism, and is more likely to become a new selling opportunity than a threat. What is required is a reconception of the totality as an emergent property of a set of fragments, an unfixed and contingent collective entity, that is the resultant of a set of practices, rather than the determinant of those practices. Such a theory is put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in the figure of the rhizome, where 'The line no longer forms a contour, and instead passes *between* things, *between* points. ... The multiplicity it constitutes is no longer subordinated to the One.'[97] The rhizome is a coherence of fragments, which no longer need to be reified into 'types' for the purposes of critical discourse; it provides an alternative rather than a challenge to the *status quo*, since to challenge it directly would involve acceding to the rules of engagement already set out. In this way the music video can remain musical and not ideal, material and not transcendent, affect rather than representation.

This problem bears more than a passing similarity to that of locating a final 'signified,' that might act as anchor to the system of language, and I do not think this is mere coincidence. It is essentially a question of ordering and understanding one's world, or better *Weltanschauung*, and this is necessarily connected with the

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[95] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[96] Lyotard, J.-F., *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Bennington, D. and Massumi, B., (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984).

[97] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *op. cit.*, p. 505.

issue of language. The binding of world and artefact takes place in and through language, although this involves an expansion of the concept of 'language' beyond the narrow one employed by Saussure. Barthes writes: 'The image is penetrated through and through by the system of meaning, in exactly the same way as man is articulated to the very depths of his being in distinct languages. The language of the image is not necessarily the totality of utterances emitted ... it is also the totality of utterances received.'[98] This is not to say, however, that the image (or music video) derives its identity from the totality of meanings centred upon it alone, but from the very system of meaning as well, from a 'language' enlarged by reception theory, the language of Heidegger, Benjamin, and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein in particular maps out a relation between identity and language that is of great significance to the fragment/totality model. The idea of language as a 'totality of utterances,' not as a single entity, but as a connected group of things (which he termed 'language-games'), is of fundamental importance to the later Wittgenstein's thought: 'We see that what we call 'sentence' and 'language' has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another.'[99] The connection between these things is the same as that between different games; there is not one rule that applies to all, a unifying law, but a range of disparate entities that are similar in some respects, different in others, but which all overlap to a greater or lesser extent to produce the field (or family) of 'games.'

> Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, - but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language." ... We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.[100]

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[98] Barthes, R., 'Rhetoric of the Image,' *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[99] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, §108.

[100] *Ibid.*, §§65-6.

This familial relationship that characterizes language, and thus an entire culture or 'form of life' for Wittgenstein, a model of multiple connections which exist as a coherence without there being any centralized unity, is precisely the kind of relationship that exists between fragments and totality, and determines the format and identity of any given artefact. Thus a clarification of identity and fragmentary structure is as much an interrogation of the sign system itself as of its specific instances.

A 'final coherence,' then, is not an appeal to a singular and unified entity, but the above does not solve the problem of its location. Barthes notes: 'theoretically, we can never halt a sign at a final signified; the only halt we can give a sign in its reading is a halt which comes from practice, but not from the semiological system itself.'[101] The solution to the problem lies not in a theorization of *Weltanschauung*, but in *Weltanschauung* itself, that is, a way of living. The 'final' signified, ultimate coherence, lies not in theory, but in praxis. Quoting Wittgenstein once more: 'Do not say: 'There isn't a last' definition.' That is just as if you choose to say 'There isn't a last house in this road; one can always build an additional one.''[102] Thus the ultimate arbiter is one's own culture and language, a 'form of life,' and the ultimate coherence the community in which it is received; a coherence in which each individual is a fragment at once constitutive of and constituted by that community. It is worth bearing in mind, then, that the source of this understanding is itself contingent and in no way absolute. Thus the idea of 'symbolic dynamism,' the continual dialectical process in which all parts of the system are caught up, such that yesterday's innovation becomes today's cliché, is not a strain upon a transcendental absolute, but constitutive of the system itself.

This close association of model and world is not entirely benign, however, particularly with regard to music. There is a danger that music video might become another means by which the model of the *status quo* might reassert itself. Music, as Deleuze and Guattari warn, is a powerful tool of connection/collection: 'Since its force of deterritorialization is the strongest, it also effects the most

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[101] Barthes, R., 'Semiology and Medicine,' in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Howard, R., (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), p. 210.

[102] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, §29.

massive of reterritorializations.'[103] Music video may facilitate an alternative to the order of representation and enable a new 'form of life,' but it does not force one to follow that line of escape; it must be actively taken up. One might equally generate a 'rhetoric' of the music video (after Barthes' 'Rhetoric of the Image'), shot through with dominant ideology (in what circumstances are ideologies anything other than dominant?): 'The variation in readings is not, however, anarchic; it depends on the different kinds of knowledge – practical, national, cultural, aesthetic – invested in the image and these can be classified.'[104] Although in one sense Barthes is correct to identify that the fragment/totality model is utterly bound up with hegemonic practice, its divergent, multiple nature makes complete codification a near impossibility, and always allows a degree of unpoliced space. Fragmentary structure is not entirely without a capacity for resistance, and its insidious nature is a potential strength as well as a weakness.

Having established that the music video artefact is neither a straightforward articulation of late-capitalism, nor is it an obvious site of resistance, one would do well to acknowledge that this condition of flexibility is characteristic of capital itself. As Tetzlaff notes: 'It [capital] does not present, nor has it ever presented, anything like a single, unified dominant ideology.'[105] Thus the field of interaction between them is very much more complicated than is often made out. Tetzlaff continues:

> The pop culture text is theorized as attempting to resolve contradictions in line with the prevailing ideology, but subcultural audiences create their own meanings, which are necessarily resistive since they contradict the dominant discourse. ... However, this is not necessarily a sign of progressive politics. ... The question is, does this indicate successful local resistances or only fragmentation of capital's address to its subjects, a series of carefully articulated "job descriptions"?[106]

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[103] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *op. cit.*, p. 348.

[104] Barthes, R., 'The Rhetoric of the Image,' *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[105] Tetzlaff, D., 'Popular Culture and Social Control in late capitalism,' in *Culture and Power*, ed. Scannell, P., Schlesinger, P., and Sparks, C., (Sage, London, 1992), p. 62.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

I am not sure, however, that I agree with Tetzlaff's rather downbeat conclusion, that in the face of late capital, as with the Daleks, resistance is futile. A resistance to the totalizing impulse, the desire to generate fragments that cohere without having an essential unity, like the language-games of Wittgenstein, is more than just good post-structural practice; it is a co-optation of the techniques of capital itself. To set up a totalized and logical system is to invite its destruction – removing any one aspect means the collapse of the entirety – better to spread oneself, like capital, in such a manner that there is not one target, but many, and so the destruction of one element need not destroy the resistive power of the artefact as a whole. And the music video artefact, as a gateway to fragmentary aesthetics, is capable of sustaining other forms of resistance. The semic proliferation generated by music video as described above, is in a reciprocal relationship with the fragment, which is to say that it is both constitutive of and amplified by, the fragment model, and can enable a form of resistance of its own, identified by Baudrillard. 'The present argument of the system is to maximize speech, to maximize the production of meaning, of participation. And so the strategic resistance is that of the refusal of meaning and the refusal of speech.'[107] In a system dedicated to use, to the effective transfer of information, and above all to efficiency, the prolific generation of that without use, an excess without logic, a kind of 'semic noise,' is a reminder of an alternative, of another way, not so very different from the Bakhtinian carnival. Furthermore, this intense polysemy may have the potential to rupture the sign system itself, to be the 'specific object' of 'semanalysis' described by Kristeva in her essay 'The Semiotic Activity.'[108] Eagleton writes: 'The representational devices of bourgeois society are those of exchange-value; but it is precisely this signifying frame that the productive forces must break beyond, releasing a heterogeneity of use-values whose unique

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[107] Baudrillard, J., 'The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media,' in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Poster, M., (Polity, Cambridge, 1988), p. 219.

[108] Kristeva, J., 'The Semiotic Activity,' *Screen*, vol. 14, (1973), p. 38. Kristeva suggests that the 'poetic text' will fulfil this role, but I believe the music video to be an even better example of 'a bearer of a surplus of signification that the system of the sign is unable to contain.' [*ibid.*]

particularity would seem to refuse all standardized representation.'[109] It is this combination of properties, the stretching to breaking point of the signifying frame, the uniqueness of each and every video coherence, of which every instance is a kind of very particular cultural map, and its problematizing of the standard idea of representation, that make the music video artefact a potent source of analytic activity.

Apart from its political potential, the fragment model, particularly as it is realized in music video, has methodological ramifications that extend beyond the direct realm of the artefact into one's engagement with the world. The idea that if one attempts to probe the 'depth' of the artefact one encounters only more fragments, combined with the absence of a fixed unity, renders the concept of 'essence,' a key object for analysis, largely redundant. As Eagleton notes of Nietzsche's thought: 'Art instructs in the profound truth of how to live superficially, to halt at the sensuousness of the surface rather than hunt the illusory essence beneath it. Perhaps superficiality is the true essence of life, and depth a mere veil thrown over the authentic banality of things.'[110] The privileged term 'depth,' as a corollary to 'essence,' 'explanation,' and more often than not, 'origin,' is turned on its head. 'Essence,' such as it is, is present not in the vertical but in the horizontal axis of the object, in a Deleuzian plane. The same form is generated by the specific nature of a particular coherence at all levels; there is no one thing to trace it back to; one simply moves further and further out into Bakhtinian 'social heteroglossia.' Instead, 'since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain.'[111] Rather, as shown previously, the purpose of analysis is to *clarify*, and not to *explain*.[112] This also implies a far greater role for the materiality of the artefact, its specific qualities and affective impact, to which I now turn.

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[109] Eagleton, T., *op. cit.*, p. 214.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 258.

[111] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, §126.

[112] A detailed discussion of this distinction can be found in Cioffi, F., *Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998).

Chora

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August 1862, Vienna

> My good mood made it easier for me on that evening to treat Hanslick for some time as a casual acquaintance up to the point when he took me aside for an intimate talk and assured me, with tears and sobs, that he could no longer bear it to see himself misunderstood by me; the blame for anything untoward in his judgements about me, he averred, was certainly not rooted in a malevolent intention but solely in a limitation of the individual, and he would like nothing better than to have the boundaries of his knowledge extended by my instruction. These declarations were made with such an explosion of emotion that I could feel no wish other than to soothe his pain and promised my undivided sympathy in his further pursuits.[1]

This moment of *rapprochement* between the two primary figures of nineteenth-century musical aesthetics, made on Wagner's part with the expressly political aim of garnering a favourable climate for production of his operas in Vienna, was to be remarkably short-lived. Only three months later Wagner invited Hanslick to a reading of the text of *Die Meistersingers von Nurnberg* with the sole aim of humiliating him through the unveiling of the character Beckmesser, an idiotic and unmusical pedant, and an obvious caricature of Hanslick (to the extent that Wagner had actually named the character Hans Lick in an earlier draft). To his eternal credit Hanslick left the gathering without a word, but from this point on

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[1] Wagner, R., *My Life*, trans. Gray, A., ed. Whittall, M., (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 694-5.

hostilities between the two were resumed in earnest, and would remain unresolved. Through a hardening of their respective positions into mutually incompatible views of music and opera, a state that was considerably enhanced by the willingness of their followers to either misrepresent or misunderstand both of their positions for polemical value, a remarkable opportunity to reformulate the aesthetics of music based upon the common ground of their theories seems to have been missed.

That Wagner's aesthetics might be misunderstood is perhaps understandable; his theoretical promiscuity and capacity for adopting entirely contradictory stances under the rubric of a self-mythology of consistency has been well documented[2] and formed the basis of a vicious attack by his former acolyte, Nietzsche[3] (and in part explains the disparate groups that labelled themselves as 'Wagnerian' in the years following his death). Whilst Wagner's capacity for being all things to all men has done little to alter his impact or popularity (at least outside of Israel, where he remains taboo), the misappropriation of Hanslick as a 'formalist' has resulted in a persistent misreading of his theories; a situation not helped by Gustav Cohen's translation into English of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* that, in the words of its recent re-translator Geoffrey Payzant 'rarely makes contact with Hanslick's argument.'[4] John Shepherd dismisses Hanslick as an 'absolutist,'[5] Jean-Jacques Nattiez as 'adopting a normatively formalist conception of music ... deny[ing] that purely sonorous configurations, independent of any textual

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[2] See, for instance, *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed Large, D., and Weber, W., (Cornell University Press, New York, 1984), and Dahlhaus, C., 'The Twofold Truth in Wagner's Aesthetics,' in *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Whittall, M., (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980).

[3] See both 'Nietzsche contra Wagner,' *Collected Works*, vol. III, trans. Common, T., (T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1899), and 'The Case of Wagner,' in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Kaufmann, W., (Random House, Toronto, 1967).

[4] The details of this are discussed in Payzant's 'Essay: Towards a Revised reading of Hanslick,' in Hanslick, E., *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. Payzant, G., (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1986).

[5] Shepherd, J., 'Music Consumption and cultural self-identities: some theoretical and methodological reflections,' *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 8, (1986), p. 310.

suggestion, do indeed have a power of evocation.'[6] Even in 1998 Christopher Small could repeat the mantra that 'formalism' has 'no content whatever beyond the contemplation of the beauty of the tonal patterns and forms,' and that 'this view even denies any value whatsoever to the sensuous enjoyment of musical sound. The nineteenth-century Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick was a leading exponent of such a view.'[7] What I hope to demonstrate here is not only that Hanslick's conception of aesthetics is more subtle than he is typically given credit for, but also that, alongside Wagner, it allows for a connection to the much more radical theories of Roland Barthes or Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and can facilitate a better understanding of the processes of music video.

The key point upon which Hanslick and Wagner are said to differ, and the most relevant to music video, is in their conception of how the arts might be related to one another, most notably in that celebrated Wagnerian concept, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a putative synthesis of all the arts rather than a straightforward composite art form. Amongst his many legitimate criticisms of Wagner, Hanslick rather unfairly suggests that Wagner's attempt to perform this synthesis rests upon his adherence to 'feeling-theory,' that is, that the function of art is either to arouse or else directly embody 'feelings' or emotions.[8] Since *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* was formulated specifically as a response to the idea that music represents feelings, it is to be expected that his dislike of Wagner's music and aesthetics would lead him to suggest that Wagner subscribed to this viewpoint (and to be fair, Wagner's sometimes confused writings do little to dissuade one from this), and thus presumably that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* operated by evoking the same 'feeling' in all art forms simultaneously.[9] Wagner's theory was actually more subtle than this (although would still be equally mistaken in Hanslick's view) and derives from a strain of thought that runs throughout Romanticism, expressed in Robert

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[6] Nattiez, J.-J., 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music,' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 115:2, (1990), p. 243.

[7] Small, C , *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*, (Wesleyan University Press, New Hampshire, 1998), p. 135.

[8] For a discussion of the complexities of 'feeling-theory,' see Dahlhaus, C., *Esthetics of Music*, trans. Austin, W., (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 16-24

[9] Hanslick selectively quotes from Wagner's *The Artwork of the Future* in the section of *On the Musically Beautiful* entitled 'Some Feeling-Theorists,' p. 91.

Schumann's aphorism that 'The aesthetics of one art is that of the others; only the material is different.'[10] In this view, taken (like so much of Schumann's theory) from the aesthetics of Jean Paul (who in turn looked back to Goethe[11]) the defining quality of art was not the concrete 'feeling,' but instead the abstract idea of 'poetry,' falling in line with the German Idealism of the time. In the hands of Wagner the difficult 'poetry' became the even more problematical 'drama,' and it is at this point that the question of how to combine differing art forms becomes embroiled in the long running dispute over the primacy of music and word; a dispute that has existed as long as one has been set to the other. Perhaps surprisingly, neither Wagner nor Hanslick strike a definite pose on one side of this issue: the question is almost entirely incidental to the core of Hanslick's arguments (although he of course engages with them), and is uncomfortably straddled by Wagner, as Nietzsche pointedly exposed in his fragment 'On Music and Words,'[12] but it is worth a brief diversion to understand both the intellectual climate in which both writers worked, and the (mis)use to which their ideas were put subsequently.

From ancient times and throughout the history of early sacred music the primacy of the word (or, indeed, the biblical 'Word') was, so to speak, taken as read. With the growing complexity of Western polyphony during the Renaissance, however, the idea that one must be sacrificed for the glorification of the other became more contentious, not least because of the clash between the Reformation's avowed desire to strip away ornament from religion, and the Catholic church's awareness of the allure of musical performance to its

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[10] Quoted in Dahlhaus, C., *Esthetics of Music*, p. 3.

[11] In fact, Goethe's theories seem to be incompatible with the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but are nevertheless an apparent inspiration of it.

> Colour and sound do not admit of being compared in any way, but both are referable to a higher formula: both are derivable, though each for itself, from a higher law. They are like two rivers that have their source in one and the same mountain, but subsequently pursue their way, under totally different conditions, in two totally different regions, so that throughout the course of both no two points can be compared.

From *Zu Fahbenlehre*, quoted in Cook, N , *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, p. 46.

[12] Nietzsche, F., 'On Music and Words', trans. Kaufmann, W., in Dahlhaus, C., *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, pp. 103ff.

congregation. The Council of Trent decrees in the mid-sixteenth century attempted to resolve this split by upholding the so-called 'Roman style' of Palestrina as a model of good practice, but could do nothing to change the underlying tension between the desire either to foreground the text or to give the music free rein. Thereafter the question of their 'correct' relation would recur sporadically, following what Carl Dahlhaus terms 'one of the oldest historiographical schemes, that of the origin, decline, and restoration of an idea.'[13] The first notable eruption of controversy surrounded the debate between Monteverdi and his critic Artusi regarding the *seconda prattica*: typical of the debate was the fact that Monteverdi restricted himself to composing, and had little to do with the theoretical nuts and bolts of the affair, leaving it to his brother Giovanni and Vincenzo Galilei to defend this 'new' music. More typical still was the variety of forms this doctrine of adherence to the text took; the intensely chromatic and polyphonic word painting of Gesualdo was as distant from the *prima prattica* as it was the *seconda prattica*, but was it a more or less faithful rendition of a given poem than the even cadenced monody of Sigismondo d'India? The answer depended upon whether one understood musical accompaniment of a text to mean illustration of individual words, of the overall 'poetic intention' of an entire clause, or else simply heightening the declamation, allowing the words to 'speak for themselves,' after an almost entirely imagined ancient Greek model, since there was at the time no extant ancient Greek music available. The question re-emerged in the eighteenth century, first with the debate between Rameau and Rousseau concerning the relative importance of harmony and melody known as the '*Querelle des Bouffons*,' and shortly after was reignited by Gluck's operatic 'reforms,' which again cited a 'decline' into ornamentation and the need to revive the model of 'the ancients.' (It was Franz Grillparzer's response to this program of reform that seems to have inspired Hanslick's attack on both Gluck and Wagner, given the extensive quotation of Grillparzer present in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*.[14]) By the nineteenth century this idea was beginning to be turned on its head, for although the idea that music and text should accurately reflect one another was retained, based on Rousseau's (amongst others') suggestion that

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[13] Dahlhaus, C., *Esthetics of Music*, p. 65.

[14] Hanslick, E., *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4 in particular.

music and speech had a common origin, music was now believed to be the site of a transcendent meaning, in comparison with which words were an inferior and incapable means of communication. This viewpoint, which has come to be associated with the term 'absolute music' (first coined by Wagner as a negative term) forms what Dahlhaus describes as 'the latent unity of musical aesthetics in the nineteenth century,'[15] but it continued to exist uneasily alongside an acknowledgement of the importance of words to music. Music continued to be thought of as a fundamentally vocal art, and as Nicholas Cook has noted, it is precisely at the historical juncture where 'absolute music' emerged that there was an explosion of words in the form of programme notes and musical analysis, as though they were suppressed in one place only to re-emerge elsewhere.[16] It is exactly this uneasy balance that Wagner attempts to strike, caught between ancient tragedy and Schopenhauer, yet in a more profound way, and this is something that Dahlhaus appears to miss, both Wagner and Hanslick, in different ways, sidestep this bugbear of music aesthetics entirely.

Regardless of what their followers might claim, or indeed what they claim of each other, neither Hanslick nor Wagner appear to be interested in establishing the primacy of either music or word. Wagner cuts the Gordian knot by subordinating both music and word to the properly abstract 'drama,' whilst Hanslick's argument is based precisely on the non-commensurability of differing art forms. at least in the terms put forward above in the Schumann quotation.[17] As Cook has suggested, the long running word/music debate has served to conceal a far more fundamental consistency – of a model of 'unitary conformance' which 'begins by identifying one medium as the origin of meaning, and uses this as the

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[15] Dahlhaus, C., *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, p. 39. See also the same author's *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Lustig, R., (University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[16] Cook, N., 'The Domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Record sleeves and Reception,' in *Composition–Performance–Reception*, pp. 105-117.

[17] It must be acknowledged here that where poetry and music *are* joined, Hanslick states that musical specificity predominates ('The union of poetry with music and opera is a morganatic marriage.' *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 26), insofar as he believes that bad music can spoil a good poem in a way that the reverse can not. This seems to be a personal prejudice, however, rather than a *necessary* outcome of his theoretical framework, and is partially retracted in his comparison of music and colour.

measure of other media through a series of pair-wise judgements of similarity or dissimilarity.'[18] Against this analysis, Wagner's model displaces all media involved by measuring them not against each other, but against 'drama,' in effect designating all media equivalent (and thus allowing himself to appear to favour one medium or the other at any given time without disrupting his overall aesthetic). Hanslick deems questions regarding the relating of differing arts to be irrelevant to their aesthetic appreciation, although not, as we shall see, to be entirely impossible.

As mentioned above, the Schumannian concept of 'poetry,' the site of Schopenhauer's 'aesthetic pleasure' and driving force of nineteenth-century aesthetics (essentially derived from the Platonic Idea), is distorted by Wagner's reading of Gluck into the concept of 'drama' in the abstract, and this distortion is not without consequences. Wagner does not encounter Schopenhauer until 1854,[19] and for all his attempts to reorder his earlier theories in the light of this, his commitment to Idealism remains short of being absolute, with the result that later self-styled 'Wagnerians' and the history of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* would take subtly divergent paths. What is certain is that 'drama' functions in a transcendent capacity: Nietzsche makes this much clear in stating 'It was not with his music that Wagner conquered them, it was with the "idea."'[20] If one reads on, however, it seems that Nietzsche's main criticism is that this transcendent idea is not ideal enough:

> It is the enigmatic character of his art, its playing hide and seek behind a hundred symbols, its polychromy of the idea that leads and lures these youths to Wagner. ... In the midst of Wagner's multiplicity, abundance and arbitrariness they feel as if justified in their own eyes – "redeemed." Trembling they hear how *great symbols* approach from foggy distances to resound in his art with muted thunder.[21]

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[18] Cook, N., *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, p. 115.

[19] Dahlhaus, C., 'The Twofold truth in Wagner's Aesthetics,' *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[20] Nietzsche, F., 'The Case of Wagner,' §10, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

In Nietzsche's view, Wagner should have given primacy to the musical idea instead of tailoring the music to 'theatrical' symbols, and thus barring access to the essential 'sanctuary of music.'[22] To attempt to comprehend music through its symbolic representation is to miss the aesthetic 'truth' contained therein.

Perhaps, then, the answer would be to strike the category of 'drama' and even 'poetry' from the equation, and look directly to the sensuous possibilities represented by the arts. Rather curiously Nietzsche is strangely quiet on the sensuous qualities of music, so caught up is he in the musical 'idea,' but paradoxically this is precisely what the symbolist movement sought to take from Wagner. Gerald Turbow writes: 'Baudelaire found a similarity between Wagner's attempt to create a synthesis of the arts and his own idea, stated in his poem "Correspondances," that our senses respond to forms in nature's language that are symbols of truths inherent in the world of the spirit.'[23] Stripping the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the unifying ideal of 'drama' enabled the symbolist poets to concentrate on the individual constituents and their sensuous possibilities, but this was fatally compromised by their continued commitment to the unity of the ideal, 'truths inherent in the world of the spirit,' which resulted in these sensuous possibilities being received not in their material particularity, but as 'forms in nature's language.' The irony of symbolism is that by responding directly to a material ideal rather than 'drama' or 'poetry,' the symbolists lost the ability to consider each art independently of the other: Wagner's synthesis of the arts became synaesthesia. Nowhere is this clearer than in the *Mysterium* of Scriabin. Scriabin, the ultimate sensualist, considered Wagner 'too theatrical', and went to extraordinary lengths to abolish the stage/theatre distinction by combining his music with coloured lighting, dancing, sacred texts and even incense in pursuit of

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[22] Nietzsche, F., 'Those who carry away feelings as the effects of music possess in them, as it were, a symbolic intermediate realm that can give them a foretaste of music while at the same time it excludes them from its inmost sanctuaries,' from 'On Music and Words,' *op. cit.*, p. 112. It is worth noting that Nietzsche is capable of just as much contrariness as Wagner with regard to aesthetics. Elsewhere he writes 'there is an aesthetic of *decadence*, and there is a *classical* aesthetics – the "beautiful in music" is a figment of the imagination, like all of idealism,' in 'The Case of Wagner,' Epilogue, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

[23] Turbow, G., 'Wagnerism in France,' in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

an 'all-unity' experience. In practice, however, the 'absolute' character of musical 'form' (not the form of traditional music analysis) acted as a spur to generate identical 'forms' in other media, to produce an absolute idea that was absolutely meaningful, which for Scriabin equated to God. In the cult of Scriabin one might educe 'the potential fascism of music'[24] identified by Deleuze and Guattari. The synaesthetic model is incapable of treating sound simply as sound; it is always a representation, a cipher of something else.

A more practical problem with the ideal unity of a synaesthetic event is the fact that it is impossible to sustain in a composite art form; however much one may try to duplicate exactly the experience of one art in the experience of another, the project is doomed to failure. As Sergei Eisenstein pointed out in *The Film Sense*, synaesthetic associations and cultural associations are both difficult to dissociate and utterly pervasive: is the quality of sunshine immanent to the colour yellow, and if so will this be experienced similarly by the Inuit of the Arctic tundra and the Bedouin of the Arabian desert? If two genuine synaesthetes cannot agree on any fixed connection between words and colours (the most common form of synaesthesia, although by no means the only one), what chance is there of persuading anyone that two distinct phenomena can provoke a singular, absolute response? In any art form composed of differing stimuli, a one to one mapping is impossible.

Cook notes of Schoenberg's attempt at a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that 'The music in *Die glückliche Hand* does not exhaust the signification of the colours, any more than the colours exhaust the signification of the sound; no mechanical translation from one to the other is possible.'[25] Schoenberg, unlike the symbolists, however, had foreseen this, and his aim was not to forge a union, but a harmony: 'The whole thing should have the effect (not of a dream) but of chords. Of music. It must never suggest symbols, or meaning, or thoughts, but simply the play of colour and form.'[26] Like Wagner, Schoenberg had acknowledged that an artistic synthesis

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[24] Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 348.

[25] Cook, N., *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, pp. 55-6.

[26] Quoted in Butler, C., *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994), p. 87.

need not be synaesthetic, but a desire for some kind of all encompassing discrete and unitary identity equivalent to Wagner's 'drama' still hangs over his abstracted 'forms,' and this quickly causes problems. He continues 'Just as music never drags a meaning around with it, at least not in the form in which it [music] manifests itself, even though meaning is inherent in its nature, so too this should simply be like sounds for the eye, and so far as I am concerned everyone is free to think or feel something similar to what he thinks or feels while writing music.'[27] This final effort to offload the issue onto the site of reception fails to conceal that Schoenberg is struggling to maintain the idea that 'forms' do not have meaning, so as to allow them to act in counterpoint to one another, but his concern for unity makes this impossible to sustain, as is clear from Cook's reading: 'both media, together and in conjunction with the other elements of Schoenberg's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, converge upon a cumulative meaning which is emotional and, in the broadest sense, dramatic.'[28] A concern for the unitary identity of 'the work' forces Schoenberg to conceive of the play of forms entirely in the abstract; in suppressing the material qualities of the disparate media that make up *Die glückliche Hand* Schoenberg effectively idealizes the concept of form in the same way as the symbolists, hence his difficulty in preventing a reterritorialization of this upon meaning and drama.

Herein lies the greatest challenge to a unified *Gesamtkunstwerk*. However much one attempts to idealize or abstract the content that makes up the work, so as to demonstrate either its essential similarity or compatibility, a stubborn materiality, an affective power remains, that evades any question of 'drama' or of 'meaning.' Cook criticizes Eisenstein's and Hanns Eisler's theories regarding composite art for being wedded to the concept of identity, and hence replicating some of the symbolist's arguments, when they are attempting to formulate a theory opposed to the model of synaesthesia.

> Like Eisenstein – like Kandinsky – Eisler has only one fundamental model for the relationship between different media, and it is identity. ... Both Eisenstein and Eisler ... assert the principle of counterpoint, but fail to theorize it; they reject the principle of

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[27] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[28] Cook, N., *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, p. 56.

> synaesthesia, but cannot escape its language. Both Eisenstein and Eisler, in short, end up going round in circles because they are trying to use a language predicated on similarity to articulate a principle predicated on difference.[29]

Cook's jettisoning of the concept of identity, and hence of the role played by specific material qualities in themselves has some profound consequences, however. He has constantly to have recourse to explanation in terms of 'meaning' and 'drama.' A specific timbre, a vowel sound, a striking colour, all can only be comprehended by Cook insofar as they have meaning, that is, by discussing not *what they are* but *what they stand for*. This is remarkably similar to one of Theodor Adorno's criticisms of Wagner's musical technique:

> What specifically characterizes Wagnerian expression is its intentionality: the motiv is a sign that transmits a particle of congealed meaning. For all its intensity and emphasis, Wagner's music is as script is to words and it is hard to avoid the suspicion that its intensity is needed only to conceal that fact. Its expression does not present itself, but is itself the object of presentation. Wagner's leitmotivs stand revealed as allegories that come into being when something purely external, something that has fallen out of the framework of a spiritual totality, is appropriated by meanings and made to represent them.[30]

Thus one always elides the object, apprehends it by proxy; one must never engage with it, only understand it passively.

How, then, might one begin to reconcile the material identity of differing art forms in order to produce a composite such as a music video that coheres in any kind of perceptible way? One can almost instinctively (that is, one perceives it to be instinctive, although it is not necessarily a-cultural) discern that some combinations of sound and vision are more apt than others, sometimes as a correspondence, sometimes as a fruitful counterposition, but how does one make

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[29] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

[30] Adorno, T., *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Livingstone, R., (Verso, London and New York, 1991), p. 45.

such a judgement? What is required is a method of identifying the individual arts in such a way as to acknowledge their specificity, whilst allowing of some kind of comparison to be made between them, a comprehensible mechanism of relation. And this is what Eduard Hanslick furnishes us with in his deceptively simple (and often mistranslated) statement that '*Der Inhalt der Musik sind tönend bewegte Formen*' ('The content of music is tonally moving forms').[31] Much of the power of this idea, that content is itself a kind of form, was neither a new idea nor restricted at this time to Hanslick. Many of the Wagnerian followers discussed above were suggesting similar things: Baudelaire's 'forms' were 'symbols of truths,' and Schoenberg made 'the play of form' the object of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Eisenstein's 'inner movement' seems especially close to 'tonally moving forms,' but it seems closer still to Johann Gottfried von Herder's 'energy of movement'[32] described in his *Kalligone* of 1800, which was in its turn inspired by Wilhelm von Humboldt's and Rousseau's ideas on speech, and so on back to Aristotle's concept of 'energia.' The importance of Hanslick's thought, however, is in his derivation of this form directly from the affective materiality of the art, bypassing completely the realm of the ideal.

> If people do not acknowledge the abundance of beauty residing in the purely musical, one may blame the undervaluation of the sensuous, which we find in the older systems of aesthetics favouring morality and aesthetic sensitivity and in Hegel's system favouring the "Idea." Every art originates from and is active within the sensuous. The feeling theory fails to recognize this; it ignores hearing entirely and goes directly to feeling. Music creates for the heart, they say; the ear is of no consequence. ... The auditory imagination, however, which is something entirely different from the sense of hearing regarded as a mere funnel open to the surface of appearances, enjoys in

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[31] Hanslick, E., *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 29. For a discussion of this phrase and the history of its translation see Payzant's 'Essay' in the same volume, *op. cit.*, pp. 94ff. It should be noted that Payzant's translation is itself not unproblematic, the translation of *tönend* as 'tonally' imputing a specific musical sense that is not necessarily present in the German original.

[32] See Monelle, R., *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music*, p. 212.

> conscious sensuousness the sounding shapes, the self-constructing tones, and dwells in free and immediate conception of them.[33]

Thus 'form' is at once an expression of musical content and also of the conditions of its own being, which is to say the nature of 'tone;' the actualization and potential of musical sound in one. Remarkably, if one looks closely one can find an acceptance of the *possibility* of this thesis (if not an actual endorsement) in Wagner's own writings, even if it is described in derogatory terms, as in this passage from *The Artwork of the Future* (1850): 'The human voice had at length completely taken refuge in a merely sensual and fluid tone device by means of which alone the art of music, wholly withdrawn from poetry, continued to present itself.'[34] One sees here for a brief moment Wagner's acceptance of the idea of music in and for itself, without recourse to the category of the ideal, be that 'drama' or the fully transcendent ideal of 'absolute music.' Being Wagner, however, he regards this as being insufficient, and sets about 'redeeming' this state of affairs by uniting music with the other arts, stating that 'Through the art of tone, the arts of poetry and dancing understand each other.'[35] The ideal site of unity that Wagner alights upon in this essay is a rather less ideal one than is seen in many of his other writings, though; namely the motion of the human body: 'This symphony [Beethoven's Seventh] is ... the most blissful act of bodily movement, ideally embodied, as it were, in tone.'[36] Thus Wagner both acknowledges the possibility of a non-ideal autonomous music (even if he does not like it), and suggests the possibility of a synthesis based upon an equally non-ideal footing (which he then rejects in favour of the 'universal drama' of Beethoven's Ninth). There is without doubt a considerable gap between Wagner's and Hanslick's conceptions of music, and how music relates to the other arts, but it is not an unbridgeable one. Both demonstrate that the model of 'unitary conformance' described by Cook (see

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[33] Hanslick, E., *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

[34] Wagner, R., *The Artwork of the Future*, extract in *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History, Revised Edition, vol. 6: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Solie, R., (W.W. Norton and Co., London and New York, 1998), p. 63.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

above), giving primary and subordinate roles to differing media, can be subverted, and I hope to have shown that their ideas regarding the combining of the arts are not so implacably opposed as is usually thought. For although Hanslick is largely silent on the topic of joining art forms, his concentration upon the 'specifically musical' need not impede the possibility of an appreciation of a composite art work, only the idea that such a thing would have an overall 'unity.' In the little comment he does make, Hanslick himself implies that his theory of 'content consisting of materially moving forms' (to paraphrase) could be extended to other media. Indeed, when he states that 'the formal aspects of both music and colour rest on the same basis,' he appears to positively encourage the same process to be undertaken in the other arts, that is, that the visual be judged on the way in which it works out and manipulates the qualities of images, poetry the qualities of language, and so on. The task of the analyst of the composite art work, then, is not simply to demonstrate unity, or even just to find multiple meanings (although that may be part of it); it is to compare and contrast these differing forms, to discover how they relate to and impact on one another, be that in the manner of conformance, contestation, or complementation.[37] It is no longer a matter of similarities, but of identifying a what, how, and why of both similarity and difference.

II

The content of an object is itself a kind of form: but this immediately requires a great deal of clarification. Combining content and form as a single entity, when the two have long been understood in opposition to one another, at least in music, creates some knotty problems and is ripe for misunderstanding (hence the designation of Hanslick as a 'formalist' concerned only with musical form, thus bypassing his argument entirely). One must first define both content and form, and show how both of these relate to the identity of an object. According to literary theory (and since most of this theoretical territory has been mapped out there it

[37] These categories are taken from Cook, N., *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, pp. 98-106.

would be wise to retain its terminology), content is understood as forming the 'what' of an object, and this is communicated by the 'how' of expression. To put it in Louis Hjelmslev's terms, there is a plane of content and a plane of expression, and each of these has a 'form.'[38] The use of the term 'form' by Hanslick, however, cuts across the content-expression dichotomy, and the use of these terms in all music theory is problematical, insofar as the distinction between what music expresses, its content, and its means of expressing it, is difficult to sustain. Indeed, this is precisely the point that the grammatically awkward phrase '*tönend bewegte Formen*' attempts to put across, and which I believe is a potential model outside of music as well, on which more later.

Even if we limit ourselves to the content-plane (so far as this is possible), 'form' describes a moulding or shaping of the material of content, a patterning that is necessarily determined by the nature, which is to say the affective properties, of the material in hand. Hanslick is not simply suggesting, then, that one takes note of the form of the content so as to perform a replacement, a substitution of content by the form that it takes, but that content in itself consists of a kind of pattern. The 'what' of a given object is comprehended as a pattern that embodies its unique qualities. One must be careful, however, with the notion of pattern as the content of an object (and not a *representation* of that content); pattern must not be understood simply as a geometric entity, such that content has/is a 'shape,' at least, not in the sense of an object with a simple (i.e. unitary) identity. The pattern has no single location; rather it is a modelling of a field of play, the relation of a set of locations, at once noun and transitive verb. Simultaneously act and abstraction.

The idea that in order to comprehend an object one must do so systemically, that is, understand its place within a set of objects rather than alone, exists in several different fields. System theory is a branch of science of its own, and informs thought on computer systems to ecology. In philosophy, Wittgenstein stated that: 'When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions.'[39] The most famous formulation of this idea, however, and certainly the most widely known, is that

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[38] Hjelmslev, L., *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. Whitfield, F., (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1969).

[39] Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1969), §141.

proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure in one of the founding texts of semiology, his *Course in General Linguistics*.[40] The lesson most often drawn from this book is his thesis that 'in language there are only differences ... a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system.'[41] What is less often noted is the continuation of this passage, in which Saussure notes: 'the statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class. ... Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact.'[42] Although Saussure's linguistic system is predicated entirely upon negative differentiation, the particular network of relations that is set up both within and between the realms of 'the concept' and phonic substance, a word's 'pattern' of difference, is a means of positive identification. That is, each word's negotiation of the relation of materiality to a range of similar and conflicting concepts produces a distinctive quality by which it can be identified. The content, however, which in the language system is 'meaning,' is not localized upon any one word; rather it is permeated throughout the system, determined not exclusively by its materiality, but by the productive capacity of the network of relations to content across the system, such that 'meaning' is an emergent property of the language system. 'Within the same language, all words used to express related ideas limit each other reciprocally; synonyms like French *redouter* "dread," *craindre* "fear," and *avoir peur* "be afraid" have value only through their opposition: if *redouter* did not exist, all its content would go to its competitors. Conversely, some words are enriched through contact with others: e.g. the new element introduced in *décrépit* results from the co-existence of *décrépi*. The value of just any term is accordingly determined by its

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[40] de Saussure, F., *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Bally, C., and Sechehaye, A., trans. Baskin, W., (Peter Owen, London, 1960).

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

environment.'[43] (Incidentally, the idea that language divides up a continuum of experience, rather than parcelling up discrete quanta of precise concepts, is still not universally recognized, as seen in recent texts by Christopher Small and Bryan Magee.[44]) There is a degree of tension here, in the generation of positive identity from the distinction between the pattern of content and the pattern of materiality, insofar as the material qualities of the word cut across the distinction content/expression by connecting outside the category of similar/differing concepts to a range of assonant words (as Saussure himself explains), which complicates the 'environment' and thus value of any term. This is not something that Saussure seems to resolve completely, which may cause him to fix finally upon the word as being not a purely relative entity, but as something with a concrete location. 'A particular word is like the centre of a constellation; it is the point of convergence of an indefinite number of co-ordinated terms.'[45] This fixing upon a singular point, an exact location rather than the locus of an equation seems to me to be mistaken, and rather to undo the value of systemic, relational understanding that Saussure's model allows. It does not diminish the validity or impact of the systemic analysis of an object in any way, however.

Understanding content, or anything else for that matter, as form or pattern enables one to model the full complexity of aesthetic appreciation. A combining of objects is no longer a straightforward addition of further properties, but a complex intermingling, algebraic rather than arithmetic. For example, if a very simple object is comprehended as a relational system of three points with three relations (and any real object would be almost immeasurably more complex), and then combined with a non-identical system also of three elements and relations, the result is not defined as a system with six points, but rather one with fifteen relations, as illustrated below.

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[44] See Small, C., *op. cit.*, pp 94ff., and Magee, B., *Confessions of a Philosopher*, (Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1997), especially pp. 76-82.

[45] De Saussure, F., *op. cit.*, p. 126.

In any given system of 'n' points, the number of potential relations in that system is given by the formula:

$$f(n) = \tfrac{1}{2}n(n-1)$$

Therefore when two objects, 'n' and 'x' are combined, it can be seen that the resultant is not simply the sum of the relations of n and x, but expressed as:

$$f(n+x) = \tfrac{1}{2}(n+x)((n+x)-1).$$

The consequent increase in complexity is thus shown by:

$$f(n+x)-f(n) = \tfrac{1}{2}[(n+x)((n+x)-1) - n(n-1)]$$
$$= \tfrac{1}{2}(2nx-x+x^2)$$

or to put it more simply, one can state that:

$$f(n+x) > f(n) + f(x).$$

In short, what a systemic understanding tells us is that in either the combining of two differing objects, or the supplementation of an existing object, the level of complexity produced is considerably greater, and thus also the need for accuracy, than the more reductive model of unitary identity would suggest. One can apply these ideas of complex identity to a range of concepts: the idea of style or genre can be understood as a set of elements in systematic relation, both internally, and in comparison with one another. Is a fugue written 'in the style of Bach' an accurate reproduction of his method? Even though it may sound correct to the modern ear in every respect, there may be one historical association that has been

lost over time, such that it would sound quite unlike Bach to his contemporaries. To paraphrase Thomas Carlyle, 'in every object there is inexhaustible meaning; the ear hears in it what the ear brings means of hearing.'[46] Similarly, it explains why two apparently similar objects can seem very easy to distinguish. An imitation stone urn made from plastic will never appear quite like the genuine article, however closely the colours and texture match, since the alteration of just one element will produce not one difference, but a whole set of different relations, a completely new pattern.

One can see these principles at work in the music of Edgard Varèse, based upon the idea of crystalline structure. The crystal has no predetermined external shape, but its internal structure, determined by the regular arrangement of one or several ions, is a tightly defined pattern, and the manner of its growth (the form of its expression, so to speak) is a result of the interaction of this pattern with the medium in which it grows. The content-pattern of the crystal is the relative positions of the ions that constitute it. One cannot point to any one of these ions (even metaphorically) and say 'There it is, that is the pattern;' the pattern is a result of combination and arrangement. To put it in mathematical terms (which is, after all, the language of the material) pattern is *permutational* and *combinatorial*. Varèse writes:

> The crystal is characterized by a definite external form and a definite internal structure. The internal structure is built on the unit of crystal, the smallest grouping having the order and composition of the substance. The extension of the unit into space forms the whole crystal. In spite of the limited variety of internal structures, the external forms of crystals are almost limitless. I believe this suggests, better than any explanation I can give, the way my works are formed. One has an idea, the basis of internal structure; it is expanded or split into different shapes or groups of sounds that

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[46] The actual quotation is 'In every object there is inexhaustible meaning: the eye sees in it what the eye brings means of seeing.' Quoted by Raymond Briggs in response to his critics in the paperback edition of *Fungus the Bogeyman*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1979), back cover.

> constantly change in shape, direction and speed, attracted or repelled by various forces. The form is the consequence of this interaction.[47]

Thus Varèse's 'musical idea' (which it should be stressed is an affair limited to sonic material alone, and is in no sense ideal) equates to the 'unit of crystal,' or content-pattern of the musical work, which in turn might be equated with Hanslick's 'tonally moving forms.' And although Varèse's compositional technique is a deliberate attempt to effect a 'corporealization of the intelligence that is in sound,'[48] his implication is that all music is constructed (more or less successfully) out of 'intelligent sounds.'

As many writers have noted, Varèse's crystalline approach to his music emphasizes the spatial qualities of his sound world; indeed Varèse cites his encounter with the work of Wronski as being 'probably what first started me thinking of music as spatial.'[49] But Varèse is neither unique nor original in conceiving of his music this way (although he does foreground the issue to a degree unseen previously); discussions of the spatiality of music are a recurrent topic in musical aesthetics and analysis across the decades. Anthony Gilbert has pointed out that the very terminology of music is replete with definitions and directions that 'require an apprehension of space or volume for their full understanding,'[50] and the analogy between music and architecture, or even landscape, as an attempt to enact 'the beautiful' in form goes back centuries, and is present in the arguments of nearly all commentators on music, including, for instance, both Hanslick and Wagner. There are, however, two very distinct

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[47] Varèse, E., quoted in Mellers, W., *Music in a New Found Land*, (Barrie and Rockliff, London, 1964), p. 158.

[48] I am indebted to Malcolm McDonald for the source of this quotation, the background to which is discussed in the section 'Wronski and 'Intelligent Sounds'' of his forthcoming monograph on Varèse, currently still in manuscript at the time of writing. Varèse showed great fondness for this quotation, which he took from the nineteenth century Polish mathematician Joseph-Maria Hoene Wronski, using it on more than one occasion.

[49] Varèse, E., again quoted by McDonald, *op. cit.*, from a lecture entitled 'Spatial Music,' given at Sarah Lawrence College in 1959.

[50] Gilbert, A., 'Musical Space: A Composer's View,' in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, (1980-1), p. 605.

schools of thought regarding how space is realized in music with differing conceptions of musical 'form,' which might be characterized (in line with Saussure) as being on the one hand a synchronic or paradigmatic approach, and on the other hand a syntagmatic or diachronic one. Neither of these approaches need be mutually exclusive of the other, but they do stem from two competing aesthetic models of musical appreciation, the former privileging the moment by moment, sensory impact of sound, the latter requiring a contemplation of the musical work (and it does depend upon the notion of the work) as a whole, at one remove from its auditory presence. As it happens, these two approaches have become entangled with musicological politics, theorists of popular music being more likely to favour the former, while more conservative theorists tend to favour the latter, with its emphasis on both canonized works and notated scores,[51] but there is no insurmountable impediment to the application of either approach to any music. Which is not to say that they are unifiable: Edmund Gurney was wrestling with reconciling the two views over a hundred years ago in his treatise *The Power of Sound*,[52] but his inability finally to do so reflects more upon the difficulty of the task he set himself than his own capabilities.[53] Consideration of diachronic form in terms of spatial metaphor, largely based on the concept of repetition of a musical 'block,' as in the balanced form of an A-B-A structure, has become familiar and well understood through long standing use (and is the source of architectural analogies), but to my mind is of limited use, certainly when attempting to relate sounds to images. One might imagine this 'spatialization' of music to be an effective means of comparison, but in practise the idea that 'melodic contours relate closely to the affect we perceive in the music,' such that 'jagged lines produce music that seems anxious and intense' or 'lines with a narrow ambitus

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[51] On this point, see Brackett, D., *Interpreting Popular Music*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995), although the same point is made in innumerable texts.

[52] Gurney, E., *The Power of Sound*, (Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1880).

[53] This point is discussed in detail by Bojan Bujic in his essay 'Form and Forming: From Victorian Aesthetics to the Mid-twentieth-century Avant-garde,' in *Composition – Performance – Reception*, pp. 118-131.

seem more meditative,'[54] not only seems somewhat crass, but is also limiting in implying once again that music and image must conform to a unitary model. Note Vernallis's assertion that 'We respond to imagery and music that work together to reflect these spatial relationships.'[55]

The idea that an individual sound moment might be conceived of spatially is seen considerably less often, although it is implicit in much music of the twentieth century that took an increased interest in the importance of musical timbre. The origin of this viewpoint, or certainly the first time at which it was codified, was in the work of the physicist Hermann von Helmholtz in the mid-nineteenth century. In his book *On the Sensations of Tone*,[56] the analysis of sounds in terms of the overtone series that constitute them provides a spatial model of any given sound that is both qualitative and quantitative, noting not only the arrangement of frequencies, but also their amplitudes, the relation between them determining the identity of a sound wave. Not only did this model produce a spatial metaphor for sound identity, but his work on acoustics also incorporated the actual spatiality within the uniqueness of a sound, since perceived sound is also determined by the space in which it resonates. These suggestions are what Gilbert refers to as 'the truly essential nature of the [spatial] phenomenon,'[57] and is probably what Varèse had in mind when speaking of his music as 'spatial,'[58] but this conception of music on its own is flawed fundamentally. Varèse attempted to 'compose out' the implicit spatiality of an initial sound or group of sounds, but even by attempting to do so he introduced syntagmatic spatiality, and even had he not, the very model of the spatial is ill-suited and insufficient for a sound event predicated upon oscillations that necessarily take place in time. The diachronic model is similarly lacking when examined closely: it is tenable only if one overlooks

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[54] Vernallis, C., *op. cit.*, pp. 158-9. Vernallis also cites Leonard Meyer's *Style and Music*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 128-9, but she could as easily have cited any number of authors.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

[56] Helmholtz, H., *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, trans., Ellis, A.J., (London, 1885).

[57] Gilbert, A., *op. cit.*, p. 606.

[58] Varèse was clearly familiar with the work of Helmholtz, and would frequently cite it as an influence upon his music.

the temporal aspect of music, which might be argued to be its most important quality. The balance and symmetry of an A-B-A structure exists for just as long as one ignores that the second A section, unlike the first, is heard both as a repetition in relation to its first airing and in relation to the B section – the experience is a dynamic one, unfolding not in three dimensions but in four. And here we run up against the limits of modelling either music or the moving image as being straightforwardly spatial, or representable by pattern alone. Any musical work is of necessity an integration of both of these forms of spatiality, a point made explicit by Pierre Boulez, of whom Varèse may be regarded as a precursor. Boulez took Varèse's concept of the sound-object, but chose to superpose it with an overall system, rather than attempt to 'grow' the sound, like a crystal. As both Bojan Bujic and Alistair Williams have noted, Boulez's notion of the relationship between static spatiality and temporal spatiality is a dialectical one, as expressed in his essay 'Le système et l'idée.'

> Boulez's notion of musical material ... is realised by the system manifesting itself in terms of the structural properties of the music, but relinquishing its grip sufficiently to allow local and contingent configurations thrown up by the material to have an intrinsic role in the musical discourse. The dialectic of system and idea is conceived in terms commensurate with the Adornian dialectic of concept and object. The musical idea is an object whose specificity eludes complete control by the system, yet which is in need of manipulation by the system. The system organises the musical object, yet recognises its concreteness and its ability to generate local configurations.[59]

In placing the two aspects of musical space in a dialectical relation Boulez has gone some way to reconcile these two strains of thought in music history, but not quite, I believe, far enough. The connection of 'system' and 'idea' or particle, is not merely a dialectical one of mutual influence, but one of fused identity, certainly in the instance of its reception, what Nattiez would call the 'aesthesic' realm. Any given system is a conglomeration of its parts, an emergent property, and attempts

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[59] Williams, A., ''Répons': phantasmagoria or the articulation of space?' in Pople, A. (ed), *Theory, analysis and meaning in music*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 199-200.

to control a system or distort it will be successful only insofar as one can add things to the set of relations in order to weight the system. One can try to conceal, or overwhelm a system, but one cannot efface any part of it; the system is an emergent property of the set of particles that constitute it, and each particle is understood in relation to those with which it is connected. It is no longer a question of space or time, or even space and time, but a fusion of the two; spaces in motion – Einsteinian space-time. One can see an articulation of this fusion in the video of the Chemical Brothers' 'Star Guitar,' which takes the form of a landscape as viewed from a moving train. Musical elements or 'sound objects' are made coincident with physical objects – for example, the repeated kick drum on the first beat of each bar is accompanied by the passing of a concrete pillar, a passing train coincides with each repetition of a high synthesizer riff – and different landscapes, be they urban or rural, accompany different sections of the music. Not only is the music's 'spatiality' thus made visible, but the viewer positioning is such that one can see the musical space that one has passed through receding into the distance. Both the immediate space of the musical object and the 'architectural' space of the music's passing through time are made available.

Even this, however, can not be regarded as a representation of music, but only as an adjunct to it. Sound itself is not an object in space but an oscillation; even if one inscribes a locus rather than a location, that locus must itself then be extended in time – it is impossible to plot sound in a three dimensional pattern. Note once more that Hanslick defined the content of music as being '*tönend bewegte Formen.*' Even the individual ions of Varèse's crystal model are not static but constantly vibrating; matter itself is a condensate of energy waves in motion. A set of relations is never a fixed pattern, but a pattern that is itself in oscillation. The principle of identity being an emergent property of a dynamic process has long been understood in chemistry. The standard test for the identity of a metal present in a compound is the flame test, in which the compound is held over a flame, and the colour of the resultant flame gives the identity of the metal. The physics behind this involves the promotion of electrons into higher energy states than they would normally occupy by the heat of the flame, and as they fall back into their usual rest state this energy is given up as light of a particular frequency. Thus it is the change in energy of this process, the relation of two different states of oscillation, that reveals the particular identity of the metal. In the words of Plato, 'Whenever

we see anything in a process of change, for example fire, we should speak of it not as *being a thing* but as *having a quality*.'[60] Representational pattern can either map the location of an interaction, or the motion of a locale, but not both, which is to say, the motion of an interaction – the diagram is no longer sufficient; to employ all necessary dimensions one must move to the equation. (I am put in mind here of the physicist's attempt to model in two dimensions the warping of three-dimensional space by showing how heavy objects distort the regular grid pattern of a taut rubber sheet. This quite literally leaves a great deal to the imagination.) To attempt to represent the pattern of the object is to miss the object altogether, to encounter it only tangentially; representation of pattern-equation involves a mathematical differentiation of its actuality, be that with respect to time or space, with a consequent loss of information.

It is, then, perhaps unsurprising that Edmund Gurney in 1880 failed to make the leap to an Einsteinian relativistic frame of space-time, both conceived of as a single entity. And it is important to realize that this reconsideration of space involves more than just adding one more dimension: the move from space to space-time requires one to make one's own status part of the equation, in that the movement of the observer is a factor of the observed, as well as the reverse. Relations that were a question of distance are now functions of their velocities; the pattern is always-already motile. Henri Lefebvre writes:

> Modern science suggests that rather than think of space as a container or bodies as "things" in space, we grasp the organism as a centre for the production of space around itself – space is not external to the body but generated by it. ... Such analysis needs to be completed by a rhythm analysis in which time is then grasped in its spatial form. ... Spatial practice is on this level most concretely articulated in the various historical and cultural systems of *gestuality*.[61]

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[60] Plato. *Timaeus*, 49d, trans., Lee, H.D.P , (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 67.

[61] Lefebvre, H., cited as an unpublished manuscript dated 1983, quoted by Berland J., in 'Sound, Image and Social Space: Music Video and Media Reconstruction,' in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, p. 35.

The point is no longer just to identify where precisely something is in space, but to understand the way the entirety of space-time is engineered and modulated, its harmonies and discordances, and the way these oscillations resonate and interact. The simple algebra and diagrams above clearly no longer suffice, but there is a mathematics and a geometry in existence designed for this task, namely the mathematics of quantum mechanics and non-Euclidean geometry. The very difficult mathematics of quantum mechanics are way beyond the technical capabilities of the writer, but the concepts and phenomena they describe and predict enable considerable insight into notions of perception, and hence aesthetics. The idea that an object might simultaneously be a material entity and a set of oscillations, or rather, that these two things are one and the same, will be familiar to anyone who has studied elementary particle physics and the wave equations of Schrödinger that accompany it. The similarity between Barthes' assertion that the idea of signifiance is 'theoretically locatable but not describable'[62] and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which states that it is impossible to simultaneously know the position and momentum of a quantum particle-event, is all the more striking for the fact that they were almost certainly developed independently. The riddle of Schrödinger's cat was formulated to show the absurdity of observing quantum phenomena at the level of the object, but it told us more about rethinking our ways of perceiving the world than it did about flaws in quantum theory.

The model of relationality demonstrated the complexity of perception and object comparison, but it did not go nearly far enough. Basic algebra could show the quantitative aspect of pattern relation in simple numerative terms, but could tell us nothing about the quality of those relations in space-time: their oscillation, intensity, duration, in short, everything about an object that individuates it rather than simply quantifying it. The object is not number, but matrix, and the composite object extends in further dimensions still. Heisenberg showed that in quantum theory the combination of 1+1 could be performed in such a way as to equal more than two, and the complex commutation of matrix mechanics, developed to model the behaviour of material systems, shows that this is true of the physical realm also.

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[62] Barthes, R., 'The Third Meaning,' in *Image –Music-Text*, p. 65.

III

So far, so abstract, one might think, but this rethinking of the object inspired by Hanslick's formulation leads to a conception of identity (and thus composite identities) that has already been effected via a different route in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. They write:

> There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected.[63]

And they go on to show the presence of such individuations in the literature of Woolf and Proust, in *haiku* poetry, in an instance of rubato in Chopin. The problem is not that of finding and identifying haecceities, however, but of delimiting them. The haecceity occupies a range of registers of existence, fragmenting and exceeding what might be regarded as the classical conception of the 'object.' Having established a systemic model of relationality in the place of the object, the boundaries that demarcate 'object' have become fluid, if not invisible. This is not to say that the object is floating freely, unrestricted; if anything it is the reverse. Rather, the world itself, what might be termed *Lebenswelt* in the jargon of phenomenology, has been systematized, aestheticized. Barthes notes:

> Just as Einsteinian science demands that *the relativity of the frames of reference* be included in the object studied, so the combined action of Marxism, Freudianism and structuralism demands, in literature, the relativization of the relations of writer, reader and observer (critic). Over against the traditional notion of the *work*, for long – and still

[63] Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F., *op. cit.*, p. 261.

> – conceived of in a, so to speak, Newtonian way, there is now the requirement of a new object, obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories. That object is the *Text*[64]

The reassignation of the object as pattern 'demands' a shift from 'work' to 'text,' and consequently a new way of approaching the object, now a subset of 'world.' The full implications of Barthes' category of object that was 'locatable but not describable' now become apparent. The question of 'what' an object is, at least in its classical formulation of meanings, origins, causes and reasons, is not one that can be realistically answered; to do so would be to step outside one's own conceptual box, an attempt to 'use language to get outside language,'[65] to borrow Wittgenstein's formulation of the problem. For Barthes to describe what he perceived in the film still would require him to describe the entire culture, or 'form of life' in Wittgensteinian terms, the complete network of which that object, in all its complexity, was part. This is of course unfeasible, but is also in a way unnecessary, given there is likely to be considerable agreement in form of life between 'writer' and 'reader.' Thus one presents the space(s) occupied by the object in the network; one can say 'where' it is (or better, where it moves) rather than 'what' it is; the linguistic trace of this idea is made clear when we talk 'about' something, instead of speaking it exactly. As Barthes himself put it: 'textual analysis ... is henceforth less a question of explaining or even describing, than of entering into the play of the signifiers; of enumerating them, perhaps (if the text allows), but not hierarchising them.'[66] As with Wittgenstein's criticism of Freud, what is required is not (causal) explanation, but clarification of a perception, an attempt to 'confer blatancy on what was immanent to it.'[67] Aesthetic experience does not prompt a search for the origin of the source of that experience, but a

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[64] Barthes, R., 'From Work to Text,' in *Image-Music-Text*, p. 156.

[65] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Remarks*, trans. Hargreaves, R., and White, R., (Blackwell, Oxford, 1975), p. 54.

[66] Barthes, R., 'Theory of the Text,' in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Young, R., (Routledge, London and New York, 1981), p. 43.

[67] Cioffi, F., *op. cit.*, p. 202.

relation of that event to one's own previous experience and to the 'web of culture.'[68]

A further, and perhaps even more radical consequence of this conception of the world is the necessary binding of the subject to any consideration of the object. This idea has a long history (at least outside the Anglo-Saxon epistemological tradition[69]) that predates the work of Einstein by nearly a century. The Hegelian dialectic, predicated on the idea of locating an active subject position distinct from the secure subject of Cartesian epistemology, performs the same theoretical movement, such that 'Things exist in themselves, but their truth will emerge only through the steady incorporation of their determinations in the dialectical whole of Spirit. What makes the object truly itself is simultaneously what turns its face towards humanity, for the principle of its being is at one with the root of our own subjectivity.'[70] This subject, however, is not the same subject as that of the text, but an Ideal subject, present to itself. Idealist philosophy's avoidance of the sensuous materiality of art and language, and the production of the subject in this is outlined by Julia Kristeva, who sees in aesthetics a 'second overturning of the Hegelian dialectic' (the first being the political economy of Marx). It is not just that the subject considers the object in its self knowing, but is produced in and by the art object: 'The *subject* is only the *signifying process* and he appears only as a *signifying practice*, that is, only when he is absent *within the position* out of which social, historical, and signifying activity unfolds.'[71] The subject that is just a product of the system from which it emerges is a very different subject to that of either Kant or Hegel, and much closer to what Wittgenstein describes as a 'form of life.' In the linguistic universe of the later Wittgenstein, the notions of 'objective' and 'subjective' are stripped of their privileged connection to

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[68] The phrase is Gary Tomlinson's, but is derived from his reading of the sociologist Clifford Geertz. See 'The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology,' in *Nineteenth Century Music*, vol. 7, (1983-4), pp. 350-62.

[69] See the essay of Montefiore, A., and Taylor, C., 'From an analytical perspective,' that introduces Kortian, G., *Metacritique: The philosophical argument of Jürgen Habermas*, trans., Raffan, J., (Cambridge University Press, 1980), for a discussion of the relation the ideas of Hegel and Kant to the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition.

[70] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 122-3.

[71] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 215.

'reality.' They become different 'language-games,' different positions one might take up within the system of one's own form of life. Since the idea of a 'private language' is shown to be nonsensical by Wittgenstein, and language is the medium in which we apprehend the world, one's experience of the world is necessarily intersubjective. 'It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.'[72] Moreover, a Wittgensteinian 'language' is far more than the set of words that are available, but a composite of all the possible 'language-games,' or modes of expression, that are in use by a form of life. A language is thus a set of practices, based upon the culture and the capabilities of the group that use it. And as Jean-Jacques Nattiez notes, these practices may be so well ingrained as to no longer constitute a distinct set of actions in themselves, but instead be an unquestionable mode of being, stating 'among the Japanese, the succession "waiting followed by rapid and violent action" is less a literary structure than a typical schema of behaviour, a cultural scheme and a way of being.'[73] Hence, when Wittgenstein states that 'If a lion could talk, we could not understand him,'[74] the point is that the activity of being a lion is so different from our own as to be incomprehensible. As to the similarity of different human forms of life, Wittgenstein equivocates: on the one hand he states 'The common behaviour of mankind is a system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language,'[75] but on the other, 'One human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of a country's language. We do not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.)'[76] Thus the connection between different human 'languages' (in the broad sense) is like that between different language-games, insofar as there is overlap and familiarity, sufficient to comprehend what is going on. Unlike language-games, though, in order to *understand*, one must be familiar with the

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[72] Wittgenstein, L, *Philosophical Investigations*, §241.

[73] Nattiez, J.-J., 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?,' trans. Ellis, K., *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 115:2, p. 250.

[74] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 223.

[75] *Ibid.*, §206.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

system as a whole, to see not only the elements but also the way in which each is connected to the others. Understanding, and thus aesthetic appreciation, is a complex process of relation: one cannot properly understand either a part of the system alone, or the whole system from the outside. One must be part of that system. 'Does the theme point to nothing beyond itself? Oh yes! But that means: - The impression it makes on me is connected with things in its surroundings – e.g. with the existence of the German language and of its intonation, but that means with the whole field of our language games.'[77] A distinction between subject and object is no longer essential, for Wittgenstein, to aesthetic appreciation of an artistic practice. One does not explain the object, and one cannot explain the system, which constitutes one's own frame of reference; instead one clarifies the spatio-temporal relations of an artistic practice to other kinds of practices, or language-games.

This mode of *Weltanschauung* (world-understanding) is broadly compatible with that of Deleuze and Guattari, who similarly see fit to dispense with the notion of subject altogether, redesignating the systemic object and subject alike as haecceities:

> We must avoid an oversimplified connection, as though there were on the one hand formed subjects, of the thing or person type, and on the other hand spatiotemporal co-ordinates of the haecceity type. For you will yield nothing to haecceities unless you realize that that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that. ... It should not be thought that a haecceity consists simply of a décor or backdrop that situates objects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity.[78]

However, they do differ on how one regards the conditions of being for the system as a whole itself. For Deleuze and Guattari the formation of haecceities takes place in a defined space, the 'plane of consistency,' which is both 'a geometrical plane' and 'a plane of ... univocality.'[79] By contrast, the form of life is precisely not

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[77] Wittgenstein, L., *Culture and Value*, revised edition, ed., von Wright, G.H., (Blackwell, Oxford, 1998), 59e.

[78] Deleuze, G, and Guattari, F., *op. cit.*, p. 262.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

univocal: even though within the system one must understand the part holistically, the system as a whole lies outside the purview of any part of that system. Even though one understands the part holistically, the whole remains beyond understanding since it has no exterior point of reference. 'What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life*.'[80] The whole is not a unitary entity, but an emergent product of a collective energy, a 'plural totality' in Kristeva's terms. In this sense it is far closer to the Derridean reading of *chora* than it is to the 'plane of consistency.' 'It does not have the characteristics of an existent, by which we mean an existent that would be receivable in the *ontologic*, that is, those of an intelligible *or* sensible existent. There is *chora*, but *the chora* does not exist.'[81]

Derrida, of course, was addressing the idea of 'chora' in the light of the work of Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and she in turn had 'borrowed' (her own word) it from a passage of Plato's *Timaeus*.[82] Kristeva describes chora initially as being 'not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e., it is not yet a sign); nor is it yet a *position* that represents someone for another position (i.e., it is not yet a signifier either); it is, however, generated in order to attain to this signifying position. Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm,' and as 'a modality of signifiance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic.'[83] One can, however, draw a distinction between this relatively abstract notion of chora and the specific instance of the 'semiotic chora,' in which 'the social' 'imprints its constraint in a mediated form which organizes the *chora* not according to a *law* but through an *ordering*,'[84] (although it should be noted that

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[80] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 226.

[81] Derrida, J., 'Khora' (rewritten throughout as 'chora' for reasons of consistency), in *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*, ed. Wolfreys, J., (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 237.

[82] Plato, *ibid.*, 48d-53, pp. 67-72.

[83] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 26.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 27. It is also worth noting that Deleuze and Guattari briefly touch on (and reject) the idea of a 'semiotic chora' (*ibid.*, p. 65), but do not mention chora again, despite its similarity to their notion of the 'plane of consistency.'

Kristeva herself does not make this distinction explicit). In this process chora is made geometric, in as much as this ordering 'fixes the *chora* in place and reduces it.'[85] The idea of form of life seems to fall somewhere between this transition from the Platonic idea of chora, to an instance of *the* chora, through its habilitation into a Freudian system of drives, being neither so abstract as the former, nor as determined as the latter. As suggested above, the reading of chora that most readily approximates to the social and biological character of a form of life is that of Derrida, as when he writes:

> Chora "means," place occupied by someone, country, habited place, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory, or region. And in fact, *chora* will always already be occupied, invested, even as a general place, and even when it is distinguished from everything that takes place in it. Whence the difficulty ... of treating it as an empty or geometric, or even, and this is what Heidegger will say of it, as that which prepares the Cartesian space.[86]

It is this fusion of the abstract and the concrete achieved in the familiar Derridean 'always already' that makes this so similar to the 'form of life.' The positing of a capacity is coexistent with its realization, neither preceding the other. The social field does not expand into space; instead the expansion of the social generates a new space. There is a potential dynamism of the social in Derrida and Wittgenstein that Kristeva seems to close off, if not disavow entirely, in semiotizing chora through the body of the mother, and hence the Lacanian phallus.[87] It would be unfair to compare Kristeva to a dishonest taxi driver, as Cioffi does Freud,[88] that takes one on a gratuitously long journey to a destination that was round the corner, but there is a degree of this in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Having suggested that 'the semiotic *chora* is no more than the plane where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of

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[85] *Ibid.*, p. 240n 15.

[86] Derrida, J., 'Khora,' *op. cit.*, p. 246.

[87] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 26 and p. 241n.22.

[88] Although he is at this point writing in lieu of Wittgenstein. See Cioffi, F., *op. cit.*, p. 225.

charges and stases that produce him,'[89] and then demonstrated how this subject is then undone in and through language in the very act of his production, we are left in the end with linguistic and artistic practice.[90] The subject is offered only to be withdrawn, and what remains seems very much like the elements of a form of life, having been put through a psychoanalytic mill. However, although Kristeva has taken us a great distance only to arrive very close to where we started, she has furnished us with a range of analytic tools along the way. Wittgenstein (after Hegel) had already reconceived the object as a set of dynamic relations, as *khoros*, above all as practise: Kristeva performs this move all over again (in a more explicit way), but she also introduces the idea of the *social* in the form of the 'symbolic,' which brings a critical potential to the form of life that is often thought to be missing. Montefiore and Taylor note that 'To the Wittgensteinian, critical theorists may appear as just another band of fools rushing about over the ground which has just been so carefully cleared by the assembled reminders about the ways in which our language works; conversely, to critical theorists the Wittgensteinian may come across as preaching an obscurantist acceptance of the *status quo*.'[91] Kristeva shows that it is possible after all to understand chora or form of life *critically* through the theory of text (although this is only a partial understanding), without stepping outside one's own conceptual box (even if the Oedipal model of the social she deploys would have been an anathema to Wittgenstein in its determinism). If we return to an earlier analogy for a moment, it might be said that in the same way that gravity is a warping of space-time, such that bodies are not directly aware of this except so far as their motion is weighted towards a massive body, so the form of life/system distorts, but does not predetermine, the limits of one's horizon. And it is through an interrogation of the social that one can become aware of this process of distortion.

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[89] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 28.

[90] *Ibid.*, pt. IV, sec. 5, 'The Second Overturning of the Dialectic: After Political Economy, Aesthetics,' pp. 214-6.

[91] Montefiore, A., and Taylor, C., *op. cit.*, p. 21.

IV

Let us prepare to grapple with the ineffable, and see if we may not eff it after all.[92]

Given that the object has been superseded (at least theoretically) by a set of dynamic relations, it is worth asking how one begins to perceive anything from the mass of information the senses receive. How does one cut through the holism of the system so as to apprehend apparently discrete units, and what is the mode of that apprehension? Whether one turns to Hanslick or Wagner, Wittgenstein or Kristeva, there is a truly remarkable convergence of opinion on this topic; a reiteration of Hanslick's wish to reinstate the role of the sensuous in perception, grounded in the capacities of the human body. As Terry Eagleton notes, 'Thought, to be sure, is more than just a biological reflex: it is a specialized function of our drives which can refine and spiritualize them over time. But it remains the case that everything we think, feel and do moves within a frame of interests rooted in our "species being," and can have no reality independently of this.'[93] As discussed earlier, we need to understand our relationships to the *Lebenswelt* not only quantitatively, identifying connection, but also qualitatively, in identifying the properties of those relations, and one's means of doing this lie in the realm of the senses, of affect. This is a return to the original project of aesthetics as formulated by the eighteenth-century philosopher Alexander Baumgarten: an attempt to cognize the world of sensation that lay outside of Kantian reason. Although the discipline of aesthetics grew increasingly distant from its initial *raison d'être* over time, a strain of it remains in the thought of Schelling, of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, and has become a familiar trope of Cultural Studies over the past twenty years, to the extent that 'few literary texts are likely to make it nowadays into the new historicist canon unless they contain at least one mutilated body.'[94] A model based upon the idea that 'the physical and sensuous experience of human

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[92] Adams, D., *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, (Pan Books, London, 1988), p. 150.

[93] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 235.

[94] *Ibid* , p. 7.

beings and our bodily experience of the world'[95] is a prerequisite of understanding, will necessarily privilege the biological facts of the sense organs in our relation to the material. This is not to say, however, that different materials impacting on different sensory modes are irredeemably distinct to the extent that they are unrelatable: the semiotic chora is a 'continuum,'[96] and although each mode may have a specific type of pattern, it is pattern nonetheless. Acknowledging the material specificity, the 'untranslatability' of an object need not make a comparison of their affective qualities impossible, once they are grounded in 'the bottom of all purely human art – that of *plastic bodily movement*.'[97] Wittgenstein wrestled with this process of comparison for many years, particularly as it related to music, and finally concluded that 'there just is no paradigm there other than the theme. And yet again there *is* a paradigm other than the theme: namely the rhythm of our language, of our thinking and feeling. And furthermore the theme is a *new* part of our language, it becomes incorporated in it; we learn a new *gesture*.'[98] This adoption of the concept of gesture as a human equivalent (and not a representation) of a specific affective entity late in his career (the above was written just five years before his death), is an important step in his last writings, with wide-ranging ramifications.

It should be stressed that gesture as a term here encompasses a great deal more than gesticulation alone. Gesture is the resultant of the interaction of the material and the social, the negotiation of object and world; it is a spatio-temporal actualization or corporealization of what Idealists would term essence; it is the space-time of affect, where material becomes sensuous and intermingles with the social body in a specific pattern-event, two modes of oscillation combining to produce a movement, *khoros*. Here is the beating of the body in Barthes' 'Rasch,' the music affecting the body and the body *inside* the music.[99] When

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[95] Small, C., *op. cit.*, p. 104.

[96] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp. 28-9.

[97] Wagner, R., 'The Artwork of the Future,' *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[98] Wittgenstein, L., *Culture and Value*, p. 59e.

[99] This phrase is Robert Samuels', and is discussed in 'Music as text: Mahler, Schumann and issues in analysis,' in *Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music*, ed. Pople, A., (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 152-163.

Barthes asks 'What does my body know?'[100] the answer is gesture. Thus gesture is the subject and the object in combination; not a translation, not a representation, but thing and apprehension in one. As Paul Johnson puts it, in writing of music:

> The phrase says something, but something which cannot be paraphrased – it says itself It makes a unique gesture, but the significance of that gesture can be explored by relating it to the network of possibilities against which it has meaning. ... What is at stake is not the substitution of one general sign for another; rather it involves finding a link between two incommensurate realms, both of which get their importance from their connection to human life and feeling.[101]

Certainly this phenomenon, binding the material qualities of an object indissolubly to one's understanding of it, is easiest to recognize in music, unencumbered as it is by the need to represent anything outside of itself, but it is common to all objects. For Saussure the words tree, *Baum*, and *arbre* were interchangeable, despite the fact that this contradicted his own theories regarding the 'environment' of a word (see above). But for Wittgenstein the phonic constitution of a word creates a 'corona' that is key to the precision of its use (and hence meaning), as in his discussion of the concept of the 'if-feeling,' which compares the word with a musical phrase,[102] in such a way that 'the word [if] ... becomes a gesture of if-ness.'[103] One sees here, in this reclamation of the material, a restitution of the 'musicality' of language, but it might as well be the 'musicalization' of any object or art form. The Romantic encounter with 'the ineffable' that E.T.A. Hoffmann found in music seems to me to have been inextricably related to an encounter with the sensuous, since that which is inexpressible might be found in language also, hence Kristeva's analysis of symbolist poets. This is, however, the sensuous as social actant, and the 'inexpressible' as something held in the interstices of

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[100] Barthes, R., *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Howard, R., (Vintage, London, 2000), p. 9

[101] Johnson, P., *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1993), p. 110.

[102] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 181-3.

[103] Johnson, P., *op. cit.*, p. 116.

language, rather than a transcendence of the social. Indeed, the very idea of an encounter with the ineffable is rather odd, since if one encounters it, it must have been expressed: in Wittgenstein's words, 'if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then nothing gets lost. On the contrary, the unutterable will be – unutterably – contained in what has been uttered.'[104] And this same point is repeated time and again in Barthes' writing on the experience of *signifiance*, those moments where meaning is temporarily obliterated to reveal – the grain of the voice, that part of the cinematic image 'that does not represent anything,'[105] the phonism of speech (in 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers')[106] – much as the obliteration of the sun in an eclipse reveals its own, normally invisible, corona. In any moment where one ceases to pursue what Hanslick termed 'the chimera of meaning,'[107] the fullness of gesture, which is to say the undoing of one's own subjecthood in a dialectic of the social and the material, may be glimpsed.

Perhaps the most immediate aesthetic ramification of gesture, however, is its dynamism. The world of gesture is no longer a world of beings, but of doings, processes rather than products. Small writes: 'Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely.'[108] This reconceptualization of the abstract 'music' as the act of 'musicking' is the touchstone of Christopher Small's attempt to reinscribe the social character of music at the heart of the discipline, and indeed at the heart of all the arts, so as to render all artistic endeavour 'performative.' Furthermore, he states that the process of social inscription undertaken in musicking is such that 'The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies.'[109] Small's emphasis upon locating meaning is perhaps the reason for his repetition of the now familiar pursuit of unity, this time in the concept of ritual, which he terms 'the

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[104] Wittgenstein, L., in a letter to Paul Englemann, quoted in Johnson, P, *ibid.*, p. 115.

[105] Barthes, R , 'The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills,' in *Image-Music-Text*, p. 61.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

[107] Hanslick, E., *op. cit.*, p. 44

[108] Small, C., *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[109] *Ibid.*. p. 13.

great unitary art in which all of what we today call the arts ... have their origin.'[110] He is correct, however, it seems to me, in demonstrating that the idea of gesture, as a set of dynamic relations, is a means of successfully comparing (although not necessarily uniting) differing art forms.

The experience of a particularly striking aesthetic impression will almost always elicit a desire for knowledge and discussion of that experience, and the form that this takes is often the search for an explanation of the phenomenon. 'I should like to say: "These notes say something glorious, but I do not know what." These notes are a powerful gesture, but I cannot put anything side by side with it that will serve as an explanation.'[111] But as Wittgenstein suggests, to seek an explanation is to miss the point of the phenomenon. To 'explain' it, and find its 'meaning,' is to translate it into something else, to step away from the phenomenon that inspired one in the first place. Instead, what is required is an elucidation of the event, a clarification of the relationships involved: 'Understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. ... In order to 'explain' I could only compare it with something else which has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern).'[112] And as Cioffi notes, 'What this amounts to is an attempt to provide an equivalent in a different modality for the experience we wish to characterize or elucidate.'[113] The particular gesture that expresses an aesthetic experience is specific and untranslatable: one cannot explain it. One can, however, compare it to other gestures, relate it to previous experiences, both those with the same material component and without, in different modes. Velvet, double cream, the descending C^6 arpeggio played on the lower middle register of an old Moog synthesizer that opens the *Kid A* album by Radiohead: clearly these are entirely distinct phenomena, and yet there are underlying similarities that most people would recognize – their patterns of identity, gestures, overlap. As Barthes notes:

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[110] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[111] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, §610.

[112] *Ibid.*, §527.

[113] Cioffi, F., *op. cit.*, p. 69.

> Rhetorics inevitably vary by their substance (here articulated sound, there image, gesture, or whatever) but not necessarily by their form. ... Thus the rhetoric of the image (that is to say, the classification of its connotators) is specific to the extent that it is subject to the physical constraints of vision (different, for example, from phonatory constraints) but general to the extent that the 'figures' are never more than formal relations of elements.[114]

There is no overarching identity to unify and explain these similarities, but there are resemblances nevertheless, like those of a family, or the overlapping concepts that constitute the word 'game' for Wittgenstein. It follows that any response to an aesthetic phenomenon conceived of as gesture is always already a composite experience, cutting across different modes in such a way as to bring out resemblances without ever compromising specificity or identity. 'It is through *gesture* (i.e. rhythm of movement) that the spatial and temporal arts are linked. ... The two share a common temporal-spatial universe, albeit working within it to different ends.'[115] The distinction between different musical objects is perceived as readily as that between objects of similar gesture presented in different modes of perception. An apparent attempt to explore this notion can be observed in Michel Gondry's video to Daft Punk's 'Around the World.' The five musical instruments that make up the piece each have a commensurate group of four dancers, and their movement in musical space is echoed by the choreography of the dancers around a small circular set. Thus the rising and falling of the bass line coincides with the ascending and descending of a set of steps of the 'bass' dancers, and as each instrument comes to the fore the choreography determines that the commensurate group of dancers is either foregrounded or highlighted by the selection of camera shot, until all move in unison at the end. The mirroring is not absolutely precise, and the characterization of each instrument (the drums as bandaged mummies, the synthesizer as women in sequinned bathing suits and caps) is clearly an invention, increasing points of relation, rather than a replication,

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[114] Barthes, R., 'The Rhetoric of the Image,' in *Image-Music-Text*, p. 49. *N.B.* Barthes' use of 'gesture' here is different to my own usage.

[115] Kershaw, D., 'Music and Image on Film and Video: An Absolute Alternative,' in *The Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, ed. Paynter, J., *et al*, (Routledge, London and New York, 199?), p. 497.

but the degree of similarity is sufficient to produce an overlap of gestural mode. The interaction of musical elements being recreated in the interaction of dancers allows one to appreciate similarity and difference of gesture across modes of perception as well as within them.

Indeed, in a *Lebenswelt* constituted by overlapping gestures, the very notion of what is 'composite' becomes rather suspect. As Wittgenstein outlines in *Philosophical Investigations* (§§47-8), the idea of what is composite is determined by the register at which one observes, the language-game that is in use at the time. 'Composite' is always a relative term, since any object is composite at some level, right down to and including elementary particles. Identifying what is composite eventually comes down to clarifying what sort of practice one is engaged in.

The description of music video as being a composite art now becomes a rather less important aspect of how one approaches it, since both image track and sound track might equally be regarded as being composite themselves, and the video as a whole is one part of the composite that is the culture in which it is experienced. As Stan Hawkins reminds us, perception does not stop at the edges of the screen: 'The viewer's sense of imagination soon exceeds the boundaries of the visual image. In other words, the sense of perception becomes altered through visual images in a manner that shapes, enhances and even detracts from our experience of the music on its own.'[116] Sound and image may be recognizable as distinct types of gesture, and normal analytic practice would be to make that distinction, but that does not of itself prevent effective and valid comparisons between the two being made, indeed, the complementation of their qualities upon one another might be said to demand this. The gestures of the one may or may not resonate with some, all or none of the other, and within themselves, for it should be stressed that the act of comparison need not be focussed solely upon resemblance: for two gestures to resonate, or 'sound well' together as 'chords' (to borrow Schoenberg's model for *Die glückliche Hand*) they need not be the same, indeed, it is preferable if they are not. Better that they are in proportion, or play off one another. For example, the video to Robbie Williams's 'Let Love be Your Energy' is characterized by an animated Williams running through a series of

[116] Hawkins, S., 'Perspectives in Popular Musicology,' in *Popular Music* 15, (1996), p. 32.

landscapes. At no point does the rhythm of his running equate to the underlying rhythm of the music, but for a short time (approximately twenty seconds) while he runs across a shining sea at a slightly higher rate, there is a relation between his running rate (around 233 beats per minute) and the beat of the music (exactly 89 beats per minute) that has an almost magical effect. To ask whether this is due solely to their relative proportions (which is incidentally that of a doubled Golden Section proportion, insofar as both are Fibonacci numbers and have a Golden Section relation to the intermediate Fibonacci number 144),[117] or to its relation to what has gone before, or the way the celebratory brassy fanfares of the chorus echo the glinting of light on the water, is to ask the wrong question. It is of course due to all of these things in part, some more than others, and many more besides, but suffice to say it is not because they are 'the same.' Plato describes a similar process, noting 'the various bodies part or come together in the course of mutual interchanges of position and what seems like magic is due to the complication of their effects on each other.'[118]

And where there are similarities, or isomorphisms, these need not mean an equivalence of identity. One might compare the phenomenon of sympathetic resonance in strings, where the upper partials of a sound will provoke a response on strings of a certain proportional relation, with a different pitch to the original, and given sufficient strength of input this would in turn produce its own upper partials, so that a system of great complexity can be generated from simple rules. This tendency of simple inputs to generate complex outcomes, such that similarities might be observed across the system in differing registers, without compromising the specificity of the part or the diversity of the system as a whole, is described by the mathematics of chaos theory, and based upon the idea of the fractal. Fractal mathematics can be observed in a range of apparently random phenomena: cloud formation, air turbulence, or crystal growth, to pick up Varèse's analogy. It can

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[117] For a detailed discussion of Golden Section proportions as they might be related to music, see Lendvai, E., *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of his Music*, (Kahn & Averill, London, 1971).

[118] Plato, *ibid.*, 80, pp 107-8.

also be seen in music analysis,[119] and in the technology used to compress and store digital images. In terms of analysis, this means that two very different gestures may have an underlying similarity that is difficult to discern, and also that combining even two very simple gestures can produce a chain that resembles neither. To say that the world is a complex place is not to say much, but it does demonstrate that any attempt to analyse a music video would barely touch the surface of what it might offer, and also that to concentrate on identifying 'the similar' would be likely to miss even that limited target.

V

> It is not idle bickering to argue emphatically against the concept of "representation," since from this concept have arisen the most serious errors in the aesthetics of music. To "represent" something always involves the notion of two separate, dissimilar things, of which one must be intentionally related to the other through a particular mental act.[120]

Where meaning seeks to reduce the object, to translate it, represent it, and efface its materiality in favour of the ideal, gesture is its antithesis, pluralizing, opening the object out onto the world. Meaning fixes the *khoros* of gesture, geometricizes its oscillations: 'here would be instituted against music (against the text), *representation*.'[121] In an essay on Bertolt Brecht, Barthes writes, 'One of the tasks of a critical age is precisely to pluralize the object, to separate pleasure from the sign; we must de-semanticize the object (which does not mean de-symbolize it),

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[119] See Madden, C., *Fractals in Music: Introductory Mathematics for Musical Analysis*, (High Art Press, Salt Lake City, 1999), and also a rather more poetic account in Adams, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 144-7.

[120] Hanslick, E., *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

[121] Barthes, R., 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' in *The Responsibility of Forms*, p. 89.

give the sign a shock: let the sign *fall*, like a shed skin.'[122] And it is Brecht that seeks to make a synthesis of these opposites, in the concept of the *social gestus*: 'a gesture, or set of gestures, in which can be read a whole social situation.'[123] Brecht resisted the totalized meaning – his plays are not constructed with a final, single moral in mind, to be reified and taken home. His plays are active, the gesture is given to be taken up and used, but he remains committed to meanings, an engagement with the social order made on the terms of that society. The Brechtian gesture, *gestus*, is extracted from its aesthetic bodily origin, and 'promoted' to the standing of reason by virtue of its capacity for meaning. The gesture, insofar as it is an entity of perception, is always already socialized, but it maintains a certain stubborn materiality, signifiance, at work on the social, undoing it. The *gestus* has already abandoned this process in favour of meaning, and no sooner has it done this than it has become re-presentation, divorced from its materiality. In Kristevan terms, it has privileged phenotext at the expense of genotext.

And this process will recur every time there is a search for meaning: Small notes that 'the convention of the concert hall denies them [musicians] any expressive use of bodily gesture, confining them to gestures in sound that are made through their instruments. The art of representation has alienated itself completely from the human body and its gestures.'[124] Small has partially recognized the problem; what he describes is in large part the phenotext of a performance, but he seems so intent on uncovering the *meanings* of the relationships a performance sets up, the non-meaning aspects of sound that have a more directly somatic appeal, the genotext, in short, (although this rather oversimplifies Kristeva's categories), has been overlooked. He is by no means alone in this intent: Adorno is not only concerned with eliciting meaning, but is positively hostile to anything that might cloud this. 'Many of the cultural products bearing the anti-commercial trademark "art for art's sake" show traces of

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[122] Barthes, R., 'Brecht and Discourse: A Contribution to the Study of Discursivity,' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Howard, R., (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), p. 222.

[123] Barthes, R., 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[124] Small, C., *op. cit.*, p. 155.

commercialism in their appeal to the sensational or in the conspicuous display of material wealth and sensuous stimuli at the expense of the meaningfulness of the work.'[125] Astute as Adorno may be on the circumstances surrounding the rise of the slogan 'art for art's sake,' one might suspect that he has fallen prey to what Benjamin notes as 'The obligatory misunderstanding of *l'art pour l'art*. For art's sake was scarcely ever to be taken literally; it was almost always a flag under which sailed a cargo that could not be declared because it still lacked a name.'[126] Adorno's requirement of 'meaningfulness' from the art object becomes paradoxical for a Marxist critic after Kristeva's suggestion that 'communication is *merchandise*,'[127] an idea also implicit in Wittgenstein's assertion that meaning is commensurate with use.

How, then, is one to 'escape the tyranny of meaning,'[128] where are the lines of flight? It is worth contrasting the notion of 'the social' with that of 'the collective.' If the social is the site of meaning, *status quo*, what Freud termed the 'Superego,' the collective is the social made aware of its non-meaning, material aspect: a Bakhtinian carnivalesque entity. Where the *gestus* of Brecht is socialized throughout, the collective 'gesture' retains some of its affective charge, remains unfixed, as *khoros*. The very idea of a stimulus acting directly upon the body demands a response that is by its very nature collective, which itself takes the form of movement, of gesture. It is in no sense coincidental that the notion of the chorus in Greek tragedy is etymologically bound to *khoros*, movement. 'The chorus is the human collectivity confronting the event and seeking to understand it.'[129] It stood as a bulwark against the intrusion of 'meaning' into the form of the tragedy, giving a physical response to the physical challenges posed by the Fates. Barthes notes:

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[125] Adorno, T W., 'How to Look at Television,' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. Bernstein, J.M., (Routledge, London, 1991), p. 137.

[126] Benjamin, W., 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' in *Reflections*, trans. Jephcott, E., (Schocken, New York, 1986), pp. 183-4.

[127] Barthes, R., 'Kristeva's *Semieotike*,' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Howard, R., (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), p. 170.

[128] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' in *Image-Music-Text*, p. 185.

[129] Barthes, R , 'The Greek Theatre,' in *The Responsibility of Forms*, p. 82.

> As the interrogation shifts to increasingly intellectual forms, tragedy evolves toward what we today call drama, even bourgeois comedy, based on conflicts of characters, not on conflicts of fate. And what marks this change of function is specifically the gradual atrophying of the interrogative element, i.e., of the chorus.[130]

In the face of drama and of narrative, individuals placed in meaningful relation to one another, there is no longer a place for the chorus, for collectivity. To narrate is to situate the characters, to map out and fix the relations between dramatic protagonists. But where there is only pseudo-narrative, in profoundly non-dramatic scenarios, in short, in music video, there the role of collectivity might flourish. The emphasis music videos place upon the scene, the resonant image or 'pregnant moment,' demands a collective response. Music video's refusal to posit a single meaning, to 'fix' itself so as to become a representation, marks it as text rather than object. The only other form that the music video could be compared to is the channel 'ident,' which has a similar striking-yet-enigmatic character that refuses to volunteer a meaning of its own. Both might be described as culturally parasitic, since they are dependent upon a process of association, based on gestural comparison, for releasing any kind of meaning, which is in any case always plural. Music video generates not a meaning but a process, a space that the perceiver might enter into to *make* meaning, or simply revel in material sensation.

In his critique of Wagner, Adorno recognized that the revolutionary claims of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* were an impossibility, by trying to embody the collective whilst being founded upon the 'genius' of a bourgeois individual.[131] Music video is not a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in this sense of the term, but it may not be so far from Wagner's stated ideals, as expressed when he wrote: 'No-one can be better aware than myself, that the realization of this [music] drama depends on conditions which do not lie within the will, nay, not even the capability of the single individual – were this capability infinitely greater than my own – but only in community, and in a mutual cooperation made possible thereby.'[132] In resisting the unity of meaning and representation, and remaining unfinished, processual, and

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[130] *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

[131] Adorno, T.W., *In Search of Wagner*, pp. 110ff.

[132] Wagner, R., quoted in Adorno, T.W., *ibid.*, p. 113.

stubbornly material, the music video allows for the possibility of seeing beyond the social and enabling 'the very transcendence of egotism.'[133] The aim of an aesthetics of music video 'is no longer the platitudinous one of Beauty: it is festivity.'[134]

[133] Barthes, R., 'One Always Fails in Speaking of What One loves,' in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 305.

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

The Technological Body

I

c. 375 B.C., Athens

> This is the kind of lawlessness that easily insinuates itself unobserved [through music] ... because it is supposed to be only a form of play and to work no harm. Nor does it work any, except that by gradual infiltration it softly overflows upon the characters and pursuits of men and from these issues forth grown greater to attack their business dealings, and from these relations it proceeds against the laws and the constitution with wanton license until it finally overthrows all things public and private. ... For the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions.[1]

The notion of aesthetics as a separate discipline, distinct from philosophy as a whole only took place in 1750 with the publication of Alexander Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*, and one senses in Immanuel Kant's 'rigorous demarcation of aesthetic judgement from the cognitive, political and ethical realms'[2] a few years later, the promotion of an ideological agenda as much as the genuine idea of an entirely new field of thought. Although aesthetics was supposed to circumvent questions of ethics and politics by focussing upon the point of sensation, prior to this the (as yet undefined) field of aesthetics, and music aesthetics in particular, were

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[1] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Shores, P., Loeb Classical Library, (Putnam's, New York, 1930), quoted in Attali, J., *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Massumi, B., (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985), pp. 33-4.

[2] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 9.

inextricably bound to their socio-ethical import. In the time of Plato, *aisthetikos* could not be considered apart from *ethikos*. (The same is increasingly true today also; witness Simon Frith's assertion that 'aesthetic response is, by its nature, an ethical agreement.'[3]) The power that Plato ascribes to music in *The Republic* and elsewhere, as having the capacity to either mould the model citizen, or else, as with 'those who dance to the Phrygian mode, releasing what is lowest and wildest in their nature,'[4] is one that is intimately connected with the social order. The process of social engineering through sound is to take place in conjunction with gymnastics, 'not because *mousike* is good for the soul, physical exercise for the body, as most people imagine, but because these two aspects of education are complementary and mutually corrective.'[5] Thus for Plato the establishment or disestablishment of social order takes place through music (and physical training) in a way that is inextricable from its affective qualities, or as Adorno put it, 'Music represents at once the immediate manifestation of impulse and the locus of its taming.'[6]

The idea that music is doubly inscribed, at once enacting (and producing) the social order from which it emanates and simultaneously prefiguring the idealized model of a 'society yet to come,' embodying a set of relationships other than those it partakes in, is a fruitful one. What for Plato was a relatively straightforward proscriptive distinction between 'good' modes and 'bad' modes of music, however, is now understood as a much more complicated set of dialectical relations between music and society. Frith neatly articulates this tension, writing:

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[3] Frith, S., *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996), p. 272.

[4] Scruton, R , *The Aesthetics of Music*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997), p. 390.

[5] Abrahams, G., *The Concise Oxford History of Music*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979), p. 32, although Abrahams is closely paraphrasing a passage from Plato's *Republic*, see Strunk, O. (ed), *Source Readings in Music History: Antiquity and The Middle Ages*, (W W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 1950), p. 12.

[6] Adorno, T.W., 'On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening,' in *The Culture Industry*, ed. Bernstein, J.M., (Routledge, London, 1991), p 26.

> What music does (all music) is put into play a sense of identity that may or may not fit the way we are placed by other social forces. Music certainly puts us in our place, but it can also suggest that our social circumstances are not immutable. ... It may be that, in the end, I want to value most highly that music, popular and serious, which has some sort of disruptive cultural effect, but my argument is that music only does this through its impact on individuals, and that this impact is obdurately social.[7]

The idea that music can both be formed by society and actively construct collective identity in the same instant is what makes its social status such a thorny problem, or a revolutionary potential, depending upon one's approach. The complexity of the problem is doubled in relation to music video, not least because it involves a combination of music, seen as a collectivizing force, and television, which is typically regarded as a dividing, individuating medium. However, as with Frith's 'good' music, the primary impulse upon seeing a particularly striking and enigmatic music video is a social one; as with Frith's aesthetic response to hearing a favourite track on the radio in a hotel room, 'I wish there were someone to play this to.'[8] My desire to discuss the music video with others, to clarify its status, to *make* meaning, is perhaps evidence of Andrew Goodwin's premise that music video is 'the *making musical* of the television image,' such that 'Television is musiced.'[9] (Or one might say, after Chris Small, television is 'musicked.') In return, music video may lay bare certain aspects of popular music, either directly, or indirectly by deliberate omission of the expected, making explicit the social qualities implicit in music. One might cite the instance of The Wiseguys' 'Start the Commotion' as a particularly clear example of this reciprocity. Like much modern dance music it is constructed through the principle of 'sampling' older records, and this track is made almost entirely from scraps of preexisting musical material that are cut up, looped and repeated. The video is similarly constructed from a set of fourteen fragments of performance footage (one for each auditory source plus footage of a DJ, one of The Wiseguys), all filmed separately on the same set and then intercut to match the music, or to preempt and cue a sample's 'entrance,' but always paced

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[7] Frith, S., *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, pp. 276-7.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 278.

[9] Goodwin, A., *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Music*, p. 70.

in such a way as to reinforce the rhythm of the track. Although each of these fragmentary 'performances' take place against the same sparse backdrop, all are costumed appropriately, with the dress, hairstyles, and gestural mannerisms that one might expect of the time period and genre of the musical samples. Thus the folk-style flute sample is 'played' by a long-haired, corduroy-clad 'folkie,' perched on a high stool, whilst the rock guitar and drum sound that underpins the track is 'performed' by a Rolling Stones-style four piece band, complete with a strutting, pouting singer. The only two performers in contemporary apparel are the rapper that presents the bulk of what are presumably new (with the track) lyrics, although his performance is visually 'sampled' in the same way as the other musical elements, and the DJ, seen leafing through records before a single Dansette-type turntable. Although the DJ-creator of the track does not produce any of the sonic material himself, his role as composer (literally) of the track is being deliberately presented in the image track, despite the fact that there is no 'performance' as such to show. (This Hitchcock-like presence of non-'performing' DJ composers is quite common in dance tracks; witness the peripheral presence of both the Chemical Brothers and Fat Boy Slim, on T-shirts, paintings, or as 'extras' in many of their videos.)

The video to 'Start the Commotion' makes overt the latent (social) content of the music track, its historical points of reference and its means of production, but one performs this connection of music to its so-called 'extra-musical' meaning at a subconscious (if not unconscious) level every time one listens to any piece of music. An educated listener (and by educated I simply mean socially practised, a form of life, rather than trained) is capable of making these associations, Peircean indexical relationships, almost instantaneously. The principle is illustrated in an obvious way in this music video by doubling up the 'social content' of the music in the image to a large extent, (although not completely: there are subtle connotations to the setting, facial expressions, and a myriad of others not immediately present in the sound, and vice versa – as Cook puts it, neither exhausts the signification of the other). But the same forces are at work, in either a complementary or dialectical relationship, in every music video. And the binding of image, a much more clearly socialized medium insofar as it is based upon the notion of representation, with the potentially socially disruptive music is to raise the stakes somewhat, perhaps even to demand a Kristevan 'semanalysis' that 'would

mean the interrogation of the fundamental matrix of our civilization grasped in its ideological, neuralgic locus.'[10] Certainly when she writes 'semanalysis needs to provide itself with a *specific object* which the traditional modes of analysis are incapable of grasping in all its specificity,'[11] she might as easily be talking of music videos rather than the poetic texts to which she devotes her attention. Indeed, Kristeva identifies the importance of the 'poetic musicality found in "symbolist" poetry and in Mallarmé,'[12] and also suggests that through 'musicality' 'Logical syntheses and all ideologies are ... displaced toward something that is no longer within the realm of the idea, sign, syntax, and thus Logos, but is instead simply semiotic functioning.'[13] Kristeva does not follow up these suggestive statements with specific reference to music, but I believe it would be fair to state that music video does involve a calling into question of the Stoic sign, which is Kristeva's stated aim for 'semanalysis.'

Before continuing, it is worth outlining a few distinctions that are required in a discussion of 'the social' so as to prevent confusion, namely distinguishing precisely what is meant by the concepts of 'the individual' and 'the social,' and differentiating between 'the social' and 'the collective,' a distinction which Frith (amongst others) fails to make, or at least make explicit. The category of 'the social' is a difficult one either to embrace or reject entirely, particularly for those of a 'leftist' persuasion (so far as this is still a useful positional term). For while on the one hand there are those who would wish to rescue 'society' from the wastebasket of history that it was thrown towards by Margaret Thatcher's now infamous proclamation that 'There is no such thing as society,' it is difficult at the same time to argue in favour of the heavy handed wielding of state power that is implied in the term 'social order.' The valorization of the individual in modern Western thought, often under the rubric of democracy, has been driven in recent times from two independent sources almost simultaneously, both in opposition to these differing conceptions of 'society:' namely in a 'freeing' of the self from an oppressive 'social order' as a strain of the 1960s counterculture, and also in the withdrawal of the

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[10] Kristeva, J., 'The Semiotic Activity,' *Screen*, 14, (1973), p. 34.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[12] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 153.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

individual from social responsibility in late-1970s free marketeering, or 'monetarism.'[14] Thus, the notion of 'the individual' became a catch-all term that acted as a lightning rod to a range of ideas united in their opposition to varying concepts of 'the social,' even though they were themselves often in opposition to one another. Although both hippies and Thatcherites set themselves against society and the state in the name of freedom, in each case their conception of the role and extent of society was distinct: the state power that constituted 'social order' was understood as an oppressive, or better, repressive force, functioning like a Freudian paternal 'Superego,' and indeed the Freud family was closely involved with both the British and American governments and corporations for a time before and especially after World War II. The state conceived of as an expression of society from the 'bottom up,' and seen by Thatcherites to infringe individual freedoms, and more particularly individual capital, bore little resemblance to the understanding of the 1960s counterculture, besides a general idea of an impersonal bureaucracy, but an unholy alliance between the two heralded the triumph of a form of individualism and a consequent decline in the status of the communal, the public. One might compare Benjamin's observation that 'the masses are brought face to face with themselves,'[15] in the newsreels of the 1930s with the contemporary fixation with individuated personalities on 'reality' shows such as 'Big Brother' on television. It is because both the 'top down' and the 'bottom up' models fall under the term 'the social' that so much confusion arises, particularly in relation to the contradictory powers of music – one might compare Plato's 'good' modes to the 'top down' model of the social, and the disruptive modes such as the Phrygian to the 'bottom up' model. If one now divides 'the social' into two distinct terms reflecting these two distinct models (regardless of their inevitable overlap in practice), into a top down 'social ordering,' and a bottom up 'collective,' a better understanding of these contradictory strains

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[14] These ideas were explored in much greater depth in the BBC television series 'Century of the Self,' broadcast in the Winter and Spring of 2002. The following discussion draws in part on these programmes.

[15] Benjamin, W., 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Illuminations*, ed. Arendt, H., trans. Zohn, H., (Fontana, London, 1973), p. 243n.21.

in music becomes available. Thus the individualism of the 1960s opposed 'social ordering,' whereas Thatcherite individualism was set against 'the collective.'

Freudian theory suggested that social ordering was both necessary and desirable, repressing the base motives of the collective 'id,' or 'the mob' as it could equally be termed, in order to function in any kind of society (hence, *Civilization and its Discontents*). (It is interesting to note that the word 'mob' is derived from the Latin *mobile*, and semantically close to the Greek *khoros*.) Followers of Wilhelm Reich, a student of Freud's who rejected this idea, including Adorno's contemporary Herbert Marcuse, famously pronounced 'There is a policeman in our heads; he must be destroyed.' However, the atomized individuals produced by this form of psychoanalysis lacked any kind of coherent political agency; as the Black Panther group realized when they were invited to participate at this school, as soon as one renounced collective identity, one lost the political power that the collective could call upon. Since the collective is not an object but a set of relations between individuals, it has a far greater resistive capacity to social control than any one individual, no matter how liberated. Conversely, however, a communal identity is difficult to direct, and thus liable to favour the *status quo*, but it does at least have the potential to challenge. The answer was not to destroy 'the policeman in our heads,' but collectively to take control of it and restrict and redirect the power it held over the individual.

In this bifurcated vision of society, 'social reality,' that is, the everyday circumstances of people, occurs at the interface of collective will, such as it is, and state power/social ordering (and by 'state' I shorthand both government, nominally itself an expression of collective will in a democracy, and also a range of non-governmental corporate interests – what was once known as the 'military-industrial complex'), so that in the absence of any collective will expressed in the notion of 'the public' there is only state power, and a utopia would be a destruction of the state, leaving only collective will in genuine and total consensus. Thus any attempt to produce an effect upon social reality must involve a stimulation of collective conscience, and here can be seen why Plato credited music, rather than any other art form, with the power to either support or destroy the social order. Music has the capacity to short circuit the officially sanctioned practices of aesthetic understanding, to bypass representation and translation into an ideal. As Frith puts it, 'Music can stand for, symbolize *and* offer the immediate experience of

collective identity. Other cultural forms – painting, literature, design – can articulate and show off shared values and pride, but only music can make you *feel* them.'[16] The idea of music appealing directly to the nervous system, the waves of sound impacting upon the body as a purely somatic phenomenon, as with Nietzsche's 'physiological objections'[17] to the music of Wagner, which caused his stomach to 'protest' and his heart and bowels to 'fret,' is one illustrated in the video to Fat Boy Slim's 'Ya Mama.' Here a tape of the track causes uncontrollable physical movement in the listener, an experience which people pay for via access to headphones. When the music is 'set free,' broadcast on normal speakers, social chaos results, and the police move in to put a stop to it and arrest those responsible. Comparisons between this video and the early 'Acid House' movement in the late 1980s are irresistible. When the holding of outdoor 'raves' began to attract groups of upwards of ten thousand people together in the summer of 1988, dubbed at the time a second 'summer of love' (after the late 1960s), there was a deliberate cultivation of a sense of communality through the new form of 'house' music and its attendant culture, 'One Nation Under a Groove,' as a record of the time put it. Presented with large numbers of people basically dancing in a field, the response of the Conservative government was astonishing in its scope, swiftly passing draconian legislation as part of the Criminal Justice Act that prohibited the outdoor playing of music 'wholly or predominantly characterized by repetitive beats' to even small groups of people. Large numbers of police were deployed to first force raves into indoor spaces such as warehouses, and then close them down altogether. Although undoubtedly a great inconvenience to the inhabitants of whichever rural community these raves might gather near to, the swiftness and scale with which the government cracked down on any uncontrolled musical gathering was educational. The social consequences of even a relatively small collective musical conscience forming outside established channels of

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[16] Frith, S., 'Towards an aesthetic of popular music,' in Leppert, R. and McClary, S. (eds), *Music and Society the politics of composition, performance and reception*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), p. 140.

[17] Nietzsche, F., 'Nietzsche contra Wagner: The Brief of a Psychologist,' in *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: vol. III*, trans. Common, T., (T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1899), p. 69.

commerce (represented by the 'superclubs' that formed in the wake of this) was not something the state was prepared to sanction.

If music and music video then have this charge, this social power, can anyone explain why 'Top of the Pops' doesn't bring people out onto the streets, or why one's local branch of HMV isn't a hotbed of revolutionary fervour? The absurdity of the question is ample proof that one can easily overestimate the oppositional power of the collective, inclined as it is to reflect the status quo rather than rise up against it in a politically engaged way, but it is also a reminder that music is in no sense independent of social reality even while it may articulate an alternative to that reality. 'Short-circuiting' the straightforwardly representative artistic model of social reality does not necessarily evade the influence of the social entirely. This is of course the birthplace of critical musicology, and more particularly of the dialectical approach of Theodor Adorno. In Adorno's aesthetic theory it is the very capacity of music to speak outside of the social that enables its relation to the social to be stated: 'Works of art – like all precipitates of the objective spirit – are the object itself. They are the concealed social essence quoted as the phenomenon. ... While works of art hardly ever attempt to imitate society and their creators need know nothing of it, the gestures of the works of art are objective answers to objective questions.'[18] It is not the case that one simply recognizes a replication of the social order in music, but a question of absence, of what the music is *not*, and can not be, that enables critical reception and Adorno's 'negative dialectics.' As Max Paddison puts it: 'The relationship between the social totality and the "autonomous" realm of art is thus misrepresented if reduced to any crude form of reflectionist theory, or to functionalism. The emphasis is rather on *mediation*.'[19] The intensely dialectical nature of Adorno's method of argument frequently resembles the actions of a tightrope walker, constantly checking himself and often giving the impression of self-contradiction: his attitude towards the relation of the individual to the collective is especially contorted, as when he writes 'In music, too, collective powers are liquidating an individuality past saving, but

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[18] Adorno, T.W., *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Mitchell, A.G. and Blomster, W.V., (Sheed & Ward, London, 1973), pp. 131-2.

[19] Paddison, M., *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, (Kahn & Averill, London, 1996), p. 49.

against them only individuals are capable of consciously representing the aims of the collectivity.'[20] At other times, as in his writing on Stravinsky, the collective is at once an attack upon 'comfortable conformity with individualistic society,'[21] and also akin to a Freudian mob. What remains constant, however, is his commitment to a form of aesthetic engagement dependent upon the location and critique of musical 'meaning,' to which end was developed his technique of 'immanent analysis.' The problematic character of Adorno's 'musical material,' as identified by Carl Dahlhaus, is discussed by Paddison elsewhere,[22] and there is little point in replicating his arguments here, but the very real achievement of Adorno here is to transpose the straightforward 'what' question of meaning into a 'how' question, an analysis of productive forces, a dialectical *process* that marks the dissolution of the distinction between 'musical' and 'extra-musical.' 'The rudiments of external meanings are the irreducibly non-artistic elements in art. Its formal principle lies not in them, but in the dialectic of both moments – which accomplishes the transformation of meanings within it.'[23] Despite his many disagreements with popular musicologists, it is this insight, which underpins his critical project, that has been fundamental to a large part of recent musicology, and provided it with a critical edge that might otherwise have been lacking. Artistic endeavour is not merely a resultant of social order, but is also formative in one's experience of that order, in an ongoing dialectic with the consumer of that art. As Adorno wrote in a criticism of Benjamin's work on Baudelaire, 'The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness; rather it is dialectical, in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness.'[24]

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[20] Adorno, T.W., 'On the fetish character in music and the regression in listening,' *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[21] Adorno, T.W., *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 159. See the entire section 'Identification with the Collective.'

[22] Paddison, M., *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture*, pp. 117-24, and also in the same author's *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993).

[23] Adorno, T.W., 'Commitment,' trans. McDonagh, F., in *Aesthetics and Politics*, (Verso, London and New York, 1980), p. 178.

[24] Adorno, T.W., 'Letters to Walter Benjamin,' trans. Zohn , H., in *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 111.

Given all of this, it becomes difficult to reconcile this analytic technique with his repeated insistence upon the complete and finished 'work of art' as product rather than continuing process, the very idea that there might be such a thing as a separating out of the 'message in a bottle' and its instance of reception. 'The objectivity of art lies in the fixation of such moments. Works of art are similar to those childish grimaces which the striking of the clock causes to become permanently fixed.'[25] Adorno's dialectic only works in one direction – all *work* is done in artistic production, what Nattiez terms *poiesis*. The object may be formative of the subject, but only the social composer-artist as subject is involved in the production of art-as-product. It is this belief in the fundamental passivity of the audience at the moment of reception that is the greatest flaw in Adorno's thought (at least with regard to popular music[26]), most evident in his undervaluing of the impact of sensory perception and the difficulty of relating his theory to the somatic realm. His critique of Stravinsky in the *Philosophy of Modern Music*[27] is based almost entirely on the charge of a reification of sound material and its withdrawal from the dialectic, which is based in turn upon a questionable notion of the body in music (a notion which is by no means restricted to Adorno).

One can detect two rather different approaches to the issue of the body in music in Adorno's writings, in his earlier discussions of mass culture, and in his approach to Stravinsky respectively. The writings on mass culture are potentially more optimistic, insofar as this can ever be said of Adorno, for although he seems to repress the issue of the body, to avoid discussing it at all, when it does briefly appear it resembles the physiological site of resistance one encounters relatively frequently in writing on popular music. In his essay 'On the fetish character in music and the regression in listening' he pointedly distinguishes between the 'mendacity' of aesthetic pleasure, and physical response (which is theoretically

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[25] Adorno, T.W., *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 132. Adorno was so fond of this analogy that he reused it in 'The Schema of Mass Culture,' *op. cit.*, p. 82.

[26] For more detail on this point, and on the connection of this to Adorno's reaction to fascism see Middleton, R., *Studying Popular Music*, (Open University Press, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 34-63.

[27] A better translation would be *Philosophy of New Music*, as Paddison chooses to call it, but I have retained the title as translated in the English edition throughout for the sake of consistency.

tenable if hermeneutically questionable) in stating: 'Enjoyment still retains a place only in the immediate bodily presence,'[28] a striking phrase to which he makes no further reference. Later writings on jazz simply disavow any connection with bodily sensation: 'When people dance to jazz for example, they do not dance for sensuous pleasure or in order to obtain release. Rather they merely depict the gestures of sensuous human beings.'[29] Implicit in this argument is the notion that were people to dance for 'sensuous pleasure' alone, then jazz might harbour some critical potential, which is not a state of affairs that Adorno's polemic against 'light music' is likely to countenance.

The suggestion that within some of Adorno's work might be embedded an uncritical notion of the body in music is surprising, but it is certainly not the case in his *Philosophy of Modern Music*. The basis of Adorno's critique of Stravinsky's music is his assertion that, unlike Schönberg, Stravinsky hypostatizes his material, refuses to engage with the dialectic of the social through musical form, and the consequent attaining of a 'false authenticity.'

> It is a matter of the chimerical rebellion of culture against its own essence as culture. Stravinsky undertakes such a rebellion not only in the familiar aesthetic game with barbarism [in *Le Sacre du Printemps*], but furthermore in the fierce suspension of that element in music which is called culture – the suspension, that is, of the humanly eloquent work of art. ... He is attracted to that sphere in which meaning has become so ritualized that it cannot be experienced as the specific meaning of the musical act.[30]

Adorno's analysis of Stravinsky's music is very often highly accurate – his relation to the history of Western art music, his treatment of musical material and harmony, the 'spatialization' of time, all of which infuriate Adorno – but his conclusions are flawed, because of the way in which he regards the body, and disregards Nattiez's 'aesthesic realm.' Adorno recognizes that there is little to be gained from the 'immediate bodily presence' of 'On the fetish character,' but fails to see that the

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[28] Adorno, T.W., 'On the fetish character in music and the regression in listening,' *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[29] Adorno, T.W., 'The schema of mass culture,' in *The Culture Industry*, p. 82.

[30] Adorno, T.W., *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 140.

problem is not 'bodily presence' *per se*, but conceiving of it as being 'immediate,' and this stems from his extreme pessimism, or perhaps condescension. In either case it results in his refusal to countenance the subject *making* meaning, and more importantly the sense of an ongoing process in the act of making itself. Remarkably he actually perceives the playing out of this issue in Stravinsky, noting: 'The goal of musical effects is no longer stimulation [of the psyche], but rather the "doing." ... In the emancipation from the meaning of the whole, the effects assume a physically material character, becoming evident and almost athletic.'[31] One might say that musical *effect* has in Stravinsky become plain *affect*. Adorno does not believe that this emancipation from meaning, from end product, might be liberating or have resistive capabilities because he is unable to conceive of the body as being an active participant in any way. As far as Adorno is concerned, in Stravinsky 'the product is nothing subjectively produced, thus reflecting the human being, but rather something which exists per se.'[32] The Adornian body of *Philosophy of Modern Music* is in a direct line from the Cartesian (as opposed to the Deleuzean) body-as-machine. 'The body is treated by this music as a means – an object which reacts precisely, it drives the body to its highest attainments.'[33] The dialectic of subject and object, so crucial to all of Adorno's writing, is abandoned in an apparent moment of reification, a denial of the productive potency of the human body. The end point of Adorno's thought is that Stravinsky's music, and popular music in general, 'arous[es] only bodily animation instead of offering meaning,'[34] as though these were two different and separable things.

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[31] *Ibid* , p. 173.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp 173-4.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

II

Adorno's theories are both a challenge and a store of great promise: much of his despair with regard to mass culture and its reception is entirely understandable when viewed in the context of rising fascism in which it was written (even if his refusal to readdress these issues in the 1960s is less so), yet the toolkit he has furnished the critical musicologist with is invaluable. Perhaps the greatest disappointment, however, is the fact that he failed to apply his own principles with sufficient rigour to the concept of the human body – one can only assume that this was an oversight caused by Adorno's own circumstances of production rather than lacking the courage of his own convictions – but the idea that the body's relation to music is immediate, somehow immune to the processes of mediation that take place all around it, is endemic (if not universal) in musicology, and has consequently mistaken the actuality of music reception's means of resistance. Time and again one sees recourse to the idea of the body as some form of 'transcendental ground,' absolutized as a guarantor of authenticity, but rarely does one see the full acknowledgement that a 'form of life' is in every sense a contingent entity, and functions as an absolute only in a particular context. Indeed, I have already quoted authors in chapter two, such as Christopher Small, who are guilty of this, and even Simon Frith repeatedly draws on a somewhat romanticized and idealized notion of the body in music, as when he writes:

> Music making and music listening, that is to say, are bodily matters; they involve what one might call *social movements*. In this respect, musical pleasure is not derived from fantasy – it is not mediated by daydreams – but is experienced directly: music gives us a real experience of what the ideal could be.[35]

I choose to address Frith on this issue not because he is a prime offender; if anything the reverse is true, for there are many writers given to a great deal less self-reflection and care when writing of music, and there is much in the above quotation with which I would readily agree. Frith has taken on board the work of

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[35] Frith, S., *Performing Rites*, p. 274.

Adorno (indeed he was one of the first writers on popular music to do so, although with some obvious provisos with respect to popular culture), regarding the presence of productive forces and social mediation of the musical text, and if anything he applies these ideas more rigorously to the notion of the body than does Adorno. Frith counters Adorno's passive and unengaged body-object, 'an object that reacts precisely,' with the idea of the body as an active and productive entity, dialectically engaged with and formative of 'the social.' And yet at the same time he seems to be drawing on the same uncritical notion of an 'immediate body,' invoking the 'essentially human' via its autonomic functions; he has his socially dialectical cake and eats it in positing the simultaneous existence of an 'ideal' bodily location. As Brian Massumi puts it in discussing the related notion of 'intensity,' this 'inevitably raises the objection that such a notion involves an appeal to a pre-reflexive, romantically raw domain of primitive experiential richness – the nature in our culture.'[36]

I will return to the question of autonomic response presently, but the problem with Frith's model is not in its internal logic, but in the paradigm of both the body and music that it employs. Frith disassembles Adorno's body-as-site-of-reception only to reconstitute it as a site of reception *and* production, when the problem was not the absence of product in itself, but the setting up of the body as a *site*, a location which serves as the origin of sound, or upon which sound acts. This becomes clearer in Frith's discussion of voice, of which he writes: 'The voice seems particularly expressive of the body: it gives the listener unmediated access to it.'[37] As the astute reader will by now probably be aware, the key word here is 'unmediated.' In order to maintain this idea Frith replicates one fundamental mistake in two ways: first the definition of the body as a discrete object-product (which retains this status regardless of whether it is fixed or unfixed) that might act as a source of sound, rather than as a medium that is itself *en procès* (to borrow Kristeva's term), and second the misunderstanding of sound itself, reifying it as a concrete thing, product, rather than as the performing of an action, a modulation of atmospheric pressure, process.

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[36] Massumi, B., 'The Autonomy of Affect,' in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Patton, P., (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996), p. 223.

[37] Frith, S., 'The Body Electric,' *Critical Quarterly*, 37:2, (1995), p. 1.

The point at which both music and the body are objectified is the point at which they lose whatever resistive potency their intersection might have had. As Terry Eagleton notes in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, the aesthetic project first outlined by Baumgarten was devised as a means of ideologizing that which lay outside the purview of the category of reason, such that 'The aesthetic springs into being as a kind of cognitive underlabourer, to know in its uniqueness all that to which higher reason is necessarily blind.'[38] The aesthetic is a socialization and subjectification of affect in order to create meaning in the form of emotion, which in turn serves as a tacit explanation and justification of the social order: 'At the very root of social relations lies the aesthetic, source of all human relations.'[39] Thus any attempt to deterritorialize musical sensation in the guise of object-product, via the body as object-product, serves only to effect a massive reterritorialization[40] onto the same old category of the ideal; there is no point in a movement to *process* if it is only done in order to restore meaning in a new site. To paraphrase an old cliché, it is not just that the travelling is important, rather than the arriving – there is no arrival, nowhere at which to arrive. The body adopts the *function* of site, while retaining a status other than that of the unitary location. As Brian Massumi writes, 'The body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds *contexts*, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. Intensity is asocial but not presocial – it *includes* social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logic.'[41] And in order to access the resistive power of the body in music this new paradigm is required, one in which the parameters of the body are altered and extended, an opening up of meaning-product in order to remain *en procès*, in *jouissance*.

Frith's discussion of voice referred to above was formulated in response to the renowned essay by Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice,' a text cited repeatedly in musicological approaches to the body. The definition of 'grain' that is

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[38] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 16-7.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 24

[40] Both the terminology, and the point made here, is owed to Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *op. cit.*, p. 348

[41] Massumi, B., 'The Autonomy of Affect,' *op. cit.*, p. 223.

most often taken away is that of 'the body in the voice as it sings,'[42] but the subtleties of Barthes' argument are frequently overlooked in the desire to claim this as a support for the straightforward expression of physicality in the voice, which is then tied to an 'organic' and 'natural' web of (Romantic) metaphor. A close reading, however, will reveal that this is almost exactly what Barthes is arguing *against*, as, for instance, in his stating: 'Opera is a genre in which the voice has gone over in its entirety to dramatic expressivity, a voice with a grain which little signifies. ... The voice is not personal: it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul.'[43] Indeed, given that Frith opens by describing Barthes' 'The Grain of the Voice' as 'his argument that different timbral qualities have different bodily implications,'[44] when Barthes explicitly states 'The "grain" of the voice is not – or not merely – its timbre,'[45] one begins to suspect that there has been a systematic misreading of Barthes' intentions. As Frith correctly notes, 'This point is usually taken up in music criticism as a celebration of "the materiality of the body,"'[46] but the nature of 'the body' that is being celebrated here is not an issue that is in question, despite the fact that this is arguably the key concept of the essay. There is a powerful element of critics taking from Barthes what they want to hear, or rather read, regardless of what he has to say, and in doing so they have missed the formulation of an entirely new paradigm of the body in music that frees critique from the situated body of the aesthetic project.

Barthes begins 'The Grain of the Voice' with a discussion of the problems faced in the translation of music into language through the form of the predicate, and the limitations that this places upon perception by *situating* the subject and tying him or her into an ethical (which is at once an aesthetical) system.

> The man who provides himself or is provided with an adjective is now hurt, now pleased, but always constituted. ... A historical dossier ought to be assembled here, for adjectival criticism (or predicative interpretation) has taken on over the centuries

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[42] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' in *Image-Music-Text*, p. 188.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 181-2.

[44] Frith, S., 'The Body Electric,' *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[45] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' *op. cit.*, p. 185.

[46] Frith, S., 'The Body Electric,' *op. cit.*, p. 1.

> certain institutional aspects. The musical adjective becomes legal whenever an *ethos* of music is postulated, each time, that is, that music is attributed a regular – natural or magical – mode of signification.[47]

If one wishes to disrupt the system of exchange set in place by this mode of musical 'understanding,' the answer is not to be found in 'struggling against the adjective,'[48] as Adorno might be said to do, but instead by attempting 'to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception of intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language.'[49] If the rules of the game are stacked against you, the answer is not to try to change the rules of the game in the teeth of opposition, but to play a different game. The nature of this displacement is not simply a change of location, but the opening up of an entirely new space, or more correctly space-time, 'where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the *diction* of the language.'[50] Diction, the *manner* of enunciation, the way in which something is done, action, process. 'The grain is ... almost certainly *signifiance*,'[51] and as such is concerned with the undoing of subjecthood rather than a constitution or expression of corporeal essence. Indeed, in 'The Third Meaning' (which might be regarded as a companion piece to 'The Grain of the Voice' insofar as it addresses signifiance in the image, as opposed to sound) Barthes quite bluntly states of the obtuse (which is to say, signifiance): 'Something in the two faces [on film] exceeds psychology, anecdote, function, exceeds meaning without, however, coming down to the obstinacy in presence shown by any human body.'[52] There is little point in dissolving the art object and the subject into process, only to reinscribe them both in an objectified corporeality.

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[47] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' *op, cit.*, pp. 179-80.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 180-1.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 182-3.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

[52] Barthes, R., 'The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills,' in *Image Music Text*, p. 54.

In order to comprehend the way in which Barthes conceives of 'the body,' one needs to approach it in terms other than that of either the socially determined entity or the self-contained, living, breathing organism; it is individuated, but it 'has no civil identity.'[53] His criticism of Fischer-Dieskau makes clear that he does not regard breathing as a genuinely 'bodily' activity: grain is not to be found in the lungs ('a stupid organ'[54]), contrary to the suggestion of both Frith and Middleton,[55] but rather in the throat, the sinuses, the resonant cavities of the body. Where the lungs might be regarded as a site of *production* of sound, that which Barthes designates as 'body' are those elements that *modify* the acoustic of the voice, a mediation of the sound of air rushing across the vocal chords. And yet the very instant of stating the phrase 'mediation of the voice' is already to have made a mistake: voice is always-already mediated. To say that it has been mediated by the body, or indeed anything else, be that the listener's ear-drum or the room in which it sounds, is to imply that vocal 'essence' has been lost, that there exists a primal 'ur-voice' that one might access if only the forces of mediation could be stripped away. As the surprise of hearing one's own voice on a recording bears testament, there is no absolute characteristic of a voice; it is a mediate phenomenon, characteristic of the medium in and through which it sounds and nothing more. The Barthesian body is not an originary source of sound so much as a mediator through which sound passes, a system of resonance and feedback, and grain is the audible presence of that mediation. The point at which 'we catch ourselves listening to the modulations and harmonics of that voice without hearing what it is saying to us,'[56] is the point at which grain is revealed to us. Thus it is the idea of mediation that is crucial to experiencing grain or signifiance; not the resultant of that mediation, nor the means of mediation, but an awareness of the act of mediation itself, a foregrounding of process. The body is a system of resonance that filters and distorts the sound that passes through it. In much the same way that the rare subatomic particles generated by the collisions that take

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[53] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' *op. cit.*, p. 182.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[55] See Frith, S., 'The Body Electric,' *op. cit.*, p. 2, and Middleton, R., *op. cit.*, p. 261.

[56] Barthes, R., 'Listening,' in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Howard, R., (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), p. 255.

place in a particle accelerator are apprehended not by unmediated vision, but through a detection of the pattern of their mutual interactions (and this is a method repeated throughout the disciplines of cosmology and physics), so the body becomes available to comprehension through the way in which it modifies sound. 'We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body.'[57]

The Barthesian body has ceased to be either an object that receives and processes, or else a secure site of sound generation, but is rather a performative intermediary through which sound passes. As Deleuze and Guattari have it: 'We thus leave behind the assemblages to enter the age of the Machine,'[58] and the Barthesian body is very close to the idea of the 'sound machine' proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, which they concretize in the figure of 'the synthesizer,' noting that: 'The synthesizer makes audible the sound process itself, the production of that process, and puts us in contact with still other elements beyond sound matter.'[59] Neither is the close connection between the 'technological' and the rendering overt of the always-already mediated something of which Barthes is unaware: having deconstructed the body of Fischer-Dieskau, the terms in which he praises Panzera are decidedly machinic. The rolled 'r' has a 'metallic brevity of vibration;'[60] he describes Panzera's vowel sounds in terms of 'the purity – almost *electronic*, so much was its sound tightened, raised, exposed, held.'[61] This does more than simply emphasize that the body is fundamentally a locus of mediation; it serves to show that the process of mediation itself is underwritten by 'technology,' for to suggest that something has been 'technologized' is to recognize that the way in which it interacts with the subject has been altered. The radical work done by 'grain' is in the extension of this process into the subject itself.

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[57] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 257.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 343. I would, however, strongly disagree with the implications of the notion of sound *matter*, except insofar as it is recognized that matter is itself at once particle and wave formation, as discussed in chapter 2.

[60] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' *op. cit.*, p. 185

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 185. The emphasis is Barthes' own.

> If I perceive the "grain" in a piece of music and accord this "grain" a theoretical value (the emergence of the text in the work), I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual ... but in no way "subjective" (it is not the psychological "subject" in me who is listening; the climactic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce – to express – that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it).[62]

The intertwining of the subject and its technologization is particularly pronounced and complicated in the field of popular music, simultaneously enabling and dissolving the myth of 'authenticity' in rock music and the positioning of the subject therein. As Frith has pointed out in his earlier work, it is paradoxical that 'a technologically sophisticated medium ... rests on an old-fashioned model of direct communication – A plays to B and the less technology lies between them the closer they are, the more honest their relationship and the fewer the opportunities for manipulation and falsehoods.'[63] This is the model that lay behind the booing of Bob Dylan by his audience when he went 'electric.' Frith demonstrates how this fundamentally nineteenth-century view of music as expression of the subject is woefully misapplied to pop and rock music – not only is its existence based upon the technology of recording, the displacing of the performing subject, but through the development of studio technology it has enabled the subject to express him or herself more exactly, in ways that would have been impossible or unimaginable in direct performance. The myth of the authentic subject in popular music falls down on even on its own terms, but more importantly (at least in the current context), this technological supplementarity of the subject explicitly poses the question of where the technology, as process of mediation, ends and the subject begins.

The most telling example of this is the development of the electrical microphone, which was closely allied to the rise of popular music as a mass culture phenomenon. The amplification of a softly spoken voice enabled an entirely new style of singing to emerge, termed 'crooning,' and as Frith notes: 'Its general effect was to extend the possibilities of the public expressions of private feelings in all pop genres.'[64] The mediating power of the technology begins to blur

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[62] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[63] Frith, S., 'Art versus technology: the strange case of popular music,' *Media, Culture and Society*, 8, (1986), pp. 266-7.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

both the relationship between putative sound production and sound receiver, which is to say the subject and the collective, and also blurs the boundaries between the singer and his or her technologization – there is an interpenetration of the body of the singer and its mediation. Frith wrote this essay in 1986, but subsequent developments have only increased the extent to which the two have become confluent: witness the band Daft Punk, pioneers of the 'filtered disco' sound, who only appear in public in the form of two robots, conducting interviews through a Steven Hawking-style computerized voice processor.

These ideas are clearly of great interest to the Icelandic singer-composer Björk, and one can see a repeated referral to these ideas in her music videos and the literature surrounding her work, particularly in the enigmatically titled *Post*, a companion book to her album of the same name. Sjón Sigurdsson tells the story of 'NovaBjörk,' a girl found buried in the forest and 'mended' through a process of amalgamation. He writes:

> The composer gathered together instruments from the Ol' World and the Nu. With sure hands he placed harp strings, microchips, pieces of brass, tiny transistors and other Energies inside the girl's body.[65]

We have here the clearest possible articulation of the notion of the 'technological body,' or as Steve Sweeney-Turner describes it in this context, a *cybjörk*. The technologization or mediation of the organic is played out both in her lyrics, and in the computer modulation of 'found sounds' in her music, as well as an illustration of the *cybjörk* in the video to 'All is Full of Love.' It is in the video to 'Hyperballad,' however, that one sees a reflection-echo of the part played by the video itself in the further technologization of the musician.

The track opens with an ethereal tone cluster (B♭, C, E♭, F – the tonality of the verse section hovers between C minor and B♭ major throughout) played on synthesized strings, under which enters an electronically generated sound lacking

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[65] Sigurdsson, S., 'The Birth of NovaBjörk: a tale in the old style of Science Fiction,' in Sigurdsson *et al*, *Post*, (Bloomsbury, London, 1995), quoted by Steve Sweeney-Turner in an unpublished paper 'Björk and the Figure of the Machine.'

any sort of attack, that slowly descends through a repeated E♭, D, C two octaves below middle C, mapping a wide sonic space. The image that accompanies this is of a modelled landscape of a plain and distant mountains, over which move computerized clouds, instantly picking up the motif of mediated organicism. As the scattershot drum break enters with a statement-echo pattern driving through each bar, similar in rhythm to the clatter of a railway, the camera pulls round to show an apparently lifeless Björk lying amongst leaf litter, but with an electronic 'haze' crackling across her in time to the drum rhythm, in a parallel, superposed plane. With the entry of the vocal line a second, ghostly imprint of a singing Björk appears, again superimposed upon 'organic' Björk and the 'electric' plane. Not only does this serve to confound authorial presence, but it also illustrates the technologized, mediated voice, and the mediation of the Björk-image in the video. A third, 'computer-game' Björk appears with the chorus, running across the model landscape which is now also superposed with computer graphics, before enacting the line 'I imagine what my body would sound like, slamming against those rocks' (see Appendix), and returning to the dead Björk/ singing Björk composite, until all three are superposed in a simultaneously static and moving landscape. (It is difficult to describe the full complexity of the series of superimposed levels compressed into a single plane that form the image track to this video, but it involves at least three pieces of footage that are combined using motion tracking techniques.) In this problematization of movement in space-time, the combining of 'organic' and 'machinic' sounds technologically with the singer-composer's unique Icelandic inflected diction, and then routing all of this through a set of 'bodies' that are all moving in unison and all identifiably Björk, any notion of a distinct, originary singing body as sound-source, opposed to its technological status, is completely overrun. What might at first appear to be the corporeal alienation of Björk's voice, instead becomes the means of reinscribing 'Björkness' across a series of technologized corporealizations. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, Björk and Michel Gondry, the director, make audio-visual the sound-image process, the production of that process, in a music-video machine.

III

> Could a machine think? – Could it be in pain? – Well, is the human body to be called such a machine? It surely comes as close as possible to being such a machine.[66]

As with Barthes, the Wittgensteinian body can be considered as a machine, but what mechanisms does this body enact, and how might this 'machine' be related to the wider concept of technology? As outlined above, Barthes' 'machine' is a complex set of interactions, the parameters of which are largely undefined: with respect to the voice, the machine-body is only one part of a wider field of technological forces; the extent of the mediation process is unfixed at both ends of the spectrum, so that the distinction body/non-body becomes a difficult one to draw. And it seems that similar problems arise with the Wittgensteinian body, which is above all a *thinking* body, processual: 'But surely a machine cannot think! – Is that an empirical statement? No. We only say of a human being and what is like one that it thinks.'[67] But when one begins to attempt to locate the thought process, whether it be in a human or any other sort of object, one starts to run up against the same problems seen earlier when trying to fix something that is fundamentally motile: 'The chair is thinking to itself: ... WHERE? In one of its parts? Or outside its body: in the air around it? Or not *anywhere* at all?'[68] And as Wittgenstein suggests, situating thought either within or without the supposedly fixed boundaries of the body-object is a fruitless activity: '"Thinking takes place in the head" really means only "the head is connected with thinking." Of course one says also "I think with my pen" and this localization is at least as good.'[69] Like the Barthesian body, the body as thinking-machine is an entity without a definite beginning and end, difficult, but not impossible, to discern from its background.

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[66] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, §359.

[67] *Ibid.*, §360.

[68] *Ibid.*, §361.

[69] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rhees, R., trans. Kenny, A., (Blackwell, Oxford, 1974), §64.

Although both Wittgenstein and Barthes provide an effective deconstruction and problematization of the individual body, neither leaves a clear map as to how to reconceptualize the new relation between the body and the collective: the status of the subject within Wittgenstein's 'form of life' is decidedly vague. An analogy is provided, however, by Deleuze and Guattari in the form of the 'tool,' which seems an apt theorization of the technological body, so long as one is careful not to simply perform a reterritorialization of the idea of technology onto isolated tools. Deleuze and Guattari state:

> The material or machinic aspect of assemblage relates not to the production of goods but rather to a precise state of intermingling of bodies in a society, including all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations, and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another. ... Even technology makes the mistake of considering tools in isolation: tools exist only in relation to the interminglings they make possible or that make them possible. The stirrup entails a new man-horse symbiosis that at the same time entails new weapons and new instruments. Tools are inseparable from symbioses or amalgamations defining a Nature-Society machinic assemblage. They presuppose a social machine that selects them and takes them into its "phylum:" a society is defined by its amalgamations, not by its tools.[70]

This goes some way to clarifying the nature of the individual in theory – the Barthesian singing voice is a fine example of a 'Nature-Society machinic assemblage' – but still leaves open the question of the precise mechanism by which material bodies perceive, or at least interiorize, their own 'state of intermingling.'

A clue as to how one might apprehend individuation without denying the continuity of individual and context is given by Ernst Bloch:

> We do not possess it, that which all this around us ... is or signifies, because we are it itself and are standing too close to it. ... But the sound burns out of us, the *heard* note, not the sound itself or its forms. This, however, shows us our path without alien

[70] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *op. cit.*, p. 90.

> means, our historically inward path, as a fire in which not the vibrating air but we ourselves begin to quiver and cast off our cloaks.[71]

There is an undeniable strain of mysticism and neo-Wagnerian romanticism to Bloch's imagery in this essay, but the important distinction he makes between 'the heard note' and 'the sound itself' in the human body makes clear that the distinctiveness of individual resonance is in no way connected to the notion of the body as sound *producer*. And as Massumi describes, the autonomic processes of the body that perceive resonance provide a mechanism that binds the interior and exterior, subject and object, in such a way as to enable Barthes' individuation that 'is not in the psychological subject' (see above). 'Brain and skin form a resonating vessel. Stimulation turns inward, is folded into the body, except that there is no inside for it to be in, because the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, and because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind.'[72] The individual is autonomous only insofar as autonomic response retains 'the *trace* of past actions *including a trace of their contexts* ... conserved in the brain and the flesh, but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities.'[73] The corporeal phenomenon that Massumi describes is *proprioception*: it is a characteristic of the flesh that infolds 'the surface of contact between perceiving subject and perceived object,'[74] and acts as a memory-bearing entity that operates in parallel to the emergence of subjectivity. 'Proprioception translates the exertions and ease of the body's encounters with objects into a muscular memory of relationality. This is the cumulative memory of skill, habit, posture,'[75] and one might well add the experience of sound to this list. Indeed, Freud's own mature theory of memory allows for such a suggestion, insofar as 'the subject centres itself in consciousness on the site where memory

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[71] Bloch, E., 'The philosophy of music,' in *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*, trans. Palmer, P., (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p. 1.

[72] Massumi, B., 'The Autonomy of Affect,' *op. cit.*, p. 222.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

[74] Massumi, B., 'The Bleed: Where Body Meets Image,' in Welchman, J. (ed.), *Rethinking Borders*, (Macmillan, London, 1996), p. 30.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

traces have established an infrastructure for such centring.'[76] Massumi has simply displaced the social construction of the memory trace from the conscious brain to the wider nervous system in a way that is not unrelated to subjectivity, but neither is it dependent upon it.

> Proprioception effects a double translation of the subject and the object into the body, at a medium depth where the body is only body, having nothing of the profundity of the self nor of the superficiality of external encounter. This asubjective and non-objective medium depth is one of the strata proper to the corporeal; it is a dimension of the *flesh*. The memory it constitutes could be diagrammed as a superposition of vectorial fields composed of multiple points in varying relations of movement and rest, pressure and resistance, each field corresponding to an action.[77]

This network of nervous tissue is the technological body, the collectivized individual, moulding the passage of sound in such a way that 'space-time is not external to the body but generated by it.'[78] It reveals the fallacy of the idea that mediation opens a space between subject and object, which conceals the truth of their indissoluble enmeshment. It is a holding still of the musical moment *en procès* in the form of potentiality or incipience – gesture yet to come and past gesture in one. But it is not the end of the story.

> The collective is a body, too. And the *physis* that is being organised for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, only be produced in that image sphere to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and

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[76] Mowitt, J., 'The sound of music in the era of its electronic reproducibility,' in Leppert, R. and McClary, S. (eds), *Music and Society: the politics of composition, performance and reception*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), p. 183. As Mowitt discusses, this particular point is made by Derrida.

[77] Massumi, B., 'The Bleed: Where Body Meets Image,' *op. cit.*, p. 31

[78] Lefebvre, H., see chapter 2, n. 61.

> all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*.[79]

This unusual passage of prose that closes Benjamin's essay on surrealism anticipates the formation of the technological body, but perhaps overestimates its political agency. A similarly utopian vision is proposed by John Mowitt in his essay on the technologies of music reception: 'If Marx could regard the proletariat as a concrete manifestation of theory, then perhaps contemporary music can be seen as a gateway to the new collectivity, since it situates subjects within an emergent structure of listening which offers experiential confirmation of social configuration.'[80] The technological body is not a call for the wholesale rejection of the subject, but for a new conception of the subject that is implicitly collective. Its expression is not necessarily revolutionary, as Benjamin hopes; Massumi has discussed the ways in which the right has taken control of the 'postmodern body.' Benjamin (via Eagleton) states that 'the body must be reprogrammed and reinscribed by the power of the sensuous image;'[81] Mowitt calls for a new inscription of 'popular memory' through the collectivizing potential of popular music. Music video-ing is not a revolutionary art practise, but the reformulation of aesthetics that its study demands, its conjoining of popular memory with the sensuous image, might enable a shift from 'being' to 'becoming,' and open a new vectorial space-time where not just television, but the sign itself is music(k)ed, so that an interrogation of the sign, of representation, could take place.

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[79] Benjamin, W., 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' in *Reflections*, trans. Jephcott, E., (Schocken, New York, 1986), p. 192. Also quoted in Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 336.

[80] Mowitt, J., *op. cit.*, p. 193.

[81] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 336.

Conclusion

"I'm confused. Is this a happy ending or a sad ending?"

"It's an ending. That's enough."[1]

Music videos are neither intended, nor very often received as attacks on the notion of capital, monologistic aesthetics, or anything else for that matter; more often they are precisely the opposite, calculated by corporations to maximize return on a cultural commodity. Anyone hoping to inspire revolution by subjecting the populace to large doses of boy bands and 'nu-metal' videos will be a long time waiting. It would be foolish to ignore the fact that both the denoted and connoted messages of the great majority of music videos (the Barthesian 'obvious' meaning), are supportive of the capitalist system almost to the point of propaganda. Whether one looks at the level of the individual video's 'pseudo-narrative,' or the 'star-text' of the meta-narrative, the same set of ideals based around the notion of the 'pop-star,' and in particular his or her conspicuous consumption, predominate. Much of the foregoing argument has attempted to show how, despite this fact, the nature of the intertwining of music and image in music video simultaneously undoes the ideology represented, not by countering it, but by problematizing the very notion of representation. This refusal of meaning, 'obvious' or otherwise, derived from the experience of music, only a short time after 'new' musicologists have worked so hard to bring it into the equation might be regarded as a controversial move, but it is borne of the belief that a critical project founded upon direct opposition to the *status quo*, although by no means worthless, is in the end unlikely ever to fulfil its aims. Its inevitable consequence is the reduction of music analysis to 'the dilemma of either the predicable or the

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[1] Exchange between Lisa and Marge Simpson, *The Simpsons*, episode reference unknown.

ineffable.'[2] The alternative proposed here, however, is no more certain to achieve critical consciousness, and indeed there are serious obstacles to this. Most notable among these is the acceptance that the process of comprehension, of clarification, must take place within one's own 'form of life,' be based upon existing praxis, which inevitably nullifies any political agency beyond step by step extension of praxis from within the 'blind spots' of a culture. Hence Montefiore and Taylor's suggestion, quoted above, that the Wittgensteinian appears to the critical theorist to be 'preaching an obscurantist acceptance of the *status quo*,'[3] and also the vital importance of Kristeva's work, whatever its weaknesses might be. Given the task of formulating a practical and effective critical theory, I, like the country bumpkin called upon for directions, would not start from here, but here is where one must begin.

What then, *is* the relationship between theory and practice in the creation and experience of music video? If, as I have suggested, music videos perform a transformation of the object into activity, an event *en procès*, it is perhaps pertinent to ask what this activity is, what is it that is being done? In a sense this has been the thrust of this entire thesis: an attempt to embed an aesthetics of music video within the world, to understand the object in terms of the actions it performs, above all to clarify the nature of the affective charge I sense in the encounter with it. And yet it is undeniable that concrete instances of these events remain remarkably *difficult both to locate*, and to discuss in an illuminating way. There is certainly space here for some hard *sociological analysis*, to determine both how music videos are typically (and atypically) received, and the *aesthetic criteria* invoked in their production, in order to ascertain the extent to which these theoretical possibilities are being played out in actuality.

Ultimately the power of music or music video to effect material change is limited: when faced with the raw power of the barrel of a gun or a tank it is as impotent as any other art, regardless of its capacity to collectivize. What power it does have is the potential to alter one's *perception* of material reality; to produce (be producing?) an 'incorporeal transformation' of the conditions of being. To take

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[2] Barthes, R., 'The Grain of the Voice,' *op. cit.*, p. 180.

[3] Montefiore, A. and Taylor, C., *op. cit.*, p. 21. See p. 92 above for full quotation.

one of Deleuze and Guattari's own examples,[4] the action of a hijacker brandishing a weapon transforms the plane into a prison, the passengers into hostages, and yet the material conditions remain unaltered. 'The transformation applies to bodies but is itself incorporeal, internal to enunciation.'[5] Similarly, in reformulating the mode of interaction between sound and image, based upon aesthetic criteria derived from a consideration of music, one's understanding of the world is instantaneously relativized. As with Wittgenstein's 'duck-rabbit,'[6] one is suddenly confronted with an alternative mode of cognition, in such a way as to require a reappraisal of one's relationship to the entity in question, and generate a previously unimagined social reality and praxis.

One sees both of these possibilities explored (that is, conventional oppositional critique and incorporeal transformation), in the video to 'Remind Me' by the Norwegian ambient dance group Royksopp. Taking off from the title and repeated intonation of the chorus lyric 'remind me,' the video demythologizes aspects of everyday working life, by appropriating the format of the technical diagram and animating it – a train journey is seen in terms of the relative statistics on modes of travel, as it passes through a cross-sectional image of tunnel construction, and via a diagram of the shifting patterns of signals and points. Similarly, a young woman's lunchtime burger is transformed into a part of a cow, which is in turn part of a herd, and the industrial processing of the milk involved in the production of her milkshake is passed through. Although the video's avoidance of naturalistic representation and appropriation of the imagistic 'tools' of industrialization to the form of animation, as well as its highlighting of industrial processing itself, might be regarded as straightforwardly resistive, it is when these images are conjoined with music that they have a genuinely subversive potential. The stock market graphs and production charts that are presented as part of the office environment are *musicked* here, made to 'dance' and move to the rhythm of the music. The imagery of international finance is transformed at an *affective* level; it ceases to be representative and is made sensuous.

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[4] Given in Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 81.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[6] See Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 194-6.

This strategy is not without risk: affect in itself is entirely lacking in critical capacity, and as Deleuze and Guattari note of sound, 'since its force of deterritorialization is the strongest, it also effects the most massive of reterritorializations.'[7] There remains the possibility that the demythologizing rhetoric of the images in the 'Remind Me' video are neither reinforced nor superseded by their relation to the sound track, but are instead recommodified in a way that the music serves to conceal. There is a danger in overstressing the 'redemptive' capacities of music, and of tying it too firmly to the idea of an 'aural paradigm' suggested above, for which an aesthetics of sound alone was only a prompt. One sees, on occasion, a favouring of the affective, the sensuous, in the realm of the image also, particularly in the films of directors such as Scorsese and Tarantino (often in association with prominent sound tracks), and in much photographic art. Aesthetic appreciation is predicated on the simultaneous presence of both 'visual' and 'aural' paradigms, their intermingling, not in an either/or relationship, but in their shifting patterns of emphasis.

There are times at which the 'aural paradigm' comes uncomfortably close to the nineteenth-century category of the transcendent, with a shiny new postmodern veneer. Reinscribing 'the unsayable' in signifiance, and then showing how 'the aural' has privileged access to this realm, may appear to reinstate music's connection to 'the ineffable,' but this would be to misunderstand the profoundly socialized, if not entirely effable, character of signifiance, which Kristeva demonstrates is based precisely in the space of interaction between subject and society.[8] My use of terms such as 'musicalization' may obfuscate instead of illuminating this point, but this is due to the difficulty of the problem faced, rather than a simple matter of terminology. 'Gesture,' as defined in chapter 2 above, is an attempt to bind the material and the social in a single entity, so as to facilitate material analysis that is at once a form of social critique – the 'holy grail' of critical musicology. Although theoretically sound, again concrete examples of its application have proved frustratingly difficult to produce, and the fear must be that it becomes a means of endlessly delaying a genuine social analysis rather than enabling it. Whether 'gesture' is a useful model of musical, or any other material,

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[7] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 348.

[8] Kristeva, J., *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 17.

has still to be proven, but I remain hopeful that it may have avoided many of the problems encountered by musicologists on this issue.

An attack on what Barthes terms the 'Organon of Representation' that addressed it directly would involve addressing it on its own terms: in the realm of the ideal, where objects and music are only ever ciphers of something else, never sensuous and motile. Music video instead sidesteps this, musicks the image in such a way as to open it up to collectivization, rather than giving the autonomous individualized subject the palliative of the ideal. It is not so much what music videos *do*, as what they *allow*. It does not attempt to destroy the status quo, but to undercut it and set it adrift of its moorings, facilitating its undoing.

If at times I have seemed hostile to the psychoanalytic subject, it is because of the emphasis it places upon the individual at the expense of the collective, the private rather than the public. Atomizing the social poses no threat to hegemonic forces; it only weakens the capacity for resistance. Music video enables one to recognize, via affective charge, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to in stating:

> There is no individual enunciation. There is not even a subject of enunciation. Yet relatively few linguists have analyzed the necessarily social character of enunciation. The problem is that it is not enough to establish that enunciation has this social character, since it could be extrinsic; therefore too much or too little is said about it. The social character of enunciation is intrinsically founded only if one succeeds in demonstrating how enunciation in itself implies *collective assemblages*.[9]

The affectivity of music acts as a guarantor of the collective assemblage it forms, and music video can then extend this collectivity into areas where one would not expect to find it; its radical materiality 'concedes nothing ineffable to the world.'[10] The aesthetics of music video is, among other things, a Benjaminian aesthetics, in that it has 'subverted almost all of traditional aesthetics' central categories (beauty,

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[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80. It is worth noting that they absolve Mikhail Bakhtin of any failings on this score.

[10] Barthes, R., *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, trans. Miller, R., (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976), p. 37.

harmony, totality, appearance),'[11] and burrows within the form of the object in order to undo it, and to extract those means of resistance that are still available, but it will not do this unaided. Like the Brechtian *gestus*, the critical potential that inheres in music video is given in order to be taken up, and it is only in its being taken up that its aesthetic might become manifest.

[11] Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 338.

Appendix

Song Lyrics

R.E.M. – Imitation of Life

Charades pop skill,
Water hyacinths, named by a poet,
Imitation of life.
Like a koi in a frozen pond,
Like a goldfish in a bowl.
I don't want to hear you cry.

That sugar cane, that tasted good,
That cinnamon, that's Hollywood,
C'mon, c'mon, no-one can see you try.

You want the greatest thing,
The greatest thing since bread came sliced,
You've got it all, you've got it sized.
Like a Friday fashion show,
Teenager cruising in the corner,
Trying to look like you don't try.

That sugar cane, that tasted good,
That cinnamon, that's Hollywood,
C'mon, c'mon, no-one can see you try.
(No-one can see you cry.)

That sugar cane, that tasted good,
That freezing rain, that's what you could,
C'mon, c'mon, no-one can see you cry.

This sugar cane, this lemonade,
This hurricane, I'm not afraid,
C'mon, c'mon, no-one can see me cry.
This lightning storm, this tidal wave,
This avalanche, I'm not afraid,
C'mon, c'mon, no-one can see me cry.

That sugar cane, that tasted good,
That's who you are, that's what you could,
C'mon, c'mon no-one can see you cry.
(repeat)

Björk – 'Hyper-ballad'

We live on a mountain
Right at the top.
There's a beautiful view
From the top of the mountain.
Every morning I walk towards the edge
And throw little things off
Like:
Car-parts, bottles and cutlery
Or whatever I find lying around.

It's become a habit,
A way
To start the day.

I go through all this
Before you wake up,
So I can feel happier
To be safe up here with you.

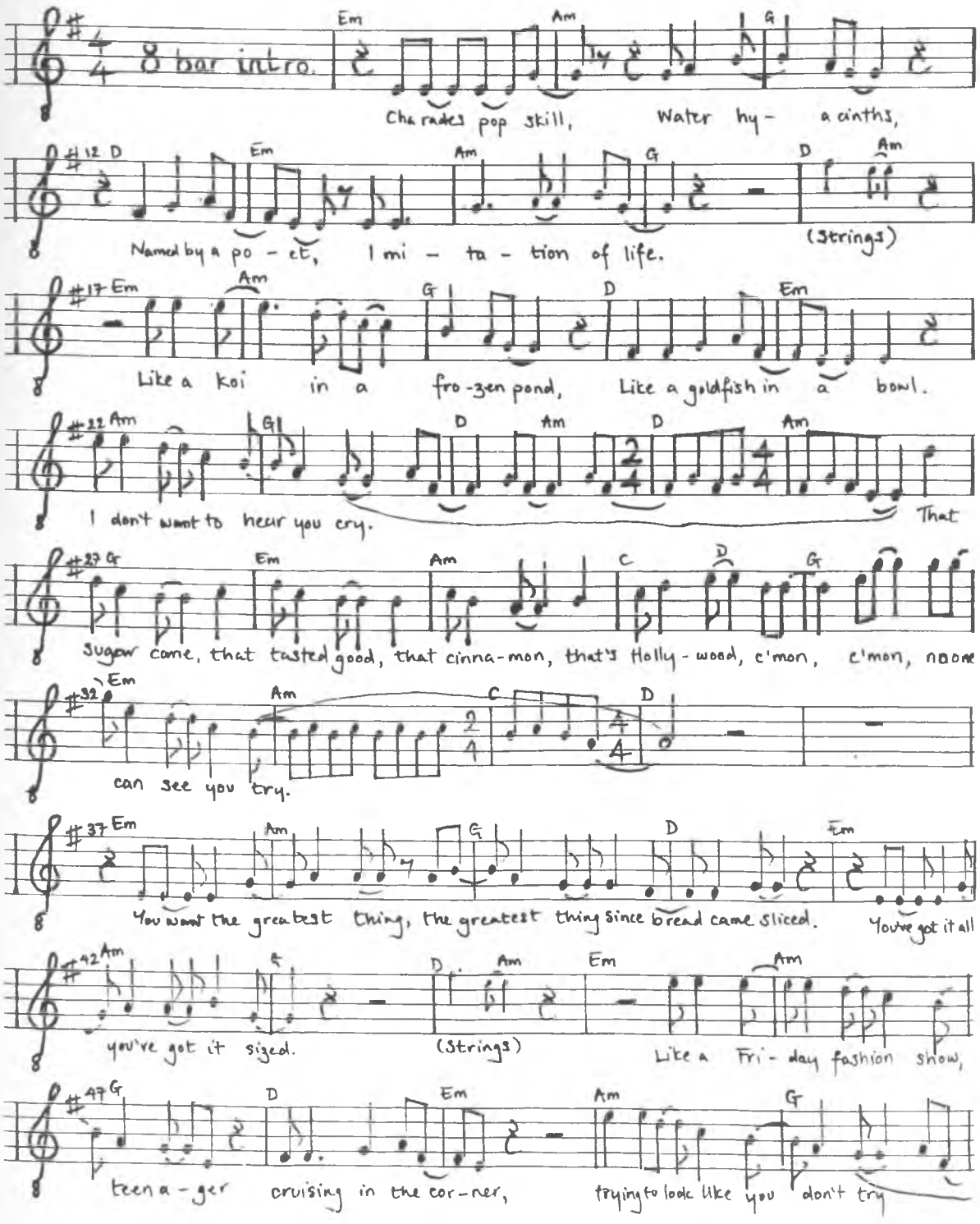
It's real early morning,
No-one is awake,
I'm back at my cliff,
Still throwing things off.
I listen to the sounds they make
On their way down.
I follow with my eyes 'til they crash.
Imagine what my body what sound like
Slamming against those rocks.

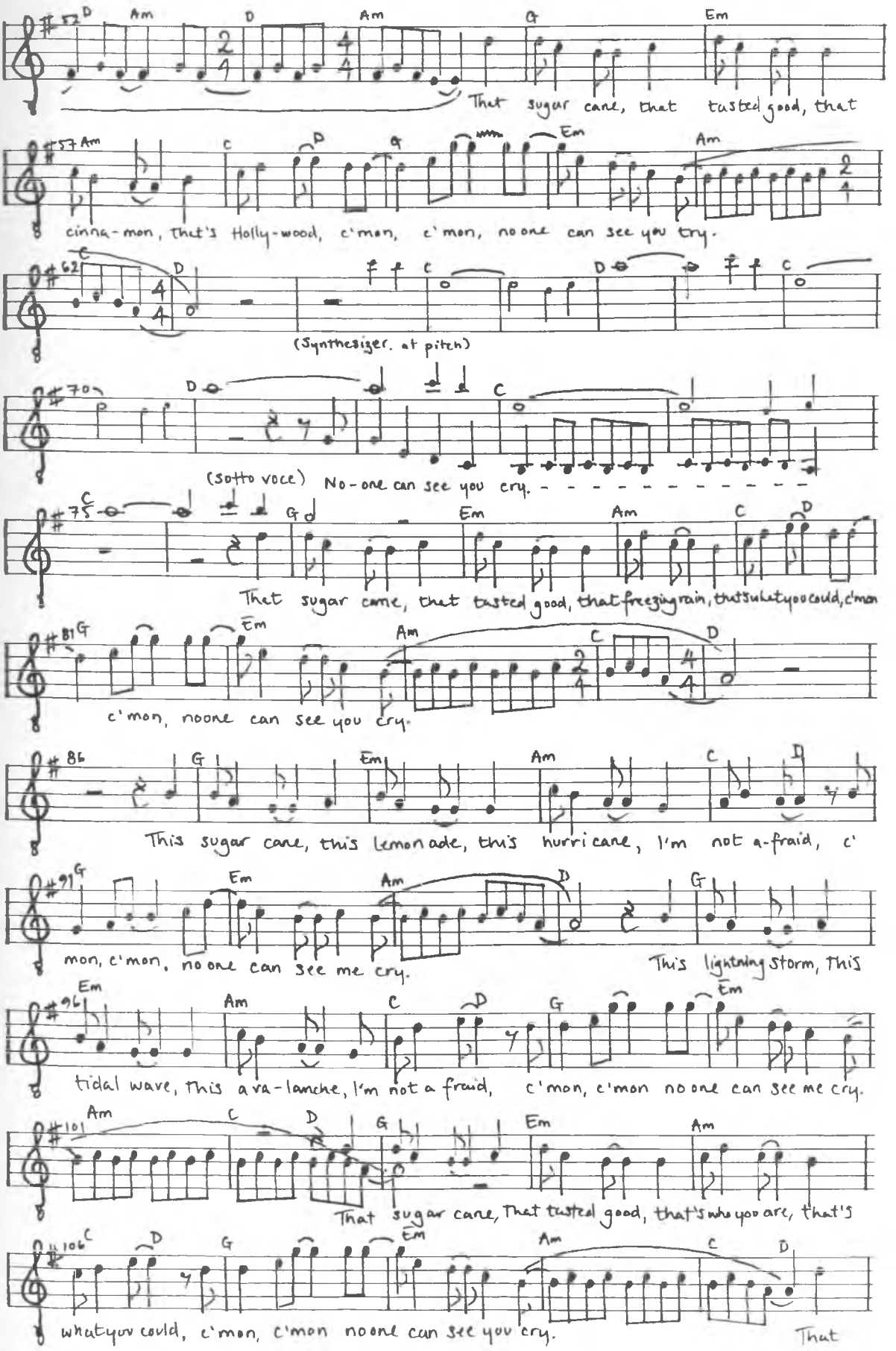
When it lands
Will my eyes
Be closed, or open?

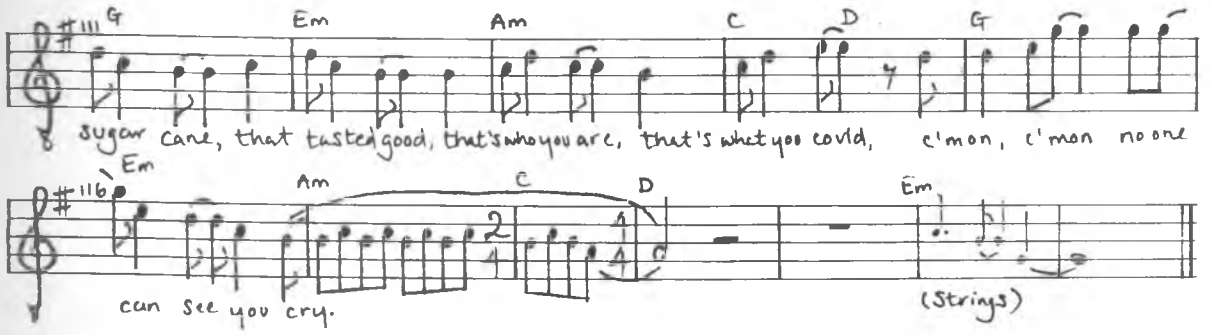
I go through all this
Before you wake up,
So I can feel happier
To be safe up here with you.
(repeat 'til fade)

Transcription

R.E.M. – 'Imitation of Life'




That sugar cane, that tasted good, that
cinna-mon, that's Holly-wood, c'mon, c'mon, no one can see you try.
(Synthesizer. at pitch)
(Sotto voce) No-one can see you cry.
That sugar cane, that tasted good, that freezing rain, that's what you could, c'mon
c'mon, no one can see you cry.
This sugar cane, this lemonade, this hurricane, I'm not a-fraid, c'
mon, c'mon, no one can see me cry.
This lightning storm, this
tidal wave, this ava-lanche, I'm not a fraid, c'mon, c'mon no one can see me cry.
That sugar cane, That tasted good, that's who you are, that's
what you could, c'mon, c'mon no one can see you cry.
That


G
Em
Am
C
D
G
sugar cane, that tasted good, that's who you are, that's what you could, c'mon, c'mon no one
Em
Am
C
D
Em
can see you cry.
(Strings)

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