

Cultural approaches to the rhetorical analysis of selected music videos.

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Cultural approaches to the rhetorical analysis of selected music videos

Karyn Charles Rybacki and Donald Jay Rybacki

Abstract

Music video has gone from being a means of selling more records to a rhetorical form worthy of serious study. Videos typically take one of three forms: performance, narrative, and conceptual. While they provide the basis for a content analytic analysis of music videos, the authors of this paper argue that a number of cultural approaches to criticism may offer greater insight. It does so by providing brief analyses of music video using a variety of cultural approaches.

The Social Values Model examines the ways in which society resolves conflicts between basic and desirable values. In Bon Jovi's video "Blaze Away," the lyrics and visuals symbolize the tension between individualism and community. In Jay-Z's rap, "By the Time I Get to the Skool," he takes Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and visualizes it in a way that suggests that the Civil Rights Movement may be replaced by a new movement.

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The Jungian Psychological Model is based on examining dream images and archetypes as the struggle between one's public and private selves. The Eurhythmics video for "Sweet Dreams" uses symbols of the conflict between what women must project as part of their public persona as opposed to their private, shadow self really is. Guns N' Roses video for "November Rain" is staged as an event which turns into a nightmare, the joyous celebration of a wedding that turns into a somber funeral for the bride's death. Both of these videos speak to the fears that young people have about living up to expectations and confronting failure, rejection, and even abandonment when they do not.

Ideological Models of criticism use a particular world view such as feminism or Marxism as a lens through which rhetorical activity is examined. The Feminist Ideological Model of criticism examines issues of gender inequality, while Marxist critics are concerned with issues of class struggle, dominance, and hierarchy. Madonna's video for the song "I Touch Myself" is replete with images that devalue women. Madonna's "Material Girl" read from a Marxist perspective suggests she is at least the equal of any man.

This research was originally presented at the 1993 Speech Communication Association national meeting in Miami, Florida as part of an all-day seminar on music video.

Cultural approaches to the rhetorical analysis of selected music videos.

The rhetorical acts of a society, particularly those conveyed by popular or mass media, are the social culture. Music has long been recognized as a form of popular culture with a certain potency for cultural change (Denisoff, 1971; 1972 and Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). The two authors of this essay are described as "raised on the radio." Our sense of message in music takes us in an aural more often than a visual direction. Eleven years ago, the manner in which popular music was experienced changed as a new staple for the "MTV-generation."

At first a not-so-subtle way of stimulating record sales, music videos are now a communication in their own right and a potent source of ideas for a new generation. Beyond its genesis as a promotional tool, video has become more than an adjunct of marketing for the music industry. Pat Aufderberg recommends that despite its commercialism, music video merits serious consideration:

"it is particularly important because it is in the vanguard of reshaping the language of advertising--the vocabulary of commercial culture--in a society that depends on an open flow of information to the quality of its political and public life. Consideration of music video's form also implies questioning the emerging shape of the democratic and capitalist society that creates and receives it." (p. 59)

Important to the dissemination of music video has been the rise of MTV, a narrow-cast cable channel that targets the 18-34 year old demographic segment of music consumers. MTV redesigned and delivered a new generation that replaced the use of the radio as the medium for rock. As David Szatmary (1991) notes, the MTV generation has no personal recollection of Elvis, the Beatles, Vietnam and seeks its own niche apart from us baby boomers. "In the 1980s, MTV designed and delivered rock to the TV generation. MTV plays a central role in the shaping of culture as D.S. Miller (cited in Abt, 1987) indicates:

"While the MTV format performs a "bardic" function of converging before its audience an array of (competing) youth subcultures and lifestyle options, at the same time it negotiates these subcultures through channels any reflective or participatory energy on the part of the audience into the act of consumption. In this sense MTV functions as a negotiator in the hegemonic process by amplifying and absorbing oppositional culture, while ultimately legitimizing and naturalizing their relationship to

institutions of a consumer society." (p. 103)

MTV's "bardic function" as such a negotiator produces what Aufderheide views as a response to the search for identity of those "raised on the video."

"Music videos are authentic expressions of a populist industrial society. For young people struggling to find their place in communities dotted with shopping malls but with few community centers, in an economy where the major product is information, music videos play to the search for identity and an improvised community." (p. 63)

Characteristics of Music Video

Ultimately we will advocate using cultural models for the rhetorical analysis of music video. To find out how a cultural model facilitates rhetorical criticism of music video, it is first necessary to explore the features of the genre. Music, particularly rock, has always had a visual element. The album cover, the band's live performance, concert staging, and promotional publicity have all helped create a visual imagery for rock (Goodwin, 1992). The use of video to stimulate album sales and the birth of the music video as a continuous outlet for viewing simply served to enhance the visual potential present in rock.

Viewers typically do not regard the music video as a commercial for an album or act. Aufderheide describes the connection of viewer to video.

"With scarcely a reference to cash or commodities, music videos cross the consumer's gaze as a series of mood states. They trigger nostalgia, regret, anxiety, confusion, dread, envy, admiration, pity, titillation, and one remove from the primal expression such as passion, ecstasy, and rage. The moods often express a sense of incompleteness, an instability, a searching for location. In music videos, those feelings are carried out as whimsy, extended journeys into the arbitrary." (p. 63)

That music videos present compelling mood states that may claim the attention of the viewer is a matter of happenstance. Abt (1987) states that "directors of videos strive to make their products as exciting as possible. In the struggle to establish and maintain a following, artists utilize any number of techniques in order to be exotic, powerful, tough, sexy, cool, unique" (p. 103). Further, Abt indicates a video must compete for attention with other videos.

"They must gain and hold the viewer's attention amidst other videos; help establish, visualize, and promote the artist's image; sell that image and the products associated with it; and perhaps, carry one or several indirect messages . . ." (p. 97).

Music videos may be further characterized by three broad typologies: performance, narrative, and abstract (Firth, 1988). These types describe the form and content selected by the director or artist to attract attention and to convey a direct or indirect message.

Performance videos, the most common type (Firth 1988) feature the star or group singing in concert to enthusiastic fans. The goal is to convey a sense of the in-concert experience. Gow (1992) notes the predominance of performance as a formal system in the popular clips indicates that music videos are characterized chiefly by communicating images of artists singing and playing songs" (pp. 48-49). Performance videos, especially those that display the star or group in the studio, remind the viewer that the source of the music is important. "Performance oriented visuals cue viewers that, indeed, the recording of the music is the significant element" (Gow, 1992, p. 45).

A narrative video presents a sequence of events. A video may tell any kind of story in linear sequencing. Love stories, however, are the most common narrative mode in music video. The narrative is one of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back. Action in the story is dominated by males and females who passively react or wait for something to happen (Schwichtenberg, 1992).

Conceptual videos rely on poetic form, primarily metaphor (Firth, 1988). The conceptual metaphysical poetry articulated through visual and verbal elements. "These videos make significant visual element, presenting to the eye as well as the ear, and in doing so, conveying truth discursively" (Lorch, 1988, p. 143). Conceptual videos do not tell a story in linear fashion, but mood, a feeling to be evoked in the experience of viewing (Firth, 1988). Conceptual videos allow for multiple meanings as the metaphor or metaphoric sequence is interpreted by the viewer. The metaphorical relations between images structured according to musical and visual rhyme play a suggestive role in soliciting multiple meanings from us, the viewers/listeners, that resound with experience--something we can feel and describe" (Schwichtenberg, 1992 p. 124).

A given music video may actually have elements of more than one category. Goodwin (1992) on Madonna's videos, suggests that the essential narrative component of a music video is found in the frame the star, "star-in-text," as all Madonna's videos seem to do. A story exists solely for its ability to recreate, in Madonna's case, the star's persona. This blending of elements can also enable a type of music, as rap, to have cross-over appeal to a wider audience.

Although we may profitably interpret the message potential of music video using these three categories as a basis for content analysis, certain limitations exist if we remain on that path. "Analysts of music video have been all too eager to freeze the moment and study videos shot by shot, but here the problem is that it generates not too much but too little knowledge, because the individual narrative is highly fragmented" (Goodwin, 1992 p. 90).

As a blend of video technique and imagery from film and television, music video offers us a rich visual agenda by providing allusions to and incorporations of old iconic imagery from film, allowing us to revisit the pieces of the 20th century information explosion (Turner, 1986). The brevity of the music video has created a new grammar of video technique particular to this miniscule video form.

"Visual techniques commonly employed in music videos exaggerate . . . Interest and excitement in music videos is created by rapid cutting, intercutting, dissolves, superimpositions, and other special effects, that taken together, make music videos visually and thematically dynamic." (Abt, 1987)

Born of an amalgam of commercialism, television, and film, for the purpose of selling rock albums, music videos frequently employ well-established verbal and visual symbols in telling a story or making a point. As these symbols exist, music videos coin their own which, given the ubiquity of the medium, quickly find their way into the vernacular.

How then to best understand the rhetorical properties that such a media form has for us? Schwichtenberg (1992) suggests that what critics should consider "is how music videos are situated in a complex cultural context that includes performers, industries, and diverse audiences who attach a variety of meanings to the music and visuals" (p. 117).

These characteristics suggest that the most methodologically appropriate approach to understanding music videos might function as rhetoric is to view them as cultural acts, intertextually located within their own experience. We define culture, with a little help from Bruce Gronbeck (1983), as a complex

determined sets of rules, values, ideologies, and habits that constrain rhetors and their acts. This a society to generate meaning through various message forms to establish a series of societal truths to which any form of communication such as a music video plays a part in the process of truth-telling. The rhetorical critic attempts to discover through criticism.

Culturally based criticism of music video

The various cultural approaches to criticism offer unique frames of reference for examining significant in the discursive and non-discursive elements of a music video. The goal of this essay is to explore which features from each approach seem to lend themselves to music video criticism. We provide three different cultural perspectives to six music videos, discussing their suitability for evaluating non-discursive elements of the videos.

The cultural approaches offered in this essay were selected after reviewing critical essays in communication journals that employed methodologies commonly identified as "social-cultural" for inclusion those approaches that seemed most applicable, given the characteristics unique to music video discussed earlier in this essay. Six videos were selected to represent the range of video categories (narrative, and concept) and a range of artists and music styles.

This essay is not intended to be a comprehensive study of each video, but rather to demonstrate selected cultural approaches in analyzing how and why a video becomes a vehicle for cultural expression, "improvised community" for the MTV-generation. Our survey of cultural approaches and video categories include:

The Social Values Model applied to Bon Jovi, "Wanted: Dead or Alive" and Public Enemy, "By Your Side";

The Jungian Psychological Method applied to Eurythmics, "Sweet Dreams" and Guns N' Roses, "Sweet Emotion";

Ideological Criticism, feminist ideology applied to Divylns, "I Touch Myself" and Marxist ideology applied to Madonna, "Material Girl."

The social values cultural model

Developed by Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frenzt (Rushing & Frenzt, 1978; Frenzt & Rushing, 1983), the social values cultural model generalizes about the value systems of a culture through an examination of text. This critical methodology begins with the assumption that a culture represents a consciousness of basic values. When values come into conflict, if the conflict is to be resolved, it offers value transformation or value synthesis. Rhetorical texts operate as a dialectic in which values are examined and either transformed or synthesized by a successful rhetorical act.

Critics using the social values model examine the rhetorical text to discover how the value changes. In particular critics seek to answer such questions as:

What values exist in opposition? (situational elements that produce value tension)

When does value tension surface? (groups, individuals, and the larger society's role in questioning a value standard)

What messages and media express the value conflict? (locus of messages and media.)

Does value reorientation occur? (determination if reorientation is a transformation or synthesis.

Who is the change agent? (identification of a rhetor or empowered agent with psychological ability to effect value change)

What is the role of the audience? (bystander or participant status)

Ultimately the critic seeks to determine if a value is transformed, with one value replacing a pre-existing value standard, or if two competing values or value standards are synthesized into a new single standard in which the characteristics of the two are united.

Bon Jovi, "Wanted: Dead or Alive"

When one thinks of the western myth and Bon Jovi, the images that immediately come to mind are the breathtaking video presentation of "Blaze of Glory," the title song for the film *Young Guns II*. Shot in the red rock country of Arizona's Monument Valley where so many classic John Ford westerns were filmed, Jovi's solo performance in the remains of a drive-in theater on the top of a mesa intercuts scenes of the performance and ends with lightning illuminating the horizon and the theater in flames. As riveting as these images are, Bon Jovi's earlier video for the song "Wanted: Dead or Alive" is an even stronger embodiment of the western myth.

As Rushing (1983) notes, the myth of the old west is a story of the clash between the savage frontier and the individuality needed to tame it, and community which requires cooperation and conformity if the frontier is to bear the civilizing influence to bear. The heroes of 1950s and earlier westerns were individualists, with a sense of duty and honor. Cooper's portrayal of Marshall Will Kane, often rode off into the sunset after saving the community from the depredations of the frontier when its cooperative-conformist values failed it.

"Wanted: Dead or Alive" represents a blend of the performance and narrative styles of video. The video is a narrative about performance as an enactment of the value conflicts symbolized in the myth of the western. Andrew Goodwin (1992) suggests this video functions as pseudo documentary, noting that

"Even performance videos that contain narrative elements may be placed in this category, since it is the act's performance iconography that is made into a story, rather than the song itself. Bon Jovi's *WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE* conflates both levels, in that the refrain "I'm a space (sic) cowboy" seems to reference the outlaw identity (based on the western) and a metaphorical allusion to the musicians as real people (with the implication, outlaws)" (p. 89).

Goodwin is in error in his citation of lyrics, "space cowboy" is the musical property of John Denver, but is correct in his discussion of performance iconography since guitarist Richie Sambora wore a cowboy hat and fringed jacket as his wardrobe trademark long before this song was recorded.

We would also suggest that the musician-as-outlaw motif is only one possible reading of the values contained in the song, since the lyrics tell of:

*The road, a place where the faces are so cold,
I travel all night just to get back home.*

Outlaws are not usually concerned about how people react to them, and we do not think of them as having homes to get back to. The non-concert footage emphasizes the boredom, exhaustion, and tension of the road, as we follow the band as it travels by airplane, bus, van, and limousine (I'm on a steel horse I ride), and as it waits in truck stop coffee shops, hotel rooms, and dressing rooms (So

you're alone, all you do is think).

Shot in black-and-white, featuring a song that appropriates its title from posters that advertised the heads of desperadoes, the video symbolizes the value opposition of rugged individualist performers that come to see them by emphasizing their separation. At one point, the lyrics comment (The people I meet, all go their separate ways) as we see a group of fans get their picture taken and literally get up and walk away, their memory of the occasion preserved on film.

Goodwin (1992) indicates that "music video clips (including performance clips) often seem to with establishing a sense of community within a group of musicians . . . or between musicians (p. 107), which is true here. We see the band share a moment before going on stage. For the only time they are not on stage, we see no indication of any negatives of the road in their demeanor.

I walk these streets, a loaded six string on my back.

I play for keeps, 'cause I might not make it back.

I've been everywhere,

I'm still standing tall.

I've seen a million faces,

and I've rocked them all.

The last line is framed by the most arresting visual imagery of separation in the video. Beginning from behind the lead singer looking out into darkness, the house lights suddenly come up to reveal

Rushing (1983) noted that "the paradox of being alone and in a community" (p.16) was something a hero had to deal with. If he was not an individual he could not be a hero, and if he did not meet the community he would not pass muster either. Likewise, the rock group meets its fans' (community providing an experience (concert), yet the group is not of the community (rugged individualists, westerns, "a pattern of dialectical reaffirmation strengthens the mythic archetype by revitalizing the paradox, as well as the inevitable tension between them" (Rushing, 1983, p. 21). Bon Jovi applies the mythos and rhetorical strategy of these classic westerns in "Wanted: Dead or Alive."

Public Enemy, "By the Time I Get to Arizona"

Rappers make certain communication claims about their music. Chuck D leader of Public Enemy "Black America's TV station. Black life doesn't get the total spectrum of information through (Newsweek, 11 May 1992, p. 52). B-Real of Cypress Hill says, "We're journalists . . . I'll take an event involves one of us or a friend, and I'll explain what happened and why" (Newsweek, 11 May 1992, p. 52). Ultimately, rap is about racism in America and its messages have a sharp edge. "While politicians talk about a harmonious society that's just a social program away, musicians and fans, black and white, dance to the massive schism between the races--consuming the rift as entertainment, a world view and dance to" (Leland, 1992, p. 47).

Rap's cross-over appeal to predominantly white audiences represents an interesting value synthesis. Music critic John Leland (1992) points out the paradox in this appeal. "Typically, when any genre attempts to 'cross over' to a broader audience, it becomes softened in the process . . . Rap was different" (Leland, 1992, p. 47). It had the curious effect of recapturing something that rock seems to have lost since the sixties. As Leland views it:

"The volatility of rap, both in its creative brio and its ability to alienate feels like rock and roll. Popular music is now reflecting deep changes in American society better than any other discussion--just as it did 30 years ago" (p. 48).

In the sixties, the issue was the generation gap between baby boomers and their parents. Today, the fascination with race. Race has replaced the generation gap as the determining force not just in what is made and sounds like but in how it is promoted, and what it means to different listeners" (Leland, 1992, p. 48).

A second aspect of the paradox of this value synthesis is found in the viability of rap, a form of music that combines commercialism and rebellion against the cultural hegemony that produces the very racism it renews. The new orthodoxy has set in, racially charged and financially very profitable. The key strands of pop culture--questions of identity, community, authenticity, language, fashion--all now filter through rap. (Leland, 1992, p. 48). The late rapper Tupac Shakur, Janet Jackson's co-star in *Poetic Justice*, said, "Now [with rap becoming more popular among whites] we see it isn't a black movement. It comes from poverty, not from race" (Newsweek, 11 May 1992, p. 53).

This anti-poverty movement has an ironically commercial basis. Rap albums bring significant profits to the recording industry. "For all the claims that revolutionary rap speaks for oppressed inner-city youth, its consumers are affluent white suburban teenagers seeking to cloak their adolescent rebellion in ghetto toughness" (White, 1992, p. 88). MTV has been a prime factor in making rap a saleable product. Initially guilty of failing to give air time to black artists, MTV has fueled the profitability of rap by appealing to white viewers. "In rap, MTV has found a music to equal its visual jump-cutting rhythms; and rap, which has long been shunned by black radio--has finally found a home" (Leland, 1992, p. 48).

Two characteristics of rap's appeal to the viewer contribute to its ability to serve as a source of value change. First, the rap audience perceives a certain authenticity to rap music that does not exist in other forms of popular music (Leland, 1992 and Roberts, 1991). Public Enemy personifies the myth of rappers as "gangstas." L. L. Cool J. (aka Carlton Ridenhour) is college-educated, and like the other members of the group, from a middle-class family (Thigpen, 1991). Nevertheless, Public Enemy perpetuates the rap myth of rebellion against the systems that engender racism.

"Public Enemy . . . carried this strategy the farthest. In its imagery, sound and lyrics, the group's music is a confrontation. Tapping the potential of video, Public Enemy created and marketed an entire body of work based on a concept of racial warriors. The group's logo showed a black youth in the cross hairs of a rifle sight, dramatized racial conflict." (Leland, 1992, p. 49)

Although existentially questionable, the perception of rappers as authentic members of a disenfranchised community is real for many viewers.

The second characteristic that contributes to rap's ability to stimulate value change is found in its timely message aurally. While it may be the most time-bound of all rock forms, rap is about the present. "Rap is music for the emphatic now, rhythm without a past or future. In rap there is only the present. The present is tense indeed" (Thigpen, 1991, p. 98). This nihilistic message is conveyed with a rhythmic style that reinforces the tension. "Rap is noted for its strong rhythm, often only a percussive emphasis on lyrics. The melody in a rap song frequently follows the performer's enunciation and usually rhymes and involves clever linguistic plays on meaning and sound" (Roberts, 1991 p. 142).

As the 1992 observance of the Federal holiday commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday approached, Public Enemy took the State of Arizona to task for its failure to make the day a State holiday as

described the video as his reinterpretation of Dr. King's role as a black leader, claiming that we "he might have been Martin Luther King Farrakhan" (Quinn, 1992, p. 63), a man more sympathetic to the black community in the absence of his dream's fulfillment. On the day the video first aired on MTV, Chuck D urged viewers not to take it literally. Rather, they should view it as his fantasy about reprisal, creating viewers into realizing the significance of a national holiday honoring a black leader.

"By the Time I Get to Arizona" opens in a manner representative of the claim that rap is the voice of the black community. A smarmy looking and sounding white politician offers his views:

"I know that you have heard all kinds of stories about me. That I am a racist. That I am a supporter of the Ku Klux Klan. That I am against civil rights. All because I oppose the Martin Luther King holiday. But I am a politician. I will stay opposed to it as long as I am in office. And as long as there are city officials with me, there will be no holiday in this state."

Dissolve to black-and-white scenes reminiscent of the civil rights marches of the sixties, as the politician's announcement airs:

"This is Sister Souljah. Public Enemy, Security of the First World, and all aligned forces are traveling off a white supremacy scheme to destroy the national celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. Public Enemy believes that the powers that be in the states of New Hampshire and Arizona have found it a source of discomfort in paying tribute to a black man who tried to teach white people the meaning of civil rights. Show 'em what you got."

The video juxtaposes simulated news footage from the sixties with two synthetic visions of black history: a recreation of Dr. King's activities during the early days of the civil rights movement, and the formation of a paramilitary unit. The recreated King material like the simulated news footage is shot in black and white, while the paramilitary unit, a staple of the MTV generation, this may be their first sustained experience of viewing images so memorable to them. The paramilitary footage is shot in color, and shows members of the unit injecting candy with pepper spray, planting a car bomb, and taking target practice. The video thus offers two narratives--the old story of violence against peaceful demonstrators of the by-gone civil rights era and the new story whose moral is, "We'll take out our leaders and we'll take out one of yours."

The recreation of news footage and the Dr. King material allows Public Enemy more latitude in exploring these two narratives and the value system that underlies each. By recreating events, Chuck D can manipulate them. The viewer quickly realizes that in Public Enemy's vision, violence was very much a part of the early civil rights movement, although it was primarily white violence directed against peaceful blacks. While the recreated Dr. King engages in no overt acts of violence in the video, his contorted expression of tension in his torso, and his obvious wariness as acts of violence against his movement escalate in these videos.

The verbal track offers Chuck D's explanation of why he is taking it on himself to force the issue with the politicians. The political process is not viable for blacks. (Neither party is mine, not the jack ass or the politician). Although the threat of violence is present in the verbal message, the rap emphasizes the black community's growing impatience with the failure to at least honor Dr. King's memory, if not to bring his dream to fruition.

*"And they can't understand why he's a man, who's singin' brother King
They don't like it when I decide to make it Wait,
I'm waitin' for the date, for the man who demands respect 'cause he was great
Come on, I'm on a mission to get a politician to honor,*

or he's a goner, by the time I get to Arizona"

The value synthesis offered by this video may not appeal to pre-MTV generations. King scholars and leaders castigated Public Enemy for doing a disservice to Dr. King's legacy (Quinn, 1992). The video only synthesizes Dr. King's non-violence with the pseudo-violence of Public Enemy's gangsta rap. As Chuck D at his word, that this is his fantasy about what he would do to politicians who even one great black leader, and if we also accept as real the recreated King, a man becoming discredited by the results of non-violent resistance, the synthesis of non-violence and pseudo-violence conveyed in the imagery may succeed as a new value system. This synthesized value sends a clear message: For this generation will continue to use pseudo-violence (words and images, a de-escalated form of violence) rather than resorting to actual terrorist activity. This is neither the non-violence of Dr. King nor the actual violence of black American intifadah but their synthesis, non-physically violent, verbal violence. What Mullen and Bowers (1984) referred to as a "thromise."

The Jungian psychological model

Adapted for the criticism of film (Davies, Farrell, & Matthews, 1982), Jungian analysis can be used in a way a succession of images involve an audience and draw perceptual, affective and cognitive responses from them. Jung's work in psycho-analysis viewed the human psyche as a self-regulating system that maintains a balance between the conscious and the unconscious, resolving the struggle between the public persona and private shadow. The images of the dream world depict the struggle each person has between the persona and shadow sides of self (Rushing & Frenz, 1980).

Davies et al (1982) use Jung's series of dream images, or archetypes, as an analytical method for the verbal and visual whole of a film. In their method, each element of the film is analyzed in terms of archetypes found in story, characters, progression of scenes, special effects, cinematography, and editing. The goal of criticism using the Jungian psychological model is to provide an understanding of archetypal themes the viewing audience experiences and to discover the psychic role such an experience plays for them.

Jung's list of the most frequently recurring symbols from the shadow side of self is used to analyze video content (Davies, et al, 1982):

Mother or origin symbols that represent the female, animals, darkness, and the primeval.

Spirit symbols represent sources or places that provide renewal, energy, and guidance.

Transcendence symbols represent heroes, rebirth, initiation rituals, and images of light.

Wholeness symbols are displayed as circle configurations, a mandala, stones, or treasure.

Jung's theory of dreams finds these symbols commonly occurring as paired opposites.

Critical analysis of rhetorical acts applies the same approach--determine how juxtaposition of symbols are indicative of the search for balance between the rational outer world and the irrational inner world. Rhetorical acts, such as music video, offer the audience a means of coping with exigencies through the video's ability to strike a balance between the persona and shadow.

The Jungian psychological model may have particular applicability for understanding narrative structure in music videos as a source of cultural identity for the MTV generation. Music video and dreams have much in common. The narrative, dream-like structures of video contribute to the viewer's personal stock of cultural symbols and also create a culture-wide "dreampool" (Kinder, 1984). From dreams individuals experience a selection

that become a kind of cultural imprinting. Like dreams, music videos can stimulate viewers to r images every time the song is heard.

"If music video reflects recent currents in popular culture and if we acknowledge the possibility th are significant contributors to our cultural dream or image pool, the similarities between dreams a surely be culturally significant." (Abt, 1987 p. 99)

What that cultural significance is may be found in the similarity between music videos and drea their structure and significant symbols. "One of music video's distinctive features as a social o open-ended quality, aiming to engulf the viewer in its communication with itself, its fashioning o world where image is reality" (Aufderheide, 1986 pp. 57-58). Likewise, dreams engulf the indivi with flexible patterns and fleeting images of reality.

A strong connection between the aural-visual world of music video and the dream world may exist perform similar functions for the psyche. Like a dream, the text of a music video has the ability congested and repressed emotions and desires. There is also "the immense potential of both dre for triggering physiological reactions to symbolic stimuli. In this sense, both music video and d the dicey cease-fire zone between the demands of society and the desires of the individual" (Harve

Further, the shifting symbols of the dream world exist in the seemingly random flow of symbols videos. Most other genre of visual narratives--film and episodic television, for example, typic thematic or structural closure that marks the narrative boundaries (Harvey, 1990). Narrative conceptual music videos are not bound by this convention.

"Symbolic systems are established--then, abandoned. Fragments of myth are introduced, then subsequent and seemingly random symbolic contradictions. The rules change constantly; one n a man, the next minute he is a guitar, the next minute he is a fish." (Harvey, 1990, p. 50)

The fluid, non-linear quality of symbols in music-video-as-dream-state has some particular implic the viewer uses the verbal and visual levels of message in decoding a video as a source of cult community. A rhetorical act in the medium that functions to solve some problem for the viewer after the viewer has decoded a very mixed message. As Lisa St. Clair Harvey indicates:

"Anarchy often triumphs in the text of music video. Social reversals remain reversed; excess followed by yet more excessive behavior rather than by the re-imposition of cultural taboo; tem hardens into a state of semi-permanent lunacy, as inanimate objects take on life, people turn i clocks and robots, and definitions of "living" and "dead" of "male" and "female," "here" and "nc for grabs and open to interpretation." (p. 50)

The impact on the problem-solving abilities of the MTV generation is that living in the world o like living in a perpetual dream state, becomes an alternative to active participation in the exta MTV generation creates not the counter-culture of the sixties, but a counterfeit culture that neith intersects with the mainstream culture. Aufderheide (1986) characterizes this culture.

"Music videos offer a ready-made alternative to social life. With no beginnings or endings--no hist be nightmarish instability, even horror. But there can be no tragedy, which is rooted in the tensi individual and society. Likewise, there is no comedy, which provokes laughter with sharp, unex context, making solemnity slip on a banana peel . . . identity can change with a switch of scene, a beat. The good news is: you can be anything, anywhere. That is also the bad news--which whets t

Eurhythmics, "Sweet Dreams"

There is a certain intertextuality between Annie Lennox's hair style and mannish dress with that of Susan Powter that may have Jungian implications for the female symbol. Lennox's image and her partner Dave Stewart along with the myriad of shifting symbols in "Sweet Dreams," make the video an interesting study of Jungian archetypes.

Lennox, who claims her music is influenced by sixties soul music, and her partner Dave Stewart updated the Motown sound. "Sweet Dreams," according to Szatmary (1991), "featured the soft, soulful, and often influenced vocals of Lennox over the insistent beat of a drum machine" (p. 262). Although it did not have the inspired lyrics, 60 words repeated enough times to fill 3:10 in the video version, the lyrical elements of "Sweet Dreams" also offers some interesting symbology when viewed from the Jungian perspective.

With such a sparse narrative, and instruments used so blatantly as props that even the worst of us can feel a bit of blush, the video presentation of "Sweet Dreams" is purely conceptual and highly Jungian. The tension exists between the Mother of origin (Annie's persona) and wholeness (her shadow). Lennox, dressed in a short haircut, black suit and tie, and black riding crop or baton, is overtly feminine with her heavily made-up face, bright red lipstick, and in the way she carries herself.

We first see her in what looks like a conference room. The walls are lined with gold records (circles of power) and at the conference table working what appears to be a primitive computer (technological treasure). On the wall, the earth seen from space (a circle partially obscured by clouds) and crowded streets are projected on a screen (more technological treasure), Annie eyes a globe on the conference table and sings:

Sweet dreams are made of this.

Who am I to disagree.

I travel the world and the seven seas.

Everybody's looking for something.

These lyrics repeat five more times before the song is over. On the first, one of the symbols of wholeness is a red spot on Annie's forehead (her third eye), enables both of them to move outside the conference room and encounter additional elements of the Mother of origin.

Through Annie's third eye we see the pair floating down a fog-shrouded river (the primeval unconscious) eventually encountering a herd of cows (animals), some of which appear when the video returns to the wholeness of the conference room. While they are outside the conference room, Lennox's costume changes briefly to a floor length red evening gown as she and her partner mimic playing cellos. Only for a moment and at the video's end, as she prepares to go to sleep clad in a night gown, a copy of "Sweet Dreams" on her night stand, do we see her wearing what we think of as a woman's garb.

Jungian symbolism is found primarily in the visual images of "Sweet Dreams." However, one aspect that offers us an impression of the struggle between shadow and persona with some feminist implications is that the business world has historically undervalued women and the rock music scene has welcomed women with open arms. A Jungian critic would suggest that Lennox's female persona has had to make a deal with the devil of her shadow's desire for success.

Some of them want to use you.

Some of them want to get used by you.

Some of them want to abuse you.

Some of them want to be abused.

In her case, the pact requires her to suppress rather than exploit her sexuality in her dress, at least within the confines of the business world. The visual symbols of conference room and the overall nature underscore this pact. Outside that world she is free to be herself from time to time.

Hold your head up. Movin' on.

Keep your head up. Movin' on.

A stronger Jungian interpretation of physical features can be made about Lennox's eyes, some also an important element in her latest video, "Diva." The fact that they are heavily, almost cartoonish has already been mentioned, but this, combined with her pale skin tone, means that the viewer is drawn to them. Corporate (shadow) Annie's eyes don't blink, a remarkable performance. They are like orbs, simultaneously commanding and disturbing. But there are brief glimpses, especially at the end, of other (persona) Annie's eyes. Devoid of make-up, their lids flutter and there no doubt they belong in peace with her identity.

"Sweet Dreams" may be regarded as an archetypal conceptual video. Its visual symbols and lyrics typify the fluid, non-linear progression of images in the dream state. Decoding these symbols into different identities, depending on the varying textual experiences the viewer brings to bear on "Sweet Dreams." A viewer, cognizant of the inner workings of the music business, may see Lennox and Stewart as a struggle between the shadow's desire for creativity as an artist and the persona's suppression of the industry's commercialism. Another viewer, seeing the video for the first time years after its release with Susan Powter's numerous talk-show appearances and infomercials, may interpret Lennox in terms of Powter's. This might produce a powerful female symbol.

Some of our students interpret "Sweet Dreams" in the context of a larger business-world versus personal struggle. They read the video's meaning as the board room represents a job, the social and parental pressure to find employment upon graduation. The personal needs and desires represented by playing tennis outside, and even having time to have a "sweet dream" are secondary to the need to get a job. They frequently see themselves as the cattle, animals herded into the business world. Our students use "Sweet Dreams" as a bad dream about their fear of not finding jobs in a shaky economic environment.

Guns N' Roses, "November Rain"

"November Rain" was picked by MTV to top their 1993 list of the 200 "best" videos of all time. It is a visual and verbal metaphor for the hopes and fears common to teenagers in the later days of the 20th century. The video is a pastiche of performance, narrative, and concept video. As a performance, it offers a glimpse of Axl Rose and Slash portraying their concert personas, although the venue resembles a church performance more than a typical Guns N' Roses concert. As a concept video, it offers a swirl of religious imagery and a contrast of symbols of both the highest (a wedding ceremony) and lowest (the bride's funeral) in the main character's (Axl Rose) spiritual existence.

Narrative is the predominant form of this video overall. The story is a nightmarish variation on the typical meets-girl, boy loses-girl video love story. Images of death are not uncommon in Guns N' Roses videos. In this video features the death of Axl's beloved rather than his own. The narrative is cast as a dream.

suggesting many of the properties of Jung's dream world struggle between persona and shadow. As the video opens, we see Axl taking a drug, possibly a sleeping pill, and then falling into a dream state. He is at a wedding, an event of great joy as the opening lyric suggests:

*When I look into your eyes,
I can see a love restrained.
Darlin' when I hold you,
don't you know I feel the same.*

As the dream unfolds, rain falls and joy turns to sorrow. Unknown agents or forces bring about the change. In the final scenes we see the bride lying in her coffin, again wearing her wedding dress, as Axl grieves.

"November Rain"'s visual images abound with Jungian archetypes that symbolize the struggle for identity experienced by teenage viewers most apt to be drawn to a Guns N' Roses video or album. The most frequently occurring symbols are spirit and transcendence symbols. We see candles, churches (the larger, more opulent one seen only on the inside), and a priest (first vested for the wedding then for the funeral).

The small, plain, stark church is set on some windswept vista. It is a source of renewal and enlightenment and symbolizes the need every teenager has--for adults to get out of their way and let them alone. The lyric states this desire:

*Do you need some time on your own
Do you need some time all alone
Everybody needs some time
Oh I know you know you need some time all alone*

This small church is transformed in the dreamstate into a magnificent, spacious setting for the wedding ceremony, itself a transcendence symbol of religious ritual, the exchange of rings and the kiss.

As the video shifts back and forth between the dream concert and the dream wedding, it offers a contrast between light and dark. The wedding is light--the bride wears a white dress, the candles are white and throw off a bright glow, the priest wears white vestments, a large pale crucifix flashes by. The intercut scenes of the dream concert are dark--the lighting is dim, the back-up singers wear black dresses, the concert-goers all seem to be wearing black clothing. Dark symbols overcome the light as the video ends with the bride's funeral. While she is dressed in her white wedding gown, her coffin is black, the priest is vested in black, and the mourners are all in black. In the last symbolic use of color, the red of a bouquet of fabric roses is washed away by the falling rain.

The struggle between persona and shadow emerging from "November Rain" is that of teen expectations for a happy life and teen fears about external forces that may interfere with realizing those expectations. Teenage dreams are symbolized by the light images of happiness in love and the wedding ceremony (I can remember knowin' that you were mine, all mine). The verbal and visual symbols also feature a longing for wholeness, visually represented by the exchange of wedding rings and verbally by the most frequent lyric. (Don't you think that you need somebody, don't you think that you need someone.)

The dominant shadow theme in this video is one of loss. At the end of the story, Axl loses his bride and is left alone. Earlier the lyric has forecast the possibility that even a wealthy, popular rock star might not escape the sorrow that frequently afflicts today's teens:

*Nothin' last forever, and we both know hearts can change
and it's hard to hold a candle in the cold November rain.*

*We've been through this such a long long time, just trying to cure the pain, oh yeah.
Knowin' no one's comin', knowin' no one's going, no one really should.
Let it go today, walkin' away.*

Although remote by virtue of his celebrity, Axl Rose is a figure with whom the viewer can identify "Rockers end up walkin' in the cold November rain."

From the Jungian perspective, the appeal of this video is in how it may function to allow the viewer repressed fears of failure, rejection, and abandonment. The dream world of the video gives ten the worst fears the viewer might have so that they might be faced. And for those unwilling to face also the possibility that this is just a dream; the sleeper may awake.

The possibility of awakening also represents the parallel cultures of the worlds of teens and adult world may foster the same fears of failure, rejection, and abandonment, it is not "adult" to them, especially for young males. In the dream world of "November Rain" the shadow's fears of the persona's need to live in the world. The viewer experiences Axel's very public joy and sorrow.

In some respects, "November Rain" sends a message to the viewer to detach yourself from both sorrows of life. (Nothing last[s] forever, even cold November rain.) Identity can indeed change in one moment you are happy, the next overwhelmed by loss. All emotions pass, so do not get too them. Since the pain is too great, as we see in Axl's persona by the video's end, the only safe world, so dream on.

Ideological models

Ideological approaches to criticism focus on a belief system which in turn sets the standard to judge rhetorical acts on a cultural basis. The ideological critic sees truth as determined by his or her That standard of truth is applied to rhetorical acts to determine the extent to which a given challenges political and social hegemony according to the tenets of the particular ideology the critic. Feminism and Marxism are predominant models of media criticism; feminist critics focus on gender Marxist critics focus on broader social-economic issues.

The feminist model

As a political ideology feminism seeks equality for women in all aspects of culture (Foss, 1989; Hunt Steeves, 1987). Feminist criticism examines rhetorical acts to determine the extent to which society women. Two ideological assumptions underlie feminism: men and women experience the world ways and language use creates gender inequality. Feminist critics apply these two assumptions to how and why a particular rhetorical act reflects gender in a given culture. A rhetorical act is analyzed basis of questions about gender experience and language use:

- What gender orientation--male, female, or androgynous--is represented in the rhetorical act?
- What cultural ideals of masculine and feminine behaviors and beliefs does the rhetorical act suggest?
- What evidence can be found in the rhetorical act that one gender is devalued? Do verbal and non-verbal devalue women?
- Is that which is culturally valuable presented as masculine or feminine?

The Divynls, "I Touch Myself"

Unless it is largely apocraphal, the story behind how this song came to be written is one that n

Not only are women seen as dependent on men, they are also characterized as passive. The two girls seen earlier reappear from time to time along with other attractive women who seem to wait for someone, some male someone, to act. Since the video is more conceptual than narrative that these "other women" are apparitions that embody the singer's insecurity about her true love. If these other women are real, the video has the feel of peeping inside a bordello. In either case the women it communicates is certainly debasing and devaluing.

Christina Amphlett's costuming and performance make her appear to be exactly what Pareles says not, a boy toy. Her costumes shows a lot of thigh and heaving bosom. While the viewer notices the musicians who pop up from time to time pay no more attention to her than to the furniture. Her style, when she isn't touching parts of herself, features the most hip action since Elvis. In a particularly memorable scene of domesticity, she is doing the ironing with more hip action than the Playboy bunny on steroids. Despite the fact that she seems like she would be willing to keep going the men in the video do not seem to notice or if they do they do not care.

By the end of the video, "I Touch Myself" has an unsavory air about it, not because it deals with masturbation but rather because its message about male-female relationships has a decidedly sad tone. There are many male musicians seen throughout the video, primarily guitar players, who play their instruments. None acknowledge Christina Amphlett's existence, much less her desires. Since she seems to get a man to satisfy her passion, she is reduced to singing into a lily, a flower with a pronounced stem. If it were a microphone, grasping and stroking the upright of a banister, and repeating "I touch myself" over as the song concludes.

Feminists and non-feminists alike have long decried the "she wanted it, so I gave it to her" myth. The message about male-female relationships conveyed by "I Touch Myself" is equally toxic: "she didn't give it to her." While Christina Amphlett may be a tough cookie on and off stage, "I Touch Myself" casts her in the kind of woman-as-victim role that the predominantly younger viewers, male and female alike, should be educated to reject. Since her physical presence on screen brings the word, *zaftig*, and since her portrayal of women as sluts-in-heat plays to many young men's imaginations, it is unfortunately likely that this is one video that made a lot of high school boys' "must see" or "watch on tape" list.

The Marxist model

Marxist critics view society as a complex network of groups who are divided by the struggle for hegemony. These divisions are fostered by economic factors, gender, race, ethnic or national origin, and political ideology. The experience is one of struggle, as each group tries to achieve dominance through control of culture, including communication media. The Marxist ideological model views mass media as the natural subject for critical analysis, because mass media is the principal means of social control in modern society.

Marxist criticism has as its goal the identification of those rhetorical acts that legitimize the hegemony of the dominant social groups. Marxist critics employ critical questions that examine the hegemony of a rhetorical act:

In what social, political, or economic context does a rhetorical act exist?

How does a given rhetorical act articulate, reflect, or legitimize the ideology of the dominant social group?

How do the visual and verbal symbols provide evidence of the subjugation or exploitation of groups?

How does a given rhetorical act attempt to incorporate subordinate classes or groups in the hegemony of the dominant social group?

How does the rhetorical act perpetuate the hegemonic ideology of the dominant group?

Madonna, "Material Girl"

Madonna's rise from merely being a popular act in dance clubs to super-star female power in the music industry is a case study of sexual hegemony in American society. Madonna's attempted metamorphosis into an embodiment of female power and the message that attempt sends to her fans can be best understood through a Marxist interpretation of "Material Girl." The video offers a narrative with several intertextual levels.

First, there is Madonna's creation of herself in the image of A Star is Born. "Material Girl" is a statement of making in Hollywood, and Goodwin (1992) interprets the video as a "star-text" for her.

"The Material Girl in the visual narrative (and additional dialogue) is the character played by whom Madonna portrays. The persona taken on by Madonna in this clip is that of an actress singing the song "Material Girl,:" but who is, in fact, not one herself . . . It is Madonna's star identity that is constructed as that of Material Girl, and this clip was precisely designed to help establish it . . . The function of shifting Madonna's image from that of disco-bimbo to "authentic" star." (p. 100)

Second, there is the intertextuality of "Material Girl" as a parody of Marilyn Monroe's performance of "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" in the movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blonds*. The intertextuality is not necessarily of Monroe, but of the Hollywood archetype of the sexy blonde who uses her looks to get what she wants. As John Fisk (1987) notes:

"The meanings of Material Girl depend upon its allusion to *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and its intertextuality with all texts that contribute to and draw upon the meaning of "the blonde." Intertextual knowledge preorients the reader to exploit television's polysemy by activating the various meanings, that is, by making some meanings rather than others." (p. 108)

Finally, there is the intertextuality of Madonna's oeuvre taken as a whole. "Madonna's popular image of an assertive, talented woman in the male-dominated music industry contributes to how we watch her music videos. She is exercising her control over the image she projects musically and visually" (Schwichtenberg, 1992 p. 125). Madonna has created a female persona that dominates rather than is dominated by the male hierarchy. The sexuality of the blond icon is her capital for purchasing dominance in the male hierarchy. "Sex sells in the mainstream and Madonna's sexual self-presentation may be a commodity particularly amenable to dominant patriarchal discourses" (Schwichtenberg, 1992 p. 129).

Do these three elements add up to an image of Madonna triumphant over the hegemony of male dominance that seems to permeate American culture and its popular culture productions? A Madonna "Material Girl" reveals that Madonna may not be the triumphant sexual capitalist she portrays herself to be; she is at least the equal of any man.

"Material Girl" has separate messages in its visual and verbal symbology that exist in tension with each other. At first the verbal and visual align as the video's narrative structure unfolds. We see the Hollywood mogul who wants the girl. A Hollywood toady and the mogul have this exchange:

Mogul: *She's fantastic, I think she could be a star.*

Toady: *She could be, she could be great, she could be a major star.*

Mogul: *She is a star.*

Toady: *The biggest star in the universe right now as we speak. Those were the sets, the director's thing, director's hot, he's hip, he's here, he's going to be doing all kinds of things. He's going to change her set, got a great idea for a blue one.*

Mogul: *Don't touch anything.*

Toady: *He touches one things he's gone, I swear, he's history.*

Mogul: *I want to meet her.*

Toady: *You got it, any time, name the place, name any where in any state you got it.*

Mogul: *Now.*

This is followed by a scene in which the "actress" is talking on the phone:

Madonna: *Yeah, he's still after me. Just gave me a necklace. I don't know, I think it's real diamonds. I think he can impress me by giving me expensive gifts. It's nice though, you want it?*

We see the mogul lurking outside her door with another lavishly wrapped, small package in his hand. The actress rejects the idea that diamonds will impress her, he throws the package in a waste can.

The video then shifts to a sound stage where a musical number is being filmed in which Madonna performs "Material Girl." She is given diamonds, furs, reaches into men's pockets for their cash. The lyrics have a theme that she is more concerned with a man's bottom line than his bottom.

*Some boys kiss me, some boys hug me, I think they're OK.
If they don't give me proper credit I just walk away.
They can beg and they can plead, but they can't see the light, that's right.
'Cause the boy with the cold hard cash is always Mr. Right.*

*'Cause we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl.
You know that we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl.*

*Some boys roam and some boys slow dance that's all right with me.
If they can't raise my interest then I have to let them be.
Some boys die and some boys lie but I don't let them play, no way.
Only boys that save their pennies make my rainy day.*

As the narrative shifts from the song-and-dance number to the boy-seeks-girl love story, the mogul gives the actress a ragged bunch of daisies--the gift of the proletarian man to his sweetheart, the most common gift than can be picked in any field rather than an expensive spray of hothouse roses. The actress accepts the gift with a smile and mogul-gets-girl. Cut to the song-and-dance number, and as it concludes we see the mogul proffering a wad of bills to a farmer for his old, beat-up truck. The sale is concluded before the actress enters the scene. As the love story concludes, the mogul, posing as a man of modest means, and the actress

What is the dialectic tension of the visual and verbal elements in terms of the Madonna-as-material-girl image? If Madonna's goal is to reverse male-dominated hegemony in the entertainment industry, is she sending a mixed message. Since the actress in "Material Girl" is secure enough about her own personal capital to love the man she chooses rather than the one she needs to advance, she does not use her sexuality to dominate the moguls of Hollywood and she is deceived by the false front her mogul character. At the same time, it could be argued that because she is such an exciting woman the mogul character

courtship ritual.

In many ways he is like her, secure enough financially to be able to buy the trappings of poverty, truly modest means could not afford to buy the trappings of wealth or even rent them. If thought they were not part of the power elite, they would not have made the choices they made. The video reinforces the notion that those that have, get. In this case they get each other, sending their message consciously or unconsciously, almost as if it were instinct or a law of nature, people pair up with their own social class. Madonna is not the champion of the feminine underclass in the entertainment world of sexual politics at large that she would like us to believe. She is however a pretty strong Madonna.

The visual elements of "Material Girl" provide her with star-text framing, but the tension between the visual and verbal elements negates Madonna's image as a sexual capitalist who triumphs over the male-dominated Hollywood hierarchy to the benefit of all women. The visual narrative reveals that she is seduced by the ability to purchase affection and sex that she attempts to turn to her advantage. She is no more a sexual capitalist in a male-dominated culture than any other woman, but she is personally powerful enough that her own interests matter no more to her than most men's ignorance of women matters to them. She may not be a second-class citizen, but she is no second-class citizen.

Conclusion

Let us end with the beginning, and an exegesis on what led us to consider the cultural approaches more appropriate to the music video genre of communication in the first place. As with so many things, this was a result of the serendipitous confluence of two forces. That is academese for "we stumbled on

During mid-Winter Break (it's called Spring Break in places where they get less than 200 inches of snow every two years ago, Don was trying to figure out how to quickly introduce the concepts of Cultural Criticism to his students. As luck would have it, he was also taping one of MTV's "Greatest (pick a number) (pick a time frame)." Later review of the tapes, with much use of the fast forward button on the VCR, revealed that, in a little over an hour of real time, videos amenable to critique by not only the methods in this paper but the others in our Cultural Approaches chapter as well had aired. In the tradition of Archimedes, Don said "Eureka," got up from his recliner, and started editing videotape.

That bit of mostly accurate historical whimsy aside, finding an appropriate methodological approach for the rhetorical analyses of music videos does pose a challenge. It is possible to apply, in some fashion, any of the established approaches, such as neo-Aristotelianism, Dramatism, Symbolic Interaction Theory, or Narrative. However, these approaches may not take you very far if you are working with performance or conceptual video, or with a song whose lyrics are non-propositional and not amenable to enthymematic examination.

Other approaches might enable you to discover something about symbol usage, but you quickly stumble against their limitations. It is important to remember that music video is a product of our commercial culture first and foremost. Thus, unlike other genres of rhetorical activity, music video is likely to be the rhetor's response to a rhetorical situation through an act of interpretation and refutation, although there are possible exceptions such as the Public Enemy rap discussed in this paper. In most part, music video as a genre of communication does not exist for and overtly rhetorical purposes other than to sell records and net viewers.

It is our position that taking a cultural perspective affords the critic a greater opportunity to explore the rhetorical function of music video and to focus on the unique characteristics of this genre. It is also our position that regardless of one's critical perspective, one must be cautious to not read more into any allegory than is there. As Brown and Schulze (1990) warn:

"Both social scientific and critical analyses often assume that "expert" coding or interpretation of a text leads to the same meanings as those constructed by typical viewers. But even the most informed viewer, narrative, or psychoanalytic "readings" of a text cannot predict the meanings that will be made in different social situations different from those of the academic critic." (p. 88)

Stated another way, we have to be cautious that when we pick up our methodological hammer to analyze everything in the world of music video does not start to look like a nail.

Freud is reputed to have said, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar," and perhaps the guitars in "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" are just musical instruments. Professor Lawrence Grossberg (1992) reports that his students are a little bit more cautious about taking a college class on rock because "they know that too much intellectual legitimation will diminish the possibilities of its effectiveness; it will become increasingly a meaningful form to be interpreted rather than a popular form to be felt on one's body and to be lived passionately and emotionally" (p. 79). Freud, "sometimes a video is just a video." Accept it and enjoy it on its own terms.

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