Rock’n’Roll Cinema

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Adam Trainer
Refereed Publications

This journal article was derived from Chapter Five

Adam Trainer. ‘The Business of Living: Secrets & Lies’ in Australian Screen Education 36. September, 2004. pp. 127-129. This journal article was written in association with research on cinematic realism, as featured in Chapter Four.

Adam Trainer. ‘“They Made Me Do It”: The Mad World of Donnie Darko’ in Australian Screen Education 37. January, 2005. pp. 138-142. This journal article was derived from Chapter Three.


Conference Papers

‘The Cinema of the Everyday’. Everyday Transformations: The Twenty-First Century Quotidian. Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Annual Conference. Murdoch University: Murdoch, Australia. 9th – 11th December, 2004. This conference presentation was written in association with research on cinematic realism, as presented in Chapter Four.


Abstract

Popular music and film are separate media, framed by specific discourses, histories of distribution and reception, semiotic relationships and literacies. Through these divergent manifestations and ideologies nodes of convergence exist. At moments of connection, new and innovative textual and contextual possibilities emerge, transforming the ways in which audiences both engage and read these media. Whilst often driven by capitalist goals, both popular music and film capture and tether personal expression and collective memory. Through these processes of signification, popular cultural texts belonging to both media forms are able to resist their commodified origins to inform and construct both collective and individual identities.

This thesis charts the movement of popular music across cinema. Rock’n’Roll is utilized not only as an amalgam of texts made up of sounds and images, but also as a critical and interpretative apparatus through which specific cultural identities are configured. This work is concerned with various manifestations of political resistance in popular culture, and the ways in which this resistance is moderated through cultural commodification. Using an interdisciplinary approach – converging film analysis, popular music studies and music journalism – this thesis constructs an ideological framework through which film and popular music can be aligned, and through which this alignment can be researched.
Through an engagement with myriad cinematic and popular cultural texts, executed through interdisciplinary methods, this thesis establishes a theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing the convergence of popular music and cinema. Its original contribution to knowledge is an evaluation of the ways in which these media are changed through their alignment and how they inform each other both structurally, as tangible manifestations of specific media codes and structures, and politically, in the ideological embodiment of particular identities and representational realities. This goal is achieved through the selection of specific research materials, especially those which have not been subject to detailed investigation in other scholarly studies. Specific filmic and musical texts are discussed because they embody the aesthetic and political synergy of these two media forms as well as demonstrating the cultural processes through which this synergy is enacted.

This thesis offers interdisciplinary dialogue as a valid strategy to understand the processes involved in the creation and reception of texts which are cinematic in nature but utilize the language and discourse of popular music. The textual and contextual manifestations of this process are a primary concern. Emphasis is placed on the implications for film form in terms of the structure of texts and their existence within specific genres, the shifting position of the auteur and the renegotiation of the term and its meaning to film and popular music, and the conjunction and interaction between creativity and commerce. In addressing the political and aesthetic possibilities of the film and popular music hybrid, as well as the cultural implications of their convergence, this thesis provides new perspectives for the analysis of both forms.
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Desire becomes its own purpose, and the sole uncontested and unquestionable purpose.¹

Zygmunt Bauman

We again arrive at the frontier between philosophy and history, between system and existence; and we feel it would not be difficult, yet no small thing, to put some order into all these words or, better still, to show that there was always a deeper order and logic there in the first place.²

Frederic Jameson

Culture is alive. It is composed of different combinations of matter and that matter takes many forms. It is hard bone with flesh, muscle and fat stretched over and around it. It is blood, water and other fluids and gasses which regulate and are regulated. It also, like any living thing, includes materials existing between solid, liquid and gas. They either take this form through necessity, or they are in transition. They may exist in a permanent state of transition; they may exist as the transition between solid and liquid or liquid and gas. As a metaphor, such movements in materiality actualize Bauman’s characterization of the current political and cultural economy as a form of ‘liquid’ modernity. In this environment, ideas are free to move around and through each other whilst maintaining referents to that which is or was once solid. Bauman uses the tenants of modernity in his analysis, such as emancipation, individuality and formalized notions of time, space, work

and community, to comment upon the political economy of change and the ways in which it relates to systemic structure.

Bauman asserts that in what he terms the “affluent West”, consumerism is ingrained in configurations of the individual.

‘[O]ur form of life’ has once and for all proven both its viability and its superiority over any other real or imaginable form, our mixture of individual freedom and consumer market has emerged as the necessary and sufficient, truly universal principle of social organisation, there will be no more traumatic turns of history, indeed no history to speak of.\(^3\)

This tether to the consumer market facilitates the manifestation of a new form of modernity within popular culture. Not only are the actual texts – the contents of culture – changing, but the ways in which that culture is contained, regulated and thought about are also affected by this change. Bauman again uses the analogy of liquidity to describe this process:

We are now passing from the ‘solid’ to the ‘fluid’ phase of modernity; and fluids are so called because they cannot keep their shape for long, and unless they are poured into a tight container they keep changing shape under the influence of even the slightest of forces. In a fluid setting, there is no knowing whether to expect a flood or a drought – it is better to be ready for both eventualities. Frames, when (if) they are available, should not be expected to last for long. They will not be able to withstand all that leaking, seeping, trickling, spilling – sooner rather than later they will drench, soften, contort and decompose.\(^4\)

This thesis situates itself in contemporary culture – in the mobile and liquid – whilst drawing out the elements of more stable discourses that inform engagement with the popular. In this context, different forms of culture emerge, where solid and liquid co-exist, where there are definite, determinate ideas and ideologies around which less stable, less fixed ideas and ideologies are able to move.

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Not only is culture physical; it is ethereal, replete in its existence as thought and feeling. This phenomenon takes no tangible form but is real, often more so than the tactile and sensory. In this instance, culture is linked to the senses, but it is greater than merely recalling the image, sound or touch of objects. Cultural preoccupations transcend tangible manifestations, using memory and emotion to forge a new molecular make-up. Cultural experience exists in this ghost town-cum-junk yard of recall and nostalgia. Texts emblazoned as exemplars of great canons and the detritus of b-grade trash share equal space and equal billing. They are all ‘great’ because they are owned and relevant.

Film and music trigger processes of consumption and the movement of texts from the private sphere to the public sphere, as well as existing as the actual, tangible texts themselves. The rules of consumption have changed as the pace of electronic and commercial transfer has quickened. This acceleration has been instigated and facilitated by processes of cultural production, distribution and circulation, embodied in the advent and rise in prolificacy of consumer economies. Specific communities form identities through collective communication via media, and the cultural connections that emerge are manifested through the ability to consume. As Grossberg suggests,

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[T]he real source of the popularity of the culture of the mass media lies, not in its ideological effects, but in its location within a consumerist sensibility emphasizing the production of pleasure.\(^6\)

It is not only the willingness of individuals to participate in commodity culture that informs the distribution of cultural capital, but also the discourses within which this consumption is based. As the processes of production and distribution have accelerated, so has this movement within, between, through and around specific discourses of culture and consumption. Our awareness of time and our ability to defy its structures have reached the point where it no longer affects our mobility or ability to consume. As Savage puts it, we are now able to exist “in several time zones at once without being torn apart.”\(^7\) This quality characterizes the contemporary situation within – and relationship to – popular cultural realms such as film and music.

Both popular music and film have distinct and intertwined relationships founded not only in consumer culture but in dominant narratives of specific media formations. Through the invocations of accelerated or liquid modernity\(^8\), traditional notions of history linger. The majority of writing on film music focuses on orchestral scoring and often incorporates

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musicology and film analysis\textsuperscript{9}. Even Davison’s \textit{Hollywood Theory, Non Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s}\textsuperscript{10} concerns itself with the return of classical film scoring. Writing and research has been conducted around the conjunction of film and popular music utilizing historical perspectives and originating from a film studies trajectory, providing snapshots of canonical moments in the culmination of these


two media forms. Crenshaw’s *Hollywood Rock: A Guide to Rock ‘n’ Roll In the Movies*\(^\text{11}\) and Denisoff & Romanowski’s *Risky Business: Rock in Film*\(^\text{12}\) are solid accounts of the increasing visibility and developing relevance of popular music on the cinema screen.

Smith’s *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*\(^\text{13}\) is concerned with the structural and economic ends of film production in its construction of a history of popular film music. It is an authoritative analysis of the ways in which film production has utilized and marketed popular music. A landmark text, it provides invaluable analysis of the origins of popular film music production and distribution, emphasizing the historical routes of this conjunction by focusing on films from the 1960s. Romney and Wooton’s edited collection *Celluloid Jukebox: Popular Music and the Movies Since the 50s*\(^\text{14}\) emphasizes the textual embodiment of popular music as a political standpoint that is able to be harnessed for cinematic representation. It provides pivotal foundations for theoretical investigations into the increasing visibility of popular music on celluloid. The book is hindered only by attempts to summarise and generalize. Giles’ contribution for example – ‘As above so below: 30 years of underground film and popular music’ – is an expanded appendix of notable underground films and their accompanying musical scorers. It provides a brief history of underground film and its connections to various musical movements without the requisite detail of analysis into why or how specific types of

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popular music are utilized or synthesized within this very specific screen culture. This brevity is a symptom of much of Romney and Wooton’s collection. Although it provides invaluable ruminations from musicians and filmmakers whose work has exemplified the collision of rock and film, the short entries which make up its core argument block the development of significant theoretical investigation other than establishing useful and relevant codes for understanding their subjects. Still, this book stands as some of the most astute and relevant writing about rock on film and is significant for its lucid depiction of the trade-offs between commerce and art in the realm of popular film music. My doctoral research extends the invaluable contributions of books such as Romney and Wooton’s by propelling arguments offered in that text into the realm of cultural theory, whereby the processes of textual creation and reception are analysed in order to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which rock music and film align textually and contextually.

Music journalism as a form of writing is linked to and detached from academic inquiry into popular texts. It establishes critical methods for analysing popular texts at speed, whilst often serving to provide and reinforce hierarchies of taste and value which are steeped in the clichés of rock discourse and elitist notions of cultural value. Inquiries into the pop and film hybrid in music journalism are often canonical and serve primarily

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15 Jane Giles. ‘As above, so below: 30 years of underground cinema and pop music’, in Romney & Wooton, op. cit. pp. 44-51
16 Exemplifying the tendency for rock journalism to iconize and canonize, as well as enforce hierarchies of taste are a range of rock-centred music magazines. UK publications such as Mojo and Uncut constantly re-emphasize specific moments, movements and musical figures by combing popular music history for singular subjects to historicize, contextualize and further explain. These magazines often focus single issues on a specific topic, such as Mojo’s ‘The 100 Coolest Film Scores Ever’ (Mojo 103. June, 2002) and ‘The 100 Greatest Drug Songs Ever!’ (Mojo 109. December, 2002), or Uncut’s ‘The Beatles: Their 50 Greatest Songs’ (Uncut 50. July, 2001). Other publications such as Q, or the US based Rolling Stone have released special editions such as Q’s ‘1001 Best Songs Ever’ (Q Special Editions, 2003) or Rolling Stone’s ‘The 500 Greatest Album’s of All Time’ (Rolling Stone 622. February, 2004).
to highlight specific moments in their shared history, such as Hepworth’s piece for *Word*\(^{17}\), *Sight & Sound*’s collection of quotes and recollections\(^{18}\) and Dellar’s *Guide to Rock Cinema* for the NME\(^{19}\). What film studies and music journalism often lack is an interdisciplinary method to investigate not only the rock and film hybrid but also the cultural processes of production and reception that cultural theory makes its primary interest. Pivotal, the presentist inflection of journalism means that theories of time, memory and history are disconnected from the prose. Particularly when working with(in) the rock discourse, it is necessary to understand the mobility of the rock trajectory, rather than perpetuating mythic concepts of radicalism and resistance. Theories of change are required. This thesis charts these changes through the use of popular music on screen.

Two exceptional books have emerged since 2000 which focus on the phenomenon of popular film music. Dickinson’s *Movie Music: The Film Reader*\(^{20}\) is an important collection of relevant essays on both traditional film scoring and the increasingly familiar use of popular music and its politics to create meaning in contemporary cinema. Covering the scope of film music criticism, from Adorno and Eisler’s groundbreaking work from 1947\(^{21}\) to her own chapter on the aesthetics of film form in pre-millennial teen flicks\(^{22}\), Dickinson begins the anthology by noting the “custom for starting any book on film music with a complaint about the degree to which academics had overlooked the topic.”\(^{23}\)

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\(^{18}\) Various authors *Sight & Sound: The Film Music Special*. Vol. 4 (9), September, 2004. pp. 26-49


\(^{22}\) Kay Dickinson. ‘Pop, speed and the ‘MTV Aesthetic’ in recent teen films’ in *Scope*. June 2003, (www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal)

\(^{23}\) Dickinson, op. cit. p. 1
This absence is no longer the case, and it is collections of essays such as *Movie Music: The Film Reader* as well as Robertson Wojcik and Wright’s anthology *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*\(^{24}\) that have ensured that eclectic and considered writing on film music has provided insight into the ways in which the visual and the aural have gelled on celluloid. Utilising case studies from predominantly Western texts\(^{25}\), this thesis aims to update the theories and research materials presented in readers and collections such as Romney and Wooton’s, Wojcik and Wright’s and Dickinson’s by its engagement with new examples and analyses of texts that freshen the insights of popular music on film. My research also fills the gaps within academic investigations into the nature of the pop/film hybrid through research that is not only grounded in film studies and popular music analysis, but also cultural theory. This collision of methodology in a new textual environment is the original contribution to knowledge of this thesis, allowing for a complex rendering of the social and cultural processes that configure the textual and contextual meaning systems that exist between pop and film.

This doctoral research aims to establish a theoretical approach towards the use of popular music in cinema, to articulate this relationship through the specificities of individual textual and generic approaches. In its engagement with specific textual forms it recalls methodologies which are relevant to film studies, popular cultural and in particular


\(^{25}\) Referring to Bauman’s discussion of “the affluent West”, this thesis takes as its main emphasis, cinematic and popular musical texts which have emanated from the United States and Britain. These countries and the cultural texts which emanated from them, as well as typifying Bauman’s term, have served primarily as the focus of most popular cultural theory and most accurately reflect the political and ideological milieu of this thesis. Zygmunt Bauman. *Intimations of Postmodernity*. London: Routledge, 1992. p. 175
popular music studies and music journalism. In this instance it aims also to establish a context for the conjunction of these seemingly disparate forms of textual analyses. The first section explores the processes and genres through which cinema and youth-oriented forms of popular music have been brought together and in doing so, having broken and reformed generic structures. The realm of popular film music has been an evolution nurtured by the various stages and states of popular song and cinema themselves, which is achieved through an engagement with genre. Altman’s writing on the musical\textsuperscript{26} is utilized, as is Dyer’s\textsuperscript{27}, however the analytical models summoned by both are specific to traditional Hollywood musicals of the pre and post-war period. They provide a basis for generic engagement with the form. Although the traditional Hollywood musical is an outdated mode of cinematic expression, my research analyzes the post-musical and its efforts to rekindle the form through its investment in a new cinematic language of the musical. This new cinematic language included not only the renegotiation of established genres, but also the structural integration of popular music into the aesthetic and thematic fabric of film.

Specific texts exist which have been canonized through their capacity to transform the relationship between film, music and audiences. *The Blackboard Jungle*\textsuperscript{28} is often regarded as the first instance of rock’n’roll on celluloid and has been canonized as the moment when youth culture first pervaded the cinema screen thanks to the inclusion of


Bill Haley & the Comets’ ‘Rock Around the Clock’\textsuperscript{29}. Fred F. Sears’ 1956 film\textsuperscript{30}, which borrowed the song and its title is also linked to the origins of rock’n’roll on celluloid. Denisoff & Romanowski\textsuperscript{31}, Doherty\textsuperscript{32} Romney & Wooton\textsuperscript{33} and Keightly\textsuperscript{34} have all provided analyses of the appearance of Bill Haley and his band The Comets, who were one of the first recognized rock’n’roll acts, in both of these films. Peterson\textsuperscript{35} has proposed that the song ‘Rock Around the Clock’ began what is considered the “rock era”, whilst Keightly calls for a clarification of the terms ‘rock’n’roll” and “rock”, following his earlier argument that “rock” was a self-conscious adaptation and critique of mass society and consumer oriented culture, whilst “rock’n’roll” existed as an element of that culture and provided links from consumer culture to youth demographics\textsuperscript{36}. The distinction between politically-emblazoned youth culture and its mass-culture appropriations is a central concern of this thesis.\textsuperscript{37}

In revisioning and resounding theories of film and music, I acknowledge but decentre iconic texts in an effort to contextualize the rock/film hybrid from a new perspective.

\textsuperscript{29} Jimmy DeKnight & Max Fredman. ‘Rock Around the Clock’. Decca, 1954.
\textsuperscript{37} Although political resistance appears at odds with the concept of liquid modernity, this thesis will argue that the two are not mutually exclusive, and that the relationship between exclusive politics and an overall ideological environment of inclusion and interconnectivity is possible, as well as demonstrating this relationship through its various case studies.
Pennebaker’s *Dont Look Back*[^38] is often regarded as being responsible for the genesis of cinema verité style in rock music documentaries.[^39] The iconic image of folk singer Bob Dylan standing on the opposite side of a doorway to D.A Pennebaker’s camera or the action shots of his back as he walks and talks, seemingly oblivious to any notion of cinematic spectacle speak not only about the manner in which *Dont Look Back* has perpetuated the development of narratives about the man, but also about how an artist such as Dylan may have chosen to have been portrayed on screen, as documented by Knobloch.[^40] Pennebaker’s documentary has stood as proto (and meta) music documentary by which preceding attempts at the genre were measured. In 2005 Martin Scorsese, who’s career has been punctuated by a proclivity for documenting moments and figures in popular music history[^41], released his own film on Dylan; *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan – A Martin Scorsese Picture*[^42]. Whether Scorsese’s film overshadows Pennebaker’s as the definitive portrait of the artist as a young man is yet to be revealed. It is fitting that Dylan, a musician who refused to be simplified, categorized or defined is,

[^38]: *Dont Look Back*. Directed by D. A. Pennebaker, Leacock-Pennebaker, 1967. The film’s original title did not include an apostrophe. All subsequent usages of the title in other publications are as printed.


four decades on from the era the new film documents, still having his past rewritten and revis(ion)ed.43

In another instance of the canonized rock film Smith discusses with reverence, the infamous ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’ sequence from Lester’s *A Hard Day’s Night*44 where ‘the fab four’ escape a television studio to frolic in a field. Framing the number as “a rapid montage sequence that was a unified and visual whole”45, as well as mentioning the song’s excerption from the film for screening on MTV, facilitates his argument that *A Hard Day’s Night*, as well as the other Beatles films, were progenitors to the music video form. The Beatles films’ have been written about from a number of perspectives46, and whilst Smith’s comments may appear overly optimistic about the bands’ cinematic legacy, his position is reflective of the general regard for the ‘Hard Day’s Night’ sequence specifically. Film studies often charts the history of its chosen medium through the valorizing of specific moments and texts.47

Particular moments in popular cultural history act as hinges upon which to hang interpretations of film technique, hybridization and intertextuality. The analytical key and methodological challenge is to locate these textual hinges and justify their selection

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45 Smith, op. cit. p. 159


semiotically and socially. That task is enacted in the pages that follow. The concept of popular memory frames cultural processes and the texts that emerge from them as sites of power negotiation and social change as well as recontextualizing the ways in which we render history and memory.

Popular culture is a conduit for popular memory, moving words, ideas, ideologies and narratives through time. It is distinct from both collective memory and history. Popular memory, by its nature, is a fount of consensus and a building block of ‘the mainstream’.\(^{48}\)

Whilst popular memory is a ‘fount of consensus’, it also exists alongside – and is embedded within – individual experience, which permits disparate remembrance and subjective opinion. It not only relies on social memory but also selectivity to inform, shape and contextualize it.\(^{49}\) Film’s status as a creative medium negates the principles of definitive historical fact through its inherent structural codes and existence as a site of subjective expression. Film history provides a blueprint which popular memory overlaps. They exist inside and outside each other’s boundaries, commenting on and allowing for new understandings of time and the ways in which it frames the relationship between texts and the processes through which these texts are consumed.


It is impossible to catalogue and discuss each example or moment of hybridity between rock and film. The aim of my research is more succinct: to provide a theoretical framework for investigating the intertwining of popular music and cinema. To achieve this goal, popular memory studies is utilized. As Virilio suggests, “[o]ur consciousness is an effect of montage.”50 Popular memory reconciles traditional, canonical histories of culture with the personal and emotional engagement with which individuals refer to culture as one of the major arenas for identity construction. Morley articulates this conjunction between textual signifiers of form-based value and the ephemeral foundations of identity through a dissection of the perfect pop song:

[W]hat makes a great pop song is not only the correct use of rhythm, form, content and glamour, but also the right atmospheric, emotional connection with performer, time, listeners, the fashion of the moment and the way the present seeps into the future.51

This slippage of time confirms how popular music manifests desire. Film has a similar ability, constructing worlds to which specific audiences can relate, but also within which they can perform and negotiate their identity. The second section of this thesis applies the concept of popular memory to popular film music in order to demonstrate its function in promoting consumerism. This discussion is necessary to structure popular film music and the excavation of musical histories for cinematic purposes within the framework of commodification, but also in order to discuss the purpose of this excavation in hailing audiences and locating specific representations of reality to which they relate.

This research project activates an interdisciplinary intervention. Film studies is often overwhelmed by grand narratives of history\textsuperscript{52}. Great directors, great performances and great movements in (singular notions of) film history dominate film theory and its explanation of how cinema should (as opposed to how it does) seep into our collective memories, and it is for this reason that a large number of filmic texts are deployed in this thesis, covering the scope of cinema history and many different production processes. However, popular cultural studies interprets and analyzes the ways in which particular versions of reality are imbedded in specific cultural formations. As such, it allows for a form of textual analysis that maps out the social and economic origins of specific texts, or of the movement of media between texts, and texts between media.\textsuperscript{53}


Whilst adequately analysing popular texts through theoretical rationales, academic engagement with popular music often fails to communicate the affective power of popular texts. This affective power is the source of individual identification and is a key requirement of any investigation of popular media forms such as cinema and film. This is an approach that journalistic writing on popular music has grasped and captured.

music theory with a sense of purpose as well as being able to accurately describe and locate popular music within frameworks of audience and genre. Effective music journalism is not only literate in the discourses of popular music structure and genre but also descriptive and engaging in its prose.

Music journalism is particularly effective at discussing both the successes and failures of particular texts based on their location within the creative languages of specific cultural formations and genres. Journalistic writing thoughtfully engages in both the strengths and flaws of the texts it critiques. Yet journalistic engagement with popular culture often captures little theoretical focus. My research aligns the theoretical investigations of film studies, popular music studies and cultural theory. It marries several methodologies in an informed analysis of popular film music’s structural and textual hybridity.

This thesis sutures theoretical movements that have informed the disparate studies of popular music and film, seeking out the theorists and critics that translate and transform popular culture through notions of time and space. Theorists who tackle the popular, such as Hall, McRobbie and Willis have probed the alignment of text and context, with

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the goal of facilitating social change and consciousness. These relationships are marked by the signifiers of capitalist discourse. The fetishism of consumerism becomes embedded in texts and the rituals surrounding them. In attempting an appropriate definition of cultural experience, it is also important to consider Bauman’s position on the nature of contemporary cultural politics. He proposes that we exist in a climate of liquidity; where ideas do not stay fixed but are mobile. Modernity was characterized by what he terms the “melting of solids”. In a liquid modern age this process has merely been “redirected to a new target.”61 My research proposes that the new target to which Bauman refers is media forms themselves, with the political and aesthetic agendas of previously separate creative realms converging and aligning textually. As such the rules, trajectory and objectives of creativity shift.

The notion of ‘the author’ comes under great scrutiny in section three of this project. Since Barthes proclaimed the death of the author62 there has been much debate as to the

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61 Bauman. Liquid Modernity, op. cit. p. 6

62 In ‘The death of the author’ Barthes negated the modernist emphasis on the notion of the creative individual as imparting definitive meaning on texts through their status as author. Roland Barthes. ‘The
role of the author in contemporary cultural contexts. Film studies reignited the debate over the author when *Cahiers du Cinema*[^63] proposed the cinematic notion of the auteur and Andrew Sarris responded with *American Cinema, Directors and Directions, 1929-1968*[^64]. Both Dyer[^65] and Ellis[^66] expanded the notion of the auteur by insisting that their role in shaping a film’s iconography or aesthetic need not be limited to that of director. Foucault suggested that, instead of inferring intentionality to the individual, the author can be viewed as a function as opposed to anything as romantic or traditionally modernist as a creative force[^67]. Bennet’s[^68] analysis is also of relevance when discussing the contemporary meaning around the author, as is Stillinger’s dismissal of the ‘solitary genius’[^69]. The author exists around a text in order to provide it with context. Occasionally this context may extend to a particular element of a film’s production, but it is limited and in flux. This capacity for change exemplifies Bauman characterization of the possibility for and implications of instability.

For a great majority of the denizens of a liquid modern world, such attitudes as a care for cohesion, sticking to the rules, abiding by precedents and staying loyal to

[^63]: *Cahiers du Cinema* was founded in April of 1951 by Andre Bazin, Jaques Doniol-Valcroze and Josephe Marie. By 1956 filmmakers and writers such as Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Goddard, Jaques Rivette and Eric Rohmer were using the magazine to espouse a loose hierarchy of critical values which they termed *la politique des auteurs* or ‘the auteur theory’, which established the director as the primary creative force behind the filmmaking process.


the logic of continuity rather than floating on the wave of changeable and short-lived opportunities are not promising options.\textsuperscript{70}

The possibilities of liquidity pose critiques of singular authorship and allow for the cinematic definition of the auteur to be expanded to include artists whose work in the arenas of soundtrack composition and performance compliment the filmmaking process and contribute significantly to its iconography.

The third section of this thesis explores the possibilities of multiple authorships within cinematic discourse through the pop to film crossover and the rock star film score. Both of these sites of cinematic renegotiation between media forms are usually analysed in the context of single artists.\textsuperscript{71} Both the pop star film vehicle and the popular musician as film scorer exemplify the processes of liquidity and mobility with which Bauman characterizes our contemporary cultural environment, as a single individual is processed as icon and signifier stretching across the media of film and popular music, usually surrounding a singular cinematic text.

The manner in which individuals connect with popular texts has changed dramatically, shaped by the evolution of technology, methods of distribution, and new possibilities for

\textsuperscript{70} Bauman. Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchio, op. cit. p. 53
readership. The splintering of textual formations into distinct yet interconnected subgenres has uncovered youth markets as a lucrative commercial viability. This process is exemplified by the concept of youth cultures. In the 1940s and 1950s, when youth was discovered as an emerging demographic, a culture which crossed media formations as well as an applicable ideological position for that culture was seemingly created in order to target this emerging youth demographic.\(^7^2\) The interconnectivity of different media forms has resulted in a new aesthetic order, one that is constantly in flux, finding new combinations and possibilities for intertextual dialogue. As Davison argues, cinema was revolutionized by several shifts to cultural formations including the dissolution of the studio system and the rise of independent methods of film production, the suburbanization of the landscape facilitating the fragmentation and individualization of readership rituals and practices, and what she labels the horizontal integration of the entertainment industry and the drive toward ‘synergy’ – that is, the mutually beneficial cross-promotion of products across different media.\(^7^3\) It is this ‘drive toward synergy’, and the results and implications of it, with which my work is concerned.

Section Four of this thesis monitors the shifting aesthetic realms and possibilities of cinema as a language in and of its own, but also as a language used in conjunction with that of popular music. The section probes resistive filmmaking’s connections to the avant-garde in art as well as its investment in youth culture and explicitly, in the resistive


\(^7^3\) Davison, op. cit. p. 43
politics expressed in much of rock’s disaffection and disenfranchisement. Transgressive approaches to filmmaking are often facilitated by their use of popular music’s resistive ideological trajectories and deliberately questionable notions of political and aesthetic taste.

Baudrillard’s antifoundationalist stance towards aesthetic pleasure lends itself to analyses of the aesthetics of consumer culture. He insists that, “the text must obliterate all reference … the text must scoff at meaning.”\textsuperscript{74} The combination of the visual and the aural provides the stimulus for visceral reactions to particular texts. Here Baudrillard proposes that in a post-aesthetic age, where any notion of a unique origin has been obliterated by our existence within a world of simulacra\textsuperscript{75}, such reactions are our only barometers of value. Individuals situated within specific social and cultural discourses make judgments on cultural texts based on their acceptance or rejection of these discourses and the literacies that they facilitate. This approach to history and memory frames an understanding of how popular culture exists within a hierarchy of cultural worth. Butler reconciles this fissure between aesthetics and judgment.

The thing that allows comparison … must be at once infinitely compared and incomparable, everywhere and nowhere. It must have something in common with its precursors and yet, as what allows this comparison, must also be different from them, incomparable: it can have nothing in common with that to which it is compared.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{76} Rex Butler. ‘The author is alive’ in \textit{Aesthesia and the Economy of the Senses}. Helen Grace ed. Kingswood: University of Western Sydney, 1996. p. 110
Again, the binary of rigidity and liquidity is utilized to understand the limits of our understanding of culture. Bauman’s comments on the transitory nature of consumerist cultural objects offers context to the inherent originality required of texts.

The ‘consumerist mode’ demands that satisfaction needs to be, must be, better be, instant, while the sole value, the only ‘use’ of objects is their capacity to give satisfaction. Once satisfaction stops (because of the objects’ wear and tear, because of their excessive, increasingly dull familiarity, or because other, less familiar, untested and thus more exciting replacements are on offer) there is no reason to clutter the house with those useless objects.77

This framework also functions as a metaphor for consciousness and the ways in which social subjects attach to cultural objects. Once a text has been ‘used’ and our memory has no more use for it – it has become predictable, or the wear and tear Bauman mentions occurs in an emotional capacity – we are able to discard it from our consciousness. Not only can cultural texts be specifically located through intertextuality and their dialogue with other cultural texts, but they are simultaneously let loose by their elliptical originality, freed of any context by their incomparability.

The final chapter of this thesis confronts the results of political resistance in filmmaking practice, analyzing several films that have melded rock’s penchant for bricolage and appropriation in an overwhelmingly radical aesthetic approach to filmmaking. Commenting on the past and simultaneously transcending it, rock and film marry the self-consciousness of admitting influence and simultaneously attempting to obliterate it with force, determination and the desire for something new. This political and aesthetic resistance can be aligned with Nietzsche’s concept of frenzy78 and is exercised in many

77 Bauman. Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchio, op. cit. p. 64
78 Nietzsche discusses “the frenzy that follows all great cravings, all strong affects; the frenzy of feasts, contests, feats of daring, victory, all extreme movement; the frenzy of cruelty; the frenzy in destruction …
facets of popular music and youth culture as it wrestles with desire for both newness and familiarity.

It is this constant dialogue between context and the uncategorizable – that which borrows from the past and that which effaces it; between the past and the present – which informs my research. Structurally, this doctorate moves through the past and the present separately, utilizing traditional historical perspectives on genre, form and intertextually. It explores different temporal locations simultaneously through its engagement with film and music that has been ripped from its temporal origins and forced into a matrix of disconnectivity. The possibility for cultural objects to be analytically positioned and to move between these frameworks is the scholarly possibility summoned in this project. Interdisciplinary analysis of media forms that are structurally separate and convergent, politically singular and yet able to be connected is necessary now, in an era of media hybridity where the theoretical interests of these separate fields of study are yet to be aligned. It is important not only to understand the structural significance of both film and popular music, which film studies and music journalism offer respectively, but also to theoretically track the textual collision of these disparate media forms within analyses of cultural process and its connection to reception and identity.

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Section One

Re-Constructing Anti-Histories
Chapter One
Rock’s Increasing Cinematic Visibility

Rock’n’roll is an attitude; it’s not a musical form of a strict sort. It’s a way of doing things, of approaching things. Writing can be rock’n’roll, or a movie can be rock’n’roll. It’s a way of living your life.¹

Lester Bangs, 1981

If Lester Bangs² is correct, then rock’n’roll enfolds myriad creative and industrial enterprises. Rock’n’Roll is an image. It is a mode of communication. It is a political stance that can be utilized and expressed through any chosen medium.³ Rock’n’Roll is an aesthetic that is able to inhabit different forms and allow – as a label – for particular texts to ‘be’ rock’n’roll.⁴ Rock music has been theorized as the domain of youth, with many

² Lester Bangs was arguably the best known American music journalist of the 1970s, whose writing in various publications including Rolling Stone, The Village Voice and Creem influenced the direction and form of rock music criticism as it divulged not only the inherent aesthetic concerns of rock criticism but also the politics of rock music.
nodes and moments of historical connection.\(^5\) Young people empower themselves through music.\(^6\) From the mid 1950s, rock communicated the frustration, anger and isolation felt by youth and other disenfranchised groups, whilst simultaneously allowing the construction of ‘youth culture’ via marketing to this new demographic. This ideology – of resistance and commodification – was so influential that it entered popular discourse. Rock is part of popular culture and consumed beyond a specific age group. Rock’s history is also the narrative of how a facet of culture so resistant and emblazoned with youthful pessimism became popularized. This chapter charts this transition by examining a number of popular cultural texts which exemplify the ideological movements that exist between rock and pop.

In order to understand how popularity emerges, it is necessary to analyse how and why specific texts and performers are invested with meaning. This meaning is the hinge upon which the convergence of specific texts hangs. According to Savage, the Beatles ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’, which closes their 1966 album *Revolver*,\(^7\) “marks the moment when pop began to move out of linear and into serial time, when directional was replaced

\(^5\) The alignment rock’n’roll with the consumer market in the 1950s resulted in the successful careers of such musicians as Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bill Haley and His Comets and Buddy Holly, and is documented and explained in Richard A. Peterson. ‘Why 1955? Explaining the advent of Rock Music’ in *Popular Music* vol. 9 (1), 1990. pp. 97-116


by circular motion, when the explicitly materialist was replaced by the spiritual.”

For Savage, ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’ marks the moment when popular music moved from the chronological to the cyclical and thus, changed the generic classification of what rock was capable of. *Revolver*’s reputation within the annals of rock history certainly supports this theory. It is problematic to overinvest one album with revolutionary potential. The catch-cry of music journalism has been that *Revolver* and others such as the Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* “marked the moment pop grew up.” If this is so, then it also marks the moment when popular music became active in expanding ideas about space, identity and the ways in which culture both informs and is informed by these. By 1966, the rock’n’roll era was embedded in wider popular culture and had been for a decade. The Beatles’ musical progression from one release to the next is no greater from *Rubber Soul* to *Revolver* than any other instance in their career. George Harrison commented that “I don’t see too much difference between Revolver and Rubber Soul. To me they could be Volume One and Volume Two.” Yet the popular histories of each demarcate separate periods in the band’s existence. My research contextualizes this iconization of texts

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within the processes of cultural consumption in order to peel back the historical lacquer and explore connections and movement, not fixity and monuments.

Rock’n’Roll is part of pop\(^{14}\), and *Revolver* is not outside this maxim. It is not the band’s first rock album – as if the movement from musical naïvety to complexity can be achieved in the space between successive releases. What makes the album important, and what Savage is noting, is its resonance with audiences, based on the combination of structural characteristics, including melodic, rhythmic and lyrical elements, sound and production and its inherent thematic content, combined with the cultural conditions under which it was created and consumed. When listening to ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’ and “a revolving Leslie speaker propels Lennon – intoning words from Leary’s Tibetan Book Of The Dead – onto the nearest hilltop” listeners are, according to Harris, hearing the “aspiration to capture both fine detail and endless expanse.”\(^{15}\) It is this aspiration, and the Beatles’ achievement or approximation of this aspiration, which has seen the album canonized and iconized.

Specific texts impart aesthetic or political messages that align them with texts belonging to other genres, media or cultural configurations. Grossberg’s notion of ‘affect’\(^{16}\) as well as his discussion of ‘rock formations’, locate methods of thinking about

\(^{14}\) Rock’s status as a facet of culture dictated by the popular and commodified as such aligns it with the notion of popular music, despite rock’s propensity for dictating anti-establishment, anti-corporate sentiment. As Frith points out “The belief in a continuing struggle between music and commerce is the core of rock ideology.” Simon Frith. *The Sociology of Rock*. London: Constable, 1978. p. 191


personal economies of taste within a specific collision of memory and artifact. These ‘rock formations’ are characterized as “as much a formation of television, film, advertising, comics, etc. It is this rock formation which in fact has colonized significant spaces within the daily life of contemporary society.”17 Such an analysis increases the trajectories and definitions of rock’n’roll, which is why cinema, through the use of its ideologies and aesthetics, has been utilized not only to incorporate, but actually as rock’n’roll. Gorbman confirms that music in film is “a space, a language, a cradle, a beat, a signifier of internal depth as well as a provider of emphasis on visual movement and spectacle.”18 Popular music in cinema moves beyond the purely diegetic to jut out into public space and into a specific history of popular culture and its relationship with the public.

Cinema is a public medium from which collective and personal meanings are constructed. Representation is essentially a social process, ingrained in the histories of iconography and semiotics. At the core of these cultural systems is the notion of power distribution through social processes. Cinema’s representational history is a way to track shifts in power relationships. As a cultural tool, it has the possibility of identifying and critiquing perspectives through which specific collectives and communities can express themselves. Cinema has the capacity to trigger critical interpretation of those in power and their impact on audiences culturally, as communities and in the personal stories of individuals operating within these discourses. If filmmaking is mobilized to tell stories of youth and

17 Lawrence Grossberg. ‘Rock culture and rock formations’ in We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture. London: Routledge, 1992. p. 132
their disenfranchisement, it is likely that the aesthetics and politics of rock’n’roll will be actualized in this transaction.

The aesthetic and political effects of rock have infiltrated the media to the point where it is often impossible to detect the seam. The convergence of the aural and the visual within popular culture encapsulates the creative and industrial spheres of media production. It is more than an alignment of aesthetic nuances – a convergence of ideas and politics is also formed. The marriage of visual and aural media within popular consciousness has ensured that popular music remains a constant element of popular culture, especially in its representation of youth and resistant politics. Cashmore has argued that in Britain before the 1950s, there was little difference culturally between generations; that youth were “simply younger versions of their parents” in terms of fashion and lifestyle.

During the post-war period, shifts in marketing taught women how to consume. Eventually youth became the next target of expanding marketing regimes. Changes to the postwar economy through reconstruction and the development of the manufacturing sector increased the rate and number of consumer goods. This economic imperative meant that youth were ‘made’ as a marketable demographic. Through this process,

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youth began questioning or challenging their surroundings and establishing their own separate mode of identity. This notion of identity was constructed through consensus. Bauman confirms that whilst a collective identity is constructed through specific individual subjectivities, these culminate to construct a collective notion of identity. He states that,

“Identity seems to share its existential status with beauty: like beauty, it has no other foundation to rest on but widely shared agreement, explicit or tacit, expressed in a consensual approval or judgement or in uniform conduct. Just as beauty boils down to artistic experience, the community in question is brought forth and consumed in the ‘warm circle’ of experience. Its ‘objectivity’ is woven entirely from the friable threads of subjective judgements, though the fact that they are woven together colours those judgements with a veneer of objectivity.”

The ideological positioning of cultural texts has played a role in this process. The baby-boomers were the first generation to grow up with a diversity of media environments in the home. The private sphere became media-ted through constant technological innovation. Turner has argued that television in the home has become “more of a social, even a collective, activity, fully absorbed into everyday routines.” As the home was infiltrated by family media, youth were exercising their newfound identities through

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mobile media such as the transistor radio.\textsuperscript{25} This distinction between home-based
entertainment technologies as family oriented and mobile entertainment technologies as
youth-based was important to the development commodity culture as ‘youth’ culture.
Both Morley\textsuperscript{26} and Cubitt\textsuperscript{27} have provided context for Turner’s argument through
discussions of other specific entertainment platforms and their increasing and evolving
roles within the home.

In the second half of the last century and beyond, the economic freedom granted to the
middle and (to a lesser extent) working classes\textsuperscript{28} had manifested in the popularization and
normalization of particular entertainment technologies. As a result, the cultural climate of
the last half a century has facilitated the growth of a specific form of consumerism
perpetuated by the media and its increased presence in everyday life. As television
extended the capacity for media consumption in and around the home, the family and the
wider notion of community, youth culture was simultaneously established through media
commodities such as radio and drive-ins. The collision of the visual and the aural in
youth culture was soon undertaken.

Whilst it is futile to locate one specific instant when popular music was absorbed into
cinema, the convergence of cinema with rock’n’roll has been credited to the opening

sequence of *The Blackboard Jungle*. So excited were youth audiences at the time, such as the Teds who coveted rock music as a specific site of cultural engagement, that theatre seats were ripped from their hinges and rioting ensued in cinemas on both sides of the Atlantic. Romney and Wooton have suggested that, “*The Blackboard Jungle* imported definitively into the cinema the notion of generation outrage.”* This claiming of specific texts as representative of a collective identity exemplifies the success of the newly derived youth demographic and the commodification of particular cultural products towards this market.

Although *Blackboard Jungle* has been cited as the first instance of rock in cinema, other forms of popular music have an extensive and embedded cinematic history that stretches further back. In his preface to Romeny and Wooton’s book, director Martin Scorsese discusses the overwhelming importance of popular music in film.

> Popular music has the potency to give movies a forceful, dynamic edge. It doesn’t have to serve simply as mood music or be an unimaginative device for establishing a time period. A striking early example of this is *The Public Enemy* (1931), where William Wellman uses popular tunes in the background played out against the chilling violence on screen creating a sense of bitter irony and authenticity.31

The tradition of film musicals also blurs the line between popular music and its historical relationship with cinema. The first film to feature synchronous sound was a vehicle for

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30 Romney & Wooton, op. cit. p. 3

popular Broadway performer Al Jolson; 1927’s *The Jazz Singer*. The film featured songs and fragments of speech and told the story of a cantor’s son who becomes a popular singing star. Likewise, the first film to utilize Technicolor as opposed to tinting was also a musical; Victor Fleming’s *The Wizard of Oz*.

As well as using popular songs to engage audiences, the early film musical, exemplified by Fleming’s film, created an alignment between popular song and traditional cinematic orchestration. Whilst the sepia scenes that bookend Dorothy’s journey to Oz were directed by King Vidor, Fleming utilized Herbert Stothart’s musical direction and songs by E.Y Harburg and Harold Arlen as well as colour film stock to create a whimsical utopia that brought audiences a new sensory experience in cinema. The film’s memorable soundtrack, especially the 1939 Academy Award winner for best song; ‘Over The Rainbow’, have helped to secure *The Wizard of Oz*’s position within popular consciousness. Taking the colour and theatricality of the Broadway musical, for which Judy Garland was already respected, Fleming’s picture propelled the aesthetics of musical theatre onto cinema screens with a rich palette of colour, dance and song. After her performance as Dorothy, ‘Over The Rainbow’ became Judy Garland’s signature tune.

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Her version of the song appears on over 120 catalogued albums\textsuperscript{37} including live recordings and compilation albums. In the case of both \textit{The Jazz Singer} and \textit{The Wizard of Oz}, popular song was employed as a strong aesthetic component of the film and as a result, has been etched into the history of film. Both films are musicals and as such feature songs and performances that have become tethered to the popular consciousness of not only music fans but cinephiles as well.

Popular film music not only owes its increased prolificacy to the quality of performance or composition, but also to the marketing of cinema that crosses the boundaries of singular forms and modes of communication. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the soundtracks to various film musicals were amongst the highest selling records of the times and occupy a curious place within popular memory hinged upon notions of nostalgia and remembrance of the texts to which they belonged.\textsuperscript{38} The first commercially released soundtrack was Disney’s first full-length animated feature \textit{Snow White and the Seven Dwarves}\textsuperscript{39} which emerged in 1937. From that point, the genre of film soundtracks expanded. By incorporating disparate media forms that could be exploited both separately and simultaneously, marketing processes engaged with the aesthetic qualities of film and popular song. Not only did the musical become the most popular cinematic genre of the post-war period, but some of the highest selling albums of the 1940s and 1950s were

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{All Music Guide}. Available Word Wide Web: \url{http://www.allmusic.com} (accessed October 21\textsuperscript{st} 2005)


\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Snow White and the Seven Dwarves}. Directed by Walt Disney. Written by Ted Seers & Richard Creedon. Walt Disney Pictures, 1937.
soundtrack recordings from films such as *The Sound of Music*\(^{40}\), *My Fair Lady*\(^{41}\) and *The King & I*\(^{42}\). The film soundtrack franchise is an integral part of the marketing and public image of cinema, particularly since the post-war period.\(^{43}\) Cinema and popular music are intrinsically linked, not only through aesthetics and the structural connection between a film and its accompanying soundtrack but through other economic forces such as the cross-pollination of media forms that has become standard in the accelerated media culture of contemporary society.

The confluence of film form and popular musical expression has had not only economic but aesthetic consequences. As the commercial viability of pop music’s inclusion in the texture or mise-en-scène of a film has increased, there have been significant developments in the synchronicity of popular music within film soundtracks. From diegetic sound, where characters choose a radio station or play a song on their stereo, to non-diegetic sound where the music seemingly floats above the action onscreen in order to illicit mood or comment on the action, popular music is vital to the way in which films are structured and presented. Film often utilizes the social relevance of popular music to convey or heighten mood and to present a cultural referent to the ambiance of a given

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\(^{42}\) The King & I. Directed by Walter Lang. Written by Ernest Lehman. 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox, 1956.

scene. *Reservoir Dogs* even constructs a fictitious radio programme, ‘K-Billy’s Super Sounds of the Seventies’ as a structural method for conveying diegetic sound that is able to speak directly above a scene to comment or add dramatic depth to the action as well as to convey background to a character.

NICE GUY EDDIE
Have you guys been listening to K-Billy’s super sounds of the seventies weekend?

MR PINK
Yeah, it’s fuckin’ great, isn’t it?

NICE GUY EDDIE
Can you believe the songs they been playin’?

MR PINK
You know what I heard the other day? ‘Heartbeat – It’s Lovebeat’ by Little Tony DeFranco and the DeFranco Family. I haven’t heard that since I was in fifth fuckin’ grade.

Popular music is one of the most easily recognized arenas of popular culture through which individuals claim identity as well as a sense of community. By indulging in the specificities of a character’s taste in music, their identity as it relates to cultural communities can be established on screen. This identification is one of the major sociological functions of popular music as it is used by cinema. Speaking about the aestheticization of music into the mise-en-scene of a text, veteran film scorer Ry Cooder offers

Michael Mann is the perfect example. He would think up stuff with this kind of emotional level in mind, like his *Miami Vice*. That is an extended video, it’s an environment put up there. I’m sure he thought, ‘How will I reflect the aesthetic values in this music that we have?’ He conjures up this little scenario involving cars, clothes, guns…

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The sociology of rock is as much about the cars (or lack thereof), the clothes and occasionally the guns as it is about the music. Subcultural theory argues that communities that are formed through popular music, articulate themselves not only through this music but through various other elements of popular culture that have a synergy or confluence, that speak the same language, that exist within the same cultural currency. They fit together because they are used together.

As the soundtrack has become a more readily recognized element of the aesthetic unity of filmmaking, the commercial opportunities of such have been exploited. A traditional film score is written to enhance and embody the political ideology of a text and to articulate the aesthetic elements of the text in an aural referent. By utilizing specific elements of popular culture, such as a song or artist with whom a certain type of politics can be associated, the same process can be achieved but with an added sense of cultural unity or authenticity. Selecting music that fits chronologically within the temporal setting of the film is a technique that has been exploited considerably since the commercial rise of the soundtrack. Compilation albums released alongside The Big Chill and Forrest Gump are two of the highest selling albums released despite, or perhaps because of their status as collections of disparate artists grouped together via a specific time period.

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A soundtrack featuring music from a specific genre or political climate is an effective way to convey temporal positioning. Post-Tarantino US cinema has seen a range of films with contemporary settings using music from past eras to elicit a sense of non-temporal nostalgia, utilizing the political tone and atmosphere of a well-known song as an accompaniment to a scene where a specific mood is evoked. *Uncut*’s review of the soundtrack to Roger Avary’s film *The Rules of Attraction*\(^{50}\), set in the 1980s, praises its ability to “catch the feel of that decade’s music without slavishly nuzzling obvious nostalgia trends”, asserting that “tone and temperature are more important here than timeliness. Acute hysteria usurps accurate history lessons.”\(^{51}\) In collecting disparate elements of popular culture from varying eras and genres, filmmakers are able to imbibe their texts with a vague timeliness that can be an effective method for creating mood without subjecting the film to the specificities of easily recognizable genres or particular political and temporal locales.

Cinema, as a popular medium, has the capacity to illustrate and recount those elements of the popular musical landscape which are treasured and regarded by specific audiences as important and significant. Through this iconographic literacy film and music hail and establish specific cultural communities. The inclusion of a valued piece of music within the fabric of a cinematic text is yet another articulation of the contemporary preoccupation with popular music and its embodiment of feeling and desire. Filmmaker Alison Anders explains the inevitability of popular music being utilized for cinematic ends in order to convey emotion, location, character and mood.

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There’s no common ground except for pop culture, so in a way it’s what’s holding it all together, it’s the new myth. And when songs can live on, it’s such an amazing thing, considering that they’re not created for that. They’re marketed in a capitalistic way to not survive, and be replaced by the next new thing. So when they live on, it’s so amazing, it’s more powerful than anything, that creative spark in a two to five-minute song.\(^\text{52}\)

By operating within a paradigm that values popular culture as a legitimate form of personal expression, it can be established that cultural artifacts belonging to popular culture exist within the structural and theoretical constraints of art. All popular art is regulated and framed by its status as popular.

The capitalist ties between all forms of commodity culture have ensured that the confluence of sound and image is often controlled by publishing rights and those who hold them are in control of the production of popular culture to cross-pollinate their product for financial ends.\(^\text{53}\) As Williams articulates,

\[\text{[I]n addition to the general process in which the market registers people’s choices and these feed back into selected or discontinued types of production, there is an evident pressure, at or before the point of production, to reduce costs: either by improving the technical means of reproduction, or by altering the nature of the work by pressing it into other forms.}^\text{54}\]

This ‘pressing’ of a text into various other forms can be taken literally or metaphorically in the sense of popular cinema. Literally, the structural nature of a text can be changed by

\[^\text{52}\] Allison Anders in Romney & Wooton op. cit. p. 119
adding a song or piece of music that will impart a particular emotion, or act as an
incubator for particular value systems. This process works on a metaphoric level,
whereby the convergence of media merges the political implications of the filmic text
with that of the music chosen to accompany a given scene. This convergence is where the
‘rock formations’ that Grossberg describes55 can be found – literally. Film and music are,
in this context, congealing and creating new formations of meaning imparted by the
specific use of a thematic motif which becomes emphasized cinematically by the use of
music. From the production perspective, the use of cross-pollinating media does not
necessarily reduce costs but increases revenue by ‘pressing’ the genres ‘hit TV series
spin-off’, ‘multi-star Hollywood vehicle’ and ‘pop music soundtrack’ together into a new
form that appeals to the sensibilities of a marketable audience. Disparate but not totally
unconnected facets of popular culture are brought together in aesthetic unity. In this sense,
filmmakers utilize that from the cultural landscape which they feel will benefit their text
in a manner that will bring about the kind of structural unity required to make the
political expectations of their text a reality. Disparate images, sounds or aesthetic
approaches can be compiled to produce a new text that not only reflects the politics of
those elements mined for its production, but a new set of meanings emerges given the
utilization of these textual shards and their thematic and aesthetic unity.

The connection between aural and visual media works within the narrative of a particular
filmic text to elicit specific political or thematic motifs that allow an aesthetic unity to
flourish within the mise-en-scene. In a cinematic landscape spilling over with myriad
excuses for a soundtrack packed with the latest and greatest, the filtering of diegetic film

55 Grossberg. ‘Is there a fan in the house?: The affective sensibility of fandom’, op. cit. pp. 50-65
music through the onscreen exhibition of secondhand media, such as radio, as exemplified in the opening sequence of *Pulp Fiction*, cinema screen; as in the atmospheric use of *Evil Dead* in *Donnie Darko* or computer screen, whereby a digital version of Massive Attack’s ‘Angel’ opens *The Matrix*, is an increasing occurrence and a far less obtrusive use of external texts. Placing popular music within the diegetic world of a film creates an onscreen environment. This environment is far more organic than that achieved through the use of music as external, omnipotent narration.

Film has followed a discursive framework that has delineated specific rules for the structural and metaphorical use of music to impart semiotic information within the paradigmatic world of a film’s narrative or plot. Popular music’s entanglement with the cinematic form has been responsible for a shift in the way music can be utilized in film and the semiotic possibilities of such utility. New layers of meaning are achieved through an awareness of the specific utilization of particular songs and their insertion into a filmic text. Film music has both helped to shape and been shaped by popular culture, imparting music that is not only resonant within the structural and ideological tenets of popular music, but when taken within the context of its role in a film, conveys a specific political position that can be understood within the thematic discourses operating in that film.

There are a multitude of uses for film music. The discursive possibilities of the film/music convergence are limited only by the structural tenants of filmmaking, which themselves are constantly in a state of flux, broken apart and reformed to make new

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meanings within the cinema, which is a concept that will be investigated further in Chapter Two. Cultural processes of signification are imperative to this construction of meaning, as they are the discourses through which both popular music and film are understood. Through their synergy a new set of meanings emerge and as does an understanding of how and what ‘rock’n’roll cinema’ can be.
Chapter Two

All Singing, All Dancing, All Knowing: The Post Musical

The classic Hollywood film musical is dead. As a genre, it peaked in popularity and prolificacy in the early 1950s, quickly dwindling with the mutation of modernism into its contorted, multi-headed contemporary form. Elements of the musical as a cinematic genre continue to permeate contemporary culture, but despite Disney’s attempts to keep the form alive via the cross-promotional zeitgeist of family entertainment (‘Sing along at home kids!’)\(^1\), the musical has for the most part disintegrated into a fragmentary, ironic parody. This dissolution is particularly fitting, as the genre found its roots in the music hall tradition of self-awareness and reflexivity. Whether it recalled the popular standards of a bygone era or presented new songs which themselves became entrenched in popular memory, the studio-era musical coiled on itself, playing out its antiquated cinematic language until audiences were no longer interested.

An aim of this chapter is to locate these clichés and explore why audiences disconnected from them; to investigate what changed popular cultural practices so that the wide-eyed

\(^1\) Disney’s cross-promotional marketing campaigns not only link its films to chart singles and soundtrack albums but also to educational products, toys, clothing, assorted merchandising and a number of food manufacturers. However, its integration of rock musicians such as Phil Collins, Elton John and Sting as soundtrack composers is the most obvious of its attempts to foster promotional links to other realms of popular entertainment. The Disney marketing plan is analysed and critiqued in: Dick Hebdige. ‘Dis-gnosis: Disney and the re-tooling of knowledge, art, culture, life, etc.’ in Cultural Studies. Vol. 17. (2), 2003. pp. 150-167
innocence of the genre could not continue to attract filmgoers. Altman\(^2\) suggests that the peak in popularity of the film musical and its eventual demise was a gradual process, whereby towards the early 1950s film audiences approached the genre with foreknowledge of its discourse.

Throughout the early fifties, musicals reached a high point of respectability by both providing entertainment and showing the processes and ideology by which that entertainment is assured. We get to consider the genre’s shortcomings as if we were serious fellows and yet walk away sure in the knowledge that a song and a kiss still have the power to save us from the ravages of time.\(^3\)

Altman argues that only later, after the popularity of the genre had subsided, were directors able to confront its shortcomings structurally in new films that reinvented the terms of the musical for audiences that had become cynical of its naïve transparency and wholesomeness.

This chapter investigates a specific history of a specific genre. Altman himself precisely researches American film musicals produced from within the studio system between the 1930s and the 1950s. Martin recognizes that such devotion to a singular form of the genre is theoretically limiting. Excluding other formations of the film musical leads to a narrow interpretation of what can ultimately be recognized as a potentially diverse framework for a great number of different texts.

\[T\]here are many ways to construct and construe the form of a screen musical which are largely unrelated to Hollywood; even speaking of ‘alternatives’ to Hollywood is not always pertinent, since that gesture ends up, despite itself, reinstating the dominance of the American model. The task of truly mapping the diverse forms of the musical does not require theoretical reverie but clear-sighted,


\(^3\) Altman. *The American Film Musical*, op. cit. p. 121
historical retrieval and aesthetic analysis, since many possibilities already exist, highly developed, within many national traditions.⁴

Martin explores other national frameworks for the musical, which alongside the traditional Hollywood model have influenced the aesthetic approach of contemporary musicals. Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge!*⁵, which is one of two case studies in this chapter, makes reference in its final climactic number not only to the tradition of the Hollywood-typified backstage musical, but to the production design of Bollywood⁶. The proliferation of texts other than those belonging to dominant modes of the genre illustrates the movement of cultural formations away from centralized, traditional notions of genre such as those supported and characterized by Altman’s work, towards the fragmentary, multimodal appropriations of the contemporary. The two case studies of *Moulin Rouge!* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*⁷ provide evidence of the deviations on the classical Hollywood model that have been undertaken in recent years.

Altman sees the Hollywood film musical as having run its course partly due to serving the interests of other forms of production such as the stage musical and the popular music industry, but also through its inability to change or reinvent itself:

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Down one path lies the death of the musical by subservience first to Broadway and
then to the recording industry; down the other lies the death of the musical by self-
inflicted wounds.  

These ‘self-inflicted wounds’ were fostered by the inability of the genre to adapt to the
changing face of popular culture and the evolving discourses of film readership that
would supercede the musical as a legitimate and fulfilling experience for audiences.

Cohan asserts that the genre became outmoded because its structural and dramatic
formulae bore the stamp of a lost era, which had been overtaken by newer cinematic
tropes. He provides a list of the musical’s outdated conventions:

[The] plots seem not only escapist but hackneyed, recycled from film to film; the
characters lack psychological depth and their passions are corny, chaste beyond
belief; the Tin Pan Alley songs are out of synch with contemporary musical styles;
the big production numbers are too over-the-top to be taken seriously. Most
alienating at all, the convention of a character bursting into song or breaking into
dance with inexplicable orchestral accompaniment, the hallmark moments of any
movie musical, occasions laughter rather than applause because it breaks with
cinematic realism.

The convoluted relationship between the film musical and notions of cinematic realism
are a contributing factor to its downfall in popularity, but has also provided a context for
new interpretations of the genre. The musical has persisted, emerging sporadically

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8 Altman. The American Film Musical, op. cit. p. 121
10 Although the musical as a strict generic form has decreased in popularity and viability, popular music has
been facilitated in cinema through other generic forms. The second section of this thesis details and
analyses the biopic, which as a genre has reintroduced the insertion of musical performance into the
narrative drive of film form. Recent examples of this genre include biopics of Ray Charles: Ray. Directed
throughout the years since its demise in popularity.¹¹ The ‘post’-musical, as it might be described, exists as a comment on the genre as opposed to a legitimate entry in its canon.

Altman mentions the work of Bob Fosse (Cabaret¹², All That Jazz¹³) and Robert Altman (Nashville¹⁴) as innovators of a form that had already lapsed into self-parody by the time their films attempted to reinvigorate it. Altman confirmed that “the genre’s shortcomings [are] properly confronted – to the point where whatever function the genre once played now becomes obliterated.”¹⁵ The post-musical owes much to the classic form. Through an analysis of two post-musicals, this chapter attempts to chart the differences between the classic film musical as a genre and its varied contemporary manifestations. By addressing the notion of myth and fantasy, as well as the utopianism discussed by Dyer¹⁶ and its relation to the concept of music as a healing force, this chapter addresses the way in which the post-musical has reinscribed the generic conventions of the classic film musical.

As Martin states, reinscription is a specific process: “As in all appropriations, what is taken is also changed, customized, combined and geared specifically to ‘local’ intensities and sensibilities.”¹⁷ This chapter shows how contemporary musicals change, customize, and evolve.
combine and gear the traditional genre formations of the musical in order to produce texts that appeal not so much to local sensibilities (although that is definitely a contributing element) but to generational sensibilities. The most effective method to enact this process is by maintaining a level of representation to which that generational audience will respond, as well as linking the narrative to music that speaks to its audience.

The film musical is no longer embedded in the organizational structure of entertainment industries. Music and film conglomerates no longer require the film musical to sustain them as a source of income, as was once the case\(^1\). Through the licensing of music to specific films and the success of music video as a cross-promotional marketing tool, the film musical is not only an outdated mode of cinematic representation, but an outdated method of organization for the economic materials involved in media promotion. Not only is it irrelevant as a coded and structured film genre, it is irrelevant as a product and source of revenue. Our experience of music has thickened. It permeates our daily lives instead of framing our escapist tendencies. It is possible now to exist in a permanent ‘escape,’ as media technology, the proliferation of the individual as the primary focus of consumerism and the integration of the two has generated the opportunity to exist in a media-saturated permanence. Dyer aligns the post-musical with this state of media pervasion.

Thereafter films based on music – in this sense musicals – have proliferated but far more in terms of rendering a life pervaded by music than in presenting a movement between the vicissitudes of the narrative and the escape and resolution found in the numbers.\(^2\)

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Dyer characterizes the post-musical as a range of films that although not strictly adhering to the formal conventions of the traditional musical, most notably the individual song and dance number, are distinguished by the integration of music into their mise en scene, the importance of music in both a narrative and a production sense.

With reference to his discussion of the rise of “musically oriented films” which were popular well after the fall of the classic Hollywood musical, using Saturday Night Fever\textsuperscript{20} and Footloose\textsuperscript{21} as his primary examples, Telotte comments,

Certainly all the films discussed here seem far removed from the traditional Hollywood musical. But then the ‘all talking, all singing, all dancing’ movie ill fits the needs of the postmodern era. Yet they also clearly signal the continuing attraction which song and dance holds for us, and, with their industrial extensions in the recording industry, their soundtrack albums, they clearly provide a measure of the power of their music.\textsuperscript{22}

Although changing discourses of film readership ensured that the film musical became an outdated mode of cinematic expression that was no longer dialoguing with the cinematic literacy of large audiences, the post-musical aligns itself with the ‘musically oriented film’ by transplanting the structures of the traditional musical into a contemporary context. Pastiche and parody are integral to this process and, although the musical was already heavily informed by this sensibility, the post-musical pushes the process even further by renegotiating and contemporizing the function of reuse and recontextualization.

Before the Second World War, ‘youth culture’ in the US and UK was rarely marked as distinct from mass entertainment. Musicals represented not only family values, but entertainment created for consumption by mass audiences that crossed generational boundaries. Brookeman asserts that Hollywood’s rejection of the avant-garde, which lasted until the mid-1950s, informed its tendency towards creating pictures of mass appeal, including amongst other genres the musical.\footnote{Christopher Brookeman. \textit{American Culture and Society Since the 1930s}. London: McMillan, 1984, pp. 117-8} Dyer’s analysis of the musical as determined by a utopian sensibility\footnote{See also Caryl Flinn. \textit{Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music}. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.} allows us to understand how and why the genre appealed to mass audiences as well as the ways in which audiences engaged with them. Dyer paints the musical as the intersection between discourse and distraction, arguing that our understanding of the musical as a representation of reality, albeit a heavily stylized representation, operates alongside its escapist appeal to our fantasies and desires.\footnote{Dyer. ‘Entertainment and utopia’ op. cit. p. 177}

Two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment, as ‘escape’ and as ‘wish-fulfilment’, point to its central thrust, namely, utopianism. Entertainment offers the image of ‘something better’ to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don’t provide.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.}

Dyer confirms that whilst the musical may provide audiences with visions of a better life, it does so through a set of discursive codes as opposed to representations of utopian systems or environments. Dyer suggests that the film musical “presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.} This is achieved through the mode of engagement that all musicals utilize: popular song. A utopian fantasy exists in all musicals, whether directly articulated through song lyric or indirectly implied through mood and aesthetic, that popular music is inherently
empowering, that it has the power to heal and that the utopian freedom suggested in the musical can be attained if audiences are willing to give themselves over to the displays of song and dance before them.

It is fitting that the utopianism of the musical number is the most significant characteristic of the film musical to come under scrutiny. Amongst changing discourses of film readership and structure, the diegetic emphasis of musical numbers as accepted within dramatic action and narrative drive is reserved for the melodramas of the classic musicals or the ironic wink and nod of the post-musical.27 The dissipating musical number has been characterized by Fehr and Vogel as “a victim of the growing disdain for accepting backlot fantasy as a means of evading the depressingly large assortment of social ills demanding real-world remedies.”28 As audiences disengaged from the dramatic rupture of the form and filmic drama became less stylized as a result, the musical was forced to adapt to this changing cultural climate.

As a result of the rise of the middle class and teen employment in the post-war period, advertisers began to market specifically to youth markets.29 This economic capacity established the notion of youth as a separately demarcated generation with its own

29 This new marketing drive was aided by the increased prolificacy of television in the home. Television as a marketing tool in the post-war period is documented and analysed in Lawrence R. Samuel. Brought to You by: Postwar Television Advertising and the American Dream. Austin: University of Texas, 2001.
concerns and interests.\textsuperscript{30} Popular culture was then able to shape and cater to those interests, such as contemporary music and film, which could be used in conjunction with one another to create cross-promotional marketing opportunities. In much the same way as family musicals before them, youth oriented, music-based films such as *Rock Around the Clock*\textsuperscript{31}, *West Side Story*\textsuperscript{32} and *Jailhouse Rock*\textsuperscript{33} resonated with younger audiences whilst simultaneously cornering the desire to own the soundtrack album or promotional single\textsuperscript{34}.

To cater for this growing demographic and remain contemporary and relevant, the film musical has had to evolve. Baz Luhrmann explains the temporal specificity required in creating a film musical that will resonate with contemporary audiences. Although he maintains that the narrative drive of the film musical is often based on classic story structures or myths, the rendering of that story is processed through the aesthetics and ideologies of the time.

[T]he stories don’t change but the way you tell them does. You have to find a code for any particular place and time. In the 30s the contract with the audience was clear: you had Fred Astaire singing to Ginger that he loves her as they dance across a gloss floor. You get to the 60s and you’ve Julie Andrews running up a real hill outdoors singing “the hills are alive with the sound of music.” In 1970 the music is Greek-chorused and Joel Grey is singing “money makes the world go round” while the Nazi’s are beating someone up. You get to the late 70s and you cut away to a


\textsuperscript{34} Whilst Bill Haley and the Comets’ single ‘Rock Around the Clock’ sold only modestly upon its initial release in 1955, after it was used in both *The Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock Around the Clock* it became a significant popular cultural text and a commercial success.
needle dropping on a record while John Travolta moves to the groove, and then someone says “Fuck” and there’s a rape scene.35

This contemporization of the song and dance musical is what has lead to the introduction of rock music to both stage and screen musicals. This binary between family entertainment and prickly counterculture provides a significant number of musicals with the platform with which to reinscribe the genre, drawing from sources other than the sugar-coated innocence of MGM and Rogers & Hammerstein. From the Berlin burlesque of *Cabaret* to the hippie counterculture of *Hair*36, film musicals have moved steadily away from the orchestrated sound of traditional song and dance films. This evolution has provided an entry into the genre for rock music and the iconography and ideology that accompanies it. Films such as *Saturday Night Fever*37 and *Grease*38, gained widespread popularity and secured major profits from record sales not from their appeal to youth markets but to ageing baby boomers.39 Rock musicals such as those written by Andrew Lloyd-Webber proved incredibly popular on Broadway, but their failure to translate well both on screen and with rock audiences left a vacuum where original, artful and authentic rock musicals should have been40. Enter German transgender Midwestern housewife Hedwig Schmidt.

35 Baz Luhrmann in Graham Fuller. ‘Strictly red’ in *Sight & Sound*. Vol. 11 (6), June, 2001. p. 16


Hedwig was the creation of actor and musical theatre performer John Cameron Mitchell, originally performed as a drag act at New York’s Squeezebox nightclub in the mid 1990s. Mitchell devised Hedwig as an intersection between the musical theatre tradition of performance whereby songs and narrative co-exist through character, and the rock’n’roll sensibility of performance, whereby music becomes a signifier of identity. Mitchell collaborated with musician Stephen Trask and his band Cheater to elaborate musically on Hedwig’s world. The resulting stage show, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, tells the story of Hansel Schmidt, born in communist East Berlin who, after meeting and falling in love with an American G.I, undergoes a botched sex change operation and becomes Hedwig in order to marry and leave for the West. Stranded in Junction City, Kansas, where her G.I leaves her, Hedwig puts her bitterness into song.

As its opening number ‘Tear Me Down’ informs us, like the Berlin Wall that prompted her escape, Hedwig exists as a divide between “East and West, male and female, slavery and freedom, top and bottom.” The text utilizes these binaries to tell a story of loss and the search for identity, love and rock’n’roll stardom. Mitchell’s genesis soon expanded into a full Off-Broadway production. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* ran at the Jane St. Theatre at the Hotel Riverview in the meatpacking district of Manhattan, which at night was notorious for transvestite prostitution. When New Line Cinema bought the rights to make a Hedwig film, they insisted that Mitchell play the title role. He also directed.

Similar to the classic musical format and much like the stage musical on which it is based, Mitchell’s film constructs its own mythology that reinterprets a folk story. The song

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41 Miriam Shor in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. op. cit.
‘Origin of Love’\textsuperscript{42} retells Aristophanes’ story about what Silverman refers to as “the birth of desire”\textsuperscript{43}. Stephen Trask, who wrote the song, reiterates the context within which Aristophanes offered his philosophy, reinterpreting it for the Hedwig generation.

All the great fag writers and thinkers and whatever in Greece were all coming to dinner with their boyfriends on their arms and they were all too wasted from the night before to do any more drugs or drink or party at all, except for Socrates who, as far as I can tell was tripping his brains out and spinning in a circle in the driveway. And they’re all gonna sit around and someone says “Why don’t we all talk about where love comes from – what’s love?” And Aristophanes tells this story that is ‘The Origin of Love’.\textsuperscript{44}

This reinterpretation of mythological narratives often drives the thematic thrust of the musical. Luhrmann’s comments about retelling classic narratives with a contemporary context and perspective is reiterated in Hedwig, which addresses Lacanian philosophy through Greek mythology, recontextualized through the story of a German born transvestite searching for her true other half.

Hedwig revolutionizes the genre from which it is derived through its indulgence in rock – in its clichés, its engagement with hedonism and ‘alternative lifestyle choices’, its excesses and its existence as a realm of popular culture devoted to and maintained by its relationship with an audience. Stephen Trask comments on Hedwig’s hybridity:

Most rock musicals are just kind of silly because they’re made by people who don’t know anything about rock music. I love the idea of the form – the idea that you can put narrative and songs together and make something bigger than just a play or a gig or a concert. The same way that rock music performs that bond between an audience and a performer who are different from each other but somehow identify; I think that musicals when they really work are set in some other culture that people can then go and look at, whether its ‘Fiddler On the Roof’, which is set in this

Jewish schtetle culture or ‘Hedwig’ which is coming out of this kind of punk rock milieu.\textsuperscript{45}

The transgender cultural experience within which \textit{Hedwig} is set and the punk-drag scene from which the character originated informs the ideologies of authenticity that the conceptual rock-operas of Lloyd Weber or even the Who or Pink Floyd lack. \textit{Tommy}\textsuperscript{46} and \textit{Pink Floyd: The Wall}\textsuperscript{47}, as insular manifestos are more reflective of the inherent excess of rock success than of the emotional core of their subject matter. They are also efforts by recognizable artists to create new creative statements that draw from their established sounds whilst attempting aesthetic and thematic singularity. \textit{Hedwig} is engaging largely through its individualized reinterpretation of recognizable rock clichés. Where as \textit{Tommy} and to a lesser extent \textit{The Wall} attempt to escape traditional rock iconography by creating their own (both are autobiographical in at least some respect), \textit{Hedwig} plays off a shameless and shambolic indulgence in rock’n’roll against a genuinely original and playful plotline. The story of a botched sex-change operation resulting in the leader of an East German glam-rock band touring in pursuit of the world-conquering rock star who stole her songs is not standard rock-opera fare. Nor is it meant to be taken seriously.

\textit{Hedwig} – as a character – is a pastiche. Promotional material for the film refers to her “an acid-tongued modern incarnation of Ziggy Stardust, Frankenfurter, Farah Fawcett and Mae West.”\textsuperscript{48} Mitchell has imbued Hedwig with her own sense of humour, fashion and

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Tommy}. Written and directed by Ken Russell. Hemdale Film Corporation, 1975.
\textsuperscript{48} Author Unknown. \textit{Hedwig and the Angry Inch} DVD artwork. Roadshow Entertainment 2003. Hedwig is also arguably inspired by drag performer Wayne County who became Jayne County after transgender
pathos as well as having contemporized and individualized her struggle. Benshoff and Griffin list the film amongst a collection of independent American films that “are queer in the ways that they explode the formal boundaries and simple-minded classificatory schemata”\(^{49}\) and Mitchell’s film does resist generic categorization purely because of its amalgamation of the musical, the ‘indie’ flick and the ‘queer’ film. It is Hedwig’s status as “An anatomically incorrect rock odyssey”\(^{50}\) that renders it unique.

The connection to and inclusion of both transgender sexuality and the traditionally hetero-realm of rock music ensures that Hedwig provides a unique vision that also draws its inspiration from various popular musical sources. The text’s transgender rock element recalls both *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*\(^{51}\) as well as David Bowie’s immaculate androgenes. Hedwig even name-check’s Bowie alongside Iggy Pop and Lou Reed one of the films quieter, more reflective scenes. ‘Midnight Radio’\(^{52}\), the song which closed the Off and On-Broadway versions owes much to Bowie’s ‘Rock’n’Roll Suicide’\(^{53}\), with it’s anthemic refrain of “Lift up your hands!” a knowing wink to “Give me your hands!” from Bowie’s *Ziggy Stardust* closer. It was Hedwig’s mixture of musical theatre, glam rock and transgender performance styles that were the cause of its initial Off-Broadway surgery. County was a member of Andy Warhol’s entourage, appeared in *Jubilee*. Written and directed by Derek Jarman. Megalovision, 1977, and fronted several New-York based glam-punk bands in the 1970s. Her career is chronicled in Nina Antonia. ‘I thought you were dead: Jayne County’ in *Uncut* 103, December, 2005. p. 24.

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\(^{50}\) Author Unknown. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* DVD artwork. Roadshow Entertainment 2003.


Yet as a film Hedwig marries the cool detachment of rock to the inherent melodrama and emotional richness of the traditional musicals.

Whilst most of Hedwig’s songs provide the glam-rock context from which this transgender rock-musical gains its inspiration, they are also completely unnecessary in terms of narrative structure, merely retelling Hedwig’s story through song. ‘Origin of Love’ on the other hand exists as a more traditional musical set-piece, providing the metaphorical context for Hedwig’s struggle. It explains Aristophanes’ myth in ballad form, for the first time displaying earnest emotion instead of sneering attitude. Emily Hubley’s animation tells the story of the Gods Thor and Zeus, who decide to split apart the Children of the Earth, Sun and Moon, thus introducing the theme of separation, loss and the search for love that frames Hedwig’s struggle. The separation of the beings in Aristophanes’ story links thematically to the severing of Hedwig’s member, proving that, as Hansel’s mother puts it “to be free one must give up a little part of oneself, and I know just the doctor to take it.” This blunt humour characterizes much of Mitchell’s film, providing a balance to the emotionally-wrought songs.

For the cynical and detached rock audience, ‘Origin of Love’ proves cloyingly sentimental. As Hedwig tells Tommy Gnosis, the rock prodigy that later supercedes her

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54 Mitchell himself comments “It was too rock’n’roll for some of the up-town theatre people. It was too rock’n’roll for maybe the gay audience. It was too theatre for the rock audience.” in Whether You Like It Or Not: The Story of Hedwig. Directed by Laura Nix. Automat Pictures. New Line Home Entertainment, 2003.
with his success, “Love creates something that was not there before.”\(^{57}\) It is this concept upon which *Hedwig* forms its thematic backbone; the bond of love being the moment in which we are finally reconnected to our other halves; to that which we have been missing. Similarly, when love leaves; when Tommy discovers Hedwig’s angry inch and when Sgt Luther leaves with a hotter, younger boy, all that is left to lift her up is rock’n’roll. This emotional reliance on music is the concept behind ‘Wig In A Box’\(^{58}\). As the song explains, whilst Hedwig mopes in her trailer in Kansas she decides to “put on some make up, turn on the 8-track. I’m pulling the wig down from the shelf.” It is through the acceptance of the life she has been dealt and her engagement with rock music that Hedwig is able to accept and take control of her transformation from bored housewife to rock’n’roll superstar. The number provides the film’s only break in diegesis, with Hedwig’s trailer morphing into the set of a glam-rock number, complete with star-mirror lights around its edges, one of which Hedwig stomps on as she completes her transformation and allows herself to claim her new identity.

The structuring of non-diegetic musical numbers\(^{59}\) as key moments in *Hedwig* provides the opportunity to make reference to the technical characteristics of classical musicals. ‘Origin of Love’ provides Hedwig with its classical mythology, the trope on which to base its narrative. Whilst Mitchell chose a relatively unpopular mythology on which to found *Hedwig*’s metaphoric content, the themes it imparts on the text are appropriate and

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\(^{57}\) John Cameron Mitchell in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, op. cit.

\(^{58}\) Stephen Trask. ‘Wig in a Box’. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, op. cit.

\(^{59}\) Examples of this are ‘Wig In A Box’, which takes over the narrative momentum of the film with the insertion of a song, and ‘Origin of Love’, which although diegetic in its performance, incorporates non-diegetic animation which creates both montages of snapshots of Hedwig’s life and visually displays the story of Aristophanes’ ‘Birth of desire’.
emphasize the struggle of its central character to find her missing half. When her search appears futile or offers up obstacles, rock music provides not only an escape or safe harbour, but a way to articulate her feelings.

Dyer establishes characteristics of the classical film musical that work together to connote utopianism.60 *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* contains the elements of this utopian analysis. At one point, the energy of the musical numbers even spills out of the context of performance. During a performance of ‘Angry Inch’61, which details the unfortunate state of Hedwig’s genitals (“Now all I’ve got is a Barbie-doll crotch”) at a Bilgewater’s Restaurant in Baltimore, a food fight ensues after an offended diner threatens Hedwig. The energy of ‘Exquisite Corpse’62 even ends with Hedwig’s drag veneer being stripped in a shamanistic invocation of the iconic on-stage rock tantrum, with her lipstick smeared in a display of drag hostility. The abundance to which Dyer refers can be witnessed in Hedwig’s deliriously camp procession of wigs and costumes; many of which are homages to famous celebrity hairstyles such as Rickie Lee Jones, Tina Turner and Farah Fawcett. As well as Hedwig’s costumes, the variously dressed incarnations of her band during performances adds an element of stylish exaggeration. The collapsing wall of her trailer completes this frivolity and camp excess. Much of Hedwig is an exercise in

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60 These are: Energy; defined as the capacity to act vigorously. Abundance; defined as the enjoyment of sensuous material reality. Intensity; defined as experiencing of emotion directly, fully, unambiguously, ‘authentically’. Transparency; defined as a quality of relationships between represented characters (e.g true love), between performer and audience (‘sincerity’). Community; defined as togetherness, sense of belonging and a network of phatic relationships. Dyer. ‘Entertainment and utopia’ op. cit. p. 181


abundance, with the film’s camp sensibility offering parody and pastiche through jokes, sight gags and toilet humour which link to the film’s drag aesthetic.63

The intensity of Hedwig’s emotional journey through the film is highlighted through musical numbers, especially ‘Origin of Love’ and the climactic Tommy Gnosis version of ‘Wicked Little Town’, which Tommy sings to Hedwig, now both emotionally and physically inverted; Hedwig stripped of her wig, makeup and female costume, as they stand opposite one another in an empty music venue. The completion of Hedwig’s emotional cycle comes during ‘Midnight Radio’, which is performed at Bilgewater’s Times Square, as Hedwig has finally proven to the world that she wrote Tommy’s hit songs and, after losing her band and her long-suffering back up singer-cum-lover Yitzak through selfishness and desperation, she is allowed her moment in the spotlight. As is Yitzak, played by Miriam Shor, who transforms into a beautiful starlet who crowd surfs as Hedwig sings an homage to all the great female singer-musicians: “Here’s to Patti and Tina and Yoko, Aretha, Nona, Nico and Me, and all the strange rock’n’rollers, you know you’re doing alright.” In the tradition of rock, Hedwig is aware that the true emotional intensity required to galvanise an audience comes not from a trashy thrash-rock number nor a soppy ballad but an anthemic catch-cry to a generation. This connectivity also links to Dyer’s notion of transparency,65 which translates onscreen to sincerity between performer and audience. Many of the performances in Hedwig are gripping because they

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63 Harris emphasizes the difference between the hyper-femininity and abundance of drag and the attempted naturalism of transvestitism, whereby men attempt to ‘pass’ as women. Although Hedwig is a transvestite, the film’s aesthetic excesses align it more with the drag sensibility. For Harris’ argument see Daniel Harris. ‘The aesthetic of drag’ in Salmagundi 108, 1995. pp. 62-74
64 Stephen Trask. ‘Wicked Little Town’. Hedwig and the Angry Inch: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, op. cit.
65 Dyer. ‘Entertainment and utopia’, op. cit. p. 181
allow cinematic space for the fans. During their Menses Fair performance Hedwig and band play to a solitary fan; a geeky goth girl with big teeth and a silent reverence for her idol.

Hedwig is not a star. She does not have profile or popularity, but she engages her fans as one. She is a star because she behaves like one, attested to by the fans in foam wigs at her Bilgewater’s shows. This celebration of performance and unity between performer and audience informs Dyer’s final requisite of the utopianism of the musical: community. Having lost it all, both physically and emotionally, betrayed and abused by the men in her life, Hedwig finally achieves the stardom she craves and in ‘Midnight Radio’ she expresses that which kept her going – the connection that can be felt towards popular music. The song phrases the union between fan and music as such: “You’re shining like the brightest star, a transmission on the midnight radio.” This emotional urgency that connects all fans to the music that they love is translated in the song’s anthemic final phrases: “All the misfits and the losers, well you know you’re rock’n’rollers spinning to your rock’n’roll. Lift up your hands!”

Not a new concept in 2001, the glam-rock film musical was reinvigorated by Hedwig through its willingness not only to marry the classic musical form with rock’n’roll, but to engage gender politics through discourses of identity, sexuality, mythology and popular culture. As Hedwig proposes during ‘Tear Me Down’\

\[66\] Stephen Trask. ‘Tear Me Down’. Hedwig and the Angry Inch: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, op. cit.
between masculinity and femininity and, like the wall that she signifies, between subservience and defiance. As Steinberg pointed out in his review of the film, “we are living at a time when many of the familiar polarities are dissolving. The Cold War is over. Gender and sexual orientation are acquiring a fluidity that defies rectangular definitions.”67 The ability of Mitchell’s text to move between familiar binaries in order to create its own distinct narrative whilst at the same time feeding from established mythology are hallmarks of the classical film musical. It is through an engagement with a different form of popular music, the rock’n’roll through which Hedwig finds liberation and the freedom to be herself that Hedwig and the Angry Inch becomes a testament to the possibilities of the post-musical, where archetypes can be morphed into revelatory narratives and new meanings can be created from the remains of a seemingly dismembered cinematic form.

As the film musical has become such a rarity in the contemporary cinematic landscape, the genre has been superceded by the music video. Given the fragmentary nature of contemporary popular consciousness with the rise of textual fluidity and the revolution of the sound-byte, the information-byte and the entertainment-byte, MTV has become not only a viable textual aesthetic but a genre unto itself.68 As the contemporary incarnation

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of a promotional vehicle for popular music the music video fulfils the same role as the
classic musicals did as cinematic incarnations of marketable albums. The genre also
provides a training ground for emerging filmmakers. David Fincher, Michel Gondry and
Spike Jonze were all prolific and established music video directors before directing their
first feature films. The genre can also provide a stopgap of quick, commercially-viable
projects for established feature filmmakers. Julien Temple’s half hour version of David
Bowie’s ‘Blue Jean’ and Derek Jarman’s extended video for
The Smith’s ‘The Queen Is Dead’ provided both directors with short film projects that
merged the dramatic, narrative driven feature film genre with that of the abstract, avant-
garde informed aestheticism of the music video.

The connections between the classical film musical and the music video are multiple and
tethered to notions of media symbiosis, commerce, cross-promotion and the aesthetic
synergy of sound and vision.

Andrew Goodwin & Lawrence Grossberg eds. Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader. New York:
Culture. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992., Joe Gow. ‘Music video as communication:
Jones. ‘MTV: The Medium was the Message’ in Critical Studies in Media Communication. Vol. 22 (1),
pp. 79-93, David Tetzlaff. ‘MTV and the politics of postmodern pop’ in Journal of Communication Inquiry.
70 Jazzin’ for Blue Jean. Directed by Julien Temple. Written by David Bowie and Terry Johnson. Nitrate
71 The Smiths. ‘The Queen Is Dead’. The Queen Is Dead. Sire, 1986. Jarman found it difficult to fund his
film projects and directing music videos allowed him to subsidize his feature film career with work
In the late 1980s, the MV became an essential part of music industry promotional strategy, selling records and helping build public identification with an artist. Virtually every single released, by both majors and independent labels alike, was supported by a video.\textsuperscript{73}

It is a viable and relevant exercise to equate the music video form, which is essentially a promotional vehicle for a song, with that of the musical. The musical is an extension of the form – an album’s worth of songs bookended by filmic narrative and thematic context. Pulp’s original video for their song ‘Babies’\textsuperscript{74} states bluntly at its opening “music videos are simply advertisements for a song”. The ‘Babies’ clip emphasizes the structural conventions of the genre throughout, with inserts of text such as “setting”, “chorus” and “lip-synch” appearing throughout\textsuperscript{75}. As Cohan recognizes, “formal conventions of studio-era musicals have been successfully imported to music videos, which are essentially solo or production numbers without the burden of being fitted into a narrative”\textsuperscript{76}. It is in the notion of both music videos and film musicals as vehicles serving the promotional requirements of popular song that the functional and aesthetic similarities between the two genres can be witnessed.

The self-reflexivity and dominance of parody and pastiche in contemporary music videos points to a lineage between the classical film musical and the music video. In her analysis of MTV as a catalyst for a “postmodernist anti-aesthetic”\textsuperscript{77}, Kaplan discusses the reliance

\begin{itemize}
  \item Nick Banks; Jarvis Cocker; Candida Doyle; Steve Mackey & Russell Senior. ‘Babies’. \textit{His ’n’ Hers}. Island, 1992.
  \item Cohan, op. cit. p. 1
\end{itemize}
of music videos on classic cinematic genres, in particular mentioning Madonna’s ‘Material Girl’ video and its pastiche of Howard Hawkes’ Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.

The violation of classical codes is paradoxical in “Material Girl”, [as it] typifies what one first notices about rock videos, namely their frequent reliance on classical Hollywood film genres, whether it be incorporation, parody, pastiche, or ridicule of representations from mainstream cinema that is going on.

This reliance on existing cinematic codes has multiple purposes. It provides an easily recognizable archetype that can be harnessed by an audience to associate with the image or persona of the artist featuring in the clip. For example in the ‘Material Girl” video, Madonna plays the role traditionally played by Marilyn Monroe in Hawkes’ film. Here, the image of the demure starlet with a penchant for pampering is attached to Madonna’s existing persona, itself already concerned with discourses of consumerism and feminized beauty.

The music video and its reliance on established cinematic forms allows, as does any example of pastiche, for new meanings and interpretations of traditional codes to emerge. The self-reflexivity of music videos allows them to critique the mainstream nature of classical realist forms because, as Kaplan states, they are “able to embody ideology subversive of bourgeois hegemony because their aesthetic strategies are set up in deliberate opposition.”

There is an inexhaustible supply of examples of music videos that pastiche iconography from recognizable films in order to assimilate themselves

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80 Kaplan, op. cit. pp. 33-34: my parentheses.
82 Kaplan, op. cit. p. 40
thematically with that text whilst at the same time creating their own resistive iconography.

Towards the new millennium, the MTV aesthetic was expanding its global grip. As a result of the increasing popularity of music video as a genre, the form was expanding its possibilities. Rap videos began to increasingly resemble short blockbuster films with lush production design, bucketloads of bling and skyrocketing budgets. Hype Williams was the director responsible for revolutionizing the music video-as-blockbuster short film approach. First coming to public attention in 1994 with his music video for Wu Tang Clan’s ‘Can It Be All So Simple’83 Williams became the most prolific video director of his time, directing over one hundred videos in five years, including some of the most iconic and recognizable videos in the rap and ‘urban’ genre. Although easily recognizable through lush visual effects, elaborate sets and costuming, and all the signifiers of material wealth and hip hop infamy such as money and jewels (bling) and voluptuous, scantily clad women, his visual style has become as eclectic as his career has been prolific, careening from the cartoonish to the futuristic. Williams’ contribution to contemporary visual style has expanded beyond the genre of music video. He has been partly responsible for the mass marketing and global recognition of iconic hip hop aesthetics with television commercials for Nike, MasterCard, Revlon and Fubu. Through his increasingly visible body of work, Williams has been partly responsible for establishing a visual language or code that trades on the iconography and ideologies of hip hop and urban street culture. When his music videos began to include credit sequences including

his name as their primary signifier, Hype Williams became a brand name in and of himself.

It would appear that, as a genre emerges, the consumption and recognition of its iconography and its politics is informed by the process of parody and pastiche. Hype Williams has been credited with almost single-handedly establishing mass media representation of a hip hop aesthetic through his vibrant, colourful music videos.\(^8^4\) These videos were informed and illustrated not only through an engagement with urban ethnicity but the entire gamut of popular cultural texts and genres. Williams himself though, whilst dependent on intertextuality and the processes of pastiche for the meaning of his videos, became the recipient of pastiche when Chris Cunningham collaborated with English bedroom producer-cum-techno superstar Richard D. James, AKA Aphex Twin to produce the music video for his song ‘Windowlicker’\(^8^5\).

Initially ‘Windowlicker’ plays itself out in the same manner as a Hype Williams video, with an extended dramatic introduction with its own story that has no bearing on the song itself, creating its own narrative around the track. Two homies, one black and one Hispanic, drive through Venice Beach in a slick car, mouthing off and bragging.

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Homie 1

“I hope we find some motherfucking bitches soon, nigga: I’m horny as a motherfucker nigga, you know what I’m saying nigga?

Homie 2

“I don’t give a fuck holmes!”

Homie 1

“I don’t give a fuck neither, not if we find some bitches man. Oh motherfucker, we need to find us some ho’s up in this motherfucker man, for real… Nigga, what the fuck is you slowin’ down for nigga? Drive this motherfucker, fool! Roll nigga, damn! We get nowhere driving like a little bitch, man. You ain’t driving Miss motherfucking Daisy nigga! Just roll nigga, shit!”

When the homies find some “hoochies” – as they are referred to in the video credits – a heated exchange ensues whereby Homie 1 attempts to coerce them into the car to “handle this business”, which they decline. After several minutes of arguing, the Homies’ car is buffeted out of the way by a thirty-eight window limousine. From the limousine emerges Aphex Twin who proceeds to impress the hoochies with a dance routine using an umbrella he is thrown from over a fence in a reference to the iconographic dance number from *Singin’ In the Rain*. It is here that ‘Windowlicker’ alternates from the standard rap video format; although the initial dialogue is so graphically cartoonish that it could never have been considered as anything other than a parody of ‘gangsta’ slang.

It is through choreographed dance routines that the ‘Windowlicker’ video utilizes the language of the musical genre, as well as that of music video discourse, in order to propel

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89 The slang used in *Windowlicker* is equatable to what is referred to as ‘Ebonics’, which has been categorized and contextualized in Kendra Hamilton. ‘The dialect dilemma’ in *Black Issues in Higher Education*. Vol. 22 (5), April 21, 2005. pp. 34-36
its narrative drive. Aphex Twin’s dance number derives partly from the tap tradition of classical Hollywood musicals and partly as a parody of the iconographic dance moves that Michael Jackson featured in his videos and live performances, such as the tip-toe stance and the crotch-grab. The dance also creates its own parodic moves as Aphex forces the umbrella through his legs and thrusts it several times to mimic a phallus. This maneuver excites the hoochies so much that their faces morph into replicas of James’. Cunningham had already employed this effect on his video for Aphex Twin’s ‘Come to Daddy’\(^{90}\), where James’ face was placed on the heads of young children and they terrorized a council housing estate in East London. For ‘Windowlicker’, the idea was pushed a step further. Cunningham explains,

> There were three more options left, I could either put his head on a woman’s body and change his sex, put his head on an animal’s body or put it on an elderly person’s body. The track sounded so sexual and feminine, I thought I’d go for the sex angle. That’s another video that I really wanted to be like a cartoon. I didn’t want the dialogue to be too realistic or anything. I just wanted it to be really over the top.\(^{91}\)

The ‘Windowlicker’ video provides a critique of the sexualized nature of female objectification in rap videos\(^{92}\) as well as offering up images that pose comment about the nature of black music and white power, the relationship between the two and the colonization of ethnic urban culture for commodification and marketing to white audiences by record executives. Although these critiques are not posed explicitly, the interplay between the homies, the hoochies and Aphex himself engages discourses specific to the rap video genre. It makes these critiques by utilizing the discourse and


\(^{92}\) The constraints of race and gender as expressed in rap videos is discussed with reference to the black female body in Steven Shaviro. ‘Supa dupa fly: Black women as cyborgs in hip hop videos’ in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. Vol. 22 (2), April-June, 2005. pp. 169-179
cinematic language of the film musical genre, which itself is linked via the minstrel to notions of cultural colonization. ‘Windowlicker’ reverses the process, turning black, female faces into a single, grimacing white male one, making a comment on the notion of celebrity and the longing by fans to literally be their object of desire. This concept is pushed further when the voluptuous hoochies, who now have Aphex faces, perform the standard rap video bump’n’grind in the back of his limo. The image of a male Aphex Twin and two female Aphex Twin’s ‘getting it on’ is a ridiculous image, yet shot in low light with the evil-looking grimacing Aphex faces it has an element of horror and the grotesque to it. Through its use of irony and pastiche, Windowlicker supports Lewis’ argument that music videos support “a social system of male privilege”93 whilst simultaneously critiquing that system and operating in opposition to it.

The ‘Windowlicker’ video is stylistically representative of Chris Cunningham’s visual and thematic aesthetic. Drawing upon the juxtaposition of seemingly oppositional ideas (such as the merging of a male face on female bodies), Cunningham’s work in music video has been dark, challenging and startlingly original. In Cunningham’s work the avant-garde nature of music video is all too apparent. Wollen chooses to characterize the music video as “an animated record sleeve, extended in time and with its own soundtrack.”94 James extended Cunningham’s idea to the cover art for the ‘Windowlicker’ single, which featured a female body taken from an advertisement in a pornographic magazine with James’ head atop it. The subversive nature of the video’s central concept and its

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engagement with and comment on discourses of race, subculture, gender, sexuality and celebrity are certainly resistant. Cunningham’s video points out in starkly comic terms, the absurdity and inherent sexism of the bling generation of music videos.

Until its final section, the video plays it mostly for laughs, subtly lampooning the ‘fast cars and hot bitches’ approach of contemporary R’n’B videos. The clip ends with an image that falls between the grotesque and the sublime. After an extended dance sequence whereby the queen hoochie, whose face is a bizarre exaggeration of the Aphex grimace floats through the legs of the other hoochies, ushered through by cheerleading pompoms in yet another reference to the Buzby Berkeley style, the sky turns dark, as does the music track. Scored by a thick, distorted synth riff, Aphex pops a bottle of champagne in a shot akin to a metaphoric ejaculation, with the droplets spraying the hoochies. Extreme slow motion footage of the hoochies’ wet, writhing, bikini clad buttocks ensues. Instead of the intentioned erotic effect that such a scene may have in a traditional rap video, Cunningham’s use of low brightness and contrast and extreme close-ups of the hoochies’ jiggling cellulite offers a starker effect. Faced with this closing image, a definitive reading of the video is difficult to postulate. The hoochies do not return to their original form; they do not reap any kind of revenge on Aphex. They merely become (and stay) willfully objectified by their morphed faces and the shower of champagne that reveals their physical imperfections.

This problematizing of specific issues and cultural narrative with a lack of definitive meaning or resolution links the music video, as a generic form, to the avant-garde.
Various visual techniques are employed, often with the sole intention of creating unique and striking imagery, often with a surreal or visceral quality. Whilst a four-minute pop song is long enough to introduce a vague plot strung together not through dialogue but images connoting some kind of linearity or inherent narrative logic, the form itself is not strictly bound by the terms of narrative storytelling in the same way as film. Music videos are able to pose questions in the form of images without the intention of answering them or offering any explanation as to why their images are, or even what they are. It is because of this lack of responsibility to narrative that the music video is able to draw from various sources at the one time.

MTV also effaces the boundary between past and present in drawing indiscriminately on film genres and art movements from different historical periods; and also in the arbitrary use of settings and clothes from the Roman, medieval and other past eras. The stance of the texts is that there is one time continuum to which all exists; past, present, and future do not indicate major time barriers, but rather a time band upon which one can call at will.  

Kaplan’s argument facilitates a rejection of historical linearity in the cultural appropriation of music video aesthetics. I would argue that through this rejection of a traditional notion of history, the working definition of genre should also be clarified. The notion of genre can hardly be recognized as a straightforward relationship between individual texts and their structural elements or lines of influence. Often genre is approximated by traditional history’s reliance on chronology and linearity. Altman recognizes the simplification that often takes place when attempting to approximate the aesthetic politics of a specific genre.

Much of what passes for genre history is actually no more than description of a genre’s putative lifestyle. Once identified, the genre’s first appearance on film is treated as a generic prototype, born of the marriage between a pre-existing form

95 Kaplan, op. cit. p. 144
and a new technology. The new genre then develops, matures and enjoys a stable career before eventually succumbing to reflective old age.\textsuperscript{96}

Altman’s analysis shows that the production process as they relate to institutional decision making, such as the studio system, as well as the need by critics to compartmentalize genre and text is responsible for this simplification of genre theory. Instead of a romanticized take on the nature of influence and intertextuality, genre is instead a complex system of historical reinscription, structural interpretation and experimentation, and most importantly, what Meinhof and Van Leeuwen refer to as multimodality.

Multimodality in this perspective is conceived as the interaction of different modes, each contributing different elements of meaning, which may or may not support one another. It is, for example, perfectly feasible that the relationship between different modes is conflictual rather than supportive or complementary.\textsuperscript{97}

It is through multimodality that the avant-garde aspect of music video is apparent. The different modes of the text interact on a structural and aesthetic basis, without necessitating an overarching commonality in meaning. This structural fracture is the primary element of form that distinguishes the contemporary music video from the classic musical. However, this distinction is important, and holds implications not only for the generation of meaning within the text, but also its purpose and inherent textual narrative. Whilst the film musical facilitates a kind of visual and sonic spectacle that could be considered to be informed by notions of the avant-garde\textsuperscript{98}, the context within which this spectacle is utilized draws it away from being classified as such.

\textsuperscript{96} Rick Altman. \textit{Film/Genre}. London: British Film Institute, 1999. p. 30


\textsuperscript{98} The film musical, through its exaggerated use of film formalism detaches itself from cinematic realism. Mise en scene is often exaggerated through the use of colour and in particular unrealistic sets and props,
Although the classic Hollywood musical chose various historical contexts for the settings of its best remembered texts, the contemporary musical often has the burden of a hyper-reflexivity through which it must accommodate the cynical, informed contemporary audience. This reflexivity returns us to the structural requirement of the musical which led to its decline in popularity. Suspension of disbelief must, in the context of the musical, be set aside for the purposes of song and dance numbers. Altman proposes that in order to understand the film musical “we must treat the conceptual relationships as fundamental, assuming that the rather tenuous cause-and-effect connections are in this case secondary, present only to highlight the more important parallelisms which they introduce.”

In this instance, stylized visual and audio syncopations are no longer problematic. Altman proposes that the relationships between characters and their environment become vehicles for the film’s style and more importantly, for the fluidity of the narrative around musical numbers. In the context of neo-realist fiction film, the dramatic elements of character, plot and the ‘cause-and-effect’ to which Altman refers are expected to be well structured and convincing both performatively and within the context of the narrative. However, the classic musical audience need not be so concerned with the clarity or rigidity of such formal conventions. This is the approach taken by Baz Luhrmann with his heady, hyper-real fables which draw equally from classical texts and twentieth century popular culture. Having proven himself adept at recontextualizing Shakespeare for the MTV generation

lighting is often overtly stylized and cinematography and sound are often dictated more by synaesthetic relationships than by the demands of narrative.

and winning favour both critically and commercially with *Romeo + Juliet*\(^{100}\), for his next project Baz Luhrman turned his attention to the screen musical.

*Moulin Rouge!* opens like a night at the theatre. Even the 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox logo and opening credits are framed by the stage and curtains, with a conductor orchestrating the pit music from in front of the screen. This opening frames the heightened reality of the ensuing film in a fitting manner\(^{101}\). Just as theatre as a performative discourse carries an awareness that because of its location within a performance space it can never attempt to claim any kind of authoritative representation, similarly *Moulin Rouge!*, from its very first shot acknowledges the trickery and performativity of cinematic representation. This reflexivity frames the film effectively and recognizably within the framework of the traditional musical.

*Moulin Rouge!* utilizes every attempt not to be considered a traditional musical. From its opening moment, the film rarely pauses for a breath, utilizing rapid-fire editing, myriad special effects, cartoonish costuming and production design that not only recalls a great many classic Hollywood musicals but also lampoons and parodies them through recontextualization and a particularly sophisticated and often confusing style of intertextual hopscotch. By referencing everything from *Cabaret* to *Gentlemen Prefer*

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\(^{100}\) *Romeo + Juliet*. Directed by Baz Luhrmann. Written by Craig Pearce. 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox, 1996.

\(^{101}\) The stage curtain motif also introduces a cyclical reflexivity, imbedding the film within Luhrmann’s ‘Red Curtain Trilogy’, which also included *Strictly Ballroom*. Written and directed by Baz Luhrman. Bazmark Productions, 1992 and *Romeo + Juliet* *Ibid*. The ‘Red Curtain’ aesthetic is referred to in James N. Loehlin. ‘‘These violent delights have violent ends’: Bax Luhrmann’s millenial Shakespeare’ in *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*. Mark Thornton Burnett & Ramona Wray eds. London: MacMillan Press, 2000. pp. 121-136
Blondes to David Bowie’s ‘Diamond Dogs’, Luhrmann’s rollercoaster through twentieth century popular culture borrows context when it requires meaning and in doing so plunges itself into the realm of image-obsessed fantasy. There is nothing ‘deep’ about Moulin Rouge!, just as it recognizes that there was nothing particularly deep about the Technicolour musicals of Hollywood’s first golden era. It provided glamorous entertainment lacquered with the sheen of celebrity, sensationalism and sing-alongs.

Some have argued, such as Steyn, that this is not enough; that self-admittance of a shallow agenda does not excuse it.

To complain, as many critics have done, about the thin characters and nothing plot seems to me to miss the point. Set in 1899 with a 1950s look, 1980s editing, 2001 digital effects and a Capitol Gold soundtrack, Moulin Rouge is a K-Tel compilation album of heightened-ness … and using not whole songs but just snatches, the hooks, the bits that stick in the head … Everything in the film is second hand – evocations of hit operas, hit movies, hit shows, from Camille to Cabaret, tunes from Jule Styne to the Beatles to Madonna to Nirvana – as if the sheer range and accumulation of references must eventually produce something new. It doesn’t.

Perhaps Steyn himself has missed the point in his insistence that pastiche, no matter how bluntly admitted, can never succeed in creating a new or valid product. Whether or not Moulin Rouge! contributes an original cinematic vision is irrelevant. Any film that trades in second hand ideas must not only be considered as a ‘product’ but as a ‘process.’ It is the process by which Moulin Rouge! unravels itself that stakes a claim for an invigoration of the rules of operation for the traditional musical and for the musical genre in its complexity and reflexivity.

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103 Mark Steyn. ‘Heightened effects’ in Spectator. Vol. 287 (9031), September, 2001. p. 43
The rock music in Moulin Rouge! inverts the standard rules for operation in other rock’n’roll musicals, indeed in all musicals. Rock music is summoned through melody and lyric, but is reinterpreted and performed in the style of big band musicals – music theatre. The use of pastiche is performed in a modernist style – the style of 1900s music hall. What Moulin Rouge! proposes is that the process of popular memory that saw the music of traditional Hollywood musicals as well as those written by the likes of Rogers & Hammerstein or Gilbert & Sullivan become part of collective consciousness, has occurred within popular music. Moulin Rouge! reminds its audience how much iconic, memorable, engaging and therefore worthwhile popular culture has cascaded our way since the dimly remembered beginnings of the age of pop. Instead of creating its own songs, Moulin Rouge! uses those that have already become iconic, memorable and ideologically recognizable, recontextualizing them and reinscribing them for its own purposes.

This collage of popular entertainment is achieved and summoned through the history of popular song and in particular, the contemporary love song and those associated with what Zidler refers to as the “thrusting, violent, vibrant, wild bohemian spirit that this whole production embodies”104. Various songs are used as motifs – ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’105 for example – to summon particular ideologies. “Here we are now – entertain us” is used to summon the hedonism of the Moulin Rouge’s bohemian atmosphere through discourses of resistance and youth. Major plot points are assigned well-recognized songs from the canon of contemporary popular music. David Bowie’s

‘Heroes’\textsuperscript{106} is used as a love theme to summon the meeting of clandestine lovers. Madonna’s ‘Like A Virgin’\textsuperscript{107} is used when Moulin Rouge owner Zidler signs a contract with the Duke allowing for his club to be converted into a theatre on the condition that courtesan Satine becomes his sole property. Zidler convinces the Duke that when they consummate the deal Satine will be cleansed of her past and it will be as though she is in fact being “touched for the very first time”. The Police’s ‘Roxanne’\textsuperscript{108} is used to montage the consummation of the Duke’s lust for Satine and a tango in which a character credited only as the Unconscious Argentinean warns Christian of the dangers of loving a prostitute.

Musically, \textit{Moulin Rouge!} binarises its soundtrack. The ballroom of the Moulin Rouge where the dance numbers take place marries big band, music hall, exotica, contemporary pop styles utilizing house and contemporary dance music beats. Norman Cook, a widely recognized DJ and dance music producer, was enlisted as music supervisor for the film.

The hedonistic scene at the Moulin Rouge is kind of the same as Manumission in Ibiza: the same kind of wild, camp abandon and, cause I DJ there he [Luhrmann] said “Just try and make them dance to what they’d be dancing to if it was Manumission instead of the Moulin Rouge.”\textsuperscript{109}

As well as a beat-heavy enactment of the bohemian reverie of the Moulin Rouge dance floor, Luhrmann and the film’s producers selected a canon of iconic twentieth century popular music, integrating the lyrical content of the songs selected into the film’s dialogue and hence, musicalizing entire movements of the film’s dramatic content.

\textsuperscript{109} Norman Cook. \textit{Moulin Rouge!} DVD extras. Director uncredited. 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2001.
Producer Catherine Knapman asserts, “A lot of the lyrics are storytelling lines and we don’t want it to appear like a normal musical where you stop and sing a number; it has to be integrated.”\textsuperscript{110} Not only does \textit{Moulin Rouge!} integrate its songs into the body of its narrative, it also integrates seemingly unrelated artists through a collage-like approach to thematic context. During the film’s love theme, which is performed atop Satine’s quarters/boudoir, which takes the form of a giant bejeweled elephant, both Christian and Satine perform a medley including lyrics performed by artists as diverse as Kiss, Lamb, David Bowie and Whitney Houston. Music supervisor Anton Monstead points out that in this context, “Songs that have only ever been sung in one voice are suddenly being turned into dialogue between two people.”\textsuperscript{111} Through this method, \textit{Moulin Rouge!} forces dialogue between the nature of the traditional film musical and the structure, production and consumption of popular song.

The dramatic implications of \textit{Moulin Rouge!}’s virtual everlasting medley/mix is that the film’s inclusion of outside texts imbues it with the traces of other narratives, other characters and other dramatic situations. The inclusion of texts such as ‘Like A Virgin’ or ‘Roxanne’ provides a context for understanding the dramatic content of Luhrmann’s film, but this is achieved through the use of other dramas. The plot and character interactions that take place in \textit{Moulin Rouge!} play out through a network of established stories, through texts that become prototypical of their dramatic purpose for Luhrmann’s story. Perhaps this is why so many critics found fault with the film. Perhaps they found its use of other texts for its own purposes disrespectful as much as they found it unoriginal. They

\textsuperscript{110} Catherine Knapman. \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{111} Anton Monstead. \textit{Ibid.}
may have baulked at the implications of stripping a song if its original arrangement and replacing it with string-heavy orchestras and musical theatre performance style disrespectful. The cornucopia of popular influence that Moulin Rouge! offers can not be matched by any other film for sheer ingenuity. Monstead explains that “We’ve had to stretch and bend the very mechanics of music licensing to fit our story.”\(^\text{112}\) The film’s triumph over the industry of popular music is certainly an achievement of considerable studio-backed economic success.

Moulin Rouge! structures itself in and around the popular entertainment of the twentieth century. It does so through a constant flood of references, be they lyrical, melodic, visual or narrative-based. Utilizing an established myth as do many musicals, in this case the Orphean myth, to tell its story, Luhrmann’s film also uses other well-worn stories with which to weave its parade of parody and intertextual poaching. Alexandre Dumas‘ novel Camille: The Lady of the Camellias\(^\text{113}\), the story of a courtesan dying of tuberculosis is summoned, as is La Bohème\(^\text{114}\), which recalled the bohemian lifestyle of turn-of-the-last-century Paris. As a result, Moulin Rouge! offers what Fuller refers to as “both an old-fashioned Hollywood backstage musical with a La Bohème-like thrust and a postmodern pantechnicon of pop-cultural allusions.”\(^\text{115}\). This theme is reinforced through the narrative, which frames the love affair between Satine and Christian against the fate of the Moulin Rouge itself, highlighting the film’s central “conflict between the bohemian ideals of beauty, freedom, truth and love on the one hand and corrupting commerce on the

\(^{112}\) Anton Monstead. Ibid.
\(^{115}\) Fuller, op. cit. p. 14
other.”¹¹⁶ It is this underlying narrative that not only provides the film with its central thematic drive, but also with a meta-narrative from which Luhrmann’s film itself operates.

The film’s detractors were unable to rid themselves – or reflexively question – the romanticized, modernist-entrenched notions of these (supposedly) oppositional concepts of art and commerce. Somehow, despite its efforts to dismantle, or at least provide an alternative to “the homogenous utilitarian naturalism that has dominated Hollywood cinema since the eclipse of the musical and the melodrama in the 60s”¹¹⁷, Luhrmann’s film became a scapegoat for cultural regurgitation and pilfered, polished populism. Isherwood referred to Luhrman’s style as a “brand of avant-garde populism.”¹¹⁸ This populism concerns itself not only with the contemporary, the present – the fashionable.

Part of what defines Moulin Rouge! is its embrace of the popular forms of music from the history of twentieth century culture. Kinder comments that Moulin Rouge! offers a pastiche of the multiple forms from which it is concocted, including European vaudeville, cabaret culture, stage musicals, opera and even Bollywood musicals. However, she emphasizes that the manner in which it does so is thoroughly concurrent with the kaleidoscopic hyper-reality and fluidity of the contemporary MTV-influenced music video aesthetic.

Luhrmann’s film reminds us that no matter which genre, medium, or culture they hail from, all avatars (like melodramatic stereotypes and tunes) can be endlessly recycled at the ever-shifting point of consumption.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 15
¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 15
Through a determination to celebrate the iconic, the surface; that which captivates us and then disappears, *Moulin Rouge!* emphasizes the desire of audiences to be told stories that they already know purely because they already know them. These stories provide comfort, understanding and archetypal roles and narratives into which an audience can escape. This is arguably the focus of Steyn and other critics’ concerns.

The central argument of the contemporary study of popular culture hinges on the necessity for popular texts to be tethered to social injustice: be it gender, class or race based – those being the three buzz terms spoken in the blink of an eye, each word bleeding phonetically into the next.\(^{120}\) When a text that captures the attention of audiences that cut across these social distinctions it is seen to have no cultural relevance, it is regarded merely as recycled fodder for the masses. Whilst there may be truth to this longstanding narrative of cultural hierarchy, processes of reception are more complex than the mere provision of base entertainment for cultural dupes. Texts that capture the zeitgeist and emerge as popular only to be branded with the tag of blind populism offer insight into the cultural appetites of a significant section of a generation by demonstrating

narratives and specific cultural discourses through which a range of different audiences can be hailed simultaneously.

Despite the fact that structurally Moulin Rouge! reverts the standard notion of what a film musical does, it exists representationally much closer to the classic Hollywood musical than Hedwig for example, which tells a specialized story, ordinarily reserved for lesser distributed films; independently produced films that exist in a series of economic and aesthetic relationships that are removed from the Hollywood studio system, to which Moulin Rouge! exists. This chapter has utilized these two case studies as examples of the potential differences that can exist in the post-musical. Their political agendas are different. Hedwig attempts to reinterpret the classic musical form by using it to tell stories that, whilst adhering to the traditional structural element of interpreting an established narrative, does so through its situation within the transgender discourse. Moulin Rouge! situates itself within a social landscape of performers, artists; the stereotypically culturally literate. This element of the narrative informs its assumed literacy of great twentieth century song lyrics; the assumption of specialized knowledge amongst a cultural elite. The irony of course is that this specialized knowledge is based in the ruins of twentieth century Western popular culture; tunes or lyrics from choruses that any fan of pop music could recall on cue.

Moulin Rouge! is informed by a celebration of popular culture and it is this that links these seemingly disparate films. Hedwig, for all its androgynous posturing and glam-rock snarl, is a celebration of the empowerment of popular music. For Hedwig, music is a way
of shedding her past and healing her wounds. Mitchell’s film takes elements of the film musical genre and weaves them into its own pastiche of transgender rock stardom and fandom. Both films are products of the transitory nature of the contemporary cultural landscape; the self-awareness and referential nature of new forms of modernity and the reflexivity of pastiche. However this fragmentation and reflexivity is the primary purpose, the raison d’etre of Moulin Rouge! Both are responses not only to the classic film musical as a genre, but also to its demise. They provide alternatives to those elements of the screen musical that contributed to its decline in popularity, just as they celebrate it and its foundation of escape through sensation, of sanctuary through spectacle. Dyer states,

When pleasure is available anywhere, any time and looks like everywhere and everyone, the dynamic of escape, foundational to entertainment, disappears. Perhaps this more than anything explains the decline of the film musical, which is not only a quintessential entertainment form but also in large part explicitly about entertainment as escape. 121

We do not need to escape as we once did. Escape is everywhere. As the everyday has become increasingly subsumed in spectacle, its necessity in entertainment has lessened. Nonetheless, when films dare to show the importance of escape, how audiences need the song and dance number to contrast the routine and drudgery of reality, of realism and of the mundane representation of the everyday, the musical provides a fitting platform for such a journey. The post-musical reminds us that although media permeates our everyday, it is still capable of forcing us to live the rush of the swelling score, of aligning the rhythm of the music track with the rhythm of our lives, of breaking the fourth wall not only structurally but emotionally

Section Two

“You Don’t Remember, I Remember!”
Chapter Three
Cashing In On Nostalgia

The three-minute pop song is an effective unit of measure for filmic drama. Cyclical, effervescent and driven by thematic signifiers in the form of lyrics or a lyrical hook, it is well suited, and has been utilized in increasingly ingenious and convoluted ways, to layer cinematic images with a narrative context. Gorbman explains this process structurally:

The stanzaic form of popular song, the presence of lyrics to 'compete' with the viewers reception of film narrative and dialogue, and the cultural weight and significance of the stars performing the songs all work against classical Hollywood’s conception of film music as an ‘inaudible’ accompaniment, relying on the anonymous yet familiar idioms of symphonic Romanticism, its elastic form dictated by the film’s narrative form.¹

The three-minute pop song is a potent aural backdrop for that most succinct of narrative boosters – the montage. Myriad films have utilized a popular song in order to convey the passing of time, be it a single afternoon, day turning to night, night becoming morning, or even the passing of a number of years. Similarly, popular music can be utilized as a temporal signifier in film, and this chapter aims to discuss this usage through discourses of commodification, popular memory and film aesthetics.

Smith argues that contemporary film music is so ingrained in the sensory experience of cinema that audiences are able to foreground the music track, not only because it is noticeable and memorable, but because of high level of literacy in the signs and

languages utilized by contemporary filmmakers. If any number of films were watched without sound, then it would not be difficult to establish where the music cues should be placed in order to establish dramatic structure.

Popular music and cinema have a particularly loaded coexistence and certainly in terms of contemporary sound design, pop songs occupy a role of convenience in terms of narrative drive, emotional affect and cross-promotional economic viability. Film producer Joel Sill comments that,

The song score has become a marketing tool. A record not only synergizes with the film, but reaches out the core youth market that the film wants to attract.

The contemporary film soundtrack, especially those which feature popular music, has become a cultural product that has continued to grow in popularity and bankability. As a new formation of established modes of communication – established media – the use of popular music in film renegotiates the discourses of culture and its commodification.

Grossboerg states,

Capitalism (like capitalists) is neither rational nor coherent; it is rather a site of struggle, constantly forging its own trajectories out of its internally competing definitions. This is not merely to say that capitalism is contradictory, for that statement often locates the contradictions in the same place over and over again;

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the contradictions themselves are constantly changing shape and place, sometimes strategically.\(^5\)

The contemporary music soundtrack is worth investigation because of its hybridity. The culmination of pre-existing popular music and new visual contexts for that music is a thoroughly liquid process. The application of pre-existing sounds containing their own cultural contexts, to images that are contextually similar but specifically different, is an intriguing concept and one that requires a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between image, origin and the usage of both. This chapter, using case studies such as Steppenwolf’s ‘Born to Be Wild’\(^6\), the found music of *Donnie Darko*\(^7\) and the films of Quentin Tarantino, tracks this relationship through an engagement with Baudrillard’s notion of simulation\(^8\) as a constant of the contemporary intertwining of sound and vision.

Burns states,

> Throughout the history of film and television, there has been an impulse to juxtapose visual image and music. The manifestations of this juxtaposition have often been incongruous if not downright bizarre. For analytical purposes, it is useful to distinguish between images and music as starting points. Taking moving images as our premise, musical enhancement appears to be a deep-seated need as well as a long-standing aesthetic problem.\(^9\)

The way in which this stylistic hybrid is connected to notions of the social and the material is the primary source of its intrigue and its power to engage.

\(^{5}\) Lawrence Grossberg. *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture.* London: Routledge, 1992. p. 325


Grossberg offers a set of relationships between contemporary music video and popular
cultural practice, to which the interchangeability of popular music soundtracks is
significant, not least due to their aesthetic similarities.

Economically, it exists within an industrial-corporate structure as a particular sort
of commodity implicated in the production of surplus value (profit). It has its own
modes of production and distribution, and its own relationship to specific capitalist
ideologies (corporatism, consumerism, etc.).

Grossberg also stresses the aesthetic and intertextual ties between popular music video
and the cultural literacies of popular culture. He articulates the importance of audiences
and asserts that the consumption of musical and visual media hybrids is not solely linked
to the corporatization of media forms, but also to the popular memories of audiences and
to their cultural literacy, to notions of subculture and to personal attachments to such.

Aesthetically, its texts construct meanings through specific practices, languages,
syntaxes, iconographies and rhetorics. Music video, as a set of cultural practices,
has historical, intertextual and intermedial ties with other cultural forms. And music
video exists within a range of social relationships: it is consumed, by different
social groups, for specific reasons and in specific ways.

The alignment of popular music and cinema is increasingly brought under speculation in
terms of its economic implications. Jane Gaines recounts a legal dispute between the
Screen Actors Guild and a major Hollywood production company, confirming that the
arbiter ruled in favour of the production company.

[T]he arbiter ruled that music videos did not necessarily constitute a new form of
entertainment; if they did, actors would have to be paid additional royalties. Instead
the arbiter argued that music videos produced in conjunction with films were just
another form of exploitation or promotion.

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10 Lawrence Grossberg. ‘The media economy of rock culture: Cinema, post-modernity and authenticity’ in
11 Grossberg, op. cit. p. 185
The popular music soundtrack is also viewed in this context. As a cultural product, popular music tie-ins are perceived largely as glorified promotional products, little more than collections of marketable product that will hook into the youth market.

Much of the scepticism focused towards these cross-promotional marketing strategies emanates from the fact that they make significant profit for record and film companies at little expense other than licensing. The implications of this economic situation are usually voided by the use of artists affiliated with the appropriate multinational conglomerations.

Perhaps Hollywood’s growing awareness of a large and monied ‘youth market’ finally led industry publicists to fully recognise the potential for music-and-movie exploitation implicit in the conglomerate entertainment networks.13

While the potential for profit can not be denied, the reasons for the popularity of this by-product of film marketing, both in terms of those who create, or rather recreate the product, as well as the audiences who make this phenomenon the multi-million dollar industry that it is are significant. Thompson asserts that music, as used in the context of filmmaking, can be utilized not only to bring aesthetic symmetry to the narrative or structural elements of the film, but also provides its own structure and context. This usage provides an intertextuality that resonates with viewers who are aware of the track’s political rhetoric. She argues that, “Music has a great potential to call attention to its own formal qualities apart from its immediate function in relation to the image track.”14

The realization that found music – pre-existing songs that have their own audiences and

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13 Alexander Doty ‘Music sells movies: (Re) new (ed) conservatism in film marketing’ in *Wide Angle* 10 (2), 1988. p. 72
project their own image has been a significant one – has allowed for the use and reuse of familiar popular music in order to align the film with these politics.\textsuperscript{15}

The popular music soundtrack is a model of culture dictated by discourses of mass consumption and capitalism and consequently by marketing, corporatization and demographics. Film is a creative medium, established as an art form capable of political and personal comment. Similarly, popular music is now perceived as ‘art’. This chapter maps the relationship between these seemingly contradictory statements, locating the relationship between commerce and art in the context of popular music soundtracks, which as well as being subject to the structures of both art and entertainment, are a cultural form ingrained in notions of nostalgia, which is in itself a commodifiable phenomenon. Speaking of the construction of diegetic compilation mixes by characters in films such as \textit{Boogie Nights}\textsuperscript{16} and \textit{Romy and Michele’s Highschool Reunion}\textsuperscript{17}, Creekmur accurately contextualizes this connection between nostalgia and commerce.

Although the actual construction of these soundtracks was in large measure determined by the semi-invisible corporate affiliations linking the film and music subsidiaries of contemporary entertainment conglomerates, for the characters and filmmakers alike, the apparent goal appears to be the same: the collecting and effective sequencing of an “awesome” pop soundtrack that subsumes personal memories and expresses individual meanings even as it also functions as both advance advertising and franchise income for the film’s conglomerate owners.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} Specifically discussing the use of alternative pop, Donnelly asserts “Alternative pop songs are a good way of differentiating cultural product in a mass market, of courting a specific audience through the use of fairly particular music, and additionally adding a level of the esoteric, or ‘hipness’ to a film.” in K.J Donnelly. \textit{Pop Music in British Cinema}. London: British Film Institute, 2001. p. 154
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Romy and Michele’s High School Reunion}. Directed by David Mirkin. Written by Robin Schiff. Touchstone Pictures, 1997.
The distinction between nostalgic recall and obvious gimmick has become increasingly blurred, and it is this distinction which can be sought out and contextualized through an understanding of subculture and identity as they relate to film and commodification.

The popular music soundtrack is a bastion of what has been termed by Wyatt as ‘high concept’ filmmaking – an economically deterministic style of filmmaking that is formed and focussed on maximum profit at minimum cost.

At the most basic level, high concept can be considered as one result of the tension between the economics and aesthetics on which commercial studio filmmaking is economically oriented, through the minimization of production cost and maximization of potential box office revenue. However, the connection between economics and high concept is particularly strong, since high concept appears to be the most market-driven type of film being produced.19

The notion of ‘high concept’ is largely achieved through marketing strategies designed to attract mass audiences, described by Barbara Klinger as the process of ‘raiding the text for ‘capitalizable’ features that can be commodified and can circulate in their own right.”20 Wyatt’s definition of ‘high concept’ runs through multiple discourses associated with contemporary film marketing, of which the popular music soundtrack is a significant component.

With the high concept films, the music is matched to a marketable concept behind the overall film. In addition, high concept is marked not only by music and a marketable concept, but also by the other traits of the style (i.e., the particular look and the other pre-sold elements, such as stars and narrative with marketing hooks). This configuration of elements distinguishes music in high concept, reinforcing the inherent marketability of placing music in the film which other post-classical films have realised.21

21 Wyatt, op. cit. p. 40
Stylistically, found music can rupture the diegesis of the film’s dramatic sphere. Like formal cues interjecting into the world of the characters, popular music can seem like the audio-visual equivalent of product placement. Despite its stylistic belonging, which in the case of found music equates to aesthetic synergy, its extraneous context often forces a reflexive and subjective distraction from the film’s representation of reality.

The viewer still tries to follow the narrative, despite the excess suggested by the music. In these cases, the music is not patterned throughout the film, but rather acts as an explosion which only momentarily disturbs the equilibrium of the film.22

This interjection has become acceptable filmmaking practice for a range of reasons. Its frequency has allowed this process to no longer jar or disorient in the same way as a new technique. As Wyatt suggests, the use of pre-existing popular music in film form is certainly linked to economic factors, but as a stylistic element of the film’s form and aesthetic approach, the choice of appropriate tracks that complement the feel and pace of the film is theoretically as important as the projected revenue gained from the use of a particularly popular or well-recognized track.

The found music used in a film can give an approximation or representation of specific sub-cultural formations and their modes of cultural expression, namely those associated with music. Spike Lee’s Do The Right Thing23, a film about racial conflict, uses Public Enemy’s ‘Fight The Power’24 as a particularly potent expression of the African American experience of oppression by authority, as well as an aesthetically appropriate stylistic choice that communicates the mood of simmering rage and forcefully pro-African

22 Wyatt, op. cit. p. 41
American stance of both the group and the characters in the film. Lee’s film deals with the genesis of a race-related riot that tears apart an African American community based around Sal’s Famous Pizzeria, run by Sal and his two sons, all of Italian origin. Like many of his other films, *Do The Right Thing* offers the viewer, a fluent command of black and white cultural languages, and an insistence on counterposing them in an aesthetic dialectic. Instead of seeing blacks purely in terms of white norms and practices, these films show blacks securely positioned in their own environments, discussing and dealing with their own problems, ignoring or at best belittling the toys and games of the dominant white culture.

‘Fight The Power’ is the aesthetic dialectic employed by Lee. The song is positioned within the film as an anthem for the defiance for which the main black characters stand. Although *Do the Right Thing* offers no solution to the problems it raises, its use of Public Enemy’s track establishes its potent political stance as well as the venomous spite that Radio Raheem, whose boom box blares the track throughout the film, feels towards systems of authority, be they the police, or merely Sal, a white business owner in his black neighbourhood. Although critics such as Snead claim *Do The Right Thing* as a powerful and provocative voice of black anger, the film has its detractors. Lubiano argues that, despite its impressive precedent within representations of the black experience, Lee’s film still operates from within the realm of marketable cultural practice, which Lubiano argues, is problematic when dealing with the anger and bile of resistive politics.

If Lee’s strength is a certain ability to document some of the sounds and sights of African American vernacular culture – its style focus – that vernacular cannot guarantee counterhegemonic cultural resistance. One can be caught up in Euro-American hegemony within the vernacular, and one can repeat the masculinism and heterosexism of vernacular culture.

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The possibility for a cultural item existing within processes of cultural production and distribution to critique those processes is problematic. The specific use of ‘Fight the Power’ in the film’s opening sequence is problematic, not it its communication of the song’s message, but in its sexual politics. The sequence features actress Rosie Perez dancing provocatively and it would appear, quite meaninglessly – objectified\(^{27}\), to Public Enemy’s song. This visual framing exposes that the appropriation of culturally resistant items, those facets of culture that have become iconized through their anti-establishmentarianism, by processes of pastiche and bricolage, does not necessarily guarantee an intact replication of the original text’s meaning. Often it presents a variation on the original muddied or tinted by corporatism, convenience or the filmmaker’s creative intentions.

This convenience is important in understanding the relationship between cultural reappropriation and the selective corporatism that drives it. Individualism is shunned as the potential profit for specific instances of cultural expression are evaluated against one another. Theories of liquid modernity maintain the fetishization of cultural objects by breeding a cultural economy dictated by personal and individual investments in culture and simultaneously eradicating any difference between them from a corporate perspective. Corrigan critiques the Marxist rationale of commodification by addressing the human power relations involved in the process:

He [Marx] sees commodities as fetishistic because they appear to relate exclusively to each other, hiding the fact that they are in actuality products of human labour and thus bring human beings into particular relations with each other. Where personal

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\(^{27}\) The case for Lee’s objectification of Perez in the film is compounded by a later scene whereby Lee himself licks melted ice from Perez’s breasts.
relations between feudalism were not disguised under the shape of the social relations between products of labour, such relations under capitalism take the form of a relation between things. These things can be exchanged on the market because they are all ‘really’ different manifestations of the same thing, namely human labour power.\textsuperscript{28}

The use of popular music in cinema carries this innate contradiction not least because of its dictation by economic forces. Capitalist institutions have always had difficulty conceptualizing the individualism of art and creative industry. Capitalism’s drive towards commodification has always found the status of art and cultural capital to be particularly problematic notions, particularly in relation to the concept of the artist.

[A]rtistic objects must appear as the product of recognizable persons: the \textit{concrete and named} labour of the artist is always paramount and must be preserved. As socially constituted, artists appear to capital as the antithesis of labour-power, antagonistic to incorporation in the capitalist labour process as \textit{abstract} labour.\textsuperscript{29}

The popular music soundtrack forces this relationship into a new perspective. As pre-existing texts shaped by various cultural conditions such as genre and period, specific cultural items such as the individual songs found on film soundtrack compilation albums reassess the relationship between abstract labour and specific commodities. As individual tracks are cauterized from the contexts of their original production, distribution and consumption, the conditioning of each track as a stylistic element of the film to which it is being connected affords each track a new status within the relationship between art and capital. The marketability of popular music is a given when dealing with this cultural hybrid, therefore it is the aesthetic and thematic symmetry of the visual with the aural that forms the synergy between these media.

The use of popular music for narrative purposes is of particular relevance when discussing period films. The 1960s, in particular the late 1960s, is an era with which a specific political and aesthetic synergy can be associated. The counter-cultural movement that took place within the space of a few years has left a legacy not only in terms of the associated popular culture, but also in terms of how people use that culture. A popular memory of the 1960s exists not only through those who experienced it first hand, but through their children – those who have been allowed access to the 1960s only through mediations: second hand memories, television documentaries, existing news-reel footage, a number of period films evoking the communal consciousness of the time and, in particular, their soundtracks. The way these texts are used and experienced is of primary concern for Grossberg. He reveals the processes of cultural consumption through a focus on the possible uses and contexts for cultural items.

It is not a question of interpreting a body of texts or tracing out their intertextuality. Rather, the formation has to be read as the articulation of a number of discrete series of events, only some of which are discursive. The formation is not accountable in its own terms, but only in terms of its specific conditions of possibility and its own effectivities. Through such a mapping, one can understand not only the emergence of a particular cultural formation, but its possible transformations and deployments.

Grossberg stresses that for an understanding of the appropriation and consumption of a particular text, theorists must consider a series of spatial and temporal relationships that concern specific cultural formations – be they relevant to the medium, the artist, the


31 Lawrence Grossberg. We Gotta Get Outta This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 70
audience or the interplay between these. Pop music soundtracks mesh discourses of filmic form, popular cultural consumption, audio-visual aesthetics and sub-cultural specificity. The relationship between these discourses is constantly changing. The social and historical positioning of the texts and readers triggers specific readership strategies within precise contexts.

Each appropriation of a specific pre-existing musical text for a film soundtrack activates this process. The way in which existing texts are used in this process of bricolage to create something of an interpretive mood is the articulation of the relationship between film and history. This attempted articulation has become particularly profitable and has seen a number of accompanying soundtracks become some of the highest charting albums of all time. In any given week, the Billboard Top 200 charts register sales of film soundtrack albums as roughly comparative to that of country music, which equates to approximately twelve percent of the market. This figure has reputedly decreased due to the advent of MP3 and downloadable music filesharing, with the emphasis of commerce being focussed less on album sales and more on individual tracks. ‘Sony Music Soundtrax’ President, Glen Brunman argues against this change in industry, stating, “There are so many choices for the consumers that I think their criteria for buying a record have risen somewhat, It's not about downloading. It's just a normal evaluation of why you want to buy something.”

decreasing in popularity or saleability despite the overwhelming success of cross-promotional marketing campaigns for film and music tie-ins.

The bad news is that 2004's soundtrack sales are down about 33% compared with last year. The good news is that soundtracks are apparently not as reliant on radio airplay and superstar acts as they used to be in order to become best-selling albums.

This emerging trend could signal a shift in what consumers prefer in soundtracks and how the music industry markets those titles. And the industry appears to be cautiously optimistic that soundtrack sales will experience an upswing in 2005.  

Whether audiences are becoming less receptive to the concept of cross-media promotions or the nature and format of soundtrack albums has changed in recent years, as a decreasing but still particularly important industry exists around the use of established music and its reinscription into film content and context.

A significant niche within popular culture exists for compilation albums assembled from tracks with a political consistency that bookend a period in time. The most successful of these are promotionally attached to a film set during that period which deals with the important cultural events contained within. This is the consumption of popular memory. It is also a commodification of time. Virilio’s theory of how memory and time work together allows for an understanding of the commodification of these processes.

Essentially, memory – electronic or other – is a fixation. This fixation becomes neurotic or pathological if not accompanied by the projectile capacities of the imaginary, whose very possibility requires forgetting, understood as the absence of consciousness, a picnoleptic interruption, is the existential prerequisite for time, and for the identity of time as lived by individuals.  

The process of remembering is ‘accompanied’, and perhaps controlled or directed Virilio argues, by notions of the imaginary. The imaginary allows us to contextualize, colour and

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34 Hay, op. cit. p. 10  
feel our memories, allowing them to become narrativized. This process also provides time and the temporal chronology of events with their changing flavours and textures, what allows for our emotional rendering of events\textsuperscript{36}. In an age where liquidity is a daily, lived reality as opposed to a theoretical inference, the media and notions of popularity provide the ‘projectile capacities of the imaginary’ to which Virilio refers. Individuals often relate to one another through their affiliation with cultural texts. This alignment is contextualized within the specificities of time and space, providing a rhythm for lived experience.

These lived experiences often coincide with the understanding of a period through an engagement with textual representations of them.

\textit{[M]uch of the compilation score’s expressiveness derives less from its purely musical qualities than from the system of extramusical allusions and associations activated by the score’s referentiality. In other words, because of the compilation score’s heavy reliance on pop and rock tunes, its meaning within a film is often dependent upon the meaning of pop music in the larger spheres of society and culture.}\textsuperscript{37}

One of the most culturally pilfered and over-represented decades in twentieth century history has been the 1960s. With the emergence of popularized resistant politics and culture that reflected it, the 1960s has become a vacuum of memory, reducing an entire decade into a simplified, catch phrase-driven approximation. Nick Hornby argues that – aurally – the decade has been rather dully subjected to a reductionist perspective that champion’s one band over all others:

\textsuperscript{36} Tacchi asserts that nostalgia can be viewed “as both a mode of consumption and a mode of production – it is consumed through radio and music and at the same time it is practiced, it is a mode of production.” in Jo Tacchi. ‘Nostalgia and radio sound’ in \textit{The Auditory Cultures Reader}. Michael Bull & Les Back eds. Oxford: Berg, 2003. p. 289

\textsuperscript{37} Smith, op. cit. p. 155
The Beatles had a context, too, but they seem to have inhaled that along with everything else: they have hoovered up and become the sixties, and everything that happened in that extraordinary decade somehow belongs to them now. Their songs have therefore become imbued with all sorts of magic that doesn’t properly belong to them, and we can’t see the songs as songs anymore.38

Whilst Hornby’s perspective is chronologically correct, with the Beatles forming in 1961 and releasing their last album *Let It Be*39 posthumously in 1970, the rights to their music has never been attained for soundtrack purposes. *I Am Sam*40, released in 2001 and set roughly during that time, featured a character obsessed with the Beatles, and escaped the song-rights palaver by enlisting a number of contemporary musicians to cover various Beatles songs, utilizing the cover versions to create one of the most commercially viable soundtrack concepts of the early millennium. *Backbeat*41, the story of Stuart Sutcliffe, the “fifth Beatle”, whose involvement with the band in the early 1960s characterized their sound from that period, also avoided this phenomenon through the creation a supergroup. Those included in the soundtrack were Greg Dulli of the Afghan Wigs, Mike Mills of REM, Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth and Dave Grohl of Nirvana and later the Foo Fighters. This supergroup, as opposed to playing Beatles songs, instead played compositions by Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and Don Was; rock’n’roll standards that the Beatles had played during their time in Hamburg.

The Beatles were not the only sound of merit to emerge from this celebrated musical decade. Although commodified popular memory has seen their legacy outweigh all others, that the rights to use their music has yet to be relinquished for soundtrack purposes has

meant that cinematically, the gaps have had to be filled by the remaining semblance of 1960s counter-cultural musical icons and in particular, individual songs of political and thematic relevance. The first 1960s counter-culture soundtrack belonged to *Easy Rider*. As Dennis Hopper notes, “it was the first film to use found music. Everything previously had been soundtracks before that.” Whilst previous film soundtracks had utilized the popular musical icons of the time, their involvement was usually to write or contribute songs for inclusion in a film. *Easy Rider* marks the first time that a film soundtrack was assembled from existing pieces of music that had been created in a different context and used in a process of bricolage for the thematic concerns of a specific film. Early cuts of the film were edited to songs from writer and lead actor Peter Fonda’s record collection, and it was assumed that Crosby, Stills and Nash would write a score upon completion of principle production. When they viewed the rough cut, it was concluded that the use of existing music could not be improved.

The most memorable and iconic use of music in the film is Steppenwolf’s ‘Born To Be Wild’, which underscores driving footage that emphasizes the freedom and liberation of the open road. This sequence is integral to the film’s overall message, that in the late 1960s a defiant counter culture was laying its own claims to the American dream, which despite largely running against many principles of the established moral order, it felt was as valid and equitable as those made by anyone else. As Jack Nicholson slips on his football helmet and saddles up on Peter Fonda’s stars and stripes decorated chopper, the

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42 *Easy Rider*. Directed by Dennis Hopper. Written by Peter Fonda & Dennis Hopper. Columbia Pictures, 1969.
43 Dennis Hopper. ‘Sequences’ in *Sight & Sound*. Vol. 4 (9), September, 2004. p. 46
anthemic Steppenwolf track virtually takes the role of narrator. ‘Born to be Wild’ expertly communicates the sense of freedom gained from being a rebel and taking to the landscape of roads and highways amidst the new American consciousness of the counter cultural revolution.

Whole swathes of the dialogue and plot are incomprehensible but the one thing everybody got was the scenes of the open road, the ridiculous, unridable bikes and the marriage of music and motion that makes the modern heart sing. Easy Rider invented whole areas of our contemporary dreamscape and made in-car entertainment one of the staples of modern life.45

It is impossible to refute the influence of Easy Rider’s use of music. Whilst popular music had been used in films before, it was always created in conjunction as a conclusive element of the production. Hopper’s seminal film contemporized the process of creating aesthetic and thematic unity between sound and image. Only a year after the film was released, Wim Wenders wrote “in Easy Rider the images have become superfluous … they only illustrate the music, rather than the other way round.”46 Specific songs from the Easy Rider soundtrack, especially ‘Born To Be Wild’ have also been used in subsequent period texts, with a notable example being the Vietnam-based television drama Tour of Duty47. Cinematically, ‘Born to be Wild’ continues to appear in increasingly tenuous and thematically disparate circumstances.

As Marx said of Napoleon III, sometimes in history the same events occur twice: the first time with real historical import; the second merely as caricatural evocation of the event, as a grotesque avatar of it – sustained by a legendary reference. Cultural consumption may thus be defined as the times and place of the caricatural resurrection, the parodic evocation of what already no longer exists – of what is not so much ‘consumed’ as ‘consummated’ (completed, past and gone).48

45 David Hepworth. ‘Heard any good movies lately?’ in Word, June, 2004. p. 70
46 Wim Wenders. Uncredited source in Hepworth, op. cit. p. 60
Two decades after its original cinematic appropriation ‘Born to be Wild’ appeared on the soundtrack to *Flashback*[^49], a buddy film starring Keifer Sutherland and Dennis Hopper, about an uptight cop and a leftover hippy. As a knowing quip about the iconic status of Hopper’s film, his character Huey makes the comment “You can’t just go to your local video store and rent *Easy Rider* to be a rebel.”[^50] None the less, *Flashback* makes a pastiche of Steppenwolf’s iconic track and its greater cinematic context, seemingly knowingly, but in order to boost the appeal of the film through intertextual links. This process is a common occurrence for a song as notorious as ‘Born to be Wild’, as several other films have utilized the track for similar purposes. *Wild America*[^51], which was set during the 1960s and dealt with three brothers’ desire to become wildlife photographers, also used the track as well as other songs of the period. ‘Real Wild Child (Wild One)’[^52] by Jerry Lee Lewis was also used, an attempt no doubt to make a play on the ‘Wild’ theme of the film’s title.

The song has also been used on the soundtrack albums for two children’s films, the 2001 Disney produced *Recess: School’s Out*[^53] and Columbia’s *Stuart Little 2*[^54], released a year later. *Recess: School’s Out* utilizes ‘Born to be Wild’ in a more recognizable process than that of *Stuart Little 2*, and one commonly associated with contemporary pop music soundtracks. The song is placed on the film soundtrack in a way that pastiches its original

use in *Easy Rider*. The opening passage of the song is featured non-diegetically when protagonist Jay Jay bribes his sister to give him a ride in their parents’ car to find his friend. The song only up to the end of its first verse is actually used, with the lyrics “Get your motor running/ Get out on the highway/ Looking for adventure/ And whatever comes my way” signifying Jay Jay’s mischievous nature and his freedom at being able to travel, albeit in the family station wagon with his sister at the wheel. Perhaps this is a device aimed at hailing an adult audience – the parents of the film’s primary demographic, who are aware of the original image, which has become iconized and tethered to notions of a 1960s counter cultural freedom. This process creates a popular memory of the 1960s that brings it akin to the process of traditional histories in that it generalizes and favours established modes of representation – it revels in cliché. Many of the parents who took their children to see *Recess: School’s Out* were too young to be a part of the 1960 counter culture, but were no doubt aware of its cultural significance and understood the use of Steppenwolf’s track in the context of the film. This exploitation and reification of a particular time period and its dominant political rhetoric is problematic, as it simplifies our cultural understanding of that time and introduces grand, overarching narratives that obliterate the subtleties of a complicated political-cultural relationship by stamping a familiar tune onto the thematic context of a scene in order to make a blatant attempt to hail the audience and their understanding of a highly iconized area of popular culture. It is this context that gives rise to the hyperreal, a state where the nature of origin is dissolved in a barrage of pastiche and simulation, where the distinction between object and representation is dissolved.\(^5\) The use of ‘Born To Be Wild’ in multiple film

\(^5\) Hyperreality is a term most readily associated with Jean Baudrillard and has been defined in Jean Baudrillard. *Simulations*. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton & Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e),
soundtracks for a range of thematic and structural purposes illustrates this process. Facsimiles of original concepts and ideas are increasingly used to replace what is considered the genuine version of a text or the concepts attached to it. The use of the song in *Easy Rider* was an act of appropriation, with a pre-existing text being replicated in a different context but with identical political implication.

‘Born to be Wild’ is not used at all in *Stuart Little 2*, but appears on the soundtrack album, which is subtitled ‘Songs From And Inspired By the Movie’. Since the track is not used in the film itself, it is difficult to comprehend how a song written and released some thirty-two years before a film which is proposed by the soundtrack album to have inspired it, could have done so. Its actual choice for the soundtrack is in fact what has been inspired due to the thematic link of the ‘wild’ element. A more rational explanation is that Columbia, the company that produced and distributed the film, also own the rights to the Steppenwolf track and decided it a beneficial cross-promotional marketing tool for the track to be included on the album, which would potentially be bought by parents of children who had seen the film.

Economically, merchandising, in music and other forms, is tied also to the conglomeration of the industry; many of the conglomerates involved with film industry distribution own companies which can produce merchandised product centred to their films.56


56 Wyatt, op. cit. p. 133
Such inclusions are often promotional manoeuvres prompted only by corporate profit-taking and the slick marketing skills of a well-oiled capitalist machine. While such an argument is easy to offer, a more constructive approach, rather than pondering whether this kind of marketing gimmick is acceptable or reprehensible, is considering how it affects the legacy of cultural items such as Steppenwolf’s song and *Stuart Little 2*.

In response to this particular use of an established cultural text, there is little purpose in echoing the same high culture/low culture corporatization debate. Garnham emphasizes the importance of commodity fetishism to the ideological content of media.

> [T]he development of political economy in the cultural sphere is not a mere matter of theoretical interest but of urgent practical and political priority. So long as Marxist analysis concentrates on the ideological content of the mass media it will be difficult to develop coherent political strategies for resisting the underlying dynamics of development in the cultural sphere in general which rest firmly and increasingly upon the logic of generalized commodity production.

An argument can be made that the ideological implications of a cultural currency based on commodification and populism are devoid of fertile political commentary, but the continued dominance of this kind of cultural/political rhetoric has made living with commodity culture a reality that we must look beyond. It is more constructive to consider

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58 Nicholas Garnham. ‘Contribution to a political economy of mass communication’ in *Media, Culture and Society*. Vol. 1(1), 1979. p. 145
the implications of such appropriation. Using and reusing a specific text for its political
implications weakens the tether to its original context and dilutes the contextually-located
ideologies of the text. This notion is informed by and aligned with Baudrillard’s concept
of the simulacra. When carbon copies of an original idea, or text, are all that exist, what is
left is not the valid and urgent political relevance of an innovative cultural item, but a
hollow, vapid and convenient usage of it.

Above all, it is the reference principal of images which must be doubted, this
strategy by means of which they always appear to refer to a real world, to real
objects, and to reproduce something which is logically and chronologically anterior
to themselves. None of this is true. As simulacra, images precede the real to the
extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction.59

Baudrillard is arguing that the appropriation of previously established images or texts
produces an inherently ironic and contradictory image, almost as though the use of an
established image negates the image itself by referring to a previous reality or occurrence.
In this way, Baudrillard is concerned with the ‘diabolical conformity’ of images – the fact
that whilst an image may appear to be a spontaneous realization of a moment, that it
instead refers to countless previous realities. This concept is also linked to the ideological
trajectory of Benjamin’s ‘Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’60, which
Baudrillard refers to in *The Evil Demon of Images*. In his work on simulation, he seems
overly occupied with the notion that nothing is original anymore. This idea that nothing is
original is not particularly original.

The streaming of facsimiles punctuates and characterizes post-industrial popular culture.
Criticism of Baudrillard’s theory often misinterprets his concept of the simulacrum as

belonging solely to the realm of tangibility, whereas, as William Merrin notes, Baudrillard has always perceived the simulacrum as “a transformation of the object into a sign for consumption”\textsuperscript{61}. This link to commodification is the trigger for Baudrillard’s continued and unwavering fascination with the notion of simulacra. It is therefore relevant to ask whether images and sounds – or any facet of commodity culture – can be circulated outside of commodification. The embedding of technology into leisure practices and the implications of digitized information have made this a reality. In this instance the commodified origin becomes lost as countless burnt or downloaded copies replace the original in its sleek, shiny packaging and record company approved artwork. With the technology revolution in home entertainment Baudrillard’s simulacra has been fed through a commodification loophole. Ideologically, this is an imperative element of our constant renegotiation of social and cultural boundaries, and whilst it forces us into a new understanding of the commodification process as it relates to simulacra, Baudrillard’s work also has less literal implications.

The simulacrum represents the death of ideas, the corporatization of images and texts and especially the free appropriation and exploitation of these texts. The liquid aesthetic and its pervasion of contemporary cultural form and style has forced consumers to adopt a different perspective, acknowledging and accepting this corporatization as an unavoidable consequence of the liquid cultural economy. More useful is an exploration of how the simulacrum and its constant reabsorption into popular cultural production,

\textsuperscript{61} William Merrin. ‘To play with phantoms: Jean Baudrillard and the evil demon of the simulacrum’ in \textit{Economy and Society}. Vol. 30 (1), February, 2001. p. 89
effects audiences and their interaction with the textual space of hyperreality. As Geyh puts it,

The generation born after, say, 1965, does not find this space either overwhelming or unmappable. Their sensibilities, forged amid the hyperspeeds of PlayStations, MTV fast-cut editing, and hip hop sampling and fragmentation, find such supersaturated hyperspaces quite congenial.⁶²

In an accelerated culture where individuals are introduced to texts from myriad sources, this fragmentation and the liminality of textual origin as a repercussion of it, forces a renegotiation the notion of cultural literacy. Whether an individual is introduced to Steppenwolf’s song and the political legacy that it carries through hearing an original LP recording from 1967 or on the soundtrack CD to *Stuart Little 2*, the ideological message is identical, but the context is shifted considerably.

Baudrillard is concerned that this shift of context cloaks the experience of ideas in a veil of consumerism and hence renders the meaning and resonance of the text impotent.⁶³ It must be conceded that the primary source of engagement with cultural texts is rooted in consumption, but the products of this consumption – cultural literacy and popular memory – are capable of transcending its economically-driven origin. Barthes offers that, much in the same way as no absolute truth is possible from documentary film, which imposes a viewer position merely through the simplest filmmaking decision such as

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camera placement, that an individual’s perspective will always offer an interpretive stance to the appropriation of established images or ideas.

Representation is not directly defined by imitation: even if we were to get rid of the notions of “reality” and “verisimilitude” and “copy,” there would still be “representation,” so long as a subject (author, reader, spectator, observer) directed his [or her] gaze toward a horizon and there projected the base of a triangle of which his [or her] eye or his [or her] mind would be the apex.64

Individuals receive and interpret ideas and modes of reception from the media constantly, with much of its delivery focussed on consumer-based interaction. However, what they do with this information, how they process it and where it takes them ideologically is the result of this interaction. Consumer culture and popular memory align and conflate. Popular memory is a product of consumer culture as interpreted and processed by the individual. When delegating the importance of the original to the understanding of or engagement with a text, the relationship between popular memory and commodification becomes problematic. Baudrillard’s simulacrum is a serpent that forever chases its tail. It is a potent theoretical concept, and provides a meaningful connection between notions of cultural commodification and origin. Evidently though, when considering the increasingly tenuous nature of contemporary popular cultural networks, Baudrillard’s theory requires recontextualization through an understanding of the ways in which meaning is made within these networks. Changes in technology and the resulting alterations in the information economy provide a new mechanism through which the simulacra and its relevance to the nature of origin and meaning are filtered.

A useful trajectory to this cyclical reductionism is tracked by Frederic Jameson, who offers the argument that contemporary art, due to its existence within a world where

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cultural innovation is impossible, is forced then to comment on the nature of art itself. Pastiche, Jameson offers, is all that is left. A knowing, ironic and infinitely referential approach to ideological comment, Jameson recognizes that instead of removing the text from its original context, pastiche works from within its boundaries, tethering the text to its source. But this means that contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more. It means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment of the past.65

It is important to understand both Baudrillard’s notion of the simulacra, which is a copy dislocated from origin, a cultural facsimile that exists purely as a metaphor for commerce, and Jameson’s reading of contemporary art trapped in the stylistic conventions of the past. The relationship between popular music and its repeated reappropriation on celluloid utilizes elements of both. Although there appears to be a paradox within the contradictory natures of simulacra and pastiche, the formation of new cultural relationships allows for this disjointed relationship to exist. Whilst the use of an existent cultural item can often sever that item from its previous ideological context, it also utilizes its form and structure to portray particular thematic or aesthetic roles necessary within its new cinematic context.

The capturing and encapsulation of an entire era within the found music of a film is a process that mimics the feel of remembrance and provides a catalyst for popular memory. However at the same time there seems to be an aesthetic of definition or explanation through the use of music accompanying this process. The period film revels in and

repeats those moments that were, during a particular era, emblematic and iconic. Those moments are significant in hindsight because they offer a snapshot of the socio-political terms of the day being negotiated and established. As Baudrillard emphasizes, an era can be stripped down to its essential political rhetoric by a process of carefully selecting the precise application of generically specific and temporally appropriate popular music.

A whole generation of films is appearing which will be to those we have known what the android is to man: marvellous, flawless artefacts, dazzling simulacra which lack only an imaginary and that particular hallucination which makes cinema what it is.66

The period film offers an approximation of a past era as a product for consumption, but inherent in this notion of consumption is the opportunity for reflection upon the subject of consumption itself. As the speed of our cultural experience continues to accelerate, this process of reflection is also seemingly shortened. The length of time it takes to produce supposedly accurate reflections is seemingly shrinking. The simulacra machine of cultural production is honing its manufacturing speed, allowing ever more rapid reflective glimpses. Douglas Coupland states,

> It seems important to me to remember that as our world seemingly “accelerates,” the expiry dates on “what defines an era” either shrink or become irrelevant.67

Ironically, the more distanced a film is from the era in which it is set, the more ‘definitive’ its soundtrack claims to be at summarizing the period. A dominant feature of a temporally specific popular memory is that, as audiences gather more hindsight with which to view a particular period of time, the clearer the lines become, the more definitive the image of what signified the political consciousness of the era. The notion of

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66 Baudrillard. *The Evil Demon of Images*, op. cit. p. 29
history becomes more conservative and less individualized. Or so the *Forrest Gump* soundtrack would have us believe."^{68}\)

*Forrest Gump*\(^{69}\) emerged like a media hurricane in 1994, obliterating most other films released within a similar time frame in terms of box-office takings, Academy Award accolades and cross-promotional marketing clout. With its vision of the US that attempted to encompass every significant political and cultural event to occur within an entire decade and even beyond, the film’s politics were certainly problematic, but provided the perfect opportunity for grand, sweeping stylistic and narrative statements. The Vietnam sequence of the film included music released after the war, as commented upon by Lapedis, and which had been used in other Vietnam films. Director Robert Zemeckis is referring not to the temporal location of the film, but to the imagined world of popular cultural Vietnam. In this instance the songs are used “on a meta-level, bringing with them the wider connotations of rebellion, drug culture and community.”\(^{70}\) Upon the release of the accompanying soundtrack album to *Forrest Gump*, it was marketed as a definitive aural snapshot of America in the 1960s. Advertised as ‘32 All Time Classics’, the soundtrack traversed rock’n’roll, rhythm and blues, political singer-songwriters, psychedelia and anti-war protest songs. It became one of the highest selling albums of the 1990s, replacing similar film soundtrack compilations as the ‘definitive’ 1960s compilation album.

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Period-nostalgia films and in particular their soundtracks trade on an attempt to summarise the prolific and memorable items of cultural relevance and distill them through a single text. The 1960s have been succinctly condensed in a number of film soundtracks that have been successful in the music charts but have also boosted the success of the films to which they are attached, such as *Stand By Me*\(^{71}\), *Now and Then*\(^{72}\) and *The Big Chill*\(^{73}\). These soundtracks are often viewed as conveniently assembled 1960s compilation albums that provide a number of recognizable tunes from the period for easy consumption. The insertion of particular songs onto a film soundtrack and their subsequent appearance on compilation soundtrack albums tethers the songs to specific instances in the films within which they are used. It also prioritises generic cinematic notions of a particular time period and the thematic concerns and aesthetic dispositions of a particular type of popular music. Their appearance on these soundtrack albums conveys a willingness by consumers to revel in the music used in a film with which they have connected, or an enthusiasm or sense of nostalgia for the music itself, despite its inclusion upon a soundtrack compilation. It is possible for an individual to consume such albums based on the track listing, as opposed to a personal engagement with the film to which it is connected.

Fan culture utilizes this process of connectivity, evoking multiple experiential tangents from which cultural items are able to be approached. Eco has written extensively on fan

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culture as a product and integral element of hyperreality. His analysis of *Casablanca*\(^{74}\) has become an influential approach towards the notion of a ‘cult’ text, and the construction of cult status through the repeated use of pre-existing situations and structural codes or rules. Eco asserts that this familiarity often breeds fandom, that in order for a text to become the subject of cult it must be loved obsessively, with fans seemingly able to live inside it and able to recognize each other through their shared love, knowledge and obsession with the text. Eco recognizes that the individual brings their own understanding and personal experience to a re-existing text and that, because of this the cult text can only be appreciated and remembered through peaks and troughs in the text’s structure, through specific instances that appeal to the individual.

I think that in order to transform a work into a cult object one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole… It should display not one central idea but many. It should not reveal a coherent philosophy of composition. It must live on, and because of, its glorious ricketiness.\(^{75}\)

This ‘glorious ricketiness’ endears the text to audiences. It establishes personal connections between individuals and the text itself. This fan culture exhibits itself in myriad ways, often taking tangible forms. Fiske offers an account of the construction and manifestation of a cultural economy of the fan.

All popular audiences engage in varying degrees of semiotic productivity, producing meanings and pleasures that pertain to their social situation out of the products of the culture industries. But fans often turn this semiotic productivity into some form of textual production that can circulate among – and thus help to define – the fan community. Fans create a fan culture with its own systems of production and distribution that forms what I shall call a ‘shadow cultural economy’ that lies

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outside that of the cultural industries yet shares features with them which more normal popular culture lacks.\textsuperscript{76}

What Fiske infers is that fans create their own cultures surrounding a text or icon. These cultures are literate, active sights for renegotiation of a specific cultural product. The internet provides a powerful vehicle to monitor the workings of a fan cultures. The internet exists as a catalyst for popular memories and the trading, appropriation and intense engagement with images and cultural capital. Many sites dedicated to the consumption of popular culture offer the opportunity for comment and discussion, establishing a platform for the ‘shadow cultural economy’ to which Fiske refers. In this instance, consumers are given a voice with which to express those facets of culture that have captivated or enthralled them, imparting opinion and summoning experience.

One of the most discussed film soundtracks of recent years, and an example of 1980s nostalgia is that of \textit{Donnie Darko}. Although the film features a number of highly recognizable popular rock songs from the 1980s, the actual soundtrack album that was produced and distributed contained none of these songs and only Michael Andrews’ minimalist, meditative score. This situation caused some confusion amongst consumers. The reactions to the release of this soundtrack of the film’s incidental score and comments posted by fans of the film on popular internet store Amazon provide a compelling summation of Fiske’s argument about the manufacture of fan cultures as alternatives to the narratives perpetuated by corporatized consumer-oriented media. As an opposition to this, Amazon and similar organizations offer not consumer-oriented, but consumer-driven discussion of popular cultural product. Documented reactions, to both

the *Donnie Darko* soundtrack as it exists in the film, and as a tangible consumer item were varied. Amazon.co.uk member a_r_m_s commented in their review of the *Donnie Darko* soundtrack CD entitled ‘kind of spaced’:

> Although not on this CD i would also like to express my thanks to donnie darko for not only being the best film in recent memory but introducing [sic] me to my band of the moment, echo and the bunnymen!, via the killing moon, again utterly apt song for the film.  

For many members of the predominantly youth audience that *Donnie Darko* captured, the found music on the soundtrack would not have been readily identifiable. The film’s overall sense of brooding engaged a significant portion of the audience to whom the period-specific indie-rock of the soundtrack would appeal stylistically; prompting some investigation into the origins of the film’s found music.

Others were more sceptical of the failure by the film’s producers to include much of the found music on the soundtrack album released for public consumption. A music fan from The Sad South Coast was less than impressed with the incidental score, having bought the soundtrack with the assumption that their favourite piece of music from the film would be included.

> I ordered this CD based on the song played during the arson scene and in the end credits and was sorely disappointed that it wasn’t included on this soundtrack. The music in itself is quite repetitive (the same motifs crop up all throughout and you find yourself thinking ‘havn’t[sic] I just heard this?’) and extremely morbid. I cannot stress this enough it is MORBID!

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Add to this the fact that none of the original 80’s tunes appear on it then you may find that this is the type of CD you buy, listen to once, and then sell for 50p in a car boot sale.\(^79\)

So popular was the established music from the film that Amazon members began posting guides on how to find the tracks from the soundtrack and which albums to buy in order to create a version of the popular music soundtrack in the corporatized absence of one. This knowledge of the text demonstrates how music and film readerships cross-pollinate one another to create specific areas of fandom based on specific, or even non-existent, texts.

*Donnie Darko*’s use of music is impeccable in its creation of mood as well as signifying temporal locale. Emotionally as well as in terms of narrative, *Donnie Darko* creates significant effect through the use of popular music. The use of poignant songs from the late 1980s by bands that remained reasonably unknown in the US but which characterize the sound of the period such as Tears For Fears and The Church, performs the functions of signifying temporal location as well as delivering the emotional affect and aesthetic synergy that is so commonly associated with film music.

The use of Echo & the Bunnymen’s ‘The Killing Moon’\(^80\) in the opening sequence of the original version of the film is gracefully evocative and has forever etched the two texts indelibly together, despite the cultural significance of the song before it was used in the context of the film. Not only does ‘The Killing Moon’, a song over a decade old when the film was released, locate the action temporally in the late 1980s, it also provides – as

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Donnie soars through the fur trees on his racing bike, the sunlight soaking in through the thick, green foliage – an emotional bond between image and audience, conveying through the melodramatic strings and chiming guitars of the Bunnymen track, a non-diegetic insight into what our protagonist is feeling as he pedals home in the morning sunlight.

In the director’s cut of the film, the song was replaced by INXS’s ‘Never Tear Us Apart’\(^{81}\), which has the same affect in terms of establishing temporal location as the song was released in 1987, the year of its setting, but produces a less insistent and more dreamlike effect. In the context of the director’s cut, ‘Never Tear Us Apart’ serves the slow motion establishing shots of Donnie’s family much better in its synergy of the visual and the sonic. There is a more serene, fluid mood to these shots as opposed to the urgency that, despite having significant effect during the early shots of Donnie on his bike, was inherent in the Bunnymen track. Both songs have a lyrical importance, foreshadowing the narrative of the film. Whilst the lyrics to the Bunnymen track are convoluted and metaphysical, there is an allusion to the notion of predetermined destiny in the lyric “fate, up against your will, through the thick and thin, he will wait until, you give yourself to him.”\(^{82}\) The INXS track however, uses the line “two worlds colliding”\(^{83}\), making reference to the portal that has opened up a loop in time between the tangent universe where Donnie is allowed to become a hero, and the reality in which he is killed by a jet engine.

\(^{82}\) ‘The Killing Moon’. Lyrics by Ian McCulloch.
\(^{83}\) ‘Never Tear Us Apart’. Lyrics by Michael Hutchence.
The film’s key use of music is also exemplified in the sequence which establishes the social structure of Donnie’s school community. As the door of the school bus swings open in slow motion and the students spill out, the anthemic piano of Tears For Fears ‘Head Over Heals’ imitates the impending ringing of the school bell as what seems like a montage sequence but is in fact three choreographed shots introduce us to the key characters. A tracking camera witnesses the school bully who snorts amphetamine from behind his locker as the principal walks by ignorantly, the shy new girl who gives a painfully fragile look to camera, and the members of Samantha Darko’s dance troupe Sparkle Motion, who hug and high five each other after a successful rehearsal, allowing a glimpse of the social structures in place such as the hierarchy of popularity. This sequence is not only ingeniously choreographed to the soundtrack, with shot speed increasing and decreasing in symmetry with the song structure, but it introduces many of the films integral characters without them having uttered a line of dialogue. Additionally, the emotional impact of the song, which lopes along with the leisurely pace of a school day, sweeping and flowing with grand chord changes and emotive vocals, aptly encapsulates the bored majesty and breezy indifference of the students and teachers.

The only pre-existing, found song used in Donnie Darko that does not actually belong to the temporal period within which it is set is Joy Division’s ‘Love Will Tear Us Apart’, which was released in 1979, almost a decade before the action in Donnie Darko takes place. This song is used in the context of a Halloween party held at the Darko home, whereby youths drink and dance as Donnie consummates his relationship with Gretchen.

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upstairs. The lyrical context of the song foreshadows and performs the film’s central narrative. The notion of love tearing us apart refers not only to Gretchen’s concerns with her mother, who was previously involved in a violent relationship and has recently disappeared, but to Donnie and Gretchen’s relationship which will soon end as Gretchen is killed by Frank who is in turn, killed by Donnie. The film also carries with it a significatory function for the suicide of Joy Division singer Ian Curtis. The song has an intertextual function in this context of signifying tragic death and, lyrically, foreshadowing the tragic death that will tear Donnie and Gretchen apart. In this context the use of the song can be viewed as a breaching of the film’s formal reality – a hyperreal moment, which transcends linear time in order to offer a thematic link to the central narrative, offering the audience a potent clue to the film’s emotional agenda. However, this instance can also be viewed as quite the opposite. ‘Love Will Tear Us Apart’, whilst having been released almost a decade before the film takes place, is used diegetically in the scene, playing from the Darko’s home stereo and is exactly the kind of party staple favoured by middle class teens with discerning musical taste in the late 1980s. Whilst ‘Love Will Tear Us Apart’ breaks the temporal space set by the period music it is also essentially, by the nature of the social group that is represented in the scene, an appropriate period piece.

The synergy between sound and image is not always so ingeniously and meaningfully negotiated. Film soundtracks have become so marketable that the use of music within a particular film can in fact shape the form and content of the film itself. It is not uncommon for a film to be cut around a particular track that has, by the decision of the
production company in financial control of the film, been included due to cross-promotional marketing trajectories. Penelope Spheeris recounts her dilemma with the music chosen by music supervisors for her film *Wayne’s World*.

When I was hired for Wayne’s World, I was just told it was going to be a Warner Bros. album, so I never questioned it. Then I met the Warner Bros. people and they were sort of vaguely interested in the movie and then when we had our first preview and our scores came up in the 90s they took this incredible interest, to the point of forcing me to use the music that I really didn’t want to use, and that’s when it got tricky. I think Eric Clapton is a cool guy and everything but I thought his music got really soft of recent years and I didn’t find it to be appropriate head-banging music, so I didn’t really want to put it in the film. But that was it, that’s the way it happens and I’ve got my platinum record at home from the sales and, you know, my job is a series of compromises, what can I tell ya?

This is a phenomenon that creates a problematic relationship between concepts of auteurism and the notion that filmmaking is an art form, and the studio-funded Hollywood film that, due to economic factors, is shaped structurally by decisions made by executive producers and music supervisors. Cameron Crowe, who began his career as a music journalist, has always used music in a distinct stylistic manner in his films. Crowe also argues that the process by which film music is chosen has become emblematic of the creative lethargy endorsed by big business filmmaking.

A lot of times, music in movies is the poor stepchild of the film process. People slap it on at the last minute, and directors who don’t know what ‘hit music’ is phone up a music supervisor at the last minute and say, ‘Let’s jam on these soundtrack hits. OK, why don’t we just have two seconds of it while the cop’s coming out of the car?’

This approach to film form has little connection to art and more to do with making money through selling corporatized cultural artefacts. The implication of this approach is one of

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88 Cameron Crowe in Romney & Wooton, op. cit. p. 133
a force-fed cultural vacuum. Individuals encounter a culture where, despite the diversity of structural and intertextual possibilities, separate texts are making the same choices for the sake of economic convenience. Already proven chart successes are more reliable than original and untested intertextual possibilities. Quentin Tarantino imagines the rationale of contemporary Hollywood music supervisors and their degree of concern for the notion of film as an art form.

It’s like, ‘Let’s put a familiar song in – let’s put “Pretty Woman” on the soundtrack or some old ditty that everyone knows and then build a little montage around that song…’ It’s mostly lazy film-making – unless you’re doing it for a reason, I don’t think you should do it.\(^{89}\)

It is because of this temptation to “lazy film-making” through the recycling of popular songs, that film form is now shaped by potential soundtrack hits. This commodification process has significant bearing on the popularity of period films, which capitalize not only on hit music, but on the culturally loaded significance of nostalgia.

There is a cluster of films that utilize period music to achieve a sense of nostalgia, achieved not by using the songs as emotional or narrative hooks that are featured as structural emphases, but through a constant use of music sitting in the background to the main action. This effect is often achieved through placing the music in diegetic relation to the action, such as on a car stereo or a party scene. These films are subtler in their use of music and possibly offer a more comprehensive and perhaps realistic portrayal of the period through their eclecticism and ensemble treatment of the period. George Lucas’ *American Graffiti*\(^{90}\) is one such example of this approach. Lucas’ film uses forty-one

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\(^{89}\) Quentin Tarantino in Romney & Wooton, op. cit. p. 139

vintage rock songs from the 1950s, mostly playing on car radios tuned to Wolfman Jack’s show, creating a representation of period through sound. This actualization occurs through the fact that the songs remain separate from the narrative, present mainly as a period device anchoring the film to a specific temporal locale.

This approach to the use of music in film is less obtrusive and more successful at representing the nostalgic mood of a past era. The use of songs as significant hailing moments often placates the cross-promotional elements of film form. Due to their presentation within the reality of a film, this usage is more emotionally manipulative. Diegetic and non-diegetic use of music are approaches that can both be utilized effectively, and in the context of presenting nostalgic moments in period films, both have their own dramatic role. The diegetic use of music, such as that employed by Lucas, provides a more focussed and undiluted semblance of period.

The soundtrack to a film need not belong temporally to the period in which the film is set. Occasionally the film from which such a soundtrack is derived is set in the present, but the soundtrack collects tracks from prior generations that may have a particular emotional resonance within popular consciousness.

Directors and producers have their own musical preferences that can be reflected in song choices for their film sound. Music that is used as a temporary track on the set or during production (or pre-tracked music used for in-house screenings prior to the score being commissioned) may become integral to the film’s ideas and style. Source songs may provide sound track flow or effective segues for image

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92 This technique is similar to the use of popular musical standards in *The Public Eye*, to which Martin Scorsese refers in the first chapter of this thesis, and is also used in *Dazed & Confused*. Written and directed by Richard Linklater. Alphaville Films, 1993.
sequences. Although the music may not be closely synchronised to the image track, it may dictate or follow the rhythm of a scene.93

Popular memory is not only a phenomenon that creates emotional affinities with texts. It is a phenomenon that can be exploited formally and aesthetically to harness the stylistics of film form, as well as being used for revenue.

Quentin Tarantino has made a career out of films – set in the contemporary era - that utilize music from varied and diverse historical backgrounds. Despite the fact that his first three films were all set in the present, each had its own definitive selection of music chosen from a particular era and genre, thus providing the music in each of his films with a distinct mood, much like an additional character in the plot. *Reservoir Dogs*94 utilizes 1970s bubblegum pop to provide an emotional antithesis to the extreme violence and ego-centric masculinity on display, whereas *Pulp Fiction*95 relies heavily on 1950s surf music to provide the film with a hipness to match its dry dialogue. The characters in Tarantino’s second film all belong to a crime underground that is, as the three interlocking stories of the plot reveal, filled with dangerous people and equally dangerous situations. There is an inherent sense of urgency to the way in which the characters live96 and as such, the thrilling instrumental rock’n’roll of the 1950s and early 1960s is the perfect sonic backdrop for these fierce, but assured characters.

93 Rebecca Coyle. ‘Pop goes the music track: Scoring the popular song in the contemporary film sound track’ in *Metro* 140, Spring, 2004. p. 96
96 The film’s main characters are hitmen, crime bosses, drug addicts and a boxer who reneges on throwing a fight.
Forgotten guitar heroes electrify the soundtrack, like Link Wray, with his ‘Rumble’ – an instrumental rock’n’roll evocation of a gang fight, sometimes credited as the first heavy metal record. Most recognisable is ‘Misirlou’, by Dick Dale, the vibrato stand-out of a batch of surf-rock instrumentals, its use during the opening credits labelling it forever as ‘the Pulp Fiction music’.97

The music used in Pulp Fiction started a trend in music soundtracks, which saw ramshackle collections of period music used to evoke all kinds of intertextual craziness in ensuing years.98

Tarantino’s second feature was produced by Miramax studios for only $8 million and on box office receipts only, made $212.9 million worldwide. It was the first independent feature to ever break the $100 million mark and as such, it stands as the film that ushered in a new melding of counter-cultural hipness with commercial clout.

Pulp kicked open the door of the indie hothouse and allowed a fresh breeze to agitate the languid petals of the exotic orchids within. Oddly enough, the [Miramax founders] Weinstein’s ambitions – art films for the multiplex audience – were not that different from [Sundance Film Festival founder Robert] Redford’s. Sundance too tried to broker the marriage of indie and mainstream, but it didn’t work, because Redford was so culturally puritanical that he more or less consigned films with any commercial elements whatsoever to the outer darkness. Miramax had no such inhibitions, and Tarantino fulfilled Redford’s dream, a melding of art and commerce that yielded a commercially successful indie film.100


99 The term ‘independent’ refers to any film not produced by a major Hollywood studio. Although at the time of Pulp Fiction’s release Miramax was not considered a major studio due to its status mainly as a distributor of independently produced films, throughout the 1990s it attained the status of a major studio thanks to the success of films such as Pulp Fiction. This success is documented and explained in Peter Biskind. Down and Dirty Pictures. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

The film’s success was also translated into merchandising opportunities. Monopolizing on the film’s vibrant, eclectic use of music, the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack\(^{101}\) became a particularly successful compilation album and is the highest selling collection of American surf instrumentals, despite the accompanying music including Urge Overkill’s version of ‘Girl, You’ll Be A Woman Soon’\(^{102}\) – released as a single due to its popularity within the film’s cross-promotional scheme, and snippets of dialogue from the film, which itself became a particularly overused practise by other films in ensuing years. The *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack is an intriguing cultural artefact. Tarantino has combed the pop landscape for superior cuts, choosing suitably obscure, yet compellingly cohesive aural snapshots of the film’s driving mood. His pop music fandom is clearly apparent.

[Fandom] selects from the repertoire of mass-produced and mass-distributed entertainment certain performers, narratives or genres and takes them into the culture of a self-selected fraction of the people. They are then reworked into an intensely pleasurable, intensely signifying popular culture that is both similar to, yet significantly different from, the culture of more ‘normal’ popular audiences.\(^{103}\)

A manifestation of the process of popular memory, the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack proved immensely successful merely by plucking choice cuts from the cultural ether and attaching them to swear-heavy verbal rants from the film. This juggling of various popular cultural artefacts together creates a sense of cohesion where previously lay no connection. Aesthetic symmetry allows popular memory and notions of individual taste to manifest liquid modernity. Whilst *Pulp Fiction* is clearly a liquid text, its music soundtrack creates a sense of this aesthetic symmetry in order to bring a cohesion and clarity to the film’s stylistic approach, albeit one of fractured and frenetic rawness.

\(^{103}\) Fiske, op. cit. p. 30
Tarantino’s third feature *Jackie Brown*[^104] is a morality tale with a racial undertone, which utilizes spiritually melodramatic, gospel-tinged black soul music from the early 1970s. ‘Across 110th Street’ by Bobby Womack[^105] is used as a refrain that bookends Jackie’s emotional journey throughout the film. Tarantino has attempted to update the blaxploitation genre of the 1970s[^106], and doing so chose the music of the day to evoke not only a remembrance of the genre, but also a sense of nostalgia connecting the characters, especially that of Jackie, to an era that may hold significant personal importance.

The thing I’m coming from is listening to music to be the guide to a movie. That’s the beat or the rhythm the movie’s to play at. I fancied Pulp Fiction as a modern-day spaghetti western. The surf music just fit in there perfectly. In the case of Jackie Brown, old-school Soul is the rhythm and feel this movie takes place to. Not high energy stuff, but Bill Withers, the Delfonics song you hear. That’s how we’re supposed to take it in. Once I decided that, it became the easy process of diving into my record collection and finding the right pieces.[^107]

*Jackie Brown* has a more considered tone than *Pulp Fiction*. It involves characters who are experiencing middle age, whose concerns and attitudes are portrayed as effectively through music as through dialogue. Jackie turns Max onto the music of the Delfonics, and their song ‘Didn’t I (Blow Your Mind This Time)’[^108] becomes Max’s anthem throughout the film. He buys a tape of the band in a convenience store and that particular song often plays on his car stereo throughout.

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[^108]: Tom Bell & William Hart. ‘Didn’t I (Blow Your Mind This Time)’. *The Delfonics*. Bell, 1970.
Tarantino’s treatment of existing music in his films is expressive and articulate. His literacy and ability to align sound with image in a potent, hyperreal manner is impressive. His soundtracks suit his film’s formalistic aspects as opposed to making musical choices based on financial concerns and potential cross-promotional profits. One particular comment that he has made in interview is puzzling, not because of its agenda, but because of his own disrespect for its premise.

If a song in a movie is used really well; as far as I’m concerned, that movie owns that song, it can never be used again. And if it is used again… You know, they used ‘Be My Baby in Dirty Dancing and its like, that’s Mean Streets’ song, how dare you use ‘Be My Baby’. If you use a song in a movie and it’s right, then, you know, you’ve got a marriage. Every time you hear that song you’ll think of that movie.109

Tarantino breaks his own rule. In Kill Bill Volume 1110 he reappropriates Isaac Hayes’ theme song for the blaxploitation film Truck Turner111. As the Bride exits the hospital in a wheelchair, the dramatic opening string and horn sections of ‘Truck Turner’112 barrage the viewer with significant urgency. It is, true to Tarantino’s imperatives, an exceptional instance of the use of found music in a film, but it runs contradictory to his rather compelling argument. This may be because his use of music dislocates the temporal belonging of songs and opts for pure emotional affect and aesthetic synergy regardless of the cultural dissonance that may exist between the filmic action and its accompanying soundtrack. As such, this cultural dissonance is never an issue because the emotional and narrative ‘feel’ of his films are always complemented rather than distracted by the choice of music. Whilst Tarantino’s musical punctuation is hyperreal – a focus of attention

109 Quentin Tarantino in Romney & Wooton, op. cit. p. 131
within the film’s diegetic environment, its aesthetic and emotional symmetry with the images ensures a heightened dramatic moment that also resonates with clarity.

This disengagement with the temporal specificity of a film’s narrative and its soundtrack has become a significant stylistic element of contemporary filmmaking, but it is not a new technique. Vincente Minelli’s original 1944 version of *Meet Me in Saint Louis*\(^\text{113}\) had used the contemporary big band musical approach for a film set in 1903. Similarly, Queen’s chest-thumpingly triumphant score for *Highlander*\(^\text{114}\) made use of contemporary early 1980s, synthesizer driven cod-rock to score battle scenes set in the Scottish highlands in the sixteenth century, a stylistic decision made no doubt, due to the energetic synergy between visuals and sound, as opposed to chronology. Kenneth Branagh’s adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*\(^\text{115}\), whilst using the original Shakespearean dialogue and appropriate period costuming used the music of Gershwin and Cole Porter to convey its unabashedly romantic spirit with a playful irony and wit. This particular use of music is a curious cinematic tryst; a product of the corporatized nature of film production and the pressure on marketable film music, but also a stylistic element worthy of some attention due not least to its ingenious use of temporally dislocated but aesthetically synergized pairings of image and music.


The popular music soundtrack as a genre has seen the emergence of both inspired and laborious aural and visual hybrids. As a huge market exists for film soundtracks, it has become an accepted repercussion of the form that its stylistic and structural implications may be laboured and obvious.\textsuperscript{116} The political implications of this apparent vacuousness are various. Baudrillard, for all his concern and distraction by surfaces, is excited by the apparent flatness of contemporary cultural modes.

We leave history to enter simulation… This is by no means a despairing hypothesis, unless we regard simulation as a higher form of alienation – which I certainly do not. It is precisely in history that we are alienated, and if we leave history we also leave alienation.\textsuperscript{117}

Here Baudrillard’s appreciation for the cluttering and collectivity of contemporary popular cultural process seems akin to Eco’s nostalgic reading of fan cultures and their subjective adoration of selected texts. The line between popular culture and personal memory is as blurred and convoluted as the notion of an origin within a landscape of simulations. As far as Baudrillard is concerned “the ecstasy of communication”\textsuperscript{118} has caused a collision between notions of fiction and reality. Jameson warns that the consequences on the individual are dire. He labels the individual existing within this new media consciousness as schizophrenic, warning that he or she,

\begin{quote}
Is condemned to live in a perpetual present with which the various moments of his or her past have little connection and for which there is no conceivable future on the horizon… The schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{116} Robertson Wojcik and Knight write “In the worst cases, the songs are inserted cynically and clumsily, booming over montage sequences and credits as if they are Pavlovian advertisements for synergy.” in Pamela Robertson Wojcik & Arthur Knight. ‘Overture’ in Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. p. 1


disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence.\textsuperscript{119}

Fragmentation has become the orthodoxy through which ideas, images, clusters of words and snippets of texts are channelled - severed from their sources, forever adrift as cauterized, connotative clones. If the individual becomes schizophrenic, then their language is that of disconnection and hazy distance.

Fragmentation, segmentation, superficiality, stylistic jumbling, the blurring of mediation and reality, the collapse of past and future into the moment of the present, the elevation of hedonism, the dominance of the visual over the verbal.\textsuperscript{120}

This state of fragmentation has become the language of contemporary cultural images. Our popular memory of music is now forever linked to visual referents, thanks to the popular music soundtrack, music video and the continual barrage of disconnected images and sounds, the convergence of meanings, the eradication of the source and the rise of the simulacra.

Viewed through anti-capitalist rhetoric this is an unappealing situation, with little but the overbearing presence of commodification shadowing everything – even convoluted notions of art and cultural expression.

\[W\]e inhabit, it seems ever more uneasily, the space between our experience of the postmodern world and its meaning--a space, experience, and meaning that seem even more complex and resistant to our grasp than those of modernism. What we have been learning to do, what we are still learning to do, is to span the gap that is this space.\textsuperscript{121}

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\textsuperscript{120} David Tetzlaff. ‘MTV and the politics of postmodern pop’ in Journal of Communication Inquiry. Vol. 10 (1), 1986. p. 8
\textsuperscript{121} Geyh, op. cit. pp. 29-30
\end{flushleft}
There are examples, some of which have been explored in this chapter, of the cultural appropriation of pre-existing texts being put to use in new, significant contexts. The purpose of this chapter has been therefore, to highlight and analyse these contexts, unstable though they are. Comment on those elements of culture that have had their boundaries and politics firmly established can be worthwhile, even if it is disconnected from original thought or mediated through simulation. Simulation must be accepted as an absolution of the liquid processes of cultural production. With this in mind, it is easy to recognize the significant critique and comment on established notions of our cultural world that this kind of representation entails. The pop music soundtrack exists as a genre in its own right – a hybrid of established cultural forms that is able to present a compelling and urgent, potent and provocative message.
Chapter Four
The Rockumentary vs. the Biopic

In the late fall of 1982, acclaimed commercial director Marty De Burgi heard that one of his favourite English rock acts – Spinal Tap – were releasing a new album – ‘Smell the Glove’ - as well as planning their first tour of the United States in almost six years. DeBurgi documented their now legendary American tour on film and the resulting film came to be known as *This Is Spinal Tap*. De Burgi is in fact a fictional character, constructed and performed by Rob Reiner for the purposes of his film of the same name. *Spinal Tap* coined the term ‘rockumentary’, referring to documentary film as it deals with popular music. The irony is that *Spinal Tap* was a satire, parodying the music industry and the cod-metal acts of the 1970s and 1980s with heavy metal clichés twisted to absurdity, which both poked fun at and paid homage to rock’s inherent pomposity, as well as lampooning the documentary form.

The fact that some believed ‘the Tap’ to be an actual band speaks volumes for the deft writing, the impeccable performances and such memorable songs as ‘Big Bottom’, ‘Sex Farm’ and ‘Tonight I’m Gonna Rock You Tonight’. The film charts the demise and eventual resurrection of a band characterized by rock’n’roll indulgence, adolescent

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2 Referencing the moment when drummer Derek Smalls is forced by female security guards to remove a cucumber wrapped in aluminum foil from his trowsers, Plantinga offers that “like Derek’s cucumber, heavy metal’s image of masculinity is a fabrication and an exaggeration. And like the security guards at the airport, *This Is Spinal Tap* displays the pretensions of the hypermasculinist discourse for all to see.” in Carl Plantinga. ‘Gender, power and a cucumber’ in *Documenting the Documentary*. Barry Keith Grant & Jeannette Slowniowski eds. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998. p. 319

3 *This Is Spinal Tap*’s structural conformity to the generic characteristics of documentary film is discussed in Jason Middleton. ‘Documentary comedy’ in *Media International Australia Incorporating Cultural Policy* 104. August, 2002. pp. 55-66
humour, spontaneously combusting drummers and “armadillos” in their trousers. Perhaps the film is more important for another reason. As a cinema verité style expose of the band’s existence onstage and out of the public eye, This Is Spinal Tap captures and explores the space away from the public, where rock musicians are free to be themselves, unencumbered by the demands of their fans or the public consumption of their art.

Using the three films about the Sex Pistols as its primary case study as well as also discussing Todd Haines’ Velvet Goldmine, this chapter investigates this private space through two genres readily associated with it; the music documentary, or rockumentary and the cinematic recreation of the lives of popular musicians, the biopic. These films not only exemplify the structural characteristics associated with these genres, but more importantly they engage in the conglomeration of youth culture and commercial culture. Both rely on this private space, away from the public, often referred to as backstage.

Jonathan Romney explains that,

‘Backstage’ is the most potent of all concepts designed to separate performer and fan. It is a space of privacy, a world behind the curtain in which the real being, the ineffable precious essence of the performer’s self, supposedly lies shielded from sight.

Whether the role of backstage footage is to increase or eliminate the distance between fan and performer is debatable. In allowing cameras behind the scenes, a performer is permitting access to that which would ordinarily be restricted. In presenting the backstage

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experience, a performer appears to be letting their guard down, indulging their fans indirectly through the camera lens in an intimate and personal experience.

In opposition to this perspective, Romeny argues that the camera exists as a distancing tool, delineating and polarizing the barrier between fan and idol. Here Romney is preoccupied with the possibility that even the backstage banter and improvised repartee between performers and those close to them is carefully plotted and even scripted. This suspicion emerges due to the fact that footage often appears in the final text only when authorized by the artist. The assumption exists that any ideology or environment that portrays performers as ordinary mocks their creative stature and is apparently unacceptable. Romney asserts that for the pop star, “their off-stage existence is expected to be their defining ‘authentic’ achievement, for a pop star is assumed to be not so much a performer as an elemental force manifesting itself.”\(^7\) He seems melodramatically unwilling to accept that the role of rockumentary in demystifying the star; in presenting that which is not a part of the carefully planned and manicured marketing regime.

Admittedly, the backstage expose may be – and often is – an integral element of that marketing regime. Romney’s argument is weighed down by that reality and seems overwhelmed by that fact that rockumentary filmmakers are usually always in cahoots with the band.

\(^7\) Romney, op. cit. p. 86
Much theory on popular culture hinges on the authenticity debate, a line of discourse that has been discussed extensively in respect to rap music, as that particular form of creative expression often purports to reveal the ‘truth’ about its subjects much in the same way as documentary. Rose has asserted that rap presents an alternative interpretation of the ways power and authority are structured in contemporary society. Documentary filmmaking has often utilized a similar paradigm, choosing to offer perspectives not traditionally recognized within dominant discourses. This disruption of dominant narratives is also the role of the rockumentary, which attempts to dismantle the myths surrounding the dominant images and public perceptions surrounding a particular performer. The presence of a camera crew, away from ‘public’ space, presents the likelihood that the subject may present him or herself through an altered or somewhat mannered personae. This presence offers the possibility that the image projected by a performer is that which they would want the public to believe is their true, unaltered self. The backstage footage that opens D.A Pennebaker’s cinema verité style account of David Bowie’s last Ziggy Stardust concert, *Ziggy Stardust & the Spiders From Mars*, presents the glamourous,

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almost kitsch public persona of Bowie’s then wife Angie, as opposed to the intimate bond between androgyne and wife. Whilst Bowie sits facing a mirror having his make-up done, Angie struts and poses, addressing the camera as much as she does her husband, in an accent that switches, sometimes mid-sentence from American to English. Angie later revealed that in these sequences “you can see what I didn’t want to: David’s smiling face when it’s turned towards me is a mask.”\(^{11}\) Romney is accurate in pointing out that what occurs in the backstage space of the rockumentary is not truthful. It is this limbo state – this discomforting manipulation of the backstage space and those who occupy it that often provides the rockumentary with its immediacy. It is in those moments that an audience can truly engage with the rockumentary form as they see their heroes and those involved directly with them in this strange mediation between authenticity and public image.

When authenticity is no longer possible, those severed from the root of the subject often miss the point. Some of the most telling and hilarious scenes of Julien Temple’s second Sex Pistols documentary *The Filth and the Fury*\(^{12}\) are the interviews with middle class American teenagers who have just attended a concert by “that naughty bunch of counterculture radicals.”\(^{13}\) One of the interviewees reveals that the reason he loves the band is because “They moved me. They made me shake more than I ever shook before and that’s what makes them the best.”\(^{14}\) Then, after a few moments, when he realizes that

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\(^{13}\) Uncredited news footage in *The Filth & the Fury*, op. cit.

this admission is far too gushy for the punk veneer he spits at his interviewer and yells “Get out of here… Get the fuck out of here!” with the self-indulgent glee of a spoilt child.

When faced with a populist charade as opposed to the ‘genuine article’ – whatever that may be – there seems far more room for misinterpretation and often, exaltation. In the case of popular memory, which layers cultural artifacts with disparate meanings and purposes, it is the inauthentic, or certainly that which has been commodified, that turns a cultural movement into a glorified haleys age. It could be argued that the rockumentary presents a blurred authenticity where reality and truth exist no more than in a promotional music video, as the act of documenting a subject on film already signifies an engagement with the populist and its attempt to render itself through cultural history. It is only after the event has been appropriated by the mainstream and forced to signify some greater level of consciousness or overwhelming understanding, that it becomes desirable and takes on the stature of ‘a history’.

The cinematic documentation of popular culture is not always this complicated. During Radiohead’s world tour of 1997/98 a documentary, Meeting People is Easy\(^\text{15}\) was filmed by their friend Grant Gee. It exposes the “overwhelming, oppressive, and repetitive nature of media scrutiny”\(^\text{16}\), which the band felt exploited their music, and treated them like a commodity for the production of revenue by record companies and the world music


press. The film documents the tired band members, jet lagged and exhausted from constant touring and rehearsal, conducting countless interviews with the world’s journalists and mobbed and photographed endlessly like the media commodities they felt they had become. A key moment in the film that reshapes Romney’s backstage paradigm includes a sequences where, tired and frustrated by the fickleness of media attention, lead singer Thom Yorke throws a tantrum, arguing with his band mates only to find himself balled up on a chair losing the direction of his argument, faltering into plaintive silence. Another scene sees the band abused in the street by passers by, mocking the melancholic cynicism of their public image and that of their music. “Hey man, why don’t you write a song about it! Go on – write it right now!”

The rockumentary is able to construct alternate histories which can bleed into the assumed or accepted narratives surrounding a band or artist, utilizing opinion and bias alongside empirical fact to tint and add depth to that which may be seen as black and white. Absolute truth is impossible in the filmmaking process - within documentary filmmaking especially, as the gaze of the camera, the editing process and every other cinematic technique has proven. The multitude of perspectives cast upon a subject make overarching statements both impossible to cultivate and unnecessary. Wooton asserts that within the rockumentary genre there are three “easily recognizable categories: the concert movie, the tour concert movie and the documentary profile of living or dead stars.” The concert film is often a mere transposition of a single concert date, which may flirt with

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17 Uncredited passerby in Meeting People Is Easy, op. cit.
backstage footage but rarely expands upon the presentation of ‘the artist in performance’. These films are often hastily produced, with marketing concerns usually governing their quality. Wooton explains that “Many of the obvious technical and aesthetic considerations that would normally go into the production of a documentary product are either ignored or subjugated to crude marketing and promotional requirements.” The tour concert film exists within the narrative of the road movie, which often indulges in significantly more backstage footage and may even capture the artist on the tour bus, engaging with fans whilst in the public space of a visited city, or in their hotel room between these obligatory ventures into public space. These films walk the line between authenticity and constructed image and as such, are often the subject of fan scrutiny. They are made specifically for fans, who demand authentic engagement with their chosen site of worship. The last category, the documentary profile, often uses stock footage alongside interviews in its authoritative retelling of a life, a movement or even a moment that has polarized itself into popular consciousness. This form is problematic in its unavoidable attempt at a representation of a singular historical narrative. Nevertheless, the rockumentary can be a powerful tool in the representation of a band or artist’s image, in the public absorption of a cultural movement or phenomenon, or in the restructuring of perception about an era, event or subject of popular scrutiny.

Julien Temple was an art student and filmmaker who in the mid to late 1970s affiliated himself with the Sex Pistols. Temple documented the anger and belligerence of the Sex Pistols and their entourage, whose quarrelsome attitude and behavior saw the media quickly label them as troublemakers. As well as documenting the rise and fall of the Sex

19 Ibid.
Pistols, Temple directed a film entitled *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle*\(^{20}\), which was constructed as a collage of existing Sex Pistols footage, short vignettes shot with members of the band, and cartoon reenactments which served to progress the film’s narrative. *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* however, was the brainchild of Pistol’s manager Malcolm McLaren. After original director Russ Meyer walked out on the production, Temple, who had been filming the band since their inception was hired, approaching the project much like a collage: “A vandalized documentary”, which attempted to “show the image-building and hype that goes into the creation of a successful rock group.”\(^{21}\) *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* is Malcolm McLaren’s film. Thematically it deals with his marketing of the band and construction of their image, but more important is its use of McLaren as its central figure. The film is an excuse for him to explain his motives and to emphasize his dominance within the narrative of the Sex Pistols as the puppet master, whose manipulation of the four young men involved allowed him to gain profit and infamy. In a voiceover from the film, he explains that his strategy revolved around,

> [F]our kids. Make sure they hate each other. Make sure they can’t play… I called them the Sex Pistols. With the line-up complete we immediately set about putting our plan into effect: to swindle our way to the top of the rock’n’roll industry. It was a plan that, within two years, was to bring us close to a million pounds.\(^{22}\)

It brought only McLaren close to that amount. Pistols singer John Lydon has attested that he never saw any of the money that he had contractually signed for. However, the power lay with McLaren. His film was financed and his narrative of events made it into popular consciousness.

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\(^{22}\) Malcolm McLaren in *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle*, op. cit.
In *Swindle*, the band members are reduced to caricatures – self mocking versions of themselves – given no chance to offer their perspective and definitely no dignity. They remind the viewer more of monkeys jumping through hoops than the passionate, aggressive young men they had been as Sex Pistols. Steve Jones pretends to act, Paul Cook drives around in a convertible, Sid Vicious slashes himself up with a broken bottle and Lydon, who had quit the band by that point, is conspicuously absent. Through *The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle* a narrative that privileges McLaren’s perspective on the integral elements of the Sex Pistols career became ‘evidence’ for the popular history of the time. Temple’s collage-like approach to his subject matter ensures that an honest representation of events is both impossible and irrelevant. The live-action vignettes provide comedic respite from the narrative, serving only to clutter and confuse the dominant imagery of the band.

The most (in)famous scene in *Swindle* is bass player and token junkie Sid Vicious’ rendition of the song popularized by Frank Sinatra; ‘My Way’\(^2\), wherein Vicious pulls a pistol from his tux and opens fire on the audience. The reuse and reappropriation of Sinatra’s song and its message exemplify the ways in which popular music engages a culturally articulate audience. This process is important in understanding the ways in which popular culture is able to speak to itself, to double back on itself in a different context: by using its past to articulate its contemporary preoccupations. Sinatra represents a distant era in the history of popular song. His comments on rock music, in particular the

Beatles provide an insight into the kind of political paradigm that he and his generation represent:

I rued the day the Beatles were unfortunately born into this world. They are, in my mind, responsible for most of the degeneration that has happened, not only musically, but in the sense of youth orientation politically, too. They are the people who first made it publicly acceptable to spit in the eye of authority.24

Frank Sinatra existed within an antiquated notion of popular musical politics. For many of his generation the shifts in cultural consciousness that rock’n’roll was a part of were an abomination; a degenerative process that cheapened and shamed pop. The Sex Pistols and others around them utilized this paradigm for their own purposes. The punk ethic was tied politically to antagonism and outrage, and this antagonism was directed towards authority; towards the sources of power that had served only to alienate and repress.25 It was “[p]unk's gutter snipe rhetoric” and the fact that “its obsession with class and relevance were expressly designed to undercut the intellectual posturing of the previous generation of rock musicians”26 that those in authority found troubling. The Beatles had preferred a revolution of the mind, but the punks had seen this achieve nothing and thus, a more aggressive and decidedly working class approach was founded.

This paradigm utilized irony and sarcasm, often proving most powerful when it was reinterpreting or ridiculing other facets of culture. A prime example of this process is the stylistic redefinition or reversal of the glam aesthetic, whereby makeup, glitter and a

willfully playful, if removed, disposition was replaced with pins and dog collars, nihilism and an attitude of downright sottiness. Vicious’ cover of ‘My Way’ captured the antagonism that the constituents of punk felt towards authority. Those who had attempted resistance before had failed, and it was this failure and the recession of resistance into middle class mediocrity that sparked punk’s violent narcissism. All of those slaughtered by Sid are middle aged, middle class sophisticates, dressed for an evening of cabaret. *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* was Malcolm McLaren’s ultimate Sex Pistols fantasy: a declaration of punk as the definitive capitalist farce, a story about getting away with ripping off the system. As such, it serves both to exalt the Pistols as a force that was unstoppable because of their sheer energy and to ridicule them as puppets manipulated by Malcolm, whose grand scheme was the ultimate indulgence. McLaren’s exploitation of young musicians is confirmed through his treatment of Bow Wow Wow singer Annabella Lwin. Whiteley explains that,

> Like the greedy villains of fairytale, his appetite for the exploitation of the young and inexperienced is disguised by his promise of fame. What he offers is a magical metamorphosis from unknown to star, but the cost of opening the door is a total subjugation to his will.”

This reputation for exploitation and sleaze, whilst providing the Sex Pistols with a platform of notoriety from which to perform in the public eye, became old rather quickly and was outdated by the time *Swindle* finally emerged.

By the time Temple’s film was released, the Sex Pistols were defunct and Sid Vicious was dead. The punk movement was a revelation to many people at a time when the

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British working class was angry and disillusioned. It is no surprise that it was eventually exploited by the mainstream and absorbed into popular consciousness. An exciting and innovative cultural movement becomes visible within mainstream media, usually due to its supposedly resistant politics. It then becomes appropriated by corporate culture and is incessantly commodified until it is no longer resistant, if it ever was. The punk explosion moved effortlessly into the realm of commodity fetishism and its prime innovators, the Sex Pistols ended with a whimper as opposed to a bang. *The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle* served as a bookend to the career of one of the most infamous and beloved innovators in British rock music. Whether it was a fitting final statement remained contested in ensuing years. As an energetic trawl through the Sex Pistols’s aesthetic of appropriation the film captures the hype surrounding punk. It serves to further McLaren’s image as ringmaster of the circus and ignores the perspectives of the band members themselves. It would appear that, as manager and financial dictator of the band, McLaren had had the last laugh, but the Sex Pistols story was to be appropriated twice more on celluloid, and once more by Temple.

In 2000, Temple directed *The Filth and the Fury*, a documentary that attempted to present a ‘definitive’ version of the history of the Sex Pistols. Instead of a grandiose swindle caper, *The Filth and the Fury* instead attempted to piece together a more authoritative Sex Pistols narrative, through extensive stock footage shot by Temple as well as interviews with the band and various other remnants of popular British culture that mesh together to

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28 The cultural environment surrounding the birth of punk in the UK has been explained through the mass unemployment affecting the nation at the time as well as garbage strikes which saw the streets lined with refuse. The political motivations for punk have been explored in Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock and Beyond*. London: St. Martin’s Press, 2002 (1992).
present an aestheticization of the Pistols politics and the atmosphere of England in the late 1970s. Much of the footage used is either old stock footage or that shot by Temple himself at the time, which also appears in *The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle*. The second time around, Temple decided to do without McLaren’s latent posturing and thus, *The Filth and the Fury* is a leaner and self-proclaimingly more accurate appraisal of the Sex Pistols saga. Upon its release, *The Filth and the Fury* was seen to be righting a wrong that had been sitting uncomfortably within popular consciousness for two decades. John Lydon elaborates,

> I had my doubts about Julien doing it and that was 98 percent why we had to have him. But, either way, he was there at the time. He actually did film us. You can’t dispute that, and if you’re going to talk about an accurate historical document, why waltz off with anybody else?29

In the sense of an accurate representation of an historical movement, *The Filth and the Fury* is a film with a purpose. Whereas *Swindle* aimed merely to provide an opinion, loosely framed and expressed through farce, *The Filth and the Fury* has a rougher texture. *The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle* actually becomes part of its narrative. Paul Cook makes the point that “We were musicians. We didn’t want to make a film”30 and Lydon explains that “I knew that it was just trash. Rubbishing the whole point and purpose.”31 In this sense, Temple’s latter text actually swallows up the former; it absorbs it as a link in the narrative chain of the Sex Pistols. McLaren himself is heard only in voice-over, accompanied visually by images of him wearing an inflatable rubber mask, again pilfered from *Swindle*. He reiterates the point made in the prior film, by explaining the band as his work of art.

30 Paul Cook in *The Filth & the Fury*, op. cit.
I didn’t think if I could be a sculptor I necessarily needed clay. I suddenly thought ‘You can use people!’ And it’s people that I used, like an artist - I manipulated. So, creating something called the Sex Pistols was my painting; my sculpture.\(^{32}\)

This argument is immediately undercut by retorts from the band. Lydon insists, “You don’t create me. I am me. There is a difference.”\(^{33}\) Steve Jones offers, “Everyone on the planet knows Malcolm’s full of shit. He’s convinced people now that he’s full of shit by all the shit he says.”\(^{34}\) *The Filth and the Fury* carries a feeling of authenticity that is not captured in *Swindle*, by allowing both arguments to be expressed. McLaren’s opinion is positioned within the narrative as a farce, conveyed by his ridiculous appearance onscreen and the way in which his statements are framed. This positioning exemplifies the negation of absolute truth in documentary filmmaking, making any claim to approximation redundant.

Whilst authenticity may be difficult to cultivate theoretically, *Filth* attempts to convey it aesthetically. By locating the Sex Pistols along side other facets of British screen culture such as Laurence Olivier’s adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*\(^{35}\) and *Richard III*\(^{36}\), Temple is able to draw comparisons between the ‘character’ of Johnny Rotten and more traditional tropes and characters that have become standards within British culture. John Lydon is particularly eager to point out the similarities between the persona he presented to the public and archetypal characters from British screen past such as Quasimodo or Olivier’s Richard III, commenting “I always did view myself as one damn ugly fuck up. I

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\(^{34}\) Steve Jones in *Ibid.*


certainly weren’t no belle of the ball.” It was this dark sense of humour that united the Pistols politically with the longstanding British tradition of farce and absurdism.

What England didn’t realize about the Sex Pistols is that we are Music Hall. There was always a sense of piss-take and fun to it. There’s a sense of comedy in the English, that even in your grimmest moment you laugh.

This statement is framed within the film by visuals of the band, both static and moving, edited to the Pistols’ rendition of Johnathan Richman’s rock standard “Roadrunner”, which is simultaneously intercut by a vocal sample of Laurence Olivier as Richard III speaking the words “deformed, unfinished”, with other vocal samples and images of various British comedians intercut to the rhythm of the music. With Filth Temple utilized the method of cultural reappropriation that had been integral to punk’s subcultural style and aestheticized it within the context of music video discourse. The Filth and the Fury plays like a feature length music video with its quick editing and its mélange of visual sources including pans over static images, snatches of television programmes and commercials, and stock footage of the band of varying quality and format.

The only pauses from this assaultive visual style are the interviews with the band members. All are seated in darkened rooms, silhouetted against windows. This technique serves to provide continuity in the images of those involved. It preserves their visages so that we only ever see the Sex Pistols as they were in the late 1970s, as young men. The

38 John Lydon in Ibid. This point is re-emphasized by Siouxsie Sioux in an interview for Uncut, where in reference to punk, and to the infamous appearance of the Bromley contingent on The Today Show with Bill Grundy she states “To me punk was always more of a comedy than a revolution. The Banshees might have seemed like they were deadly serious but, most of the time, we were pissing ourselves with laughter. It does amused me when something like the Bill Grundy incident is written about like it was a landmark event. We were all just having a laugh.” in Jon Wilde. ‘Siouxsie Sioux: The Jon Wilde interview’ in Uncut 103. December, 2005. p. 34
darkening of their images as older men serves to provide a reserved and somewhat humble retrospective narration from each. On occasion, the dark outline of John Lydon’s spiky hair becomes visible as he rocks back and forth in his seat, but only clear, definitive images of the Sex Pistols as they existed and continue to exist within popular memory are presented. For many, 1977 is a vacuum – a space of transformation. In silhouetting the members of the Sex Pistols in his film, Temple has ensured that 1977 remains static and frozen so that perspective could be added without cluttering the film’s imagery. What is more, not actually being able to see Lydon, only his silhouette, as he breaks down and cries in the dark for the death of Sid, is moving in its nakedness and simplicity. This somber moment of grief is the film’s greatest rhythmic break to the reckless intensity that dominates the rest of the film.

_The Filth and the Fury_ reorders the way in which documentary filmmaking technique is used. In creating a mélange of disparate cultural objects, Temple has created a cinematic aesthetic that flows with the force of the punk politic. The film is driven though, by its remarkable narrative. The rise and fall of the Sex Pistols is one of rock’n’roll’s greatest narratives and it is recounted in _The Filth and the Fury_ with passion, humour and reverence. From its exposition, the punk explosion as a movement is treated with the veneration afforded any historical recounting of a political revolution. There is a genuine belief by the main protagonists and filmmaker that the Sex Pistols had a profound effect on British culture and the political trajectory of British youth in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The opening epitaph of the film, spoken by John Lydon is:

What you’ve seen in any documentary about any band before or since is how great and wonderful everything is. It’s not the truth of it: it’s hell, it’s hard - it’s horrible.
It’s enjoyable to a small degree. But if you know what you’re doing it for you’ll tolerate all that, because the work at the end of the day is what matters. We managed to offend all the people we were fucking fed up with.40

It is this position that provides the film with its potency. In creating controversy and demonizing themselves, the Sex Pistols were able to liberate a generation and introduce the populace to a new mode of thinking and expressing themselves. Lydon explains that “People that had no self-respect suddenly started to view themselves as beautiful in not being beautiful.”41 The Filth and the Fury follows the trajectory of punk’s ascension and decline, from the excitement at something new, through the demonization of the Pistol’s and their politics, to the absorption of punk into the mainstream and its eventual death through corporatization and capitalist populism.

The same account of youth culture meets commercial culture is found in Doug Pray’s Hype!42, which transplants the Sex Pistols narrative into early 1990’s Seattle in its discussion of the Grunge movement, its musical progenitors such as Nirvana, Mudhoney and Soundgarden and the eventual exploitation of the scene by corporate culture. Both texts carry a prevailing attitude that this process means creative and sociological death for the cultural movement within which it occurs, as its constituents are no longer able to exist outside of and usually in resistance to capitalist and populist discourses. Hype! utilizes interviews with a disparate array of Seattle’s local musicians who all bludgeon home the same point. The youth of Seattle created their own scene out of boredom and an excuse to vent frustrations through music. As the label Sub Pop started circulating this music, it quickly grew from a small independent label run by friends to the most widely

40 John Lydon, in The Filth & the Fury, op. cit.
41 John Lydon, in Ibid.
42 Hype!. Directed by Doug Pray. Helvey-Pray Productions, 1996.
recognized alternative music label of the 1990s. The Sub Pop saga is a fitting metaphor for the Grunge sound. As certain bands gained global popularity, ‘Seattle’ and ‘Grunge’ became chic catchphrases bandied about by the likes of Time Magazine\(^{43}\). This corporatization disgusts one long time fan so much that he destroys his old gig posters for the camera, giving approximate prices in hundreds of dollars for each one as he slices them up.

The parallels between Punk and Grunge are not surprising as the cultural forces that were at work in each instance were strikingly similar. Cultural studies and specifically the subcultural analysis of such theorists as Hebdige\(^{44}\), Hall and Jefferson\(^{45}\) and Redhead\(^{46}\) dwells in this tension between detachment and authenticity, between the pursuit of engaging and important cultural objects and the desire to analyse these objects as the products of specific cultural codes and practices. This theoretical limbo is often negotiated by the analysis of subcultural appropriation, whereby specific groups are able to utilize the conditions foistered upon them by specific cultural conditions for the purposes of expression. When faced with mass unemployment, a garbage strike and the bleak social landscape of the welfare state, urban British youth created punk. Similarly, when faced with cold weather and a lack of anything to do, the youth of Seattle created grunge. Lipsitz argues “People resisting domination can only fight in the arenas open to them; they often find themselves forced to create images of themselves that interrupt,

\(^{43}\) Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder was featured on the cover of *Time*. Vol. 142 (17), October 25, 1993.
\(^{44}\) Hebdige, op. cit.
invert or at least answer the ways in which they are defined by those in power.”

Punk and Grunge harnessed the negative perspective of youth culture held by those in power and redirected its aimless and destructive energy towards a vibrant and assertive political rhetoric. This process is a cycle, alternating between the culturally insubordinate and the mainstream, as a resistant cultural movement becomes absorbed into the commodity culture despite and because of its inherent resistance, which, if left long enough to gain wider cultural attention will undoubtedly become fashionable. This constant tug-of-war between creative credibility and commercial success is the basis of rock journalism. The political urgency of the music is viewed as constantly competing against the commodification of that resistance, struggling to voice itself over an increasing chorus of corporatized clones.

As Frith points out, “records are valued for their artistic authenticity or for their truth to youth experience, they are condemned for commercialism. The belief in a continuing struggle between music and commerce is the core of rock ideology.”

As with Filth, the most endearing moment of Hype! is an interview with a bloodied and battered fan, fresh from the pit, who with equal doses of venom and resignation explains that “what really pisses me off” is that “I was into them first!” This constant struggle for authenticity – and the claiming of identity through it – is inherent to popular culture. Both The Filth and the Fury and Hype! Exemplify the dispossession and anger of youth and those involved

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47 George Lipstitz. ‘We know what time it is: Race, class and youth culture in the nineties’ in Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture, Andrew Ross & Tricia Rose eds. New York: Routledge, 1994. p. 20
49 Uncredited fan in Hype!, op. cit.
in youth culture when the cultural movement from which they claim their identity and within which their chosen community exists, is superceded by corporate interests.

This is a narrative that dominates every rockumentary, either intentionally or inherently, as the act of documenting any band, artist or moment inherently subjects itself to the throes of populist representation. It may not necessarily be the filmmaker’s intention to indulge in the establishment and endorsement of definitive historical narratives and often filmmakers are attempting to operate outside of traditional notions of storytelling.

However, all popular music communicates itself through the nature of mass culture and the capitalist discourse to which popular expression is often tethered. In this instance Benjamin’s ‘The work of art in the mechanical age of reproduction’ can never really escape the binary of art versus entertainment and the corporate containment of such, however many times it might be reinterpreted and reappropriated. It is for this fact that the rockumentary never escapes populist methods of representation and often continues the same narrative, despite its inherent irony and often because of its use of the standard sub-culture to mass-culture narrative.

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51 Benjamin’s theory has been critiqued in Mark Cauchi. ‘Infinite spaces: Walter Benjamin and the spurious creations of capitalism’ in *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*. Vol. 8 (3), December, 2003. pp. 23-39. In this article Cauchi proposes that “Through its relentless production of commodities, capitalism demands (if it is not to produce itself out of existence) that its commodities decompose into ruins and thereby call for others to come into existence (but again, only for a finite period of time). p. 35 This perspective offers a finite context to the boundlessness of Benjamin’s argument as well as reinterpreting it for the liquid age and supplanting it within the fickleness of contemporary culture.
Rockumentaries present the “processes through which cultural identities are formed, both at personal and collective levels”\(^{52}\) by telling the stories that become snapshots, momentarily pausing the flux of identities in order to explore their relation to culture through their engagement with music. Bauman’s work on ‘idol-focussed aesthetic communities’ provides a context for this construction of identity through culture. He proposes that “[t]he trick which the idol-focussed aesthetic communities accomplish is to transform ‘community’ from a feared adversary of individual freedom of choice into a manifestation and (genuine or illusory) reconfirmation of individual autonomy.”\(^{53}\) The rockumentary forges aesthetic communities through the identification with an individual, group or community as it is represented on film.

The biopic also carries this purpose and has been utilized to recreate or represent an important life or period in the historical narratives that make up the popular musical landscape. The biopic differs in its execution, relying on the methods of traditional narrative fiction filmmaking, removing the subject from the straightforward manner in which the rockumentary can make claims and offer opinions. The biopic is also able to do this, but its aesthetic palette is encumbered by the restrictions of character, plot and motivation. In *The Filth and the Fury* it is openly remarked that Sid Vicious was a junkie, but the biopic must convey the junkie lifestyle through dialogue, performance, character motivation and production design. As Atkinson notes,

> Pop music, or more specifically rock’n’roll, is both an essentially cinematic beast and the frankest manifestation of life force that modern culture has ever produced – which may amount to the same thing. Thus its biopics create and then lament the


frustrated dreamtime of our collective fantasies, which with the creation of youth culture after World War II, have never before been more powerful or seductive.\textsuperscript{54}

In 1985, Alex Cox directed \textit{Sid and Nancy}\textsuperscript{55}, a film about the doomed relationship between Sid Vicious and his girlfriend Nancy Spungen. What removes \textit{Sid and Nancy} from other love stories is couple’s constant bickering and screaming. Few traditional signifiers of love and romance are utilized to convey the nature of its subjects. If Cox’s film is to be believed, then Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen did not have a romantic relationship. The cultural movement they were a part of perpetuates this narrative. In one scene during the film’s exposition, as members of the Bromley contingent lay strewn on a nondescript floor, Nancy makes an advance towards Johnny. He responds by berating her: “Fucking Americans – that’s all you ever think about – sex. None of us fuck, see. Sex is ugly. None of your free hippy love shit here.” Rejected, she then turns to Sid, who echoes Johnny with “Sex is boring, ugly, hippy shit.”\textsuperscript{56} There are occasional moments of tenderness but they are usually tainted by a stark realism like, for example when the pair consummate their relationship after shooting up for the first time, or when Sid calls Nancy on tour to tell her that he misses her and she explains to him that he’ll have to find someone else to sleep with. Cox finds in his subjects a constant tension between the squalid junkie chic that rode the coat tails of punk and moments of sublime romanticism and inspiration.

Surreal imagery punctuates the dour, oppressive mood in which \textit{Sid and Nancy} revels. In the film’s exposition, Sid and Johnny vandalize a Rolls Royce amongst council flats as

\textsuperscript{54} Michael Atkinson. ‘Long black limousine: pop biopics’ in Romeny & Wooton, op. cit. p. 24
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Sid and Nancy}. Directed by Alex Cox. Written by Alex Cox & Abbe Wool. Initial Pictures, 1986.
\textsuperscript{56} Andrew Schofield & Gary Oldman in \textit{Sid and Nancy}. Directed by Alex Cox. Written by Alex Cox & Abbe Wool. Initial Pictures, 1986.
Mounted Guards pass them in the street. During riots following the Pistol’s jubilee performance on the Thames, Sid and Nancy walk arm in arm as police scuffle with rioting youths, impervious to the violence around them. In another scene Nancy flicks a cigarette butt onto the floor and watches, placing Sid’s arm around her, as their hotel room is engulfed in flames. This dreamlike stylization is the film’s aesthetic crutch. Cox has extracted moments in the lives of Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen and filled them with a bizarre twisted fantasy, attempting to enhance the romanticism of their relationship, as he has stated that there was nothing romantic about the filth and sickness of their heroin addiction57. During the final act this becomes the dominant thematic motif of the film. As the Sex Pistols self-destruct, Nancy and heroin become Sid’s only concerns. Much of the narrative during the latter part of the film is interspersed amongst scenes of Sid and Nancy smacked up and bickering incoherently, falling asleep or trundling around dirty New York City streets looking for drugs.

_Sid and Nancy_ does not attempt to explain the career of the Sex Pistols. As a cinematic representation of a life, or two lives in this case there is an emphasis towards character development as opposed to the progression of a plot or even the dissemination of fact. There is almost an assumption that the viewer is aware of the story and will recognize such moments in the film as the band’s infamous appearance on _Today_58 with Bill Grundy, the outbreak of violence at a Pistols concert during their American tour and the filming of Sid’s version of ‘My Way’. However these moments and signifiers of a Pistols narrative are treated much like folklore and are appropriated by Cox in a whimsical,

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57 Alex Cox in Clark Collis. ‘Never mind the bollocks’ in _Uncut_ 47, 2001. p. 35
lyrical manner. During the sequence where Sid is attacked onstage, instead of continuing the show he is dragged into the crowd, disappearing amidst a sea of screaming, writhing bodies. The next scene has him being beaten by four concert-goers on a railway track. They release him only when McLaren intervenes, clasping his hands together in the shape of a pistol and shooting an imaginary bullet at them.

The film’s conclusion has been the source of some contention for Cox. After he is released from police custody for stabbing Nancy to death, Sid walks through an empty city lot. Reflective and resigned, he dances with three youths until a shiny yellow New York cab pulls up alongside them. Opening the door, Nancy invites him in, and as an emotive synth riff reverberates, they drive off into the sunset. Alex Cox:

Pay no attention to the bullshit message of this film. The end of Sid and Nancy is a sell out. But we had become enamored of Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen. We wanted to give them a happy ending. The truth is though, that junkies die in pools of blood and vomit. That’s what they do.59

In comparison to both Swindle and Filth, Cox’s film is an elegiac and moody narrative. The aesthetic discourse of punk is not inherent to the film’s style – it is conjured and imitated in the performances and production design. This aesthetic replication is the fundamental purpose of the biopic, which attempts to approximate and recreate as well as inform. Death is a staple of such films.60

59 Alex Cox in Clark Collis. ‘Never mind the bollocks’ in Uncut 47, 2001. p. 35
The lives and untimely demises of popular cultural heroes are played out in much the same manner time and again for the glorification of our worship and respect. The biopic, despite being stooped in the specificities of a particular artist, era or musical genre is a cinematic archetype. As Atkinson puts it “the grandstanding, fire-breathing music genius/god courting Untimely Death by way or his or her essential extra-ordinariness” is the prototypical rock’n’roll narrative and has been utilized to tell the stories of those who are venerated and revered. Marilyn Manson has stated that,

Jesus was the first rock star. The cross is the biggest, greatest piece of merchandise in history, bigger than any concert T-shirt. And Jesus was the first dead rock star. Like Jim Morrison and Kurt Cobain and Jimi Hendrix, he became immortal by dying… It’s not just death that turns you into an icon. It’s how many people are watching when you die, and the way the camera can turn you into a martyr.61

They die so that others may live through their brilliance: this is the mantra of the biopic.62

In an age where youth culture often feeds vicariously off the glory of celebrity, it is no surprise that the rock star biopic locates so much of its imagery in quasi-religious iconography and the expression of cultural engagement, that notion of ‘jouissance’63 that Barthes ultimately could not rid himself of, in spiritual and metaphysical terms.

Rock music has not maintained its cultural currency of excess. Sweaty, long haired guitar wielding freaks no longer punctuate the popular musical landscape like demented demi-Gods. Rock has become self-conscious, introverted and paranoid. It does not parade itself shamelessly, flaunting its slick, baby-oiled curves or mock itself jeeringly, wagging

62 The link between performer and audience in the musical biopic has been analysed in Cynthia A. Hanson. ‘The Hollywood musical biopic and the regressive performer’ in Wide Angle. Vol. 10 (2), 1988. pp. 15-23. In this article Hanson discusses the relevance of death and the memory of the performer to the ritual of the biopic’s representation of that performer.
tongues or other appendages defiantly at its audience the way it did in what some might call rock’s heyday. Just as the economy of the media has expanded via new technologies and new standards for production, distribution and reception, consequently popular culture has fragmented to the extent where the halcyon days of glitter, pomp and true rock anarchism seem to have faded into a sepia-tinged memory. Or so Todd Haynes would have us believe in his cinematic enactment of the glory days of glam and the sobering corporatization of its visage.

*Velvet Goldmine*, Haynes’ elegy to the glam era of the 1970s, was released in 1998. The film is named after a David Bowie song. Bowie himself was approached by the producers of the film to co-operate on a project that was being developed as a loosely biographical recount of the period surrounding his early career. Seven Bowie songs were used in the original storyboards for the film. Always wary of his visage being utilized by others to tell their own history, Bowie refused. Still, Haynes was not to be deterred. Set in 1984 (a reference no doubt to Orwell’s famous year and Bowie’s song) his film tells the story of one reporter’s journey back to the heyday of British glam rock and the onstage-assassination of megastar Brian Slade. Releasing albums under the moniker of androgynous alien rocker Maxwell Demon, Brian Slade is observably modeled on Bowie64, and there are many other striking similarities between scenes in the film and events in Bowie’s career. There is a re-enactment of the infamous guitar-fellatio that Bowie performed onstage with Spiders From Mars guitarist Mick Ronson, as well as

64 Just as Brian Slade is modeled on Bowie, the supporting characters are also based on people close to him at the time. Slade’s wife Mandy is based on Angie Bowie, Curt Wild is arguably an amalgam of Lou Reed and Iggy Pop, and other characters are based on Bowie’s managers Kenneth Pitt and Tony Defries as well as members of the Bowie entourage Coco Schwabb and Ava Cherry.
almost shot for shot recreations of backstage footage from the *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* rockumentary.

To provide an aural accompaniment to Haynes’ frenetic visual style, musical producer Michael Stipe compiled a collection of bands and musicians hand-picked from the current British rock landscape as well as a few old gems from the era to make a convincing stab at a representation of the popular history of glam rock. Two supergroups of contemporary musicians were created specifically to record songs for the soundtrack. The Venus In Furs, arguably named after the Velvet Underground’s homage to S&M, featured the talents of ex-Suede guitarist Bernard Butler and Radiohead’s twin genius’ Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood, covering three songs from the first Roxy Music album. The Wylde Rattz, fronted by lead actor Ewan McGregor, who cover The Stooges’ ‘TV Eye’ featured guitarist Thurston Moore and drummer Steve Shelley from avant-noise outfit Sonic Youth. The chance for these supergroups to cover old tracks from the glam era is both an opportunity for the musicians to revel in their influences, but also provides an excellent selling point as fans of the contemporary acts on offer are no doubt excited by new product attached to those acts.

The *Velvet Goldmine* soundtrack is that rarest of texts that, much in the same way as the film, straddles the line between authenticity and homage. Whilst an almost generic reading of the high points of the glam period are represented, contemporary music fans no doubt salivated over new compositions written specifically for the film by Shudder To Think, Pulp, Teenage Fanclub and Grant Lee Buffalo. In rehashing the classics as well as

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presenting new product, the *Velvet Goldmine* soundtrack reappraises the glam paradigm for a new generation whilst simultaneously providing significant motivation for the gaining of revenue.

Borrowing its central structure and much of its imagery from *Citizen Kane* and attaching a prologue connecting aliens and Oscar Wilde’s childhood desire to be a pop idol to the already cluttered narrative, *Velvet Goldmine* exemplifies the form of a liquid text. Its indulgence in parody lends itself to what O’Neill recognizes as a cinematic form of historical revisionism.

Visual styles and images from the past are self-consciously borrowed in order to signify historical distance and reality, while at the same time the borrowing is underlined in a way that makes the text refer to other texts rather than to an extracinematic historical reality.

*Velvet Goldmine*’s engagement with *Citizen Kane*, Oscar Wilde and Pennebaker’s Bowie documentary are all particularly self-conscious. Their use is more than mere parody as flattery. Each of the aforementioned texts serves a structural purpose in creating the intertextually bound world of the film. Its structural and visual sources create a context for its visceral flair.

With pacy editing, constructed ‘stock’ footage and extended set pieces flowing seamlessly in and out of the narrative, *Velvet Goldmine* is particularly visually accomplished. Perhaps the most enjoyable element is the way in which it purports to be fictional but skirts so close the actual truth of David Bowie’s early 1970s career. Liberties

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66 *Citizen Kane*. Directed by Orson Welles. Written by Herman J. Mankiewicz & Orson Welles. Mercury Productions, 1941.

are taken with the narrative. Many scenes in the film are opportunities for Haynes to attempt to commit to celluloid representations of real events. Pegg has commented that this mixture of fact and fiction sits uncomfortably, and that it is impossible to experience the film as either an accurate portrayal of real events or a fictitious account of an actual period. Many of the people close to Bowie have commented that *Velvet Goldmine* is unfair, inaccurate and even “muddled around in glam rock masturbatory narcissism.”68 Nevertheless, the music was a big draw-card for the youth market, with the amalgamation of contemporary performers and iconic tunes an irresistible combination.

Ultimately, the narrative of *Velvet Goldmine* is that of the changing media economy and the way in which a golden era of music could give way to capitalism and the commercialized nature of popular culture. Arthur Stewart, the journalist investigating Slade, discovers that there is a connection between Slade, whose career ended after the hoax shooting onstage, and that of Tommy Stone, middle aged pop singer with a hairstyle parodying Bowie’s Fuehrer of the early 1980s. The first glimpse of Stone is actually at the beginning of the film, on a large outdoor television screen, talking about the merits of expanding global economies (be they political, cultural, aesthetic). Haynes’ concern with this particular cultural history is spiteful, even sour and “sulky about the idea that his hero has sold out on hype and betrayed some sort of authentic ideal.”69 Again authenticating ideologies surface, with Haynes arguing on the side of rock music’s supposed ideological solidarity. As a realm of culture dictated by popularity, rock can only stretch its ideals so far outside of the corporate paradigm. As Goodall emphasizes, “Pop problematises the

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nature of taste itself: what is valuable is not what is original but what is replicated, not what is timeless but what is by its nature ephemeral and obsolescent.”70 The ‘sell out’ is as integral a part of that ephemerality as the nobility of the glory days. Only nostalgia separates and differentiates the two.

A recurring technique for establishing authenticity in popular music performance is the breaking of codes and the creation of new or transformed codes of style… The new style is invariably drawn from a particular audience group or subculture and is then rearticulated by the popular music performer.71

The reading or interpretation of this new style is largely dictated by taste, but also by personal opinion and more specifically, by exposure to this particular style. If audiences have been involved in a particular style formation, its absorption by populist culture may be an issue: the ‘selling out’ of a facet of culture regarded with personal import; of an object that informs identity.

*Velvet Goldmine* takes a fan’s perspective, which explains its preoccupation with the cluttering of media economies in the 1980s. Inherent in the film’s treatment of the commodification of rock is an argument that this is a cheapening of its potentially resistant politics. Oppositionally there exists the concept that popular music elicits within its audience an experience that attains the status of the sublime, that the ascension of popular forms of communication into the conceited ranks of art theory is an unnecessary one, that it belies the true nature of the of emotional resonance attained by popular culture. Douglas Coupland explains his excitement:

to find out that [Pop Art] was actually a real sensibility, that you could actually think of yourself as being pop … a lot of it is detestable and silly and dumb. But at least it allows me to be able to communicate with relative ease to someone who grew up thousands of miles away. It’s a common bank of experience.\textsuperscript{72}

This ‘common bank of experience’ is, for those who spend their lives surfing cable channels and internet bandwidth, an exciting concept filled with the possibility of knowledge not yet learned, as well as a source of comfort and belonging. It is the cultural currency of the biopic. There is almost always an attempt at understanding between the filmmaker and his or her audience – a common bank of experience.

\textit{Velvet Goldmine} succeeds in summoning ideologies of nostalgia. The rendering of early 1970s glam-fandom during the film’s exposition is breathtaking. However, as the narrative progresses, Haynes becomes bitter about the path of popular consciousness and popular culture, as if to remind his audience that the 1980s in all its globalized corporatism ruined everything that was great about the 1970s. The explanation of a rock’n’roll conspiracy is ultimately an uncomfortable, somewhat bland ending to a film that celebrates the glam rock period on the surface. Perhaps this is an ironic twist on the barbed fantasy of the glam aesthetic, but it is indicative of an attitude common of art’s contemptuous view of pop. This perspective is a simplification and ultimately, an unfair rendering of the cultural process of political reappropriation. One of the lessons that popular culture and consumerism have taught consumers, is that contradiction is inherent in any cultural realm dictated by fashion. The sanctimonious belief that one must, for the sake of artistic dignity or some antiquated notion of authenticity, never contradict one’s own personal politic has been subsumed in the fickle and transitory nature of cultural

capital. *Velvet Goldmine* reminds us of this phenomenon as much through its failures as its successes, as well as through its mediation between a reinterpretation of a historical narrative and a fictitious piece of celluloid.

Not a biopic in the strict sense of the genre, *Velvet Goldmine*’s ‘story within a story’ structure makes comment on the volatile nature of attempting to render a history. The biopic by its very definition may exist alongside the traditional literary biography as a historically-based recreation of a life. Pop music biopics such as Oliver Stone’s *The Doors* have been able to transcend the limitations of subjectivity foisted upon the genre by presenting such a convincing recreation of an era. In terms of both production design and narrative; through the representation of the cultural preoccupations and social fabric of a time, such texts are important cultural artifacts. Whilst this can lead to excess, often excess is required in re-treading the hype and sensationalism of rock stars, of which Jim Morrison is a strong example. Conceited, self-interested and undoubtedly talented, his only natural state was that of a god-like genius, regardless of whether or not others truly believed. In its aestheticization of psychedelic rhetoric and the sheer breadth of his lived experience, Stone’s film authenticates an entire ideology through Morrison. Atkinson argues that, “*The Doors* manages to be more pretentious about Morrison than he was about himself; and sometimes, at least, Stone seems to know it.” This outward pretension is the ambition of all biopics: to be a history lesson in why a particular cultural figure such as a popular entertainer is to be considered important or significant. This significance is what establishes Bauman’s notion of idol-centred communities. “The idols

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74 Atkinson, op. cit. p. 30
accomplish a small miracle: they make the inconceivable happen; they conjure up the ‘experience of community’ without real community, the joy of belonging without the discomfort of being bound.”75 The rock biopic celebrates the individual through the discursive language of the community and the cultural realms through which this language is spoken. Hype is obligatory. It is expected.

Cinematic indulgence in history raises similar issues, irrespective of structural execution. Through its engagement with particular examples of this indulgence, this chapter has reconciled the ways in which the rockumentary and the biopic attempt to rekindle our familiarity or our engagement with the popular both through indulgence in the grandiosity of rock, and subtle and reserved critique of a life or a moment. Authenticity is as much a hurdle to be leapt as a fundamental element of historical discourse to be respected and obeyed. By means of the cinematic apparatus popular music and its defining moments, its undeniable geniuses and its mere casualties are told. They die so that we may live through their brilliance. This story, like a recurrent fable, is why we continue to watch.

75 Bauman, op. cit. p. 69
Section Three

“Way To Jump On The Bandwagon, Sell Out!”
Pop and cinema have extensive histories that can be either separated or intertwined. The first film made with a synchronous accompanying soundtrack was *The Jazz Singer*\(^1\) in 1927, a vehicle for cabaret singer Al Jolson. Two years later Jimmie Rodgers made what Ben Thompson refers to as “the charisma crossover”\(^2\) with *The Singing Brakeman*\(^3\). Since these early cross-promotional incidences, pop icons have traversed the realms of music and movies, attempting to pollinate cross-media hybrid identities in order to either expand or prolong their fame and success; and using cinema the catalyst.

The history of popular music is also the history of rock stars. Like predestined hurricanes of fate they may not be those who record companies establish as stars, but those who point to new directions in image and sound which is later appropriated by others. As Frith, Straw and Street argue, Elvis Presley exemplifies this process.

Rock musicians (unlike country or rhythm and blues or mainstream pop performers) are expected to do their best work at the start of their careers, to sell out to commerce and to be corrupted by fame, and Presley’s career was the archetype: signed up as a young man to a local independent label, Sun Records, which refused the genre and racial musical distinctions which were then the music biz norm; taken over by a shrewd but unimaginative manager, Colonel Tom Parker, who had no interest in music but a sharp eye for a quick buck; sold by Sun to a major label, RCA, which (with the help of the army) curbed Presley’s more

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\(^1\) *The Jazz Singer*. Directed by Alan Crossland. Written by Alfred A. Cohn. Warner Bros., 1927.
\(^3\) *The Singing Brakeman*. Written and directed by Basil Smith. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1929.
anarchic musical tendencies and sold him globally as a slick white entertainer, the
good natured, unthreatening star of countless bad Hollywood films.4

The pattern of rock star excess and self-absorption for which Presley’s career is almost a
blueprint has become a familiar narrative. Elvis’ story facilitates this rumination that the
pop or rock star film vehicle is merely another product of record executive manufactured
star propaganda. This point is given credence by any number of Elvis’ post-army films
such as Easy Come, Easy Go5, Clambake6, Stay Away Joe7 and Charro!8 This cluster of
films is a convincing portrait of the dire trajectory of his career, which saw him become a
virtual parody of his former self. When Elvis became a pop commodity in the late 1950s,
the demand for product linked to him became increasingly urgent. His image was
marketed via cinema almost immediately after he was signed to RCA.9 His early films,
whilst mostly formulaic musical comedies with strong romantic sub-plots have a
reputation as light but enjoyable family entertainment, with amicable performances and
songs. As his popularity waned after army service, his films were more formulaic, less
inspired, and the iconography of his career appeared less charismatic or bracing.

Presley made more money from films than he did from music, and in terms of iconizing
himself, his canon of film performances are as important as his hip gyrating on The

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4 Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street. The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 75
5 Easy Come, Easy Go. Directed by John Rich. Written by Allan Weiss & Anthony Lawrence. Paramount
Pictures, 1967.
7 Stay Away Joe. Directed by Peter Tewkesbury. Written by Michael A. Hoey. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer,
1968.
9 Elvis signed to the RCA artist roster on November 20, 1955. His first film appearance was in Love Me
Tender. Directed by Robert D. Webb. Written by Robert Buckner. 20th Century Fox, 1956., which was
released in the US less than a year later on November 15, 1956.
Milton Berle Show\textsuperscript{10} or his bloated jumpsuited visage from the decadent Vegas period. Amos Poe offers a nostalgic reminder of why Elvis once commanded appreciation and awe in terms of his on-screen embodiment of his pop-music persona, whilst acknowledging the economic determinism of the venture.

Elvis Presley actually, if you look at some of his films, there’s some sort of comedy going on there, it’s like a hick backward guy playing Hollywood – you know, Viva Las Vegas. But it’s kitsch, it’s pop, and you’re selling the album for that moment, it’s not for posterity.\textsuperscript{11}

In terms of artistic longevity, the great number of bad films that Elvis made under the management of Colonel Tom Parker had significant impact on the way in which the King has been historicized. Viewed as the beginning of the end in terms of Elvis’ ‘authentic’ period, the string of post-army films have no doubt left a blemish upon a career that had, up until that point been blindingly innovative and inspired.\textsuperscript{12} When compared to other Sun recording artists of a similar period such as Roy Orbison, who did not make the leap from one medium to another\textsuperscript{13}, Elvis may have done his legacy an injustice by attempting the charisma crossover. Orbison remained a popular and arguably more ‘authentic’ symbol of the country-influenced early rock’n’roll revolution than Presley despite the latter’s superior record sales and status as the definitive icon of modern popular music. It

is this ‘sellout factor’ that holds so much sway in terms of audience appreciation and critical respect. It is this relationship between authenticity and image that characterizes this chapter, which through investigations into the onscreen images of popular musicians such as Tom Waits, David Bowie and Madonna, tracks the consequences of popularity and populism on the genre of the pop star vehicle.

The inevitability of the pop star vehicle lends itself to culturally-elitist derision. In a popular-cultural marketplace breeding cross-promotional tie-ins of any and every nature, from blatant fast-food giveaways to brand name product placement there seems to be little respite from the capitalist cultural zeitgeist.

Mass art is produced for profit and the pursuit of profit determines its form and content. The problem is to explain cultural consumption, to account for the replacement in the last hundred years of popular art by mass art. Reference to the power of advertisement, to market manipulation, is not enough: mass cultural solutions may be “false,” but the needs to which they are a response are real.14

That this hyper-capitalist ideology is capable of permeating our everyday involvement with culture is perhaps a depressing proposition. As cross-media promotional marketing becomes increasingly prevalent amongst the cultural clutter it becomes increasingly appealing to adopt a neo-Hegelian stance of objective idealism, which, according to Frith, prescribes to a view that “under liberal democratic conditions the capitalist media [are] being used to manipulate ‘the masses’ and consumer culture to buy them off, thereby suppressing critical reason and eliminating the possibilities of revolutionary social change.”15 In an economically-determinist cultural landscape, the movement from one media form to another can be viewed as purely profit-based. As Bauman notes, “[t]he

celebrities’ authority is a derivative of the authority of numbers – it grows (and falls) together with the number of watchers, listeners, book-buyers or record-buyers.”16 If a performer is able to transfer this ‘authority’ to which Bauman refers, from one cultural sphere to another, the possibility for profit is guaranteed. Such a slick capitalization upon cross-media promotional possibilities provides the performer with access into yet another medium for promotion and profit, as well as providing the film with a readymade guarantee of at least partial intrigue by the public, based on the name, image and potential economic viability of their star.

No doubt a significant motivation for the music to screen transition is past acting experience. TuPac Shakur began his performing career in a play produced by his manager, Kylie Minogue was the darling of Australian soap opera, Britney Spears was a Mouseketeer and Courtney Love had cluttered the mise en scene in a few Alex Cox films. This experience does not always qualify popular musicians for careers in cinema. Often they receive parts in films for which their acting abilities betray them. This occurrence leads cynics to the inevitable conclusion of inherent economic determinism. Dyer emphasizes that musicals, variety and cabaret are and have always been considered purely as entertainment. Under this umbrella of ‘showbiz’, where notions of artistic merit are usurped by spectacle, there is a disparity of interest between form and the will of governing financial concerns.

There is the usual struggle between capital (the backers) and labour (the performers) over control of the product, and professional entertainment is unusual in that: (1) it is the business of providing forms not things, and (2) the workforce

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(the performers themselves) is in a better position to determine the form of its product than are, say, secretaries or car workers.\textsuperscript{17}

Whilst the performers are more empowered in their delivery of product, their status as ‘stars’ is dependent upon and allowed by the will of capitalist forces. Whatever previous media exposure the icon in question might have had, the pop star to screen presence phenomenon can often be explained as having happened when the exercise became potentially profitable for someone other than the performer.

Cultural iconography and its appropriation have increased in speed and clarity. As such the success of the charisma crossover becomes dependent on the timing of release. The speed of imagery transference, aesthetic sensibility and ideology between music and film has irrevocably increased. The convergence of media has become standard, with this convergence tempering the production, marketing and public consumption of texts. Virilio provides a theoretical definition of this process of convergence.

\begin{quote}
At the close of our century, \textit{the time of the finite world is coming to an end}; we live in the beginnings of a paradoxical \textit{miniaturization of action}, which others prefer to baptize \textit{automation}.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The use of the word ‘finite’ – or rather the implication that this term can no longer be applied to the tangible world – emphasizes the acceleration that the systems of cultural production have undergone in recent history. The ‘automation’ to which Virilio refers has become accepted, with the identical and timely duplicate becoming the standard format for media consumption. As the temporal specificity of mass culture has increased, the timing of release for the pop star vehicle has become increasingly refined. Misjudging the

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release date jeopardizes the success of a film that is dependent on the public reception of its star.

Britney Spears’ foray into acting – *Crossroads*¹⁹ – came too late, as she had already moved beyond the wholesome girl-next-door appeal of her first album to a decidedly more sexualized image. Public interest over the status of her virginity had been rife as she was romantically connected in tabloids to both Justin Timberlake and Limp Bizkit frontman Fred Durst, whose tabloid confession that “Spears turned up at his house at 3am in a see-through top with no bra”²⁰ was echoed in lyrics from an incomplete Limp Bizkit song: “Ain’t it funny, scared to admit it. Very first night made the Limp dog hit it.”²¹ With excessive tabloid hype shattering Spears’ clean-cut image, *Crossroads* was a career misstep that despite box-office profits, appeared as a contradiction to Spears’ evolving star image.

As a vehicle for the singer, there are several opportunities where music is conveniently woven into the narrative. Spears’ character Lucy evolves from miming Madonna’s ‘Open Your Heart’²² in her bedroom to winning tips from a karaoke competition to auditioning as a genuine pop performer. Traditional traits of the buddy film have Spears’ singing along with her co-stars to Shania Twain’s ‘Man! I Feel Like A Woman’²³, whilst the road movie formula supplies the car stereo that accompanies them, as well as the love interest

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²⁰ Johnny Sharp. ‘Rizky bizness’ in *Q* 204, June, 2003. p. 58
in the form of a traveling musician who composes music for Lucy’s poetry; the lyrics of which form the film’s central selling point, the ballad ‘I’m Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman’\textsuperscript{24}. The film’s musical director Daniel Carlin points out that the two original Britney Spears songs that appear on the film soundtrack were written specifically to follow the narrative drive of the film.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Crossroads} did reasonable business at the box office, recouping over $5 million more than its $12 million budget on its opening weekend and more than tripling it in gross profits\textsuperscript{26}. Spears image was not necessarily tarnished by the film’s frosty critical reception so much as her ineptitude as an actor. Although it may be appropriate to view its wholesomeness as an attempt at damage control to quell the Timberlake/Durst controversy or an ill-timed and outdated star vehicle, the film’s politics are reckless and overly simplistic.

Inadequate treatment of ‘teen issues’ such as pregnancy and date rape are neatly tied up into one character; the helpless tomboyish Mimi whose status as white trash casts her in opposition to prissy prima donna Kit and Spears’ Lucy, whose mechanic father has tried to provide her with a decent upbringing and instill in her the virtues of hard work and moral conformity. It is in this sense that \textit{Crossroads} makes most sense, as a coming of age story aimed at pubescent girls, preaching that keeping a strict moral code will inevitably win out over partying and drinking. With slick cross-promotional tie-ins such

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Dido, Max Martin & Rami. ‘I’m Not A Girl (Not Yet A Woman)’. Jive, 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Daniel Carlin in \textit{Crossroads} DVD. Paramount Home Video & Roadshow Entertainment, 2002.
\item \textsuperscript{26} All Music Box Office Details. Available world wide web: \url{http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0275022/business}. Accessed 15\textsuperscript{th} April 2004.
\end{itemize}
as the would-be anthemic ‘I’m Not A Girl, Not Yet A Woman’ single and a DVD filled with extras, it is difficult to view Crossroads as much more than an exercise in quasi-megastar promotional prowess. Adding insult to ineptitude is the ‘token’ black character Kit. Spears’ initial popularity appeared to have blossomed from her down to earth southern belle image, but it was also an overtly white image, devoid of black representations. The biographical material on Spears fails to mention the 44% African American population of her hometown, Kentwood, Louisiana. None of her biographical stories include blacks, until Crossroads’ conveniently placed Kit.

Her small-town southern background and the presumed absence of blacks in Kentwood are two powerful means by which Britney projects an overwhelming aura of whiteness. Such an image is also constantly reaffirmed by her enthusiastic embrace of gender conventions which, though cross-racial in practice, are often exclusively associated with white southern women.

What makes the character of Kit so insulting is that she is not even written as black and may as well have been played by a woman of any ethnicity. This thinly veiled ‘token’ placement adds to the promotional propulsion of a particular brand of star image facilitated by tastes and political leanings of the demographic at which it is aimed – in this case, young white females.

It is impulsive to delineate the pop star vehicle as a realm of culture dictated by formula, fashion and finance. In this post-everything age, binary oppositions of art versus entertainment too conveniently rationalize the capitalist implications of any media.

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phenomenon against its status as culture with merit. Cultural hierarchies of high and low culture have been proven and disproven repeatedly, as have their economic versus their political motives. In his introduction to *High Pop*[^30], Collins delineates various stages in the history of the popular culture/high culture divide. The first stage, occurring during the first half of the nineteenth century, saw new realms of popular culture emerge due to the mass production systems and mass audiences, two by-products of the industrial revolution. In this context, popular culture was encountered in the same venues as high culture without any preconception that the two might be mutually exclusive. The second stage saw this cultural cornucopia abolished, as hegemonic control was administered over museum boards and symphony societies, delineating economic structures to cultural institutions and in doing so creating a cultural divide based on class. This hierarchy of taste remains in place until the third phase began in the late 1950s, when the Pop Art movement revolutionized culture and, aided by the economic freedom afforded the middle and working classes, allowed a culture of surfaces to flourish as fashion and personal identity became inherently linked to consumerism. Lipsitz argues that “Within the interstices of popular culture, a rich collective counter-memory carries on the tasks of historical thinking in new and significant ways.”[^31] The third phase of cultural populism is where this collective counter-memory finds it purpose and potency.

It is in this phase that the pop star film vehicle is situated. Cultural populism prescribes that anything popular is worthwhile. This paradigm delineates cultural value based on mass consumption, but more importantly it utilizes Hall’s argument that

Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured.32

Popular culture has often borne the stigma of trash culture. Although it lacks the specific formal elements of high culture, it can become potently politically resistive. For Ferguson and Golding, this potential is not enough.

Cultural Studies has always been resolutely focused on the links between culture and power, especially as detectable in popular culture. But this credo seems little evident in the torrent of dissection of the epiphenomena of popular culture and everyday practice in which the dynamics of power, inequality and oppression seem obscured.33

It is a potent and sustaining argument that popular culture too often fails on its promised resistance. Frow offers that the specific brand of resistance offered by popular culture is often politically flaccid and thus, unable to transcend its attachment to capitalist ideology.34 Political agency is never implied in popular culture, but is applied singularly by its practitioners.

Popular culture is never inherently political. It has the capacity to incite resistance through its use and appropriation, but it never “automatically becomes a site of resistance.”35 The flippancy of using the overall resistive potential of popular culture without framing the individual resistive properties of specific texts has seen cultural

studies attacked by those who claim that as a discipline its foundations are far from stable.

Gitlin asserts that,

Seeking to find political energies in audiences who function qua audiences, rather than in citizens functioning as citizens, the dominant current in cultural studies stamps its seal of approval upon what is already a powerful tendency within industrial societies: the diffusion of popular culture as a surrogate for politics.36

Whilst popular music and cinema have both been claimed as sites of political resistance, as Thompson37 and Hawkins38 both attest, as well as being media that have been appropriated by audiences to inform their own resistance, this is not always the case. Much popular culture exists with no inherent resistive or political interests whatsoever, leaving the implication of its political utility solely to the reader. Many pop-star film vehicles are simple exercises in record company exploitation thinly veiled as entertainment with star-power.

The pop star film vehicle is able to utilize structural film discourses of narrative and character alongside discourses of image and surface: which are traditionally associated with the pop star phenomenon, in order to create a hybrid form that is not always without political validity.

The politics of popular culture have often been misunderstood and its progressivness unrecognized by theories that fail to take account of the differences and the relationships between the radical and the progressive, and between the micro politics of everyday life and the macro politics of organized action.39

The ideological potency of this hybrid form is varied, constantly in flux and innately fickle. It varies between individual texts. Often the primary concern of the pop star

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37 Thompson, op. cit.  
vehicle is to provide cross-promotional access to a popular icon, their image and the
-cultural phenomenon surrounding them, which is why the form often collects derision
-from those concerned purely with the filmic medium. Often the choice of role or even the
casting of a given individual says more about the relationship between the thematic
consistencies between the film and star in question.

When discussing the difficulties of traversing the structural divide of the pop star film
vehicle it is worth considering what cabaret cum circus freak crooner Tom Waits means
when he comments that moving from music to films is “like going from bootlegging to
watch repair.”

No doubt he refers to the precision of filmmaking as a technical exercise,
but the tedium of this precision as compared to the energetic rawness of live performance
and music creation is also inferred. Waits’ cinematic incarnations have been a rough
bunch of drunkards, psychos and loners, from the unemployed DJ in Jim Jarmusch’s
*Down By Law* to the wheelchair bound Vietnam vet in *The Fisher King* to the
cockroach eating lunacy of Renfield in *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. Particularly relevant is
Earl Piggot, the alcoholic chauffer married to Lily Tomlin’s diner waitress in Robert
Altman’s adaptation of the writings of Raymond Carver, *Short Cuts*.

In *Short Cuts*, a pivotal scene between Waits and Tomlin occurs when she returns home
from work to their trailer to find him drunk and abusive. He berates her for wearing short

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43 *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Written by James V. Hart. Based on the
44 *Short Cuts*. Directed by Robert Altman. Written by Robert Altman & Frank Barhydt. Based on the
skirts to work and comments on her “sad, middle-aged ass”. As their bickering escalates she kicks him out.

Earl
How come you don’t wear your wedding ring to work no more?

Doreen
Oh, you’re such a bullshit artist- you lied to me, now get the hell out of here. I’m not taking you back no more. No more I’m not taking you back!

Earl
I’m not coming back!

Doreen
Slobbering all over Honey like that…

Earl
I never touched Honey!

Doreen
I never said you touched her I said you slobbered on her!

Earl
You’re the one chipping on my mansion of love baby! Not me!

Doreen
Why don’t you go get drunk and pee on Erma Dee’s driveway again?

Earl
I am gonna get drunk! I’m gonna get drunk right now goddamn it!^45

In a pop market flooded by boy bands and pop princesses, Tom Waits is not a particularly viable name for guaranteed commercial success. Neither is he an assuredly bankable personality in terms of the charisma crossover. Yet Waits’ performances on screen are not only important as a counter argument to the economic determinism of so many pop

star screen outings, they are important in terms of thinking of the contemporary performer as a cross-media entity, who can manufacture a specific image that is punctuated by consistent thematic motifs in a range of media.

The characters with which Waits imbues in his songwriting as either subject or narrator, are similarly lonely and pathetic miscreants. Themes of emotional isolation, Dionysian abandon and subject matter largely concerning the seedy underbelly of the socially inept dominate his recorded work. When considering the mood and images conjured up in his spoken word vignette ‘Frank’s Wild Years’ from the 1983 album Swordfishtrombones\textsuperscript{46}, the similarities to a character such as Earl Piggot are striking.

Well Frank settled down in the Valley
and he hung his wild years
on a nail that he drove through
his wife’s forehead
he sold used office furniture
out there on San Fernando Road
and assumed a $30,000 loan
at 15\% and put a down payment
on a little two bedroom place
his wife was a spent piece of used jet trash
made good bloody marys
kept her mouth shut most of the time
had a little Chihuahua named Carlos
that had some kind of skin disease
and was totally blind. They had a thoroughly modern kitchen
self cleaning oven (the whole bit!)
Frank drove a little sedan
they were so happy

One night Frank was on his way home
from work, stopped at the liquor store
picked up a couple Mickey’s Big Mounths
drank ‘em in the car on his way
to the Shell station, he got a gallon of

\textsuperscript{46} Tom Waits. \textit{Swordfishtrombones}. Island, 1983.
gas in a can, drove home, doused everything in the house, torched it, parked across the street, laughing watching it burn, all Halloween orange and chimney red then Frank put on a top forty station got on the Hollywood Freeway headed north

Never could stand that dog

It is through an understanding of the thematic consistencies between a musician’s work in both popular music and film that auteur theory becomes important to the way in which the pop star film vehicle is negotiated.

Auteur theory is a method to describe and analyse the use of specific stylistic motifs of film form, by a director to portray particular thematic or political information. The way in which meaning is made from all texts, including film, has changed due to the decentralizing of cultural regimes, methods of production and especially the increasing flexibility of varying modes of reception.

Over the last twenty or thirty years advanced industrial capitalism has radically modified its techniques of manufacture and marketing in such a way as to incorporate as a structural moment the value of aesthetic singularity.

Personal and entertainment technology has increased the capacity for audiences to utilize the cultural industries for their own purposes. The ‘aesthetic singularity’ upon which Frow comments is utilized in the rock discourse through notions of ‘authenticity’, but is never-the-less wholly encapsulated, through the status of specific texts as cultural

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48 The origins of the term auteur are detailed in the introduction to this thesis, whereby the first instances of the term in the French magazine Cahiers du Cinema are detailed.
50 Bauman points out that “Thanks to the immense capacities of electronic technology, spectacles can be created which offer a chance of participation and a shared focus of attention to an indefinite multitude of physically remote spectators.” in Bauman, op. cit. p. 66
commodities, in capitalist rhetoric. This commodification of culture has not only affected the status of cultural artifacts but it has changed the ways in which these artifacts are produced, released and consumed. As a result of such processes the literacy of popular cultural readerships is increasingly complex and dynamic. Virilio observes about the contemporary Westernized concepts of time and space that,

We now have a different day. Instead of a solar or otherwise illuminated day, we have a subliminary and paraoptic day that has no relationship whatsoever to direct observation, and in which representation and configurations arise less from the separation of the points, lines, and planes of visual experience, or image resolution, than from the interruption of projection sequences… so the gap between world and time and human time ends.51

In this context, the status of cultural interface changes. Critical relationships to texts are less definitive. The relationship between individual texts is less specific, less tangible. Cultural literacy52 theory, particularly that which refers to specific technologies, has increased in its relevance. Through the media saturation that has solarized contemporary culture, it has been far easier to gain an understanding of the ideological and aesthetic confluence of certain texts, and as such new narratives based on personal engagement with texts become the more readily deployed tropes of culture and its reception.

The rules for judging authorship and the expanse of its domain have also shifted significantly, becoming more subjective, but also more open, less definite. As a result there has been some revision of the term. Both Dyer53 and Ellis54 have written on the concept of the star as auteur and Wollen suggests that, “The auteur theory does not limit

itself to acclaiming the director as the main author of a film. It implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none had been seen before.” The term ‘auteur’ can be extended to refer to an artist in a general sense, whose work in various media forms has dealt with and been based around consistent thematic content. A distinction between director as auteur and star as auteur is necessary. Musician Nick Cave offers his perspective on this distinction:

I still consider film to be my favourite medium. I enjoy seeing films more than looking at a painting or listening to a record or whatever, I find they have a more lasting effect on me in general. But I don’t think I have the capacity to be able to direct a film as such – the patience, or to have the longevity of vision or whatever, that you need to have. To be involved with something for five years, one idea or whatever, and to hold onto that idea and carry it through, and try to keep your original vision intact while its being kind of ripped apart by all these people you’ve employed and so on. I’m not sure if I could have the artistic constitution to cope with that.

As opposed to the use of film form to present ideological positions, which by the production processes that govern it is a collaborative medium, the use of consistent aesthetic and ideological approaches can be and often is, in the case of popular musicians, manifested through image. This thematic consistency is no less manifested via collaboration with other individuals, but in terms of popular music, has a ‘totality’, which revolves primarily around the artist. Dyer states, “It is certainly possible to establish, as ‘auteur theory’ enjoins us, continuities, contradictions, and transformations either in the totality of a star’s image or in discrete elements such as dress or performance style, roles,

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publicity, iconography.”57 The continuities still exist, but the process has evolved to include iconographic materials stretched across different media forms.

Through the confluence of interconnecting media phenomena through which artists are able to communicate and market themselves, particular stylistic consistencies become evident, from the use of a generic icon or font on record covers and official web pages to music videos created with a signature director. In this sense, an auteur now becomes a cross-media identity whose work is of interest not only because it belongs to an identifiable personality. Fame is certainly part of the cult of the auteur in a cinematic sense. However, the work of a cross-media auteur may contain specific issues or thematic content, aesthetic nuances or performance styles which are of relevance to the career of that personality within various media forms. Extending the role of auteur to include such creative activities as making music and featuring in films as actor, the cult of the auteur is propelled into a more popular sense, which, although relying as much on aesthetic and thematic links between texts, now extends to include the cult of celebrity.

In an interview in 1988, surrounding the release of the film which he wrote, scored and performed in, *Ghosts ... Of the Civil Dead*58, Nick Cave explained his resentment towards the production ‘machine’ that saw his name used as a publicity device for the film.

I found myself basically, trapped in this whole thing, and unable to get out of it in any way. So I basically spent the last three years of my life a kind of virtual artistic prisoner, having to carry this film because of my name and the fact that I’m pretty

57 Dyer, op. cit. p. 174
famous. And the fact that you guys have used me; used that fact and exploited that to its absolute limit has meant that I’ve been unavoidably involved in the film.59

Cave was a fitting figurehead for the film. The imagery of violence that had always permeated his music, especially his engagement with the personal and emotional implications of a death-row prisoner about to be executed, ‘Mercy Seat’60, is the musical counterpart to his involvement in*Ghosts... Of the Civil Dead*, and the two were conceptualized within a similar time frame. His visage fills the front cover of the DVD reissue and he receives second billing, above Vincent Gill and Dave Mason. Both of these actors have more significant roles and more screen time than Cave, who is on screen for only five minutes in total. His role is a cameo, with minimal relevance or importance to the dramatic arc of the film. As such, his indictment of the use of his name for publicity is an interesting inversion of the standard marketing plan for a pop-star film vehicle.

Mass culture influenced by neo-conservative capitalist ideology reveals a complex arrangement of readership behaviour and consumer discourse. Liquid forms of cultural production and consumption have made the integration of new forms of media seemingly less intrusive may have been the case previously.61 According to Huysen,

The earlier avant-garde was confronted with the culture industry in its stage of inception while postmodernism had to face a technologically and economically fully developed media culture which had mastered the high art of integrating,

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59 Nick Cave in interview. *Ghosts... Of the Civil Dead Collector’s Edition DVD*, op. cit.
diffusing, and marketing even the most serious challenges, making the ‘shock of the new’ much harder to sustain.\(^\text{62}\)

Technological advancements in cultural consumption are usually, in the context of popular culture, appropriated by audiences in intense waves of consumerist frenzy. Leisure-based technologies which can be incorporated into the lifestyles of individuals exemplify this process. The extension of commodified creativity into new realms of cultural activity, such as the proclivity towards new forms of digital media in the recent past offers new creative possibilities as well as new configurations of audiences and systems of reception. If the artist in question is able always to capture a tangent of social importance through their work, as well as keeping abreast of new technological developments in popular cultural reception and consumption, their status as auteur can be sustained throughout their career.

David Bowie is such an auteur. Consistently, his work in the realm of music as well as in other forms of popular communication such as film, theatre and multimedia have considered and commented on the distinctions between surface and substance, between image and content, often incorporating dramatic contradictions between the aesthetic and thematic components of his music. Auteur theory tracks the repetition of motifs, be they aesthetic and structural or metaphorical and thematic. Perhaps within popular culture, these motifs are less structural or metaphorical and more aesthetic and thematic. Popular culture manifests itself structurally in a much different fashion to high culture. Utilizing structural systems such as the three-minute pop song, the music video or the pop-star film

vehicle, where a character may be written specifically for its star, the aesthetic concerns of its production are largely determined by its content. To classify David Bowie as an auteur is to scrutinize the way he presents himself and his own ideologies within his work.

In 1975, Bowie made his first appearance onscreen in a leading role, playing the stranded alien Thomas Jerome Newton in Nicholas Roeg’s *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. Roeg has stated that his intention had been to cast “someone who was inside society but awkward in it.” It had been Alan Yentob’s documentary *Cracked Actor* that had convinced Roeg that Bowie was suited for the part. Chronicling his cocaine-addled tour of the US, the film exposes a man disillusioned with fame, stooped in excess and controlled by his indulgences. Bowie has mentioned that “Just being me as I was, was perfectly adequate for the role. I wasn’t off this earth at that particular time.” Watching Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth* the impression is given that Nicholas Roeg decided construct a film around Bowie himself, his image, that of his music and of the cult surrounding him. Over the course of Roeg’s film, Newton establishes a business empire on patents for vastly superior technologies, then watches it crumble, as he does his relationship with Candy Clark’s all-American Mary-Lou. He also becomes addicted to television and alcohol and falls prey to an unspecified government agency, that conducts extensive tests on him, in the process breaking his will, only to release him back into self-contained exile as a hopelessly wealthy but ultimately doomed drunk.

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65 *Cracked Actor*. Directed by Alan Yentob. BBC, 1975.
66 David Bowie in Rob Hughes. ‘Loving the alien’ in *Uncut* 103. December 2005. p. 82
Bowie, throughout his popular history, had been associated with images of disconnection. His music had facilitated, performed and reinforced the resentment and isolation felt by young people who felt alien to the prevailing cultural abhorrence to difference. Not only was Bowie effective for the role of Newton, he was all of Newton’s qualities manifested in a popular icon with whom audiences identified and had already fashioned a relationship. Ellis explains the nature of this relationship:

Stars have a similar function in the film industry to the creation of a ‘narrative image’: they provide a foreknowledge of the fiction, an invitation to cinema… The basic definition of a star is that of a performer in a particular medium whose figure enters into subsidiary forms of circulation, and then feeds back into future performances.67

Bowie’s appearance in The Man Who Fell To Earth is such a performance: one nurtured and facilitated by presupposed concepts of his work and the ideologies inherent within it. The androgyny communicated through Newton’s lack of human genitalia, and more specifically, the film’s overriding themes of alienation were not new to Bowie in 1975. Throughout his career, his songwriting has been heavily informed by issues of emotional isolation and the ways in which the individual fits, or rather does not fit, into social and political formations. The aesthetic evocation of these themes has not always been consistent, with Bowie’s preferred musical style garroting through musical-hall, glam-rock, white soul, electronica and slick-pop. However, a consistency in theme has tempered his work, allowing for bridges to form ideologically between diverse styles and forms within which he has chosen to express himself.

In his discussion of auteur theory, Berger mentions the use of syntagmatic analysis, which involves links and chains, most commonly utilized structurally by overlapping narratives. The use of syntagmatic analysis in relation to Bowie’s film roles reveals the recurrence of narratives dealing with gender and its relationship to hegemonic authority. This consistency is represented differently in each role, from the way in which Newton gains so much power that he is literally able to remove Mary-Lou from his life, to the way in which Jack Celliers is executed at the end of *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, because he communicates unacceptable and uncomfortable images of masculinity under the discourse of militaristic power.

Distinct from the ideological relationship that a pop performer’s film roles might have to their musical output, often the transition from music to film does not translate comfortably. Johnson believes that “the rock star as auteur was never meant to be” because the pop persona is more impulsive, more dynamic and less mannered or stifled than the film persona. There are exceptions to the fickleness of onscreen pop personae. Thomas Jerome Newton was as complete a persona as Ziggy Stardust or Aladdin Sane.

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71 Johnson, op. cit. p. 31
He WAS the Thin White Duke. Two of Bowie’s albums from the period; Station To Station\textsuperscript{72} and Low\textsuperscript{73} featured stills from The Man Who Fell To Earth as their cover artwork, and one of the instrumental passages from the latter album was written originally for the aborted score that Bowie composed for the film.

Bowie’s personal unhappiness at the time, his fame and cocaine addiction, manifested in an overwhelming fear and paranoia also translated into the character of Newton. Buckley argues that throughout this period his “off-screen unhappiness fused with the alien morphology of the Newton character. Bowie became a frozen addict – part media creation, part human being.”\textsuperscript{74} Bowie has commented that, “After four months of playing the role I was Newton for six months afterwards.”\textsuperscript{75} He even used his costumes from the film on stage and for publicity after shooting was completed. None the less, Johnson’s argument is based on the notion that Bowie was unable to sustain a consistent film career after his initial breakthrough role. As he grappled with various film roles such as the eighteenth century vampire living in modern day New York in The Hunger\textsuperscript{76}, the sensitive martyr in Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence and the goblin king in Labyrinth\textsuperscript{77}, for the first time in his musical career it was possible to see a rift between history and the present. Whilst previously there had been a picturesque flow of ideas as one manifestation of Bowie’s performance style morphed into another, in the 1980s Bowie’s

\textsuperscript{72} David Bowie. Station to Station. Virgin, 1976.
\textsuperscript{73} David Bowie. Low. Virgin, 1977.
\textsuperscript{75} David Bowie in Johnny Black. ‘Eyewitness: The Man Who Fell To Earth’ in Q 183. November, 2001. p. 84
\textsuperscript{76} The Hunger. Directed by Tony Scott. Written by James Costigan & Ivan Davis. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1983.
music became an anti-image. The only image left to inhabit became a mode of corporatism that was seemingly encroaching on popular culture.

The decision by Jim Henson to cast Bowie as Jareth the Goblin King in his 1986 film *Labyrinth* was evocative in its mobilization of popular cultural capital. As it is a children’s film, the parents of the audience, most of whom no doubt owned at least one Bowie album, were surely amused to see the English rock star tackle the role of ‘King of the Goblins’. The film’s accompanying soundtrack recording features six David Bowie songs, interspersed between Trevor Jones’ score. The song that appears over the opening and closing credits of the film, ‘Underground’78, was released as a single in June of 1986. It reached number 21 in the UK singles charts, and heralded the beginning of what could be considered Bowie’s decline in terms of chart success. ‘Underground’ was the first of a string of single releases that did not break into the Top 10, a trend which lasted for seven years. With his traditional rock audience having abandoned him and younger audiences not receptive to his tired take on soul-pop, Bowie’s career wallowed in the lower reaches of the pop charts, making him a steady fortune, which built on the success of *Let’s Dance*79 and subsequent singles. His ‘Blond Fuehrer’ image and new musical direction had 80 succeeded in allowing him to publicly renounce his past and seamlessly slide from the rock end of the art/entertainment binary to the pop end. For Bowie, *Labyrinth* presented worldwide exposure to which he was allowed to attach his own creative output in the accompanying soundtrack. Given free rein by Henson, Bowie turned in songs that,

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whilst presenting satisfying melodies and echoing the film’s plotline and dominant motifs of imagination and fantasy, were self-conscious and dangerously over-produced.

Bowie’s music had – by the 1980s – become widely recognizable to pop music audiences. His slicker, corporate image allowed him to publicly renounce drugs and ambiguous sexuality, and as a result his former incarnations, especially those linked with drugs, sexual experimentation and the irritable, anti-establishment paradigms associated with the counterculture had been completely destroyed. Bowie’s decision to play the villain in a children’s film was linked aesthetically to the escapist notions of his glam-rock imagery. As Hebdige has acknowledged,

Bowie’s meta-message was escape – from class, from sex, from personality, from obvious commitment – into a fantasy past (Isherwood's Berlin peopled by a ghostly cast of doomed bohemians) or a science-fiction future.81

In Labyrinth, the fantasy past that had been a vital image to Bowie’s escapism was driven even further into the realm of myth and the supernatural. It was as if, in the midst of the early 1980s media boom, the campy androgynes of the Ziggy era were reduced to caricatures and reincarnated as fantasy creatures played by puppets with Bowie as their ringleader. The pied-piper of glam-rock who once led youths through the streets in bright orange mullets and platform shoes was now rallying goblins to destroy a girl in a mythical castle at the center of a labyrinth. Bowie’s cult of escapism and transcendence – of the eternal now – transformed into more than style or affect. It became part of the cult of Labyrinth and is integral to much popular culture, especially youth culture and children’s culture – that which occupies a curious status of appreciation hinged on temporal remembrance and popular memory.

81 Hebdige, op. cit. p. 61
Drawing from snapshots, frozen images, passages of dialogue and the context of viewing, hearing or experiencing, popular memory shapes the way in which popular texts reverberate for the individual. This connectivity explains why those texts that we engage with as children leave a lasting impression. Popular memory is drawn as much from nostalgia as it is from the remnants of popular cultural discourse. Those texts which, as well as having been conceived and produced primarily for children, contain some other element to which youth culture has developed an affection and hence attached a cult status. In this context Eco’s description of a cult text is particularly valid.

The work must be loved obviously, but this is not enough. It must provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fan’s private sectarian world, a world about which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the sect recognize through each other a shared expertise.  

For many, this process has become a common experience, as particular films, albums, television shows or any other cultural phenomenon becomes another quotable link to personal histories, shared experiences and yet more cultural links, or what the Popular Memory Group refer to as “the social production of memory”83. Visiting any *Labyrinth* fan website reveals such a world as described by Eco, having been tangibly created and mapped out in HTML.

[The one thing that makes rock more than simply an industry, the one thing that transcends the commodity relation, is fidelity, the idea of a relationship. There are voices you turn to as a friend, and you don’t just turn your back on your friends if they go off the rails. You hang around.84

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Such a situation as this is largely what propels the artist-as-auteur phenomenon into being. Fuelled by an indescribably intense passion for and consumption of the work of an artist whose record sleeves, music videos and on-stage costumes are simply not enough, the pop-star film vehicle provides a sustained yet still intangible link to the realm of the impenetrable star. Moreover, the pop-star film vehicle often gives voice to those understated elements of a star’s career, which is why Thomas Jerome Newton encapsulated what Bowie was in the mid 1970s so completely and Jareth the Goblin King gave voice to tangents of fantasy at which Bowie’s music had only previously hinted.

The cross-pollination of media forms allowed popular performers like Bowie to capitalize not only on careers within a specific creative outlet but within several, as image and the notion of personality became increasingly relevant to the success of a particular media entity. Labyrinth, or any film in which Bowie appeared in the 1980s, can be viewed as an attempt to create an image that ran contradictory to much of his work up until that point. The way in which this image was manifested and manicured bears little resemblance to the methods for image creation of Bowie’s earlier years. Having proven himself as a successful recording artist with a significant cult following the urge to solidify mainstream popularity was particularly easy to act upon, with the systems of media production at his disposal and an audience willing to invest in the slick soul-pop of a clean-cut middle-aged pop star as well as the movie tie-in. In this context, a Leavisite perspective is easy to adopt.

Leavisites, indeed, celebrate the values of “popular” art; they argue that mass culture is a “corruption” of such art. The key critical concept is “authenticity”: a culture created for commercial profit must lack “a certain authenticity” even if it “dramatizes authentic feelings.” Mass teenage culture is, as Hall and Whannel put
it, “a contradictory mixture of the authentic and manufactured – an area of self-expression for the young and lush grazing ground for the commercial providers”.  

The “lush grazing ground” to which Hall and Whannel refer was, in the 1980s, an ideologically favourable realm of involvement for commercial providers, as well as for artists and those who stood to profit from the corporatization of their art and the commodification of their image. The pop-star film vehicle has the capacity to fulfill this capitalist intent and has done so many times.

This transition is not often successful, especially when the artist in question has already established their cross-over potential. Johnson argues that this is because the image cultivated in pop is more grandiose, more all-encompassing than a ninety-minute stab at character development. Johnson also argues that Bowie’s lackluster celluloid exposure after the heady beginning of The Man Who Fell To Earth prefigures similar failings by other pop superstars such as Prince and Madonna to maintain careers on celluloid after the success of Purple Rain and Desperately Seeking Susan respectively.

The meaning of Prince’s star vehicle is only effective when his musical persona is used virtually wholesale, as in the case of Purple Rain, Sign o’ the Times (1987) and Graffiti Bridge (1990). In Under the Cherry Moon, his attempt at a character role was unsuccessful because the stylistic features of his musical persona – the camp element of his performance repertoire for instance, so well-wrought in more abbreviated forms such as the short music video – simply could not be effectively developed in a traditional feature-length production, which required causality and coherence.

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87 Johnson, op. cit.
In the MTV-fuelled convergence of culture that took place in the 1980s, Prince attempted more and more ambitious film projects, most of which fell considerably short of his troubled young genius from a bad home in *Purple Rain*. Madonna took roles in films she was able to attach herself to for cross-promotional soundtrack purposes such as *Who's That Girl?*[^91] and *Dick Tracey*, and the indulgent pseudo-documentary-cum-masturbatory power-trip *In Bed With Madonna*[^93]. Along the way, she paid the price professionally, with performances in films that, whilst ensuring the continuity of her bad girl image through supposedly provocative sex scenes, did little for her critical reputation.

Towards the mid 1990s, Madonna’s image had evolved past the sexually liberated neo-feminism of her early records into that of a sultry and incendiary madam hell-bent on pushing the boundaries of public discourse on sexuality. Following the publication of her highly controversial but somewhat mundane soft-core coffee-table book *Sex*[^94] and sandwiched between two of her most tawdry albums, 1992’s *Erotica*[^95] and 1994’s *Bedtime Stories*[^96] were two films of overtly provocative subject matter. *Body of  

Evidence⁹⁷ was a sexual thriller with challenging subject matter and confrontational attitudes towards sex. Dangerous Game⁹⁸ was an independent film about a director whose life starts to imitate the film he is making about a married couple whose sexual and drug-induced excess is destroying their marriage. In a barbed twist on the ‘film within a film’ formula, Abel Ferrara has Harvey Keitel’s director abuse Madonna’s mainstream starlet by branding her a no-talent sell-out.

Eddie
Who the fuck are you to tell me to be a man? Sarah? Huh? You commercial piece of shit? Who the fuck are you, you commercial piece of shit, to tell me anything?

Sarah
Who the fuck am I?

Eddie
Yeah, do the lines, you commercial piece of shit. Do the lines. Let’s see if you can do them. Do the lines!

Sarah
Oh, you think you’re so smart.

Eddie
Smarter than you.

Let’s go back again. Come on, you commercial piece of shit, tell me how smart you are. Tell me how smart you are, how dumb I am. Come one, do those lines. I’m telling you what you are. If I left you on TV you’d be selling toothpaste for the rest of your life.⁹⁹

The type of politics that Madonna was addressing in her early 1990s incarnation – both on screen and on record – are reminiscent of the pseudo-intellectual controversy that overtly sexualized images are capable of eliciting, but have little political potency.

Towards the mid 1990s, Madonna was largely preaching to her already existing fans. Her sexual revolution was embedded more in capitalism than as a resistive political statement. This particular mode of politics is often found in popular culture positioned as ideological resistance, but when consumed, serves the purposes of providing titillation and thrills for audiences less interested in sexual politics.\textsuperscript{100}

It is a politics without effects, which offers little disturbance to the real social relations of advanced capitalism.\textsuperscript{101}

*Body of Evidence* and to a lesser extent *Dangerous Game* both proved to be excuses for audiences to watch Madonna strip whilst attempting to make statements about the nature of contemporary sexuality. In this instance, Frith’s admonition that “Cultural politics are only significant in the circumstances in which they’re being made”\textsuperscript{102} captures the paradox. Critics were particularly harsh towards *Body of Evidence*, whereas Ferrara’s film received some positive responses based on his reputation for evoking naturalistic performances from his cast and his non-exploitative approach towards confrontational material.\textsuperscript{103} Neither film was successful in cinemas, although *Body of Evidence* became popular in its un-rated European version on the home-video rental market. This particular consumption of the text is a more revealing statement about the nature of contemporary

\textsuperscript{100} Madonna’s reputation as an outspoken advocate of female sexuality is dealt with in Sheila Whiteley. *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender*. London: Routledge, 2005. pp. 194-195. Whiteley argues that Madonna’s sexually loaded image transferred comfortably from the 1980s to the 1990s. However authenticity is determined by the fan base not the performer, and the luke-warm reception to both *Body of Evidence* and *Dangerous Game* exemplifies the argument that in 1993 audiences were losing interest in Madonna’s sexualized image, or even that she had pushed it further than they were willing to follow her.

\textsuperscript{101} Frow. *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, op. cit. p. 63


sexuality and its relationship to notions of media exhibition and consumption than anything contained within the film.

In December 1996, the transformative nature of the media was employed to morph Madonna from lurid provocateur to well-respected woman of the people when *Evita*[^104], based on Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Broadway musical was released in cinemas. Madonna was transformed from the suggestive and outrageous woman of supposed loose-morals known for flaunting her sexuality by any means possible to the dignified and empowered mother/savior figure who represented hope and salvation the common people. Eva Peron, whom Madonna portrayed, herself undergoes a transformation from illegitimate country girl born into poverty to the most powerful woman in Argentina, whose will to succeed saw her become simultaneously the most loved and reviled woman in the country and, according to the video jacket, “the spiritual leader of a nation.”[^105]

The transformation taking place in Madonna’s own life was similar. Two months before the film’s release she had given birth to her first child, having been pregnant during the shooting of *Evita*. The shift in dynamic in her career not only parallels Peron’s metamorphosis, but also provides evidence as to the nature of Madonna’s change in image[^106]. Renouncing the provocation of her former career, Madonna’s music moved away from the sleaze and sauciness of *Bedtime Stories* and *Erotica*, to the hippy/dippy


[^106]: As if to signify the final attainment of her long fought acceptance by entertainment industry authorities, Madonna was awarded a Golden Globe for Best Actress for her portrayal of Peron, further exemplifying her movement from adolescent tease to mature performer.
earth mother danceability of *Ray of Light*\(^{107}\). Gone were the flesh-baring antics and incendiary costumes, replaced by a worldly wise, maternal image that embraced the movement from adolescent narcissism to spiritual enlightenment and personal fulfillment.

Her subsequent marriage to British film director Guy Ritchie and starring roles in two mediocre romantic comedies – his berated *Swept Away*\(^{108}\), and the ill-fated *The Next Best Thing*\(^{109}\) – saw Madonna attempting to extend her oeuvre to include more liberal, mainstream-friendly film roles that would push her decidedly more amicable mother and wife image.\(^{110}\)

Johnson’s theory on the difference between the pop persona and the film vehicle character may hold some validity. As Reynolds points out, in pop music “characters are always lopsided, contrary, incomplete, the sum of wounds and bigotries”\(^{111}\), whereas the pop star film vehicle, for the sake of mass appeal, often, but not always, aims for a more complete, less sketchy representation. Whether or not the pop persona is as blatantly and purposefully manufactured as that of Bowie’s alien androgynes, Madonna’s material girl or even Eminem’s Slim Shady, when the pop to film transition occurs, it transpires more believably and successfully, at least in terms of capital, when the role being played on film is almost a carbon copy of the pop persona on which it is often based. In *8 Mile*\(^{112}\) Eminem’s Rabbit, a ‘whiteboy’ from the working class Detroit suburbs, raised by an


\(^{111}\) Reynolds, op. cit. p. 22

alcoholic mother, who attempts to scramble his way out of the ghetto via freestyle rhyming contests, shares similar traits to Marshall Mathers himself. The parallel was so sharp that upon the film’s release, there was some contention as to whether or not it was a biographical representation of its star’s rise to fame. Eminem admitted that the role was written specifically for him and that various elements of his life were used to create the dramatic arc of the film’s plot. As such, *8 Mile* is a disappointment. With very little but the rhyming to distract audiences from the vehicle status of the film, and despite Eminem’s best efforts to stretch himself beyond a mere caricature of his pop image, the impression emerges that director Curtis Hansen was afraid that the excesses of plot or character development might threaten the charisma of its leading man.

The film’s attempts at political engagement are admirable. Whilst the representation of Rabbit’s socio-economic situation is overtly simplistic and his mother, played by Kim Basinger, is demonized far too easily, the film is supportive of the popular cultural project where disempowered groups are capable of rewriting and revisioning signs and codes for the expression of transgressive politics. Throughout the film, Rabbit bitches to his friends about his white trash upbringing, but it is only when he channels his rage through poetry that his perspective gains clarity and strength. The film is simplistic through its propagation of the star myth – the meritocratic ideology – that anyone with ambition and talent can break out of their given situation, that all it takes is the will to succeed. This proposition is a commendable but politically dangerous one, and it ultimately restricts *8 Mile* from transcending its star-vehicle status. Yet the film’s function remains significant. As Grossberg confirms,
Too often, the assumption (and it is a crucial assumption for cultural studies) that people are active and capable of struggle and resistance… becomes a discovery unto itself.\textsuperscript{113}

Without addressing the reasons as to why political power remains out of reach for the majority, a film such as 8 Mile which casts Eminem as the lone white boy against a black and Hispanic sub-cultural collective, remains politically vapid.\textsuperscript{114}

This is the reality of many pop star vehicles. The marketability of a product, regardless of its political rhetoric or even the acting talent of its main attraction, often clouds the reception of a film that has a major pop star attached to it. There is little chance of escaping the promotion and publicity zeitgeist of popular music and the vanity projects that populate it. If the pop star vehicle is viewed as an extension of the persona or dominant public image of an artist, in an attempt to submerge it within the canon of their recorded work, both inconsistencies and parallels arise. Much like any other collaborative text, the varying results start to make sense in terms of an overall career in much the same way auteur theory explains the dominant thematic motifs of particular filmmakers. Politically, the pop star vehicle cannot transcend its attachment to the parent medium. Often the ebullient manifestation of personal ideology that allows for pop music politics to instigate resistive politics can not transcend the pop music medium and the transition to film. An attempt to cauterize the star from the production system with which they are


familiar allows for subjective criticism based on cultural hierarchies of which cultural populism has no relation. Because of the economic discourses with which they are tied, the pop star film vehicle usually exists as a culturally populist text, which despite its attempts to the contrary, often lacks the political immediacy that its star carried in their music.

The contemporary popular musician is capable of auteurism. Throughout their career, they make statements and provide representations of their world using elements of themselves as the single enduring medium. Utilizing music and film as well as album cover art, promotional materials and web-based media to facilitate a constantly shifting vision, there will always be highly discernible sections and gaps in a career whereby one idea has not flowed directly from that which preceded it. Often the film vehicle reveals such a gap. It locates itself in the space between pop image and celluloid image. This is the way histories are now told. Linear narratives have all but been suspended within cultural expression since the circumstances of production have changed and the rules and parameters of reception have shifted.

The pop career is capable of thematic and aesthetic inconsistencies and more often than not it embraces and celebrates both high art and pop art, sometimes knowingly. As Reynolds confirms, “You believe pop is or can be art, but that belief is sustained by only very rare instances.”\textsuperscript{115} Pop music has the potential to be both art and entertainment, often separately, but most exhilarating when simultaneously. It can attain the status of art, but as pop art it utilizes the language, the signifiers, the social, cultural and political

\textsuperscript{115} Reynolds, op. cit. p. 27
specificities of its creative circumstances in order to articulate itself. This chapter has proven that multimedia personalities and inherently pop auteurs are by their trajectory and history unpredictable and contradictory. As my next chapter will prove, there are number of other cinematic formations that can be constructed around popular musicians. As one of these, the pop star film vehicle is a model for the process of popular memory and the formation of popular cultural narratives. Increasingly, these narratives revolve around that which is non-linear, non-partisan to either art’s pretensions or to pop’s trivialities and are often far more intriguing as a result.
Films are not made by directors. They are not the property of their leading stars or main characters. Films are not owned by any singular cultural figure, but certain isolated facets of film production are capable of making a film, of allowing it its identity, profile and currency. There are parts of a film that force it into the world as an individual entity separate to any other. Films are not merely visual but visceral, encompassing physiological reactions that stimulate the senses. Films are also cultural and contextual, and when considering the cultural circumstances of a film’s production such as the time of its release, the place in which it was produced, the individuals involved in various production roles and its resultant socio-political orientation, the viewer’s relationship to the screen changes yet again.

In this chapter I explore the popular film score, focussing on the ways in which the musicological elements of its structure, tone and aesthetic relate to the thematic and ideological elements of a film. I relate this textual analysis to an engagement with auteur theory and the work of both its practitioners, through case studies such as Neil Young and Billy Corgan, and its detractors, while monitoring the cultural politics of the popular film score. Auteur theory and its various theoretical reinterpretations are employed to explain how the popular film scorer, as a musician operating within corporatized media industries, is employed to provide a film with aesthetic and ideological links. These links provide a film with an ideological context, which are harnessed for both structural cinematic and
marketing purposes. Here the connection between art and commerce, and the exploitation of the former for the sake of the latter is explored.

The auteur is a cinematic concept that has, through critiques by Foucault’s notion of the author\(^1\) and Barthes\(^2\), been branded an outdated, essentialist and over-romanticized concept rooted in late modernism. According to this perspective, what Stillinger refers to as the “myth of the solitary genius”\(^3\) has little place in a fragmented, post-everything landscape, where the notion of a singular origin has been completely undermined. The rules of film production and reception have been altered as a result of liquid modernity. The convergence of media forms and the integration of the film industry into wider regimes of cultural organization such as corporate conglomerates has produced new ways of exhibiting films, which in turn has offered new alternatives to the way in which film is consumed. Although this corporatization invites Marxist critiques, it is important first to establish the status of the auteur in this contemporary situation. Whilst new political economies of culture dictate a fragmentation of subject, auterism does exist, albeit in a drastically different manner to that in which it was once understood. In a cultural economy where the voice of art is disembodied from the tangible, and the transitive nature of cultural goods forces us to live with fragmentation as a constant, the concept of the artist as an image, a set of images or even a signification system is closer to reality than the flesh and blood of the unique individual of classic auterism. Foucault’s ‘author

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function’ configures an understanding of the author as both a product and purveyor of discursive structures, dismissing outright the notion of the originary experience as principal motivation.

The fact that a number of texts were attached to a single name implies that relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentification, or of common utilization were established among them. Finally, the author’s name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author’s name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary attention given to ordinary, fleeting words. Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates.4

The specific discourse of popular music theory, in its fascination with the artist, is aligned with trajectories of the auteur. Academic debate on popular music has facilitated an emphasis on the political economies of production, reception and consumption.5 Whilst film theory focuses on how individuals create specific texts, academic debate on popular music deals primarily with what audiences do with texts. It is through an investigation of these concepts that the link between contemporary film and its renegotiation of auteurism through popular music becomes apparent.

Although popular texts may utilize the persona of their authors, the musician can function sociologically or filmically in the role of auteur. Aesthetics summon an ideology. The function of the auteur is to tether a specific aesthetic to an ideological position. As Stillinger points out, with the multiple and diverse agencies of film discourse and

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4 Foucault, op. cit. p. 452
production so intricately organized, individual authorship becomes unassignable. Bennet also explains that film “contradicted the central tenets of the Romantic definition of art as authentic and irreproducible, as the ‘unique creation of an individual author’ and as the ‘expression of genius’” This is why Foucault’s notion of the author function works in the context of not only post-structuralist theorization of the auteur but also with relation to the inter-disciplinary nature of the filmic medium.

Although film and music are both facilitated by the socio-politics of cultural systems such as genres or audiences, they also adhere, or at least exist in relation to elements of textual form and structure. Film is not only a visual medium – it is audio visual. The combination of sound and vision, along with the context of action and chronology, makes film a medium that exemplifies the principles of Gestalt: “a configuration, pattern or organized whole with qualities different from those of its components separately considered.” It is for this reason that sound design is as important an element of production as set design, lighting or performance.

The task of the production designer is to tell the story visually, as does the sound designer acoustically. The elements of image (brightness, hue, contrast, shape, space, texture, movement, framing) are different from those of sound (rhythm, intensity, pitch, timbre, speed, shape, organization) and music (melody, harmony, dissonance, tonal center), but they are related through the Gestalt principles. In both image and sound, the polarities or contrasts are what we perceive.

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6 Stillinger, op. cit. p. 174
Although the combination of image and sound may contain separate elements that are semiotically dissonant, in being brought together they produce a structural synergy. The Gestalt principles provide an argument that, despite their aesthetic and structural differences, and perhaps because of them, film does not merely stimulate us visually but also aurally and in the case of John Waters’ *Polyester*\(^{10}\) also olfactorily. ‘Odorama’ aside, truly silent film has never existed.

As Donnelly explains\(^{11}\), even when ‘silent’ films were being produced, they were often distributed with either recordings of musical accompaniment or sheet music of a score to be performed alongside the images. Film sound has developed from the rustic simplicity of the so-called silent era into a multi-dimensional, spatially vibrant, digitally enhanced realm of its own. Sound, and in particular music, is capable of this free movement from the actual to the expressive, as structural cinematic discourse has facilitated our links in perception between the actuality of vision and the emotional rendering of music. It is the audio-visual status of celluloid that has lead to some of the most important collaborations between filmmakers and musicians. Film is a collaborative medium. When directors and composers understand the dynamics of a given film they are in a position as an artist of whatever means they choose, to be able to realize the dynamic of that particular piece of cinema.

A film becomes its own beast. You have to allow people, or guide them, to develop their own relationship with it. I do not believe in those immortal words, ‘A film by…’. I do not believe that singular ownership of a film is the reality of

\(^{10}\) *Polyester*. Written and directed by John Waters. New Line Cinema, 1981.

When you get filmmaking right, it is a creative, exciting and challenging collaboration between key people.\(^\text{12}\)

When the collaboration between film and music functions, the two are indelibly linked in a relationship of aesthetic and sensory symbiosis. While it is possible to view the images without sound, or listen to the music written for those images on its own, the two are invariably tethered. Listening to a film score returns snapshots, scenes, traces of dialogue or the mood or feel of a film. This sonic memory is often a heightened experience, as the memory of a film romanticizes or embellishes the resonance of its shapes, colours and movements. Watching a film without its accompanying score can be a numbing experience. Without the emotional flourishes provided by the sonic-visual relationship the images are flatter, sharper and cleaner. The absence of the score’s emotional elaboration gives the onscreen exchanges a menacing blandness.

With the inclusion of sound, images are more effectively and realistically rendered. Sound and vision are the two senses that allow us to register action and event from distance. Smell and touch are far more personal, more visceral; closer to the body. The body is able to ascertain and interpret perspective from aural and visual phenomena better than other senses. We never stop learning how to see or hear. The possibilities for these senses are recognized through new and complex theories of auditory culture, as edited collections by Bull and Back\(^\text{13}\), and Cox and Warner\(^\text{14}\) confirm. Hearing and seeing facilitate the mode of communication that is necessary for an understanding of our world.


better than any other tangible means. Keen to apply this unique effusion to various media, Philip Brophy’s work across several genres has predominantly been informed by his engagement with the sound of film.

Having listened to a lot of film music over the years has lead me to understand how cinema works and made me realise how important music is to film. Instinctively I was always knew its importance, but then I also realised that no one was really consciously understanding that [sic]. Everyone was still treating cinema as a theatrical medium, a visual medium, a photographic medium, a literary medium, but never a sonic medium. I realised that a whole range of film people who are meant to be sharp and intelligent were really missing an obvious point, which is that cinema is an audio-visual medium.15

Brophy has worked in film sound design, directing and scoring the splatterfest Body Melt16 in 1993 and acting as sound designer for Vincent Giarrusso’s Mallboy17, as well as instigating Cinesonic – the international conference of film scores and sound design. His sound design, exemplified in his score for Mallboy, is layered, cerebral and dense.18 Not only does it encompass several styles including jazz, electronica and hip hop, but the film’s overall sound design has been influenced by music concrete, with large sections of the score devoted to reflecting and submerging the audio environment of the film within the score as opposed to commenting on it in purely musicological terms. For these reasons, Brophy’s work on Mallboy is a literal example of the way in which popular music can be anchored aesthetically to the form of a particular film. Brophy’s soundtrack blends popular musical genres such as hip hop and guitar-driven psychedelia with the

18 Brophy’s previous scores have been critiqued and analyzed by Samartzis, who emphasizes not only his willingness to move between contemporary popular musical sounds and structures and the more experimental aspects of film sound, but also his propensity for the inclusion of diegetic and suggestive or implied sonic phenomena within the soundscape. Philip Samartzis. ‘Avant-garde meets mainstream: The film scores of Philip Brophy’ in Screen Scores: Studies in Contemporary Australian Film Music. Rebecca Coyle ed. North Ryde: Australian Film, Television and Radio School, 1997. pp. 124-140
music concrete approach of the film’s diegetic sound design, creating a hybrid that achieves a synergy through allowing the two elements of the sound design to influence each other.

The *Mallboy* soundtrack is alternately jagged and submersive, stimulating and calming; moving from samples of rickety trains speeding along their tracks with bursts of free jazz percussion to the sonic periphera of a shopping mall or distant reverby conversations accompanying gritty breakbeats. Brophy explains his technique of using the “noise of life”:

> The cinema is not a concert hall: it does not require the hush of mute respect to follow its stories. The cinema expels us, projects us and snares us in its enlivened spaces. More films could sound the noise of life and immerse us in all that occurs beyond the edge of the frame.\(^{19}\)

The sonic environment of the suburbs, with its cluttered malls, rustling trees and passing cars is never far from the heart of *Mallboy*, which Brophy performed as a part of Underground LOVERS, the experimental rock band that Giarrusso fronted with guitarist Glen Bennie since the late 1980s. The sounds of the suburbs are immersed in the score, shimmering to the surface, then submerging themselves within the non-diegetic sonic hues and textures. The Underground LOVERS’ score and Brophy’s sound design move in and out of the film’s diegesis. This exemplifies the ability of the aural elements of the mise en scene to rupture the reality of the film whilst also adding an emotional context that is accepted as a standard element of film form.

Music is the only element of cinematic discourse besides credits that is primarily nondiegetic. It can also move easily back and forth from the level of the story world to the nondiegetic level on which that world can be commented on. In the back of our minds, we are aware that the practise of scoring films with music that

has no source in the story violates verisimilitude, and yet we readily accept this
convention.\textsuperscript{20}

In submerging the score within ‘natural’ diegetic sounds and vice versa, Underground
LOVERS score for \textit{Mallboy} attempts to lessen this contradiction between the violation of
verisimilitude and our acceptance of it through an understanding of film form. The
bouncy, plastic sounds of shopping malls filter through guitar drones and waves of synths;
the interference of telephone towers, planes overhead and busy traffic fade in and out of
ambient pieces, which in turn bookend structured songs, be they thrashy rock numbers,
beat heavy hip hop or expansive psychedelia. In \textit{Mallboy}, the suburbs have been
sonically ingrained.

The suburbs are full of sonic irritation and aural aggravation. Far from settling in
the suburbs, you would be nestling in noise... It starts with the tolling crash and
boom of trucks picking up recycled glass bottles; and does not end until the first
Miner birds pierce the reverberant enclaves of corrugated tin carports. It awakes
with the scream of the newborn and withers only after the last hoarse screech of
domestic conflict. Many people are attracted to the suburbs, believing they will
escape the claustrophobia of housing commission flats or inner-city apartment
blocks. The acoustic reality is that in the suburbs, the people next door are
amplifiers of all you wish to censor, suppress, silence.\textsuperscript{21}

This metaphor is the film’s central narrative device. Sean, the film’s protagonist, is a
young teen in trouble with the law and under attack from his single mother as a result.
His only escape is the mall, with its massive swarm of consumers. Its glass and tile
reflects collective noise and its expansive dimensions dissipate it into a lively but
subdued babble.

To go to a shopping mall is a therapeutic respite from the acoustic terror of
suburbia. Bathed inside its binaural warmth, you can float along its glistening
corridors, carried on the wash of white noise which combines music, speech and

\textsuperscript{20} Timothy Corrigan & Patricia White. \textit{The Film Experience}. Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 2004. p. 191
\textsuperscript{21} Brophy. \textit{Mallboy} Soundtrack sleeve notes, op. cit.
sound into a sonic foam of consumerism. Giving into the mall is a numbing yet nonetheless sensory experience.  

*Mallboy* embodies this experience through a synthesis of sound design and visual exposition. Brophy, having worked with Giarrusso on compositions for the film understood the sonic requirements of the film. The sonic landscape of the suburbs was allowed to influence the film’s musical component not only in terms of mood, but also through the integration of the two structurally. The sound design infuses the score, and the score reflects the sound design.

Matching the texture and mood of a film with appropriate sonic accompaniment is a task that requires not only diligence and understanding on the part of the scorer but also foresight on the part of whomever is responsible for choosing an appropriate artist to score a film, be it the director or the music supervisor. It can be difficult to translate between the sonic and the visual. Representing a film’s emotional core through the formal structures of music can prove problematic. Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth explains this discrepancy.

I think the idea of putting music to film for a lot of film directors – it’s very mysterious, just from my discussions with different filmmakers. They see – sort of the process of making music and adjoining it to film scenes – they see the musical end of it as a very mysterious thing, which is really funny because it’s also vice versa for musicians sometimes, working within visual mediums. They’ll try to explain what they want on certain scenes and it’s all very sort of emotional but they can’t really articulate what it is and basically the instruction is like “Just do something.” you know “That will work”. 

In such instances, it is important for the director to have faith in their choice of musical collaborator. Sonic Youth have written or contributed scores to several films with varying

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results. For Richard Linklater’s *SubUrbia*\(^{24}\) the band contributed demo-quality sections of songs they were working on at the time. Much of the material from *A Thousand Leaves*\(^{25}\), the band’s 1998 album, was road-tested successfully in the score for *SubUrbia*, released two years previous, especially the stirring and memorable single ‘Sunday’\(^ {26}\), which gave a stark but emotionally resonant edge to several scenes in the film. This resonance emanates from the synergy between Sonic Youth’s music and the socio-cultural location of the film and its characters. The slacker mentality espoused by the two Dougs – Rushkoff\(^ {27}\) and Coupland\(^ {28}\) – and by Linklater himself in his earlier film *Slacker*\(^ {29}\) is the same that Sonic Youth communicated so ironically well through their no-wave noise rock. Here it gives an aural backbone to the characters in Linklater’s film who haunt the local convenience store; drinking and smoking because they have no ambition, and are angry at the world but do not know why.

As Coupland attested through his rejection of the label ‘Generation X’, all generations are imagined, they are built of intangible links to associated histories and popular memories of images, catch phrases and sounds. At one point ‘Candle’\(^ {30}\) can be heard emanating from a portable stereo. This moment, where the band’s triple guitar attack communicates a futility and fragility, like suspending single notes upon invisible wires strung across the frame, performs this imagining role of defining the socio-political situation of the film and its characters.


I think music is a very abstract medium in a way and to sort of attach it to something that is very static, it is interesting; it is kind of mysterious, and it can be really magical. And I think that’s a lot of reasons why fairly huge budget Hollywood controlled films have gotten really used to the idea of just sort of licensing songs; ’cause it’s a very easy process and it’s just sort of money exchanging hands and having music available and music to sell etcetera, and that’s become sort of really uninteresting I think as far as contemporary film is concerned.  

As opposed to merely licensing songs, even Sonic Youth songs, Linklater attached not only the image but the rhetoric of Sonic Youth’s musical politics to his film. The slacker characters in Eric Bogosian’s screenplay and the play upon which it is based are the kind of unmotivated and morally bankrupt middle-class youths that the band’s music spoke to. The SEX=DEATH ambiguity of their early material coupled with the textural dexterity of their developing sound tapped into the psyche of a generation of teenagers and college kids who witnessed the futility of the Regan era morph into the cultural banality of the Bush Snr. era and beyond.

Much like a great proportion of the band’s audience, both the film’s characters and their dialogue revel in the sarcastic consumer/victim status of mallrat detachment and suburban teen angst. Sonic Youth captured the vibe of that era without resorting to any of its clichés either lyrically or musically, which is why Sunday and Candle, as well as the rest of their score for SubUrbia work so well. The politics of Sonic Youth’s music expressed the cultural ideology of the characters in Linklater’s film, thus creating a synergy between the events onscreen and the non-diegetic use of music. When this

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31 Thurston Moore in interview. Things Behind the Sun DVD extras, op. cit.
synergy exists, the world that the film creates is complete, textured and balanced, allowing for a unique vision to be summoned, where both the images and sounds comment on each other simultaneously. This vision is not only that of the director, but of the film’s musical contributor.

When too much information is summoned, the relationship between sound and image is cluttered, uneven and less effective. In 2003, Sonic Youth again composed some loose, unstructured melodic jams for use on Allison Anders’ *Things Behind the Sun*[^33]. The scope of Anders’ project musically was over-ambitious. As a film whose central character is a musician, the primary focus is her singer-songwriter status, her Joplin/*The Rose*[^34] style antics and relationship with her pub-rock band mates. However, the film also hinges on flashbacks to the mid-eighties and in particular the hardcore punk scene of the time. Although tethered to the anti-politics of the punk movement, Sonic Youth’s music, especially that from the early years of the new millennium, was distanced from the three-chord thrash championed by hardcore punk or even the slick rock of blues educated session musicians. For Anders’ film, Sonic Youth created subtle, textured guitar washes that almost slip from the viewer’s attention as opposed to dominating the soundscape.

Founding member of the band Kim Gordon states that,

> I think it can be actually emotional noise. I think people have far too much music in film and almost none of it really fits the film. American soundtracks seem to be always much louder than European soundtracks and its strange how a soundtrack can almost be another character. But people don’t utilize that, they don’t take that into account. I just think movies would probably be better if people thought of the music as more, just sort of enhancing. I mean, it’s really hard to enhance a scene;

it’s like putting a blanket on top. You know, it’s hard not to cover up what’s going on, on the screen.  

Sonic Youth’s score for Anders’ film works as a gentle, emotionally coercive but barely present element of the mise en scene. As opposed to the brash pub rock of lead character Sherry’s band and the thrash punk that pumps from a home stereo during the flashbacks, their score is submissive and almost translucent. It adds texture and enhances nuance as well as providing a sense of movement for the film aesthetically, through which it can move back and forth in time between the hardcore punk of the flashbacks and the pub rock of the present. Here the score behaves aesthetically – not only to create mood but also to facilitate the story and structure of the film – as opposed to the other music used in Things Behind the Sun, which has a semiotic purpose.

Popular music in film, particularly original composition, is used structurally on one of two trajectories. Music can behave as a signification system of a particular political discourse, which adds contextual gravity to the film’s socio-political location. Alternately, the pop music film score can behave as solely aesthetic, facilitating a more musicological role that enhances the film’s emotional movements and acts as a structural element of the mise en scene. Corrigan and White offer,

Film music encourages us to be receptive to the information being conveyed by the visual as well as by the other acoustic dimensions of the film. It opens us to experience the movie as immediate and enveloping. It encourages us to let our barriers down. Many commentators speculate that these effects are psychologically related to the fact that the earliest human sensory experience is auditory. Because music is non-representational – it is not a copy of something specific in the world the way an image is – it can be more suggestive.  

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35 Kim Gordon in interview. Things Behind the Sun DVD extras, op. cit.
36 Corrigan & White, op. cit. p. 191
As a structural element of a film’s visceral impact, the accompanying music, be it part of
the diegetic world of the film or external to the representational field of the frame, acts to
strengthen and configure a cohesive emotional argument of a film’s characters and
situations. The imagery and predominant political economy of an artist’s aesthetic and
thematic output also comes into play. An instinctive director uses both the political and
the structural elements of a composer’s music to strengthen and solidify a film’s
emotional journey and the way in which it is aesthetically realized.

Jim Jarmusch’s choices for his film scores have a familiarity that exemplifies the
influence that music plays in the formulation of his films. In pairing the thematic content
of his films with artists whose previous output shares an aesthetic and political affinity
with the film on which they contribute, Jarmusch monopolises on the symbiosis of film
and film score. Two films in particular, 1995’s *Dead Man*37, which was scored by Neil
Young, and 1999’s *Ghost Dog*38, scored by RZA from Wu-Tang Clan, contain some of
the most elegant sonically matched sequences of Jarmusch’s career. Both films in fact
were inspired by their composers. Whilst writing the screenplays for both *Dead Man* and
*Ghost Dog*, Jarmusch listened to music by their respective composers and used these
sounds to influence and inspire the mood and structure of his films. In this sense, both
films can be seen in a sense as homages to their respective composers. Using the music of
a particular artist as a template or guide for a film has proven for Jarmusch, to be a
powerful tool in assembling a strong, cohesive mood for each of his works.

37 *Dead Man*. Written and directed by Jim Jarmusch. 12 Gauge Productions, 1995.
In the liner notes for Young’s *Dead Man* score, Jarmusch mentions that he had been listening extensively to Young and his sometime band Crazy Horse during the writing and shooting of the film. Editor Jay Rabinowitz cut together sequences of the film to instrumental passages of Young’s music as examples of the way in which his music might work for the aesthetic of the film.

From the very start of the project there were hopes of Neil Young performing music for the film, but I was never very confident that this would actually happen. When Neil finally saw an early cut of DEAD MAN and then agreed to score the film, I was ecstatic … What he brought to the film lifts it to another level, intertwining the soul of the story with Neil’s musically emotional reactions to it – the guy reached down to some deep place inside him to create such strong music for our film.39

Young’s score for *Dead Man* matches the timbres and textures of the film’s grainy black and white film stock with gain-drenched electric guitars. Jarmusch’s film is in turns a violent, comic and contemplative existential western about a wanted man’s journey through the frontier to his death. Comparatively, Young’s score is a potent and engaging sonic approximation of the film’s major binary, that of violence and dreams. This synergy is achieved through the actual music that is presented alongside Jarmusch’s images, but also through the context of Neil Young as a performer. Through an understanding of the principles of auterism, as well as a semiotic reading of Neil Young as a popular musician whose image and former work have contributed to a conceptualization of what he means as a performer, his position as the film’s composer is analysed through its contributions to the film. In identifying a correlation between the film’s mood and theme, and those of Young’s music, a context for the film’s evocation of a particular image of the North American frontier can be established, as can his status as composer as semiotic currency to the film.

The opening section of the score, which accompanies William Blake’s train ride to the town of Machine, chugs, spits and spatters as Blake dozes and wakes, peers out of the cabin window and attempts to retain his composure as he heads closer to uncertainty. The menace of the scrapings and churnings of Young’s guitar strings sonically suggests a decent into unwelcoming and perilous territory. Similar to Robby Muller’s sepia-tinged cinematography, Young’s score has a desolate loneliness to match the harshness of the American frontier and the landscape upon which it resides. In this instance the score is just as integral an element of the mise en scene as any other element of the production design, cinematography or performances. Young’s score actually creates the film’s aesthetic in the same way as the cinematography, editing or direction as opposed to merely reflecting the rhythms and structures of these elements. This aesthetic alignment, as opposed to structural causality, is what makes Young’s score a vital element of the film and allows Jarmusch’s vision to be presented with equal emphasis on image and sound.

Neil Young was a fitting choice to score an existential western. His recorded work has earned its own place amongst the ramshackle remains of the sounds of Americana. Slotting somewhere between the plaintive, pastoral twang of country, the emotive honesty of folk and the fury of balls out West-Coast rock, his work, especially with Crazy Horse frames a period of American rock music veiled in a dust-soaked nostalgia. With

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Although Neil Young was born in Toronto, Canada and grew up in Winnipeg, he moved to Los Angeles in 1967 to form Buffalo Springfield. His recorded work as both a member of that band, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Crazy Horse and as a solo artist has been influenced by and commented upon his life in the United States.
his evocative falsetto and contemplative lyrics, Young’s music often betrayed the harsh, guitar driven bile of the traditionally masculine notions of heavy rock. His lyrics were frequently esoteric and brooding, dealing with love and loss and often working these concepts through landscape and place. The lyrics to his 1969 song ‘Down By the River’, from the album Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere carry an affinity with Jarmusch’s metaphysical screenplay: “this much madness is too much sorrow. It’s impossible to make it today.” The song gives off the same feeling of eerie emptiness and voyage into the desolation of the American landscape as Young’s score some twenty-six years later. It carries with it the same mangled, primal guitar churnings, despite its delivery of a haunting vocal.

The relationship between the style and mood of Dead Man, including its score, and Neil Young’s previous recorded output rests on a cultural preconception of star image. Both Dyer and Ellis have written on star image as a realm of culture dictated by auteur theory. The star as auteur is a renegotiation of the concept as it was originally understood. Dyer engages with Tudor’s work on star image, which explains that the audience’s engagement with stars is limited, and that the formulation of star image is not something that audiences have control over. Dyer argues that production and consumption are “differently determining forces in the creation of stars”, arguing that both are ideological. Ellis extends this argument by suggesting that the star image is begun in subsidiary forms of media such as interviews and fanzines, and is only completed through

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42 Richard Dyer. Stars. London: British Film Institute, 1979
45 Dyer, op. cit. p. 22
film performance. The star’s image is not complete until it is presented to an audience, until an audience is allowed to consume it. In this process traditional notions of the auteur are eradicated. Classical auteurism had no use for the audience – they were irrelevant despite the artist’s negation of existence without them. As a modernist romanticization of the artist as a unique individual whose work reflects their experiences, auteur theory has little role in a culture dictated by fragmentary contemporary discourse. However the star as auteur reinterprets the term, renegotiating the notion of the auteur to include the influence and effect of populism and the definition of the star as a product of consumption, or as a reason or motive for consumption, as Ellis points out. “Stars have a similar function in the film industry to the creation of a ‘narrative image’: they provide a foreknowledge of the fiction, an invitation to cinema.”46 The popular musician, whose recorded output creates a similar “narrative image”, which is associated with elements of their image or persona such as musical style, lyrics, artwork or costume, is able to provide a similar invitation. Similar to the anticipation of watching a popular musician as an actor, this invitation comes with the preconception that what an audience will experience will be similar or comparable to their previous output; that it may appease the same sensibility; that it will ‘fit’. Jarmusch knew what Young meant to audiences when he wrote Dead Man, and it was this that enabled him to facilitate his vision, using Young’s music as a catalyst.

Balancing wistfully fragile lyrics with tornadoes of distorted and structurally versatile guitar solos, Young laid a path for the twee singer-songwriters of the indie generation,

46 Ellis, op. cit. p. 91
without leaving loud guitars too far behind. It is through a roster of younger artists such as Pavement and Sebadoh that Young’s status as proto-indie becomes apparent.

I have come to associate “indie” with a kind of revisionary folk movement—something in the “bad voice” tradition of Bob Dylan and Neil Young, though less politically charged and more self-deprecating, attaining through lyrical depth and minimal production a sound that is conscientiously “backwoods” or “bedroom.” Further characteristics of these indie pioneers include a sublimation of the artist's identity through the extensive use of personae … and reconceptualizing of the album as an autonomous and thematic text or narrative, rather than simply a collection of songs gathered to meet the demands of radio or linked only by the time and place of their production.47

Neil Young characterizes many of these qualities associated with a conceptualization of ‘indie’. His records frequently incorporate an overarching theme and aesthetic so as to make them coherent and unified texts. His image or personae of a confused and angry young man disenfranchised with an America slipping morally into fascism has facilitated many of these albums and although many of his most recognizable albums were heavily reliant on the studio, his work with Crazy Horse facilitates a garage rock DIY approach. If Young could be considered an ‘indie-auteur’, then his Dead Man score is the consummate indie-rock record. Loosely structured, densely atmospheric and with little regard for songs as individual signification systems, it is a conceptual record, with its own aesthetic and temporal agenda. It is in this context that similarities between particular types of structurally experimental indie-rock and the structureless, sometimes ambient leanings of film music can be witnessed48. Despite scoring a period western,
Young’s score includes the sounds of car doors slamming and vehicle engines rumbling, as if it were recorded in some roadside gas station. These temporally inaccurate and unexplained sonic additions provide the score with an aesthetic akin to Jarmusch’s film that is bleak and disorienting in its temporal disjunction.

The main theme of Young’s score is based around a single guitar riff. Although it is played through various incarnations, and rhythmic variations are made to its structure, the same melodic pattern is apparent throughout. In this sense, through its rhythmic ebb and flow and melodic and textural constancy, Young’s guitar is a metaphoric mantra for William Blake’s journey towards death. During the film’s final section, as Blake floats out to sea in the cedar canoe that Nobody has made for him, Young’s guitar makes random stabs through the soundtrack. This motif provides a sonic equivalent of the fingers of sunlight that randomly penetrate the open sea through the clouds, as well as mimicking the canoe’s uneven motion upon the waves. His patient playing allows for single note feedback drones to provide a gentle sonic bed upon which the quieter, more meditative moments of the film can rest. Inversely, the cracking and rolling of the film’s gain-drenched melodic motif adds movement as do pans across frontier landscapes to the sections of horseback travel. In this instance a true audio-visual collaboration occurs between the images, characters and mood of Jarmusch’s film and Neil Young’s score. Perpetually in touch with the situations and exchanges it overlays, Young’s score takes the emotional resonance of the film to a less literal, more visceral level.

All music in a film, especially pit music, can function like the spatiotemporal equivalent of a railroad switch. This is to say that music enjoys the status of being a little freer of barriers of time and space than other sound and visual elements. The
latter are obliged to remain clearly defined in their relation to the diegetic space and

In its freedom to move above the action onscreen, the film score is able to narrate,
tethering sonic motifs to occurrences within the frame. Here a sensory relationship exists
not only between diegetic sound, but also between the action, rhythm and movement on
screen and the film score. In its ability to relate to image, action and chronology, non-
diegetic film music provides context, commenting on the film’s formal elements of
narrative. Young’s score, through the context of its creator and the cultural
preconceptions of his involvement, generates a context disengaged from the film’s
structural existence.

Jarmusch has involved popular musicians in a number of his films, not only as composers,
but as actors. Tom Waits, Iggy Pop, Jack and Meg White and RZA and GZA all appear
as themselves in \textit{Coffee & Cigarettes}\footnote{\textit{Coffee & Cigarettes}. Written & directed by Jim Jarmusch. United Artists, 2003.} and Pop appears in \textit{Dead Man} as a frontier-era
transvestite. There is more to the relationship. Especially in his early films, there exists a
synergy between Jarmusch’s onscreen world and the world of popular music, such as the
Japanese Elvis fans and blues musicians who scatter themselves throughout the dank
Memphis hotel of \textit{Mystery Train}\footnote{\textit{Mystery Train}. Written and directed by Jim Jarmusch. JVC Entertainment, 1989.}. Some kind of plot or casting link from Jarmusch can
usually be expected to relate to popular music folklore. It is therefore not a surprise that
the director collaborated with a popular musician again in 1999 with \textit{Ghost Dog: The
Way of the Samurai}. Dealing with an urban hitman who lives by the ancient code of the
samurai, Jarmusch enlisted the musical skills of RZA, whose hip hop outfit Wu-Tang

Clan had over several records impressed their affinity with martial arts, sampling sounds and speech from ninja and kung-fu films. On their first album *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers* this approach gave their music an eerie quality that, when juxtaposed with harsh break beats and the aggressive rhyming of nine MCs made for an electrifying renegotiation of the hip hop genre.

The opening scenes of *Ghost Dog* are similarly striking, with collaboration between Jarmusch, RZA, cinematographer Robby Muller and editor Jay Rabinowitz submerging the viewer in the world of the film. As RZA’s broken beats flutter and jab the soundtrack, the flapping of a bird’s wings visually orchestrates the rhythm of the track. The effect is hypnotizing, providing a stylistic entry into the urban wasteland of an unnamed city where Ghost Dog occupies a solitary position alongside gangs of specifically black ghetto youth and eccentric, ageing Italian mafioso. The rendering of race is particularly important to the interior world of *Ghost Dog*. As a victim of a gang-related incident whose life is saved by a member of the mafia, Ghost Dog is indebted to Louie, his Italian-American ‘master’, for whom he acts as a retainer and contract killer. However the black gangs who occupy and patrol the streets also respect him as a lone warrior. In one scene as he walks a city street, a member of a gang passes, offering him a respectful reverence. Similarly, as he sits in the park listening to a group of rappers freestyling about gang violence and they name check him as a sign of respect, he sits quietly listening to their rhymes, attempting to understand their situation whilst simultaneously feeling disconnected from it. RZA’s affiliation with the kung-fu hip hop of the Wu-Tang

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is a masterfully integrated auditory backdrop to the film’s plot. Providing tense, dark
beats with minimal melodic accompaniment, the inherent danger and savagery of the on
screen environment is communicated with a deft understanding of mood and the film’s
sparse rhythm of action and story. Jarmusch’s trademark delicate pacing is complemented
by RZA’s measured hip hop. RZA’s ability to dictate the mood and style of the music
coincides with Jarmusch’s vision of the manner in which specific images are presented.

The relationship between aural embodiment and narrative information provides a context
for notions of film authorship. The film scorer exists alongside the director as an auteur
whose specific personal approach to their craft may be harnessed to produce particular
moods, textures and aesthetics. Gorbman offers a case for a Romantic auterism within
film music appreciation.

Post-structuralism’s dethronement of the individual artist has simply not occurred
for film composers, since much academic discussion of film music occurs in
contexts such as film music festivals of the Society for the Preservation of Film
Music in Los Angeles, where there is a certain pressure to see and appreciate the
music through the composer’s eye and ear.53

This is a mode of film music readership tethered to notions of high art and artistry, where
the film composer is regarded as a creative intellect whose sonic orchestration of on
screen activity is to be revelled in and revered; placed upon an artistic pedestal. The
popular musician renegotiates auterism through a relationship between individual
experience, creative expression and public recognition and consumption. The cliché that
pop is reviled by patrons and supporters of the fine arts and excluded from auterism is

53 Claudia Gorbman. ‘Film Music’ in Film Studies: Critical Approaches. John Hill & Pamela Church
supported by the sphere of traditional film scoring\textsuperscript{54}. This maxim is based on the ideology that popular music triggers a different response to auterism. As the notion of the auteur came under attack, disempowered groups to whom popular music was a bastion of individual artistic freedom were establishing auterism as a powerful and valid form of artistic recognition, and facilitated a powerful rebuttal to the post-structural critique of the notion of the author.

This critique, forwarded by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and others – white male theorists one and all – worked to dismantle the importance of authorship, but precisely at the time women, gay men and lesbian women, and people of colour were beginning to be recognised. Liberal feminists recognised that such a critique did not necessarily forward the goals of political liberation for marginalized people.\textsuperscript{55}

Popular music, as a marginalized cultural formation, supports Silverman’s notion of a psychoanalytic model that produces a reinterpretation of authorship that recognizes the implications of social construction but channels this through the historically and culturally specific experience of the individual.\textsuperscript{56} This is a reinscription of Foucault’s author function, whereby he purposely sets aside “the conditions that fostered the formulation of the fundamental critical category of ‘the man and his work’”\textsuperscript{57} in order to focus on the discursive frameworks that facilitate the author as an entity. Silverman offers that the specificity of the individual experience is of relevance when attempting to understand texts and their creators. What led Jarmusch to involve both Young and RZA


\textsuperscript{57} Foucault, op. cit. p. 447
in his films was a subjective reading of their work as a creative embodiment of their specific experiences as artists. With his desert-soaked electric guitar, Jarmusch knew that Young would be suited to score an existential western. Similarly, with his blunted beats and kung-fu samples, Jarmusch could be assured that RZA’s musical style would ably reflect the context of a samurai ghetto film. However RZA had his own motivations, mentioning that “I chose to go behind the camera because I wanted to master a craft before I entered it. There are very few black composers. I wanted to make a mark.” RZA’s comments confirm Metz’s argument that the culturally and historically specific role of the author is of particular importance to disempowered groups as it allows for empowerment through not only creativity, but recognition of that creativity.

The moment in *Ghost Dog* that engages with the discursive specificity of race comes when one of the ageing Mafioso is revealed to be fluent in the discourse of hip hop and particularly knowledgeable about Public Enemy – much to the bewilderment of his contemporaries. A film exists within particular cultural, political and social discourses and as a result, aesthetic frameworks that reflect all of these. As an integral element of the mise-en-scene, the film score must reflect the discourse within which the film is literate. This intermedia literacy is often what leads to director/popular musician collaborations and almost definitely what lead Jarmusch to enlist the help of Young and RZA respectively. After *Ghost Dog*, RZA went on to score Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill*. In Hay’s article for *Billboard* he stressed the fickleness of the film industry and its

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implications for would-be film composers, stating that “Filmmakers want a packaged piece of product that’s timeless, not just the latest songs. You don’t really know about a job unless the job is done, sealed and the check is in your pocket.”60 Through film composition, artists who are recognized as popular, whose previous output has made profit and who are recognized as being driven and singular in their creative vision, are able to commodify their status.

Popular music is a public medium. Popular musicians are required to present a ‘persona’ in order to be recognized and marketed. As Dyer and Ellis both stress, this persona, as a tangible manifestation of the dominant imagery and thematic content of their work often acts as a signifier of the aesthetic realm that they signify.

The celebrity’s power is derived from the collective configuration of its meaning; in other words, the audience is central in sustaining the power of any celebrity sign. The types of messages that the celebrity provides for the audience are modalised around forms of individual identification, social difference and distinction, and the universality of personality types. Celebrities represent subject positions that audiences can adopt of adapt in their formation of social identities.61

Popular music as an industry is supported and sustained by its audiences. The public status of popular musicians who attain celebrity necessitates that their audiences must have access to them in some form and that this access must produce revenue. Yet the role of film scorer is far less recognizable. It is vital to film production, but not lauded or publicly scrutinized. When the two are aligned, the middle ground is invoked. The artist is stripped of their persona, or forced for that persona to transplant itself into the fabric of a film, adding to the world within which it is located. It is as though the artist’s persona

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60 RZA in Hay, op. cit. p. 5
becomes another character, an external narrator whose method of communication works stylistically alongside the film to present an omnipotent commentary on plot, character and mood.

Popular music in film, specifically pop and rock music film scores draw from two alternate readings of auteurism, establishing its own negotiation of the terms of the artist and their role as musician, composer, recognizable popular cultural identity and film collaborator. Taken from the ‘high art’ tangent of film music auteurism is the recognition of the artist’s structural and aesthetic competency in negotiating the world of the film – a visual medium with its own structural forms and rules, and creating appropriate sonic cues and motifs.

Does this mean that a film’s soundtrack constitutes a continuous flow without breaks for the listener? Not at all, for we can still discern units. But such units – sentences, noises, musical themes, “cells” of sound – are exactly of the same type as in everyday experience, and we can identify them according to criteria specific to the different types of sound heard.62

The film scorer must create their own hierarchy of “cells of sound” based on their interpretation of the most appropriate aesthetic approach to the film’s plot structure, character development and story arc. It is possible to view the break beat, a bastion of hip hop discourse as one of the most integral cells to the Ghost Dog score. The break beat provides the film with a sonic signifier of the African-American popular musical discourse that resides largely in working-class urban spaces. Similarly the samples of oriental and eastern instrumentation that provide the melodic content of RZA’s tracks63

62 Chion, op. cit. p. 45
63 The line between appropriation and respectful use is one tread by any musician utilizing samples, especially those with a pre-existing national, racial or ethnic significance. In his role of producer for Wu Tang Clan, named after a mystical sword carried by an elite group of Shaolin warriors, RZA was able to
give the film's mise en scene a signifying link to eastern, specifically Japanese social, religious and philosophical discourse. The adaptation of one art form to the rules and structures of another that allows for a highly engaged auterism, which requires a particular literacy of both film and musical form.

When auterism is being summoned with reference to the popular and in particular to cultural industries that are based around and dictated by capitalism, the commodification of individuals is often invoked.

The emergence of efficient and expansive methods of cultural articulation and dissemination that accompanied industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries played an important role in the process of identity formation and social interpretation. For the first time the social production of people as masses is possible.64

Also possible is the social and industrial production of individuals as commodities. This commodification can be problematic, as Hall65, Grossberg66, Harron67 and others realized in their movement between a suspicion of the populist, and a crass celebration of the popular. The automatic assumption that popular culture is inherently positive in a social


capacity can be problematic, as any cultural product created for mass consumption is subject to the pressures and effects of economic viability.

Such studies might also lose sight of the manipulative and conservative effects of certain types of media culture, and thus serve the interests of the culture industries as they are presently constituted and those groups who use the culture industries to promote their own interests and agendas.

Cultural realms dictated by the pursuit of profit ensure that the name or work of a recognizable individual is a viable element for a product’s success or popularity. More importantly for auteur theory, the mass distribution of the work of an individual can and does ensure the creation of audiences for their work and of personal affinities worthy of being deemed ‘cult’ appreciation.

Popular culture – and in particular popular music – facilitates an auterism based in recognition of the artist as an individual who creates a distinct body of work through historically and culturally specific conditions. The power of popular music is in its collective nature, as Frith, Grossberg and Hebdige have attested. Pop has the capacity to engage collectivity, but its power is often manifested through the work of individuals who represent the experiences of an entire generation, be they united through race, class, gender or marketing demographics. An auteur requires the collective capacities of cultural narrative and popular memory in order to be deemed such. Popular cultural auterism extends the definition of ‘auteur’ to refer to an artist whose work,

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although politically consistent, is dictated by the economic determinism of cultural production and consumption.

As opposed to auterism, which supposes and expects a movie to be narratively, thematically, and formally coherent, a view of the production process that acknowledges its multiple logics and voices will recognise that Hollywood’s commercial aesthetic is too opportunistic to prize coherence, organic unity, or even the absence of contradiction among its primary virtues.72

The auteur has a place within the system of production responsible for creating commercially viable popular cultural texts. Although auterism may no longer be the modus operandi for film production, it is still an important element in the branding of cinematic texts. In this capacity, Foucault’s author function provides a viable explanation for the role of the auteur within capitalist driven systems of cultural production and consumption. The function of the auteur in a socio-political sense allows audiences to engage with them, just as its function for producers is to provide a product that will generate revenue.

In contemporary filmic discourse, especially in terms of Hollywood and the mainstream, branding occurs at every level of film production regardless of a director or even score composer’s status. The emergence of a ‘younger’ Hollywood, one raised in the post-everything age, facilitates a negotiation of auterism that betrays its inherent importance of singularity whilst utilizing it for name value. Former Nine Inch Nails keyboardist and film composer Charlie Clouser comments, “There’s a whole new generation of movie power players who grew up with rock, hip hop and music videos, so they’re going to be more receptive to working with [non-traditional] composers.”73 Although theorists such

73 Charlie Clouser in Hay, op. cit. p. 5
as Barthes\textsuperscript{74} and Lyotard\textsuperscript{75} foresaw the eradication of auteurism in its original incarnation as well as the knowledge systems that sustained it, as a cultural phenomenon it manages to resurface in less coherent and more fractured terms, facilitating a new literacy for popular texts and the status of their creators.

The marketing and publicity for a film with a recognizable name from the popular music world attached as composer or sound designer is likely to provoke more interest at the box office.\textsuperscript{76} Jason Linn, executive VP of music at New Line Cinema comments: “A lot of it has to do with marketing. The studios want to attach themselves to up-and-coming composers who might be on the mix tapes [owned by] the same people they’re trying to target for their movies.”\textsuperscript{77} Speaking of his involvement in film scoring, Billy Corgan, former frontman of the Smashing Pumpkins alludes to the possible explanation for his hiring for the soundtracks to both \textit{Ransom}\textsuperscript{78} and \textit{Stigmata}\textsuperscript{79}.

Now I am at a place where people recognize who I am, and certainly you can't disregard the commercial aspect of it. It's a fact that attaching my name to something like this gives a certain feel. As film-makers look for other ways to bring music to movies and other ways of advertising and reaching other people, it makes sense to branch out. I'd like to think it was all musical, but I know that's not necessarily the case.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{74} Barthes, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{77} Jason Linn in Hay, op. cit. p. 5
\textsuperscript{80} Billy Corgan in Catherine Applefield Olson. ‘Many ways to score (film soundtracks by rock, pop and rhythm and blues composers)” in \textit{Billboard}. Vol. 111 (43), October 23, 1999. p. 22
Corgan’s soundtrack to *Ransom*, released in 1996 after the Pumpkins gained major recognition with their *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* album, was a different proposition to the prog-indie of that particular release. Written, produced and performed all by Corgan with additional drums by Matt Walker, the Pumpkins frontman shared scoring duties with James Horner, despite not receiving a title credit and having his compositions shunted to the status of background diegesis. Horner’s score was the traditional orchestral fare, predictable string movements with a tense, menacing tone composed and edited into the action to raise the emotional currency of the onscreen images. Corgan on the other hand composed heavy, angry guitar dirges, entire songs based around single riffs. Almost polar in sonic texture to Horner’s score proper, Corgan’s ‘songs’, were inserted into scenes set in the house where Sean Mullen is held hostage as diegetic rock music blasting from his captors’ stereo.

Corgan’s compositional pieces from *Ransom* lack structural and melodic substance. A year later Corgan wrote the song ‘The End is the Beginning is the End’ as well as several instrumental pieces performed with the Smashing Pumpkins for *Batman & Robin*. In comparison, the songs he created for *Ransom* are didactic and have no direction. ‘Worms’ sounds suspiciously like a demo version of his compositions for Joel Schumacher’s second Batman film. This sonic palette is all that Corgan was required to deliver. As the pieces are used so infrequently, insignificantly and briefly, they are merely required to occupy a particular sonic trajectory, maintain it and filter through a

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82 Billy Corgan ‘The End Is the Beginning Is the End’. Alex, 1997.
cycle of effects so as to give the allusion of a song structure without distracting unnecessarily from the action onscreen. Squalls of guitar have been compressed so heavily that they resemble industrial machinery and frequency buzzes. Through them organic drums and churning synthesized beats cut almost primal, trance-like rhythms whilst programmed beeps and assorted other sonic distortia add layers of almost incomprehensible sound.

Three years later, Corgan composed the score for Rupert Wainwright’s supernatural thriller Stigmata. Having attained compositional experience on Batman and Robin and Ransom, Corgan was still a risk, given that he had never previously tackled a score in the traditional sense. Musically orchestrating the movement and flow of a film’s dramatic development was Corgan’s new challenge.

When you’re trusting someone to do a film score, especially if it’s their first time, it’s a big gamble. A lot of really talented composers come from symphonic training, so if you hire composers from the recording industry, a lot of people see it almost like stunt casting.85

The film’s key song was the coma-inducing ‘Identify’86, co-written by jazz pianist Mike Garson, and performed by Australian soap star-cum-pop ingenue Natalie Imbruglia. Although a promotional video was shot, the song was never released as a single due to the film’s stifled release schedule. Characterized by synth flusters and unobtrusive drones and alternately by harsh, dirge-like beats during moments of action, Corgan’s Stigmata score is less referential to and derivative of his work in the Smashing Pumpkins than his contributions to Ransom. However it remains so steeped in film soundtrack cliché that it is impossible to hear any of Corgan’s musical identity shine through the clouds of synths.

85 Joel C. High in Hay, op. cit. p. 5
and predictable piano melodies. The Stigmata score is puzzling in this respect; lacking any defining aesthetic to link it to its creator’s former incarnations. The subject and mood of the film are certainly appropriate, as the Pumpkins were virtually adopted into the goth fraternity with the period theatrics of the Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness promotional aesthetic and string laden production of that album. The song ‘Eye’, which appeared on the soundtrack to David Lynch’s neo-noir Lost Highway and the neo-goth of Adore, saw the band in heavy eyeliner, striking poses on windy cliffs. Corgan was even made up as Nosferatu for the music video for ‘Ava Adore’. It was because of this image, as he himself stipulates, that Corgan was chosen to compose the score for Stigmata. That under these circumstances it is impossible not to be influenced and even controlled by the economic determinism of the popular music industry makes comment on a more widespread cultural assumption. Medhurst frames this assumption as one that:

pop was a gimmick to be sold like the hula-hoop, that it had no intrinsic merits or deeper resonances, and needed only shrewd management to turn it into profit made from the dupes on the street.

This is an oversimplification of the socio-historic space that pop music has occupied and has continued to claim throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Under certain circumstances such as providing a sonic aesthetic for a score that would not only suit the

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mood and content of a particular film, pop can exploit its marketability and its leap into profitable demographics.

As a band who had gathered a widespread appreciation throughout their career, any project connected to the Smashing Pumpkins was bound to stimulate interest – and revenue – from fans.

Ultimately, if we are to understand why certain cultural goods are produced by the media and culture industries, we must foreground the system of production and the political economy of culture, since it is that very system which determines the boundaries, constraints and possibilities for production.94

The political economy of culture in the instance of the Stigmata soundtrack found that attaching Billy Corgan’s name to a film that had an aesthetic affinity with his recorded output had the potential to attract audiences and make revenue. It was the same political economy of culture that inevitably let the producers of Stigmata: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, down because they failed to judge it appropriately. The film itself, although the tangible manifestation of a director (Rupert Wainright)’s imagination, Corgan’s scoring efforts, the performances of its cast and the effort of hundreds of others who worked on the film is the product of a studio system that shapes and influences the form of any text created from within it.

For much of American culture, corporate imperatives operate as the primary constraints shaping the narratives and iconography of the text as well as the manufacture and licensing of the intertextual materials.95

The use of the songs licensed for its soundtrack, the hiring of Corgan to oversee its score and to write ‘Identify’, the decision for that song to be sung by Natalie Imbruglia and the marketing and publicity of all of these elements of the production shape Stigmata and its public reception. These elements were dictated by Stigmata’s existence as a film created from within a studio system and its ultimate success or failure reflects how apt the individuals involved were in judging the corporate viability of the project.

Stigmata was not a particularly successful film, costing US$32 million and making back US$50 million in gross profits. With the last Pumpkins album, Adore, over a year old at the time of the films release, Corgan’s involvement was less effective in generating interest than expected. Moreover, the lack of either ‘Identify’ to achieve chart success or the score to draw from Corgan’s established musical milieu saw Stigmata become a missed opportunity for crossover profit making. Whether it was bad timing, bad product or too tenuous a link between the film and Corgan’s participation in it, Stigmata demonstrated an overestimation of the currency of an established and respected musical identity.

The bombastic production values of Stigmata in comparison to its less than modest recuperation of profit may be a key element in understanding why Corgan chose a comparably small, independently released film for his next scoring project.

Creative fulfilment can be an important goal of the artist, but crossover composers and the people who work with them say that the composers must not lose sight of the fact that their work is supposed to help sell a movie.

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97 Hay, op. cit. p.6
Recoiling from the pressure imposed by his name being a condition of profit-making, Corgan chose a less ‘risky’ project. *Spun* was a cartoon-like black comedy about a bundle of vacuous and unlikeable speed addicts. In contrast to the perpetually amphetamine-fuelled performances, giddy editing and colourful flourishes of hallucinatory animation, Corgan and members of his new band The Djali Zwan wrote and performed a number of sombre acoustic numbers to accompany the film in its reflective moments. More noticeable within the mise-en-scene than either the trad-score of *Stigmata* or the soundbites of *Ransom*, The Djali Zwan’s songs also lend an emotional voice to the film, which is deliberately as stripped of emotion as the characters that inhabit it. The film’s musical highlight however is their impeccable acoustic version of Iron Maiden’s ‘Number of the Beast’, which communicates the detachment, emptiness and isolation of lead character Ross and his amphetamine addiction. *Spun*’s reasonably successful accompanying music provides an antithesis to Corgan’s stunted movement into film scoring, proving that without the pressure of major studio production or the onus on himself personally, he was able in a collaborative situation to create a simpler, more naturalistic score that provided an emotional core for the events onscreen, as opposed to attempting to comment on or narrate them.

There is a distinction between traditional, usually orchestral scores and those that use pre-existing music or contemporary popular music as a platform for visual accompaniment. Traditional scores usually attempt to narrate with music structurally composed around the

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film’s editing through the use of music cues triggered by diegetic occurrences. This particularity can make listening to a film score without the visual referent a disconcerting experience. Without the context of filmic action, the traditional film score jumps and jars with little concern for recognizable popular musical structures. String sections clash and collide with orchestrated percussion. The stir and crash of a particular movement breaks apart the cohesion of the listener’s expectations. Even the Dust Brothers’ dirty instrumental hip hop score for David Fincher’s *Fight Club*[^1] was written to emphasize precise shot movements, delicately cut montages and specific editing cues; thus listening to it on CD[^2] without the accompanying images can be awkward and, perhaps futile.

This structural specificity is the role of film scores in a traditional sense. The music serves a purpose – to support the images and their formation of story, mood and causality. In this sense, but certainly with exceptions, the music is subordinate to the images.

The majority of popular musical scores are less hinged on structural synergy. They are often freer in form, relying not on precise synchronicity but on mood, theme and character to dictate a more impressionistic and less literal form. Kim Gordon: “I mean, it’s really hard to enhance a scene, it’s like putting a blanket on top. You know, it’s hard not to cover up what’s going on, on the screen.”[^3] There is a correlation between popular film scores with loose, textural approaches and independent films. The unstructured atmospherics of the indie film score by a popular musician is almost a genre of itself,

with *Dead Man*, *Somersault*\(^\text{104}\) and Folk Implosion’s contributions to *Kids*\(^\text{105}\) all exemplifying the phenomenon.

“Part of it is name value: the filmmakers might want someone who already has a built in audience,” Lions Gate Films senior VP of music and soundtracks Joel C. High says. “These types of composers also bring a type of sensibility about them that isn’t typical film-score language.”\(^\text{106}\)

With less at stake financially than a major studio production, and keeping in mind the cult appreciation and avid collector status of many audiences associated with such artists, such approaches can be rewarding aesthetically and promotionally, even if the score’s actual impact on the film to which it is attached is tenuous.

The marketing of a film’s association to the rock world may work in the favour of independent films, which struggle to gain an audience due to the exorbitant costs of promotion and distribution. Indie films with a popular musician attached in the role of score composer can be a step towards greater recognition and reception. The music laid down by popular musicians is often mere sonic noodling, appropriately abstract so as not to be too specific; perfect for use at a director or music supervisor’s discretion. This impression is given by the slew of non-specific, non-intrusive pop music compositions that are often so diluted, intangible and nonfigurative as to be barely of consequence to the career of the musician who created them. This approach works for *SubUrbia* because of the cultural/political connection between the film, its characters and Sonic Youth’s music, but the cluttered *Things Behind the Sun* is too schizophrenic for the band’s music to be anything other than soundscapes shifted to the background of the viewer’s attention.

\(^{104}\) *Somersault*. Written and directed by Cate Shortland. Red Carpet Productions, 2004.


\(^{106}\) Hay and Joel C. High in Hay, op. cit. p. 5
In this instance the film score can no longer be thought of as an integral element of the mise en scene. Instead it facilitates a particular mood, becoming supplementary as opposed to complimentary, passive as opposed to vibrant and fully present. When the correlation between popular film and popular music is syncopated, the two spark off each other, providing context for each other’s structural elements. Often the use of a name, as opposed to the work of an artist is what is being utilized, obstructing a true cross-media hybrid of aesthetic and meaning.

Popular music in film is transient, fickle and elusive. As a sonic language with visual consequences, popular film music is still establishing its dimensions, expanding its boundaries and facilitating its own dialect. The literacy of film music is also developing. Audiences are learning how to listen to popular music in film; how it differentiates itself from traditional scores, what it brings to a film contextually and how it generates a film’s aesthetic. What have been referred to historically as ‘new’ mass media forms are continually grappling with their form and context as languages.

The new mass media – film, radio, TV – are new languages, their grammars as yet unknown. Each codifies reality differently; each conceals a unique metaphysics. Linguists tell us it’s possible to say anything in any language if you use enough words or images, but there’s rarely time; the natural course is for a culture to exploit its media biases.\(^\text{107}\)

As a hybrid form, popular film music has double the lexicon with which to express itself and as such, many more times the possibilities for use and expression. Not only does film use the language and expressive capabilities of popular music to create context and make meaning, but the opposite is also true.

The incidence of bands scoring existing films has been allowed to blossom into a vibrant and imaginative outlet for creative expression. This particular convergence is explained by greater mobility of texts from private to public spheres; from copywritten product to public performance, and helps to explain the popular music and film hybrid as “coding a generative syntax for new languages of creativity.” This modality is an appropriate way to explain the function the popular musician-composed film score.

Building on the established sound, image and aesthetic approach of a performer and tinting it through the abstraction of film form and discourses of the visual and the visceral, the film soundtrack provides a new language of creativity for artists, and through which these artists can be viewed. In moving from music as creative expression and entertainment to music as an auditory manifestation of structured and contextualized images new musical languages are created, whereby an artist is able to either draw from their existent, established sound or to remove themselves from it altogether. Many trade their careers as popular musicians for the confines of the studio to work exclusively on

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108 One such pairing was soul/country outfit Lambchop and F.W Murnau’s *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*. Directed by F.W Murnau. Written by Carl Mayer. Fox Film Corporation, 1927. Other acts, particularly from electronic, dance and hip hop genres have utilized visual accompaniment for their live sets. Hecstatic use video editing software synchopated with their music software for synergetic visualisations of their electronically driven instrumental hip hop and DJ Spooky has produced a live ‘remix’ of *The Birth of a Nation*. Directed by D.W Griffith. Written by Thomas F. Dixon. David W. Griffith Corporation, 1915 entitled ‘Rebirth of a Nation’, using software to sample and restructure sections of Griffiths’ original film. The Cinematic Orchestra released a DVD of their accompanying soundtrack to Dziga Vertov’s 1929 documentary *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*. Directed by Dziga Vertov. VUFKU, 1929, and in 2000, Detroit techno producer Jeff Mills attempted a similar project with Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*. Directed by Fritz Lang. Written by Fritz Lang & Thea von Harbou. Universum Film A.G, 1927, which itself has a complicated history of sonic versions. Giorgio Moroder’s 1984 version of the film was the source of some contention, as documented in Alan Stanbrook ‘As it was in the beginning’ in *Sight & Sound*. Vol. 59 (1), Winter, 1989-90. p. 31 and Thomas Elsaesser. *Metropolis*. London: British Film Institute, 2000. p. 58

film soundtracks. Others create music in their own right whilst simultaneously keeping their bank balance in bloom via the lucrative field of film scores.\textsuperscript{110}

If the 1980s was a decade defined politically by a new inflection of the market economy through neo-liberalism, perpetuated by neo-conservative political regimes, it was defined sonically by the synthesizer. It was a relatively new\textsuperscript{111} and technologically advancing instrument, constantly changing and innovating itself, capturing the futurism and ambition of the prevailing mood of the times. The synthesizer was an appropriate sound to capture the ideology of a decade preoccupied by advancement and propulsion. German prog-electro pioneers Tangerine Dream are often best remembered for their sleek synth scores. Paul Morley comments on the inevitability of this career decision:

> Eventually they wrote soundtracks for second-rate Hollywood movies. That was not so perfect, and yet was somehow inevitable. They started out the day after tomorrow on another planet and ended up in the next door to the everyday.\textsuperscript{112}

Whilst Morley’s critique of the band is accurate in characterizing their dissipation into film score territory as an unsatisfactory professional trajectory, Tangerine Dream’s status as innovators in an emerging sonic field of the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as their distinct yet versatile electronic sound ensured that they were keenly sought after to score films in a plethora of styles.

\textsuperscript{110} Exemplifying the movement from popular music practitioner to film scorer are Ryuichi Sakamoto, former keyboardist for the Yellow Magic Orchestra, whose score for \textit{Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence.} Directed by Nagisa Oshima. Written by Paul Mayersberg & Nagisa Oshima, Asahi National Broadcasting Company, 1983 as well as several of Bernardo Bertolucci’s films have secured his reputation as a purveyor of epic, romantic scores, Greek keyboardist Vangelis, whose score for \textit{Blade Runner.} Directed by Ridley Scott. Written by Hampton Fancher & David Peoples. Warner Bros., 1982 has become a prototypical example of the science-fiction score and Mark Mothersbaugh, who after the dissolution of Devo formed his own recording studio and scored all of Wes Anderson’s films.

\textsuperscript{111} Although the Moog synthesizer was first manufactured in 1963, it remained a relatively elitist piece of electronic equipment due to the expensive nature of analogue electronics. It was not until the early 1980s with the advent of monophonic synthesizers that the instrument became affordable and widely available.

In the early 1980s, rock was still the dominant mode of youth music, although new wave and the increasing immediacy and popularity of the synthesizer were quickly changing that assumption. Tangerine Dream’s score for *Risky Business*\(^\text{113}\) acts as a distinctly separate entity to the roots rock used diegetically. For instance, Bruce Springsteen’s ‘Hungry Heart’\(^\text{114}\) flows from lead character Joel’s stereo as he talks to love interest Lana and Bob Seger’s ‘Old Time Rock & Roll’\(^\text{115}\) is the sonic context for the film’s signature scene. The sequenced blips and propulsion of the arpeggiated analogue synthesizer melodies act as an antithetical narration to both the ballsy, bluesy rock favoured by the sexually blossoming young men who populate the film, and to Cruise’s voice over. As such, the synthesizer ably communicates the bracing sheen of the 1980s and act as an equally cold, removed critique of the ‘greed is good’ ethos of capitalism-driven Reagan era politics that dominates the film.

The score functions in *Risky Business* as an omnipotent observer. Separated from the characters and their adolescent rock, it suggests a kind of sophistication without directly addressing one. The sleek, shiny synths add a distance and crispness to the emotionally resonant moments on screen, but these moments are the emotional disappointments. Almost all of the exultant scenes have either diegetic rock such as the infamous use of ‘Old Time Rock & Roll’ or the frat party atmosphere of the brothel Joel sets up in his parents’ house. What is left when the emotion and energy of adolescent cockiness is wiped away is cold reality; surreal and dizzying in its sobriety of consequence. The sonic

backdrop as distanced, narration-like presence speaks similarly about the film’s representation of youth. Cruise’s infamous dance to a song that was at the time of the film’s release almost a decade old, as well as the constant progression of rock-based diegetic music suggests a nostalgic representation of young masculinity. Whilst Joel and his friends are trapped in an outdated vision of middle-class suburban life with a male-oriented rock soundtrack, the reality of the 1980s is one of inorganic, synthetic propulsion and the harsh realities of capitalism; a lesson Joel learns when he loses all his pimping money. The *Risky Business* soundtrack works because it is such an odd selection and combination of music, recognizing the masculinist tendency towards trad-rock, but also emphasizing the score’s primary stylistic importance to the socio-political context of the film’s temporal setting.

Tangerine Dream’s forays into the expressive world of soundtracks is only one example of a trend that saw an affinity between the grandiosity of progressive rock and science fiction, adventure, horror or other supernatural or epic themed film genres\(^\text{116}\). The most infamous of the prog film scorers, Goblin rose to the top of the charts in their home country of Italy with their score for Dario Argento’s thriller *Profondo Rosso*\(^\text{117}\). Best known for their scores for both Argento’s infamous slasher classic *Suspiria*\(^\text{118}\) and


\(^{117}\) *Profondo Rosso*. Directed by Dario Argento. Written by Dario Argento & Bernardino Zapponi. Rizzoli Film, 1975.

\(^{118}\) *Suspiria*. Directed by Dario Argento. Written by Dario Argento & Daria Nicolodi, Seda Spettacoli, 1977.
George A. Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*[^119], the band provided intense, expressionistic sonic vignettes based around swirling synthesizers and churning rhythms. Although their theme tune for Argento’s *Suspiria* is their most recognizable work, the best example of their versatility and dexterity is their score for *Dawn of the Dead*.

*Dawn of the Dead* is a strange hybrid, characterized by excessive gore and violence and a satirical stance on consumer culture. Episodic and epic but always tongue in cheek, *Dawn of the Dead*, or *ZOMBI* as it was titled in Europe provided the perfect opportunity to showcase Goblin’s bludgeoning musical style. Founding member Claudio Simonetti comments:

> It was probably the most enjoyable film project that we ever worked on because it gave us the greatest opportunity to express ourselves. *ZOMBI* was really a very complex work and required lots of time – always with the supervision of Dario, who provided lost of ideas.[^120]

Goblin’s *Dawn of the Dead* score is even more ridiculous that that of *Suspiria*, in which the stylized rendering of lavish sets with obtrusive red lighting was achieved through campy effects, reverb-drenched voices and chaotic, rhythmically uneven percussion. *Dawn* was more a subdued and naturalistic film and the band relied on its shopping mall setting and consumer-numbing muzak to prompt their score. Romero has referred to the text not as a horror film but as an action romp, and it is this element that sets both the film’s mood and Goblin’s accompanying score apart from those of *Suspiria*. Their compositions for the action sequences have a rollicking pace to them, providing bracing, camp musical renderings of zombie chases and extreme violence stooped in 1970’s prog-rock sonic theatrics.

Similar to Romero’s film, *Suspiria* is a chaotic, stylized slasher film made more visceral and exaggerated by its indulgence in occult evil. Goblin’s score for the film reflects this high drama. As Corrigan and White confirm, at times film music can draw more attention to itself than to the nuances of the onscreen action: “Occasionally we are jolted out of absorption in a film because the music is simply too overblown, its commentary on the action too obvious.”¹²¹ This is precisely the effect desired from Goblin’s scores. Two cuts of *Dawn* exist: the US cut, which uses portions of Goblin’s score but usurps other sections in favour of what Romero refers to as “these schmaltzy library tracks, [where] it winds up being so corny in places.”¹²² Goblin’s score ably slots into the corniness of Romero’s music choices. It is for this reason that the band epitomises the often laborious and demanding but never repugnant sonic approach of prog-rock film scores. There is an ambitious determination to 1970s progressive rock as it attempts to achieve all the grandiosity of the pit orchestras used for the religious epics of the post-war period and inject it into the supernatural fantasy or horror epics of its contemporary filmic imagination.

Pop music is pervasive in contemporary film. It is difficult to resist or ignore its commercial viability and cultural dominance, nor the far-reaching popular memory of contemporary pop music and its effects. The dialogue between pop and film has become encoded in our film readership rituals. Our cultural awareness of a song and the possible contextual weight it adds to a film has evolved with the increased space of pop in

¹²¹ Corrigan & White, op. cit. p. 191
¹²² George A. Romero in *The Dead Will Walk*, op. cit.
contemporary society, as has our understanding of the persona or dominant image of a popular performer and the way in which their attachment to a film might alter its aesthetic. Because particular sonic signs and codes provide access to specific auditory cultures, film is able to hail specific audiences through its use, and the way in which it uses particular types of popular music. The attachment of a popular musician to the role of film scorer can provide contextual direction for audiences, allowing them an unspoken understanding of a film’s political or aesthetic agenda. Pop music configures a film with a more opaque sonic narration than the overbearing saturation of an orchestrated score.

Director Allison Anders comments:

I think there is little place any more for the classic film scores. Film has become so coded now that you don’t need as much for the emotions to come through. Sometimes you have to work with rock musicians, in terms of pacing and stuff like that because I find that they understand the feelings a whole lot better. There’s a kind of innocence that doesn’t crowd, they don’t add on so much that you’re distanced from the feelings.123

Although this is a valid perspective, the popular film score is still capable of change and flexibility, in genre, instrumentation, and cross-media linkages. It can be loose and atmospheric, it can be literal and specific; it can be classy, crass, detached or overbearing. So can film. It is all of these things because of the passions and visions of those involved.

Through various case studies and an engagement with auteur theory, this chapter has proven that when that involvement extends itself into the realm of popular music, the results are affected by the parameters of that discourse. Auteurism is employed, though not in traditional terms. The image, aesthetic and public perception of an artist who contributes to a film in the capacity of film scorer dilutes auteur theory by plunging it into the matrix of fragmented contemporary film production and promotion. Nonetheless,

123 Allison Anders in Romney & Wooton, op. cit. p. 137
these elements are essential in understanding the convergence of popular musicians and film scores. The popular musician can provide an approach towards sound design or song-structure that reflects not only upon the film to which it is attached, but also to the synergy between the film’s structural make-up and thematic content and that musician’s output. The most effective pop music film scores register on a visceral level as much as the images they accompany. At their best, they compliment and nourish the fabric of a text. Alan Rudolph states in this context that,

You can make an argument that music is the soul of the film. In movies it’s like a flavouriser – it heightens, it sharpens, and it’s contradictory presentation of action and emotion. Sometimes the best things that work in film are things that are undercurrents and other meanings, and music allows you to do that more than almost anything because you don’t have to explain anything. It instantly becomes an emotional event.124

Popular film music is an emotional as well as a cultural event. Although structurally the viewer registers the way in which sonic motifs relate to visual cues, the awareness of the individuals who have created these sonic motifs, as well as an understanding of the context of their previous work allows for a complex rendering of the film’s aesthetic world and the way in which the score contributes to it. A balance is required between text and context, to ensure that the contribution made by a musician does not overwhelm the signification system of a film. The film and its score must operate structurally and emotionally, regardless of the viewer’s knowledge of the film’s composer. An intimate understanding of the world of the film is required, and the pop film scorer’s contribution needs to provide a voice for that world. When it works, the results transcend the film to which they are linked, drawing on popular memories and tangible connections to a sustained cultural identity to provide a film with a recognizable voice.

124 Alan Rudolph in Romney & Wooton, op. cit. p. 119
Section Four

“Filth is My Politics, Filth is My Life!”
Trash culture is the semiotic currency of disenfranchised youth. Pop music, drugs, youth, sexuality, and the potent effects of media images upon social consciousness have assumed a satirical self-mocking irony, tempered by the cynical disinterest of underground culture. The view outside of economically determined and mass consumed culture is occupied by those who exist away from its aesthetics and ideologies. This space, identity and positioning is often punctuated by contempt, ridicule or vague indifference.

For those who affirm distinct discursive systems and aesthetic preferences, the ‘mainstream’ represents little more than a vacuous mélange of redundant politics and fetishes. For those who have their own fetishes, acts of transgression, outsider culture and trash politics are far more appealing. As Thornton suggests,

Undergrounds denote exclusive worlds whose main point may not be elitism but whose parameters often relate to particular crowds.\(^3\)

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Resistance exists in order to offer alternatives to the dominant. Cinematically, the avant-garde does not exist as an entity separate and utterly removed from the Hollywood production system. It can be viewed as an alternative where the aesthetic approaches and structural invention established by the avant-garde trickles into the dominant polemics of mainstream filmmaking. The avant-garde is defined as that which is reflexive, groundbreaking and ahead of its time⁴. This cultural collage necessitates an awareness by avant-garde practitioners of the political and aesthetic purposes of trash culture, which often refers to popular culture as opposed to outsider culture, as well as a desire to experiment, improvise and push structural boundaries. It is this willingness to experiment which informs the notion of transgression, which in the context of this argument can be defined as any act which violates normality as defined by social structures and hierarchies. This concept of transgression has been utilized by filmmakers in various ways, but most importantly as a rhetoric which informs their work.

Through an engagement with the history of transgressive filmmaking from Kenneth Anger through John Waters to the Cinema of Transgression based in New York in the 1980s and 1990s, this chapter analyses the ways in which resistant ideologies inform the relationship between popular music and the cinematic avant-garde. The aims of this chapter are to define and locate various definitions of trash, which will be acheived

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through a negotiation with Bordieu’s notion of class and taste, to establish a lineage of artistic influence in the realm of transgressive filmmaking and to monitor the interaction between this resistant form of social comment and the aesthetic concerns of commodified youth culture.

Surrealist film is a relevant touchstone for those operating within the contemporary avant-garde, as it communicates itself through experimentation, violent and sexualized imagery and overarching abstraction which belies traditional notions of realism in both form and content. The surreal also necessitates an awareness of not only the structural hierarchies involved in image production, but also in the act of producing and presenting images for an audience. Bunuel and Dali’s *Un Chien Andalou* is the most renowned text from the surrealist film movement. Curtis explains the film’s structural rhetoric.

In the working out of the plot, every idea of a rational aesthetic or other preoccupation with technical matters was rejected as irrelevant. The result is a film deliberately anti-lastic, anti-artistic, considered by traditional canons. The plot is the result of a CONSCIOUS psychic automatism, and, to that extent, it does not attempt to recount a dream, although it profits by a mechanism analogous to that of dreams.

The film’s barrage of images is more concerned with the act of representation and the confluence of image than with narrative structure or cause-and-effect. *Un Chien Andalou* is an exemplary blueprint for experimental approaches to the representation of images.

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In its plural politics, loss of grand narratives and levelling of cultural value, contemporary experimental film carries a silent disclaimer that the act of watching is as political as the processes of producing, distributing and exhibiting.

The very idea of making or using a film as a means of exploring dimensions of the film apparatus is a confrontation of the conventional assumption, implicitly accepted by movie producers and moviegoers alike, that the cinema is a “neutral” technology to be enjoyed without question and without investigation, and that, therefore, any attempt to draw sustained attention to the means of production of the film image is unnecessary, pretentious, “boring”.8

McDonald infers that films which reveal their consciousness of the discursive narratives of traditional modes of production and exhibition and purposely subvert them are often branded by dominant culture as pretentious.9 In utilizing this perspective a specific aesthetic or political disposition is required in, which is why the avant-garde remains untethered to dominant culture until shifts in popular consciousness allow for it to be incorporated.

Film is a fetishized medium that carries with it a history of audience interaction based on the obsessive nature of cult. This situation is difficult to articulate in terms of formal, structural elements or narrative flow and thus, it is often left to the abstractions of surrealism to comment on the processes of desire and their affiliations with the cult of filmic texts.

Surrealist film’s imitation of the discourse of the unconscious once again has the paradoxical effect of making the spectator more conscious of the processes that produce desire.10

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This obsession not only operates within the discourses of desire and fetish, but also incorporates aesthetic excess and the compulsive and manic consumption of an object of desire – whether a person, a politics or an abstraction or representation of something less articulate. Surrealist film’s revelry in formations of desire links itself to the structural and polemical awareness that the avant-garde celebrates.

The Surrealists exposed what other filmmakers tried to hide: the underlying structure of the fetish and its role in the creation of desire. When the cinema is a fetish, when it only manipulates the desires of its audience, it cannot possibly reveal its fetish structure as well. But when the cinema ruptures the identification between spectator and image, the fetish function of the institution crumbles as well.\(^\text{11}\)

The avant-garde carries a tradition of self-awareness that has transferred into popular culture and which draws inspiration from its politics. The awareness of mainstream mores and taboos and the willingness of alternative cultures to break them, informs the cult text. This evasion of traditional cinematic structure also endears the cult text to small, specific audiences.

What the film cultist embraces is a form that, in its very difference, transgresses, violates our sense of the reasonable. It crosses boundaries of time, custom, form, and – many might add – good taste. And this is the case whether we are talking about classical films that have been resurrected by a special audience or the popular “midnight movies.”\(^\text{12}\)

The “midnight movies” to which Telotte refers have an unquestionable link to the avant-garde and the realm of underground cinema. Cult film often embraces aesthetic difference and employs avant-garde and surrealist techniques as well as utilizing political

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\(^{11}\) Williams, op. cit. p. 219

paradigms such as subversion and transgression in order to convey the experience of
difference from that which is mundane, accepted and taken for granted.

The avant-garde utilizes disparate elements of culture, meshing fragments belonging to
aesthetic realms that may ordinarily appear polarized, in an effort to critique dominant
meaning systems. This juxtaposition is where an awareness of the political and aesthetic
traditions of the mainstream or the popular and its desire to manipulate them becomes
practiced as opposed to inherent. Rock music – itself a genre steeped in collage and
fusion – has often been incorporated into the aesthetic and ideological approach of
experimental and avant-garde filmmakers. The reverse is also true. Specific rock
performers have become enamoured of the dissonance offered by the avant-garde and
have attempted to imbibe their own creations with its experimental approach, structural
invention and antagonistic ideology.

There are various definitions of ‘trash’ that can be used to describe and articulate the
mode of socio-cultural politics embellished in subversive culture and acts of cultural
transgression. Trash culture is often, due to its low-production values and amateurish
approach, ignored by corporatized culture. A more common term for these kinds of films
is ‘underground filmmaking’.

Underground films or, what most people think of underground films are films that
were made on a very cheap budget with unknown people that sort of play
sporadically - you don’t really know where they’re playing, you have to sort of
look for them. No matter how much the film cost people really don’t care anymore,
it’s just got to make it on its own. So, I think the term has sort of lost its meaning. I
guess it’s experimental type films, independent films, any film that’s made without major studio backing or made, sort of hit and run.\textsuperscript{13}

Gestated from this ‘hit and run’ approach, a trash aesthetic emerges where that which is dismissed as vulgar, brash, offensive or lascivious is celebrated and reified through acts of transgressive behaviour and representation. Underground film, cult film and avant-garde film all have histories that exist outside of the traditional modes of film language, due to their content, but also largely due to their appeal to and popularity amongst cultural groups whose politics and tastes are ignored on celluloid.

\[T\]he conjunction of a limited audience and a limited, even unconventionally measured success becomes significant. For it underscores how that “love” aspect of the cult film functions: it works in a realm of difference – from normal film viewing practices and from marketing customs.\textsuperscript{14}

The cinema of transgression is facilitated by underground networks and a genuine interest and passion in subverting social, cultural and aesthetic norms. Through this transgression, communities of artists, filmmakers and musicians have created bizarre and politically resistive pieces of cinema, branded by the mainstream as ‘trash culture’. Often these films are gestated and formed through a genuine desire to create subversive, genre-dodging filmic statements. It is this DIY approach that underground filmmaking shares with the political rhetoric of rock’n’roll.

There is an affinity between the revolutionary politics that rock offers and the freedom, release and transformative power of acts of transgression. The act of performing rock


\textsuperscript{14} Telotte, op. cit. p. 7
music is often transgressive itself15 and although it has become almost mundane in its classification as the cultural realm of disaffected youth, rock music often utilizes the ideology of transgression. The politics of transgression are inherent in both. Often the two are not mutually exclusive.

For here the young have declared their independence from received wisdom and ‘immutable’ patterns, (such as competitiveness, violence, and the desire for bourgeois living), creating their ‘alternative life styles’ with a gusto and consistency that unites – as does the avant-garde in art – form and content and hence becomes doubly dangerous.16

It is this element of ‘danger’ and subversion that links rock’n’roll discourse with experimental and underground filmmaking. The DIY aesthetic and the discontentment with dominant institutions and establishment figures spurred the punk movement and the same can be said for experimental and underground filmmaking. Disaffection with the representation of cultural categorization will always necessitate argument, debate and resistance. Underground filmmaking articulates that which is silent in the mainstream. It bears no relation to cultural hegemony. It exists so far outside of the complacency of dominant imagery that when it appears, its very absence up to that point becomes palpable and glaring.

In Deathtripping, Sargeant defines and explains cinematic transgression through a group of filmmakers whose work has tested the limits of cinematic vision. Attaining cult status

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due to their virtual ignorance by the production and marketing systems of mainstream culture, Sargeant’s book addresses,

primarily New York based, transgressive, underground filmmakers whose work, while radically differing in style and content, shared/shares a desire to challenge and confront the audience, society, and perhaps sometimes even themselves.\textsuperscript{17}

The most prolific of these New York filmmakers are Nick Zedd and Richard Kern, who are also the primary focus of Sargeant’s book. Zedd’s cinematic output includes \textit{Geek Maggot Bingo}\textsuperscript{18}, \textit{Police State}\textsuperscript{19}, \textit{Whoregasm}\textsuperscript{20}, and the film that is considered by fans of transgressive cinema as his artistic apex, \textit{War Is Menstrual Envy}\textsuperscript{21}. Zedd’s films are primarily concerned with the generation gap that punk attempted but often failed to articulate, offering grotesque imagery dealing with the consequences of Nuclear catastrophe, sexual subversion and transgression, authoritarian exploitation and abuse, and the socio-political industrial complex of contemporary urban life.

Zedd’s first film, \textit{They Eat Scum}\textsuperscript{22}, was shot on Super-8 and screened at Max’s Kansas City in 1979. The film was a campy, satirical romp, with elements of family melodrama, juvenile delinquency and post-apocalyptic schlock. Main protagonist Suzy Putrid kills her family and her Death Rock band the Mental Deficients cause a nuclear meltdown. Years later, the legion of Death Rockers who have taken control must fight off radioactive mutants to retain their supremacy. Included in the film is “slice’n’dice cannibalism, oral bestiality and a fake punk being forced to eat a live rat.”\textsuperscript{23} The aim of

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\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Geek Maggot Bingo}. Written and directed by Nick Zedd. Weirdo Productions, 1983.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Whoregasm}. Written and directed by Nick Zedd, 1988.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{War Is Menstrual Envy}. Written and directed by Nick Zedd, 1992.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{They Eat Scum}. Written and directed by Nick Zedd, 1979.
\textsuperscript{23} Sargeant, op. cit. p. 25
\end{flushleft}
such a film is primarily to shock. The inclusion of as much taboo-breaking as possible, as well as lashings of rock music and an overwhelming indulgence in youth culture in all its debauchery, sets the cinematic world of transgression distinctly apart from other forms of filmmaking. There is an indulgence in exploitation, rebellion and trash aesthetics and a propensity for revelling in the spaces outside dominant values. This is a cinema of anger, disaffection and disillusionment. Its uber-punk political trajectory is far more extreme than other forms of resistive cinema, for the sheer obscenity and depravity on offer.

**Mark Doucett:** Basically, in one sentence, give us the definition of the Cinema of Transgression.

**Nick Zedd:** Fuck you.24

The political purpose of the Cinema of Transgression is to overturn the dominant moral codes that dominate contemporary culture, as well as the complacency, ignorance and desire for the mundane and familiar inherent in it. This kind of politics presupposes the notion that the act of viewing something inherently brings with it the responsibility of commenting or forming an opinion. Representing that which is deemed obscene or depraved by those in positions of authority brings with it the necessary question of purpose. Also a prolific writer, Zedd published the ‘Cinema of Transgression Manifesto’ under the moniker of Orion Jeriko, which explained its exact aims and intentions.

It delineated a clear break with ‘70s avant-garde and film-school generated movies and criticism. Nietzschean in tone the manifesto consisted of a series of aphorisms delineating an aesthetic of shock and humour (directly revealing the Cinema of Transgression’s debt to John Waters) which must challenge all values in order to be truly liberatory.25

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24 Marc Doucet. ‘Nick Zedd Interview’. *Sub-Terrenea.* Original publishing details unavailable. Repr. in Sargeant, op. cit. p. 27

25 Sargeant, op. cit. p. 28
The argument that art’s propensity for confrontation alleviates its engagement in exploitation or titillation is abolished by the Cinema of Transgression, as acts of titillation and exploitation are the sole purpose of this movement.

Because of its subversive content, the cinema of directors Zedd and others often has restrictions placed upon its release, exhibition and availability to global audiences.

Yes, Underground Films do exist, and as we who have been suppressed by the indifference of the bastards in the clouds are well aware, there have always been alternatives to the bubble-gum of the mind peddled by Hollywood and Europe for our consumption. And for the time being their capital is New York… Underground Films are only available by mail from New York. Since they are banned everywhere, they are almost never seen anywhere. Everyone is afraid to show them.26

Censorship has ensured that cinematic releases for transgressive films within the United States are not possible due to their provocative nature and incendiary content. Cinematic release in other countries is often also impossible. There is a mail order video market for such films, however due to the differing video formats and regional encoding of various countries this has ensured that the circulating versions of transgressive films are often third or fourth grade copies27.

During the beginning stages of the cinematic underground in the United States, the only way to view avant-garde and experimental films was either in college film clubs or in midnight screenings. The ‘midnight movie’ became a phenomenon unto itself, linked inexorably to cult film and exploitation cinema. Midnight movie houses became the

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27 An argument can be made that the added hiss and carrier noises of these copied tapes adds to their mystique and to the appeal of this form of expression which does not exist in a stable, perfectly transferable state of noiseless simulation.
spaces in which cult materialized, with films such as John Waters’ *Pink Flamingos*\textsuperscript{28}, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*\textsuperscript{29} and *A Clockwork Orange*\textsuperscript{30} gaining status through popular and repeated screenings. These theatres were also the spaces within which trash cinema manifested itself, as the avant-garde was screened alongside exploitation film as the politics between the two genres merged. This amalgam is often referred to as ‘paracinema’

‘Paracinema’ is “a most elastic textual category” and is “less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol, a counter aesthetic turned sub-cultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus.”\textsuperscript{31} Sconce notes “the caustic rhetoric of paracinema suggests a pitched battle between a guerrilla band of cult viewers and an elite cadre of would-be taste makers. Certainly, the paracinematic audience likes to see itself as a disruptive force in the cultural and intellectual marketplace.”\textsuperscript{32}

Although politically linked in their rejection of good taste and heterogeneous sensibilities, the experimental and the exploitative often provided counter-arguments to each other’s quandaries with mass representation. The same formation can be witnessed in rock, where the experimental or resistive is commodified and distributed to mass audiences as popular entertainment.

Whilst exploitation cinema was viewed by established cultural codes as bombastic, crass titillation, the avant-garde can be seen to have held this view of these same established cultural codes. Transgressive cinema’s willful ignorance of cultural conservatism,

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\textsuperscript{28} *Pink Flamingos*. Written and directed by John Waters. Dreamland Productions, 1972.

\textsuperscript{29} *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Directed by Jim Sharman. Written by Jim Sharman & Richard O’Brian. 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Fox, 1975.


\textsuperscript{31} Jeffrey Sconce. ‘Trashing the academy: taste, excess and an emerging politics of cinematic style’ in *Screen*. Vol. 36 (4), Winter, 1995. p. 372

manifested in different aesthetic manners, linked this particular type of cinema to the avant-garde.

And this is the basic paradox of exploitation cinema: it is precisely its ability to resist and escape established networks of theoretical and historical discourse that makes it of fundamental interest and importance to those discourses, even as that same elusive quality condemns it to remain in the province on cinephilia.33

Jonathan Ross argues that the label of exploitation cinema has been applied to filmic texts that attempt to “grab an audience by offering something unavailable elsewhere – films that pander to our baser instincts, pique our curiosity, salaciously sell us the seamier side of life, but do so knowingly and for one basic reason – to make money.”34 It could be very easily argued that this is the primary motivational force for the majority of Hollywood produced ‘blockbusters’ that abandon character development in favour of explosions and narrative drive for body counts, as explained by Pauline Kael.

The scenes of carnage are big blowouts – parties for the audience to gasp at in surprise and pleasure… the writers and directors no longer create different emotional tones for the deaths of good and bad characters. The fundamental mechanism of melodrama has broken down35

The line is difficult to draw between mainstream and trash culture. Often the most apparent signifier is politics, and often these politics are linked to a socio-economic hierarchy that delineates class and taste. Watson states,

The notion that the ‘taste’ of an educated ‘elite’ with refined sensibilities constitutes the litmus test of film appreciation is just one instance of a complex set of socio-cultural propositions determined by equally diverse ideological and economic factors that conspire to regulate what is on and what is off the critical agenda.36

33 Watson, op. cit. p. 66-67
36 Watson, op. cit. p. 68-69
That which is deemed trash through cultural hierarchies and popular discourses is often rooted structurally and formally in notions of the popular and is often referred to as belonging to the base cultural modes of working class culture. Much of this trash culture was shaped by and actively expressed class difference.

Historically those who could afford the luxuries of middle and upper class lifestyles were also able to luxuriate in the standards of the dominant moral order, whereas those who struggled economically were forced into what Bourdieu refers to as a "taste of necessity". From ‘burlesque’ to World Championship Wrestling to Jerry Springer, much working class culture has been branded trash culture and its revelry in ethically questionable content and borderline exploitation has facilitated this branding. Bourdieu emphasizes that,

[N]othing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works, the platitude for taking a specifically aesthetic point of view on objects already constituted aesthetically – and therefore put forward for the admiration of those who have learned to recognise the signs of the admirable – and the even rarer capacity to constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary or even ‘common’ (because they are appropriated, aesthetically or otherwise, by the ‘common people’) or to apply the principles of a ‘pure’ aesthetic in the most everyday choices of everyday life, in cooking, dress or decoration, for example.

Bourdieu offers that the working classes are almost handed-down a specific aesthetic predisposition and their experiences of working class culture are tempered and influenced by this. This approach is essentially reductionist, and facilitates a view that escape from class structure is impossible. One of the central tenets of much underground filmmaking

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37 Bourdieu, 1986. op. cit.
38 World Championship Wrestling is both a televised programme and the production company responsible for that programme as well as a number of televised specials screened between 1992 and 2000.
40 Bourdieu, 1986. op. cit. p. 40
is its revelry in the elements of working class culture that are tied to exploitation and questionable moral codes. Utilizing Bakhtin’s theory on the grotesque and carnivalesque, Barbara Creed explains the rejection of the dominant moral order in the horror film:

> Like carnival, the horror film mocks and derides all established values and proprieties; the clean and proper body, the desire for immortality, the law and the institutions of church and family, the sanctity of life. It is this aspect of the horror film that offers immense pleasure to the spectator – particularly the youthful audience.

Underground filmmaking and transgressive filmmaking are linked aesthetically and politically to surrealism and the avant-garde, which search outside of class distinction for new approaches to new subjects, whether they are linked to the working or middle classes. Hebdige summarises this process, whereby hierarchies of taste and delineated cultural concerns are subverted, even abolished.

>T]he traditional hierarchical ranking of art and design – a ranking established during the Renaissance – moving down in descending order of merit, importance and spiritual value from fine art through graphics to the decorative arts has been overthrown and cast aside. And with this, another implication – that the disruption of established formal values signals the collapse not only of aesthetic boundaries but of the principle of exclusivity – of social segregation – which those boundaries are erected to maintain: the return (yet again) of the repressed: art’s sacred vessel seized by a gang of low-born pirates.

Often the specific sub-cultural origins of trash culture are those of outsider culture. The cliques of artists and art movements that evolve from specific historical and geographical circumstances create unique statements that reverberate throughout popular memory. The noise rock of Sonic Youth was borne from a linear tradition of adrenalized punk rhetoric

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and the artistic influence of the avant-garde that could never have arisen from anywhere other than New York in the early 1980s. Likewise, John Waters’ middle class upbringing in suburban Baltimore shaped his perceptions of popular aesthetics and provoked his satirical filmic representations of middle-class Americana.

Trash culture’s affiliation with avant-aesthetics occurs on a much smaller scale than the production systems of corporatized cultural manufacture. There is a greater opportunity for cliques of artists who operate within varying media to collaborate. Often particular filmmakers are launched into the realm of notoriety through their associations with rock acts, and vice versa. It may be pertinent to ask whether Warhol’s art of celebrity, including *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable*[^44], which can be viewed merely as a single shot film of a band rehearsal, was responsible for the cult of the Velvet Underground. Similarly, it may be pertinent to ask whether Adam Ant or Siouxsie Sioux would have any major label interest in their respective bands had they not appeared briefly in Derek Jarman’s defiant punk war cry *Jubilee*[^45]. Popular culture and popular memory have been altered because of these associations and as a result, the connection between transgressive film and popular music is contextualized through these intertextual and intra-media relationships.

True to the manner in which regional art movements operate, transgressive filmmakers become known to wider audiences through their connection to popular musicians. Its pairing with popular music allows for transgressive cinema to be consumed by more

widely distributed media markets. Of all of Richard Kearn’s work in film and photography, only his cover art for Sonic Youth’s *EVOL* album, itself an independent release predating their major label signing by four years, and his music-video for their song *Scooter + Jinx* are available within mass-markets via the production systems associated with major record labels. Kearn had previously shot the video for Sonic Youth’s *Death Valley 69*, which also starred musician and songwriter Lydia Lunch and featured footage which later appeared in his film *Submit To Me Now*, as well as stock footage of missiles and the members of the band dressed as members of the Manson family and their victims. This collage-like appropriation of disparate imagery fits the band’s conceptually diverse avant-rock, which would segue between traditional song structures and feedback-drenched noise art.

Even Kenneth Anger, whose use of unlicensed pop songs to score his films, became one of the most influential aesthetic practices within the American film underground eventually broke away from such, and by the time he made *Invocation of My Demon Brother* in 1969 he had Mick Jagger supply the score in the form of improvisation with a Moog synthesizer. This instance was not the only time Jagger’s music was used in conjunction with subversive acts committed to celluloid. Otto Muehl, performance artist and Viennese ‘aktionist’, used the music of The Rolling Stones, namely ‘(I Can’t Get No)

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Satisfaction\textsuperscript{51} to score the filmic documentation of one of his ‘aktions’ whereby an orgy took place with the performers defecating and urinating on one another.

Muehl has no time for film aesthetics, his films are not always well made and are becoming stylistically repetitive, but this means nothing to him. \textit{Sodoma} (1969) is a … compilation of earlier ‘materialaktions’, where the participants perform every conceivable outrage upon each other, killing animals and inflicting severe pain in an orgy of tortures, destructive anally-obsessed sex. The theory is one of catharsis – expiation almost – a purging of collective sexual guilt.\textsuperscript{52}

Although Muehl’s use of the Stones is a far cry from the mutual appreciation of most film/music collaborations, it shows the ends to which the politics of transgression and subversive exploration unite those disenfranchized with contemporary conservatism and dominant social mores.

Creative admiration ensures that a politics shared, particularly a resistive one, is often likely to provide camaraderie and incendiary notoriety. Speaking about his infamous and influential \textit{Pink Flamingos}, John Waters comments that,

\begin{quote}
[N]o one sent me resumes, I mean people signed up like a crime, like “I’ll drive the getaway car, I’ll eat shit, I’ll show my dick, I’ll show my asshole.” It wasn’t about a resume, it was about “Let’s do something hideous - let’s strike!” And that’s the spirit that it was made in, as if we were all committing a comedy crime. And I think you can feel that when you watch it.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Warhol and his menagerie of artists, junkies, would be stars and transvestites marked the beginning of a cultural movement that would perpetuate itself through a consistent commitment to the structural and political reinvention of art and what defines it. Warhol begat an entire cinematic culture that carried forward the work of Kenneth Anger and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52]Curtis, op. cit. p. 154
\end{footnotes}
included Waters in Baltimore and later an entire group of filmmakers devoted to political transgression through cinema.

The role that Kenneth Anger’s films played politically in the representation of queer sexuality on celluloid is unquestionable. *Scorpio Rising* and *Kustom Kar Kommandos* are amongst the first instances of alternative sexualities being represented cinematically through the rock’n’roll ideology, with facets of youth culture such as popular music and resistive subcultures making defiant appeals to assert their relevance and significance. The alignment of the resistive energy of rock with the cinematic form, exemplified by Anger, provided a new discursive framework, and an expansion of the language of subculture. Rock and the politics of youth disenfranchisement provided underground filmmakers with an existent cultural context to which they could attach their work in order to perpetuate their own form of political change in cinematic terms.

Kenneth’s probably the seminal figure in American Underground film. Anger’s movies - they’re very autobiographical, they’re very shocking sexually, they have great use of music; they actually got commercial run. When *Scorpio Rising* opened, things started to change.56

That Anger’s films were granted commercial release is an indication that underground cinema was garnering a positive response from audiences and that there was in fact a viable market for such challenging and bold cinematic statements. Anger’s films work more within the realm of artistic statement than as investigations of film form or experiments in generic structure. Repetition is a favoured aesthetic approach, which gives

56 Bill Landis in *Divine Trash*, op. cit.
his films an element of voyeuristic intrigue and compulsiveness. His lingering camerawork and minimal editing add to the exploration of desire and fetishization.

*Kustom Kar Kommandos* is a three-minute film featuring images of two hot-rod enthusiasts, a potent image of sexualized 1950s masculinity, detailing and performing maintenance on a car. The way in which the camera lingers on their working limbs, chest and thighs and avoids their faces as they polish and caresses their machine is a particularly lurid and highly fetishized reinterpretation of the dominant ideology of masculinity presented by the biker and ‘rev head’ image and their place within twentieth century Americana. To further steep the images in a haze of popular cultural nostalgia, the film features girl group The Parris Sisters performing ‘Dream Lover’.

*Scorpio Rising* also invests in this imagery, with long tracking shots of hot rod engines and leather-clad bikers inter-cut with a small boy playing with wind-up toy cars and bikes. The opening of the film focuses on the ritual of bikers assembling their machines before dressing in their leather and shades, with languid pans up and down their bodies. This homo-erotic reinscription of dominant tropes of masculinity and the rituals that accompany it are further pushed into the realm of subversion with the following scene which attaches various popular cultural references to discourses of fetishistic nostalgia and pop paraphernalia. The scene presents another biker lounging in his room enjoying comic book images of boyhood mateship, a television image of Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, pin-ups of James Dean, badges and skull-rings and Elvis Presley’s ‘Devil In

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Disguise’59. Later scenes are inter-cut with stock footage of religious epics featuring Jesus and his disciples; a motorcycle race is juxtaposed with Nazi imagery including stills of Hitler and swastikas, and an orgy takes place inside the biker headquarters, with the pace of cutting increasing to an intense crescendo scored by The Surfari’s ‘Wipeout’60. The film ends with a dead biker lit only by a red flashing police light and siren. A brazen and uncompromising artistic statement, Scorpio Rising has been attributed with indisputable influence in terms of contemporary visual literacy. Matthew Wilder states,

Kenneth Anger's remarkable 1964 short film [is] the barbaric birth yawp of modern (and postmodern) cinema as we know it. Ostensibly a fetishistic self-generated porn reel, made, as Genet wrote his fiction, for the maker's masturbatory pleasure, SCORPIO RISING pulls together unlicensed pop songs with obsessive images of hunky guys, leather, chrome, comic strips, and death, to create a code for the programming of music, picture, and unspoken content that would go on to inform everything you see from Nicolas Roeg to VH-1.61

Anger’s films not only introduced a new way of using the surrealist engagement with the unconscious, they reinscribed notions of masculinity and subverted traditional sexual politics through a self-aware engagement with established culture, pushing the modernist inclinations of surrealism into the realm of pop art. Undoubtedly influential, as emphasized by Hoberman, Scorpio Rising is one of the most widely recognizable films to emerge from the underground.

With its self-conscious media quotations, mock heroic view of urban youth culture, knowing homoeroticism, and smashing use of rock’n’roll, Scorpio Rising burst dramatically on the American scene. If its acceptance was not completely universal – the Los Angeles Police Department confiscated the print during its initial midnight run, and Anger was sued by the American Nazi party for ‘desecrating’ the

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Unrepentant, antagonistic and decidedly camp, Anger’s filmmaking is incendiary, purposely self-aware and culturally loaded. The distinction between modernism, the surrealist mould of filmmaking and the underground or avant-garde approach lies primarily within this element of self-awareness and intertextual referentiality.

Whilst other modernist texts utilize parody, which seeks to shadow the narrative and structural elements of other texts, surrealist texts, though still modernist, break from standard narratives and linearity, utilizing imagery, structural approaches and even aesthetic practices associated with other generic forms and individual texts and rearranging them to suit their own purposes. This practice of pastiche or collage is inherently liquid in nature and was utilized in pop art and continues in contemporary popular texts. Lyotard offers “a culture that gives precedence to the narrative form doubtless has no more of a need for special procedures to authorize its narratives than it has to remember its past.”\textsuperscript{63} This is the primary distinction between parody and pastiche. Parody utilizes the familiar, shadowing and recreating, allowing for new variations on existent forms to emerge. Pastiche carries with it a self-referentiality and awareness of existent forms. It indulges in a nostalgia of which modernist texts are not capable. As


Oliver explains in his comparison of Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose*\(^{64}\) and Bernardo Bertolucci’s celluloid epic *1900*\(^{65}\), this process,

> does not concern narrated time (days in the novel as opposed to decades in the film) or the immediate epistemic, semiotic or social significance of their respective themes, but rather the different, anti-thetical attitudes, experiences, beliefs; in short, the alternative, recurrent possibilities of human existence which constitute the fabric of their distinct narratives.\(^{66}\)

The reinterpretation and reinscription of existent texts relies on nostalgia; the indulgence in the sentiment, texture, timbre and grain of voice, image or aesthetic. This politics of recyclability is what made pop art and its consummate reliance on kitsch and surface so viable and provocative. Pop art demonstrated a shallowness and debt to other forms and this admittance became its primary source of vision. Rock admits a similar debt, trading on influence and familiarity in order to establish new musical orders through the reinterpretation of established genres and sounds. It is because of this use of pastiche that rock belongs to the pop sensibility.

The most recognizable name to emerge from the 1960s pop art movement in New York was Andy Warhol. Utilizing a range of media including screen-prints, painting and film, Warhol created and facilitated a community of artists. As opposed to a singular artistic identity, Warhol existed as a catalyst for art, allowing it to happen around him and surrounding himself with as many beautiful, talented and intriguing people as possible. His films reflect this fascination with others – a consummate voyeur he would often merely leave his camera running in order to catch the unprompted spontaneity of random

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\(^{66}\) Bert Oliver. *Projections: Philosophical Themes on Film*. Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth Press, 1996. p. 23
action. His static approach to capturing images, which pre-empted reality TV by decades, involved single takes and no camera movement, with such films as *Sleep*\(^{67}\), *Eat*\(^{68}\), *Haircut*\(^{69}\), *Blow Job*\(^{70}\) and *Empire*\(^{71}\) exemplifying this technique.

The formal statement in these silent films is everything: the confrontation of the audience with an image that changed in conventional terms only marginally and only over a long period of time; once again, audiences were outraged. It was, however, an affirmation of the principle of non-activity and his faith in the superficial aspect of seen objects\(^{72}\).

*The Exploding Plastic Inevitable* was shot in an identical fashion and was a filmed collaboration with The Velvet Underground that also involved lighting, projection, dancers and other effects. Lou Reed and his band had become associated with Warhol, playing at Factory parties and allowing him to produce their first album, *The Velvet Underground & Nico*\(^{73}\). *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable* was another of these parties featuring the Velvets. Jonas Mekas explains the rhetoric of this ‘happening’.

The film-maker here became a conductor, having at his fingertips not only all the different creative components – like sound controls, a rock band, slide projectors, movie projectors, lighting – but also all the extreme personalities of each of the operators of each piece of the equipment.\(^{74}\)

Warhol’s work with the members of the Factory revolved significantly around personalities and the concept that art, fashion and attention had the capacity to change the individual, to allow them to transcend themselves. This celebration of surfaces, of that which is unnatural, performed and explicitly fake is central to the concerns of trash

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\(^{72}\) Curtis, op. cit. pp. 152-153


\(^{74}\) Jonas Mekas. ‘Notes after reseeing the movies of Andy Warhol’ in *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*. London: British Film Institute, 1989. p. 32
culture. Trash culture is an unabashedly exaggerated snarl performed metaphorically for the sheer effect of inciting shock and as Jonas Mekas pointed out, indulging in the ego.

The strength of Plastic Inevitables, and where they differ from all other intermedia shows and groups, is that they are dominated by the Ego. Warhol, this equivocal, passive magnet, has attracted to himself the most egocentric personalities and artists. The auditorium, every aspect of it – singers, light throwers, strobe operators, dancers – at all times are screaming with an almost screeching, piercing personality pain. I say pain: it could also be called desperation. In any case, it is the last stand of the Ego, before it either breaks down or goes to the other side.\(^5\)

The indulgence and revelry in and celebration of the ego primarily drives a significant amount of underground art. Warhol carried on from the deliberately laboured hedonism of Anger, popularizing pop and revolutionizing artistic politics and introducing a camp sensibility in the process. The performativity of camp also provided a link via situationism to the surreal, and its self-reflexivity, which became a notable feature of camp as it was utilized by Anger, Warhol and others such as Jack Smith\(^6\) and the Kuchar brothers\(^7\).

The notion of camp was taken to extremes in the 1970s by John Waters, whose upbringing in suburban Baltimore set the platform for his fascination with subverting middle-class values and exploring the depths of bad taste. His films, especially those made early in his career usually take the form of domestic melodramas, pushed into the realm of satire by the use of non-professional actors, crude humour and handheld camera work. The infamous *Pink Flamingos*, shot in 1973 and banned from mass distribution

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\(^6\) Jack Smith’s most notable film was *Flaming Creatures*. Written and directed by Jack Smith, 1963., which took the self-reflexivity of situationism and surrealism and translated it through queer sexuality to inform the notion of a camp sensibility.

\(^7\) Mike and George Kuchar’s *Sins of Fleshapoids*. Directed by George Kuchar. Written by Mike Kuchar and George Kuchar, 1965. is discussed extensively by Sargeant. 1995, op. cit. as having influenced not only John Waters but also the filmmakers of the Cinema of Transgression.
through its inclusion of such acts as vaginal injection of semen by syringe, the killing of a chicken during sex, a singing anus and the infamous coprophagy scene, or as it is more commonly referred to; the scene where Waters’ leading lady Divine eats dog excrement.

Taking the overtly camp style of exploitation filmmakers such as Herschell Gordon Lewis, whose 1963 feature *Blood Feast* was the epitome of low-budget, bad taste schlock-gore, Waters mixed it with the aesthetic of underground filmmaking, which took a radical political stance in heralding diversity, the breaking down of sexual mores and the plurality of contemporary social discourse. Colin MacCabe states,

> What seems positive to me in the commitment to popular culture is that element which is determined to break with any and all of the formulations which depend on a high/low, elite/mass distinction. Those who isolate themselves within the narrow and exclusive traditions of high art, those who glory in the simple popularity of the popular, both effectively ignore the complex way in which traditions and technologies combine to produce audiences. It is in this figuring of different audiences that the political reality of art can be found – the particular way in which an audience is addressed and constituted in relation to the political forms in which it participates.

In reinscribing the oppositional traditions of the experimental underground and populist exploitation Waters heralded a generation of people bored with the bland hippie rhetoric of peace and love and looking for something that spoke to their desire for revolution, which instead of pandering to their leftist sensibilities, packed a punch.

Like many of the underground filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s, Waters began making films on his Super 8 camera, casting his friends and writing the scripts himself. It was through the advocacy of 16 milimeter film stock and to a more amateurish extent Super 8

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filmmaking, through campus film clubs that the underground cinema revolution took its foothold.

The choice by post-war American film-makers of the amateur’s gauge, 16mm, was an important one, for by doing so they consciously cut themselves off from all but non-theatrical exhibition. However, this gesture of defiant independence from the film industry laid open to them the rapidly increasing number of college film societies – the much discussed “college circuit”\(^\text{80}\)

Waters’ early films, up to his last short - *Eat Your Make-up*\(^\text{81}\), were shot on Super 8. Borrowing money from his parents and shooting on weekends over the course of months, he moved into a higher budget threshold with his first colour film and the one that would gain him infamy and cult celebrity status. It was through the underground film clubs and midnight screenings of 16mm avant-garde and experimental films that *Pink Flamingos* took hold of audiences.

Waters’ cinema, as it came into existence, was a mutual hybrid of two markedly disparate film genres: Exploitation and Underground. To any serious film artist the lines between the two were starkly drawn: The Commercial versus the The Personal, Commodity versus Art Object, Job versus Vision. Waters threw all that bullshit out the window and baldly stuffed his movies full of things that excited him and that would give him attention – the thing he wanted most.\(^\text{82}\)

The style and content of Waters’ films, which *Pink Flamingos* typifies, takes its inspiration from a range of sources. Underground film in general can be seen to have been influenced by the avant-garde, in particular the surrealists. However, Waters melded this experimental bent with the burlesque gratuity of Exploitation cinema, in particular the films of Russ Meyer.\(^\text{83}\) In interview, Waters stated,

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\(^\text{80}\) Curtis, op. cit. p. 134
\(^\text{81}\) *Eat Your Make-up*. Written and directed by John Waters. Dreamland Productions, 1968.
I don’t really have an idol. I think Warhol’s… I like Warhol’s films a lot and I think because of him it’s easier for other filmmakers to get their things shown because it’s proved to the distributors that that kind of film can make money, but my idol I guess would have to be the Manson girls and Russ Meyer.  

The campness of Meyers films is manifested in implausible plotlines, extreme violence, raunchy subject matter and bloated sense of self-awareness, which are all elements that pervade Waters’ films. Many, especially Pink Flamingos and its successor Desperate Living, begin as domestic melodramas and quickly snowball into the realm of lurid, absurdist fantasy.

Pink Flamingos concerns the exploits of one Babs Johnson: current holder of the title of ‘Filthiest Person Alive’. Babs, her son Crackers, “travelling companion” Cotton and senile mother Edie are thrown into a tumultuous array of adventures by Raymond and Connie Marble via their challenge of Babs’ title, which involves having their transvestite manservant Channing impregnate women they have locked in their basement. The Marbles adopt the babies out to lesbian couples, and reinvest the profits in pornography shops and schoolyard heroin rings. The purpose of this perverse subject matter is explained by Bourdieu,

The easiest, and so most frequent and most spectacular way to ‘shock the bourgeois’ … is done by conferring aesthetic status on objects or ways of representing them that are excluded by the dominant aesthetic of the time.
Waters’ inclusion of alternate sexualities in his films was a bold move, especially in the early 1970s, when widespread public acceptance of such was relegated to occasional instances and specific locales. For Waters, filmmaking was an opportunity to celebrate his difference, to glorify his predilection towards bad taste and to allow his friends a space within which they could be themselves. Divine; Waters leading lady in Pink Flamingos and “favourite actor in the world” was born Harris Glen Milstead. Giving a transvestite the lead role in a film was, in 1966, when John Waters cast Divine in Roman Candles, unprecedented. Although Waters maintains that he is not a political filmmaker, the positive influence his persistence in allowing cinematic space to those of alternate sexual persuasion has had on the cinematic representation of queer identities can not be denied.

I’m not trying to say anything, I’m just trying to entertain people, make them laugh and uh, give them a little shock value for their money’s worth.

This is the politics of transgression: a non-politics that demands cultural reconfiguration and a new consideration of that which is regarded by dominant social orders as subversive or deviant. By presenting that which resists the moral order as unproblematic, Waters encapsulated the essence of transgression and its relation to conscious and unconscious identities.

The taboo is incomprehensible without the sensibility of transgression. We need no values to protect us from things that we do not feel possible for ourselves as transgressions. Thus, the taboo inscribes the transgression also. What is seductive for us gathers taboos around it, and what is taboo gains, in being prohibited, a

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90 John Waters in Divine Trash, op. cit.
seductive power. Thus, to transgress simultaneously draws us into the social space of values and relates us into the space beyond or before sociality.91

In *Pink Flamingos*, no issue is made of Divine’s gender. The character he plays is female and true to the suspension of cinematic disbelief, all the characters in the film accept Babs as a woman. Her title of ‘Filthiest Person Alive’ adds a connotative subversion that women who look like Divine, or rather men, are dirty, unwholesome and deviant.92 The fact that Babs lovingly cares for her family is given more emotional weight within the narrative than the labelling of her as filthy. The audience is positioned to accept her as the film’s heroine. The deeds committed by the Marbles are illegal and evil, as they knowingly inflict harm upon others for pleasure, whereas Babs and her family are merely content to wallow in their debauched sexuality and devote themselves not to committing filthy deeds so much as to the knowledge of being filthy. They derive simple pleasure from their acts of transgression and are represented as naïve and innocent. Their power and status as protagonists derives from their inherent knowledge of filth and its essence.

As Lemert and Gillan emphasize with reference to Foucault,

> Power... is not merely negative, repressive, and prohibiting, but positive and productive, and explicitly bound in knowledge.93

Waters films reverberate with a power of self-assurance. The power in the knowledge that acceptance is a more positive and practical force than repression allows for the suspension of disbelief at Divine’s gender and the acceptance of the Johnson’s revelry in filth.

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92 Harries analyses Divine’s transvestitism in the context of star persona and the notion of cinematic parody, arguing that Divine is often reduced to the status of “a freak and subversive threat who parodies the social order through a grotesque transformation.” Dan M. Harries. ‘Camping with lady Divine: Star persona and parody’ in *Stars: The Film Reader*. Lucy Fischer & Marcia Landy eds. New York: Routledge, 2004. p. 155
The celebration of filth and debauchery powers a significant portion of transgressive cinema. Waters takes great pride in presenting trailer trash with no inclination whatsoever to be anything other than low-brow, low-class white trash with a penchant for filth and debauchery.

The toughness and meanness of Waters’ world is not unlike that of the characters in the Depression movies of W.C Fields. But the Fieldsian lower class is just a notch above the Watersian: does not admit its rank, insists on its respectability; and thus forgoes the all-out hedonism and slobbiness of Waters’.94

The indulgence of Waters characters’ in their transgressive tastes and behaviours is the heart of Waters’ political rhetoric. This indulgence, as opposed to attempted transcendence of social station and cultural identity, albeit one with anti-hegemonic connotations, is precisely where popular culture made its break from preconceived notions of personal politics. This indulgence also allows the cinema of transgression to claim its importance in and relevance to contemporary cultural representation.

Waters’ legacy would no doubt be as strong today is he had never made another film after Pink Flamingos. Speaking on the personal politics of underground and independent filmmaking, Jim Jarmusch admits a tremendous debt to Waters.

He inspired me certainly to make films my own way and to try to make films with the hope that there might be an audience for a sort of outside kind of filmmaking.95

This kind of praise acknowledges that Waters’ filmmaking is an acquired taste. His scripts are raw and obscene. His early work is visually amateurish, with handheld camera work a constant formal distraction from the otherwise cunningly and cheaply crafted

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95 Jim Jarmusch in *Divine Trash*, op. cit.
filmic space. The performances in his films are always obvious, with clichés treaded pointedly and almost as cues. The overacting belies not only the amateurish look of his work, which it would ordinarily compliment, it transcends the formal limitations of Waters budgetary constraints in order to convey a synthetic cinema; a world so far removed from normality that it achieves the status of a monstrous fairytale.

Sonically, Waters took the same approach as Kenneth Anger, using unlicensed recordings of girl groups and cult rock’n’roll tunes to supply the action of his films with a fitting irony. For example when Babs shoplifts a steak by hiding it between her legs ‘(I’m not a) Juvenile Delinquent’96 by Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers plays on the soundtrack. Waters also used the 1950s rock’n’roll imagery to provide his film with an additional element of nostalgia. Adding to the film’s set and costume design, which was assembled from the tackiest pieces bought from thrift stores, this rock nihilism pushed the kitsch aesthetic of Pink Flamingos into the realm of true originality. In the early 1970s, the 1950s were too temporally specific to be fashionably retro, so Waters indulgence in the aesthetic excesses of that decade were certainly a novelty. Whereas Anger had used the rock’n’roll music of previous decades with a great deal of irony, Waters used them literally, retaining the same irony but adding a comedic element that added to the film’s bad taste appeal.

Pink Flamingos gained a cult appreciation through its screening at various midnight sessions in low-rent urban cinemas throughout the US. It was made a success by the slew of youths, many of whom were gay, and many of whom were involved in the

counterculture of the day. Coming several years after the summer of love and several before punk broke, Waters film, with its revelry in the grotesque can be seen to have traversed these respective counter-cultural eras. Waters himself has conceded that “It was just punk in hippie drag.”97 Taking the antisocial and anarchically resistive rhetoric of the latter, Pink Flamingos is as much a statement against the peace movement as it is a resistive argument against repressive moral orders. Hoberman and Rosenbaum point out, Like underground cartoonist R. Crumb, Waters burlesque hippie tolerance: one must do one’s own thing – even if that includes incest, bestiality, theft or murder. Moreover, he makes these outrageous occasions for laughter. Here lies a crucial distinction between Waters and his “favourite novelist” Genet. For the revolutionary Genet, crimes are freedoms won for their own sake. But Waters, his American disciple, is at once more cynical and more naïve. Filtering Genet through the media materialism of Andy Warhol, Waters refuses to grant these acts any moral seriousness beyond their inherent sensationalism.98

Sensationalism is the modus operandi of transgressive cinema. By attempting to break the presupposed conventions of filmic representation, truly resistant filmmaking often wields awareness and pretension like weapons.

After Waters, transgressive cinema splintered. As before, where Warhol stood antithetically against Russ Meyers, after Waters’ culmination of exploitation and underground, the arthouse scene began to gain notoriety, as its affinity with experimental, foreign and independent American filmmaking became more widespread. The exploitation genre can be seen to have once again become popularized as the 1980s began, rightwing politics gained control and the action blockbuster was born.

The cultivation of a ‘counter-cinema from the dregs of exploitation films’ and the a fortiori positioning of the paracinematic writer as ‘explicitly … in opposition to Hollywood and the mainstream US culture it represents’ belies the fact that

97 John Waters in Pink Flamingos DVD Commentary, op. cit.
exploitation cinema has to a large extent always gone hand in hand with precisely that cultural mainstream. And its recuperation as a kind of postmodern avant-garde merely serves further to bury its true significance in the margins and footnotes of our theories.\textsuperscript{99}

The fact that Russ Meyer and Herschell Gordon Lewis are seen to have been of influence to the US filmmaking underground of the 1960s and 1970s is not necessarily contradictory to the fact that their films were popular, albeit in a cult capacity, because of their willingness to pander to the base instincts of their audience in the same way as the action blockbusters of the 1980s. This titilation explains the cult appeal of the cinema of John Waters. The viewer expects to have their desire for perverse and often voyeuristic representations of sexuality and gratuitous if obscure violence sated. The same can be asserted about any number of blockbuster action films churned out by Hollywood. The difference is the text’s dominant political rhetoric, or lack thereof, and its use by date, as punk and the fashion chic of other musical movements would prove.

Punk’s ideology is difficult to categorize or label, but it carried a desire to affirm and prescribe to a new order. Anger, subversion, violence and sexual deviation were all products of the movement in Britain. Although it has become one of the most overused and undeserved political monikers in history, one film distilled the bile and rage of the punk ethos before it spilled into the mainstream and was lost forever to popular memory and cultural crimes made in its name. Derek Jarman’s \textit{Jubilee} is the first self-aware and reflexive example of punk filmmaking. Drawing heavily from the avant-garde and from the aesthetic discourse of the movement from which it draws its politics, \textit{Jubilee} was a harsh and venomous film, stooped in the irony and barbed humour that characterized the

\textsuperscript{99} Watson, op. cit. p. 67
punk scene in Britain. As such, Jarman’s film used its savagery to merge past and future in a cynical indictment of British social structure and mores. O’Pray explains Jubilee as,

A prophetic film, it also set Jarman’s agenda – the critique of contemporary times through a vivacious merging of history with both the present and the future. Like Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, the film gazes back into the past from the standpoint of contemporary England and then proceeds to create an image of the future.¹⁰⁰

Set in the scarred industrial landscape of a post-apocalyptic Britain, Jubilee concerns itself with the way in which cultures relate to themselves and their histories with only memories to illustrate and enlighten. It critiques the hierarchical order of authority and the relationship between government, power, art and social degradation. Jubilee literally ‘trashes’ the dominant social order of the times. Garder recalls,

Jarman celebrated delinquency and subversion, yet his weapons were words and images, which may at first seem mild or unthreatening. Yet if their violence was figurative it was none the less potent.¹⁰¹

When the film was released, one year after the silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II a significant backlash ensued. As punk chic generated significant cultural attention and snowballed into a media-supported and instigated fad, as opposed to a politically resistant discourse of dissolution and dissent, some saw Jarman as having sold out punk’s interests and over-intellectualized its politics. Jarman himself reflects,

Had I betrayed Punk as Vivienne Westwood’s t-shirt would have us believe: ‘Derek the Dull Little Middle-Class Wanker’? Or had Punk betrayed itself? How could you fight success?¹⁰²

Punk was such a potent political manifesto precisely because of the accuracy of its rage and its intelligence. Jarman fed off this direct antagonism for his film, but filtered it

¹⁰² Jarman, op. cit. p. 43
through modernist sensibilities and resulting distanced some of those involved in the movement through his seemingly stilted treatment of punk. Whether considered a success or a failure, *Jubilee* is one tangent taken by underground filmmaking took during the beginning of the 1980s. Unrepentantly ‘arty’, the film epitomises the underground punk aesthetic as filtered through the intellectualism and po-faced seriousness that would characterize arthouse cinema in the ensuing decades.

At the beginning of the 1990s, when American independent film found itself undergoing a boost and a new era of brave, inspired US cinema was attempted, if not entirely consummated, a series of queer filmmakers like Todd Haynes, Gregg Araki and documentary filmmaker Jennie Livingston found their films, which identified strongly with the history of transgressive cinema, the subject of a flurry of excitement at the prospect of a burgeoning movement. Peter Biskind explains that,

> The New Queer Cinema was a cinema of transgression born in the flames of the AIDS epidemic. As Haynes explains it, “AIDS was a life and death issue then. A lot of gay people wanted to be accepted and treated like everybody else, but AIDS was making that impossible, so there was almost no choice but to stand up and express a more militant position. If I have any investment in being gay, it’s not about just fitting in and being like everybody else, it’s actually acknowledging how upsetting homosexuality is to the world.”

Haynes’ film *Poison*[^104], a triptych involving a 1950s B-grade horror parody, a mockumentary about a boy who shoots his father and flies away, and a romanticized turn of the century gay love story set in an isolated prison and based on a Genet story, won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance film festival in 1992. Gregg Araki’s *The Living End*[^105],

named after a song by Glaswegian noise-pop outfit The Jesus and Mary Chain, was a misanthropic tale about two HIV positive hedonists who take to the road on a killing spree. It was filled with gross humour and film school in-jokes. Certainly more akin to the gross-out transgression of Waters and the b-grade brigade, it was critically maligned\(^{106}\) and gained a cult following, but didn’t make any money. The outcome of the short-lived New Queer Cinema typifies the position within the populist cultural economy that transgressive cinema has always occupied. It is as though the preoccupations of art are a drawback in terms of trash culture, deeming it too left-field and intellectualized for exploitation markets and for similar reasons, mainstream markets also.

The cult status and popularity of trash depend largely on irony. The viewer, as well as the creator is aware that what they are engaging with is not high culture; it doesn’t even pretend to be. There is an expectation of vulgarity, crudity and bad taste that is met, often exceeded. Never the less, there is a continuum along which this use of irony can travel, depending on the vitality of the ideas and the conviction, not necessarily the quality, of the script, performances or direction. MacDonald states,

> All that is really necessary for the production of a critical film is the decision by a filmmaker to make a film that, for those who see it in a movie theatre (or on videotape), will have an impact because of its difference from what is usually seen.\(^{107}\)

Trash cinema is critical because it holds a spotlight up to fashionable culture in order to shine through it, revealing its opacity in the process. There is a shared politics between fashionable marketable culture and trash culture – that of exploitation and excess. Where

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\(^{107}\) MacDonald, op. cit. p. 19
the distinction lies is in trash culture’s admission and revelry in its whore status. It is the falseness and pretension of corporatized culture, with its earnest appeals to the subjective taste of its audience that appears so vulgar in comparison with the honesty and self-awareness of trash culture.

The assumption that ‘outsider culture’ is more authentic than culture that has been appropriated by a popular audience, is in a cultural climate altered by post-everything theory a naïve one. In the discussion of culture, especially popular culture, there is no outside.

In its full-blown romantic form, the belief suggests that grassroots cultures resist and struggle with a colonizing mass-mediated corporate world. At other times, the perspective lurks between the lines, inconspicuously informing parameters of research, definitions of culture and judgements of value.\textsuperscript{108}

The perspective once stood that all culture produced for a mass audience was trash, that popular meant populist. However, niche markets, which occupy just as valid and integral a space within commodity culture as that which follows dominant cultural orders are recognized not through their status as opposite or polar, but through their politics and their aesthetic regimes, which are as individual and varied as any that might be scattered between disparate media forms, genre definitions and identity politics.

Said wrote in 1993 that, “cultural forms are hybrid, mixed, impure, and the time has come in cultural analysis to reconnect their analysis with their actuality.”\textsuperscript{109} Trash culture’s relationship to traditionally legitimized popular culture is at times a parasitic one. As this chapter has proven through numerous case studies, it exists as a separate,

\textsuperscript{108} Thornton, op. cit. p. 116
sentient being but it feeds off the dominant being, from which it takes what it needs. This process of satire through regurgitation is what sets it apart from commodity culture, as it draws its inspiration from it, celebrates it, but at the same time points out its shortcomings by critiquing its politics and offering pluralities that renegotiate the singularity of dominant forms. It is because of this element of critique that ‘avant-garde’ is recognized as an adjective of both the words ‘new’ and ‘progressive’. As my next chapter will point out, the plurality of new forms of cultural expression allows not only for these cultural hybrids to feed off existing forms but for critique and satire to motivate and embody liquidity. Trash is of poor workmanship or low quality material. It manages to transcend its position as second rate by reinterpreting the social processes through which it has been created to offer vitriol as well as celebration, release through subversion and genuine excitement at a cultural currency that resists its tether.
Chapter Eight
The Rock Aesthetic and Notions of Cinematic Structure: Rock’n’Roll Filmmaking

In the parking lot of a convenience store, an albino woman speaks directly to camera, under which play various shots of her sitting in her dark blue sports car, dancing to the pumping acid house on her stereo, sitting on the bonnet and smiling widely and sweetly as she speaks. “My favourite movie stars are Pamela Anderson and Patrick Swayze… Patrick Swayze is sexy. He’s good lookin’. I love that man to death. I would pay money – to touch him.”¹ This is how popular memory operates. This is rock’n’roll filmmaking.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theorization of rock’n’roll as an aesthetic and political intention of filmmakers, and through the accumulative conceptual work that has been undertaken throughout this thesis to construct an ideological foundation for what I am naming ‘rock’n’roll filmmaking’. Utilising Bauman’s notion of liquid modernity and Baudrillard’s notion of speed I will analyse the way in which particular filmic texts aestheticize a state of media saturation by deploying other popular cultural texts in order to define and construct themselves. Rock’n’roll cinema often achieves this heightened state through its invocation of personal stories located within a world of social decay which is saturated by culture. This milieu of films is represented in this chapter by three case studies, namely *Gummo*, *Natural Born Killers*² and *Nowhere*³.

² *Natural Born Killers*. Directed by Oliver Stone. Written by Oliver Stone, Quentin Tarantino, David Velos & Richard Rutowski. Warner Bros., 1994
Harmony Korine’s first film *Gummo* is a structureless and stylistically vivid trawl through the urban wasteland of middle American white trash. Youth roam the streets unsupervised and scatter themselves on porches and in cluttered, shabby houses to absolve their boredom. The film does not have a central or definitive narrative as such. Instead it encapsulates Lyotard’s concept of narrative that does not exist in totality; that is both constitutive and disruptive to the idea of narration itself.4 *Gummo* is made up of short filmic vignettes; snap shots of individuals, random incidents and relationships. It is a film of polarized moments which capture the residents of Xenia Ohio, which – as we are informed during the film’s rough-hued video introduction – was hit by a tornado ten years previous. It is as if the residents of Xenia have been residually affected ever since, unable to break the cycle of incest, substance abuse and violence that was beset on them like a plague, but which equally seems to have always been a part of the cultural landscape of this sick, swollen community of what some would label hopeless miscreants.

For Korine Xenia, Ohio is a place where friends Solomon and Tumler hunt and kill cats with their BB guns, selling or swapping the carcasses for glue with the local butcher. It is a place where teenage sisters Dot and Helen bleach their hair and place masking tape over their nipples in a subversive manifestation of sordid baby-doll sexuality. It is a place where a friend of Tumler’s is free to pimp his retarded sister to his buddies and where Clifford Duncan, who we are informed via voice-over from Tumler, is “the fat cocaine

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addict who lives down the street” conducts cocaine parties where he “fucks different women in front of kids from the neighborhood.” This white-trash mise en scene is revealed to the viewer through a mélange of visual formats, from bright, pixilated video and grainy film stock to still photographs with words and slogans etched into their surface. Stylistically this use of disparate aesthetic approaches mimics the transient nature of popular memory, whereby single moments are often sutured together to form a makeshift representation of lived experience. The rough hew of these unevenly sewn rag strips of footage give the same cluttered impression as many of the spaces in *Gummo*, from the domestic hallways piled with clothes and bric-a-brac to the concrete verandas lined with cane lounge suites and kitchen chairs and their chain-smoking, booze guzzling, trash talking inhabitants. In its characters and locations, but especially through its aesthetic vocabulary, *Gummo* creates a hazy yet vivid cinematic vision of a particular social memory of the lower and working class occupants of a seemingly overpopulated, under educated, media saturated and morally corrupted contemporary America.

*Gummo*’s sound design compliments its dizzying stylistic method, with sound and vision often completely disengaged from one another. Far from contradictory, the visuals and sound always carry some aesthetic or ideological synergy. As opposed to random pairings, the layering of sounds and images with complimentary connotations is profound. Often the aesthetic combinations are like half formed segments of a whole that the viewer must piece together using their own subjectivity. Not only is music used competently to create mood, with everything from Swedish black metal act Bathory to Roy Orbison forming the sonic backdrop to the action, but found sounds and fuzzy field recordings are
often used to add aesthetic depth to the barrage of poorly shot video footage and still images of satanic murals and haunting inbred family portraits. The muddy and poorly shot video footage is often scored by various layers of sonic phenomena, from chiming bells to home recordings of guitar, children shouting, dogs barking or even the tinkling of musical toys.

In an interview with Geoffrey Macnab, Korine makes reference to his plans for “completely objective film-making, where it’s all about the images – about something you can’t verbalise.”¹ The segments of Gummo made up of rough, cluttered video footage and murky soundscapes of voices, vehicles and mayhem certainly give a precedent for this cinematic manifesto. The film’s cluttered structural aesthetic suggests an abstraction of traditional modes of narrative cinema as well as an inventive aesthetic approach, which lends itself to a sense of objectivity, where the impression is given that the scraps of social history have been mined to form a delicate, ramshackle collection of instances, more representative of a feeling or mood than of a dramatic story arc.

Gummo is a film populated almost exclusively by young people. The only adult character we are allowed access to is Solomon’s mother, an alcoholic widow who pines for her husband while parading about their cluttered basement in his old tap shoes. When switching off the cassette of Madonna’s ‘Like A Prayer’⁶ fails to register a response from Solomon or raise his spirits she jokingly taunts “You came outta my womb and I’ll stick

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you right back in my womb: if you don’t smile, I’m going to kill you!” This is a strangely touching scene, emblematic of Korine’s overall compassion towards his subjects throughout the film. Notions of class and identity are presented cinematically without the traditional ideological baggage that they might ordinarily be attributed. This is because Korine’s approach to his subject comes from a source of empathy and experience. Many of *Gummo’s* cast members were Korine’s friends and members of his community. The filmmaker asserts,

> I don’t patronize anyone. I spent months before the production just photographing these people, going inside their homes and spending time with them. I knew almost everyone who appeared in the film from hanging out with them beforehand. For me as a film maker or artist, to go in and make fun of someone – I don’t even understand the concept. As long as I’m not forcing anyone to do what they don’t want to do, I don’t see how there could be a question of exploitation.  

This statement is problematic. Film and documentary theory instilled that every cinematic gaze holds an ideological implication. Korine might not be photographing his subjects with the same intentions as those who are unfamiliar with their way of life, but a message is still conveyed by placing personal experience in front of the camera. Where Korine’s ideological approach differs from other social realists is that *Gummo* does not attempt to place blame. It cannot place blame as it is made from within the circle of life it represents. Rather, it shows a cycle of social decay that has placed these characters in their situations and instead of preaching, it illuminates the paradoxes existent in each moment, the splendor in futility.

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7 Linda Manz in *Gummo*, op. cit.
8 Harmony Korine in Macnab, op. cit. pp. 196-7
As with any film evoking popular memory, *Gummo* deploys readily identifiable popular texts in order to mobilise their contextual relevance, reinscribing them and subsuming them within itself. For example, in one scene where Solomon and Tumler sniff the glue they have procured in a nearby forest clearing, Tumler speaks of his brother, a transvestite who was forced to leave home and, according to Tumler “was always singing that song ‘Crying’”\(^{10}\). When Solomon grunts his bemusement and ignorance of the song, his friend sings the chorus for him in a detached, drugfucked voice full of reserved tenderness and embarrassment. In the film’s last sequence Roy Orbison’s studio version is used to score shots of Dot, Helen and the film’s quasi-mascot, the perpetually unidentified bunny boy frolicking in an above ground pool while it rains, and where bunny boy stands, shivering in the rain holding a mutilated cat up to camera, before bolting off into the brush. Such thematic disparities only serve the film’s sense of futility, creating a heady dreamscape of nonsensical social claustrophobia, upon which intertextuality is established and embedded within the use of specific popular cultural texts for the making of meaning. Gus Van Sant commented that *Gummo* was “made by a young person speaking through a sophisticated and refined cinematic dialogue of modern cultural influences.”\(^{11}\) The use of readily identifiable cultural artifacts with specific connotative value and disparate cultural contexts is suggestive of the ‘cinematic dialogue’ to which Van Sant refers.

Cinema often includes other media forms in its efforts to represent culture as a social process. Rock’n’Roll filmmaking is the aestheticization of the process by which other

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\(^{11}\) Gus van Sant in Felicia Feaster. ‘Gummo (review)’ in *Film Quarterly*. Vol.52 (2), Winter, 1998. p.41
media forms create connections and contexts, through which they express the personal
and the emotional. Eco states,

Our relationship with mass-produced goods has changed and also with the products
of “high” art. Differences have been reduced, or erased: but along with the
differences, temporal relationships have been distorted, the lines of reproduction,
the befores and the afters.12

Gummo submerges the viewer in a mélange of media interferences. It is this aesthetic
frenzy that characterizes its relationship with popular memory and hyperreality. The
constancy of the mass media has become an accepted influence on our immediate
experience. Contemporary cinema offers commentary on the nature of this constancy and
its effect on our collective psyche. Gummo’s aesthetic panic articulates the world of
social decay and saturation by trash culture, and communicates without prejudice towards
either art or entertainment, the (hyper)reality of such an existence. Gummo is an art film
without the pretension or indulgence of art cinema. It is not a mainstream film, but it is a
film about the way in which lives are framed and molded by representation – the reality
of being inundated by images. Exemplifying the social ramifications of this inundation
are moments where Dot and Helen’s younger sister or daughter (we are never told), sits
on the bathroom sink with her tongue sticking through a glossy magazine constantly
repeats the words “I wanna moustache dammit! I wanna look like Burt Reynolds!”, or
where Solomon quietly and diligently lifts weights with ‘Like A Prayer’ as his personal
workout mantra. Gummo’s unwavering saturation by other forms of media is an example
of liquid modernity’s aesthetic urgency.13

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13 Bauman comments that “If the work ethic pressed towards indefinite extension of delay, the aesthetic of
consumption presses towards its abolition.” This abolition of delay is constitutive of Gummo’s ‘aesthetic
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Rock’n’Roll filmmaking is fast. It is visually and aurally frenetic. It is giddy with excitement and obscenely grandiose. Often inarticulate and uncompromisingly so, it gives off the same buzz as an adrenaline rush. It inhabits the spaces of popular experience too blurry to be definitively labeled, providing an aesthetic articulation of the process of cultural commodification, which Baudrillard expresses through the concept of speed.

Speed is the triumph of effect over cause, the triumph of instantaneity over time as depth, the triumph of the surface and pure objectality over the profundity of desire. Speed creates a space of initiation, which may be lethal; its only rule is to leave no trace behind. Triumph of forgetting over memory, an uncultivated, amnesic intoxication.  

Such a conceptualization of speed can be used to understand the processes of production and commodification. The surface image to which Baudrillard refers is what popular culture uses to trade itself. Neither viewers nor theorists can invest in the instantaneous moment because it evaporates and leaves no trace, except through popular memory, which is often the aim of commodified hyperreality. Capitalism works from this assumption – that a text exists both as a singular temporal entity that is impossible to encapsulate, and as an endless string of identical, digitized copies. Cultural authentification works on the principle that our desire to capture the singular and transient moment can be exploited through the tangibility of these identical copies. Whether the individual interprets and values the text is dependent on their investment in it. This investment exists in relation to both Baudrillard’s theory on speed and its antithesis, the process of popular memory – which slows texts by weighing them down with intertextuality. This constant push and pull between the weight of context and the

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velocity of corporatization is what situates texts within the popular. All popular texts are reliant on this process. Rock’n’Roll filmmaking exemplifies it.

Rock’n’Roll filmmaking has ably established its structural and ideological significance to our mobile, transitory, liquid cultural experience. This cultural experience is often characterized by its existence within what Bauman terms ‘communities of judgement’. These communities are fleeting, reflecting the transitory nature of cultural consumption. Bauman asserts that,

passion being the sole cement holding the company of the faithful together, the ‘shelf-life’ of the ‘community of judgement’ is bound to be short. Passions are, after all, notorious for their incurable volatility and the way they shift. The need for aesthetic community, notably the variety of aesthetic community which services the construction/dismantling of identity, tends for those reasons to be as much self-perpetuating as it is self-defeating.\textsuperscript{15}

Music, specifically rock and pop, as well as other forms of common culture almost always figure heavily in the immediate aesthetic impact of films made via such political outlooks. The constancy of media saturation has become both a new art form to be harnessed and explored through film form and an issue to be addressed, expressed and investigated through the filmmaking process. Rock’n’Roll filmmaking utilizes the shifting aesthetic parameters of different media forms to create subjective commentary on the new media economy and its effects on our individual and collective cultural experiences.

The most apparent example is Oliver Stone’s \textit{Natural Born Killers}, a film dealing specifically with the consequences of media saturation and the escalating influence of

popular culture over increasingly media saturated generations. With a panic-stricken visual style, it not only interweaves disparate aesthetic approaches, but also crosses genre boundaries. With its use of black and white, saturated colour, stock footage that moves in and out of the filmic space, and even segments in sitcom and anime styles, the film simulates the heady rush of pop culture’s frightening constancy.

In *Natural Born Killers* scenes sometimes bump up against each other; galloping horse, huge newspaper headline, demons, Las Vegas lights, homicidal couple in a convertible. In so doing, might scenes find new ways of commenting upon each other, as words – bumping up against each other on pages, in lists – once did?\(^{16}\)

Adding to this excessive visual style are characters that often verge on parody. Tommy Lee Jones as the sleazy shyster of a prison manager, Rodney Dangerfield as the slovenly, abusive father and Robert Downey Junior as the exploitative network television star, often balloon into caricature. This dramatic overabundance is Stone’s intention, and as an assault on the senses it succeeds, with a barrage of images with multiple denotative properties often being fired at the viewer within the same shot.

*Natural Born Killers* reveals its politics through a complex system of aesthetic cues and cluttered images; some original, some intertextual. At various points during the narrative words and images are projected onto both lead characters; Mickey and Mallory. During their visitation with an elderly American Indian, one such moniker appears across the both of them - “Too much TV”. During the film’s exposition, Mallory’s home life is presented in the style of a sitcom, whereby the incestuous nature of her relationship with her father and her mother’s indifference and lack of power are played off for vulgar laughs. These are tangibly supplied via canned laughter - no longer an annoying by-

product of the network television experience; instead transformed in the context of sexual abuse and extreme familial dysfunction into a sickening manipulation of media representation and of the culturally-fuelled depravity of which Mickey and Mallory are both victims and perpetrators.

The “I Love Mallory” section of *Natural Born Killers* ruptures filmic space and the suspension of disbelief by abandoning the aesthetic sensibilities perpetuated by standard film form. It also conveys the implied extent of television’s manipulative production processes. The segment glows with an unhealthy video sheen; the colour balance warped for maximum contrast. The set borrows its dominant spaces directly from the sitcom format, with the action taking place in the living room and kitchen. The most obvious signifiers of the televisual screen space are the insertion of the cheesy title card, the generic theme song reminiscent of low budget sitcom musak, and the canned laughter, which breaks loose at moments – which in the context of relative filmic space would be inopportune and awkward – but in the context of bawdy sitcom humour plays the extreme dysfunction of Mallory’s home life for laughs. This aesthetic heightens the dramatic tension, pointedly amplifying the uncomfortable elements of human relationships. The segment plucks the unhealthy, immoral and deviant and exaggerates them to extremes so as to draw upon the contemptible nature of contemporary society as a basis for its characters.
Sonically, *Natural Born Killers* trawls through the popular history of subversive American pop music, spanning the morose and unsettling ‘Waiting For the Miracle’\(^{17}\) by godfather of the manic-depressive, singer songwriter Leonard Cohen, to the haunting Cowboy Junkies’ version of the Velvet Underground’s ‘Sweet Jane’\(^{18}\). The Junkies’ version was recorded live in a disused warehouse by a single microphone suspended ten feet above the band, and its dreary, reverb soaked late-night mood ably underscores Mickey and Mallory’s roadside philosophizing on the nature of human existence and pain.

Exemplifying a popular trend in contemporary film sound, Stone enlisted mid-1990s alternative music royalty Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails to produce the soundtrack. Several Nine Inch Nails tracks were utilized such as the deeply meditative ‘A Warm Place’\(^{19}\), which is a womb-like ambient drone, emotionally humbling in its sonic reflection of the metaphysical implications of Mickey and Mallory’s journey. Reznor also wrote the aggressive, misanthropic ‘Burn’\(^{20}\) specifically for the film, which indulges in alternative and industrial music’s perennial self-loathing specifically for the film.

In his online review of the soundtrack, Stephen Thomas Erlewine argues that “Reznor managed to convey the insanity of the movie's lead characters much more effectively than Stone did with the film itself.”\(^{21}\) This analysis is debatable, but he is successful in pointing out the importance of the film’s sonic backdrop on the clarity of its characters and their development through the narrative. The *Natural Born Killers* soundtrack is in

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turns uncomfortable and sedatory. The insanity of its narrative is conveyed, often in an overt manner, through snatches of dialogue from the film, sound effects and song fragments.

A significant thematic link was made by the use of one particular song fragment, ‘Sex Is Violent’ – a section of Jane’s Addiction’s indictment of serial killer Ted Bundy; ‘Ted Just Admit It…’22 from their 1988 album *Nothing’s Shocking*23. With lyrics addressing the volatile and pessimistic nature of sexual frustration, the song is used to score a scene where, angered that Mickey is showing more sexual attention to their hostage than to her, Mallory drives to a garage and impulsively seeks sex from the attendant. As she writhes underneath him, at the last minute drawing a gun to shoot him, the climax of the song imparts “Sister’s not a virgin anymore. Her sex is violent.” With the knowledge of Mallory’s sexual abuse and the nature of her relationship with Mickey, his betrayal and her capability for spontaneous anger, the accompanying Jane’s Addiction track conveys all of these story tangents in one abrasive, animalistic chorus.

Without its accompanying soundtrack music, the emotional impact of *Natural Born Killers* would undoubtedly be lessened. It would be dramatically more reliant on its visceral aesthetic and structural approach. In political terms, the appropriation of existing cultural texts in *Natural Born Killers* serves a double purpose. The use of specific tracks on a soundtrack serves a dramatic purpose, conveying a particular mood by matching the images with a stylistically cohesive piece of music. These tracks also serve as hailing

devices. The use of pop music in cinema is an intertextual link to a particular cultural position, whether it be reminiscent of a specific movement, time or place or merely a fleeting and transitory moment. The use of ‘Ted Just Admit It…’ hails a culturally literate audience. The song is a meditation on the relationship between violence, sexuality and the media: themes that are all dealt with in the scene at the gas station. The attendant recognizes Mallory and becomes aroused at the prospect of having sex with a celebrity. As they embrace on the hood of a car his movements become increasingly violent, until Mallory is struggling under him. After she kills him and walks away from his dead body she spits “Next time don’t be so fucking eager.” The first verse of ‘Ted Just Admit It…’ is itself a particularly resonant encapsulation of the film’s central argument:

Camera got them images
Camera got them all
Nothing’s shocking…
Show me everybody
Naked and disfigured
Nothing’s shocking…
And then he came
Now sister’s
Not a virgin anymore
Her sex is violent.24

The music elsewhere in Stone’s film is chosen for its aesthetic and political implications. The use in the film’s introduction of ‘Shitlist’25 by all-girl grunge troupe L7, which scores Mallory’s obliteration of a misogynistic cowboy in a diner provides much riot grrrl aggression, and Patti Smith’s version of ‘Rock’n’Roll Nigger’26 gives off a heady, adrenalized kick, scoring Mickey and Mallory’s getaway via hot red convertible, dust spiraling in their wake, camera panning up as they disappear into the landscape.

24 ‘Ted, Just Admit It…’. Lyrics by Perry Farrel.
In a clumsy and heavy-handed instance of cultural appropriation, the scenes showing Mickey or Mallory’s repentance are underscored by ethnic music, such as ‘Allah, Mohammed, Char, Yaar’\textsuperscript{27} by Sufi musician Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Whilst there is no doubting the aesthetic synergy between the sounds and images, this is a rather blatant attempt to polarize the West as tainted, vulgar and impure and native cultures as innocent, sacred and pure. This irresponsible use of ethnically specific music to bludgeon the audience with the perspective that it is only when Mickey and Mallory confront their true selves in a spiritually enlightened state that they realize the propensity of what they have done is reckless. The Nine Inch Nails tracks ‘A Warm Place’ and ‘Something I Can Never Have’\textsuperscript{28} convey the couple’s repentance and spiritual awakening just as convincingly, without resorting to orientalist tropes or representations of an exoticized other. Likewise, the use of Doctor Dre’s ‘The Day the Niggaz Took Over’\textsuperscript{29} in the prison riot at the film’s climax is almost a token gesture to black music, conveying through its harsh beats and rhymes that mainstream white culture has made criminals out of the culturally disempowered. In a film so consumed by image, the use of such self-consciously ‘political’ texts is stilted. \textit{Natural Born Killers} is not a subtle film, and its appropriation of culture is the source of its brazen political approach.

In presenting an inflated rendering of culturally related hyperreality as its narrative starting point, \textit{Natural Born Killers} provides a popular memory of trash culture and its


\textsuperscript{29} Dat Nigga Daz, Dr. Dre, RBX, Snoop Dogg, Toni C. ‘The Day the Niggaz Took Over’. \textit{The Chronic}. Death Row, 1992.
effect on the cultural literacy of those who have no alternative to its barrage of violence, sex and commerce. Denby characterizes this reality,

[O]ur children, to our chagrin, may no longer have the choice not to live in pop. For many of them, pop has become not just a piece of reality – a mass of diversions, either good or bad, brilliant or cruddy – but the very ground of reality. The danger is not mere exposure to occasional violent or prurient images but the acceptance of a degraded environment that devalues everything – a shadow world in which our kids are breathing an awful lot of poison without knowing that there’s clean air and sunshine elsewhere. They are shaped by the media as consumers before they’ve had a chance to develop their souls.30

The world that Denby speaks of is undoubtedly the world that Mickey and Mallory inhabit. The most intriguing element of Natural Born Killers’ preoccupation with media exploitation is Mickey and Mallory’s ability to make the process work for them by inverting the rules of celebrity and using media infamy and mass murder as processes by which to market themselves as the latest fad filling television screens. Gross explains that,

It is an attempt to look at how an ‘image culture’ has taken over immediate experience. Violence is a secondary symptom of a primary disease, the sheer pollution of representational imagery.31

Natural Born Killers creates its own representational imagery in the form of Wayne Gale’s ‘American Maniacs’. Filtered into the narrative via a series of stories and updates on Mickey and Mallory, and filtered into the film structurally via stock television footage including recognizable commercials for major products, ‘American Maniacs’ simulates the reality crime television that became popular in the late 1980s, mocking its sensational and exploitative nature by pushing the persona of its host, and its exaggeration and manipulation of the truth to extremes.

The use of genuine stock footage, including commercials for legitimate products, saw the film come under attack from the Coca Cola company, who were angered at the use of their polar bear commercial intercut with scenes of extreme violence during the screening of an American Maniacs interview with Mickey. Stone reassures “It was all legally done; it was approved by the studio. Personally I think they should be proud of it. I think it’s a very interesting usage of their commercial. It’s part of the landscape, like Nixon’s face.” This is the kind of intertextual link that bleeds into the collective consciousness via popular memory as well as by the cinematic processes of cultural appropriation and active media reception. *Natural Born Killers* comments on how violence is cultivated by the media, but also on the contextual tangibility of such a process. Films like *Gummo* and *Natural Born Killers*, which address the social consequences of junk culture are often met with controversy. Such films are quite often implicated in the kind of moral furors on which they attempt to comment.

*Natural Born Killers* was the source and subject of a moral panic when seeming copycat crimes were committed by youths in both Britain and the US.

In the wake of Scotland’s Dunblane tragedy, when in 3 minutes of carnage on 13 March 1996 Thomas Hamilton shot dead 16 small children, their teacher and then himself, David Alton MP, who had already campaigned for tougher restrictions on video certification, sought to ban the release on video in Britain of Oliver Stone’s inept movie *Natural Born Killers* (1994) because of its violent content.  


Novelist and lawyer John Grisham also rallied for the film to be banned due to evidence that the murders of Bill Savage and Patsy Byers by Benjamin Darras and his girlfriend Sarah Edmonson had been caused because the couple were under the influence of the film. Grisham argued that the “last hope of imposing some sense of responsibility on Hollywood will come through another great American tradition: the lawsuit.”

Whether or not Grisham was attempting to foist legal action on the Hollywood production system for his own purposes or to promote social change, his knee-jerk reaction to an infamous and controversial popular text reflects the inflamed stance often adopted by neo-conservatives whereby objects or artifacts are blamed, especially those which are seen to have had a negative social influence, as opposed to being subjected to social analysis.

The question of whether or not violence requires a context is an integral element of Stone’s argument. Whilst flashback snapshots of Mickey and Mallory’s dysfunctional roots interject on occasion, their explanation of the deeds committed by the couple is tenuous at best. Whilst Mallory’s violence is implied to be motivated by a combination of revenge and Mickey’s influence, his violence and rage is far more metaphysical. This less explainable violence is the grounds upon which the film has been attacked as misogynistic. In this sense Mallory is viewed as another victim. The scenes in which she commits acts of violence against men are all linked to their sexual objectification of her, linking to her past. However Mickey, especially after his interview with Wayne Gale, in which he ruminates that he has evolved into a purer, more animalistic form of killer (“You and I aren’t even the same species”), has less explanation for his rage and provides

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a case as to why the film was so controversial. Apart from the graphic violence and excessive body count, the lack of explanation for it other than Mickey and Mallory’s emergence from dysfunctional white trash pasts was confounding. The demonization of Mickey as an anti-Christ incarnate is melodramatic, but it serves the films bombastic and antagonistic political stance.

Resistive popular culture often finds opposition from neo conservatives and rock’n’roll cinema is no exception. Embodying rock’s methodology of rupture and dealing thematically with situations and themes often considered by the right to be transgressive or socially intolerable, resistive filmmaking almost requires moral outrage as a prerequisite for either commercial success or sustained cult status. As cynical and overt as it might appear, Stone made his film in an effort to garner debate, whether palpably inflammatory or more considered, on the nature of twentieth century violence and its connection to the media.

*Natural Born Killers*, for all its energy, has also come under attack as a film which perpetuates the patriarchal order as well as imposing a far too simplistic ideology of mass-murder. In his discussion of the spate of serial killer films that emerged in the mid 1990s, Phillip L. Simpson argues that,

the serial killer’s success depends on American culture staying exactly the way it is, and while this can be presented as a scathing indictment of the culture, in most cases it is not. The texts portray ritual, repeat murder as the apolitical strategy that these primitives choose in order to transcend materiality.35

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A divide exists between those who agree with the viability of such a specific political stance and those who are offended or antagonized by it. What Simpson implies is that Stone’s film is overtly concerned with the specificities of its characters, and therefore cannot claim to be a definitive or generalized statement on the nature of violence in a media-saturated society. Simpson claims that the same is true of Dominic Senna’s *Kalifornia* and David Fincher’s *Se7en*, which also used the oppressive industrial music of Nine Inch Nails on its soundtrack. Whether or not Stone intended his film as a generation-defining cinematic statement, it would appear to have been interpreted that way. This branding of texts as generalized is one of the pitfalls of rock’n’roll cinema. Often its political stance, aesthetic ingenuity or general antagonism can paint a particular film as an incitement to revolution regardless of whether it was ever intended as such is.

Independent American filmmaker Gregg Araki has come under such attack for his nihilistic queer youth-oriented films. Paul Burston’s indictment of his third feature *The Living End* was a scathing attack on the film’s lack of substance. He bemoans the fact that Araki shakes up a cartoon cocktail of sex and violence that occasionally hits the right nerve but lacks any real conceptual clout. It’s a hangover from punk, which came rather late to Los Angeles, and Araki is a damned sight more comfortable with it than he can afford to be.

Burtson could likely make the same observation about Araki’s later ‘Teen Apocalypse Trilogy’, comprising of *Totally Fucked Up*[^40]; a documentary style account of disaffected gay teens in LA, characterized by harsh black and white cinematography and abrasive characters, *The Doom Generation*[^41]; which combined a standard road-movie narrative with uber-cool, nihilistic characters and inventive sets that used rich colours, particularly the stark contrasts between black, white, red and blue to characterize mood and relationships, and *Nowhere*, which extended the aesthetic and political concerns of his earlier films within larger budget constraints[^42].

Perhaps Burston was left expecting a politics that was never intended. Labeled with other filmmakers such as Todd Haynes and Tom Kalin as an important contributor to the ‘New Queer Cinema’ movement, which celebrated as well as critiqued queer transgressions, Araki, according to Burston “bank[s] instead on his in-your-face posturing to blind us to his intellectual and political shortcomings.”[^43] Despite this damaging comment, neither Araki nor any of his characters presented anything other than pristine detachment in ensuing films. *Nowhere* – the third and final installment of the supposed trilogy takes the cynical apathy of Araki’s earlier work and churns it through a number of ideological precepts such as religion, consumerism and celebrity.

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[^43]: Burston, op. cit. p. 140
Whilst Burston is astute in confirming the most significant ideological and stylistic element of Araki’s filmmaking, or supposed lack thereof, to label this apathetic hedonism a failing is missing the inherent irony and satirical nature of his work.

The most significant element of Araki’s films, in particular Nowhere, which locates its characters within a mélange of cultural influences and pop culture references, is their self-awareness. His characters are decadent and occupied with surface and image – Baudrillard’s theory of speed made flesh. The dialogue is self-indulgent, but carries a detached cynicism. One scene in particular, featuring cameos by Shannen Doherty, Rose McGowan and Traci Lords, lifts dialogue directly from Bret Easton Ellis’ novel Less Than Zero.

Valley Chick #3
“If Jason did Eileen, then he must have done Richard.”

Valley Chicks #1 & #2 (together)
“Who’s Richard?”

Valley Chick #3
“Eileen’s other scag. And she’s totally into these kinko threeways.”

Valley Chick #1
“Eileen is a whore!”

Valley Chick #2
“Is Richard the surfer with the hairlip that drives the black Jetta?”

Valley Chick #3
“No, he’s got a Lexus.”

Valley Chick #2
“I thought he hung himself.”

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Valley Chick #3

“No, he’s like totally gorgeous. Plus he’s got a Lexus.”

The names and cars have been changed, but the dialogue is a word for word replication of Ellis’ novel. In a similar way, Araki is attempting to highlight the hilarity of that which his characters accept as mundane. This use of disparate cultural texts such as Ellis’ dialogue and the ‘Valley Chick’ characters, as popularized by Frank Zappa’s song ‘Valley Girl’, which featured his daughter Moonunit reciting various catchphrases in the same vacuous accent, require literacy in popular culture.

In another scene, Zero and his girlfriend Zoe pull up at a convenience store with a neon sign heralding “Consume” which is decorated outside with signs advertising “Shop $15.49”, “Drink $79.99”, “More $24.99”. These signs are a contextual restructuring of Alex Cox’s Repo Man, which was characterized by bland, generic products with equally bland labeling for “Beer” and “Food”. Whether or not the viewer is aware of the origin of these references is irrelevant. When their cultural literacy is hailed, there is an inexplicable familiarity that allows the individual to bond with the text. The greater context of the film has been subsumed by the individual’s own popular memory, which is the feeling Barthes refers to when he discusses the notion of ‘jouissance’ as being lost or consumed. Such revelry in the milieu of contemporary cultural references is precisely the politics with which rock’n’roll filmmaking concerns itself. Rock’s acceptance that nothing is new is celebrated in Nowhere. As such, accusations that the

47 Repo Man. Written and directed by Alex Cox. Edge City, 1984.
film is meaningless and narcissistic are moot. This is precisely its intention. It is an exploitation film for the bored, apathetic “whatever” generation.

*Nowhere* is so conscious of its position within youth culture that on the films official website, Araki labeled it “90210 on acid” with reference to the popular 1990s teen drama *Beverly Hills, 90210*. The characters are all vacuous and restless, their lack of taboos or external direction from sources of authority has facilitated a boredom so expansive that it supercedes their attachments to responsibility and even to each other, a concept discussed by Zito.

Unable to find or make a “meaningful relationship” in the absence of meaning, the level of their frustration increased. It is a truism of the social sciences, perhaps its only truism, that frustration leads to aggression. Aggression takes many forms. The inner rage of Lasch’s narcissist is one form of it. This leads to resentment of the parents, especially the mothers. But it also leads to a propensity to blame others for one’s own lack of success, of achievement, of “having it all.” One begins to see one’s self as victimized: not personally perhaps, not directly, but indirectly because one is a member of a group and, one claims, that group has been victimized.

The teens in *Nowhere* are largely interchangeable replications of the same detached malaise. Vaguely drawn, largely self-centred but with varying degrees of social conscience, they hang out, gossip, discuss pop culture and avoid class. They are members of the upper-middle class, with disposable income to spend on drugs, cars, camcorders and “the new Dead Puppy’s CD”. As with Araki’s other films, the overriding angst of his characters, despite the fact that in this instance they aren’t actually victimized or members of a disempowered underclass, positions the viewer towards an understanding

52 James Duval in *Nowhere*, op. cit.
of them in relation to Zito’s theory of disempowerment. Their nihilistic tendencies manifest themselves in their predilection towards commitment free sex, drugs and hedonism. Much of the social fabric through which they relate to one another is grounded in debased simulations of popular culture. Cowboy and Bart play music at a venue called ‘The Buttcrack’, with bands such as ‘Jane Mansfield’s Head’ and ‘Sandy Duncan’s Eye’, advertised by fliers that promise ‘GIRL+ANIMAL=SEX’. When Elissa asks Montgomery is he’s ever heard of ‘The Rapture’ he thinks she’s referring to the album by Siouxsie & the Banshees. The film is concerned with representation, crammed with pop culture references. For example in a reference to Andy Warhol, a complacent drug dealer is bludgeoned to death by nihilistic biker Elvis with a tin of Campbell’s Tomato Soup. In the image-laden world that the film creates, where popular culture infiltrates every situation and exchange, a loss of moral responsibility is expected.

One of the most appealing facets of Araki’s film is its self-referential casting, which draws upon its audiences assumed knowledge of popular culture in order to present reinscriptions of mainstream representations of youth. The ‘youthpic’ sensibility is offset by stark, apocalyptic messages strewn throughout, surreal, nihilistic behaviour and an aesthetic sensibility heavily influenced by Pop Art. The entire film is an exercise in popular cultural image creation, concerning itself with those so disillusioned by contemporary society that they fashion their own relationships with the external forces of pop culture and its iconography. The decision to cast many former television identities is an attempt to foster ironic recognition from its audience, whilst its colourful production

design, gallows humour and savage attitude warps preconceptions of the identifiable personalities and their former performative incarnations.

The parents of Nowhere’s principle cast are also recognizable identities with ties to popular culture. Main character Dark’s mother is played by Beverly D’Angelo, better known as Mrs. Griswald in the National Lampoon’s Vacation54 films. She appears in only one scene in Nowhere, wearing a cosmetic face mask and rollers in her hair. The carefree maternal role she flaunted over a decade previous is warped here into a nagging, cynical, mother burdened by her role of parent and provider.

Dark’s Mom
“Dark! Are you in there flogging the puppy again? Lemme in, I gotta wash this crap off my face.”

Dark
“Mom, can you wait just a sec please?”

Dark’s Mom
“Honey, I have to rot my life away at a nine of five hellhole to support your lazy, juvenile delinquent ass, remember? Sweetheart, chipmunk, my little ray of sunshine - open up this motherhopping door now!”55

All the adult characters and supposed figures of authority in Nowhere are played by former television personalities from 1970s and 1980s sitcoms, with David Leisure from Empty Nest56, Charlotte Rae from The Facts of Life57, and Lauren Tewes from The Love

Boat\textsuperscript{58} all making appearances. In a particularly inspired piece of casting Eve Plumb and Christopher Knight, who played Jan and Peter in \textit{The Brady Bunch}\textsuperscript{59} play Mr. and Mrs. Sighvatssohn, the European immigrant parents of gay heroin addict Bart, who suicides by sticking his head in the family oven. This purposeful reinscription of the Brady narrative hints at the notion of ‘television incest’ and draws upon the inherent sordidness of the show’s pairing of three boys and three girls as step-siblings. \textit{The Brady Bunch} is a laughable target for pop culture parody, and the six Brady children have even become the subject of slash fiction.\textsuperscript{60} Brash, obnoxious and unashamed to celebrate trash culture, \textit{Nowhere} takes its aesthetic cues from Pop Art, with production design coated in a drug-induced haze of colour and characters both unabashedly vacant and self-assuredly pretty.

It is the film’s (and its character’s) absorption with surface that aligns it with the Pop Art rhetoric of reuse. The continual reinscription and recontextualization of cultural iconography has facilitated a celebration, as opposed to abhorrent shock, of the reappropriation of established texts. As Klossowski points out stereotypes bear the mark of simulacra which have become subsumed by a universal interpretation\textsuperscript{61}. Rock’n’Roll cinema celebrates this common interpretation. It purposefully and consciously indulges in it and in doing so points out the absurdity of such simplistic categorization and what it implies about the fetishistic ideologies supported by it. McGee refers to

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{The Love Boat}. Directed by Jack Arnold et al. Aaron Spelling Productions. Originally aired 24\textsuperscript{th} September 1977.


a tendency toward autonomy which offers resistance to the pressures of the culture industry that would reduce the film to an object completely subsumed by the profit-making calculations of business. Such autonomy is not pure in the sense that it can completely negate the commodity fetishism of the culture industry. But insofar as the film can be made by immanent analysis to disclose the contradiction between its meaning and its commodity form, it becomes an absolute commodity that is impelled by its own internal contradictions to the moment of an explosion or self-negation.62

Films exist within capitalist discourse; the object of capitalist pursuits such as the cross-pollination of media forms, which precipitates the existence of texts as corporatized entertainment. Rock’n’Roll cinema supposes that this commodification can be celebrated and exploited cinematically via structural invention and aesthetic positioning, which lends itself to an ideological position reliant on textured surfaces achieved structurally through the use of bricolage, which collects disparate elements of culture and rearranges them for its own purposes. *Gummo* achieves this process by utilizing recognizable cultural texts and imbuing them with personal experience, as well as by creating a literal bricolage of cluttered form. *Natural Born Killers* does this by inserting pre-existing media images into the film structurally as well by projecting them onto its sets and actors. *Nowhere* does this by utilizing readily identifiable popular cultural images and performers and re-signifying them.

Whether individuals invest in the post-stereotyped inauthenticity of such texts is reliant on their relation to them as determined by the binarized notions of speed and popular memory. Baudrillard’s speed forces the text to exist singularly, as a temporally-specific object, which is a pure product of corporatized systems of media production. Speed

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“cancels out the ground and territorial reference-points” Speed creates detached, perfect, whole objects. The process of consumption however, is where the object becomes marked and subsumed by popular memory – a sea of contextual reference points and tangible, structural, emotional links to a range of other seemingly pure objects. Rock’n’Roll cinema is the aestheticization of this corruption of the perfect object. Popular memory is concerned with texts as markers and signifiers of time, measuring itself often through a level of emotional investment dependent on personal engagement. This emotional investment is what weighs objects down, reduces their speed, and sees them become the decaying ruins of the cultural landscape.

As much as the antithetical positions of rock and pop have been aligned through commodification, a political difference between the two exists at the level of discourse, ideology and history. Although pop music on occasion takes on the libidinous excesses of rock, Lester Bangs’ position that “Rock’n’roll is an attitude; it’s not a musical form of a strict sort. It’s a way of doing things, of approaching things” loses none of its potency or relevance. For many, this is the primary source of artistic creativity, to which Nietzsche also attributes Dionysian frenzy as the primary contributing characteristic.

Frenzy must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine; else there is no art. All kinds of frenzy, however diversely conditioned, have the strength to accomplish this: above all, the frenzy of sexual excitement, the most ancient and original form of frenzy. Also the frenzy that follows all great cravings, all strong affects; the frenzy of feasts, contests, feasts of daring, victory, all extreme movement; the frenzy of cruelty; the frenzy in destruction; the frenzy under certain meteorological influences, as for example the frenzy of spring; or under the

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63 Baudrillard. America, op. cit. p. 6
influence of narcotics; and finally the frenzy of will, the frenzy of an overcharged and swollen will.\textsuperscript{65}

The politics and aesthetics of rock music can be thought of as a contemporary artistic invocation of Nietzsche’s Dionysian frenzy, encapsulating the manifestation of base instincts through performance and structural execution as well as thematic motifs and the elusive, transitory element of mood or feeling. This intensity is where the politics of rock’n’roll filmmaking are established – in the frenzy of images, sounds, violence and speed that clutters our collective consciousness. The “irrationalism, anxiety and helplessness”\textsuperscript{66} to which Waugh refers is the starting point for an understanding of rock’n’roll filmmaking’s articulation of the contemporary media-saturated aesthetic of our resigned contemporary existence. By understanding how these qualities have pervaded social systems and cultural representations of such, filmmakers are able to engage with the Dionysian abandon in a political and aesthetic manner cinematically.

In \textit{the rise of the image the fall of the word}, Stephens titles his chapter addressing the notion of montage in the video age as “Multiple Fragments... Assembled Under a New Law”. He discusses television commercials in respect to the development of stylistic techniques in film.

Coke commercials, no matter how stylistically advanced, don’t seem to deserve mention in the same paragraphs as an “intellectual cinema” or an intellectual television or an intellectual anything. Nevertheless, they can’t be excised from this history.\textsuperscript{67}

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\textsuperscript{67} Stephens, op. cit. p. 101
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Visual literacy is an evocative theory emerging from discussions of critical pedagogy. With a proliferation of technology, particularly as it pertains to leisure, visual literacy has been an increasing factor in our consumption of popular media. Rock’n’Roll filmmaking not only embraces a capacity for interpreting visual clutter, it attempts to push and break the rules of conventional modes of cinematic representation. Through the transformative nature of media technology a “subversive reconception of the subject that situates the human and the technological as coextensive, codependent, and mutually defining” is achieved. This recontextualization has been a large factor in the integration of technology not only into our lives but into our consciousness.

Rock’n’Roll filmmaking attempts to comment on this process not in a literal sense but in a metaphysical understanding of what it is to exist in a culture completely subsumed by technological forces and in particular, media technology.

Rock’n’roll cinema activates aesthetic politics. It celebrates excess and makes no excuses for its deliberate and purposeful reuse of established cultures and cultural artifacts. As Bauman suggests “Liquid modernity is a civilization of excess, redundancy, waste and waste disposal.” Rock’n’Roll cinema indulges in this excess and waste in aesthetic terms. It boldly accepts that our existence within liquid discourse should be accepted as

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normative. Rock’n’Roll filmmaking is not concerned whether hyperreality is a viable or even alternative reality. It prefers to deal aesthetically and structurally with the implications of such an existence – with our social and moral choices as members of a cluttered, disorganized, wired, ‘constant now’ state of mind. Towing the line between the svelte brilliance of Baudrillard’s speed and the boggy quagmire of popular memory, rock’n’roll filmmaking is contemporary critique from the inside, refusing to give up its cultural predilections for the sake of objectivity. It is an attempt at a cinema of abjection, with its feet planted firmly in its own tastes. Violent, indulgent, perverse and morally objectionable, rock’n’roll cinema is a new order in the visual aestheticization and alignment of resistant politics and corporatized culture.
Conclusion

In Martin Scorsese’s *Goodfellas*¹, the song ‘My Way’ is used twice. In the first instance, the song provides a socio-temporal referent to the film’s setting. Released in 1953, Frank Sinatra’s version of the song stands as its definitive incarnation. Performed in this context by an icon of Italian-American old-school style, ‘My Way’² signifies the determination and independence associated with a generation of Italian Diaspora in the US during the film’s nostalgic incarnation of post-war America. Yet the song is summoned again in the film. Sid Vicious’ version³, recorded twenty four years later, is used much in the same structural context – to frame the film historically – to pin it to a temporal location. The difference between Frank’s defiant ‘triumph over adversity’ croon and Sid’s smacked-up, ‘don’t give a fuck’ snarl speaks of and to different histories of cultural value and the mobility of the popular. These two versions are both the same and not the same text. They are melodically comparable and ideologically oppositional. There is (only) a thread holding together the swinging, swollen strings of Sinatra’s majestic version and the obliteration of Sid’s atonal screech, which begins with a pious, sarcastic string section and ends with the distorted howl of an electric guitar.

Film and music are intertwined, yet separate. They mobilize diverse media histories for distinct purposes, enmeshing themselves with that which they can use, reinterpret,

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annihilate and celebrate. Audiences mobilize similar strategies, using what speaks to them and leaving that which does not in the dustbin of history. Audiences provide music and film with their status as commercially viable, commodity-oriented populist cultural forms. Each audience has its own dustbin, filled with the debris and detritus of discerning aesthetes. Individuals move through histories in the flick of a switch, the touch of a keypad and the flicker of a dimly lit projection booth. Narratives morph and they stay the same, as do audiences. The duality of contemporary existence within both fixed and unsettled ideological situations is perfectly exemplified by relationships to culture.

Bauman explains this as a movement from collectivity to individuality.

[W]e are presently moving from the era of pre-allocated ‘reference groups’ into the epoch of ‘universal comparison’, in which the destination of individual self-constructing labours is endemically and incurably undetermined, is not given in advance, and tends to undergo numerous and profound changes before such labours reach their only genuine end: that is, the end of the individuals life.4

The soundtrack to our lives is now not only a dusty LP in a vinyl bargain bin but also a flashing, pixilated downloadable popup5. Bauman’s comments highlight the shifting direction in capitalism from explicitly understood and contained cultures to the individualized notion of the discerning consumer. Individuals choose culture. They choose the narratives it teaches and they choose the histories and communities through which these narratives are implemented and supported.

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This thesis has mobilized the shifting academic platforms of popular music and film history to contextualize and contain, but also to free each other from the rigors of definitive meaning. Texts emerge from specific social, economic cultural origins. In order to understand what they do for and to audiences it is necessary to negotiate these origins within the context of specific structural formations of culture. This negotiation process can never be achieved and should never aim for critical certainty – the use of texts for specific purposes is an end in itself and concepts of worth which implement cultural hierarchies of taste and value negate these ends. It is important to filter texts through established codes of form and structure, but to adequately articulate the cultural context through which they can be understood in terms of value or meaning, we require an engagement with the cultures through which they are validated. The success of a text either commercially or in terms of popularity and what is precariously called ‘cult’ appeal hinges not only on its ability to hail already established literacies but also to invoke new formations of structure and meaning, form and context.

In choosing popular film music as its site of inquiry, my research required disparate methodologies to understand diverse cultural formations. Film theory champions history, canonizing particular texts, individuals and structural approaches to filmmaking as an art form, in an effort to establish a definitive concept of ‘good’ cinema. It is precise and specific, appraising the ability of a text to conform to particular codes of formalistic structure and to interpret or experiment with others in a manner conducive to particular formations of cinematic meaning. Writing on popular music is often consigned to either popular cultural studies or journalism. Whilst academic writing on rock is often criticized
as unapologetically populist in nature, serving not to effectively critique the cultural production of meaning but to celebrate the popular, journalistic writing often lacks the theoretical platform from which academic writing bases its approach towards popular music. Goodwin provides an effective summary of the failings of these two disparate approaches:

There are too many academic books on pop that fail because the author lacks three basic qualities: knowledge of facts, understanding of music, ability to write. However, there are far fewer bad books on pop by academics than there are useless books by rock critics, most of which lack ideas, argument, critical thinking, analysis, theory, social context, political sophistication, or indeed any quality that would give the reader some hint as to why the book was written in the first place.6

Just as film studies requires a cultural context for its analyses of the formal characteristics of the cinematic language, the theoretical analysis of cultural processes must attend to the specific modes through which texts are produced and consumed. Popular music journalism must provide its subject with theoretical processes through which to define itself, instead of insisting on texts and generic forms as ends in themselves. All three methodologies contribute meaningful and effective ways of viewing popular texts, but they must be allowed to speak to each other; to contradict and complement each other in order to provide a contextually complete engagement with cultural objects.

My work utilizes the theoretical trajectories of each of these disciplines in order to establish a new frame of reference for understanding the textual and contextual elements of popular film music. Its original contribution to knowledge is an alignment of film analysis and popular music studies which filters concepts of auteur theory through popular cultural studies and popular memory studies in order to provide a theoretical and

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methodological platform for the study of popular music in film. It utilizes a disparate and eclectic range of source material for analysis and historical context in order to adequately theorize the appropriation of popular music by film and filmmakers. The breadth of this source material provides a textual manifesto through which various narratives and histories of the relationship between these media forms can be understood and contextualized. Through its engagement with cultural theory and popular memory, this doctoral thesis works against grand narratives of textual value, offering a cultural context of origin and representational process for each of the texts it encounters.

Although theorists of liquidity and acceleration such as those of Bauman\textsuperscript{7} and Virilio\textsuperscript{8} explore the dissolving and dismantling of time, space, identity and creativity, it is impossible to dislocate objects of culture from their tangible origins of creation and production. Contemporary cultural theory has placed attention on the process of reception as opposed to restating the importance of specific narratives of production. In order to fully understand why specific texts take the form they do, an understanding is required of those who consume them but also of the culture from which texts emerge. The first section of this research project provided an historical context for the increasing visibility and commercial viability of popular music and in particular rock music on screen. It also contextualized this history within the development of consumer culture and explained the movement from linear to cyclical notions of time through Bauman’s concept of liquidity\textsuperscript{9}. The assertion that popular music and cinema were bound together through the collapsing rigidity of generic and media formations, as well as the economic

\textsuperscript{7} Bauman, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{9} Bauman, op. cit.
implications of these new cultural economies was central to this argument. It was arguably through the burgeoning demographic of youth culture that both media were allowed to flourish both separately and in conjunction as tangible and commercially viable forums. Youth culture’s inherent resistance and capacity for critique aligned it with the political concerns of rock music. This possibility for escapism and potential for personal emancipation is what unites film and popular music as media forms that are often harnessed by youth to speak to and about them and their concerns. The first section of my work located this phenomenon within generic frameworks. Through its increasing cinematic visibility, popular music became exemplified on screen via the genre of the musical, which provided both cinematic escapism and a visual space for popular song.

As attractive to post-narrative formalists as they are to hardcore sentimentalists, the musical occupies that razor’s edge where emotion bleeds into intellect, entertainment becomes abstraction and artificiality waxes transcendent.10

This notion of artifice is pivotal to discussions of any popular form of communication. The musical, as well as other genres which exemplify the potential hybridity of the visual and the aural all trade in surface. Pop’s politics of surface provides a contemporary context for the intellect, abstraction and transcendence discussed by Pevere. Genres such as the post-musical and the music video provide opportunities for the contemporary renegotiation of the seeming populism of the musical and its utopianism. Popular culture, through its inherent political struggles also provides this utopia.

Not only does the relationship between film and popular music involve a history of their collective use, but it contextualizes cinematic representations of the histories and

narratives of rock and pop. Section Two of this thesis explored the ways in which film deals with nostalgia through music. One of the fundamental theoretical contradictions of my research is the contextualization and historicization of an ahistorical time and culture. The ideological positioning of individuals within dislocated cultural terrain often manifests itself in political economies of taste that transcend the linearity of traditional time and space. My work therefore deals with “how objects, discourses, and practices construct possibilities for and constraints on citizenship”\textsuperscript{11} This citizenship is increasingly fragmentary and dislocated. Notions of linear history are fast being eradicated by popular memory and the perpetuation of a society that trades on information. It is therefore relevant to explore the ways in which specific discourses comment upon and reinterpret that which has become imbedded in the past.

As a marker of temporal and political location, popular music can be utilized on screen to denote a particular time or offer a nostalgic link to a specific brand of socially specific politics. The second section of this research project analyzed the use of specific pieces and periods of popular music on screen and their appropriation for specific temporal or political ends. This analysis was achieved in the context of the compilation soundtrack, the rockumentary genre and the biopic genre. In doing so, this section established a methodology for interpreting cinematic representations of particular political trajectories which are facilitated not only by the use of specific texts but by the popular memory and political currency surrounding them.

The compilation soundtrack, rockumentary and biopic are all tethered to different discourses of film commerce. These distinct relationships to commodification affect the ways in which each summon nostalgia. Section Two of this thesis analysed the respective methods of historical rendering of each of these forms. Romney and Wooton make useful observations about the nature and structure of rock documentaries in their respective chapters of *Celluloid Jukebox*¹², establishing an argument regarding the form as a glorified marketing tool for a band or artist. Wooton address the myriad of bad rockumenatries as symptomatic of this tendency:

Ineptitude is endemic to rock documentary, but does it matter? By and large, rock documentaries are an adjunct of the marketing of music products by a global industry, and if they are not very good, why should anyone care? It could be argued that that rock documentaries are little more than a bastardized sub-strand of more significant cultural forms and that it is too much to expect them to be anything other than occasionally diverting.¹³

In the second section, I provided a response to Wooton’s argument, as well as developing a contextualized notion of the representation of musical artists across the cinematic medium. The convergence of popular music and film is a process not only aligning separate histories, but a process in representing history. Section Two of this investigation monitored the representation of popular musical histories within the cinematic discourse, relating this analysis to concepts of popular memory and cultural literacy, and framing this process within the commodification of cultural products.

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¹³ Adrian Wooton. ‘The Do’s and don’ts of rock documentaries’ in *Ibid.* p. 103
Music on film often severs the iconographic renderings of pop in its pure form. Grossberg speaks of “rock formations”\textsuperscript{14} through which music is merely a single element of a greater, sometimes unitary, sometimes fragmented whole. The Third Section of this doctorate considered the location of the pop star film vehicle and the popular musician as film scorer within a discourse of celebrity and cross-media promotion, which allows for recognizable performers to build upon the iconographic status of their musical personas in an integrated fashion. Both Dyer\textsuperscript{15} and Ellis\textsuperscript{16} have written on the star as auteur, and the third section of this investigation explored their theoretical concern directly, asserting a renegotiation of the auteur as it relates not only to concepts of the individual as artist, but also to the definition of an auteur in the cinematic sense of the term. As such, it connected the cross-media auteur to the notion of multiple authorships in film, allowing for an understanding of the economic/production frameworks that facilitate the cross-media production of an artistic image or identity.

Popular music and film, as cultural forms embedded in processes of commodification require a surface veneer that carries a familiarity and predictability in order to appeal to specific audiences. This section connected the necessity for recognizable images in cinema to the popular musician and their role in shaping the imagery, iconography and surface politics of particular cinematic texts. The inclusion of a popular musician in a cinematic text as performer or scorer provides that text with a link to the previous output of that musician, as well as to the implied political position of their work. In this capacity

\textsuperscript{14} Lawrence Grossberg. ‘Rock culture and rock formations’ in \textit{We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture}. London: Routledge, 1992. p. 132
\textsuperscript{15} Richard Dyer. \textit{Stars}. London: British Film Institute, 1979
\textsuperscript{16} John Ellis. \textit{Visible Fiction}. London: Routledge, 1982
the popular musician is a conduit for the cinematic realization of a particular aesthetic or politics. Simultaneously though, the cinematic form is harnessed by musicians to rechannel their established imagery and sound. It is through the meshing of iconography, aesthetic approach and specific cultural politics that popular music and cinema are able to transcend their commodified origins in order to renegotiate the role of the artist and establish new modes of thinking about the concept of the auteur. Both media forms are changed through this transaction, gaining a connection to specific audiences and aligning themselves with the implied currencies of taste associated with the site of interaction.

In order to adequately understand the efforts of creative individuals, their work must be contextualized within a discursive framework which negotiates the social, cultural and economic conditions of their creativity and its products. The last section of this thesis turned attention to the politics of rock music and the ways in which this politics has been harnessed directly by filmmakers for aesthetic ends. The politics of popular music is a politics of youth. It is a politics of resistance, ambiguity, immersion in the image and the search for transformation and transcendence through that image. It is the search for belonging that informs rock's immersion in that which is often deemed trivial, incendiary or transgressive. It is through this engagement with the detritus of popular culture that new forms and codes of creativity are founded, often linking transgression with the avant-garde but filtered through a pop sensibility.

Popular music often manifests itself as a cultural site utilized by young people. However, in ageing, its fans and those who engage with it in its creation choose whether or not to carry the political implications of their subcultural musical experience with them. This is arguably the basis of nostalgic evocations in popular music history.
This research project investigated the legacy of the avant-garde in its creative conjunction with rock music and provided a framework for texts that established contemporary culture as liquid and mobile. This immersion in surface and the re-engagement with established cultural texts informs the rock discourse, as well as providing a platform for cinema as a conduit for this rhetoric, which often privileges that which has been discarded or critically ignored. Andy Warhol comments on his fetish for that which others consider worthless: “I always liked to work on leftovers… Things that were discarded, that everybody knew were no good, I always thought had a great potential to be funny… I always thought there was a lot of humour in leftovers.” Warhol’s legacy was his fascination with surface, with that which appeared to have no immediate value, and it is this quality that can be observed in cinema that speaks not only through rock, but through discourses of resistance or transgression.

The popular is able to draw from established cultural codes that which can be used to comment on the dominant paradigmatic structures of its time. Rock’s origins as a bastardization of other musical cultures lends itself to cinematic articulations of reuse and reinterpretation. Resistance can take political ends through pure aesthetics. This is the ideological platform within which the last section of my research is situated. It is here that the project and primary concern of this research flips back on itself, returning to Bangs’ proposition that rock’n’roll is “a way of doing things, of approaching things.”

The final section of this thesis details the aesthetic approach of rock’n’roll with film as its

medium. This cinematic manifestation mimics the intertextuality of popular music, illustrating the possibility for form to dominate content and for image to manifest meaning without intrinsic reliance on narrative. Made up of smaller pieces and informed by the scattered effect of pastiche, the cinematic performance of rock is enacted not only through its politics, but also in a structural context. Rock’n’Roll cinema adheres to dominant cultural protocols whilst simultaneously fraying them, allowing its inherent contradictions to exemplify its status as both entertainment existing within a culture of populism and performativity and politically motivated, aesthetically driven art.

Texts summon fixed meanings only briefly. They are continually being renegotiated, recontextualized and reimagined as new texts speak of and through them. Audiences grow up, grow old and grow out if it, yet the tangible signifiers of lost cultural loves and harmless infatuations linger to remind and retell the histories of personal affect. Film and music provide the wallpaper for these romances. It is “the emotional pleasures of consumption, the dreams and desires which become celebrated in consumer cultural imagery and particular sites of consumption which variously generate direct bodily excitement and aesthetic pleasures”20 with which my investigation is concerned. Popular film music, or rather popular music on film illustrates our evolving relationship with art as entertainment; that which grips us and that which merely provides a temporary distraction. Today the cultural consumer is plugged in, logged on and siphoned through the cultural zeitgeist via satellite and broadband. Popular forms of mass communication provided the blueprint for this phenomenon. As Lash articulates, the way in which individuals communicate is directly affected by what is communicated to them on a

collective scale. In this instance, information is intimately dialoguing with cultural differences and contexts.

The mass media of communication, which preceded the computer age by a great number of decades, already established a paradigm for the information age: a model that only has much more recently, with its mass pervasion through explicitly information technology, achieved hegemony.

There are many ways to conceptualise this cultural landscape. Morley pursues music in the form of a cityscape. Bauman’s concept of liquidity facilitates a tangible reality for Toop’s *Ocean of Sound*. Cinema also negotiates the relationship between cultural production and reception. The worlds of films speak through each other, with sequels, satires, homages and in-jokes the dominant paradigm through which audiences understand and relate to film. There is still a deep affect that grips and motivates us. Marcus’ notion of “the mystery of spectral connections between people long separated by place and time, but somehow speaking the same language” may lead us to a deeper evocation of culture, as intricate, dynamic and delicate.

Popular culture repeats itself but always with a different accent. Rock gives itself a body through film and film uses rock to sing, speak and swear. Both use each other to remember. So do we. Both use each other to express what only they can about the present; about the undeniable ‘nowness’ that pervades the culture of fashion, which is ultimately a culture of commodification. Both rock and cinema are undeniably fetishistic realms of

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culture. We iconize the instant we identify, which does nothing for the sign; but it
deriably changes its meaning, filtering it through experience and creating a process
where before there was only an image or a sound. Individuals can never expect to find the
expression of their reality through culture. It expresses the possibilities for reality and
through these possibilities connects past and future. Through rock and film audiences
imagine new destinations. In order to understand the relationship between rock and
cinema it is necessary to directly engage with their respective histories, with their
collective histories and also with social histories and histories of consumption, of both art
and entertainment. An equal appreciation of form and content is necessary. The
imperfections of culture must be acknowledged. Subjectivity reveals the elliptical
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