

**FEEL IT ALL AROUND: ART MUSIC VIDEO, ART CINEMA, AND
SPECTATORSHIP IN THE STREAMING ERA**

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This dissertation describes a trend in contemporary music video that I call “art music video.” This kind of narrative music video features striking images that disrupt plot coherence, prompting a kind of spectatorship that involves endlessly rethinking narrative events and meaning. These striking images leave spectators with a number of questions at video’s end that neither the spectator nor the video can answer with certainty; these disruptive moments emphasize that the art music video is essentially and intensely discontinuous. This dissertation details the connection of the art music video to art cinema—as an institution and global cinema trend from 1945 to the present day—and art cinema spectatorship, emphasizing the widespread availability of both art music video and art cinema in high definition on streaming platforms. The first chapter traces the form and key characteristics of contemporary art music video by comparing its narrative features to those common to art cinema, both as scholars have tended to define art cinema and within specific examples of classic art films that challenge these definitions; the second chapter focuses on art films that deploy pop songs to describe how these pop music moments call into question auteur-focused readings of art cinema and unsettle art cinema’s traditional white, male, heterosexual perspective; the third chapter situates the defiant work of Kanye West at the intersection of black cinema and art cinema by describing his work in the context of hip-hop aesthetics and Jacques Rancière’s notion of the aesthetic regime; and the fourth chapter takes up the concepts of cinematic excess and the neo-baroque to describe art cinema and art music video as promoting a spectatorship attentive to excessive surface and

excessive depth. As a whole, this dissertation aims to chart the lineage between music video and art cinema, and to locate the art music video within a feedback loop of virtual, aesthetic, intellectual, and affective contexts.

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PREFACE

First, I would like to thank my committee for all of their help and support in this process. Randall, I appreciate you joining the team fairly late in the game and encouraging me with your enthusiasm about my project; Mark, thanks for your willingness to both criticize and contextualize my work—I always enjoy talking music with you; Dan, your discussions with me over phone calls and during brief return visits to Pittsburgh have been incredibly helpful; Neepa, thank you for your very detailed feedback on all of my work, regarding both its form and its content—I also deeply appreciate your willingness to let me borrow your library access during the months when I didn't have it. Adam, the chair of the committee, thank you for helping me navigate a rather complicated constellation of topics—music video, art cinema, spectatorship—in our numerous meetings together. I especially liked those moments when you said, “There, write *that* down” (I can hear you saying it in my head) as a way of showing which of my spoken observations would be most useful for shaping the dissertation.

Second, I want to acknowledge the incredible intellectual and emotional support of my Pittsburgh family: Javier O'Neil-Ortiz, Molly Kirwan, John Rhym, and Veronica Fitzpatrick. We've had so many great discussions about the terrible, terrible films you've made me watch. That's a joke, but I do believe that these informal discussions—as well as the experience of just watching stuff, together—have honed many parts of this dissertation, especially the pleasure it takes in moments of shock and surprise and wonder. I'd like to think that any wonderful moment

it contains is only there because we danced it there. I'd also like to acknowledge the friendship and support of my sister, Erika Deiseroth, who, along with my other family members, encouraged me to keep going when I was exhausted and laughed with me often. Thanks as well to the friends and graduate students—most of whom are now *previous* graduate students—whose work and thinking I admire for its imagination and rigor: Jedd Hakimi, Jordan Hayes, Julie Nakama, Ben Ogrodnik, Kuhu Tanvir, Kevin Flanagan, Amanda Awanjo, and Katie Bird. I can only hope that this dissertation—and the defense that you're about to witness—exhibits even a fraction of your scholarly adeptness.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

At this point, music video has lived many different lives. Before the music video became a recognizable form, there were the Scopitone and Panoram movie jukeboxes, as well as short musical films commonly called soundies, in the 1940s and 1950s;¹ additionally, promotional clips were distributed by artists and record labels to be exhibited in lieu of physical appearances in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, music video countdown shows became popular in the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Video Concert Hall* on USA and Showtime and *Night Flight* on USA the two most prominent in the United States.² MTV appeared on the scene in 1981, bringing the music video to new prominence and wider popularity, and then YouTube—which launched in 2005—became popular as a platform for streaming music videos in an era when MTV had significantly decreased its music video programming to focus on reality television instead.

All of this movement has made the music video difficult to pin down in terms of production and reception.³ There's a story to tell about each of these contexts: their particular aesthetics, their makers, their funding and distribution, their materiality. And this is before we

¹ Steven Shaviro mentions these movie jukeboxes in his recent *Digital Music Videos*, but it's worth noting that he also goes back a step further to *The Jazz Singer* (1927, dir. Alan Crosland), since "it gave audiences the opportunity to see Al Jolson, one of the most popular singers of the time, perform on camera" (1). Shaviro also makes note of *A Hard Day's Night* (1964, dir. Richard Lester), with its songs "separated from the rest of the action and often filmed as self-contained skits" (1).

² It was another show, BBC's *Top of the Pops*, that featured what Shaviro calls the first music video: Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (1975, dir. Bruce Gowers). *Top of the Pops* was not a music video countdown show—it usually featured live performances by popular artists.

³ Shaviro: "cultural categories like 'music video' are intrinsically vague, with fuzzy boundaries" (4).

even get to the question at the heart of this dissertation: How does music video fit into the wider cinematic landscape? The logical place to move to answer this question is the musical, whether that's the Classical Hollywood Musical, the rock 'n' roll musical, the Bollywood musical, or any other of the musical's iterations. But we could also look to the marketing surrounding popular movie soundtracks, perhaps focusing special attention on the Blaxploitation Era, when soundtracks for films like *Shaft* (1971, dir. Gordon Parks) and *Super Fly* (1972, dir. Gordon Parks, Jr.) outgrossed the films in which they appeared and featured music created by black musicians in styles popular at the time. Or we might even look to movie trailers or other sorts of advertisements to focus on the way in which music videos act as elaborate commercials for the songs they feature.

But this dissertation tables these questions—and the kind of historical work necessary to provide more details about how music videos were produced and circulated in each chapter of music video history—in favor of a more personal, idiosyncratic approach that takes up global art cinema narrative and the spectatorship it encourages in order to place art cinema in conversation with a particular trend in contemporary music video. Part of the appeal of this approach, for me, is its illogic: viewers and critics tend to see music video and art cinema as existing on completely opposite ends of a moving image spectrum with new media, low art, postmodernism, and speed on one end and with old media, high art, modernism, and slowness on the other. As somebody who—in his own, private form of illogic—has formed a devotional attachment to each, I thought, ‘What might happen if we fold this spectrum in on itself?’ As this dissertation sets out to explain, what we uncover is a close relationship between the two forms, with art cinema

commonly relying on pop songs for realism, ambiguity, and critical distance⁴ and with contemporary music video featuring ambiguous narratives that work in ways strikingly similar to art cinema narratives.

Enough crossover exists between the two media forms—art cinema and music video—for me to label a particular kind of contemporary music video the *art music video*: a kind of music video with an ambiguous narrative ruptured by striking images that force a reconsideration of the previously provided narrative information. But to call this the *art music video* immediately poses a problem, since most contemporary definitions of art cinema rely upon a description of its institutional features: funding, production, distribution, marketing, exhibition, and so on. These definitions involve an examination of the politics of events and ideas surrounding art cinema, like prestigious international film festivals, awards, grants, auteurs, genres, and stars. However, when it comes to music video, there are no (or very few) analogues to these institutional features and politics—that is, the funding, production, distribution, marketing, exhibition, and so on occur for music video in a very different way⁵ and do not necessarily determine whether a music video is labeled “art.”

Another problem posed by the term *art music video* has to do with the aforementioned high culture-low culture distinction that the term breaks down: “art” is on the side of high culture, “music video” on the side of low culture. In this view, *art music video* is a term that contradicts itself. While I would argue that its absurdity in and of itself makes it worth using (since it’s this absurdity that forces us to rethink the boundary between high culture and low culture in the first place), the term *art music video* also provides an illustration of what Steven

⁴ Perhaps art cinema also includes popular music vampirically: to attempt to reinvigorate that which is seen by many audiences as incredibly boring.

⁵ However, there’s room for more research and thinking here, since grants fund some music videos in much the same way that they (often) do art cinema. See, for example, the now-defunct MuchFACT.

Shaviro calls “the way connections between high and popular culture are being reconfigured in the twenty-first century” (18). For Shaviro, videos like those for Animal Collective’s “Applesauce” (2013, dir. Gaspar Noé) and Kylie Minogue’s “All the Lovers” (2010, dir. Joseph Kahn) refer directly to high modernist art (Paul Sharits’ *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*. [1968] and the photography of Spencer Tunick, respectively) while at the same time “releas[ing] us from the straitjacket of modernist rigor and reductionism” (84). For Shaviro, digital music video provides a sensual, pleasurable, aesthetic experience while still referring back to stuffy, stringent high-modernist art. But if modernism usually focuses on form at the expense of representation, illusion, or anything that traditionally provides audience identification and enjoyment (and thus ends up on the high end of the low-to-high culture spectrum), then we must also reexamine the tendency to associate art cinema with modernism,⁶ since many art films rely—in their most thoughtful, affecting moments—on pre-existing popular songs. (Chapter 2 examines this phenomenon at length.) We find “intensely embodied aesthetic experience” not only in digital music videos but also in the art films from which digital art music video springs (84). Moreover, Shaviro sees in the music video a mode of telling stories⁷ that is “not dependent on the articulation of space, time, and causality” of “mainstream narrative cinema” (15). This mode of telling stories is also a key feature of art cinema, which I discuss further below and in Chapter 1.

My term, *art music video*, exists as a music video *type* under Shaviro’s umbrella term of *digital music video*. It is a kind of music video that has nothing to do with the genre of music played in the music video or the features generally appearing in music videos of that genre. In other words, if we might tentatively name certain music genres—hip-hop, R&B, country, jazz,

⁶ For more on this association, see Kovács 16-32.

⁷ When music videos do decide to provide narratives, that is. Shaviro notes that “music videos are often nonnarrative” (15).

rock, electro—and music video genres—the party video, the live performance video, the dance video, the “crew” video, the gross-out video, the vacation video—we can also note that the “art” descriptor *transcends* these categories and can appear in any of them, as a sort of productive complication. We can say the same for art cinema, which includes films from a wide variety of genres: melodramas, musicals, westerns, noirs, costume dramas. To base one’s description of art music video or art cinema on their narrative features and the spectatorship these features encourage does not, then, turn art music video and art cinema into genres. Instead, to do so shifts the conversation from institutional matters to concerns of spectatorship⁸ (a direction in which Shaviro’s term to describe Animal Collective’s “Applesauce”—“intensely embodied aesthetic experience”—already leads us).

⁸ Spectatorship, in the context of film and media studies, is a fraught term and one whose many possible meanings are too complex to resolve in the context of this dissertation. However, my use of it here could, productively, lead us down any number of thought-provoking paths. We might begin, for example, by thinking about Althusser and ideology, considering the ways in which art cinema interpellates the viewing subject (in comparison to Hollywood and mainstream cinema) (Mayne 14). We could then move on to consider Barthes’ *S/Z*, paying special attention to the relationship between the “writerly” and art cinema’s narrative discontinuities, as well as to what Barthes calls the hermeneutic, semic, and proairetic codes (Mayne 15). We might also consider writers like Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey, and Stephen Heath, whose psychoanalytic approaches allowed a generalizing stance towards cinema spectators, who—in their work—tended to be seen as subjects embedded in the “dominant ideology” that the very structures of the cinematic apparatus enforced (Mayne 17-8). Of special interest might be “John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*” and “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” both published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the latter of which describes the way in which certain films include a kind of “internal criticism . . . which cracks the film apart at the seams. If one reads the film obliquely, looking for symptoms; if one looks beyond its apparent formal coherence, one can see that it is riddled with cracks: it is splitting under an internal tension which is simply not there in an ideologically innocuous film” (qtd. in Mayne 19). Judith Mayne, whose invaluable *Cinema and Spectatorship* I’m relying upon in the sentences above, describes, however, the way in which “the cinematic institution under investigation [in the work of the writers and mentioned above] was the classical or mainstream cinema” (21). It’s against this mainstream cinema that art cinema sets itself, although not by rejecting narrative altogether—in fact, one might argue that art cinema (particularly as I attempt to redefine art cinema, in Chapter 1) purposefully foregrounds those cracks that one must actively seek out in mainstream cinema. Furthermore, Mayne neglects to discuss the fact that “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” does not solely focus on mainstream cinema but includes among its categories those political films that actively and directly “attack the ideology” (category [b]), those films whose formal qualities constitute an implicit political attack upon dominant ideology (category [c]), and those political films that “do not effectively criticize the ideological system in which they are embedded because they unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery” (category [d]) (32). Somewhere in these three categories is what tends to be labeled art cinema, and Comolli and Narboni suggest that it’s only a critical spectatorship that can determine which of these categories to which a given art film belongs. My project does not go so far as to claim that art cinema and art music video actively resist dominant ideology; instead, my project emphasizes that the narratives of *art* texts encourage a kind of productive, unresolvable confusion through their use of striking images. This confusion—both intellectual and affective—neither totally disrupts ideology nor totally affirms it, in large part because spectators never find a totally convincing resolution that would turn their uncertainty to conviction.

This is certainly not to say that institutional matters and spectatorship are unrelated, since modes of spectatorship develop from viewing practices that are connected, in turn, to institutions. Thirty years ago, we might have contrasted urban arthouse theaters and film festivals as the major places to view art cinema with cable television as the major place to view music videos, but, in fact, recent years have seen a coming together of viewing practices⁹ for art cinema and music video, since both are most widely available on the internet, via streaming.¹⁰ While some have accused the internet of promoting surface over substance or glance over gaze,¹¹ I argue that the kind of spectatorship encouraged by art cinema and art music video prompts a kind of disruptive thoughtfulness—that is, a kind of affectively and intellectually engaged thinking about narrative disruption. The circulation of art cinema and art music video on the internet, in high definition, *heightens* this kind of thinking instead of acting as obstruction to it¹², in large part because the internet exists at a junction where users must already negotiate a number of different ideas at once and be prepared to work through the very kind of disruption present in art cinema and art music video.¹³

This may seem very new—the virtual, the uploaded, the network interruption—but to consider art cinema spectatorship is in fact a return to some of the foundational writings about art

⁹ It's also important to note that production tools have converged. In the 1980s, we might have contrasted video (music video) with 35mm and 16mm film (art cinema), but now filmmakers and videomakers predominantly shoot both on HD digital cameras.

¹⁰ A fruitful project might involve comparing new, virtual platforms in which music video and art cinema exist. How, for example, does one tend to watch FilmStruck compared to how one tends to watch YouTube?

¹¹ See, for example, Naomi Baron's "Do Students Lose Depth in Digital Reading?" (2016) and Ferris Jabr's "The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens" (2013). For a more nuanced, book-length take on the subject that questions the idea of a completely active internet user in favor of emphasizing internet *spectators*, see Michele White's *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (2006).

¹² Perhaps we can tie this to what Shaviro calls "music video's second golden age," which he sees as a result of "[t]he combination of ever-cheaper digital video production with the ease of online digital distribution" (6-7).

¹³ Shaviro writes, "Sonic and visual *material* is always being worked and reworked: in the physical spaces before the camera and sound recorder, in these mechanisms' own processes of capture and transmission, in the digital transformations accomplished through the computer, and in our own subjective acts of perception, reception, and synthesis" (11, italics Shaviro's). This "worked and reworked" aspect of digital images encourages a productive curiosity regarding discontinuity, since all digital things exist in a state of discombobulating flux.

cinema. I'm referring not only to Bazin and his understanding of postwar Italian cinema as able to prompt a certain kind of prolonged, careful looking¹⁴ but also to David Bordwell and his "Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice." Here, Bordwell writes, "Uncertainties persist [in the spectator's understanding of an art film] but are understood as such, as *obvious* uncertainties, so to speak. Put crudely, the slogan of the art cinema might be, 'When in doubt, read for maximum ambiguity'" (99). Bordwell is concerned with many aspects of art cinema but takes a special interest in how spectators view art films. How do spectators make sense of these narrative films that are "altogether different from *Rio Bravo* on the one hand and *Mothlight* on the other" ("Art Cinema" 94)? Leading up to Bordwell's claim regarding art cinema's "slogan" is a list of parenthetical questions ("Is a character's mental state causing the uncertainty? Is life just leaving loose ends? ... What is being 'said' here? What significance justifies the violation of the norm?" [98]) that—along with his claim regarding ambiguity—suggest Bordwell sees art cinema as a cinema that prompts a spectatorship of active questioning.

This active questioning is absolutely central to the art music video, too, as spectators wrestle with their uncertainties. The art music video viewer asks, "How is what I'm seeing connected to reality? Which characters' particular ways of thinking might I be attuned to here? To what aspects of real life does the video connect, even when not portraying everyday reality?"¹⁵ For example, watching the video for Jaden Smith's "Fallen" (2016, dir. Miles Cable & Jaden Smith) which follows a wounded Smith as he vomits blood in the streets of a deserted

¹⁴ Karl Schoonover sums up Bazin's ideas regarding art cinema spectatorship this way, in "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer": "...the art film...encourag[es] its spectator to acclimate him-or herself to slow time and remain open to its potentialities. The restlessness or contemplation induced by art cinema's characteristic fallow time draws attention to the activity of watching and ennoble[s] a forbearing but unbedazzled spectatorship" (70).

¹⁵ On top of all this is another key question: "How does what I'm seeing relate to the song—musically and lyrically—that I'm hearing in the video?" This also becomes a key question for those art films that include popular music in their audio track, especially when the song included takes over the soundtrack, a practice I'll discuss at some length in Chapter 2.

Western town identified as “Calabasas 1867,” spectators wonder how what they’re seeing connects to the video’s named setting, especially since Smith wears clothing obviously from a time nearer to the present (e.g. Nike shoes, a Suicidal Tendencies patch). Things are disrupted further by the appearance, later in the video, of a leather jacket (with a colorful floral/angelic pattern) that hangs from a metal post; a record player/telephone with the cover of a Kid Cudi album prominently displayed; and a figure that the end credits identify as “Sheriff Harry,” a white man dressed in all black with silver chains around his neck and a black velvet, wide-brimmed hat on his head. The video also eventually moves to a sunset-lit mountaintop, where Jaden Smith dances and then dies or goes to sleep on the dirt ground directly in front of the record player/phone. Are we witnessing a kind of death dance as the Jaden Smith character, whom the end credits identify as “Syre,” moves into a next life? Is the sheriff responsible for his death, for gently escorting him to the next life, or both? What does this video tell us about death or about dream or about racial tension and time?

Bordwell ends up tying art cinema’s uncertainties and ambiguities to the figure of the auteur and to realism, arguing that art cinema’s ambiguity arises from the spectator’s inability to fully understand if the disruption they see is representative of some expanded notion of realism or of authorial expressivity. It’s ironic, then, that Bordwell often ends up being criticized as a figure who sees art cinema as a genre instead of as a constellation of various institutional factors, since it’s his insistence upon art cinema’s institution of the auteur that causes him to narrow his perspective and limit the causes of art cinema’s ambiguities. (It’s additionally ironic that those writers who focus more explicitly on the structures of funding and production and distribution and exhibition end up attempting to imagine an art cinema loosed from the constraints of the auteur and of the film festival, as I’ll discuss in Chapter 1.)

One of the strengths of music video is to move us away from the figure of the auteur, at the very least by emphasizing a diffuse sort of authorship. If the musical artist sometimes seems the most obvious figure to name as the author of the music video, this is complicated by prominent directors, producers, choreographers, and record labels who are sometimes seen as playing the central role in authoring the video. Furthermore, as I've mentioned above, there are few industrial norms for the music video like there are for art cinema, which means that the spectatorship it encourages doesn't have to limit itself to certain institutional commonplaces, like the auteur or realism. This hints at the way in which art music video encourages us to re-read or re-think art cinema and its potential for seeing the old anew (as is explicitly clear in "Fallen").

The contemporary moment is an especially fruitful and engaging one for music video, since the newfound artistic freedom provided by the internet means that a wider range of videos is available for viewing than ever before. While larger record labels still sometimes wield influence over what kinds of videos major stars produce,¹⁶ it's not only major labels that have the clout to get their videos shown, since any artists can post their own music videos on YouTube for the world to see. The wide availability of lower-cost digital cameras and digital editing software also means that inventive, aesthetically interesting videos don't have to rely on a large budget. The art music video represents just one kind of contemporary video available on an internet full of them,¹⁷ but, as I argue here, art music video is a particularly complex, significant type of music video that complicates our understanding of both music video and art cinema (not to mention our understanding of defiance and excess, which I'll discuss in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, respectively).

¹⁶ See, for example, Heather McDonald's "The Record Label's Role in the Music Industry" (2017).

¹⁷ My own attempt to "keep up with" as much contemporary music video as possible results in monthly playlists of around 500 videos, and my feeling is that I'm just seeing the tip of the iceberg.

The art music video certainly arises out of art cinema and the use of popular song in art cinema, but it also arises out of three major trajectories in the history of music video. First, there's music video's incoherence, related to its spectacular nature. Music video was always intended to grab our attention with shocking or otherwise fascinating imagery, whether this was related to the bodies of performers or to visual effects—it was and is, at the very least, a way for us to remember the song it included (whether the video wants you to *purchase* the song or not).¹⁸ For this reason, early music videos—and some contemporary music videos—did everything they could to grab your attention, whether or not the final product made sense. In other words, the music video has always provoked a number of un-resolvable questions from spectators about what exactly it is that they're seeing. The *art* music video takes these questions and ties them to a particular narrative structure that purposely emphasizes narrative ambiguity (instead of something more purely avant-garde or chaotic).

Second, there's the rise of the music video director, which explicitly began in 1993, when MTV began listing the video's director at the beginning of every music video (Austerlitz 163). Although music video authorship remained diffuse in this period (along with the director, the video's beginning credits would list the artist, the song title, and record label), this was the closest music video came to having an explicitly auteurist moment. The director became a notable creative contributor at this time, and this resulted in the production and exhibition of visually inventive music videos from the likes of Michel Gondry, David Fincher, F. Gary Gray, Mark Romanek, Spike Jonze, and so on. Accompanying this emphasis on the director was a switch from video to 35mm film as the main medium for music video, a move that made images clearer and the director's visual style more evident. This emphasis on the director was, in many

¹⁸ For a lengthy discussion of early music video's connection to advertising, see E. Ann Kaplan's *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture*, particularly her first chapter (12-21).

ways, a response to accusations that music video was incoherent, frivolous, silly; this newfound prominence for music video directors—as well as their skyrocketing budgets, to go along with the move to 35mm film—encouraged artists to take the making of music video seriously. Moreover, as the list above indicates, with its many names who would go on to become renowned film directors in their own right, many music video directors saw music video as a kind of tryout for feature filmmaking. It would only make sense, then, that the music video would end up tying itself to traditions and trends in filmmaking, particularly the art film, historically one of the most prestigious and auteur-centric kinds of films. If there could be music video auteurs, why could there not be art music video? Although the answer to this question eventually moved beyond the concept of an auteur music video, it was an important starting point for developing a kind of music video that aspired to the status of cinema.

Third (and sometimes in connection with the rise of music video director), the artist or band who had been so central to the music video began to disappear, replaced by actors or dancers or animation or found footage. Some of the most well-known videos from the 1990s and early 2000s don't feature the artist at all—see, for example, Fatboy Slim's "Weapon of Choice" (2001, dir. Spike Jonze), Wax's "California" (1995, dir. Spike Jonze), or The White Stripes' "Fell in Love with a Girl" (2002, dir. Michel Gondry). This opened the way not only for contemporary videos that do not feature the artist (see, for example, Jay-Z's "Marcy Me" [2017, dirs. Ben Safdie & Joshua Safdie] and The Blaze's "Heaven" [2018, dir. The Blaze]) but also for musicians to appear in videos as non-musicians—they could appear in videos without having to lip sync or mime playing an instrument. Musical artists and performers, then, could become actors, and actors could become characters around whom narrative worlds could be built. Recent videos from the likes of Frank Ocean ("Nikes" [2016, dir. Tyrone Lebon]), Kendrick Lamar

(“Element” [2017, dirs. Jonas Lindstroem & The Little Homies]), illyr (“i. chokehold” [2017, dir. REMEMBER YOU WERE MADE TO BE USED]), and Perfume Genius (“Die 4 You” [2017, dir. Floria Sigismondi]) exemplify this trend. Occasionally they do feature the artist lip-syncing but less to highlight their performance and more to acknowledge the importance of the song to the experience of the video. This trend is important for the development of the art music video insofar as it showed that the artist performing a song did not have to be at the center of the music video, and this freed up the music video to explore a wider range of narrative possibilities.

These three trends, combined with the possibilities of high-definition filmmaking/streaming and the free-for-all provided by YouTube, have allowed music video to experience a kind of renaissance in the contemporary moment, a renaissance that has resulted in the creation of the art music video. One might compare this situation to that of the New Hollywood Cinema in the late 1960s and 1970s, which saw, as Jon Lewis puts it, the emergence of “an independent spirit...within mainstream, commercial cinema” (7). European art films directly influenced this independence, in part since it was “an influx of foreign films with a stronger adult content” that broke down existing censorship rules in the first place (Conrich 239). Although the New Hollywood Cinema was short-lived, it represented a loosening of institutional control over what had been—up until the loosening of censorship rules and laws in the early-to-mid 1960s—a tightly controlled, top-down system of motion picture making. The YouTube era similarly finds music videos much less tightly controlled in terms of length, subject matter, and style than in the MTV era, when the network had final say as to what videos television audiences could see. The post-MTV, YouTube era, like the era of New Hollywood Cinema, sees an independent, playful spirit at work in a wide variety of music videos featuring the songs of both mainstream and independent artists. Not all music videos feature an experimental approach, but

the art music video represents one kind of music video that does and is therefore worth considering within the larger context of music video and moving image media as a whole.

This consideration will take place across this dissertation's four chapters. Chapter 1 carefully defines the term *art music video* by rethinking art cinema and art cinema spectatorship. It takes up three key examples of art music videos—Earl Sweatshirt's "Grief" (2015, dir. Hiro Murai), Droool's "End Girl" (2015, dirs. Cara Stricker & Gina Gammell), and Justin Bieber's "Company" (2015, dir. Parris Goebel)—to assist in this process. It also examines the way that film scholars have tended to define art cinema and examines two key examples of classical art cinema—*One Wonderful Sunday* (*Subarashiki Nichiyōbi*) (1947, dir. Akira Kurosawa) and *The Flowers of St. Francis* (*Francesco, giullare di Dio*) (1950, dir. Roberto Rossellini)—to challenge/complicate these definitions. The chapter argues that the recent appearance of art music video challenges traditional definitions of art cinema, especially those wrapped up in the figure of the auteur, and encourages us to re-imagine art cinema to focus on its potential for prompting a certain kind of disrupted, active-thinking spectatorship.

Chapter 2 examines the use of popular song in art cinema, from *Le Notti Bianche* (1957, dir. Luchino Visconti) to *Beau Travail* (1999, dir. Claire Denis), to explore how popular songs have tended to affect the ambiguous narratives of art cinema. It argues that popular songs have intensified art cinema's discontinuity, even as art films have—until recently—tended to deploy popular music *skeptically*, from a critical distance. The chapter also argues that the use of the pop song itself destabilizes the auteur's control over the film, since it represents a giving over of the film to the particularities of a given song and its performers.

Chapter 3 finds in art music video's discontinuity not only the influence of art cinema but also the influence of hip-hop and of black filmmaking styles. It focuses on a Kanye West art film

and a Kanye West art music video (*Runaway* [2010, dir. Kanye West] and “Mercy” [2012, dir. Nabil Elderkin]), respectively) with a special emphasis on how the two works rely upon the logic of sampling. I argue that defiance, central to hip-hop, complicates the ethics of both West’s videos and art cinema/art music video more generally, resulting in a kind of frustration that is central to Jacques Rancière’s aesthetic regime and therefore to the *art* in both art cinema and art music video.

Then, my final chapter rethinks the concept of excess—a term that scholars often associate with music video—by examining two recent *art* works: the music video for Ben Khan’s “Youth” (2014, dir. BRTHR) and *Mysteries of Lisbon* (*Mistérios de Lisboa*) (2010, dir. Raúl Ruiz). It argues that excess is central to both art cinema and art music video, as long as we understand excess in art cinema and art music video as a kind of intellectual excess: that which the spectator endlessly thinks and rethinks in relation to the narrative. It sees art music video and art cinema as excessive and neo-baroque in the fullest sense of those terms, in that the spectator’s relation to them begins on the surface but insists that spectators think beyond the surface forever, adjusting and readjusting their readings in relation to concepts like desire, violence, and memory.

Just as the excess of art cinema and art music video prompts many questions, this dissertation aspires to do the same. How does the art music video move us beyond the intellectual and economic limitations of art cinema? What effect does the (high-definition) digital have upon the thinking spectator? To what other kinds of experience does the art music video direct us, in comparison to art cinema? And, critically, does art music video’s *difference* from art cinema push us beyond the term *art* as an appropriate descriptor for either art music video or art cinema? In other words, is it possible that art music video, continuing to develop and morph, represents the *end* of art cinema and a signal of something new?

This dissertation engages with these questions by (re)defining both art music video and art cinema in narrative terms, with all of the intellectual and affective investment that the term *narrative* implies. This engagement does not remove the auteur from the equation, as such a removal would be impossible; instead, it imagines, through art music video, the possibilities wrapped up in readings of art cinema that begin with narrative to then move—in question and confusion—to a lived, embodied elsewhere (rather than seeing art cinema’s institutional markings and systems of circulation as able to fully enforce certain interpretive strategies upon a given film). This builds on Judith Mayne’s concept of spectatorship as negotiation to suggest that while, on the one hand, the diverse, diffuse authorship of art music videos—which is to say an authorship that arises from a number of different creative personnel (not just the director or musical artist), many of whom are non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual creative individuals—troubles the connection between 1970s spectatorship theory and a “classical or mainstream cinema...that...is emblematic of the modern cultures of Europe and North America, cultures, that is, which are predominantly white, industrialized, and Eurocentric, geared toward an ethos of consumption” (Mayne 21), on the other hand, refuses to see art music video (and a redefined art cinema) as a completely successful way out of dominant ideology, since art cinema and art music video do not offer any concrete political position and would lose much of their power if they did. Ultimately, through defining art cinema and art music video in narrative terms, these categories become more difficult to contain, as their narratives are based around their ability to surprise and confuse, endlessly—their ability to reject “the idea that things have a single and definitive meaning” (Tanke 73).¹⁹ Finally, my engagement with the categories of art cinema and

¹⁹ This quote is taken from Joseph J. Tanke’s “What Is the Aesthetic Regime?” which, as its title suggests, defines Jacques Rancière’s aesthetic regime and explores some of its possible consequences for other “theorizations of

art music video suggest that the virtual—where the streaming of art cinema and art music video take place alongside one another—allows not only the circulation of art cinema and art music video to wider contexts than art cinema’s institutions have traditionally allowed but also the formation of a kind of viewing practice that involves a prolonged, unresolved “thinking through” of images and their (im)possible connections to ourselves and our lives. It’s this “thinking through” that this dissertation both analyzes and enacts, using art cinema and art music video to complicate conceptions of spectatorship and art cinema’s institutional norms.

twentieth-century art” (72). I see Rancière’s aesthetic regime as closely related to possibilities for art music video and art cinema spectatorship, as I discuss at length in Chapter 3.

2.0 REDEFINING ART CINEMA THROUGH ART MUSIC VIDEO: NARRATIVE STRUCTURES, STRIKING IMAGES, AND WONDERING SPECTATORS

To provide a fuller definition of the art music video and to redefine art cinema, this chapter first provides close readings of three contemporary art music videos. It then considers radical possibilities for art cinema and its spectators, the importance of intensified discontinuity for the art music video, recent changes in art cinema institutions, and the limited ways in which film scholars have tended to define art cinema. It then concludes with a reading of two classic art films in terms of their narratives in order to suggest that a certain style of art cinema narrative exists outside of what's generally understood as the central period of modernist art cinema.

My argument is that existing art cinema scholarship does not adequately describe the possibility of a non-auteur-driven art cinema, even as this scholarship sees disruptive potential in the art film (or at least in the idea of the art film). I suggest that art cinema narrative is critical for reimagining art cinema's potential to prompt a certain kind of actively thinking spectatorship based around disruption and for breaking down divisions between high art/art cinema and low art/music video.

2.1 THE ART MUSIC VIDEO

Take three music videos from 2015: the video for Drool's "End Girl" (dirs. Cara Stricker and Gina Gammell); the video for Earl Sweatshirt's "Grief" (dir. Hiro Murai); and the first²⁰ video for Justin Bieber's "Company" (dir. Parris Goebel). Each one is very different from the others in terms of music genre and popularity, even though the videos are similar in duration ("End Girl" lasts 3:42; "Grief" lasts 4:31; "Company" lasts 4:56). "End Girl" is a new-wavy rock 'n' roll song; "Grief" is a rap track with a distorted, slowed-down beat; and "Company" is a danceable electropop/R&B number. On YouTube, the video for "End Girl" has around 55,000 views; the video for "Grief" has around 7,000,000 views; and the video for "Company" has around 34,000,000 views.²¹ The styles and subject matters of the three videos also contrast with one another. The video for "End Girl" seemingly consists of a single take in and around a modernist glass-windowed mansion where a fashion shoot is taking place, while the video for "Grief" is made up of a computer-animated, chiaroscuro, inverse-image stream of dark scenarios portraying the artist, Earl Sweatshirt, smoking weed and following a girl to a swimming pool. The video for "Company" shows a group of girls leave a hotel room and meet up with a group of guys at a diner, where one of the girls and one of the guys seem to hit it off and proceed to dance through a mostly deserted shopping area; the video ends by returning to the hotel room, where a group of women dance and play.

Yet the three videos are alike in the sense that they all contain similarly structured, ambiguous, question-eliciting narratives. Each video gives a sense of plot events happening

²⁰ Technically, the video I'm writing about here is a segment of the longer "PURPOSE: The Movement" short film, composed of several Justin Bieber songs from his album, *Purpose*. A second, stand-alone video for "Company," directed by Rory Kramer, was released later, in June of 2016.

²¹ As of June 2017.

along to their respective songs yet also ends up complicating these events by portraying striking, mysterious images whose relation to the rest of the video's images remains unclear.

In "End Girl," two white girls wearing only see-through underwear walk into a party, while a camera follows from behind. We see—sometimes following behind the two girls, sometimes not—that a fashion shoot or music video shoot (or maybe both) are happening, with cameras and lights set up in the mansion's main room while a group of women dances and feigns playing instruments. Others inhabit or pass through the room, too: three women in one-piece swimsuits and swim caps who walk out the back door, for instance, as well as a man and woman sitting on a couch, the woman reclining across the man's lap. The camera proceeds to a side room of the mansion, bathed in red light and with a flickering television. Here, one Asian woman, with white gauze over her eyes, lies across another's lap; a kind of strobe light—perhaps from the flickering television—pulses in the room. The camera then moves back towards the main room but this time stops at a bathroom door, where it captures two white boys, both shirtless, one curling a weight in his right hand, slouched against the doorway, his head too big for his body; the other sitting on the floor, looking towards the camera, his face cloaked in shadow. The camera then moves away again, locating one of the topless girls, whom it follows outside, where there's green shrubbery and palm trees. The camera then turns back to the house, which now, it turns out, is empty of people.

So the narrative here is about a fashion shoot and the interactions of the people involved in that shoot, especially the two nearly naked girls. Or at least it seems that way until we see the shoot's margins: the room with the flickering TV, the big-headed boy lifting weights. Is this all part of the shoot? If so, why is so little of it in front of the camera and lighting set-up in the main

room? Also, why is the house empty of people when the camera capturing the video turns back towards the house? The video offers no solid answers.

In “Grief,” we see Earl Sweatshirt—glowing white against a black background, like we’re watching the video through an infrared camera in black and white—from a distance; he is alone on a couch, smoking weed (parts of which also glow white). The camera moves forward, towards him. We cut away from him to see a ceiling fan; we return to him; we cut away again to a close-up of his blunt. The video goes on like this. We see a stove on fire; coins; a dripping sink; a couple of friends playing video games on a different couch or standing stock still. It seems, perhaps, that Earl is sitting by himself at a party. But we then see a shot that shows Earl on the couch in the foreground, all of his friends in the background eerily facing the opposite direction from him. The video unravels further from there. Snakes appear, as well as mice. A woman appears and seems to be guiding Earl somewhere; he follows. She jumps into a pool, which is completely dark and blends in with the background, so that it gives off the impression that she is diving into nothingness. One shot shows her emerging from the water in close-up, her eyes glowing empty white and liquid dripping down her face in such a way that it’s unclear if she’s crying, bleeding, or just dripping water from the pool. She soon disappears, and the camera whirls around Earl—who previously had been standing by the side of the pool—while we see several jazz drummers in masks, set up in a circle surrounding Earl, playing their instruments around him. We also see an uninhabited drum set in the circle, burning. The video ends with the initial image of Earl on the couch. The song over, we hear only the sound of his coughing.

Here, the narrative involves Earl’s experience at a party, with friends and perhaps a girl he likes. But when we see that the people at the party are all faced away from Earl or the snakes or the girl’s disappearance into the pool or the jazz drummers or the fire, we wonder if this party

is actually happening or if Earl, high, is only imagining it. Also possible is some combination of imagination and reality: maybe there's really a party and a girl, and Earl is just imagining the other elements; conversely, maybe only the fire is real, and Earl, high, will soon burn, too. Again, these possibilities remain unsettled; the video does not offer a single or correct way to understand its plot.

The video for "Company" begins outside the closed door of a hotel room, Room 1113. The camera moves away from the door and back down a hallway, but then a group of four young black/multiracial women emerge from the hotel room, in the distance, which causes the camera to push forward again, towards the women. It then follows them, rightwards, to an elevator, which the women enter. The camera remains outside as the elevator door closes. Suddenly, we find ourselves in a diner with a group of young men of different races, clowning around. The group of women from before then enters the diner, and the men take notice, looking towards the women. One of the men, a young black man in a cap and t-shirt, goes to the women's table, introduces himself, and then takes the hand of one of the women, a light-skinned short-haired (dyed blonde) black girl wearing shaded John Lennon lenses. The two exit the diner and move out into a mostly deserted, neon-lit shopping area. They dance together through its space, she alternating between evasiveness and flirtatiousness, he pursuing her, coordinating himself to her rhythms. After a while, the screen splits into three horizontal bands, the middle band showing the same couple standing by the elevator that the four girls had entered previously, while the upper and lower bands continue to show the couple dancing in the shopping area. Then, the upper and lower bands cut to black, and we just see the couple entering the elevator in romantic fashion, he putting his arm around her and drawing her in for a kiss.

But suddenly the video cuts to black, before rewinding to show the couple exit the elevator (now in full screen) and then to show the four girls in the elevator again. At this point, we see a repeat of the video's initial camera movement but in reverse and sped up, the camera zipping backwards then forwards down the hall and eventually ending up, once again, at the door to Room 1113. The video cuts to black again before cutting back—in black and white—to the door, which now opens slowly. Inside we see a multitude of women dancing slowly and sensually around one another. The washed out, black-and-white images turn red, and then begin to alternate among red and black-and-white and full color. They dance, on the beds and in other parts of the room. A giant stuffed teddy bear is also involved. We see the girl who was part of the dancing couple earlier, but she's just one face among many. The video ends with a black-and-white shot of the door to Room 1113.

The narrative in the video for "Company" initially seems to be a rather conventional, musical-like romance. A girl and boy meet, they dance together in a way that seems symbolic of their blossoming attraction. It then looks like they're continuing their relationship beyond that first night, going out again, just the two of them...until the video stops them in their tracks and rewinds to an earlier moment. It's unclear whether this indicates that their meeting never happened or that the girl is merely thinking back to an earlier moment, perhaps remembering coincidentally or perhaps wishing that the meeting with the boys had not occurred at all. What's happening in the hotel room is also left ambiguous. Is this a party? A representation of female community? A spectacle for the desiring audience? What's with the teddy bear? Again, the video refuses answers to these questions but instead allows the viewer to think through multiple possibilities for their meanings.

Each video provides a plot (or at least some semblance of a plot) before confusing that plot with the insertion or appearance of striking images. It's not that these images are merely beautiful or spectacular; many images in these videos would qualify for those categories. Instead, they're strange and jarring, revealing something that viewers could not have imagined moments before. They are images for which the video has not prepared us (before they appear) and which the video does not fully explain (after they appear). Sometimes the videos shift or change or take away their music to draw extra attention to the striking images: the new-wavy rock song of "End Girl" shifts into a distorted electronic instrumental when we see the image of the white boys in the bathroom, and there's silence when the camera turns back towards the mansion, emptied of people, at the end of the video; in "Grief," the jazz drummers appear when the track shifts from the earlier rap track to a jazzy, hotel lobby track, and we only hear the sounds of Earl's coughing as the song ends; and the "rewinding" moment in "Company" features only rewinding sounds, followed by a sparer version of the song as the door to Room 1113 opens. In the case of "End Girl" and "Company," these moments do not appear in the songs themselves (if you listen on Spotify or to the physical album on which they appear), while the jazzy ending to "Grief" does also appear in versions of the song existing apart from the music video. On the other hand, other striking images in the videos feature no complementary change in music, like when the girl jumps into seeming nothingness in the video for "Grief" or when the girls begin to dance with the bear in the video for "Company."

Regardless of the relation of music to image, these images only have the kind of disorienting effect I'm describing here when the music videos in which they appear feature or suggest a narrative. There are many music videos that do not feature narratives, many of them with disturbing or jarring images, but, where there's no suggested plot, there's no resulting

narrative ambiguity from the image. The striking images I'm describing usually feature a particular placement in time, after a narrative has been introduced and as the narrative continues. This placement prompts the viewer to consider the relation of such images to the narrative beginnings that came before and the narrative information that comes after.

It's also important to note that the three videos I've described can include the artist or not, lip-syncing or not. For instance, the video for "Grief" is the only one to prominently feature the artist, in this case Earl Sweatshirt. We sometimes see him mouthing the words to the track, we sometimes see him when he's not mouthing the words, and we sometimes do not see him at all (even if his rapping is still happening on the audio track). The kinds of narratives in these three videos can occur with or without the artist lip-syncing: the narratives happen along with or even in spite of any lip-syncing. At the same time, they don't have to be completely silent narratives (that is, silent but for music): see Earl's coughing at the end of the "Grief" video or the girls' talking and the series of elevator dings in the "Company" video. Sometimes these videos will play such sounds along with the track; sometimes they'll play such sounds before and/or after the track begins; or sometimes the sounds will completely interrupt the track (either relegating it to the background or cutting it out entirely).

These three videos and their qualities that I've described above are indicative of a larger trend in recent music video, a type of narrative music video that I'm calling the *art music video*. Many other music videos like the three I've described above exist, videos featuring music from many different genres, videos with millions or tens of millions of views, as well as videos with thousands or hundreds of views. They feature narratives made ambiguous by the appearance of striking images that complicate previous and/or future plot information; they disorient viewers,

who wonder about the videos after viewing them, piecing together various possibilities for what they saw.

I'm choosing the term *art music video* to describe these videos (and others like them) not because they are more artful or artistic than other music videos but because of what I see as their relationship, mainly in terms of their narrative structure, to *art cinema*, a term with its own complicated history (and complex set of problems that comes along with this history). This chapter and the following chapter will examine the relation of this history and these problems to contemporary art music video. This chapter examines these two questions (which are not always distinct): 'How have scholars tended to describe the way that art cinema structures its narratives, historically and into the present?' and 'In what ways has existing scholarship about art cinema tended to limit the interpretive possibilities these narratives present?'; the next chapter will take up the question, 'What is the relationship between art cinema and popular music, and how has this relationship transformed over time?' Answering these questions will allow me to defend and explain my use of the term *art music video* to describe the trend in music video that such videos as "End Girl," "Grief," and "Company" represent; it will also give a sense of the feedback loop between music video and art cinema that has existed from music video's pre-MTV beginnings to its post-MTV present. To describe this feedback loop is not to say that all music video draws from art cinema (or vice versa) or even that all narrative music video draws from art cinema (or vice versa); it is instead to argue that certain strands of narrative music video have pulled ideas and narrative structures from art cinema and to argue that certain strands of art cinema have pulled ideas and narrative structures from music video. Presently, such contemporary art music videos and such contemporary art cinema exist side-by-side, structured similarly and streaming online, in high definition—and, moreover, often shot on the same digital cameras and edited with

the same digital software. This has the effect of drawing the two—art cinema and art music video—closer than ever before.

However, it's important to note here that I'm less interested in conscious influence of art cinema on music video or vice versa: I won't be parsing interviews or marketing materials or preproduction documents for references to MTV or to Ingmar Bergman. Whether the similar styles of crafting narrative are done consciously or not, similarities exist. This is not to say that conscious influences aren't interesting or important (or that they don't exist); it's merely to say that my focus is a different one and necessarily limited. Although I will also consider a limited number of interviews to provide necessary context and refer briefly to other possible influences upon the art music video, my project here is as much to *dream* a certain historical trajectory (and intertextual overlap) as much as *discover* one in secondary documents.

2.2 DREAMING ART CINEMA

In the Jean-Luc Godard film, *Hélas pour moi*, we hear a character intone, “History is not made except in its telling. But in revealing it, we lay bare our dreams.”²² This statement provides a sort of inspiration for my approach to examining art music video and art cinema. There is meant to be something dreamlike and personal in my forging a historical connection between art cinema and art music video—these works move me and infiltrate my vision. The quote from *Hélas pour moi* suggests the relevance or even inescapability of such personal and dreamlike elements: to strive for a connection between popular music and art cinema through a kind of music video is to lay

²² The dialogue is in French; the above is how the lines are translated in the film's subtitles.

bare my desire for a deeper understanding of works—usually seen as polar opposites, music video, low culture, and art cinema, high culture—that have transformed my thinking and my way of being in the world by awakening my intellect, my emotions, my senses.

I refer to the dream and the dreamlike as a way of invoking surrealism and its influence on not only this project but also the kind of narrative structure I'm describing more generally. While I'm not engaging with surrealist films or surrealist music videos per se, I'm engaging with works whose narratives—like the narrative of *Un chien andalou*—encourage a kind of engaged spectatorship prompted by mysterious images. In his *Dreaming of Cinema: Spectatorship, Surrealism, and the Age of Digital Media*, Adam Lowenstein describes how viewers of *Un chien andalou* “are encouraged by the film’s evocation of (but resistance to) conventional chronology to revisit the film and seek out alternate chronologies, to assemble different versions of *Un chien andalou* the way a participant in an exquisite corpse game might contribute different sorts of words or images depending on the round that shift the game’s outcome” (73-4). Similarly, art cinema, as I dream it, invites viewers to imagine various possibilities for its narratives, based on the jarring images deployed by each film that prompt uncertainty or confusion. Viewers do not dream rootlessly but according to disruptive images and discontinuities within otherwise (at least somewhat) legible narratives.²³

Surrealism—especially the exquisite corpse game mentioned briefly in the Lowenstein quote above—also influences this project in a way similar to that described by Mark Betz in *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema*, who purposefully aligns his work with

²³ See also Lowenstein’s description of *Un chien andalou* as “a volatile engagement with spectators trained by the conventions of earlier avant-garde films as well as popular romance narratives” (77). Art cinema draws from narrative conventions in order to provide some semblance of legibility to viewers, at least during certain moments. For more on art cinema narrative conventions and the relation of European art cinema to genre, see Chapter Five of András Bálint Kovács’ *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*.

that of the surrealists for the sake of seeing art cinema differently, as a kind of exquisite corpse. As Betz describes, in the context of the game of exquisite corpse as the surrealists played it, a set of conventions structure the game's randomness, which means that to see art cinema as an exquisite corpse means seeing it as "both a rule and a transgression" (185). My way of redefining—dreaming—art cinema does operate according to a certain set of observations regarding discontinuous narrative structure, but it also transgresses the laws set up by art cinema's traditional institutions in doing so. If, as I argue, art cinema has at its core a certain kind of narrative, then it means two things: one, that the institutions in place that label certain films *art cinema* (discussed further below) lose some of their power, as we become aware of their shortcomings and their games of prestige; and, two, that art cinema—and, more broadly, *art*, as an adjective—can emerge from any number of contexts. To declare this is to transgress art cinema and its gatekeepers.

This transgression allows a kind of opening up of art cinema's boundaries to other practitioners and production contexts, as well as to a mode of spectatorship that no longer sets the auteur as a limiting factor. The three music videos I've mentioned above prominently feature the work and performances of white women (Cara Stricker and Gina Gammell, *Drool*), a Japanese-American man (Hiro Murai), a black man (Earl Sweatshirt), and a woman of Samoan descent (Parris Goebel)—all of these represent groups often absent from the ranks of art cinema and its complementary prestige.²⁴ Furthermore, these music videos didn't premiere at film festivals and don't require any screening pass or DVD or streaming service subscription in order to view them. This is not to paint an entirely rosy picture for the art music video or to make any sweeping claims about art music video escaping normativity, but it is to suggest that music video

²⁴ However, as we'll see in Chapter Four, not all scholars understand art cinema in a positive light.

production is more readily available to a wider range of creative people, including both those involved in staging/performing/capturing the visuals and those involved in making the music, and that music videos are more readily available for immediate viewing and re-viewing than art films.

Part of what I'm implying above (in referring to "a wider range of creative people") is that music video's diffuse authorship²⁵ (whereby songwriters, musicians, performers, and directors all play a key role in authoring a given music video) already allows a kind of transgression of auteurism, a transgression that labeling a kind of music video *art music video* only furthers. This, too, builds on the work of Betz, who focuses on the omnibus film in 1960s European art cinema to question the centrality of the figure of the auteur to art cinema. As we will see, later in this chapter, the figure of the auteur all too often acts as obstruction to more radical interpretive possibilities on offer in art cinema. So while the art music video is at the center of this project, it's important to not lose site of its direct connection to art cinema: while art music video emerges out of art cinema, long after art cinema's birth, art music video also reveals anew the possibility of a kind of engaged spectatorship across art cinema as a whole. In other words, this project examines possibilities in the contemporary moment for a form that seems ultra-contemporary, that seems to be *new media*, as a way of rereading art cinema history.

²⁵ This diffuse authorship is clear from the very different approaches of Andrew Goodwin in *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, which emphasizes the musical artist as both star and author, and Carol Vernallis in *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*, which seeks to develop a kind of auteurism for music video built around the music video director. Additionally, Vernallis does note that "[m]usic, image, and lyrics can also function synergistically: all are transformed as they become part of a new entity" [235]. This suggests that, in experiencing a music video, the author(s) of the music and of its performance, the author(s) of the lyrics and their performance, and the author of the image track [which Vernallis sees as the director, but could be any number of other people involved in its production] all play a role in structuring interpretive possibilities.

2.3 INTENSIFIED DISCONTINUITY

My main focus in this chapter and in the project as a whole has been and will be short-form art music video (i.e. ten minutes or fewer in length),²⁶ and because that is the case, a key term at the foundation of this project is *intensified discontinuity*. The term is meant to be a reference to and reworking of David Bordwell's *intensified continuity*, which he uses to describe "the editing style that comes to dominate American films after 1960 or thereabouts" ("Intensified Continuity Revisited"). Bordwell notes the ways in which contemporary American films have not gotten rid of classical Hollywood's rules of spatial continuity but instead have "amped" them "up, raised to a higher pitch of emphasis" ("Intensified Continuity: Visual Style" 16). He ties these rules of spatial continuity to narrative causality, implying that for a Hollywood film's narrative to make sense, viewers must be able to understand the relation of characters to one another in space and that, conversely, spatial continuity in and of itself doesn't offer excitement to viewers unless characters and plot events exist within the spaces it portrays.²⁷

Art films sometimes use the techniques Bordwell describes in order to communicate a similar sense of spatial continuity and narrative causality—that is, until they don't, disorienting viewers in terms of both space and narrative. Or sometimes art films use alternative techniques to

²⁶ The one exception to this is Kanye West's "Runaway," over a half-hour in length, which I will read as a kind of art film in its own right.

²⁷ A quote from Bordwell's "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film" demonstrates the way in which these two—spatial continuity and narrative causality—are tied together in his conception of Hollywood cinema:

In particular, the ways in which today's films represent space overwhelmingly adhere to the premises of "classical continuity." Establishing and reestablishing shots situate the actors in the locale. An axis of action governs the actors' orientations and eyelines, and the shots, however different in angle, are taken from one side of that axis. The actors' movements are matched across cuts, and as the scene develops the shots get closer to the performers, carrying us to the heart of the drama (16).

The passage emphasizes that certain visual techniques—establishing shots, the axis of action, matching across cuts, increasing shot scale as the scene goes on—exist, necessarily, with actors, their movements and positioning within and across shots communicating narrative information. The final words of the passage—"carrying us to the heart of the drama"—highlight how these visual techniques immerse us in Hollywood films' coherent, dramatic narratives.

grant a sense of spatial continuity and of a coherent narrative (e.g. extensive long-takes and/or deep-space cinematography that show characters moving in and out of a given space)—but then go on to find ways of complicating or confusing both spatial and narrative continuity.²⁸ In general, art cinema uses a much wider range of visual techniques (and of combinations of those techniques) than those used by Hollywood cinema, making it much more difficult to come up with a concept in art cinema synonymous with Hollywood’s classical continuity. The closest Bordwell comes is naming three key characteristics of art cinema (in *Narration in the Fiction Film*): “‘objective’ realism, ‘expressive’ or subjective realism, and narrational commentary” (205), all of which have a much wider range of expression available to them than the coherence of expression offered by continuity editing or intensified continuity editing. Instead, art films use many different techniques to offer a sense of coherence at certain times but then interrupt or confuse that sense of coherence without providing a concrete way to understand exactly what is happening in relation to what has happened up to the interruption and what will happen after it.^{29,30} Because of such interruptions, art films are fundamentally *discontinuous* in their construction of space and narrative.

²⁸ For instance, Bordwell himself describes how the “expressive realism” so central to the art cinema “can shape spatial representation” and include techniques such as “optical point-of-view shots, flash frames of a glimpsed or recalled event, editing patterns, modulations of light and color and sound” that are “motivated by character psychology” over narrative causality and spatial continuity (205). He also puts it this way, in the afterword to the 2007 printing of “The Art Cinema As a Mode of Film Practice” in *Poetics of Cinema*: “The film initially trains the viewer in its distinctive storytelling tactics, but as the film proceeds, those tactics mutate in unforeseeable ways” (165).

²⁹ *Syndromes and a Century* (2006, dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul) is a particularly illustrative example in that it features both a major interruption at its center (when the characters from the first part of the film are suddenly in an urban instead of rural environment, interrupting a set of loosely coherent stories taking place in the first part of the film) and a number of smaller interruptions (e.g. the shots of outdoor statues in the second half of the film that have no direct relationship to the characters or narrative).

³⁰ Some writers have overlooked the fact that art films do, at certain points, establish coherence. See, for example, Tom Ryall on art cinema, who describes it as a complete overthrow of Hollywood stories and styles: “The traditional qualities of the linear narrative with a finite ending, clarity of plot, such unobtrusive use of film techniques as camera movement and editing, the underlining of thematic and narrative points through repetition, sharply delineated characters and empathetic character identification techniques were jettisoned by the art film. In

Since art music videos are much shorter than art films, they contain *intensified discontinuity*. In art music video, narrative information (including the spaces/settings in which the narrative occurs) is portrayed—and interrupted—more quickly and thus more intensely, along to the affective beat and lyrics of a song.³¹ At the same time, to describe the intensified discontinuity of art music video is to diverge from Bordwell’s description of Hollywood’s intensified continuity because Bordwell isn’t discussing films that are shorter than previous Hollywood films. Furthermore, Bordwell describes specific techniques—“more rapid editing,” “bipolar extremes of lens lengths,” “more close framings in dialogue scenes,” “a free-ranging camera”—that characterize films with intensified continuity as opposed to older Hollywood films and their non-intensified continuity. Analogous changes in technique from art cinema to art music video do not exist, at least not across the board. While some art music videos do contain more rapid editing than some art films and some art music videos feature various kind of eye-catching strobing effects or changes in color that are absent from some art films, these kinds of differences cannot be generalized. Some art music videos consist of a single take; some art films feature rapid editing. Some art films feature changes in color and/or aspect ratio; some art music videos do not. So I do not use the term *intensified discontinuity* to refer to specific differences in technique; instead, I use it to refer merely to the way that art music videos shorten the time in which narrative/spatial information appears and is interrupted, becoming discontinuous.

their place came oblique, non-linear, and episodic narration strategies, a commitment to ‘realism,’ both in terms of surface detail and complex character definition, thematic ambiguities, and overt displays of cinematic style” (119). On the other hand, András Bálint Kovács does gesture towards the presence of coherence in the art film when he writes, “[e]ven the most esoteric art-film form was not without some roots in traditional genres” (83). Kovács goes on to describe the influence of the melodrama and the detective film/film noir (as well as a number of literary forms, including the picaresque and the essay) on modernist art cinema.

³¹ Andrew Goodwin, for instance, writes of music video’s indebtedness to what he calls “a rock aesthetic...of intensity, vulgarity, and immediacy” (xviii). While I would hesitate to tie this “intensity, vulgarity, and immediacy” only to rock or rock ‘n’ roll, certainly the qualities he describes continue, twenty-five years on, to be important to the short-form music video and its affective bursting forth.

The radical possibilities on offer by the art music video arise from this concept of intensified discontinuity. I described above how viewing art music video doesn't require any special screening pass or subscription service, but it's also more approachable than art cinema for its brief duration. You can watch a music video, depending on its length, two or three times in ten minutes. This means a shorter time is necessary to encourage the kind of active, imaginative spectatorship I describe above; a much shorter time is necessary to, as Lowenstein describes it, play "a game of critique built into the game of images that extends from narrative structures to social ones" (48). This does not make art music video's intensified discontinuity better than art cinema's discontinuity, but it does make this discontinuity—and its resulting heightened awareness, whereby a sort of active, creative thinking extends from screen images to lived images—more approachable and pointedly affecting for a wide range of viewers.³²

This is certainly true for the music videos with which I began this chapter. While a common critique of music videos is that they are all surface and no depth, the intensified discontinuities of the videos above take up concerns related to the long-term effects of party culture ("End Girl," "Grief"), drug use ("Grief"), and loneliness and community ("Grief," "Company"). The questions they raise are not part of some ultimately meaningless game about only the narrative; instead, like art films, they take up contemporary life and the human condition. So when we ask, for example, with "Grief," if the party is actually happening or if Earl, high, is only imagining it, we are also concerned with the repercussions of either possibility. If the party is actually happening, a terrifying alienation exists among the partiers (who avert their eyes from one another, suddenly disappear from each other's sight, and play with both fire and snakes); if the party isn't happening, a terrible disconnect between

³² As we'll see in Chapter Two, art cinema's awareness of intensified discontinuity's approachability and affective power is present in its own deployment of popular music.

hallucination/dream and reality exists, to the point that Earl may be burning alive. Furthermore, race and gender enter the picture, as we wonder about the relation between Earl's troubled mental state and his blackness, as well as the connection between Earl's gaze and the actions of the woman whom he watches and follows (we might see her as accommodating his gaze through her movement into the pool or as exceeding his gaze through her tears; or we might see the video as challenging his gaze due to its inverse black-and-white imagery that refuses to turn the woman into an unproblematic spectacle).

Discontinuous narrative is a key characteristic of the art film (hence the importance of intensified discontinuity—which prompts the kind of questioning, engaged spectatorship I've described above—to the art music video), to the point that we can call a kind of music video *art* music video merely for its narrative characteristics. To argue this involves a two-fold argument, with some major consequences for the way in which film studies conceptualizes art cinema. First, the argument involves understanding (a certain kind of) narrative as the key feature of art cinema; second, it involves characterizing discontinuity as art cinema narrative's most salient feature.³³ The first major consequence of this focus will be shining a new light on the term *art*, as an adjective, that will understand it in narrative terms rather than in economic or industrial ones. That is to say, this understanding of art cinema strives to decouple it from the economic infrastructure that has been traditionally understood as keeping art cinema alive: state funding, film festivals, arthouse cinemas, and so on, that both writing about and marketing for art cinema often highlights as an important contrast from the market logic and popular aims of Hollywood and other corporatized cinema. If narrative comes first when defining art cinema, then films

³³ Parts of this argument draw heavily from András Bálint Kovács' 2007 book, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*, as well as David Bordwell's 1985 book, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. These two books have been the most in-depth attempts, to date, at systematically describing the narrative characteristics of art cinema, although, as we'll see below, I don't always agree with them.

made and circulated in any context can, if they feature certain sorts of narratives, be art films. The term *art film*, then, becomes less about prestige or high-mindedness and more about a possible mode of spectatorship prompted by a certain kind of narrative structure. Furthermore, as we'll see below, the traditional institutional underpinnings of art cinema have transformed radically anyways—which means that this is an appropriate time to redefine, and dream anew, art cinema. The second major consequence of my argument about narrative's centrality to art cinema will be a de-emphasis of the figure of the auteur in art cinema, a figure usually so central to arguments about art cinema and its importance. This de-emphasis stems from the radical interpretive possibilities spawned by a narrative understanding of art cinema, possibilities that exist beyond the auteur as art cinema's central figure.

While both cinema's economic underpinnings and the figure of the auteur can sometimes be incredibly useful in expanding one's understanding of a given film³⁴ (and, therefore, will sometimes be referenced in my work), defining art cinema in a way that's reliant upon neither the auteur nor its strategies of funding, production, distribution, or exhibition frees up the term *art*, as an adjective, to be used in other, wider contexts—in such a way that neither art music video nor art cinema necessarily implies a limited audience or a certain production/distribution context. As we saw with the three art music videos described above, *art* can and should refer to works viewed by both a limited segment of the public or a very expansive one, as well as to works that have very different subjects and surfaces. Understanding art cinema (and art music video) in a narrative sense does not place more value on either a limited audience or an expansive one, nor does understanding the adjectival *art* in a narrative sense value one kind of

³⁴ Janet Staiger, in an essay titled "Authorship Approaches," also points out that certain film artists are reliant upon the idea of the auteur to procure funding for their films and assert artistic agency—which may be enough reason in and of itself to keep the auteurist myth alive.

production context over others; instead, this understanding sees possibilities in all sorts of audiences and production contexts for the art film and the art music video.³⁵³⁶

2.4 ART CINEMA'S (CRUMBLING) INSTITUTIONS

It's important for the trajectory of this chapter to describe what is usually meant and implied by the term "art cinema" (and how this has changed in the contemporary moment). András Bálint Kovács describes how, in 1924, there appeared in *Le Figaro* a description of an "intermediate category" of film, before the term "art cinema" took hold, noting that at this time, "there existed a type of film that could not be categorized appropriately. It was a kind of dramatic social fiction (storytelling but in a realist way), which was serious and looked like art—but not in the avant-

³⁵ With the so-called "viral" video, we see that a YouTube video can move from a small audience to an enormous one very quickly. David Gurney, in his article, "Recombinant Comedy, Transmedial Mobility, and Viral Video," describes comedic videos as those most likely to go viral but also notes, "A viral video is most successful when it includes a careful (though still unpredictable) balance of expected and unexpected" (12). This marks the art music video, with its balance of legibility and illegibility, especially ripe with possibility for virality. On the other hand, the recombinant qualities Gurney sees in viral videos, whereby short clips are placed into a wide variety of new contexts, seem less likely to be present in art music videos, which rely on the unfolding of a narrative over a longer amount of time. Joan Burgess, in her essay, "All Your Chocolate Rain are Belonging to Us?: Viral Video, YouTube and the Dynamics of Participatory Culture," also stresses the importance of participatory practices—like recombination—in her definition of "viral." She writes, "For my purposes, the more interesting examples of 'viral video', while being quantitatively popular in this way, also attract active, participatory and creative engagement from other participants" (88). My argument is that art music video prompts intellectual engagement from viewers, but this intellectual engagement does not always manifest itself in the creation of new videos or even in typed comments that appear underneath the video.

³⁶ However, a wider audience does hold greater promise insofar as it allows the narrative form of art cinema and art music video—along with the kinds of thought it encourages—to affect the thinking of more people. This ties to what I see as the Bazinian nature of my project, which I see as attempting to position criticism (of particular works) and theory (about film and new media landscapes) as inextricable, with close reading playing a crucial role in establishing the theoretical implications of contemporary art music video and a redefined art cinema. Like Bazin, I find it necessary that important styles and trends in moving image media find a wider audience. Colin MacCabe writes the following in his essay, "Bazin as Modernist": "For Bazin an avant-garde must be linked to a mainstream; it cannot constitute itself as an entirely separate realm" (72). MacCabe also notes that Bazin refused to separate "elite and popular art" (71), and I similarly refuse this separation, discovering possibilities in music video's development of art cinematic narrative strategies. Music video makes this possible in a unique way, with its circulation on YouTube and other accessible websites and its use of popular music styles.

garde sense. Its seriousness stemmed from its social concerns. It was narrative-based, therefore placed in the commercial circuit, but not made for the satisfaction of the widest possible audience” (20-1).³⁷

Although naming this “art cinema” didn’t happen until later, we find in this quote from *Le Figaro* a starting point for coming up with a definition of art cinema: *narrative films dealing with social problems in realistic ways that would likely only attract a niche group of viewers.*

To expand upon this definition, in the 1920s and beyond, is to point out the modes of production, funding, distribution, and exhibition that developed around this nascent category of *art cinema*. For example, later in the 1920s, a marketing and distribution network specific to the intermediate cinema began to develop in order to attract and profit from a certain kind of intellectual audience (Kovács 24; Ryall 115). As modes of distribution and exhibition specific to art cinema formed, another step in art cinema’s institutionalization took place: the setting aside of government funds to support art cinema production. And while this government support in the 1920s and 1930s (mainly in France and Germany) was—for the most part—strictly nationalist, the establishment of “art-film theaters” around this time in Paris allowed for exhibition of films from outside France, especially Germany and the United States (Kovács 25). Eventually, art film theaters—also known as arthouse theaters—proliferated, in the 1950s, especially in France and Germany,³⁸ and these were supported by the formation of film clubs and the founding and circulation of film magazines like *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Positif* in France and *Cinema Nuovo*

³⁷ There were several national cinemas of the 1920s that could have been the basis for such a definition, even though Kovács doesn’t provide any context for this quote. Both Kovács and Ryall name German Expression, French Impressionism and Surrealism, and Soviet montage as the key trends in global cinema from the 1920s that influenced the formation of an institutionalized art cinema.

³⁸ Ryall also mentions the development of arthouse theaters in the United States in the postwar period, following the success in the United States of Italian neorealist films. He goes on to describe the appeal of European art cinema—with its more liberal portrayal of bodies, sex, sexual deviance, and drug use—to postwar American audiences used to the strict censorship codes of Hollywood; this would also have led to the formation and success of arthouse cinemas in the United States. David Andrews mentions this as well.

in Italy (Kovács 26; Nowell-Smith 567). Then, in 1955, the International Confederation of Art-Film Theaters was established, solidifying the importance of the art film theater as a key European cultural establishment (Kovács 26).³⁹

The first international film festival—Venice’s, in 1934—enforced the internationalist bent of these art-film theaters. It wasn’t until after World War II, however, that international film festivals really took off. By 1950, Kovács notes, “half a dozen new international film festivals were launched in Europe within four years” (25). Kovács also describes the founding of the *Fédération Internationale des Auteurs de Film* (International Federation of Film Auteurs) at the 1952 Cannes Film Festival, noting that it “was the first international institution to openly describe the antagonism between art cinema and film entertainment as an institutional problem” (26).⁴⁰ One of the ways the *Fédération Internationale des Auteurs de Film* in fact complicated this antagonism was through its very name, signaling its members were true, artistic, ambitious authors in contrast to the less sophisticated workers in Hollywood and elsewhere. Kovács quotes one of the federation’s initial statements at length:

Defending their essential rights, film auteurs do not want to defend just their own destiny, but also the destiny of the cinema, which by becoming a servant would stop being an art, and would deserve only the name of an industry. Protecting their own freedom, film auteurs will

³⁹ Ryall offers a template through which to understand this movement from the 1920s to the 1950s in a slightly different light. He describes instead the possibility of seeing two competing definitions of art cinema, one “extended,” including a wide range of films with artistic ambitions, and one “restricted” to the wave of modernist European films released in the 1950s and the years immediately following. However, Ryall also suggests that one could see them as “interrelated” (115).

⁴⁰ However, such an antagonism was implicit in the formation of art cinema from its beginning. Tom Ryall describes how German, Soviet, and French films from the 1920s “reflected an attempt to establish alternatives to the evolving Hollywood cinema of stars and genres” that has already begun to dominate the market, thanks in large part to lack of domestic wartime destruction in the United States (116). David Andrews points out that both David Bordwell and Steve Neale begin their definitions of art cinema by noting that “art cinema gained traction as a genre through Europe’s opposition to Hollywood’s domination of its film markets” (3).

protect the cinema, its original virtues, its cultural and social function, its high mission.... Thanks to us, the cinema is an art (26).

With this brief history of the formation of art cinema as an institution in mind, we might expand our initial definition of art cinema to read something like this: *government-funded, auteur-driven, narrative films from all over the world (but mainly Europe) portraying social problems in realistic ways that attract a niche group of viewers; art films premiere at international film festivals and then circulate to a network of arthouse theaters.* A sampling of other succinct definitions of art cinema shows similarities to this definition. Tom Ryall offers a “restrictive” understanding of art cinema as “the emergence in the 1950s of a strand in European cinema with a distinct set of formal and thematic characteristics, specialized exhibition outlets, specific artistic status as part of ‘high culture,’ constituting in some respects cinema’s belated accession to the traditions of twentieth-century modernism in the arts” (115). Geoffrey Nowell-Smith names several key features of art cinema, focusing on art cinema from the 1960s: “openness to a variety of experiences” (567), “sexual frankness” (567), “rough-hewn narratives, with a real-life inconclusiveness to them” (567), a focus on the “auteur” as the creative presence behind the film (569), and a tendency to premiere at film festivals and rely on “the efforts of critics and distributors, and...a public...eager for novelty and tolerant of occasional moments of boredom” (570). David Andrews goes much broader, describing art cinema as “an idea of cinematic high art that has since the silent era inspired value-oriented events and value-oriented institutions as well as a multitude of aspirational forms in a multitude of contexts” (2).

However, as we move past the 1950s and (eventually) into the present day, we notice these definitions—or at least parts of these definitions—fraying or falling apart. First, there’s the issue of government funding. In the postwar period, the production of art cinema and its

establishment as an institution of sorts was initially understood as, largely, a European project, whereby multiple European countries would co-finance a film, with the director's nation of origin seen as the domestic market for the film and the film's co-producing nations seen as a (slight, simple) expansion opportunity (Nowell-Smith 574; Andrews 5).⁴¹ However, the nationalist and European bent of art cinema began to visibly falter in the 1960s and 1970s, with Michelangelo Antonioni's producer, Carlo Ponti, completing a production and distribution deal with MGM for three Antonioni films and with the financial success in international markets of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) (Nowell-Smith 574). This was Hollywood funding, and along with it came the promise of expanded markets and greater profits—something “art-film insiders,” according to David Andrews, could not resist. However, even without Hollywood in the picture, Andrews points out that art films receive funding “from behemoths like the French studios Pathé, Gaumont, and StudioCanal” or from a combination of other sources that include various forms of government funding (“public subsidies, tax incentives, coproduction agreements”), as well as “festival grants like the Hubert Bals Fund.”^{42,43} As internationalism became a key feature of art cinema, these new sources of funding appeared, so while the final art film product often remains associated with a particular national origin, especially in the case of so-called ‘heritage’ films, the current funding situation is such that

⁴¹ Nowell-Smith also points out that films from smaller or restrictive European nations were reliant upon larger European nations for funding. On the other hand, David Andrews describes how, before the period of co-production, “The postwar art cinemas of France, Germany, and Italy got their start through national strategies designed to protect domestic industries and to reinforce a sense of native cultural identity, which seemed threatened by imports from Hollywood and elsewhere” (4). In the 1940s to early 1960s, these three nations formed a number of state-funded organizations (e.g. France's Centre National du Cinéma Française, Germany's Kuratorium junger deutsche film) to assist in this process.

⁴² Another major festival-based system of funding and distribution is the Sundance Institute, described online as providing “25 residential labs, grants exceeding \$3 million, and ongoing mentorships that support more than 900 artists each year.”

⁴³ As Andrews points out, the work of Peter Lev, Tino Balio, and Mark Betz have shown Hollywood's influence over and funding of art cinema is actually no recent phenomenon, complicating the picture of art cinema as purely state-funded (in a way that supposedly provides a filmmaker more freedom) at a much earlier point in its history.

contemporary art films tend to gather their budgets from a wide range of international state-sponsored, private, and corporate sources.⁴⁴⁴⁵

The question of funding is also significant to the matter of the auteur, who is commonly understood as absolutely central to an art film's production and meaning. We can understand the presence of Hollywood, film festivals, and other international funding schemes behind every art film as compromising artistic freedom (and therefore compromising the idea of the art film as expressing the auteur's singular vision).⁴⁶ So while the figure of the auteur continues to dominate the approach of cinephilic publications and remain a central factor in determining which films end up being shown at film festivals,⁴⁷ a number of critiques of the auteur's privileged place in

⁴⁴ A telling example is Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendor*, which features contributions by twelve different production companies: Kick the Machine (Thai, private), Anna Sanders Films (French, private), The Match Factory (German, private), Geißendörfer Film- und Fernsehproduktion (German, private), ZDF/Arte (German, state-funded), Astro Shaw (Malaysian, private), Asia Culture Centre-Asian Arts Theatre (Korean, state-funded), Detalle Films (Mexican, private), Louverture Films (American, private), Tordenfilm (Norwegian, private), Centre National de la Cinématographie (French, state-funded), and Illuminations Films (British, private).

⁴⁵ The presence of streaming companies like Netflix and Amazon Prime as producers and distributors of art cinema complicates matters further, as the recent scandal involving Bong Joon-Ho's *Okja* (2017) proves. On the one hand, streaming services increase opportunities for funding for filmmakers struggling to pull together funding for their films (i.e., all filmmakers); on the other, the streaming of art films interferes with the economic well-being of art house cinemas. The Cannes Film Festival recently banned films with no theatrical release from competition; additionally, France already has a law in the books that (technically) bans streaming of films within three years of their theatrical release. For more on this, see <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/may/11/cannes-film-festival-takes-on-netflix-with-new-rule> and <http://variety.com/2017/film/global/cannes-film-festival-maintains-netflixs-movies-in-competition-sets-new-rule-amid-turmoil-1202420874/>. For more on how Netflix and HBO fund television and films, see <http://www.magnetmediafilms.com/blog/netflix-hbo-how-do-they-fund-original-content-creation-infographic>.

⁴⁶ Mark Betz has pointed out that Hollywood's presence in art film production has led to cinephiles and critics questioning the artistic integrity of the movies that arise from partial Hollywood funding (like Antonio's trilogy of *Blow Up*, *Zabriskie Point*, and *The Passenger*, mentioned above), and wonders why similar questions don't arise in response to European art films with their own set of funding procedures: "European art films have thus been left free to carry on as signifiers of stable national cinemas and identities or as gleaming expressions of their auteur's vision, somehow not blurred by the quite specific determinants of cross-national cooperation that leave their marks everywhere on the film, from its budget to its shooting locations to its cast to its sound track" (9).

⁴⁷ For more on the "festival auteur," see Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong's *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*, where Wong describes how festivals "support this process [of determining festival fare] by reinforcing meanings and strategies of auteur and training 'future masters' (100). She examines Antonioni, for example, as an auteur whose status film festivals bolstered and propagated by continuing to show his films, even as the films' critical reception declined.

art cinema⁴⁸ (and of the auteur as concept central to film studies more generally) have fundamentally changed how we understand the term “auteur.” Robert Stam sums up this situation in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, when he writes, “auteur studies now tend to see a director’s work not as the expression of individual genius but rather as the site of encounter of a biography, an intertext, and institutional context, and a historical moment” (6).⁴⁹ Additionally, a number of other writers have argued that figures other than the director deserve the status of auteur⁵⁰. So even while the institutions surrounding art cinema, like film festivals and cinephiles, enforce the idea of the auteur’s centrality to the art film, the criticism and resultant loosening of the term itself opens art cinema to new possibilities.

The matter of “niche audiences” has also changed since the 1950s, as art cinema’s market has expanded beyond intellectual audiences to include various sorts of fans and curious viewers.⁵¹⁵² It’s common for art films to star famous actors and musicians (see, for instance, the

⁴⁸ Critiques of the auteur more generally—in art cinema or not—have circulated in film studies almost since the inception of the idea, with *Screen* theory in the late 1960s and 1970s (as well as the revolutionized *Cahiers du Cinema* and the work of Peter Wollen not just for *Screen* but also for *New Left Review*) being especially cold towards the idea, favoring psychoanalytic and Marxist and structuralist readings over the auteurist ones presented, for example, by Andrew Sarris in *Movie* (Hillier 147, 149).

⁴⁹ Marijka de Valck expresses a similar idea in her introduction to *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* when she writes, “This perspective [offered by network theory] results in the reframing of new waves and the author within their economic-cultural context rather than deploying them as tropes for the cultural analysis of films as singular creations as expressive of national/artistic essences” (24).

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Angus Finney’s criticism, in *The State of European Cinema: A New Dose of Reality*, that “[i]n an auteur-dominated environment, feature-film development was an idea in a director’s head, rather than a team-driven process involving the producer’s input, let alone a script editor or co-writer” (27) or Rick Altman’s claims that, “[u]nable to suppress language, cinema theory transferred its resentment to the source of that language, banning the screenwriter eternally from serious consideration. With the *auteur* ‘theory’ the screenwriter was finally done away with all together....” (70).

⁵¹ From the very beginning of the art house trend in the United States, we see that the audience wasn’t as neatly academic or intellectual as imagined, with the less restrictive portrayal of sexuality in foreign films acting as a key part of their appeal to American audiences and success in the American market (Andrews 72). Furthermore, Barbara Wilinsky describes (in *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema*) how audiences in the 1950s “turned to taste and culture to distinguish themselves from others” in an environment where the suburban American dream was becoming readily available to everyone. Wilinsky draws on the work of C. Wright Mills to suggest that “[p]eople spent time determining what would make them look as if they belonged to a higher status group” (85). Art cinema audiences, then, were at least partly composed not of intellectuals but of people attempting to look like intellectuals for the sake of standing out from their peers.

recent crossover from Hollywood into art cinema of Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson, or the appearance in Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* [1987] of both Peter Falk and Nick Cave), whose fans will watch what they're in out of sheer devotion.⁵³ Streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime include art films that any viewer might stumble upon and watch.⁵⁴ Additionally, the precarious position of many arthouse theaters (struggling to compete with streaming and other home media) means that those art films that do make it to the big screen outside of New York or Los Angeles (or other major metropolitan cities across the globe) play in cinemas—belonging to a major chain, a small chain, or independently owned—right next to mainstream fare.⁵⁶

Additionally, international film festivals now exist in almost every major city across the globe and show films coming out of Hollywood and other mainstream filmmaking conglomerates (as well as films imitating or aiming for the major market), student films, local

⁵² Andrews' work on the cult art film suggests the presence of a non-intellectual highbrow audience for certain kinds of art films traditionally/historically associated "with the trash aesthetic that emerged from a youth-oriented taste for the exploitation flicks and 'midnight movies' first produced in abundance in the 1950s and 1960s" (98).

⁵³ Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, in their introduction to *Global Art Cinema*, also discuss the existence of a kind of star system in art cinema that "nevertheless might define the nature of stardom or the bodily qualities desired in a star differently from Hollywood" (33). In the contemporary moment, we might think of actors like Juliette Binoche, Isabelle Huppert, Kim Min-hee, and Vincent Lindon as being part of the art cinema star system.

⁵⁴ For instance, as of writing this footnote (October 2017), recent critically acclaimed art films like *Nocturama* (2016, dir. Bertrand Bonello), *The Ornithologist* (2017, dir. João Pedro Rodrigues), and *Stranger by the Lake* (2013, dir. Alain Guiraudie) were streaming on Netflix, while *After the Storm* (2016, dir. Hirokazu Koreeda), *Irreversible* (2002, dir. Gaspar Noé), and *Laurence Anyways* (2012, dir. Xavier Dolan) were streaming on Amazon Prime. These films are often recommended (on Netflix's "More Like This" and Amazon's "Customers Who Watched This Also Watched") to viewers of more mainstream fare.

⁵⁵ Sean Fennessey, writing for *The Ringer*, notes, "Independent cinema is moving out of the art house and into every house. The collapse of this viewing window and the bidding-war armistice has been mitigated by prefab dealmaking. Technocratic distribution companies like Netflix and Amazon have upended the state of independently produced movies."

⁵⁶ For more on this, see, for example, recent news articles like Rachel Koning Beals' "Independent and Art-House Movie Theaters Double Down on Anti-Netflix Vision" and Claire Atkinson's "Independent Movie Theaters Are Making a Comeback" that document the presence of craft cocktails and high-end food at independent movie theaters that show not only both mainstream and art films but also sporting events and concerts.

films, and all sorts of other fare.⁵⁷ (This has also meant a further loosening of art cinema's traditional Eurocentrism, with major festivals happening all over the world and their films being pulled from a wide range of national and transnational origins.⁵⁸) On top of this, sales agents working for distributors owned by major corporations attend festivals and buy films for millions of dollars.⁵⁹ While this doesn't mean that festivals are not still centrally involved in the institutionalization of art cinema (especially at the so-called "international 'A' festivals at Venice and Cannes as well as Berlin, Toronto, Tokyo, and Pusan and through the giving out of awards at these major festivals and others),⁶⁰ it does mean that the festival climate has changed, making it difficult to label a film "art cinema" for its appearance at a festival.

In other words, the time is ripe to redefine and reexamine art cinema, because many of its traditional assumptions and features have changed drastically in the past few decades; additionally, the current financing situation for art cinema—as an institution—means that there is more reason than ever doubt that (those whom art cinema declares to be) its makers protect cinema and preserve it as an art better than others. There are cracks in the façade of art cinema as an institution, but I strive to preserve the term—by redefining and expanding it—as a way of referring to art cinema's rich history and rich potential for a certain kind of thinking spectatorship. I am by no means the first to attempt such a redefinition, but my approach is not just to define but to imagine and dream based on the films and videos I have seen and

⁵⁷ See David Andrews' "Art Cinema as Institution, Redux: Art Houses, Film Festivals, and Film Studies" (p. 8-9); Nick James' "Whose Cinephilia?" (p. 5); and Nick Roddick's "Window Shopping" (p. 13). A number of recent books on the global phenomenon of film festivals are useful here as well, including Kenneth Turan's *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made* (2003), Marijke de Valck's *Film Festivals : From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (2007), Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong's *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (2011), and Brendan Kredell, Skadi Loist, and Marijke de Valck's *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (2016).

⁵⁸ For more on this see the introduction to Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover's introduction to *Global Art Cinema*.

⁵⁹ See Mark Peranson's "'First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals" (2008).

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 8.

considered, some of which traditionally belong to the art cinema and some of which emerge elsewhere yet offer similar kinds of possibilities for an engaged, thoughtful spectatorship built around discontinuous narratives; based on both the shortcomings and strengths of the writing about art cinema that has existed up to this point; and based on the realization that, as described above, the institutions of art cinema are not only changing but disintegrating.

2.5 SITUATING ART CINEMA DREAMS WITHIN AND AGAINST EXISTING ART CINEMA SCHOLARSHIP

In academic discourse about art cinema as a category, writers have taken one of two approaches: to focus mainly on its textual features or to focus mainly on its institutions. While my definition of art music video is based on a textual feature (discontinuous narrative centered around striking images that provide a disorienting or jarring effect) that I see as central to the history of art cinema, it's important to note that to posit this definition of art music video is also to destabilize art cinema institutions based on festivals, arthouse cinemas, film distributors, and so on (which do not exist for the art music video). It does not pretend that there are no institutions but instead foregrounds extra-institutional possibilities.⁶¹

As I've described above, one of the key institutional elements of art cinema is the auteur, and even as the understanding of the auteur in the context of film studies has necessarily expanded and become more complicated than the romantic concept of a single individual

⁶¹ This is in part because the institutions of the internet, the only purveyor of music videos that matters in the post-MTV age, are not so easily set in stone: it's no simple task to institutionalize and categorize and play gatekeeper to the billions of music videos uploaded to YouTube and Vimeo—any attempts to do so must acknowledge that they are merely scratching the surface. I'm not so naïve as to think the Internet represents a total free-for-all for its users, but—as of yet—there's no Cannes Film Festival or deluxe subscription service for music video.

realizing his brilliant vision, it's a concept that can still tend to obstruct narrative understandings of art cinema when writers insist that the auteur not only expands viewers' understanding of a given art film's narrative (i.e., if we notice certain narrative patterns and themes across several films directed by the same individual, we more fully understand the narrative of one of the director's films) but also structures the art film's narration. It's largely the latter, not the former, with which I take issue: my argument is that, by foregrounding the auteur as a key element of the art film, we not only limit the concept of art cinema to certain contexts but silence some of the disruptive, uncomfortable discontinuities of art film narratives. I do not argue this to reignite debates about auteurism—there is some practicality to the term, as chapters three and four make clear—but to show its tendency in the context of art cinema to *solve* or *explain away* narratives whose mysteries demand a more radical kind of engaged uncertainty.

Because there are two key approaches to understanding art cinema (institutional approaches and textual approaches), there are two key approaches to deemphasizing the auteur: to loosen the grip of the institutional in our understanding of art cinema and to highlight the possibility of art film narratives existing apart from them. First, however, it's important to understand how the auteur operates in key readings, both institutional and textual, about art cinema.

One such key reading is David Andrews' 2013 *Theorizing Art Cinemas: Foreign, Cult, Avant-Garde, and Beyond*, in large part because Andrews is the most recent scholar to write a book-length study about contemporary art cinema (beyond any particular national or historical context). His writing sits squarely on the institutional side: he's interested in how critics, websites, fans, film festival directors, marketers, and filmmakers construct some concept of art cinema and its canons. The concept of the auteur remains central, then, for Andrews, because it

is central to how these critics, websites, fans, festival directors, marketers, and filmmakers describe art films. He writes,

[A]cademics should not kid themselves into thinking [the auteur] may be gotten rid of simply by highlighting its epistemological defects. Auteurism accesses something too basic in human nature for this to be possible. It simplifies in a way that is too convenient, too malleable. And it is now the foundation of too many institutions and investments (37).

The auteur, for Andrews, becomes inescapable, as it is too deeply ingrained in both the human imagination and in art cinema's institutions.

The problem with this view, rooted as it is in the biological (or, as Andrews puts it, "the biocultural," the idea being that the natural processes of human and cultural evolution have created and relied upon the concept of the author), is that it sees these processes as inexorable, as if writers themselves could not, in their writing, affect the way these processes operate. Ironically, the end result is a kind of quieting of the very human imagination he claims to observe and understand. Andrews claims,

[s]cholars are at their best when they are more detached, telling us what is going on and how that relates to what has gone on in the past—when they tell us what a canon has been *thought to be* by actual groups and institutions rather than when they tell us what it *ought* to be. When they get more personal, these commentators promote their own agendas, in effect playing a game they should be explaining (33)

There's perhaps no statement that better reveals the downfalls of the institutional view of art cinema, which at its worst insists on the permanence of existing institutions and denies its complicity in both creating and affirming them. The scholar, for Andrews, becomes a kind of scientific observer, who must leave thinking of alternatives to the marketers and fans and artists.

Yet others who have taken on art cinema's institutions—many of whom are writers Andrews references as his models—end up performing the kind of imaginative work that Andrews refutes as mere play. Above, I've already discussed the work of Mark Betz, for example, who—relying on Surrealism as a kind of model—imagines ways to transgress art cinema's institutional bounds. He and other writers who take on art cinema's institutions dare to realize their projects' possibilities for imagining art cinema anew, with the idea that revealing existing institutions provides an opportunity to playfully destabilize them.

Steve Neale's "Art Cinema As Institution" (1981) was one the first published essays to engage—directly and at length—with art cinema, writ-large, not as a genre but as a category defined by its "practices of production, distribution and exhibition" (Neale 15). The piece takes up art cinema institutions not for their own sake but for the sake of imagining the possibility of a *different* sort of British art cinema, which—he remarks at the end of the piece—should see "Art Cinema policies in Europe...more useful as a strategic precedent than as a model, since, with few exceptions, they are and have been constantly marked by a combination of commodity-based structures, relations and practices on the one hand and the culturally reactionary discourses of high art on the other" (39). This passage reveals that Neale sees the possibility of moving into the future *transgressively*, away from those elements of art cinema that are not worth saving (obsessive commoditization, snobbish tendencies) but maintaining some concept of art cinema nonetheless (because, he writes, it "has, historically, provided real—if limited—spaces for genuinely radical work, though the impact of that work has often been blocked and nullified by the overall institutional contexts in which it has found itself" [33]).⁶²

⁶² This seems directly related to Nowell-Smith's argument that art cinema "reflects, above all, ...the fact that there is still room for difference, even in a world of reconsolidated monopoly power" (575).

For writers like Betz and Neale, the figure of the auteur represents a central part of art cinema's institutions: Betz writes that his project allows "a fading of the individual importance of the auteur for understanding the meanings of European art cinema" (43), while Neale writes that "the mark of the author is used as a kind of brand name, to mark and to sell the filmic product" (and therefore is clearly aligned with those commodity-based structures that he wants a British art cinema to resist) (15). For them, this represents not something inescapable but rather a key reason to move away from the figure of the auteur in both reading and creating art cinema—and, at least for Neale, reading and creating are necessarily tied together, since readings of art films become a central way to enforce art cinema's institutions.

This tendency in the work of Betz and Neale shows up a key shortcoming in the work of writers who have focused on the textual features of art cinema: these writers, unlike Betz and Neale, refuse to read against limiting or monolithic institutions of art cinema and instead let these institutions insinuate themselves into their own art film hermeneutics. This is most clear in the work of David Bordwell, who insists—in both his chapter, "Art-Cinema Narration," from *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) and in his (slightly) updated "The Art Cinema As a Mode of Film Practice" from *Poetics of Cinema* (2007)—on the auteur as inextricable from the art film. He writes, "In the art cinema...the overt self-consciousness of the narration is often paralleled by an extratextual emphasis on the filmmaker as source. Within the art cinema's mode of production and reception, the concept of the *author* has a formal function it did not possess in the Hollywood studio system" (211, italics Bordwell's). Although *Narration in the Fiction Film* is a book about the textual features of many different types of films, it's clear from the comment above that institutional matters play a key role in how Bordwell understands interpretive

possibilities for these films: the “mode of production and reception” of the art cinema demand an auteur, and Bordwell is more than happy to provide one.

In the context of “The Art Cinema As a Mode of Film Practice,” originally published in 1979, Bordwell had seen art cinema’s ambiguity as arising from “uncertainties” about whether a particular textual feature should be “resituated as realism (in life things happen this way) or authorial commentary” (156). Bordwell allows for no other possible readings of art films *because the institutions of art cinema would have it no other way*. Nevertheless, his *Narration in the Fiction Film* initially provides a way out of this dilemma (i.e. before he falls back on the figure of the auteur).⁶³ For example, the following passage gives a sense of Bordwell’s hesitance to tie art cinema’s narration directly to an auteur:

To “objective” and “subjective” verisimilitude we may add a third broad schema, that of overt narrational “commentary.” In applying this schema, the viewer looks for those moments in which the narrational act interrupts the transmission of fabula information and highlights its own role. Stylistic devices that gain prominence with respect to classical norms—an unusual angle, a stressed bit of cutting, a striking camera movement, an unrealistic shift in lighting or setting, a disjunction on the sound track, or any other breakdown of objective realism which is not motivated as subjectivity—can be taken as the narration’s commentary. Recall the “prophetic” camera movement in *The Spider’s Strategem...*, or the satiric freeze frame in *Viridiana* that

⁶³ A paragraph soon after the paragraph about narrational commentary reads, In the art cinema, however, the overt self-consciousness of the narration is often paralleled by an extratextual emphasis on the filmmaker as source. Within the art cinema’s mode of production and reception, the concept of the *author* has a formal function it did not possess in the Hollywood studio system. Film journalism and criticism promote authors, as do film festivals, retrospectives, and academic film study. Directors’ statements of intent guide comprehension of the film, while a body of work linked by an authorial signature encourages viewers to read each film as a chapter of an oeuvre. Thus the institutional “author” is available as a source of the formal operation of the film. Sometimes the film asks to be taken as autobiography, the filmmaker’s confession (e.g., *8 1/2*, *The 400 Blows*, many of Fassbinder’s works). More broadly, the author becomes the real-world parallel to the narrational presence “who” communicates (what is the filmmaker *saying*?) and “who” expresses (what is the author’s personal vision) (211).

invites the spectator to compare the beggars' feast to the Last Supper. The marked self-consciousness of art-cinema narration creates both a coherent fabula world and an intermittently present but highly noticeable external authority through which we gain access to it (209).

The passage presents the notion of narration as a powerful presence in its own right and, moreover, provides a template for understanding art cinema narrative in terms of discontinuity. It is "the narration's commentary" whose viewpoint structures the film—in other words, it is the shape of the film's narrative itself that prompts us to read what is happening in certain ways, looking for the themes, political issues, and so forth that the *film*, not the film's auteur—is communicating. Even when Bordwell refers to specific films in this passage, he makes no mention of the director: a film can be "prophetic" or "satiric" without the author's presence. The film itself—outside of institutional demands for the presence of the auteur—guides a certain kind of thinking or viewing, encouraging viewers to especially notice and consider the effect of interruption on interpretation.

And it is interruption that is central, for Bordwell, to the art cinema. The individual film presents moments that do not otherwise fit into the narrative—these moments disorient viewers and raise all kinds of questions. At the same time, even if viewers are aware, as Bordwell argues, that "an external authority" gives us access to these moments, this external authority does not have to be the auteur (it could be the camera or the film itself) and, moreover, does not get in the way of "a coherent fabula [i.e. story] world." The coherence of the art film narrative necessarily involves questioning and ambiguity, even if Bordwell doesn't make this clear in the passage above. He describes the camera movement in *The Spider's Stratagem* as "prophetic" and the freeze frame in *Viridiana* as "satirical," but their range of possible meanings necessarily stretches

beyond as viewers struggle to reckon with the images in connection to the story world and beyond it.

It's for this reason, because of *this* element of art cinema—its tendency to interrupt its narration with striking, unresolved images—that I have labeled art music video, *art* music video, not due to the presence of art cinema's institutional trappings, like the figure of the auteur or the arthouse cinema or state funding. The authorship of all kinds of music video has always been diffuse, emphasizing and deemphasizing at certain points directors, musical artists, choreographers, record labels, and so on—the art music video continues this trend and thus suggests other interpretive possibilities, beyond the auteur, for the art cinema. As far as the implications of this for defining art cinema, it simply means that not every film that has emerged from the institutions of art cinema is art cinema and that some films which have not emerged from the traditional institutions of art cinema can still be properly labeled *art cinema* or *art films*. This is another position that builds on certain aspects of Bordwell's work, especially his suggestion that “[w]ithin a machinery of production, distribution, and consumption...there exists a body of films which appeal to norms of syuzhet and style which I shall call art-cinema narration” (205). In this statement is the possibility for attempting—dreaming—readings of art cinema that exist outside of its institutional bounds and the possibility of *art* works of art, like art music video.

2.6 DISCONTINUOUS ART CINEMA NARRATIVE OUTSIDE OF MODERNISM

Chapters three and four of this dissertation include readings of contemporary art cinema and art music video that dream of possibilities existing beyond (although not entirely beyond, since this

would be impossible) auteurist or other traditional readings. Yet such readings are possible as well for older art films, which, as Bordwell points out, also feature narratives interrupted by images for which the film has not prepared us (before they appear) and which the film does not fully explain (after they appear). The examples below are important for positing that these sorts of art narratives are not specific to a particular historical moment in art cinema but rather exist—at least in glimpses—*across* the history of cinema. This is to directly contradict the work of András Bálint Kovács, who, while spending a great deal of time discussing the features of art cinema narration, limits art cinema’s ambiguity to the modernist art cinema of, roughly, 1958-1978.⁶⁴ Above, I’ve described the art music video as characterized by *intensified discontinuity*, a discontinuity related directly to the way in which art music videos provide a narrative (or at least some semblance of a narrative) before confusing that narrative with the insertion or appearance of striking images for which the video has not prepared us (before they appear) and which the video does not explain concretely (after they appear). Absolutely central to this discontinuity is both ambiguity and the actively thinking spectator, who attempts to understand the relation of the striking images to the video’s narrative. However, Kovács (building, in fact, on Bordwell’s description of art cinema narration in *Narration in the Fiction Film*) describes such elements (“*ambiguity* of the interpretation, the spectator’s conscious intellectual *involvement* in the plot construction, and the *subjective* character of the story”) as important not to art cinema generally but to modernist art cinema specifically (62, italics Kovács’).

Kovács’ claim—as well my own description of an open-ended text containing multiple possibilities and my desire to rethink art cinema’s *essence*—raises the question of whether the kind of music video and cinema I’m describing would be more accurately labeled modernist

⁶⁴ 1950-1980 is the period that appears in the book’s title, but Kovács’s chronology begins in 1958 with *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *The 400 Blows* and ends in 1978 with *The Meetings of Anna*.

cinema or modernist music video. However, I see two major shortcomings with connecting the kinds of videos I'm describing to modernism. First, modernism itself contains multitudes, so to speak: *modernism* has become a term that requires some sort of qualification (whether that's vernacular modernism, literary modernism, or so on). It can become, in the context of narrative analysis, an empty signifier for any dense or complicated text not directly about virtual worlds or purely contemporary existence (which must represent the *postmodern*).⁶⁵ To call the kind of music video I'm describing *modernist music video* would be to set stricter limits around it; to call it *art music video* opens it up to a wider range of possibilities and interpretations. Second, the discontinuity I discuss appears in art cinema prior to and after the 1958-78 period most commonly referred to in discussions of cinematic modernism.

It's helpful to look at two examples here, one from beyond the European context and another from within it—*One Wonderful Sunday* (1947, dir. Akira Kurosawa) and *The Flowers of St. Francis* (1950, dir. Roberto Rossellini)—to show the existence of art cinematic features in a time period preceding what's usually thought of as the key moment in cinematic modernism, as well as to show that these features across different national and cultural contexts. This is also a chance to see how two specific films (from a period of time that, on initial glance, looks very far away from the YouTube era) prompt viewers towards a kind of intellectual engagement with mysterious narratives, without the auteur as a narrational presence.

One Wonderful Sunday (*Subarashiki nichiyôbi*) takes place during a single Sunday as a very poor, dating couple wanders through Tokyo, trying to find ways to pass the time in Tokyo that they can afford and that won't compromise their moral standards. (Gambling, accepting

⁶⁵ Kovács himself falls into this trap when describing postmodernist narratives as “tak[ing] place in a series of possible worlds, each of which is unambiguous” (77), as if, after 1980, art cinema narrative changed irrevocably and as if the virtual were entirely incompatible with modernism's deployment of the “dramatic effect of accidents” (72).

money for which they didn't work, and even having sex are all ultimately out of the question, even though the possibility of all of these is present at various points during the film.) To put the film's plot very simply, it works something like this: the two characters, Masako and Yuzo, seem on the verge of breaking up at various points during the day but, after realizing the importance of imagination and hope, decide they'll stay together (at least long enough to meet up again next Sunday).

However, the film is chock-full of startling, disruptive images that make its narrative ambiguous and involve the conscious construction of the plot by the audience. I'll discuss three brief examples of this: the sudden appearance, by the train tracks where Masako and Yuzo eat, of a disheveled boy who does not answer their questions about his life (where he comes from, if he has a family) and visibly shakes up Masako; a shot that tilts up while Masako and Yuzo are in a train on their way to the symphony, eventually causing the two of them to disappear from the frame (the camera briefly watches two handstraps for standing riders instead—they sway there, momentarily, along with the movement of the train); and, perhaps most glaringly, a couple of shots of a tiny bear figurine inside Masako's purse to which no character ever refers directly (one of these shots is a swooping crane movement that, in finding the bear in her purse, leaves Masako and Yuzo entirely offscreen). We are left to wonder about all three of these moments, as they are never explained. Why is Masako so upset by the boy's appearance? What sort of existence does this boy have? Why does the camera take us away from Masako and Yuzo to focus on the handstraps or to discover the bear in Masako's purse? As in the art music videos I've described above, we never receive any solid answers. And while there isn't ever any doubt that the events in the film occur on the single Sunday of the film's title, there are enough gaps between the film's episodes that the audience still must put together what happens in the film

(for example, we don't know what happens to bring Masako back to Yuzo's house even after he attempts to rape her or what happens between Masako and Yuzo's embrace in an empty amphitheatre and their waiting for the train at the station; the mysterious bear, too, like the bear in the video for "Company," insists that we keep thinking about its relation to the plot's happenings).

It's clear that the film's ambiguities do not need an author to exist and to disrupt. They are there without any reflection upon the problem of the clash between realism and the presence of the auteur, as Bordwell would have it. Instead, the disheveled boy and the handlestraps and the bear figurine point us back towards the narrative and the narrative world, the lives and inner lives of the characters as they bump up against a world of other humans and machines. In this world, there are those who appear that are also poor; there is unnoticed, dancing material; there are possessions whose existence remain unknown, even in intimacy. Viewers recognize that this is so yet cannot "solve" the film with this knowledge—they are left instead to wonder, ceaselessly, even upon re-watching (which does not clear things up but instead makes the film's irresolution even clearer and more complex). Furthermore, the concepts related to the film's ambiguities become part of this wondering: issues of poverty, technology, absence, and concealment rise to the fore and become lenses through which viewers not only deepen their questioning of the film but also necessarily guide them to the world outside film. Viewers wonder, then, about the poverty of the others who remain in the periphery; about the unseen movements of the engines that transport us; about the bus's empty seats; about what's hidden away in beings' bags. The wondering does not result in concrete solutions to social problems (which is one of the reasons that has led many writers to criticize art cinema as apolitical), but it heightens one's awareness of worlds and their processes nevertheless.

The Flowers of St. Francis (*Francesco, giullare di Dio*) is more obviously episodic than *One Wonderful Sunday*, as it contains an intertitle between each of its sections that offers a brief description of what will happen in the next section of the film. For example, one of these intertitles (translated from Italian) reads, “How Francis, praying one night in the woods, met the leper.” What’s remarkable is how little explanation the film provides for what the episodes really contain. For example, in the aforementioned leper episode, lasting only five minutes, we see Francis approach the leper and pull on his arm, attempting to stop him (perhaps to talk or to get a sense of the leper’s needs). When Francis finally succeeds in this, by stepping directly in front of the leper and embracing him, the leper does not return his embrace. He merely walks on, looking back at Francis momentarily before proceeding. Francis breaks down and cries to God in response. It’s a completely mysterious, affecting scene (or, as the description would have it, “meeting”): wordless, one remembers mainly the sound of the bell around the leper’s neck as well as the horrific disfigurement of his skin by the disease. And, like the train moment in *One Wonderful Sunday*, the leper scene features a mysterious tilt up, from a high angle of Francis on the ground to the neverending empty fields to the clouds and finally to a low angle of the blank night sky. While it may seem obvious that this tilt up has something to do with God, the scene remains utterly ambiguous for what it represents, whether it’s God’s absence, God’s presence, or God’s inadequacy. Is the leper’s look back meaningful, touched by Francis’ generosity and kindness? Is it empty, mystified? Or is it angry, lonely, an indication of the leper’s status as forgotten, marginal, or even non-human?

The leper scene, when it’s paired with others in the film, also forces the audience to perform the work of story or plot construction. This isn’t immediately obvious, however, since the film begins as Francis and his band of monks initially interact and ends as they go their

separate ways. The second of the film's episodes shows the monks constructing their chapel and, more generally, putting together the place where they will live—this seems to cement that the film's episodes are happening chronologically. But the question of what happens between the episodes and of the chronological relation among the six scenes at the film's center remains unclear, so viewers must decide for themselves whether they are witnessing some sort of growth, inertia, backslide, or mystery—and whether this growth, inertia, backslide, or mystery is spiritual or secular in nature.

For instance, the character of Ginepro is at the center of both chapter 4 and chapter 7: “How Brother Ginepro cut off a pig's foot to give to a sick brother” and “How Brother Ginepro was judged on the gallows, and how his humility vanquished the ferocity of the tyrant Nicalaio.” Depending on which of these two chapters comes first, chronologically, can entirely change the way we understand Ginepro's arc. If chapter 4 comes first, we see a movement from Ginepro torturing an animal to Ginepro being tortured (although it's unclear whether this is evidence of spiritual growth or the randomness of nature). If chapter 7 comes first, we see the opposite movement, with Ginepro perhaps learning a vicious sort of cruelty (cutting off the foot of his brother—well, a pig understood as brother) from the cruel ways of the soldiers that torture him. A whole slew of other options and readings exist as well: we can understand Ginepro as wrapped up in the same humble cluelessness in both scenes, suffering whatever is requested of him in the moment. Either way, by placing Ginepro at the center of multiple scenes, the film prompts us to construct the plot in which his character exists, to better understand the way in which his character does or does not develop.

While the life of the auteur (in this case, Roberto Rossellini) or the existence of his other films may help provide interesting lenses through which to understand the film, his life and

oeuvre are not necessary for the process of questioning prompted by the film's discontinuities (the breaks between episodes, Ginepro's torture, the leper's refusal, the tilt of the camera to the sky). These discontinuities—as with those in *One Wonderful Sunday*—push us deeper into the film and beyond it: disfigurement, disability, the absence or presence of God, and violence become ideas through which one can further think about the life of film and about the life beyond it. While both films tend to focus on matters of social class and poverty over race and gender, the ambiguity of their narratives allows or even prompts readings that take race and gender into consideration. It's not that the possibilities for readings of a given art film are boundless; rather, it's that the striking images themselves are disruptive in a way that necessarily opens each film up to a multiplicity of readings that center around these striking images, in context.

So we see that the two films, usually chalked up by critics to be reflecting the neorealist concerns of the time (cf. Michael Koresky's essays on Postwar Kurosawa and Bazin's "In Defense of Rossellini"), do much more than just "loosen up...classical narration": they complicate any idea of straightforward narration, drawing us into their ambiguities and the work of constructing their plots with striking, mysterious images and moments. (Such moments are what some critics have called their excess; I'll take this issue up further in my fourth chapter.) Less ambiguous films exist within neorealism, so we might understand some early postwar, neorealist films as a kind of proto-art cinema, labeled art cinema at the time for marketing and exhibition purposes but ultimately, in hindsight, looking—in terms of narrative—very much like mainstream cinema of the time. Some mainstream fare of the late 1940s and early 1950s was, like the emerging institutionalized art cinema, finding new ways of coming to terms with and portraying reality. Certain films noirs, like *The Naked City* (1948, dir. Jules Dassin), *The Third*

Man (1949, dir. Carol Reed), and *Night and the City* (1950, dir. Jules Dassin), featured location shooting and realistic, sometimes grisly, portrayals of urban crime. Similarly, melodramatic westerns like *Red River* (1948, dir. Howard Hawks) and *The Furies* (1950, dir. Anthony Mann), featured a great deal of location shooting and portrayals of cutthroat, patriarchal, capitalistic business practices. But these films make a point of limiting or closing off ambiguity and viewer confusion, opting—due partially to the censoring pressures of the Hays Code—to end tidily even if it meant shutting down more nuanced possibilities in the text. So realism was a concern of multiple kinds of cinema of the 1940s and 1950s, while emphatic, striking-image-centered, open-ended ambiguity was only prominent in the emerging art cinema, which in the 1940s was continuing an institutionalization process that had begun in the two previous decades.

This chapter has described a category in contemporary music video that I'm calling the art music video through close readings of three art music video examples. It has argued that this label—art music video—is appropriate because art music video and art cinema share a tendency to structure narrative according to a certain kind of discontinuity that disrupts viewer interpretation through the deployment of striking or shocking images that the text never explains. Additionally, this chapter has acknowledged that other readings of art cinema have not tended to foreground this kind of narrative structure but instead have limited interpretive possibilities (or kinds of engaged spectatorship) by foregrounding art cinema's industrial limits (especially the figure of the auteur). Because of this, I have, in part, framed the chapter as a *dreaming* of art cinema rather than as a simple redefinition of art cinema and have offered examples from films and videos—as well as examples of spaces within writing about the art cinema that hint at the possibility of redefining art cinema—as the foundation for my dreaming. I have also argued that the contemporary moment is particularly ripe for dreaming art cinema anew, due to the

destabilization of many of art cinema's traditional industrial trappings (represented, in part, by online streaming and the art music video).

The purpose of all this has been to destabilize the high-low divisions between art cinema and music video and, moreover, to do this in order to show within both the possibility for an actively thinking mode of spectatorship prompted directly by the narrative structures of the works themselves, even though scholars have tended to ignore or look beyond narrative in both art cinema and music video. This is not to say that other kinds of films and music video cannot or do not prompt active thinking; rather, it's to suggest that art cinema and art music video prompt a specific kind of active thinking that must ceaselessly think discontinuity and disruption—that is to say, the thinking prompted by art cinema and art music video is a thinking that never ends, because the texts insist that viewers find no concrete answer, no definitive interpretation. This is especially promising in the context of the art music video, which arrives unattached from predetermined or expected forms of intellectualism. This project becomes, then, is a way to dream openness, to find pleasure in disruption and discontinuity through wondering.

However, this chapter often has focused on narrative structure at the expense of the popular music that is so central to the music video. What does music have to do with dreaming a version of art cinema and art music video that encourages spectators to wonder within the film and beyond it? The next chapter seeks to answer this question by examining the ways in which art cinema has tended to deploy popular music, historically and into the present.

3.0 POPULAR MUSIC IN ART CINEMA: DISCONTINUITY AND THE MOVEMENT AWAY FROM CRITICAL DISTANCE

Music is absolutely critical to the redefinition of art cinema that I began in the previous chapter, as well as critical to the mode of spectatorship that both art music video and art cinema prompt. It's the use of popular music, from the birth of rock and roll⁶⁶ and into the present, that's especially important here, since the inclusion of rock and roll and other postwar music styles (e.g. hip hop, disco, funk, R&B) in art cinema signals a dramatic break from the inclusion of orchestral scores, classical music, jazz, and folk songs that previously characterized those art films that chose to include music.⁶⁷ I call this break dramatic because the birth of rock and roll signaled a shift not only in its aggressive sound and rebellious connotations⁶⁸ but also in the

⁶⁶ The influence of jazz is also incredibly important, even though it's not the focus of this dissertation. Russell Lack writes,

Jazz revolutionized that pairing of music to image in so many ways that the subsequent rise of the pop song and the pop score became inevitable. Chiefly, for film music, jazz broke up the Wagnerian reliance on leitmotifs and themes and replaced them with an impressionistic musical commentary that functioned much more like an omnipotent narrator within the film than a film score (195).

It's worth noting his choice of words here: the *omnipotence* of the music *subtracts* power from the makers of a given film.

⁶⁷ It was around this same time that mainstream Hollywood music also began to include rock and roll music, but Arthur Knight and Pamela Robertson Wojcik are careful to point out, in their introduction to *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, that "the popular score is not, as many seem to suggest, exclusively a post-1950s, rock-and-roll-era phenomenon" (3). They gesture back to the importance of popular song to the cinematic experience that began with the silent film and continues up through musicals and other genre films. However, not only are Knight and Wojcik focusing on Hollywood cinema instead of art cinema, they're also thinking about the use in film of popular music in a more general sense than the sense I examine in this chapter. I focus on moments when a pre-existing pop song dominates the film's soundtrack, not on related phenomena like music composed for a film in popular styles.

⁶⁸ A large part of rock and roll's rebellion and perceived aggressiveness was inextricable from its close ties to black styles of music (see Mundy 25).

marketing and packaging of music to appeal to young and independent audiences with access to disposable income and a desire to (rebelliously) dance.⁶⁹

Popular music, from (at least⁷⁰) rock and roll on, represents a certain kind of unfettered energy, and its change in sound over time has prompted concurrent changes in taste, changes in fashion, changes in dance, and—most importantly, at least in the context of this project—changes in visual style. Very closely related to these changes are changes in marketing meant to tap into whatever is new and in style. In the 1950s, for example, both the music industry and the film industry attempted to draw on the popularity of rock and roll by, in music, shifting from the sale of sheet music to the sale of records and, in film, portraying on screen the performances of rock and roll stars (Mundy 24). In *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956, dir. Frank Tashlin), for instance, a narrative about a woman's surprisingly successful forays into rock and roll performance occurs against a background of performances by rock-and-roll (in the broadest sense) artists including Fats Domino, Little Richard, Eddie Cochran, The Platters, Abbey Lincoln, and so on.

So, we see already that mainstream, Hollywood cinema had—and continues to have—plenty of reason for tapping in to new popular music styles, since it was these popular music styles that could help Hollywood keep an audience and remain economically viable⁷¹ (especially in response to the competition provided by television, which was also growing in popularity at

⁶⁹ See, for example, John Mundy's definition of 'pop' music (within which he sees rock and roll as a subgenre) as "the new youth-orientated music which emerged" in the 1950s (9).

⁷⁰ Lack describes jazz in similar terms, noting that "jazz—with its aesthetic of imperfection—captured musically some of the sense of spontaneous authenticity that many film makers were looking for" (197).

⁷¹ Jeff Smith's *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (1998) emphasizes the economic factors wrapped up in Hollywood's decision to increasingly rely on both original scores composed in popular idioms and compilation scores. The economic benefits for Hollywood, according to Smith, include "ancillary revenues from the outright sale of records and sheet music"; "additional monies from [Hollywood's] control of various copyrighted materials"; and the fact that "theme songs and soundtrack albums became valuable cross-promotional tools" (2).

the time).⁷² But since art cinema portrays itself as free from market pressures⁷³ (or, at the very least, more interested in intellectual audiences than in the masses⁷⁴), what reason could it possibly have for including popular music in its soundtracks? The choice to include popular music in a film connects, historically, to the capitalist market logic that Hollywood and related industries represent—and that art cinema portrays itself as resisting—so it seems bizarre or even counterintuitive for art cinema to interpolate pop songs.⁷⁵

A number of reasons for this interpolation will become apparent as this chapter proceeds, but we see right away that the inclusion of popular music in art films poses a number of significant problems for art cinema as an institution. How can art cinema represent high art if it includes what represents a low art? How can art cinema distance itself from market pressures—and commoditization more generally—if it includes songs that are readily available for purchase? How can art cinema prompt a certain way of thinking through its discontinuities when the songs it includes threaten to disrupt art cinema’s intellectual pleasures?

In order to respond to these problems, I will examine several specific examples of scenes in art films (from multiple moments in art cinema history, from the late 1950s to the late

⁷² See also Hilary Lapedis’ “Popping the Question: The Function and Effect of Popular Music in Cinema,” where she examines popular music as it appears in Hollywood cinema of the 1980s and 1990s (*The Big Chill* [1983], *Forrest Gump* [1994], and *Trainspotting* [1996], specifically). She argues that “the apparent emergence of a hybrid music/movie form seems to be a function of the new, vertically integrated entertainment corporations” yet also notes that “commerce is not the only consideration, nor is it necessarily the final determinant,” noting that effects of the pop song in commercial cinema include an emphasis on “visual montage”; a shortening of scene length to match song length; and a focus on episodic over linear narratives (379).

⁷³ See the statement by the Fédération Internationale des Auteurs de Film in Kovács, 26.

⁷⁴ See Kovács, 20-1, as well as Ryall, 115 / Andrews, 2 for their emphasis on the connection between art cinema and high art.

⁷⁵ In Russell Lack’s *Twenty Four Frames Under*, in a chapter titled, “Arthouse Cinema and Classical Music,” he emphasizes the use of music in art cinema as distinctly auteurist, describing “a select band of directors whose body of work is so distinctive that they merit the term ‘auteur’ in the sense of being authors creating an artwork rather than a commercial commodity” (296). Their use of classical music, he argues, is part of their authorship. Yet he makes this argument at the expense of their use of pop music, which, presumably, takes something away from these directors’ authorship.

1990s⁷⁶) that choose to include popular music, in the form of pre-recorded, pre-existing songs. (It's important that the songs are pre-recorded and pre-existing to differentiate my study from the related, but peripheral, concerns of the art movie musical and of musical performance in the art film.) While it's impossible to represent art cinema as a whole in this examination, I will do my best to build bridges between each of my examples, attempting to provide a sense of trends in art cinema between their release dates, as well as to discover certain commonalities among the films that their use of popular music reveals. I've chosen the following examples based on what I see as important trends in popular music (and its deployment in visual media) from the time of the film's release; based on their affective resonance; and based on what I might call their surface connection to the art cinema—that is, their historical/institutional connection to art cinema. I use the wide range of films represented below to argue that, through the period of these films' release (i.e. the 1950s to the 1990s), their use of music prompts us to reconsider or even topple traditional, institutional understandings of art cinema and to do so by paying attention to the kind of affective, active-thinking spectatorship they foster through their deployment of pre-recorded, pre-existing songs. Moreover, I argue that art cinema's use of pop music always fosters a kind of discontinuity,⁷⁷ taking us away from the total control of the auteur and into the hands of the music itself.⁷⁸ If, as we will see below, art cinema initially remains wary of pop music and

⁷⁶ I'm choosing to stop in the 1990s, because by the 2000s, the inclusion of popular music in all sorts of cinema becomes a common stylistic gesture.

⁷⁷ This may relate to what Eric Prieto (in *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative*) argues as central to the thinking about music and narrative in T.S. Eliot's essays about music and poetry, as well as in Edouard Dujardin's lecture about the influence of Richard Wagner's music on his own writing: that which is "musical" as "a form of logic that can be opposed to the rules that govern conventional literary discourse" (14). At the same time, Prieto's focus on the influence of instrumental music on narrative structure is a very different convergence of music and language than that represented by pop songs. Pop songs allow the kind of "literal contact between music and literature" that modernist literature cannot (17).

⁷⁸ A quote from filmmaker Andrzej Wajda about the use of *classical* music in film is interesting in this context: "All of these pictures [that used fragments of classical music] began to blur into one, as the music swallowed up the personality of the director, the scriptwriter, and the actors, transforming the cinema into a series of pictures illustrating the eternal music" (quoted in Lack 306). Here, it's interesting that Wajda understands classical music as

refrains from giving itself over to the songs it includes,⁷⁹ by the end of the twentieth century, art cinema fully embraces the songs it deploys and their far-reaching possibilities.

3.1 BEGINNINGS: *LE NOTTI BIANCHE*

As useful a beginning as any for examining the deployment of popular music in art cinema is *Le Notti Bianche* (dir. Luchino Visconti). Released in 1957, it sits in an uneasy position between the neorealism of the immediate postwar period and the rebellions of Michelangelo's modernist experiments, as well as the developments of the French New Wave. Reflective of this position, the film includes both realist and expressionist or fantastical elements in its portrayal of Mario's infatuated pursuit of a woman named Natalia, who deters his advances because she is waiting for the return to Livorno, where the film takes place, of the man she loves. *Le Notti Bianche* was filmed entirely on a meticulously constructed set in high-contrast black and white, which becomes especially noticeable when snow begins to fall near the film's end ("*Le Notti Bianche*" 2). However, the film's representation of bombed-out structures indicates Italy's continuing post-

detracting from the distinctive style of its many contributors. It's likely that he would see the pop song as intensifying this effect, since it would allow a clearly commercial endeavor to take (even more) attention away from the artistry of the directors, writers, actors, and so on. On the other hand, perhaps the lack of "eternal" qualities in popular music would, in Wajda's view, prevent understanding the music as a distraction from the film's artistry.⁷⁹ Knight and Wojcik describe the use of pop music in the work of some European film directors (they list Jean-Luc Godard, Wim Wenders, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder) as "creat[ing] various alienation effects through their use of global popular music" instead of "simply spotting songs for soundtrack sales" (3). Interestingly, they also credit both art cinema and "the American avant-garde" as highly influential on those Hollywood films that include popular music for (what Knight and Wojcik consider) commercial reasons. Jeff Smith also sees the American avant-garde as highly influential on the use of the compilation soundtrack in Hollywood, remarking on the ability of *Scorpio Rising* (1963, dir. Kenneth Anger) to "use...rock as a kind of referential intertext capable of commenting on or satirizing the image track" (159). Although my project focuses on art cinema instead of the American avant-garde, another interesting project would involve considering similarities and differences in their deployment of popular music for the sake of critical or ironic distance.

war realities and its inclusion of immigrants and prostitutes in its narrative further place the film in a real time and space (Hennessey 162-3).

Nino Rota's orchestral score makes up most of the film's music, although a visit to the opera and an experience with street musicians provide the film with other sorts of sound and song. All of these other sorts of music abruptly disappear during a scene about two-thirds of the way into the film, as Mario becomes increasingly convinced that Natalia will leave the fantasy of her lover's return behind in order to be with Mario instead, and the two visit a night club. When they first enter the club, a jazzy number quietly plays on the jukebox while a number of couples slow dance or lounge together. But as Mario and Natalia sit at a table, the jazzy number ends, and a patron puts on Bill Haley and His Comets' "Thirteen Women (And Only One Man in Town)." The volume of the music grows louder once the song comes on, but it never completely overtakes the soundtrack, not even once Mario and Natalia stop chatting and get up to dance themselves: in addition to the song, we hear the stomping of feet and eventually the clapping of hands, both of which add an additional layer of percussion that isn't always on beat. This has the effect of the making the scene seem even more chaotic than it would be if we didn't hear these additional sounds—it's as if the night club and the people in it are in danger of ripping apart at the seams.

This manic energy finds its way into the bodily movements and gestures of the two main characters. Natalia doesn't dance and has never been to a nightclub before: thus, she twitches and bobs awkwardly with an embarrassed smile on her face. Furthermore, all of the dancing around her acts as a major distraction, both before and after her conversation with Mario ends, so her gaze keeps turning away from Mario as he speaks or dances. Mario, on the other hand, wants to show off his dancing experience and tries to do everything he can to keep Natalia's attention. To

this end, he's the one to suggest that they get up to dance in the first place, against Natalia's shy resistance. His dancing style is all energy and no grace. Natalia can't keep up with him and soon becomes separated from him. When he notices her paying a kind of flirtatious attention to another male dancer, Mario begins to imitate this other dancer's clearly more accomplished movements, perhaps as a kind of joke or perhaps as a genuine attempt to compete with the other man. Mario flings himself around the center of the dance floor while others watch and clap in a circle that formed near the halfway point of the song.⁸⁰ Natalia gasps and laughs, clearly astonished by Mario's performance, but she does join him when he beckons for her to do so and spins around in response to his urging. When the song ends, the two end up in each other's arms and longingly remain on the dance floor for a short time as the other patrons exit, momentarily unsure as to how exactly they can transition back into normalcy, but—finally—the two exit the dance floor and return to their table.

All in all, from their entrance into the nightclub to their exit from the dance floor, the scene lasts around seven minutes, while the portion of the scene that includes "Thirteen Women" goes on for a little under six minutes. The scene includes twenty-eight shots, twenty-three of which feature the song. Many of the earlier shots in the scene either obscure Mario and Natalia by having the scene's wild dancing enter into the foreground or abandon Mario and Natalia altogether. This is especially noticeable in the scene's sixth and seventh shots. The first of these, the sixth shot of the scene, introduces us to the tall, gaunt male dancer and his initial, female dancing partner. The man begins at the jukebox in a long shot, but the camera dollies in slightly as the partners find each other on the dance floor and advance towards the camera; the two dancers look, it seems, in the direction of Mario and Natalia. Eventually, with their movements

⁸⁰ It's important to note, as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith points out, that the song actually plays *two* times during the scene.

and with the movement of the camera, the two dancers end up in medium close-up, where it becomes evident that, while the woman laughs and moves her gaze towards her partner and down at the floor, the tall man is keeping his gaze trained on the table where Mario and Natalia sit. This becomes even more obvious as the two twice perform a sudden separating motion that causes them to exit frame momentarily. Both times, when the man re-enters the frame, it's clear that he can't take his eyes off Natalia and Mario.

A cut takes us from this sixth shot to the seventh, a reverse shot that also begins as a long shot. It shows us Mario and Natalia still sitting at the table, where Natalia looks back towards the dancer while Mario only has eyes for her (and in fact is trying to make some observation about Natalia's grandmother when the shot begins). The dancing couple proceeds forward and continues to dance wildly, sometimes completely blocking our view of Mario and Natalia with their movements. The camera moves in towards Mario and Natalia and pans right as the dancers exit frame, but the movement reveals another set of dancers in the background and to the right of Mario and Natalia's table. The camera continues to move, dollying back and slightly right as now the second couple moves to obscure our view of Mario and Natalia, dancing from right to left and then from left to right, obscuring them a second time. We see other dancers as the camera dollies in a semicircle to the right of the table, a movement that allows dancing to fill the left of frame while Mario continues to try to talk to Natalia over the noise and the chaos. The camera now glides back and slightly to the right—more of the dance floor and its busy movements become visible. At this point, Mario and Natalia occupy only one-sixth of the frame (on its right side)—the other portion of their third of the screen contains the walls and lights. That third of the frame is still, while the other two-thirds overflow with life and movement.

Finally, Mario gets up to invite Natalia to dance. The camera pans slightly left as she accepts his invitation, and they begin to dance; then, both the camera, with a rightward dolly, and Mario/Natalia enter the fray of the dance floor completely. The initial dancing couple (to whom we were introduced in the sixth shot) become visible again, at first in the background, but then the two of them dance towards the foreground, blocking our view of Natalia and Mario yet again. Moments after this, the dancing couple generously shares the frame with Natalia and Mario briefly, before the skilled dancers successfully initiate a partner exchange. The shot ends as Mario spastically keeps twisting his head to see what Natalia is doing, as she moves into shot's background; she laughs and seems to divide her attention equally between the thin man and Mario.

The reason I describe these two shots in detail is to reveal the complex relationship in this scene among music, camera, movement, dancers, and the central characters. The movement of the camera in these shots suggests that it's drawn into the music and into dancing itself (that is, its movements track the dynamic motion of the dancers instead of sticking with Mario and Natalia, while its dollying back and forth indicates a dancing of its own)—and, moreover, seems to beckon Mario and Natalia onto the dance floor as it circles them and moves its gaze to the dance floor. Like Natalia, it cannot pay attention to anything other than the music and the dance. It also introduces both a variety of couples attuned, attractively and playfully, to the music and the male dancer who, like Natalia's lover, competes with Mario for Natalia's attention. While the happily dancing couples emphasize Natalia and Mario's conservatism and out-of-place-ness (particularly in combination with Natalia and Mario's outdated clothing choices), the male dancer acts as a threat to Mario and his pursuit of Natalia. The scene in general works to emasculate Mario, playing up both his silliness and his ineffectiveness as Natalia's suitor. The

song's lyrics are about one man competing for the attention of many women, as its title suggests, and, here, it's as if the one man in town is the thin dancer, who effortlessly garners attention while Mario can only flail.⁸¹

While it's true that Mario and Natalia do end up in each other's arms at song's end, one gets the sense that this is in spite of the music, not because of it. The song and the young people who can keep pace with it threaten to tear both the couple and the film completely apart. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith writes that the popular music here (and the dancing it engenders) represents "the negative side of modernity," but the scene's relationship to the music is more complex than Nowell-Smith's comments suggest. The camera's movements (and the scene's [eventual] high angle shots, which capture the movements of the entire dance floor) reveal the music's magnetism, while the duration of the music reflects its compelling energy. If the scene is negative, it's only negative for accentuating Mario's weaknesses (Natalia, who supposedly knows less about the modern world, gets along surprisingly well), especially since the scene takes place on his side of town, not hers.

In fact, a purposely fantastical or dreamlike element to the scene connects it to Natalia and what Nowell-Smith calls "the fairy-tale atmosphere of [Natalia's] world." Although Brendan Hennessey is right to point out that there's an element of realism⁸² to the deployment of the Bill Haley song—the song was actually quite popular at the time, so it would make sense for it to play through a jukebox at a nightclub in 1957, and the song's lyrical reference to the "H-Bomb" reflects 1950s anxieties about nuclear destruction—it's difficult to read the narrative and visual

⁸¹ Brendan Hennessey remarks, "The male dancer that they encounter catalyzes the action of the scene and foreshadows the return of the stranger who, like the dancer, is able to captivate Natalia in a way that Mario simply cannot" (176).

⁸² One of the key effects of using pop music or pop music styles in a film, according to Aaron Copland and discussed by Jeff Smith, is its ability to "convey...a convincing atmosphere of time and place" (6).

elements that go along with it (the expressive dancing,⁸³ as well as the dancing's spontaneous beginning and equally spontaneous end) as anything other than a *rupture* of everyday reality. Such a rupture is to Natalia's advantage, and the ending of the film, which finds her Prince Charming returning to her arms, confirms that this is so. Therefore, even though the film doesn't fully embrace the popular music it deploys (the fact that it doesn't take over the soundtrack completely confirms this), it decisively gestures towards the many possibilities for movement and imagination that pop music is able to offer.

The scene prompts the viewer to think through these possibilities and to think through the relationship of the song to the film's reality in a way that we might productively compare to the way that the scene in the music video for "Grief" (mentioned in chapter 1) where the circle of drummers surrounds Earl Sweatshirt out of nowhere and prompts us to wonder about that video's connection to reality: where did these figures originate, and why do they just as suddenly disappear? While art cinema discourse traditionally suggests that we interpret what happens in this one scene in the context of other films by the same auteur (Luchino Visconti for *Le Notte Bianchi*, Hiro Murai for "Grief"), the very appearance of the song threatens the authority of the auteur by presenting the work of another artist—in *Le Notte Bianchi* this is Bill Haley and His Comets' moment⁸⁴ as much as it is Visconti's. The song possesses the camera and all the

⁸³ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith points out that the lead male dancer in the film, Dick Sanders, choreographed the dancing in the scene.

⁸⁴ Bill Haley and His Comets also featured prominently in two early uses of rock and roll in Hollywood cinema, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *Rock Around the Clock* (1956). Paul N. Reinsch describes this at length in "Music over Words and Sound over Image: 'Rock Around the Clock' and The Centrality of Music in Post-Classical Film Narration" (2013), where he builds on Rick Altman's notion of the "audio dissolve" to describe moments, like the playing of "Rock Around the Clock" over the opening credits of *Blackboard Jungle*, when, in Altman's words, "[e]verything—even the image—is now subordinated to the music track" (qtd. in Reinsch 4). Reinsch emphasizes that the cinema speakers would have provided a much louder experience of the track than teenagers would have normally been able to experience. Hearing the song on the soundtrack provoked dancing (and sometimes vandalism) from teenage audiences, and this seemed to confirm the worries of those who considered rock and roll as a negative influence on young adults. In some ways, one might see the dance scene in *Le Notte Bianchi* illustrating both the infectious effect of rock and roll on young audiences and its potentially negative—or at least disorienting—impact.

characters in front of it, effectively wresting it from Visconti's control, even if only for the duration of the scene.

3.2 THE 1960S: NEW WAVES, MORE POLITICS

The art cinema of the 1960s, including the French New Wave, Italian Modernism, and American film at the start of the New Hollywood era, furthered the process that *Le Notti Bianche* had begun by including multiple popular songs in a variety of diegetic and non-diegetic ways. Yet many of these films continued to tie their use of popular music specifically to realism, whether that realism is connected more closely to setting (as in *Le Notte Bianchi*) or the specific experience of a character.⁸⁵ While neither Mario nor Natalia seems especially familiar with the song that plays on the jukebox at the nightclub, characters in many art films of the 1960s seem to know, very intimately, the music to which they listen.⁸⁶

This seems especially true of the female protagonists in *A Woman Is a Woman* (*Une femme est une femme*) (1962, dir. Jean-Luc Godard) and *I Knew Her Well* (*Io la conoscevo bene*) (1965, dir. Antonio Pietrangeli), Angéla and Adriana, respectively. *A Woman Is a Woman* sits squarely within the central part of the French New Wave period, while *I Knew Her Well* sits

However, if the scenes in *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock Around the Clock* represent, as Reinsch argues, the dominance of song over image and story, we cannot say the same for *Le Notte Bianchi* or for the art film in general, since art cinema's emphasis on ambiguous narrative (and on discontinuity as a way of deepening the narrative, vertically) insists that we return to the narrative to reconsider the numerous possibilities of the relationship between the discontinuous moment and the narrative information provided up until that moment.

⁸⁵ A second key effect of using pop music or pop music styles in a film, according to Aaron Copland and discussed by Jeff Smith, is that it "underlines the unspoken feelings or psychological states of characters" (6).

⁸⁶ See also Lack's claim that an emphasis on including diegetic sources for popular music in "American and European cinema in the late 1950s and early 1960s...reintroduce[d] music to the lives of the characters; suddenly they appeared to have concerns, memories and associations far wider than the arc of their story within the film" (205).

decidedly in Italian cinema's post-neorealism era,⁸⁷ influenced heavily by the French New Wave's playful, ironic deployment of popular music and other elements of mass culture.⁸⁸ The key pop song moment in *A Woman Is a Woman* is another jukebox moment, towards the end of the film. Here, Angéla asks Alfred to play a song on the jukebox, and, in reply, Alfred asks, "Which one? 'Itsy-Bitsy'?" Angéla, however, insists on listening to Charles Aznavour, so Alfred plays Aznavour's "Tu t'laisses aller."

As soon as he chooses the record, however, Alfred places a photograph in front of Angéla that shows her romantic partner, Émile, with another woman. It's at this point that the song begins. It dominates the entire soundtrack up until its final moments—we don't hear any other sounds. Instead, while the song plays (for over three minutes), the film alternates among close-ups of Angéla, close-ups of the photograph, medium close-ups of the jukebox, and the occasional close-up of Alfred. The lyrics of the song⁸⁹ express the perspective of a long-married man who hopes to rekindle the romantic flame of his relationship with his wife. He bemoans her mistreatment of him, wonders about their future, and—in a cruelly masculine gesture—even suggests she lose some weight. Although the introduction of the photograph and the following

⁸⁷ Peter Bondanella describes the era of Italian cinema in which *I Knew Her Well* was released (the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s) as one showing "a natural evolution of Italian film language toward a cinema characterized by many different styles and concerned with psychological problems as well as social ones" (45). Alexander Stille, on the other hand, connects *I Knew Her Well* to other films by the same director, Antonio Pietrangeli, that fall into the category of "*commedia all'italiana*, the popular Italian comedies of the 1950s and 1960s that combine humor and light satire of Italian society with darker notes" ("*I Knew Her Well*: City Girl").

⁸⁸ Russell Lack describes the French New Wave in terms of its "heady incorporation of cliché, pop culture, sex and violence" (193).

⁸⁹ The lyrics show in the subtitles on the Criterion DVD of the film—this is an interesting choice, as it clearly emphasizes the song's lyrical content to such an extent as to trouble Jeff Smith's distinction between the pre-existing pop song's two main functions: to function for "an audience of uninformed viewers...as background music, pure and simple" and to function for "an audience of informed viewers" (who "recognize the song's title, lyrics, or performer") in such a way as to "comment on the action or suggest the director's attitude toward the characters, settings, and themes of the film" (167-8). Here, even for an unfamiliar audience, the lyrics take center stage by appearing, translated, in the subtitles and very directly comment on the film's action. Many art films emphasize lyrical content in this way, emphasizing the song's significance, especially as this significance pertains to its specific lyrics. I've used these subtitles in my interpretation of the song, above.

shots suggest that it portrays Angéla's extended response to the photograph, the scene also seems to represent her response to the song. The song and the photograph are so closely related—both tied to a long-term relationship that's on the fritz—that, when Angéla asks at the end of the song, “Who's the girl?,” it's unclear if she's referring to the girl in the photograph or the woman to whom the lyrics of the song refer. Angéla hears Émile's voice in both; both indicate that he no longer loves her as once did. Alfred's answer—“Isn't it obvious?”—and Angéla's affirmative response confirm that this is so.

It's a moment, like the moment in *Le Notte Bianchi*, which takes the film away from the auteur's control (here, Jean-Luc Godard) and places it in the control of Aznavour's song. This is a departure from the earlier moments in the film when popular music⁹⁰ dominated the soundtrack for only a few moments at a time, in fragments. For example, the end of the same Aznavour song plays in the moments immediately after the film's opening credits, and as it ends, Angéla puts change in a café jukebox to play it again. It begins, but only plays for thirteen seconds, until Angéla leaves, when it stops abruptly. This is also true of the scene that shows Angéla walking into her apartment: a jazzy song with English lyrics (“Hello Joe, whaddaya know?”) plays, although this time, there's no clear diegetic source. The song takes over the soundtrack only until Angéla leaves the apartment sixteen seconds later. If these moments represent the auteur very obviously exerting his control (and momentarily disrupting our immersion in the narrative while doing so), the later jukebox moment gives itself over to the song.

It's significant that the Aznavour jukebox scene combines a sense of realism (a jukebox like this one would actually exist in a café like the one where Angéla and Alfred chat) with a sense of psychological expressionism. The film accomplishes this through the use of close-ups in

⁹⁰ I'm referring specifically here to the music that isn't sung or played by characters in the film.

the scene, in opposition to the long shots and long takes in *Le Notte Bianchi* that gave an impression of the dance floor as a whole. Here, Aznavour's song exists in a web of romantic feeling—recognition, doubt, betrayal, affection, attraction—that is as important for the scene as the presence of the jukebox in the room.

The moment in *I Knew Her Well* most similar to this finds Adriana driving home after a long night out, in the last few minutes of the film. As she drives, Gilbert Bécaud's "Toi" plays: the song comes on in the first shot of Adriana behind the wheel and ends as she drives into her parking garage over two minutes later (and once the song has played all the way through). The shots in this scene are almost all moving shots that show Adriana behind the reflective surface of her windshield from a medium or medium close distance, but a couple of other shots find the camera's eye wandering to the surrounding buildings and streetcars before roving back to Adriana and her windshield (the final shot in the scene finally takes us into her car, where we can see Adriana's reflection in the interior rearview mirror). The lyrics of the song⁹¹ find another male singer reflecting on a relationship with his lover, but this time the relationship hasn't continued into the present: he reflects on when he met the "toi" of the song's title, remembering the moment when she first appeared and "time stood still." Although the song is meant to reflect on this woman and her beauty (and the fact that she eventually ends their relationship), the lyrics end up focusing on the man and *his* experience of her instead: she is the only face he notices in "a crowd of nobodies" and she represents "a gust of happiness for [him] alone." So while the song is meant to fondly recall a fleeting moment, it instead plays up the fact that the singer barely knew the woman to whom he's singing.

⁹¹ As with the Charles Aznavour scene, the translated lyrics show in the subtitles on the Criterion DVD of the film. Again, I used these subtitles in my interpretation of the song, above.

Like the scene in *A Woman Is a Woman*, we see multiple shots of the central character's face, but here we never get the impression that we have any actual access to Adriana's feelings. She remains inscrutable, hidden behind the windshield or in a mirror's reflection. Adriana, like Angéla, becomes like the one about whom the song is sung—here, this signifies that she's beautiful but unknown. This is a departure from the rest of *I Knew Her Well*'s pop soundtrack, which is made up of over fifteen European pop songs from the period. While other scenes in the film show a diegetic source for the music—usually Adriana's record player, but sometimes a nightclub dance floor—this scene never clarifies whether the song is actually playing in Adriana's car. Additionally, this is the only moment in the film when a pop song takes over the soundtrack completely, barring us from hearing any additional sound. Its effect, in the context of the film's narrative, is discontinuous, forcing spectators to make sense of its appearance in this moment of the film. Yet the scene also works as a culmination of the rest of the soundtrack, since "Toi" is directly about what the rest of the film portrays: Adriana's surface and the lack of access for others, including us, to her interior life.

Thus, we can describe the song choice in this driving scene as deeply ironic in a critical way. Even though the film deploys these songs and even though "Toi" takes over the film for a couple of minutes, the film can't help but take a critical stance towards its own soundtrack. While the songs are a major part of Adriana's life, they neither know nor save her and in fact emphasize her feelings of loneliness and isolation. This distance between the film and its own soundtrack also appears in *A Woman Is a Woman* to the extent that that film both emphasizes the masculine qualities of Aznavour's song, which are not adequate to Angéla's complexities and clearly represent a voice that's not her own, and—on the other hand—suggests that Angéla's experience of the song is not very complex or interesting at all (see, for example, Anna Karina's

looking directly into the camera during the scene). If *Le Notte Bianchi* was charmed by the pop song it deployed yet struggled to make sense of it, both *A Woman Is a Woman* and *I Knew Her Well* give off the impression of being very aware of their songs and their meanings and of criticizing them for that reason.⁹²

This interplay between deploying the song, letting it take over the film, and creating distance between the song and film, refusing to embrace it fully, continues to characterize pop music art films as the decade goes on and the films become more overtly political. That is, art films of the 1960s begin to explore—and mostly reject—the political potential of popular music as an integral part of (revolutionary) youth culture. As with *A Woman Is a Woman* and *I Knew Her Well*, it's not as if these later pop music art films reject the songs completely or don't see their appeal, since their deployment results in disruptive, spectacular, affecting moments. Instead, the films betray a kind of uneasiness in response to the music: the songs are attractive, even infectious, and that's exactly what not to trust to about them.

This is certainly the case in *Masculin Féminin* (1966, dir. Jean-Luc Godard), which portrays its pop songs as a frantic distraction from brutality by placing fragments of these songs next to random acts of violence, as when a man stabs himself immediately after a portion of Chantal Goya's "Laisse Moi" plays on the soundtrack, and by placing these fragments in the context of a soundtrack that otherwise emphasizes loud, harsh noises (car horns, gunshots).⁹³ Furthermore, the film portrays its female characters as wrapped up in pop culture—and pop music in particular—at the expense of political engagement. This is especially clear in the

⁹² Russell Lack refers to the pop songs in Godard's films as being "used for [their] status as cultural artefact[s]," and this seems important for emphasizing Godard's critical stance and that of other art cinema filmmakers in the same period: they show the culture—they let it play—in order to reveal its flaws (300).

⁹³ Adrian Martin describes the film's soundtrack this way: "The film's sound, recorded and organized by René Levert, is just as remarkable as its images: the inescapable barrage from offscreen of street noise or office chatter; the violent mixing in and out of scraps of pop music and radio broadcasts; the faltering, thin voices . . . and the gunshots!" ("*Masculin féminin*: The Young Man for All Times").

interview with Elsa cheekily titled “dialogue avec un produit de consommation” (translated in the subtitles as “dialogue with a consumer product”), in which Elsa becomes visibly uncomfortable in response to political questions and responds to them in a vague, confused manner (“I’m not qualified to answer [the question about socialism]. I know nothing about it”). While the film is still part of the French New Wave,⁹⁴ it also showed the youthful energy of the French New Wave beginning to transform into a more rigorously political response to current events.

Sympathy for the Devil (1968, dir. Jean-Luc Godard), also features this ironic distance from its musical material—here, predominantly studio footage of the Rolling Stones recording the eponymous song—even though it represents a move further away (literally, into England) from the French New Wave’s initial playfulness into a more fragmented yet politically direct cinema. The film deconstructs their process and ultimately reveals the song as incommensurate with the radical politics of the era and somehow unaware of the violence existing in the rest of the world (although a great deal of controversy ensued when the film’s producer, Iain Quarrier, decided to include a portion of the song’s final, polished version in the film’s final scene, against Godard’s wishes).⁹⁵ *Medium Cool* (1969, dir. Haskell Wexler), an example of the New Hollywood Cinema,⁹⁶ marks out a similar position by placing the music of Frank Zappa next to

⁹⁴ Hilary Ann Radner marks the French New Wave period as lasting from about 1959 to 1968 and also notes how “the relatively low budgets associated with [the French New Wave] made it attractive to intellectuals interested in interrogating social norms and circulating anti-establishment political statements” (263). *Masculin Féminin* certainly features this interrogation of social norms (in this case, the norms of French youth culture of the 1960s) and a political stance against these norms, highly aware of their contradictions.

⁹⁵ A related stance appears in *Gimme Shelter* (1970, dir. Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin), an American direct cinema documentary about The Rolling Stones that portrays the Stones as completely unaware of the relationship between violence and their musical performances, even as the film clearly recognizes these performances as dynamic and exciting. Amy Taubin notes that it “began life as a concert tour documentary but turned into something more complicated and disturbing” (“*Gimme Shelter*: Rock-and-Roll Zapruder”).

⁹⁶ The New Hollywood Cinema was clearly influenced by European art cinema and represented a kind of art cinema in its own right. For example, David Bordwell, at the end of “The Art Cinema As a Mode of Film Practice,” remarks that “we have seen an art cinema emerge in Hollywood” (100). Generally, however, The New Hollywood Cinema

documentary images of the violence in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention, revealing the gap between the psychedelic fun of a nightclub and the brutality of the police in response to the political activism of the same hippies enjoying the nightclub.

3.3 MOVING FORWARD, MOVING BACK: TOXIC MASCULINITY IN *BAD*

TIMING

The art films of the 1970s that feature popular music continue this ironic distance, although sometimes in a less blatantly political way, as in *Five Easy Pieces* (1970, dir. Bob Rafelson), which uses a number of Tammy Wynette songs⁹⁷ to both mockingly portray Bobby's girlfriend, Rayette, and show the gap between her background and his, represented by the classical music Bobby plays on the piano. But many art films of the 1970s moved away from the rock and roll experimentation of the 1960s and often relegated popular music to a background role.⁹⁸ For example, *Beware of a Holy Whore (Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte)* (1971, dir. Rainer Werner

was not as skeptical about rock and roll's potential for allowing a kind of political stance. Although films like *Medium Cool* and *Five Easy Pieces* (discussed below) remain skeptical of popular music styles, films like *The Graduate* (1967, dir. Mike Nichols), *Head* (1968, dir. Bob Rafelson), *Easy Rider* (1969, dir. Dennis Hopper), and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971, dir. Robert Altman) attempt to associate popular music with an effectively countercultural or poetic mode. Jeff Smith discusses many of these New Hollywood films at length in Chapter 7 ("The Sounds of Commerce: Sixties Pop Songs and the Compilation Score") of his *The Sounds of Commerce*, but I ultimately disagree that these films used popular music in a fundamentally different way from European art films like *A Woman Is a Woman* and *I Knew Her Well*, which Smith claims is the case: "Thus, while it is true that New Hollywood directors often strived for art cinema's emphasis on ambivalent protagonists, it is also true that they used pop songs to clarify particularly murky or uncertain aspects of character" (170). The pop songs in these films—both art films and New Hollywood films—don't "clarify" character as much as they nuance or complicate character, using song lyrics to add another layer to each character's particular psychology.

⁹⁷Its use of multiple songs by the same artist on its soundtrack connects the film to both *The Graduate* (1967), with its use of Simon & Garfunkel tunes, and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971), with its deployment of multiple Leonard Cohen songs.

⁹⁸There are key exceptions to this rule, including several New Hollywood films (e.g. *The Last Picture Show* [1971, dir. Peter Bogdanovich], *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, *Mean Streets* [1973, dir. Martin Scorsese]), *Zabriskie Point* (1970, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni), and *Touki Bouki* (1973, dir. Djibril Diop Mambety). Additionally, several 1970s Blaxploitation films included original pop (soul/funk) soundtracks that gave music a prominent position on the soundtrack and in the narrative world of the film.

Fassbinder) includes an extensive pop soundtrack (including songs by Leonard Cohen and Spooky Tooth), but these songs do not dominate the soundtrack⁹⁹ and in fact often emanate, eerily yet quietly, from a jukebox in the hotel lobby where the characters wallow in self pity and frustration.¹⁰⁰ *Fox and His Friends* (*Faustrecht der Freiheit*) (1975, dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder), like *Five Easy Pieces*, emphasizes the gap between social classes via their music choices (here, Georges Moustaki and Elvis Presley versus the opera) without ever letting the music dominate the film's soundtrack. Both *Beware of a Holy Whore* and *Fox and His Friends* belong to the New German Cinema, whose soundtracks Caryl Flinn describes as “composite score[s]” that “pillaged freely from existing music, sometimes mixing it with originally scored music, creating odd cultural and historical hybrids in the process” (2).

The pendulum swings back towards popular music in the 1980s, as is especially evident in *Bad Timing* (1980, dir. Nicolas Roeg), which was released during what Scott Henderson calls “another period of crisis within British cinema” when only a select few directors, like Roeg, Ken Russell, and Stanley Kubrick, made a number of innovative yet controversial films (340). It features a wide range of music: Billie Holiday, Harry Partch, Tom Waits, Keith Jarrett, The Who. But it's the film's use of Billy Kinsley's “Dreaming My Dreams with You” that's most significant here, since it most fully represents the film's insidious masculine violence and obsession. “Dreaming My Dreams with You” begins to play about a quarter of the way into the film; while it plays (for around two minutes), the film shows its female protagonist, Milena,

⁹⁹Caryl Flinn, in *The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style*, writes, “The tunes are just background sound that seems as unmotivated as the characters that languish about: songs are played at a low to mid-range volume, and their lyrics don't provide any clear function or commentary” (36).

¹⁰⁰A similar kind of effect appears in *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (*Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant*) (1972, dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder), which prominently features songs by The Walker Brothers and The Platters, as well as an excerpt from a Verdi opera. However, the music does, at times, almost entirely take over the soundtrack, as during the film's ending, when The Platters' “The Great Pretender” plays loudly enough to almost conceal the sound of Marlene's packing.

exchanging glances with and then making love to her husband in Czechoslovakia before meeting up with the film's male protagonist, Alex (notably played by Art Garfunkel), her lover, at the Austrian border. While the song does not dominate the soundtrack at first (we hear the scribbling of her husband on the page as he works; we hear the rustling of Milena's robe as she walks by), it eventually increases in volume to dominate the soundtrack while Milena and her husband have sex and then decreases in volume again when we first see Alex at the border (towards the end of the scene, we hear car noise at the border [engine noise, car doors opening and closing] and Milena placing a key on a table). The lyrics of the song deal with the end of a romantic relationship from the perspective of the male singer, who describes his difficulty in moving on from his lover. In fact, he sings that, even as time passes, "I'll always be dreaming my dreams with you."

Unlike the previous uses of pop songs I've examined in this chapter, "Dreaming My Dreams with You" has no possible diegetic source, no car radio or jukebox or singer from which it might emerge. It's a song that exists in multiple times and places at the same time. If this isn't already apparent from the song's continuation between Milena's departure and her arrival, it becomes especially apparent in the shot appearing near the midway point of the scene, a long shot of the sunrise at the border, likely hours before Alex arrives there. The shot is entirely uninhabited by people and lasts only a few moments yet draws attention to the distance between the two scenes the song bridges. Furthermore, the connection of the song to the scene is entirely ambiguous. To which of the male characters should we connect its lyrics?

The open-endedness of this question coheres around the shot that portrays Milena walking away from her husband. It begins with a high angle medium long shot of Milena's suitcase, sitting on a table. It shows us Milena's lower half as she bends down to pick it up, then

tilts up to show her in a medium shot, as we see her husband lying on the bed in the background. Milena walks towards the camera and stares directly into it, her expression breaking into a smile as she moves into close-up. The smile distances Milena from the song's longing but presents her as a fleeting object of affection for both of the male characters. At the same time, it's unclear how or if Milena's smile ties to the two men between whom she moves back and forth.

While the moment may seem pleasant enough in the context of this scene alone, in the context of the rest of the film, the scene becomes immensely disturbing, as Milena is in a coma for much of the film's duration and, when she's not, we see the deterioration of her and Alex's relationship due in large part to Alex's sexual obsession and possessiveness, which eventually leads to Alex raping Milena as she lies unconscious from a drug overdose on her bed. The response of Milena's husband to this, ironically, is to suggest that a man must give up his dignity to love a woman—which is exactly what Alex has done by spying on her and sexually assaulting her. It seems that both men dream of romantically and sexually possessing Milena, regardless of her desire for them. In light of this, the sweet love song doesn't just seem aimed towards the main female character, as the songs from *A Woman Is a Woman* and *I Knew Her Well* did—it seems to be romanticizing a whole slew of violent, misogynistic actions and obsessions. If “Dreaming My Dreams with You” is able to connect two different moments in time and two different places, it's only able to do so through an obsessive male gaze.

Even if we realize that the actions of the men in the film are deeply troubling, the film gives itself over to its songs and, more particularly, to Alex's gaze. The Who's “Who Are You?” soundtracks two different moments in the film, each about one minute long, that find Alex spying on Milena or on the others who hold her romantic interest. The song's title may seem a little obvious to play in these scenes (Alex is trying to figure out who Milena really is), but the

song's lyrics regarding bourgeois privilege—and the song's ambivalence regarding the aggressive politics of punk rock¹⁰¹—tie directly to Alex's position as a professor and lecturer. He has everything, but uses his privilege to look at and control Milena. As much of the film takes place from Alex's perspective and goes so far as to depict—directly and at length—his rape of Milena, it would seem that the film does *not* maintain the critical distance of earlier art films but only breaks that distance down to immerse itself in a perverted male perspective.

However, other art films of the 1980s find directors embracing popular music more wholeheartedly as a less ironic or malicious way into their characters' experiences. The American independent films of Jim Jarmusch, for instance, use music to access their characters' listening/dancing habits (Earl Bostic's "Up There in Orbit" in *Permanent Vacation* [1980], Screamin' Jay Hawkins' "I Put a Spell on You" in *Stranger Than Paradise* [1984]) or their fantasies (as with Elvis's "Blue Moon" in *Mystery Train*). Even when these songs don't dominate the soundtrack, they seem to give their characters a fantastic kind of energy that breaks up the boredom they usually experience. Furthermore, *Vagabond (Sans toit ni loi)* (1985, dir. Agnès Varda) shows the obsession of Mona, its wandering homeless main character, with the radio and pop music.¹⁰² (It features songs by Passion Fodder, The Doors, and Les Rita Mitsouko.) While this obsession does not save Mona like it does not save Adriana, there's no sense that the music's lyrics misread or misrepresent Mona as in *I Knew Her Well*. Still, the film only *attempts* access to Mona through pop music and ultimately fails to reconcile her attempt to live freely with her actions and eventual death. The music, like Mona, is unknowable and oddly distant.

¹⁰¹ The song's lyrics describe Pete Townshend's annoyance at running into members of The Sex Pistols at a bar.

¹⁰² Her obsession with pop music represents a decidedly post-1968 moment in French culture/history when, as Hilary Ann Radner notes, "Global consumerism appeared as if it would successfully colonize French culture, which seemed in danger of losing its specificity" (265).

3.4 THE 1990S: *LA HAINE* AND *BEAU TRAVAIL*

Two key art films from the 1990s represent art cinema not only using music for disruption and discontinuity but also for immersing us in the dreams and possibilities of their characters: *La Haine* (1995, dir. Mathieu Kassovitz) and *Beau Travail* (1999, dir. Claire Denis). Although each deploys a wide variety of music, both films allow their popular music to culminate in a single scene that fully embraces the ambiguous, tentative connections among song, fantasy, and character.

In *La Haine*—a film representing a concern with social issues that Hilary Ann Radner points out as a key trend in 1990s French cinema¹⁰³ (267)—this moment occurs about midway through the film and is actually made up of a DJ’s performance as he mixes three songs together: Edith Piaf’s version of “Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien,” KRS-One’s “Sound of the Police,” and NTM’s “Police.” At the beginning of the scene, one of the film’s three main characters, Hubert, who is Afro-French, gazes out of his window. The following shot seems to represent his perspective: the camera pans and tilts around the courtyard, starting with another of the film’s main characters (and Hubert’s friend), Vinz, who is Jewish, in the frame, but then moving around to children playing and men lounging. Eventually, the camera tilts up and finds a DJ setting up an enormous speaker in a tenement window. The next shot takes us inside the DJ’s apartment, the camera at the level of his turntables with the DJ in profile on the right side of the frame. He starts to warm up, spinning his records to produce quick, sharp bursts of sound and voice. Another shot takes us even closer to the records and to the agile hands of the DJ as he continues to warm up. The film then returns to the previous camera set-up before tilting up to

¹⁰³ Radner places *La Haine* in a category called the *cinéma de banlieu*, that is, films concerned with largely non-white French citizens living in neighborhoods on the outskirts of Paris.

show the DJ rubbing his hands together and then wiping the sweat from his face. Then, the next shot takes us behind the DJ, in medium shot: we see his turntables in front of him and the opposing apartment buildings out his window. He begins his mix in full now, the music immediately drowning out other sounds. Another shot takes us back to close-up of the turntables, before, suddenly, the camera seems to be floating outside, its gaze trained towards the window where the DJ performs. At this point, the camera drops down and then lifts back up as the mix continues. It looks down toward the ground as it floats away from the window, showing the treetops and people populating the communal area between apartment buildings. It floats farther and farther away, towards a parking lot, but the volume of the music remains as high as it did before. Towards the end of this shot, the camera tilts up, away from the ground, and seems to ascend even higher into the sky, as if it will soon fly completely away. Then, the film suddenly cuts to Vinz and Saïd—the third friend in the group, an Arab Maghrebi—both looking up, in a courtyard. After this cut, the music gets much quieter to emphasize Vinz and Saïd’s dialogue.

The music plays at full volume for only a single minute, but this minute is rich with narrative possibility: it is as if the music carries with it an opportunity to defy gravity for its lower-class characters otherwise trapped in the *banlieue*.¹⁰⁴ The music itself defies time, bringing together the classic and the contemporary. Furthermore, the music defies authority: it ties together a white French icon with the voices of black French and American rappers shouting, at times, “Fuck the police!” It also provides two of the main characters with the chance to enter a state of dreaming, of irrational imagining. Hubert has smoked some weed right before the scene begins and stares out his window in contemplation as it starts. Vinz, on the other hand, sees a

¹⁰⁴Sanjay Sharma and Ashwani Sharma remark (in “‘So Far So Good...’: *La Haine* and the Poetics of the Everyday”) that the film’s music in general “is the principle modality through which the imagining of a fleeting utopia can be experienced” and note that the DJ scene allows “the camera” to “hover...disquietingly and sweep...across the estate as if it were marking out a protective zone” (112).

cow wandering through the *banlieue* in the moments after the song decreases in volume. Such imaginings seem impossible in much of the rest of the film, weighed down as it is by police brutality and racism and the possibility—eventually fulfilled—of violence.

In this sense, the music does provide a sense of discontinuity with the rest of the film's narrative, but it does so without either rejecting the attractiveness of the music or affiliating itself with perverted male desire. Instead, it affiliates itself with its characters' desire for freedom and even suggests the possibility of them realizing that freedom. While one might be tempted to see this view as limiting the film's potential for multiple possible readings and tying the film to a naïve bourgeois identification with characters from the lower classes, the song's combination of voices and Vinz's cow hallucination suggest otherwise. Is it freedom that the scene represents or merely some stranger version of reality? The film never clarifies.

In fact, the possibilities for this scene from *La Haine* open further in light of the ending of *Beau Travail*, during which Corona's "The Rhythm of the Night" takes over the soundtrack. Like *La Haine*, *Beau Travail* is a French film concerned with social issues, but the film's African setting, adaptation of narrative elements from Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*, and concern with French legionnaires places it at the complex intersection of multiple texts and concerns. In the moments leading up to "The Rhythm of the Night," we see Galoup in his Marseille home, having been banished from his adjutant general post in the French legion for his mistreatment and attempted murder of Gilles Sentain, a subordinate legionnaire. He shirtlessly makes his bed to military standard then sits down on it. Briefly, we see a long shot of a group of legionnaires standing on a sun-beaten beach, smiling into the camera, before we return to Galoup, who retrieves a handgun from the floor and reclines on his bed, still shirtless, his hand resting gently on his stomach. We see the gun in close-up once Galoup has moved it up to his bare belly and

then we see a close-up of Galoup's left pectoral muscle as he reads its text in voiceover: "Serve the good cause and die." The camera moves along his arm, and we see a large vein pulsing steadily.

"The Rhythm of the Night" begins to play, softly at first. Suddenly, a cut takes us to an image of Galoup dressed in all black (except for the white leather sides of his dress shoes); he stands alone in the darkened Djiboutian nightclub where earlier scenes in the film took place. We see him standing against a wall covered in mirrored tiles and speckled in glowing pink lights. The song's volume increases, taking over the soundtrack. Galoup smokes and begins to stroll around the room, somewhat rhythmically, moving his arms slightly. He spins and resumes strolling, then crouches and rocks back and forth to the music. He gets up and strolls again, before breaking out into full dance: he twirls and rocks; slides and lilts. He gives himself over to the music with abandon, eventually spinning around and around and around, to the beat of the music but seemingly about to topple over. The film cuts to black and the credits begin to play, but the song continues, and, after a few seconds, the film takes us back to Galoup in the club, where he dances even more wildly, madly, flailing like his body is about to burst. Finally, the film cuts to black a final time and the credits continue. All in all, the scene lasts around two minutes.

The scene disrupts the silence in the moments leading up to Galoup's (possible) death, returning Galoup to the location where the film began. But this time, he is not so restrained and faces no distractions. The other soldiers, whom he desires and hates, disappear, and his Djiboutian girlfriend is nowhere to be found. The scene may represent some version of the afterlife, some version of the past, some version of a dream, some version of sexual expression, or some combination of these. The song's lyrics deal directly with desire on the dance floor: the

woman who sings promises to the object of her desire that she will make their life better. Furthermore, the song suggests that hopeful desire is wrapped up in both the night and life in general—this is in sharp contrast to the bitterness and isolation that Galoup displays during the rest of the film.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps he becomes the singer, finally welcoming the expression of desire, whether this is his own desire or someone else's, beyond the darkness.

The scene cannot entirely escape death or violence, however, and therefore reminds us of the death and violence in *La Haine*: the DJ scene, even though it's given over to the potential of the music, cannot escape death or the threat of violence. So while these scenes embrace the music in possibly liberating ways and disrupt their respective films in a way that is productive for the spectators and their thinking about the narrative, they cannot entirely escape the cold violence of reality. Still, the music moves each film in some ethereal direction that has little to do with a marketable soundtrack or an easily consumable experience, as much writing about popular music in cinema emphasizes. Moving into the 2000s, a number of art films follow in their wake: *In the Mood for Love* (*Faa yeung nin wa*) (2000, dir. Wong Kar-wai), *Morvern Callar* (2002, dir. Lynne Ramsay), *Talk to Her* (*Hable con ella*) (2002, dir. Pedro Almodóvar), *Three Times* (*Zui hao de shi guang*) (2005, dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien), *35 Shots of Rum* (*35 rhums*) (2008, dir. Claire Denis), *American Honey* (2016, dir. Andrea Arnold). Like *La Haine* and *Beau Travail*, these films allow the song to introduce a particular kind of deeply moving discontinuity to their narratives. The art film finally becomes not only aware of the song's affective potential but entirely embracing of it, letting the song move us where it may.

¹⁰⁵ Laura McMahon cites an interview with Claire Denis in which “Denis explains that the dance scene was positioned *after* rather than before the contemplation of suicide in order to ‘give the sense that Galoup could escape himself’” (69-70). She remarks that, in this scene, “we witness the unravelling of the identity of Galoup and, by extension, the collective identity of the legion” (70).

If we see in art cinema's use of popular songs that take over the soundtrack a movement from skepticism to embrace, we also see that the use of the pop song in art films continues to disrupt both narrative and the status of the auteur. Spectators must reconcile the song with what is happening in the film and what has happened up to this point in the film. Expressive camera movements and editing (e.g. the "dancing" camera in *Le Notti Bianche*, the cutting among close-ups in *A Woman Is a Woman*) enforce that this is the case, since they reflect the infectious qualities of the song, which—at least momentarily—threatens to completely take over the film. It's from this prioritizing of song in relation to visual material, whereby the song is allowed to dominate a film's sound track and hold a position equal to that of the image, that the music video arises. It's the *art* music video that not only allows this sort of song dominance but also deploys similar narrative strategies to those featured in the art cinema, even if these narratives are much shorter than those that appear in art films.

4.0 HIP HOP'S DISCONTINUITIES AS DEFIANCE: AN ART FILM AND ART MUSIC VIDEO FROM KANYE WEST

Where do music videos come from? I traced out a brief history of the music video form in my introduction, along the same lines Saul Austerlitz traces in his *Money for Nothing: A History of the Music Video from The Beatles to The White Stripes*. The title of this volume is deceptive in that Austerlitz's history begins before The Beatles, with early cinema accompanied by various sorts of music, recorded and/or live; movie musicals with their song-and-dance numbers; and video jukeboxes and Snader Telescriptions of the 1950s. Only then does it proceed to rock-and-roll musicals (like The Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*) of the late 1950s and 1960s; and then the stand-alone music videos produced in the 1960s to 1970s, intended to be shown as promotional materials at music stores or, eventually, on video countdown and variety television shows. If we tell it teleologically, all this led to MTV in the 1980s and 1990s and then YouTube/Vimeo/Vevo in the 2000s and up to the contemporary moment of near-ubiquitous Internet accessibility.

This may describe what led to the music video form (music-driven, music-dominated, visual texts, containing one or more pre-recorded songs), but what about music video style? Previous writers, like E. Ann Kaplan, Carol Vernallis, Andrew Goodwin, and Simon Frith, have suggested advertisement, fashion, and Hollywood as obvious predecessors, and certainly one can find music video's influences in these sources: product placement here, some inspiring outfits there, and an explosion over there. The ancestors of music video, as for most arts, are many and

hybrid. Part of my work here seeks to present another, usually disregarded influence: art cinema, especially in certain videos (videos that I'm calling art music videos), and my goal here is to both acknowledge the presence of art cinema narrative structures in much contemporary music video and, in so doing, to transform the definition of (and reinvigorate) art cinema.

The existence in many music videos of art cinema narrative structures often results in what I'm calling intensified discontinuity: art music video takes art cinema narrative structures and condenses them. But to claim that art music video's discontinuity comes entirely from art cinema is to tell only part of the story. Steven Shaviro, in *Post-Cinematic Affect*, would claim that another, major, part of the story has to do with structures and flows of twenty-first century capitalism, and this is certainly an important claim to consider. But what Shaviro doesn't discuss is what I find to be another very significant element of the story establishing contemporary art music video's emergence, and this element is that intensified discontinuity, in music/music video, emerges in part from a hybrid genre: hip hop.¹⁰⁶

This chapter argues that, although the narrative discontinuities of the art music video arise in part from art cinema, these discontinuities also have been influenced hip-hop music and Black popular media aesthetics. It suggests that the boundary between hip-hop and art cinema is more porous (or impure) than one might expect, since many Blaxploitation films—an important influence on hip-hop aesthetics—drew inspiration from the French New Wave. It also argues that central to hip hop's discontinuity is *defiance*, which both ties to art cinema's refusal of mainstream narrative storytelling and comes into conflict with it in so far as art cinema remains understood as a predominantly white, European phenomenon. It closely analyzes two music

¹⁰⁶ Traditionally, hip hop includes “Four Elements”: DJing, MCing, breakdancing, and graffiti . But we could certainly add hip-hop fashion and hip-hop cinema (or maybe style more generally) and probably some other “elements” as well (hip-hop photography, hip-hop cars, hip-hop architecture).

videos by Kanye West—*Runaway* (2010, dir. Kanye West) and “Mercy” (2012, dir. Nabil Elderkin)—to argue that the combination of art cinema and hip-hop influences in the work of Kanye West complicates the high-low division and the boundary between art cinema and hip hop not only through these videos’ particular aesthetics but also through their ability to unsettle, endlessly, illustrating Jacques Rancière’s aesthetic regime.

4.1 DISCONTINUITY AND DURATION IN HIP HOP

Hip-hop music emerges in the Bronx, during the political and moral exhaustion of the 1970s, at the hands of DJ Kool Herc and DJ Coke La Rock, livening up the dancefloor by exploiting and extending the “break”¹⁰⁷ of soul, funk, and disco¹⁰⁸ tracks. Here already a sort of discontinuity exists: a DJ takes a continuous song, breaks off a chunk (breaks off the break), and repeats it for ultimate, enduring dancing pleasure. Richard Shusterman describes this willingness to draw from and break down other pieces of music as a middle finger to the Aristotelian principle of artistic unity and the tendency to “treat...art works as transcendent and virtually sacred ends in themselves, the integrity of which should be respected and never violated” (462). This is to say that hip hop takes the Western world’s norm of unity and throws a wrench into it, breaking it into fragments, making it discontinuous.

It is important to note that there is something specifically Black in hip hop’s sampling aesthetic (although it is also significant that hip hop has multicultural, not merely Black, roots

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Chang defines this as a “song’s short instrumental break, when the band would drop out and the rhythm section would get elemental” or, alternately, “the fundamental vibrating loop at the heart of the record” (79).

¹⁰⁸ This is a conservative list of the genres from which hip-hop originally pulled. One could also safely list reggae, jazz, rock ‘n’ roll, and European electronica here. Then again, nothing is as iconic a James Brown sample or that sample of Chic’s “Good Times” in “Rapper’s Delight.”

and ambitions).¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Wheeler writes that “fragmentation and reassembly describe both black music and black history” (qtd. in Bartlett 400), and the very forms of Black artworks aggressively thwart a unified, continuous aesthetic. These forms instead take a number of principles from multiple aesthetics and manage to “merge,” “balance,” and “elaborate” them into works of art that, like many hip-hop tracks, stand as “complex...arrangement[s],” powerful and moving in the images they present (Bartlett 399).

My reference to “images” here relates to what I see as the presence of discontinuity in not only hip-hop music and Black music/history but also hip-hop cinema and music video. This manifests itself formally in what I call a visual *stuttering*. For example, in early hip-hop music videos for “The Message” (Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 1982) and “Planet Rock” (Afrika Bambaataa, 1982, dir. Danny Cornyetz and Jessica Jason), the image itself halts and begins and halts and begins again, breaking up what would be the relatively smooth motion of bodies or vehicles or planets. This seems to mirror not only the prominent repeated break of the drumbeat but also the dance moves done in response to such a beat. Additionally, we see in

¹⁰⁹ Hip hop sought (and seeks) to transcend any limitations—in terms of race or location or faddishness—that critics or other outsiders might impose. S. Craig Watkins points this out when he writes that, “[e]ven during its humble beginnings hip hop was never strictly a black thing. It has always been multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual” (*Hip Hop* 150). Tom Silverman, himself a Caucasian music writer and record label owner, describes how “Planet Rock” “was the record that initiated that it wasn’t just an urban thing, it was inclusive,” that it made hip hop “global” (qtd. in Chang 173). Jeff Chang expands: “‘Planet Rock’ was hip-hop’s universal invitation, a hypnotic vision of one world under a groove, beyond race, poverty, sociology and geography” (172). However, Chang also chronicles the failings of Planet Rock’s vision, in which an all-embracing mindset led merely to various white outsiders commercializing hip hop for profit. He describes “white-owned indies...eclips[ing] the Black-owned ones,” and the terms are telling: no matter what hip hop’s global vision might be, it could still be seen as an attempt for urban Black Americans to express themselves more powerfully and politically and defiantly, an attempt constantly under attack—blatantly malicious or casually insidious—by white businessmen and culture mavens (184). We see this in the case of Malcolm McLaren, who, in bringing hip hop to a broader audience also aggressively ripped it off for his own profit. Chang describes how Bambaataa had two words with which to describe McLaren: “culture vulture” (165). Additionally, we should not forget that hip hop did emerge from a group whose majority was Black Jamaican immigrants and African-Americans in the Bronx who pulled aesthetic influences from—not only, but *predominantly*—Black forms of cultural expression, like reggae and soul and jazz. Hip hop’s political stance was also drawn from African-American politics and cultural protest, like the Black Panthers. Black male figures like Malcolm X and Haile Selassie were iconic figures that hip hop respected as models for and historical forbears of the kinds of power and leadership that hip hop looked to build and/or consolidate.

Blaxploitation cinema—an important influence upon hip-hop music, culture, visuality, and style—a certain style of opening credit sequence, which, like music video, is mostly dialogue free and dominated by non-diegetic, usually quick-tempo music. Here, it's important to remember that the stuttering to which I'm referring isn't synonymous with rapid-fire editing. Rather, it has more to do with the way the image starts and stops, freezes and moves forward. The opening credits of *Foxy Brown* (1974, dir. Jack Hill), *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971, dir. Melvin Van Peebles), and *Black Belt Jones* (1974, dir. Robert Clouse) all feature this sort of stuttering image: characters who freeze in mid-air or mid-coitus or mid-pose for a moment or two before they move fluidly anew. In each case, the stuttering is set to a funky score that silences, completely or partially, any diegetic sounds. So even as the music continues, the image halts, becomes discontinuous. Certainly this relation between the unrelenting flow of music (music that, in the case of hip hop and the popular music it has influenced, is fragmented) and the stuttering of the image influenced a great deal of contemporary music video.

More generally, Blaxploitation cinema featured music as a dominant element that worked as an important marketing (and additional money-making) tool. Paula J. Massood writes that “a number of blaxploitation vehicles, *Shaft* and *Superfly* in particular, capitalized on the popularity of their musical tracks by separately producing and selling sound track albums (thus adding to the income of the films)” (111). If, here, we seem to be plagued once more by a temptation to rely on accounts of music video and its history that see music video as nothing more than a marketing tool, a glance elsewhere in Massood provides an alternative perspective. For Massood it is important to point out the way in which the soundtracks of Blaxploitation films “contribute an immediacy because the music becomes inseparable from the city culture being visualized onscreen” (111). Regardless of market motivations, Blaxploitation films prefigure music video

aesthetically, since these films actively locate ways to create images that feature music as a centerpiece, images through which the music can flow and, in the instances I'm describing above, stutter.

So far, the discontinuity I'm describing—present in hip-hop beats, early hip-hop music videos, and Blaxploitation cinema—is one-dimensional: it's just a stuttering, a breaking down, a chopping up. Up to this point, it may seem that I'm suggesting the following: quickness of editing and other instances of images and motion being broken down that are present in contemporary music video come from hip hop. But even though a relation does exist here, the discontinuity present in hip-hop music, hip-hop music video, and hip-hop cinema is much more complex than this. In fact, hip-hop discontinuity, when it appears in hip-hop music video and hip-hop cinema, often manifests itself in long or extended takes, which are generally understood as *more* continuous than cutting or editing of any sort (and certainly more continuous than rapid-fire editing). For instance, the opening shot of Afrika Bambaataa 's "Planet Rock" video is an extended take (about fourteen seconds long), and five other shots in the video last longer than ten seconds.¹¹⁰ Many of these shots feature multiple screens and/or computer animation and so have a different effect from shots captured by a camera, but they have a durational quality to them nonetheless. The first shot of the music video for Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" is also an extended take: it lasts between twelve and nineteen seconds, depending on when you start counting.¹¹¹ And the video as a whole continues this extended-take aesthetic: it

¹¹⁰ Keep in mind here that, while 10-15 seconds may not seem very long, in the context of a short music video 10-15 seconds is quite a long time.

¹¹¹ The video's opening features a rather sophisticated technique that allows us to see two shots in the same frame, the initial shot shrinking for a time before enlarging again and taking up the full screen. The technique either interrupts or extends an already extended take, depending on how you read it.

features nine shots that last longer than nine seconds and reaches a sort of pinnacle in its last two shots, one of which lasts thirty-eight seconds, the other of which lasts forty-seven seconds.

Slowness and extended takes are also quite common in Blaxploitation films. It's incorrect to label *Ganja & Hess* (1973, dir. Bill Gunn) a pure Blaxploitation picture, but producers and distributors tried to market it that way and, indeed, were wanting Bill Gunn to make a profitable Black vampire film.¹¹² The resulting movie is full of enigmatic long-takes and off-beat cutting patterns and dream sequences. However, even a better-known example of Blaxploitation cinema like *Foxy Brown* features extended takes. An early static shot in *Foxy Brown* lasts longer than fifty seconds as it waits to reveal the film's central female villain, Miss Katherine Wall (Kathryn Loder): we hear her voice while she assists her boyfriend and assistant, Steve Elias, in interrogating their hired goons, but the camera stays glued to the back of her chair until the next shot, which shows Miss Katherine from the opposite angle as she gets up from her chair. Other extended takes in the film feature various pans and tracking movements. For example, a shot about forty-five seconds in length pans right to follow Foxy Brown as she enters a hospital room and then tracks in on her as she begins seducing her injured boyfriend.

How can hip hop's fundamental discontinuity reveal itself in long or extended takes? The answer forces us to shift our conception of discontinuity as that which straightforwardly interrupts some unceasing movement. Instead, we must see discontinuity as a certain kind of relation among elements, some of which continue moving while others cease. Discontinuity also suggests a certain kind of correspondence with history and the commonplace (as these exist in Western lines of thought): discontinuity exists in dialogue with traditional historical narratives and the norm more generally, taking certain elements from Western tradition but moving in a

¹¹² For more on this, check out the fascinating DVD commentary by producer Chiz Schultz, actress Marlene Clark, cinematographer James Hinton, and composer Sam Waymon (available on the 1998 Image Entertainment release).

fundamentally different direction from it. Part of the complication here is that hip-hop music seems, on the surface, both continuous and discontinuous: it breaks down other kinds of music but turns these breaks and samplings into something entirely new and whole.

The moving image, as it exists next to this music in cinema or music video, draws our awareness to this dis/continuous nature. An extended take, for instance, might draw our attention to the MC's unrelenting flow. Here, I'm referring to the rapper who rhymes over the beat. She provides the breathless continuity of the voice, which endures across a given track, never stopping. Hip-hop lyrics, too, often emphasize duration and concentration. Take, for example, Rakim's "I Ain't No Joke." Rakim commands his audience to listen closely to his rhymes and notice his intense focus, a focus that they have to follow, knowledgeably and quickly, or they'll miss it completely. Lines like, "Deep concentration cuz I'm no comedian"; "You can't cope, you should've broke [attention] cuz I ain't no joke"; and "When I MC, I'll keep a freestyle, going steadily / So pucker up and whistle my melody / But whatever you do, don't miss one / They'll be another rough rhyme after this one" all point to the ways in which Rakim flows seamlessly and at a rapid pace.

Conversely, but also at the same time, an extended take might draw our attention to the appearance and disappearance of the sample, breaking through the song and then disappearing, only to return yet again. The hip-hop long take is discontinuous in that it provides both the illusion of continuity and the accentuation of discontinuity, each element shining through at various times, as the song and the image continue.

But if there is even just a small presence of the continuous or of duration in hip hop, why describe hip-hop music, music video, and cinema as *discontinuous* and influential in its discontinuity? Part of this has to do with the fact that the distinctive visuality of hip-hop music

video and hip-hop cinema comes out of the French New Wave, additional art cinematic modes, and other alternative, unconventional modes of filmmaking. Paula Massood observes that *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* “draws from the aesthetics of both international art film and Third Cinema” and goes on to point out that “location shooting, sync-sound, and a mobile camera, along with discontinuous editing” were all “techniques that would then be utilized by American directors” (95). Manthia Diawara, too, points out the influence of the French New Wave, and independent modes of filmmaking more generally, on Black American film directors (5-6).

There are two significant items to note here. First, we can infer from Massood’s and Diawara’s comments that Black and hip-hop cinema, like hip-hop music, works along the logic of sampling. It pulls pieces from different sources—perhaps even from *every possible source*—and puts them one against the other, often to jarring effect. This is discontinuous even in the traditional sense. Second, we can note here the tendency to overlook the presence of long and extended takes in French New Wave and Third Cinema. Films from these genres/periods tend to strike viewers as full of dynamic movement: handheld camera here, a jump cut there. Both the filmmakers who produced these films and their original viewers emphasized their difference from the stifling stillness of prestigious Hollywood and European dramas. Yet an equally important difference rests in their willingness to stay still, to hold the camera’s attention on something for longer than bourgeois films did. The presence of this stillness next to dynamic movement and fast-paced cutting adds yet another element to these films’ discontinuity.

4.2 DEFIANCE IN THE WORK OF KANYE WEST

This brings me to Kanye West, whose presence in the realms of hip hop and fashion accentuates these demands: West insists that recognition of Black artists continues to be necessary. Kanye West—ornery, loud, frowning—very clearly represents the defiant spirit of hip hop that I’ve described. And yet, like most contemporary hip hop, Kanye sits at the intersection of hip hop, specifically, and popular music, more generally.

For there is one way in which, in the contemporary moment, all popular music aspires to hip hop: see, for example, the presence in almost every pop song of thumping bass lines, slowed-down Houston-style vocals, and/or rapping of some kind (either by a featured rapper or by the spoken rhymes of the artist him or herself). This (as well as the inclusion in various popular music videos and promotional materials of hip-hop style, graffiti, dancing, posturing, etc.) is the occasionally discussed hiphopization of popular music and popular culture.¹¹³ To understand what I’m calling “hiphopization,” we might begin by looking at the top ten most popular songs of 2014. Of these, we can easily call four of them hip hop for featuring a rapper: “Dark Horse,” Katy Perry f/ Juicy J (2); “Fancy,” Iggy Azalea f/ Charli XCX (4); “Talk Dirty,” Jason Derulo f/ 2 Chainz (6); and “Problem,” Ariana Grande f/ Iggy Azalea (9). Two others featured prominently on the radio in remixes drawing from EDM and hip hop: John Legend’s “All of Me” (3) and Sam Smith’s “Stay with Me” (10). This leaves the two whitest tracks on the list (“Counting Stars,” OneRepublic [5], whose first hit was produced by hip-hop extraordinaire and sometime rapper Timbaland, and the reggae-quoting “Rude,” Magic! [7], the official remix for which features rappers Kid Ink and Ty Dolla \$ign); Meaghan Trainor’s hip-hop-inspired booty anthem “All

¹¹³ See Cecil Brown’s *Dude, Where’s My Black Studies Department?: The Disappearance of Black Americans from Our Universities* (2007).

About That Bass” (8), in which she sometime-raps her way through lyrics referencing “boom boom” and “skinny bitches”; and “Happy,” produced, written, and performed by Pharrell, who is a producer and artist previously most famous for his work with rap artists like Jay Z, Snoop Dogg, and Clipse (1).¹¹⁴

A recent study, “The Evolution of Popular Music: USA 1960-2010,” conducted by researchers Matthias Mauch, Robert M. MacCallum, Mark Levy, and Armand M. Leroi, confirms this so-called hiphopization. They conclude, using “Music Information Retrieval (MIR) and text-mining tools” that “ana[lyzed] the musical properties of ~17,000 recordings” that “[t]he rise of rap and related genres appears to be the single most important event that has shaped the musical structure of the American charts in the period...studied” (1, 8).¹¹⁵ If we bring this over into contemporary music video and the specific sort of discontinuity present especially in contemporary art music video, it makes sense that hip hop would have an effect here, too.

All of this ties to Kanye West in complicated and fascinating ways. First of all, alongside the hiphopization of all music there still exists hip hop/rap as a separate genre, a genre where West, auto-tuned singing and all, securely sits. West is, among other things, a rapper. Additionally, West produces beats that bear the influence of hip-hop drum patterns and bass lines for himself and other artists. And yet these beats—and all of Kanye’s art—bear influences from all sorts of other genres, styles, and eras. If we look, for instance, at the music on West’s *Yeezus*,¹¹⁶ we find samples from gospel (Holy Name of Mary Choral Family), reggae/dancehall

¹¹⁴ Of course a possible response would be that everything sounds like hip hop because hip hop continues to draw its samples from all sorts of music genres and styles, contemporary and dated. Either way, hip hop has reached a level of cultural significance where all music seems to bear its influence in some way or another.

¹¹⁵ Musical features of hip hop highlighted by the study include a lack of “clearly identifiable chords” (4), perhaps showing up the complexity and sometime atonality of hip hop. It’s unclear to me how this relates to the “thumping bass lines, slowed-down Houston-style vocals, and/or rapping of some kind” or how the first of these three relates to the current musical prevalence of EDM.

¹¹⁶ A full-length album West released in 2013.

(Capleton, Beenie Man), Hindi music (Burman, Manna Dey, and Asha Bhosle), Hungarian rock (Omega), R&B (Kenny Lattimore), jazz (Nina Simone), EDM (TNGHT), hip hop (Lords of the Underground, Pusha T), and soul (Wee, Ponderosa Twins Plus One, Brenda Lee). If this isn't exactly new for hip hop (it's always drawn from a wide variety of sources), the particular way in which West puts all this together, in the case of *Yeezus* but also in the case of his other albums, becomes a distinctive hybrid beast in its own right, a combination of hip hop, punk, R&B, soul, industrial rock, electro, post-punk, pop, and all of their many subgenres. Miles Raymer writes in *Esquire*, for example, that “[w]hat *Yeezus* most closely resembles is the industrial music of the 1990s, during the phase of the alternative rock boom when the genre had its greatest pop-cultural influence. Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, and Marilyn Manson were the most recognizable names that the industrial scene produced, but it also boasted a vast global underground community, and one of its epicenters was in Kanye's hometown of Chicago.”

This points out the way in which West doesn't signify merely hip hop but his own distinctive brand of hip hop, drawn from his past and in a style that other hip hop might find undesirable—and would find very difficult—to imitate. West's power is that of a polymath with talent, a vision, and a complicated history. One part of this complicated history is his relationship to rap—his supposedly not being urban enough, in style or rhyming, to fit in as a rapper. Kanye has assimilated this “not fitting in” into his music, disarming critics and rap executives by turning what some believed would make his music unmarketable into its most distinctive, impressive mark: changing hip hop around him instead of the other way around. But why fans find this so powerful is not merely its uniqueness—Kanye West isn't like other rappers—but its ability to ultimately amplify hip hop's most important quality: its defiance.

This applies to West's visuals as well. I mean this term, "visuals," in its broadest sense, including album art, dress, promotional materials, performance style, and—most important for my study—films and music videos. In his album art, West has commissioned and referenced artists ranging from George Condo (*My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, *Yeezus*) to Takashi Murakami (*Graduation*) to Riccardo Tisci (*Watch the Throne*); worn a leather skirt by Givenchy and various woven and jeweled masks by Martin Margiela while performing; commissioned artists like Miles Tsang and Dan White to help design tour posters; and choreographed concert set pieces alluding to Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain*. This, too, is obviously a kind of sampling, a pulling from a very broad range of sources and inspirations to fashion some new hybrid. This hybrid, like much contemporary art music video, certainly complicates the division between 'high' and 'low': West takes high art and high fashion and flips them into popular phenomena (sold-out concerts, platinum record sales, millions of music video views, etc.).

So it should make sense that West's music, films, and music videos play a major role in my discussion of contemporary art music video, itself a complicated web of intersecting trends and influences. I argue for the presence of art cinema narrative strategies in music video, especially in what I'm calling the contemporary art music video (I'm calling it "art music video" for its style of narrative, not for its intended audience or aspirations to high art)—and I also argue that this influence has been under-recognized throughout music video's history *and* that this influence complicates the divide between high and low culture in productive, fascinating ways. The discontinuous narratives of art films are condensed and emphasized in contemporary art music videos in a process I'm calling, drawing on David Bordwell, *intensified discontinuity*.

But this chapter acknowledges that there is another major influence upon the contemporary art music video's intensified discontinuity, in terms of both visual style (and, less

directly, narrative strategies): hip hop. While parsing out exactly where hip hop's influence exists in contemporary music video can be a difficult task, Kanye West's music videos quite clearly show the coexistence of discontinuities belonging to both art cinema and hip hop. Because of this, his videos provide a framework for perceiving, understanding, and scrutinizing the intersection of these two influences upon contemporary music video.

Although each of West's music videos is interesting in its own right, there are two I will focus on in the space of this chapter: "Runaway," West's short film from 2010, and "Mercy," a music video from 2012 also featuring Big Sean, Pusha T, and 2 Chainz. Although the two videos are extraordinarily different—*Runaway* is over 30 minutes long, in color, and quite obviously a narrative work, an art film in its own right; "Mercy" is under 6 minutes long, black-and-white, and not obviously a narrative work at all—both fruitfully show the possibilities for intersections and overlaps among hip hop, art cinema, and music video.

4.3 *RUNAWAY*

Runaway (directed by and starring West himself, written by popular hip-hop video director Hype Williams, and produced by Jonathan Lia, who has produced, executive produced, and directed a number of music videos) very clearly manages to reference and combine ballet, the mythical figure of the phoenix, rock 'n roll, Gucci loafers, Mozart's requiem mass, Michael Jackson, the Ku Klux Klan, and Gil Scott-Heron; based on interviews West has given, it also (less clearly) references Helmut Newton, George Lucas, Jim Henson, Federico Fellini, and Stanley Kubrick. It is a combination of music video and narrative short film in terms of its use of both diegetic and non-diegetic sound. While most of the time the video's soundtrack is made up of non-diegetic

clips from West's hip-hop album, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, occasionally there is dialogue, diegetic background noise, and diegetic music clips. Even though the song clips far outnumber the lines of dialogue spoken in the film and parts of *Runaway* may seem disconnected, *Runaway* is clearly a narrative film. Its narrative runs something like this: Kanye West comes across a phoenix-woman (played by model/actress Selita Ebanks, wings designed by Martin Izquierdo of *Angels in America* and Victoria's Secret fashion show fame), takes her home and then to a fireworks show, and shows her off to some friends and family at a dinner party where the phoenix-woman is horrified to see birds served as the meal's main course. West and the phoenix-woman make love, the phoenix-woman flees while West is still sleeping, and West runs into the forest to find her, but it's too late: she's already taken off to the clouds in a burst of flame. These narrative details are rather obvious, but the video/film also features "art cinematic" images that relate to the narrative in less obvious, elliptical, discontinuous ways—these are images that raise more questions than they answer. They relate to the film/video's narrative, but not simply as events that fit into a particular chronology. Rather, they deepen the narrative's seemingly straight, one-dimensional contour.

As an example, let's take an image from *Runaway* that the film/video privileges, an image that appears twice. This is the image of ballet dancers frozen in position, as the camera cranes around and above them. It appears first at 19:39 in a shot that continues until 20:45: here, the camera, attached to a crane of some kind, moves slightly right and up, rising and rising until it is looking down at the frozen dancers from a high angle. As part of this same shot, the camera swoops carefully back down and left, shooting from a straight-on and then very slightly high angle. The image of the frozen dancers appears again at 26:08 in a shot that lasts until 26:33, this time floating, arcing around the (mostly) static figures, left to right. In the first appearance, we

hear non-diegetic sound: the long epilogue of the song, “Runaway,” whose title provides the name of the film. In the second instance, West and the phoenix-woman are having a conversation about statues (the ballet dancers appear immediately after the phoenix-woman asks, “All the statues that we see, where do you think they came from?” and then disappear once she says, “You try to tear it down”), during which she argues that all statues are phoenixes turned to stone.

The dancers’ stillness is a fascinating stillness, for it’s not as if the image itself is frozen: it is a moving image. We certainly see this in the camera’s movement, but we also see it in the dancers’ bodies, which can’t quite stay completely still. Look closely and see an arm twitch or a leg shift, slightly. Their bodies are uncontainable; they are not stone but flesh. Why are the dancers frozen like this, still yet moving almost imperceptibly? And why does the video show them twice? How can we explain their presence in terms of the film’s narrative?

On the surface, their stopping, in the dance scene, is not motivated by the narrative but by the music: when the sounds of all the other instruments disappear and all that’s left is the sound of a single note on the piano, the dancers stop moving. However, the dancers’ performance to West’s singing and piano playing is also part of the film’s narrative, not just its musical construction: it’s the dinner entertainment for a group of Black, formal-appareled guests who sit around the table in the empty hangar where the scene takes place. The stillness occurs when West stops singing (he hasn’t been playing the piano for a while at this point), so really there is only silence (as well as the echoes of moving chairs and clattering dishware that we heard earlier), diegetically, at this point in the performance. This makes sense: the music stops (for the diegetic spectators) or changes from maximal to minimal instrumentation (for the non-diegetic spectators), and the dancers pause. So the musical motivation, in this instance, is the narrative

motivation as well: the performance is part of the narrative, part of what happens at this dinner party.

Yet the second appearance of the almost-still dancers (in the hangar, as before, as a kind of flashback) is not quite as clearly motivated by narrative. It does not seem to relate to or advance the film's narrative to have the dancers appear when the phoenix-woman discusses statues with West. In fact, the image's reappearance interrupts the conversation, drawing our attention elsewhere, discontinuing the image's flow. Yet their presence in this second moment deepens the narrative, vertically, forcing us to understand the dancers' stillness as existing beyond the practicality of their performance. The dancers are not reappearing because the phoenix-woman or West are referring to them directly or because the dancers are performing again. Moreover, we might be tempted to infer that the phoenix-woman's comments in this scene—that statues are phoenixes whose wings have been removed and thus turned to stone and that what she “hate[s] most about your [West's] world” is that “anything that is different, you try to change; you try to tear it down. You rip the wings off the phoenix and they turn to stone”—provide a simple explaining away of any lingering sense of mystery: the dancers just want to express themselves but society, in all of its mean conformity, prevents them from doing so (and this is just like how the phoenix wants to remain a living creature, but society wants to remove her wings and turn her into a statue).

This gets at one possible understanding of the still dancers, but the phoenix-woman's words do not *explain* the dancers' presence here or their stillness; instead, the words—like the images immediately surrounding the still dancers—open up a number of possible explanations or meanings. The comment, next to the image of the not-quite-still dancers, halts the narrative,

making the moment—and by extension, the film’s narrative— discontinuous, providing a moment of confusion for the spectator.

To make sense of this confusion, the spectator must return to the narrative, and this connects *Runaway* to art cinema, for this is one of the major ways in which art films operate: their complicated, unresolved stylistic gestures and striking images—such as this one, where editing suddenly, surprisingly takes us back to an earlier moment in the film—encourage us to deepen our understanding of the story, its nuances and themes. This is the exact opposite of what Kristin Thompson calls the “unobtrusive” style of Hollywood cinema, both pre- and post-classical, in her *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (11). The style is obvious, and yet it is not, as David Bordwell implies in “The Art Cinema As a Mode of Film Practice” by foregrounding “authorial expressivity” as a structuring principle of the art film, for the sake of style in and of itself or for the sake of the author expressing her genius or talent or grand idea. For it is not as if “authorial expressivity” magically takes us outside of the film. How can it, when such an assumption is grounded on previous knowledge of the director and her previous films? And while it is certain that knowledge of a director’s other films can increase a sort of pleasure had while watching the film at hand, it is not necessary for immersing oneself in the scene’s ambiguities. In art cinema, style—in the form of the striking image—calls attention to itself, forcing us to think of narrative in a different, vertical way as well.

To return to the un/moving dancer repetition in “Runaway,” we can see that many of the *possible* explanations or meanings revolve around the concept of difference (“anything that is *different*, you try to change,” says the phoenix-woman). Where does difference actually exist in the dinner party/performance scene? In terms of skin color and of costume, there is very little difference at all, at least within certain groups: the dinner guests are all Black and wearing white;

the servers are all white, wearing white robes, and holding carafes of white wine; and the dancers are all white or Asian and wearing the same black costume. Of course, the phoenix-woman is quite different, but this doesn't fully motivate why the image of the still dancers appears a second time (for the filmmakers could just have easily have chosen to insert an image of the phoenix-woman sitting alone at the table or getting strange looks in order to emphasize her difference).

The possibility for difference seems weakest among the servers, who say and do only that which is subservient,¹¹⁷ but, interestingly, the possibility is very weak for the Black dinner guests as well, who not only dress and act similarly but also respond most negatively to the phoenix-woman's appearance. A series of three medium long shots show three different couples gawking in West's and the phoenix-woman's direction as they enter, and additional shots show the diners making faces and whispering to each other, even directly next to the phoenix-woman. Most obviously negative, the man sitting directly next to West, after remarking that "your girlfriend is really beautiful," proceeds to ask, "Do you know she's a bird?" and say, "I mean, like, leave the monkey in a zoo." We might assume that a group of elegantly dressed Black men and women, in the context of a Kanye West video, is an expression of the "black excellence" West describes, alongside Jay-Z, in his track "Murder to Excellence" (where West raps, disapprovingly, "In the past if you picture events, like a black tie, / What's the last thing you expect to see? Black guys").¹¹⁸ But West is getting at something different here, for this group is certainly not portrayed in a positive light: they are closed-minded, conformist, even hateful.

¹¹⁷But here, too, there is possibility. Notice the way one server glares defiantly at the camera while she pours West's wine. Are these the ones made of stone? The reappearance of the image of the static dancers draws our attention to these servers as well.

¹¹⁸ And the remarkable effect of reversing the white-dominated black tie affair, portraying an elaborate dinner for a Black-dominated, "white tie affair," should not be underplayed. Indeed, the mere portrayal of such a gathering is a

This leaves the dancers as the most obvious candidate for difference, because they are artists in some sense and because they appear when the phoenix-woman discusses difference. And, indeed, a closer look at what immediately follows the initial stillness scene seems to confirm them as unique. Beginning at 20:45, there are fifteen shots of individual dancers, no longer mostly motionless but moving and spasming at will to the music of the continuing epilogue. In each shot, a dancer is shown in long or medium long shot while a graceful, craning camera dances with her, sometimes above, sometimes below, sometimes at the same level. The dancer is the only one who occupies the frame in each instance, a stark contrast to the previous long take, where the dancers form a cluster of sorts.

The fact that the dancers are alone in each shot suggests the impossibility of their free dancing. That is to say, the space of the hangar and the logic of the performance disallow their actually performing these movements: they would crash into other dancers or the piano or the servers or the table; they would break the stillness/silence that the performance requires at this moment, before its conclusion, when they stream out in two carefully coordinated single-file lines (in the shot immediately following the fifteen shot sequence of their individual dance moves). So the film seems to suggest, then, that their dancing is occurring elsewhere, perhaps in the space of the imagination: they imagine freedom of movement and individual expression that draws upon their skills as ballerinas while also providing an opportunity to demonstrate the singular manner of their own bodies.

They do this, the film suggests, while quite literally trapped, static as the music fades or ends. But this raises another question: what is it that has trapped them? This leads to another set of potential narrative routes that force us to consider West's position in this film (as a character,

powerful image of difference that, undoubtedly, would be and has been traditionally opposed in the European/Western tradition.

as an auteur, and as a hip-hop musician). He is in many ways the narrative's driving force: he finds the phoenix-woman, takes her home, takes her with him to a fireworks show and party, stages a performance, runs after the phoenix-woman as she burns. Additionally, his music, which peppers the film, provides the momentum and timbre for what we see and refers in its lyrics to his power and desire. West himself determined how all of this would go together, conceiving of its story and serving as the film's director.

Yet, rather astonishingly, the film's art cinematic gestures open up the possibility of this power as something negative or constraining. We assume, if we know anything of West's comments at awards shows and in interviews, that the phoenix-woman's reference to a world that tears down those who are different is in fact a reference to West's own difference from other, lesser artists who aren't "God's vessels" or "complete awesomeness" or "the number one most impactful artist of our generation".¹¹⁹ We would think the film would figure West as the one who must be persecuted for his uniqueness, and other moments in the film may seem to confirm this, like when the dinner guests seem to be putting West down for his choice of date as much as laughing at the phoenix-woman. But the repeated image of the still dancers reminds us that it is actually West (as puppetmaster of the performance, both diegetically and non-diegetically) who has demanded the dancers' stasis (and the entire rhythm of their dance). The phoenix-woman knows the world to which she refers mostly through West's having shown it to her, often at spectacles that seem to arise according to his whims or to some master plan. In the context of the video, he tears the world down around him and attempts to form one of his own.

His response to the phoenix-woman's assertion that she must burn so that she does not turn to stone confirms his controlling, possessive personality: "I don't want you to go back to

¹¹⁹ See "Kanye West's Best Quotes," compiled by Jim Merrett and this transcript of interview with West on *Sway in the Morning*: <http://genius.com/Kanye-west-sway-in-the-morning-with-kanye-west-excerpts-lyrics/>

your world. I want you to stay here with me.” Soon after he says this, he pulls her toward him for a kiss and proceeds to have sex with her, seeking to control her sexually as well. West is the one who seeks to quash that which is different, controlling it, orchestrating it. He arrests the dancers’ movement; he determines that the phoenix-woman shouldn’t burn. And yet his best attempts to control the women fail: their bodies are uncontainable, still moving when he wants them still—they move slightly, physically. Furthermore, as I’ve mentioned above, the film presents it as a possibility that the female dancers’ imaginations allow them to move even further and more fully. The phoenix-woman burns and returns to the sky, despite West’s best efforts: he sprints magnificently towards the flames but is too late.

The discontinuity that is the dancers’ reappearance in West’s and the phoenix-woman’s conversation draws us back into the narrative, forcing us to wonder about stillness, control, and individuality—not merely as abstract concepts but as factors that increase our understanding of the film’s narrative. In the context of the film, all of these belong to West and also escape him: he controls the dancers’ movements, but their movements are out of his control (they shift ever so slightly and dance differently in their imaginations); he takes the phoenix-woman where he pleases and makes her dance, too, but she eludes his grasp and moves back towards the sky; he creates elaborate, unique performances and dates a bird, but, ultimately, he is still stuck on earth. We are pulled back to these paradoxes and possibilities by the mysterious, interrupting image of the not-entirely-frozen dancers.

Also, by placing himself in one of the film’s lead roles (a move which we might again at first glance consider vain or arrogant) and acting out some version of his real existence (he composes and performs music and seems to be quite rich), West expands the film’s narrative to imply his own narrative, including that part of the story where West is filmmaker. For the film

emerges from the music he has created: its images and narrative belong to his music in an integral way. The combination of his self-deprecating, soul-searching energy with his big-headed self-confidence, become newly apparent through the images the music makes. Consider the deeply bitter, sarcastic chorus of “Runaway”: “And I always find, yeah, I always find something wrong / You been putting up with my shit just way too long / I'm so gifted at finding what I don't like the most / So I think it's time for us to have a toast / Let's have a toast for the douche bags / Let's have a toast for the assholes / Let's have a toast for the scumbags, / Every one of them that I know / Let's have a toast to the jerkoffs / That'll never take work off / Baby, I got a plan / Run away fast as you can.” These lyrics suggest that the story of *Runaway* is a story that allows us to catch a glimpse of a world that smartens up and is, at least in some sense, running away. It is a world that confirms that West’s instruction to “run away” is an ironic one, for it is something he actually does *not* desire: he wants the phoenix-woman to stay and dance to his music and the dancers to also follow his instruction.

The topic of gender is unavoidable here, since both the all-female ballerinas and the phoenix-woman escape West’s control, at least in some sense. The video suggests that these women are not marionettes of West’s making, for their movements exist apart from him. This in itself might be surprising to some of West’s critics, who consider his lyrics and videos one-hundred percent misogynistic. And to deny the presence of misogyny in West’s work would be foolish, when it’s so apparent, in several of his songs: see lines like “So mami, best advice is just to get on top of this / Have you ever had sex with a pharaoh? / Put the pussy in a sarcophagus / Now she claiming that I bruised her esophagus / Head of the class, and she just won a scholarship” (“Monster”) or the racist *and* misogynist “Eatin’ Asian pussy, all I need was sweet and sour sauce” (“I’m In It”). And to gesture towards the fact that West consistently

acknowledges his foolishness and the terror and despair that come along with them (see in the song, “Runaway”—next to words like “bitch” and “ho”—West’s rhymes “I don’t what it is with females, but I’m not too good at that shit”; “I just blame everything on you / At least you know that’s what I’m good at”; and “Never was much of a romantic / I could never take the intimacy / And I know I did damage / ‘Cause the look in your eyes is killing me”) only addresses part of the issue. To address the issue further is both to return to the identities of both hip-hop and art cinema as deeply conflicted at their cores. Hip hop imagines a world of struggled-for equality and fairness, a world united under the banner of “Planet Rock”; and yet at the same time it so often concerns itself—even within a single album—with apparent references to intraracial violence, misogyny, and homophobia. Stylistically, it offers the continuous flow of lyrics over a discontinuous amalgam of styles, genres, and eras. Art cinema, on the other hand, gestures towards politics and political problems without offering concrete solutions; it also offers a narrative without the comforts of goals, clear progression, or closure. And yet this conflictedness is not reason to simply denigrate either art form, when both art forms make this conflictedness productive of deeper thought (even if this is thought that never finds some grand concrete answer), as viewers and listeners consider—feel—the importance of defiance, listener/viewer identification, narratives, suggested themes, and the connections of these themes to our worlds.

This conflicted nature at the heart of both hip hop and art cinema connects closely to both Jacques Rancière’s aesthetic regime and the rethinking of *aisthesis*—as “an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality” (18)—that Claire Bishop, drawing directly from Rancière, continues in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012). Rancière describes the way Western conceptions of art have developed through time, tracing a path from the ethical regime of images (a Platonic regime in which

images are thought about according to their origins and ends), to the poetic/representative regime (an Aristotelian regime that is largely concerned with imitations and their hierarchization according to various ways of “doing, making, seeing, and judging” [22]), to—finally—the aesthetic regime, which Rancière sees as the current regime into which the arts find their place. This regime is not so strictly defined or hierarchical: rather it holds under its umbrella everything that somehow fits into the category of art. It is, in Rancière’s words, “inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, *logos* identical with pathos, the intention of the unintentional, etc.” (23). This is to say that the aesthetic regime arises from the mysterious, the uncharted, the indefinable. It is *somewhere*, in suspension, nebulous.

Although Rancière’s category is an extremely large umbrella and fits more than hip hop and art cinema, both categories, large umbrellas themselves, foreground this suspension, this inbetweenness. Neither hip hop nor art cinema is quite so easily figured as progressive or conservative—or quite so easily figured as anything concrete or monolithic. “Runaway,” with its combinations of hip hop and art cinema, exemplifies that this is so. It slips in and out of categories like *feminist* or *patriarchal*—even though there are those on both sides who would argue adamantly that it is solely one way or another. And even though it is indeed important to think about such categories, especially in a contemporary climate in which female artists of all sorts are consistently overlooked and denigrated, it is also important to avoid a situation of aesthetic production and criticism in which, in Claire Bishop’s words, “sensitivity to difference risks becoming a new kind of repressive norm” (25). Bishop, writing in 2012, opposes those

trends in the arts that privilege the charitable and the kind over that which offends or disrupts. She writes,

I would argue that unease, discomfort, or frustration—along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity—can be crucial to any work’s artistic impact. This is not to say that ethics are unimportant in a work of art, nor irrelevant to politics, only that they do not always have to be announced and performed in...a direct and saintly fashion (26).

To connect Bishop’s ideas to the defiance of hip hop, present in *Runaway*, is to realize that this defiance is not comfortable, nor should it be (no matter how much angsty, bro-y, Kanye fans may upset us). The song—and the film with which it shares a name—defies those who would consider West, or hip hop more broadly, only arrogant and misogynistic by suggesting as a possibility that women in West’s life—past and present—cannot and do not belong to him, not fully. And it suggests this through its particular mode of discontinuity: its sampling aesthetic (the song “Runaway,” for example, samples The Backyard Heavies, Rick James, and James Brown) which breaks apart pre-existing songs, and its (somewhat¹²⁰) intensified brand of art cinematic discontinuity, a sort of discontinuity that I have distilled in the repeated image of the almost-unmoving dancers (although there are other enigmatic, narrative-deepening, discontinuous images I could have considered instead: the repeated images of deer and sheep; the running child with the can of red smoke; the Ku-Klux marching band with a papier-mâché Michael Jackson head; the mysterious figure standing at the very edge of the backyard near the video’s conclusion). I have followed the path of the repeated image of the dancers to understanding the film’s narrative in terms of West’s failed attempts to control the women around him; and also to

¹²⁰ I only say “somewhat” here because “Runaway,” at almost thirty-five minutes long, is six or seven times longer than the average music video.

gesturing that the film's narrative construction impels the viewer toward such consideration, forcing us to piece together the narrative and its meaning.

And yet one of my major points about art cinema images is that they proffer, through enigmatic images, question as answer or ellipsis as fullness—and this also true for the repeated image of the dancers. If the image in one sense takes us back to their uncontainability and the potential freedom they can achieve in their imaginations, it also takes us back to their attempting to follow West's command, to their carefully filing out of the hangar (as directed by West, presumably), to the sensuality of their movements and costume (and of the phoenix-woman's movements and costume) that are there, at least in one sense, for West's sake. And the repeated image also forces us to consider: from where does the repetition emerge? From the phoenix-woman's imagination? From West's imagination? From the dancers, somehow? From the film itself (which, in some way, is created by a character in it)? All of these questions could lead us to new possibilities, some much more cynical than what I've suggested here so far.

If the image is really as open as I suggest, then its defiance, too, must shift. This shifting defiance is both hip hop's appeal and its frustration, depending on who or what it's defying. Maybe West is actually responding with a middle finger to those who accuse him of misogyny, but in the opposite direction: "So what I'm a misogynist? I'm still a genius." But if the image is open and questioning and therefore the film's defiance shifts, this does not mean that its defiance disappears. In the context of *Runaway*, the very openness of the images is itself a kind of defiance against those who would pigeonhole hip hop into something that can only be "street"

and unconcerned with nuance. *Runaway* frustrates both the misogynistic and those who stand against misogyny: it just never quite possesses women and just never quite lets them go.¹²¹

4.4 “MERCY”

This is equally true for another Kanye West work, “Mercy,” this one directed by Nabil Elderkin. Upon initial glance, it may seem very different from *Runaway*: five-and-a-half minutes long (instead of thirty-five minutes long); black and white (instead of color); one location (instead of four); a single take (instead of having quite a large number of shots); and no obvious narrative (instead of having what seems at first glance a very simple narrative). But both videos feature hip-hop music in all of its discontinuous pleasure: here, the song combines three songs from a decade-long space between 1983 and 1993 (two reggae songs [Super Beagle’s “Dust a Sound Boy” and Reggie Stepper’s “Cuh Oonu”] and “Tony’s Theme” from *Scarface* [1983]), as well as lyrics from two contemporary hip-hop tracks (YB’s “Lambo” and Early Mac/SayItAintTone’s “Dance [A\$\$]). And both use open, questioning images to suggest an unsolvable narrative that can’t be explained or understood in simple terms, and in both cases this conflicted narrative relates in some way to misogyny, stillness, and control.

¹²¹ An annotation on *Genius* suggests that West’s art more generally demonstrates his mastery of frustrating both ends of the spectrum by finding not the middle, but some new, offensive dimension. The line reads “Black girl sipping white wine / Put my fist in her like a civil rights sign,” while the annotation about it reads, in part: “Using the image and power of a fist, Kanye compares sexual freedom to civil freedom. This line is a celebration of sexual liberation disguised as misogyny. If it’s consensual, we have no right to judge Kanye nor the woman. Every person has the right to engage in whatever form of sexual intercourse they desire, especially if it culminates in an orgasm... The lyric intends to unite the socially conservative with the progressive by offending both of them, proving haters to be either stuck in the past or hypocritical.” This annotation and *Runaway* suggest that West’s art, while shocking, can force us with its openness into new and surprising ways of being open ourselves.

In the case of “Mercy,” no narrative exists without the video’s more enigmatic images (whereas for *Runaway*, the more enigmatic images just force us to realize that the narrative goes deeper than we assume): otherwise, it’s just four rappers (Big Sean, Pusha T, Kanye West, 2 Chainz) and their friends performing a song and dancing around in a mostly-abandoned parking garage. But our enigmatic images begin appearing early: as the camera pans left, we see a woman with a flowing skirt who flips it outward, menacingly, sending up a cloud of dust. While her presence here might suggest that this woman could be a friend of the rappers, her angry gesture with her skirt and her looking away from the camera suggest she’s not having a good time and is not interacting with the song performed. She also appears a second time, at 2:25 to 2:34, flipping her skirt again, staring in the opposite direction. Additionally, at 1:31, as the camera now pans methodically right, there materializes a crouching man who dons a keffiyeh that covers everything but his eyes and who unblinkingly¹²² stares directly into the camera for the twenty seconds it takes for the camera to move past him. His stillness and his stare and his clothing are mysterious, even confounding.

Perhaps the video’s most mysterious element, however, is its deployment of doubles. The doubling begins when, around :41, the camera, which continues panning left, eventually finds Big Sean, as his verse begins, appearing from behind a pillar. But how did he get behind the pillar in the first place, when we saw him at the video’s beginning, on the opposite side of the garage? Even if this could somehow be explained by his moving from one side of the space to the other out of the view of the camera, the appearance, moments later, of a second Big Sean (the same individual, dressed in the same outfit) in the background (walking out from some corridor), sharing the frame with the first Big Sean, cannot. The appearance, disappearance, and

¹²² Almost. He blinks twice.

reappearance of doubles (or, in one case, triples—Kanye West, at 3:44) from behind columns or people recur throughout the video's course.

What does this doubling mean? The traditional reading of this device, in the context of music video, involves understanding in terms of technical mastery or sheer visual enjoyment. This is, for example, how critics tend to talk about Michel Gondry's video for "Come Into My World" (2002). Here, Kylie Minogue, who performs the song, walks around in circles, and both she and the world around her multiplies as she does (e.g. during the first circle we see one ladder leaning up against a building, during the second we see two, during the third, three, etc.) The question generally isn't, "What's happening in this narrative?" it's, "How did he [Gondry] do that?" Or, if there's no question, it's just, "Oh, cool!" or "Whoa! This is trippy."

But I would like to stay with the former question, in part because of the mysterious woman in the video and the equally mysterious staring man. Just the fact of these characters' presence suggests narrative (and this is regardless of the fact that those in the know realize they are actually artists—Teyana Taylor and Mr. Hudson—signed to West's label, G.O.O.D. Music). There is a story in the motion of the fabric of her skirt, a story in a look. But where the non-narrative avant-garde recognizes and plays upon this, concerning itself only with textures and movements of various kinds and focusing predominantly on philosophical concepts, the art music video, like "Mercy," takes these images and forces us to think about them not only in terms of concept but also in terms of a larger, complex story with characters, setting, and so on. Here, this story is of the rappers' actual lives (or some semblance of their actual lives), with each rapper playing himself in some sense. Similar to how we recognize Kanye West as Kanye West in the context of *Runaway*, here we recognize the rappers as themselves from their rapping. However, Mr. Hudson (wearing the keffiyeh) and Teyana Taylor (flipping her skirt) do not play

themselves (or at least the images allow us to read the video this way): they do not sing or write or produce in the context of the video.

In fact, it would seem they have little or nothing to do with the rappers at all and distance themselves from the rappers on purpose. These are characters that cannot be swallowed up by the luxurious lifestyle the rappers present (it is, after all, a song about a Lamborghini Murcielago), not even when this luxurious lifestyle multiplies the rappers, as if the many faces they present to the media—philanthropists, misogynists, social activists, drug users/dealers—could actually turn into complete, separate persons. The woman and the crouching man remain somehow apart from the rest of the video, the woman's skirt flinging the rappers away, the man the only one on camera for almost a full ten seconds. There is some irony here in that they represent hip hop's defiance more fully than the rappers do, even while these two characters say not a word. Hip hop's defiance goes beyond its lyrics and its beats: it is just as important for it to be an attitude, a way of moving, a posture.

In the context of this video, the hip-hop attitude presented by these two characters overcomes that presented by the rappers themselves, who are ultimately swallowed up by the wealth of which they brag. The video's last two images are of the four rappers, looking down or at the camera, and a Lamborghini that drives by in front of them, erasing their presence. No matter how many selves the rappers are able to present to the world, the products and brands they hype swallow up every one of their selves. The narrative is one of how an object becomes the subject, how four multi-millionaire performers multiply themselves only to be completely swallowed up by that which their millions bought. If this might at first seem to suggest the powerlessness of hip hop's defiance against the global economic market, we need only

remember the woman and the staring man, who are not effaced by the rappers or by the car that removes them. Their defiance remains, even after the video has ended.

Yet, again, this is not the only way to read these images: the images defy even our attempt at a singular, positive reading of them. Perhaps, for instance, the keffiyeh-donning man is actually just there for stylistic/sartorial purposes, since West, Sean, and 2 Chainz are also wearing turbans and other sorts of middle-eastern inspired headgear. He is not opposed to or set apart from their cool—he just extends it. Moreover, his look into the camera is not very different from the direct looks into the camera by the rappers. And then the skirt-flipping woman may just provide contrast to the song’s chorus: “Lamborghini Mercy / Your chick she’s so thirsty / I’m in that two-seat Lambo with your girl / She’s tryna jerk me.” The woman here isn’t *your* chick; it’s *theirs*, which means that she’s more choosy. Her anger may be more directed towards others than to the rappers in whose video she appears and to whom, in some sense, she belongs. In the end, she is gone, too, along with *all* of the men, not only the rappers.

The openness of the images in both *Runaway* and “Mercy” is, indeed, very frustrating in this way, for the images carry with them the possibility of a radical anti-capitalist, anti-masculinist stance—but they also carry other, more conservative possibilities. It is their placement in the videos as enigmatic in relation to the rest of the text—to the rest of the narrative—that allows us to question their relationship to the story that we piece together. This sort of discontinuity—the interruption of a story with an enigmatic, difficult-to-read, striking image—is something common in art cinema. But it is a discontinuity that also runs through hip hop’s veins: the interruption of one or many other songs to make up another. Hip hop’s defiance is a part of and intensifies this discontinuity, so hip-hop art music video can come across as especially jarring and difficult to parse. And if other styles of popular music and popular music

video imitate something of hip hop's discontinuity, rarely are such videos able to communicate this discontinuity so defiantly, so vehemently, demanding that we dig even deeper to understand the narratives and struggles they so powerfully represent.

We see, then, that the influence of hip hop and Black popular media aesthetics on the art music video both extends and complicates the relationship between narrative, spectator, and auteur. If films like *La Haine* and *Beau Travail* suggest the positive potential of non-white, non-heterosexual, non-male actors and directors, who lead the art film to fully embrace the disruptive power of popular music, these works by Kanye West warn us against fetishizing their involvement in art cinema, because neither art cinema nor art music video exists in order to fit neatly into spectator expectations. In fact, the never-ending process of questioning that art cinema and art music video prompts in the viewer can lead to some ugly possibilities related to misogyny and self-aggrandizement (as we also saw in *Bad Timing* and will see for "Youth" and *Mysteries of Lisbon*).

This should remind us, also, of the possible death that haunts both *La Haine* and *Beau Travail*, never completely out of view: the presence of the art music video and art film within Rancière's aesthetic regime insists that these works remain unsettled, doubling back on themselves. West's works also demonstrate the impossibility of completely removing the figure of the auteur from the picture of art cinema and art music video: our knowledge of West as a public figure bleeds through *Runaway* and "Mercy." However, this does not help us definitively answer the questions raised by the texts but further unsettles them, suggesting that an emphasis on narrative that leads, eventually, to the auteur can intensify, instead of quieting, a mode of spectatorship that wonders ceaselessly, dissatisfied.

5.0 EXCESSIVE SURFACE, EXCESSIVE DEPTH: UNSETTLED NARRATIVES IN “YOUTH” (2014) AND *MYSTERIES OF LISBON* (2010)

When it comes to understanding music video, one of the primary matters to consider is that of excess. This is due to the fact that film and media scholars have tended to describe music videos in terms of excess or excessiveness, mainly for the large amount of visual information they include over a brief duration and for their difference from Classical Hollywood Cinema, with its insistence upon a coherent narrative that unfolds across a three-act structure. E. Ann Kaplan, in her MTV-era *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Post Modernism and Consumer Culture* (1987), describes some of the differences between Classical Hollywood Cinema and MTV at length:

The main differences between MTV and the classical Hollywood film arise from the structuring of the station as a 24-hour continuous flow with its three- to four-minute texts (often non-narrative [...]), and from the song-image format. First, a word about the structure that offers a decentered position for the spectator, far different from the sutured, Hollywood film spectator[...]: on the one hand, there are the constant interruptions caused by the ending of one video and the start of the next, by the veejay's comments, introductions, interviews, and by the ads; on the other, there is the absence of the cause-effect narrative of the Freudian “family romance” type that film theorists have described. Together, these elements prevent the kind of

regression to Oedipal primary processes possible in the cinema through the prolonged narrative identification, and through the devices of the shot/countershot, etc.... (41).

Although some of Kaplan's comments are clearly irrelevant to the contemporary music video context (her mention of veejays, for example, or her understanding of music video as part of a televisual "24-hour continuous flow") and although she understands cinema as something that exists predominantly on movie theater screens, many of her comments still hold true: most music videos are still three to four minutes long and thus do not allow for "prolonged narrative identification"; they also still have what she calls "song-image format." Furthermore, her understanding of music video as part of a continuous flow holds some validity, even if that flow is no longer televisual. Instead, YouTube's and Vimeo's seemingly endless array of videos (as well as with those sites' tendencies both to automatically move viewers from one video to the next and to interrupt the viewing experience with advertisements of various sorts) now make up the flow to which she refers.

It's notable that, in the passage above, even when she's describing differences between cinema and music television, Kaplan does not talk about music video purely in terms of excess and even seems to place it next to cinema in an unbiased way, not seeing music video as something lesser (or as something more gaudy) than cinema but rather as something new. However, in the context of *Rocking Around the Clock* as a whole, she sees videos as little more than advertisements. Kaplan writes, "The rock video idea was originally an advertising idea; in fact a better name for rock videos is really 'rock promos,' since they are widely seen as promotional tools for the record companies" (13) and later notes that "MTV is more obviously than other programs one nearly continuous advertisement, the flow being merely broken down into different *kinds* of ads" (143, italics Kaplan's). This tying together of music video and

advertisement has the effect of associating music videos with the excesses of Reagan-era capitalism. In other words, if at first it seems that Kaplan sees music television as potentially revolutionary (or at least exciting) in its difference from Classical Hollywood Cinema, she ultimately reveals that she sees this potential as wasted on capitalistic, consumerist excess. This, then, is one sort of excess traditionally associated with music video: the excess of the advertisement, of consumption-centered pleasures.

Other writers take issue with Kaplan's alignment of music video with advertisement, but still see music video as an excessive form for its difference from Hollywood cinema. Carol Vernallis writes in her post-MTV book, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*, that "[i]n the 80s and 90s people knew what a music video was—a song set to memorable imagery, paid for by the record company to promote the song or musicians, and screened on cable. Now, however, with YouTube's cornucopia of clips, DIY aesthetics, and the new digital cinema's musical segments, the boundaries have been blurred" (182).¹²³ Nevertheless, Vernallis associates music video and other YouTube clips with what Angela Ndalians calls "a neo-baroque mannerist era" (27), describing its neo-baroque excesses in terms of "[a] surface style and hyper self-referentiality" (28). So even while Vernallis sees other possibilities for the music video beyond advertising and recognizes that the production of music videos is not necessarily all about a record label promoting a song or an album, she still sees in the music video's formal qualities a kind of neo-baroque excess.

Additionally, in Vernallis' earlier book about music video, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (2004), she discusses props in music video as "carry[ing] an

¹²³ Vernallis does later agree with "Thomas Frank's arguments about mass contemporary culture—no longer is there any outside space beyond advertising" (143). So it's not so much, for Vernallis, that music video is no longer associated with advertising; it's just that every art form is associated with advertising, music video included, whether we like it or not.

excess of meaning, almost as compensation for the absence of dialogue” (xiii). In another passage, later in *Experiencing Music Video*, she describes the dancers in Prince’s video for “Gett Off” as “mov[ing] in a state of sublime excess—they seem infused with a sense of play, humor, archness, and camp that carries them beyond whatever they might be doing at the moment” (248). In both of these passages, we get a sense of the music video as something wild, trying to make up for its difference from the more coherent visual narrative style of Hollywood cinema. In these passages, Vernallis describes music videos in such a way to make it seem that an illegibly massive amount of props, imbued with incredible importance, replace the legibility of dialogue, while dancers become so caught up, playfully, in the music, that they forget everything else, including narrative or any sort of discernible meaning.

In the case of both of Vernallis’ books, she’s moved away from understanding Classical Hollywood Cinema as the cinematic norm. (Kaplan’s book, released in 1987, considers Classical Hollywood Cinema the absolute standard, not yet noticing anything new or different taking hold through films such as *Wild Style* [1983, dir. Charlie Ahearn] or even *Footloose* [1984, dir. Herbert Ross].) Especially in the case of *Unruly Media*, we get a sense of music video existing amidst a swirl of films and other visual media, some of which emerge from both Hollywood and Bollywood. Indeed, Vernallis gives the impression that new cinema exists in a feedback loop with music video, each drawing from and influencing the others’ techniques. So, if in Vernallis’ earlier book, *Experiencing Music Video*, she separates the excessive incoherence of music video from the subtler narrative coherence of (classical) Hollywood cinema, by the time she writes *Unruly Media*, Vernallis begins to see the trends common to the music video—now dubbed “mannerist,” “neo-baroque,” “surface,” “hyper,” and “self-referential”—across many films and music videos. Her filmic examples—*Moulin Rouge!* (2001, dir. Baz Luhrmann), *Eternal*

Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004, dir. Michel Gondry), *Dil Se* (1998, dir. Mani Ratnam), and *Yuva* (2004, dir. Mani Ratnam)—are important for showing the prevalence in contemporary cinema of pop music and inventive editing.

Vernallis writes, for instance, in the introduction to her chapter on *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, that

Since the early 1990s critics have been complaining that films look like music videos, and indeed close study of this “low art” can help to explain contemporary film. The new visual elements (relying on close shots, wide-ranging camera movements, and rapid editing) have long been central to the music video genre because they illuminate musical form. Free-ranging camera movements like dollying, handheld, reframing, and crane shots reflect music’s flowing, processual nature; blocks of image highlight song structure; intense colorization illuminates features like a song’s harmony, sectional divisions, and timbre; visual motifs speak to musical ones; and editing-like effects such as strobing, flash frames, and superimpositions not only show off the song’s rhythmic strata but also function to switch among elements (narrative, dance, lyrics, hooks), letting none take the upper hand. Music videos foreground unpredictable teleology and ambiguous endings (94).

Vernallis gives us a lot to unpack here, listing numerous techniques that originated in music videos and now appear commonly in feature films (due, at least in part to, Vernallis goes on to say, “economics, production practices, and technological developments” [94]). She doesn’t say it here directly, but one could describe these techniques as excessive (even the way she lists them in one long paragraph suggests a sort of excess of audiovisual matter to peruse). Terms like “wide-ranging,” “rapid,” “free-ranging,” “intense,” and “flash frames” all gesture towards a surfeit of visual information, while her description of “switch[ing] among elements..., letting

none take the upper hand” suggests a kind of audiovisual chaos. Clearly, excess is central, in Vernallis’ view, to new digital media. So, even if Vernallis now sees connections between films and music videos that she didn’t acknowledge earlier, the matter to consider is still that of excess—an excess that, in Vernallis’ view, now bleeds over from music video to cinema (and back).

Vernallis also provides us with a sense of the negative way in which critics have tended to respond to those music video techniques (these critics have been “complaining,” she remarks) that now commonly appear in cinema, and part of her project does seem to be demonstrating the artistry of the new films and their “music video techniques” to use such a demonstration against critics’ complaints. Vernallis’ study of music video across multiple books and articles shows that she takes issue, too, with the classification of music video as a “low art,” a term that she sets aside in scare quotes to point up the ridiculousness of both the term itself and its application to music video. Vernallis takes up this categorization and critics’ complaints in the context of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, using an obviously “music video-esque” film to prove her points. First, she indicates through her list of techniques common to music video (quoted, at length, above) that her examination of the feedback loop between music video and cinema is centered upon these audiovisual techniques. A film like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is full of them: strobe effects, rapid editing, and intense colorization are central to its visual style. More importantly, pop music styles are central to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, with pop music producer Jon Brion (who has worked with Fiona Apple, Kanye West, and Frank Ocean, among many others) providing the film’s score; with an original song by Beck playing behind the film’s opening and closing credits; with ELO’s “Mr. Blue Sky” providing the soundtrack for the film’s dynamic trailer; with songs by artists ranging from The Polyphonic

Spree to The Willowz appearing in the film; and with references to The Clash and other musicians contained in the movie's dialogue. On top of this, and also central to Vernallis' argument, is the fact that the director of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Michel Gondry, got his start in music video. The carryover of excess from music video and pop music to cinema is quite clear, then, for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

Less central to Vernallis' reading of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, but worth mentioning here, is what she calls its "unpredictable teleology and ambiguous ending." Vernallis makes note of these but does not foreground them, in part, I assume, because of her emphasis at other parts of *Unruly Media* on music video as an artform to which narrative is not always central. She writes, for example, that "[m]usic video imagery, though it can have narrative elements, is often processually structured, which better reflects a song's own movement and keeps our focus on the music" (97). Her term "processually structured" refers to her reading of music video as possibly narrative but possibly not; it emphasizes the process of the song's unfolding and the way that the music video's visual cues illustrate this unfolding. In Vernallis' view, sometimes this unfolding can be read as a narrative, sometimes it cannot. She sees some reflection of music video's processual structure in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (she writes of "the extensive cross-cutting among Stan and Mary's love affair, Patrick and Clem's courtship, and Joel's memories" [97]), but this is tangential to her examination of the film. The film's visual techniques and musicality take center stage, building a bridge for excess from music video to cinema.

It's important to describe Vernallis' argument at length because of its ability to indicate what much of the scholarship on music video and excess looks like. She makes a compelling point when she notes that many films now look like music videos, and Vernallis' focus on

particular audiovisual techniques is useful for understanding exactly why certain resemblances occur. It also makes sense to talk about these resemblances in terms of a certain sort of neo-baroque excess, with musical and visual styles combining in surprising, disorienting, stimulating, intricate patterns in much contemporary pop music, contemporary music video, and contemporary cinema. Additionally, her emphasis on “processual structure” over narrative allows her to examine music video as a whole, because, indeed, many music videos do not have narratives at all, and, in Vernallis’ view, music video’s excess goes beyond any traditional view of narrative—and in the context of the moving image media, the unspoken narrative standard is still Classical Hollywood Cinema—in the first place.

However, taking “excess” as a key term for understanding music videos and their relation to cinema, I would like to consider several questions that Vernallis and other music video scholars do not. First, there’s the matter of *narrative*. We’ve seen from Kaplan and Vernallis that a key reason for understanding music video as excessive has to do with its difference from the narrative patterns of Classical Hollywood Cinema (and those contemporary films that still, to some degree, follow those patterns). However, we also get a sense from both Kaplan and Vernallis that music videos *can* have narratives. If we isolate these narrative music videos, we find—as mentioned in previous chapters—that many kinds of narrative patterns and structures exist. So I suggest, then, one further isolation, this one of those videos with ambiguous narratives centered around certain indelible, question-eliciting images—what I’m calling *art music videos*. These isolations do detract from our ability to refer, as both Kaplan and Vernallis do, to music video as a whole, as something cohesive enough to study in a broad sense, but this detraction is a purposeful one: too often, prolonged studies of music videos are prolonged studies of The Music Video, writ large, and, while this can be important sometimes, it is equally important to

recognize that an astonishingly diverse array of music videos exist. It is useful to organize this diverse array, to isolate certain categories or genres of music video, in order to both give a more specific sense of these types and to complicate and inform the bigger picture painted by writers like Vernallis.

A large part of this bigger picture that I want to both complicate and inform has to do with excess understood in terms of music video's difference from Classical Hollywood Cinema. When Kaplan describes this difference, she sees an intensification in music video of the art of advertising and marketing. If music video is new, in Kaplan's view, it's new for its putting ads into hyperdrive, making promotion and consumption the center of audiovisual existence. Vernallis, on the other hand, does tend to see music video as totally new or at least as the engine for wild audiovisual evolution, for a movement from staid Classical Hollywood Cinema to unruly contemporary media existing across cinema and other screens. Neither writer provides a sense of historical precedents for music video's style beyond advertising.

However, since a major part of music video's excessive nature is its difference from Classical Hollywood Cinema, and since this can include its construction of other sorts of narratives (non-Hollywood narratives), I suggest we look to art cinema as a historical precedent for certain kinds of music videos (which, as I've noted above, I'm calling *art music videos*, as a way of referring to art cinema past and present) and as a way of better understanding these music videos' narratives. Therefore, beyond narrative, there's also the question, for excess in music video, of *history* or *precedent*. This is not to say that Vernallis has it wrong in presenting her view that the feedback loop between cinema and music video begins with movies lifting audiovisual techniques from music videos. In other words, I'm not arguing here that music video began with art cinema. Instead, I'm arguing that a feedback loop has always existed between

certain sorts of music video and cinema and has moved, like most loops do, in both directions at once, to the point where it's difficult to pinpoint either music video or cinema as the origin point.¹²⁴

I also want to highlight here that my focus on both narrative and precedent does not preclude audiovisual technique, which is central to understanding both the construction of narrative and the relation of past media with current media. For this reason, in the close readings that follow, I will carefully refer to specific audiovisual techniques deployed by both films and music videos. At the same time, I argue that interrelations among music video and movies are not limited to obvious digital editing and cinematographic techniques or to what Vernallis, drawing on Ndaliansis, calls “surface style.” A high-definition digital camera, digital editing

¹²⁴ One writer who does take up the issue of historical precedent and narrative is Andrew Goodwin, in his 1992 book, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*. Building on Adorno's scholarship about pop music, Goodwin suggests that music video's most important antecedent—and the most important factor in understanding music video narrative—is pop music itself. Goodwin suggests that those arguments considering music video to be avant-garde for its difference from Classical Hollywood Cinema (and other realist texts) only do so because they don't recognize the “stability and coherence” (84) in pop songs themselves, with their recognizable structures (what Adorno calls “part interchangeability” [78]) that find resolution in the music itself. While Goodwin's comments are useful and more strongly based in history than Kaplan's or Vernallis', they are limited in two major ways. First, his comments have their roots in an earlier moment in music video history, when it was easier to claim that all music videos were pop music videos for pop songs (and thus intended to sell as many records as possible). In the contemporary moment, this is decidedly not true: music videos exist for many different kinds of music, some of it characterized by structures quite different from the traditional pop song (songs without lyrics, for instance, or hip-hop “freestyle” videos that often feature a rap artist rhyming for as long as they wish over a continuing beat); additionally, it's not uncommon for a music video to not even feature a purchasable song (the song might be on a mixtape you can download for free, for instance, or it might be a song that exists only in music video form, unavailable on any album or for-pay streaming service). The music video for “Youth,” discussed below, certainly does not have a traditional verse-hook-verse-hook-bridge-hook structure. Furthermore, when Goodwin describes how music videos feature the artists themselves (as in his description of the music video for Suzanne Vega's “Luka”), he also remains in this earlier moment in music video history, when it seemed necessary for music videos to include images of the artist performing or lip-syncing. These images, Goodwin argues, reinforced the importance of the music and lyrics (of what Goodwin calls the “direct address to the listener/viewer in which the personality of the storyteller usually overwhelms characterization within the story”) to the music video's structure (76). While this is still common now, it's not nearly as common as before (and completely absent from the music video for “Youth,” described below). Second, Goodwin's argument tends to simplify the relation of a song's aural structure and its corresponding music video's visual structure, as if a music video's visuals arise quite organically—with a little guidance from MTV's precursors, like variety shows and talk shows that also feature an artist performing directly to a camera—from the music. This overlooks the more experimental or playful aspects of music video, which perhaps became more obvious in the late 1990s with the unconventional music videos of Michel Gondry, Jonathan Glazer, and Spike Jonze, videos obviously trying to imagine new possibilities in putting image with song.

software, and the high-definition digital streaming that has since developed with it are capable of allowing for many different sorts of techniques, and a digital art music video and a digital art film may use vastly different sets of techniques but still share similarities that are absolutely central to our understanding of possible meanings in the two texts and of what it means for a film or music video to be excessive.

The questions I'm raising to build on Kaplan's and Vernallis' concerns are the following: What happens when we move narrative away from the periphery and allow it to act as a central concern, isolating those music videos that contain certain kinds of narratives as a distinct genre of music video (the art music video)? What sorts of similarities across art cinema and art music video narratives do we find? How do these narratives relate to matters of excess, and what sorts of striking similarities exist across films and music videos that do not necessarily contain many or any of the flashy techniques that Vernallis highlights?

I believe these questions are absolutely central for finding less obvious but equally important intersections between cinema and music video. Part of the process of finding these intersections is, first, as I suggest above, to stop pretending that either cinema or music video is only one thing—or, more to the point, that digital/digitized cinema or digital/digitized music video is only one thing. There are key historical patterns to follow along certain *types* of videos and films and their move towards the digital—and these historical patterns help us see the important intersections to which I've referred above. One way, of course, to classify types of texts is through their particular sorts of narratives, and while critics have made innumerable attempts to come up with various sorts of narrative-based classifications for cinema, attempts to do this for music video have been few, probably because most music video critics tend, Kaplan- and Vernallis-like, to emphasize music video's difference from a) Classical Hollywood Cinema,

and b) narrative artforms in general. In fact, several critics (e.g., Kaplan, Vernallis, Arild Fetveit¹²⁵) have suggested that the source of music video's power and seeming newness has something to do with its anti-narrative features and, by extension, its pro-excess features.¹²⁶

But I argue that narrative is absolutely central to many music videos as well as to their power, seeming newness, and difference from Classical Hollywood Cinema (and other mainstream cinema). I also argue that many of these striking narrative music videos are indebted to another narrative cinema, existing in distinction from Classical Hollywood conventions—namely, art cinema. Art cinema is “altogether different,” as per Bordwell, “from *Rio Bravo* on the one hand and *Mothlight* on the other” (94), and my argument is that a select group of narrative music videos fall into a similar in-between zone—between Hollywood-style narrative and avant-garde non-narrative—and can rightly be labeled “art music videos.”

We've seen already that, historically, music video and excess have gone hand in hand, with critics describing music video as an excessive form. We've seen music video's excessiveness understood as part of a new stream of audiovisual advertising (in Kaplan's *Rocking Around the Clock*); as a complete divorce from narrative cinema (in *Rocking Around the*

¹²⁵ In “Mutable Temporality in and Beyond the Music Video [2011],” Fetveit argues for the importance of the presence of “an aesthetic of post-production” in contemporary music video, whereby various elements of the image are slowed up or sped down *after* filming in order to connect music to visuals in surprising, dynamic ways. In his discussion of this aesthetic, he ignores narrative completely, emphasizing instead “a circulation of energies and impulses that seem as much human as machinic, as emanating from the ‘shape-shifting’ plasma in play” (177). Furthermore, he then goes on to claim that one of the reasons that cinema has not cultivated such an aesthetic is “[t]he realism of storytelling” that dominates cinema, as if certain narrative forms actively restrain more important and interesting visual developments.

¹²⁶ For other critics, like Marsha Kinder in “Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology and Dream,” the consumerist aspects of music video completely overwhelm anything interesting that music video accomplishes. So while Kinder does use a whole section of her piece to describe “Videos Dominated by Narrative” (a move quite different from Kaplan's in that it emphasizes the importance of narrative, but quite similar to Kaplan's in that it continues to emphasize music video's function as advertisement) as one of three main types, along with “Videos Dominated by Performance” and “Videos Dominated by Dreamlike Visuals,” she sees these as indicative of “commercial interests” expanding their bounds to include unconscious thought. Narrative videos, for Kinder, offer easily remembered stories and attractive fantasies in order to better exploit the desires of impressionable consumers.

Clock and Vernallis' *Experiencing Music Video*); and also as being conducive to appearing in a certain kind of narrative film (in Vernallis' *Unruly Media*). So to better understand the art music video, as a narrative art form, we must see how it relates to the question of excess.

The predecessor (as well as the co-existing companion) to the art music video is the art film, and the art film, too, has some important connections, historically, to matters of excess. These important connections, however, have often been overlooked, the art film often described in terms of its careful restraint and meticulous auteurist construction,¹²⁷ the opposite of the overwhelming audiovisual hyperactivity critics usually see in music video. Yet if we examine several key essays that take up the matter of filmic excess, we see that many art films fit into various definitions of excess and that a unique sort of excess characterizes art films.

In this chapter, I will examine several of these key pieces (centrally, Kristin Thompson's "The Concept of Cinematic Excess" and Linda Williams' "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess") in order to better understand the connections among art cinema, art music video, narrative, and excess. I will argue that it is only through an understanding of audiovisual excess that is rooted in vertical or deepened narrative—a kind of narrative that exists as both textual feature and reading strategy—that art films and art music videos can rightly be labeled excessive. Moreover, I will argue that it is this particular understanding of excess that unites art cinema

¹²⁷ Tom Ryall, for instance, in fact states that the term "art cinema" itself already "implic[s]...such European *auteurs* as Michelangelo Antonioni..., Federico Fellini..., Jean-Luc Godard..., and Ingmar Bergman" (115). He goes on to say that, "unlike the authorial anonymity associated with mainstream filmmaking, art films are assumed to possess a strong, identifiable authorial presence" (119). Ryall opposes entertaining, action-packed films to art films, which expertly display the themes and ideas placed in the film by a specific artist. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith also describes authorship as a central feature in art cinema, at least since the 1960s, and notes that, "[i]n Europe, where they had long enjoyed greater control of their work and more legal protection, directors took advantage of the new audience to present films which were intellectually challenging as well as shocking" (569). And while Nowell-Smith goes to great lengths to describe art cinema as heterogenous, enveloping many different sorts of films on a spectrum going from wildly experimental to almost completely conventional, he does state that art films "were...dependent...on the existence of a public that was eager for novelty and tolerant of occasional moments of boredom" (570). This reference to the existence of boredom in art cinema represents the common characterization of art films as sleepy or introspective rather than excessive (a term that often connotes quick movement and excitement).

with art music video, in a way that goes beyond shared use of certain kinds of music or certain flashy, traditionally excessive audiovisual techniques.¹²⁸ To this end, I will use as key examples two very different works of art: the music video for Ben Khan’s “Youth” (2014, dir. BRTHR) and the Raúl Ruiz-directed feature-length film, *Mysteries of Lisbon* (2010). In fact, it is the magnitude of their surface differences—one about four minutes long, the other over four hours long; one a pop music video, the other a pop-music-free piece of endurance cinema—that will be crucial to my arguing for a similarity of excess across art music video and (a redefined) art cinema.

5.1 CONCEPTIONS OF EXCESS IN FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES

Several key essays discuss the matter of excess in a film studies context. First, Kristin Thompson’s “The Concept of Cinematic Excess,” originally published in 1977, continues to be a central essay for understanding the relation of excess to cinema and to other media. As recently as 2010, published essays with visual excess as a central concern cite Thompson’s piece as a major reference point. Although much about moving image excess has since been published, Thompson’s piece is still powerful for its suggestion of purely audiovisual bedazzlement or excess in each film that exists beyond a film’s contained/containing systems of meaning (including those contained/containing systems of meaning that relate to the film’s narrative and

¹²⁸As discussed above, Vernallis chooses *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* as central to her argument, a film one could label as an art film, under my redefinition of that category, for its emphasis upon ambiguous narratives and mysterious, open images. But it’s also a choice that, for the purposes of my study, is too obvious—it’s a film that very openly draws from music video style. Furthermore, Vernallis does not use *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* in such a way as to draw attention to its context in the history of art cinema: more than anything, for Vernallis, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a contemporary part-independent, part- Hollywood-appropriated film that seems strikingly different—visually, musically, and narratively—from Classical Hollywood Cinema.

themes). In the essay, Thompson describes a way of viewing and writing about cinema that goes beyond understanding a film's various elements as motivated by the film's narrative. According to Thompson, one should glory in a film's formal play—enjoying its repetitions, redundancies, sharp edges, colorful costumes—rather than try to understand every element as placed there purposely by a filmmaker for narrative/thematic purposes. While it's possible, according to Thompson, to attempt to fit every element into the box of narrative, such a process requires so many mental gymnastics that it becomes silly. 'You're just trying too hard,' Thompson rebukes viewers who can only understand a film in terms of its story: "Indeed, any stylistic disjunction may lead the spectator into an awareness of excess—unless he/she strives too hard to recuperate them" (60).

Part of what Thompson is doing is pushing against the mode of viewing seemingly enforced by Classical Hollywood Cinema, which she (and Kaplan and Vernallis along with her) sees as primarily narrative-based. Her concept of cinematic excess is, first and foremost, a reading strategy, an alternative system through which one can view and analyze films: "[excess] offers a potential for avoiding the traditional, conventionalized views of what film structure and narrative should be—views which fit in perfectly with the methods of film-making employed in the classical commercial narrative cinema" (62). Thompson points to education as necessary for the shift from a narrative-centric understanding of cinema to an excess-centric understanding: "[t]o a large extent, the spectator's ability to notice excess is dependent upon his/her training in viewing films" (57). It's only those enlightened cinema viewers who can watch a film in the alternative fashion Thompson presents, even if "we are always guided by our...cultural tradition" (63).

It's noteworthy that Thompson associates narrative here with a sort of low-culture closed-mindedness. Her key example, Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1944), confirms this. Thompson implies that, if one only knew more about the world and art, filmgoers would know better than to try to perceive a story where there's so much other pleasure and freedom to be had. If the viewer embraces excess (which necessarily goes along with embracing a wider range of films—non-Western, experimental, etc.), she “is no longer constrained by conventions of reading to find a meaning or theme within the work as the solution to a sort of puzzle which has a right answer. Instead, the work becomes a perceptual field of structures which the viewer is free to study at length, going beyond the strictly functional aspects” (63).

But Thompson's view of narrative here, loosely based on the writings of Russian Formalists, is characterized by the assumption that narrative is little more than a cause-effect chain of events and a narrative's thematics as an equation to be solved. For her argument to work, narrative must be understood as a something definite, concrete, intentional, and exact—in other words, not very much fun at all. At the same time, her version of excess cannot let go of narrative entirely. If at one point she notes that “[e]xcess is not only counternarrative; it is also counter-unity” (57), she finds herself later writing about *Ivan the Terrible*'s “redundancy” that it “does not advance the narrative in every case; rather it tends to expand the narrative ‘vertically’” (59). Here, she signals that narratives have a depth or density that expands beyond any notion of motivation or cause and effect, arguing that narratives have vertical dimension: they are not merely horizontal paths through a three-act structure.

Angela Ndalianis, in her essay, “The Frenzy of the Visible: Spectacle and Motion in the Era of the Digital,” builds upon Thompson's essay by writing about the pleasure of the digital effects in *The Matrix* (1999). She, like Thompson, describes excess as a reading strategy of

playfulness whose relation to a film's narrative is loose or tentative, but, unlike Thompson, tends to understand digital effects as a textual feature crucial to provoking this sort of excessive reading. Ndalians writes, after quoting from William Paul's book, *Laughing Screaming* (1994), that Paul "calls for a need to open up interpretation and take into account the fact that sometimes other elements beyond the ideological, for example, may also be at work in cinematic reception, elements that involve a more rudimentary sense of play and interaction." Scholars in literary and film studies have traditionally labeled such "other" elements "excess," that which exists beyond narrative and beyond any stable systems of meaning.

However, Ndalians notes at the beginning of her piece that cinema both historically and in the present represents "a visual culture that moved beyond a purely literary form of storytelling in order to deliver its cinematic narrative to the audience." This "narrative" bit is quite important, because it suggests its centrality even in those films, like *The Matrix*, that are sometimes relegated to the purely spectacular or the purely excessive. The implication, in Ndalians' piece, is that the viewer sees the lightning-speed special effects in *The Matrix*—is even caught up in these effects—as part of a process of being immersed in the film's narrative and the process of interpreting that narrative (particularly in a film with a complicated narrative like *The Matrix*). Building upon Ndalians' piece, it seems that, in *The Matrix*, we see both Neo and the viewer sharing a position of confusion. Viewers ask, because the narrative encourages it, "What is possible, and how is it possible?" The speed of the visual effects in the film becomes part of this process of questioning: "How is this quickness possible in this narrative world?" This is, moreover, a pleasurable, even "playful" questioning process, highlighting that sense of "play and interaction" to which Paul refers, as viewers attempt to piece together the world of the film and the possible narrative developments that can take place in it. So, Ndalians implies, that

which provokes an excessive reading—digital effects in a Hollywood film, not training in viewing alternative cinemas, as Thompson suggests—necessarily leads to questions about narrative, too, perhaps even a Thompson-esque “vertical dimension,” as the audience attempts to understand the various elements of *The Matrix*’s narrative world.

Writing, on another end of the excess spectrum, about what some might consider an art horror film (*Trouble Every Day* [2001, dir. Claire Denis]), Saige Walton also takes up the matter of excess as it relates to the baroque and the Deleuzian notion of the fold. Like Ndaljianis and Thompson, Walton sees excess—not computer effects, like in *The Matrix*, but the blood, skin, and texture that dominate *Trouble Every Day*—as, in some sense, going beyond narrative. Walton writes, “In *Trouble Every Day*, Denis’ aesthetics are loosened from the demands of plot, characterization and causality, so as to develop as a font of sensuous meaning in their own right.” This is, in some sense, the auteurist equivalent of what Thompson describes in her piece on cinematic excess, but instead of excess arising as a reading strategy or as result of digital effects, as it does in Thompson’s and Ndaljianis’ work, respectively, it arises here as a technique that appears in the film as a result of the work of the auteur. That is, Denis draws special attention to the excess of the film by crafting for it an aesthetic of excess.

But Walton, like Thompson and Ndaljianis, can’t quite totally divorce this aesthetic from the film’s narrative. Taking issue with writers like Martine Beugnet and Laura Marks, who tend to emphasize total abstraction or even illegibility, Walton writes that “it is by way of the neo-baroque that I articulate a cinema of sensation that need not be divorced from figuration, genre or *narrative*” (italics mine). And, digging deeper into Walton’s essay via the Deleuze text from which she heavily quotes, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, we find plenty of support for this statement. For, in Walton’s words, “Deleuze discusses the baroque as an organization of the

world along two vectors. This organization is what the philosopher describes as the external ‘pleats of matter’ and the inner ‘folds in the soul.’” Walton uses this dichotomy to describe a connection between filmic surface and affective depth, but it can also be used to expand upon Thompson’s notion of narrative’s verticality. There is indeed the excessive surface, but there is also an excessive depth, the two united, in Leibniz’s terms, as the *monad*, which Walton describes as expressing “a unique but interconnected point-of-view on an infinite world.”

Walton focuses on the affective element of this depth, but her essay implies the continued importance of narrative for provoking and sustaining the film’s affective depth. She describes “[a] thickening affective atmosphere of anxiety and anticipation envelop[ing] the film, as ‘one [has] a pervasive sense of [...] something about to happen,’” and narrative is necessary for developing this sort of atmosphere of tense waiting, as well as the bursts of violence that follow from it. Therefore, she returns to specific characters throughout her essay, remarking upon the importance, in one scene, of the visibility of “Shane’s open and bleeding mouth, as it emerges into view directly after his killing and mauling of Christelle.” This is not some random mouth opening, bleeding: it belongs to a character, to Shane; the body he has ripped apart belongs to Christelle. Moreover, these belong to the characters as complex beings—even beings with folded souls, compelled to eat flesh for reasons ultimately unknown. The folds of the film—containing, beyond the surface, the narrative, the characters, and the affect within and emanating from them—are, in Deleuze’s words, “always full.” They deepen, it would seem, rather than go beyond, narrative.

Tied to Walton’s piece in its examination of the body, horror, and the importance of generic tropes more generally, Linda Williams’ “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess” is one of the most famous essays about excess in the context of film and media studies—and a

necessary complication to Thompson's view of excess. Williams' essay was published in 1991 (over ten years before Walton's essay, which is in many ways indebted to Williams' work) and acted as a necessary re-reading of three genres usually reviled by critics as anti-intellectual or over-emphatic upon bodily instead of intellectual concerns: horror, pornography, and melodrama. The body and its excesses—its fluids and discharges—are central, Williams argues, to the pleasures of these genres and their narratives. Unlike Kaplan or Vernallis or Thompson or Ndalians or Walton, Williams understands excess not as that which exceeds narrative in some sense but rather as an important element of narratives within certain genres and of audience reactions to those genres. In fact, building upon a Rick Altman essay, "Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today," Williams notes that "both genre study and the study of the somewhat more nebulous category of melodrama have long been hampered by assumptions about the classical nature of the dominant narrative to which melodrama and some individual genres have been opposed" (160). The implication here is that an understanding of film narrative in Classical Hollywood Cinema terms severely limits genre study by not realizing that other kinds of narrative exist. Williams quotes Altman directly: "Unmotivated events, rhythmic montage, highlighted parallelism, overlong spectacles—these are the excesses in the classical narrative system that alert us to the existence of a competing logic, a second voice" (160).

Williams is utilizing Altman here to highlight many of the features of the excessive bodily genres that interest her: horror, pornography, and melodrama. Although she's particularly interested in processes of viewer identification and response—especially because viewers are usually considered *overinvolved* in these genres, caught up *too much* in the action on screen—her analysis of each of these genres results in many useful observations for thinking about narrative's relation to excess. In horror films, Williams argues, the violence aimed at female

characters and the resulting rivers of blood and gore result in a physical jolting and shuddering for the sadomasochistic viewer; in pornography (sadistic porn in particular), naked bodies having sex and visions of orgasms and ejaculation result in sexual arousal and perhaps ejaculation on the part of sadistic audience members; and, in melodrama, weeping and agony on the part of female characters in the film results in floods of tears and sobbing for the masochistic audience. For each genre, the pattern is clear: it's elements of their narratives and the identification of audience members with characters in these narratives that unleash these dramatic bodily reactions. Williams describes here a sort of reading strategy but one that emphasizes the physical over the intellectual and that seems physically forced upon viewers rather than willfully decided by viewers as they watch the film.

Williams' piece is the only one of the four I've discussed here that does not attempt or ever imply an understanding of excess that necessarily exceeds narrative. For the films Williams examines, narrative both includes and incites excess. Although the excess she describes emphasizes bodily aspects, her position is still very useful for deepening our understanding of art cinema and art music video for their placing together, hand-in-hand, of narrative and excess. We see in Williams that narrative can both have excess as a textual feature and explosively provoke excessive responses or readings that key into the uncontained or the uncontainable; while she emphasizes bodily excess in her essay, it also opens up possibilities for a similar kind of intellectual excess, already hinted at in Thompson and Ndalians and Walton through their descriptions of excess as reading strategy and their gesturing towards a vertical element of narrative.

The idea of excess as reading strategy (especially as a reading strategy prompted by certain kinds of films or certain elements of films) and the idea of narrative's vertical element

relate closely to many concepts central to art cinema. The relation of each of the four essays I've examined above to art cinema differs from piece to piece, and although none of the essays mention it directly, each essay informs our understanding of the relation between excess and art cinema. Walton dances around the topic of art cinema, clearly figuring the auteur, such a central figure to art cinema discourse (see footnote 5), as an incredibly significant shaping influence in her examination of Denis' influence on the excess of *Trouble Every Day*. Thompson's choice of film similarly brings us into a cinephilic realm of art cinema or quasi-art cinema (even if, in this case, it's Russian cinema and not European art cinema that forms Thompson's focus), but Thompson attempts to bypass the question of the auteur, since it, too, is a kind of contained or containing system of meaning. On the other hand, her gesture towards the importance of education—of exposure to other sorts of cinemas—as integral to developing new kinds of reading strategies opens up the possibility of art cinema acting as one kind of gateway to the sort of excessive readings she describes. Ndalians' choice of film, *The Matrix*, would seem to be completely outside the realm of art cinema. However, first of all, digital effects are not isolated to big-budget Hollywood films, and if it is digital effects that do act as a kind of trigger to excessive readings, then Ndalians' argument can work for certain strands of art cinema, too. Secondly, *The Matrix*'s disorientation of viewers and its use of digital effects does encourage a sort of questioning and (re)thinking as one watches the film, similar to the kind of disorientation and questioning prompted by art cinema.

This disorientation that leads to the viewer questioning the narrative, wondering about the world in which the film occurs, is central to art cinema. Although *The Matrix* offers a sort of final, correct answer to this questioning, while art cinema (at least as I understand and redefine it in chapter one) never does, disorientation is a starting point for considering the vertical

dimension of narrative in the context of art cinema. As I've stated elsewhere, I redefine art cinema to place ambiguous narratives centered around certain indelible, question-eliciting images at its center. These questions raised do not have answers; instead, they guide viewers to reconsider and rethink the film under consideration, whether they are currently rewatching the film or simply remembering it. This thinking moves, necessarily, beyond the excessive surface to a film's excessive depth and beyond the horizontal to the vertical. It is a movement deeper into a film.

As I've described above, Thompson, Ndaliansis, and Walton all gesture towards this vertical element, to excessive depth beyond excessive surface. Although Thompson provides the phrase "expand the narrative 'vertically,'" her essay does the least to explore what this means; she references this sort of expansion only in passing. For Ndaliansis, a deepening of narrative has to do with dizzying new digital effects and the questions they provoke. For Walton, it's Deleuze's notion of the fold, containing within it incredible fullness, that allows for excessive depth. Art cinema, by emphasizing (or, following Williams, *overemphasizing*) mystery and uncertainty, forces a consideration of the vertical, of the fold, of fullness, of depth. This is not to say that excessive readings—now (following Thompson, Ndaliansis, and Walton) understanding "excessive readings" to necessarily indicate a vertical dimension—are only possible with and for art films; rather, as all three writers indicate, excessive readings are possible for many different kinds of films (perhaps, if we agree with Thompson, for all films). Instead, this is to say that this sort of excess is central to art films, their construction, and the readings they provoke.

I began this chapter by examining Kaplan and Vernallis and their understanding of music video excess which emphasized that which goes beyond a certain conception of narrative—Classical Hollywood Cinema—considered to be the norm. Kaplan emphasizes the non-narrative,

while Vernallis focuses on “processual structures” that can include certain kinds narrative but don’t have to. The similarity of music television to advertising takes center stage for Kaplan’s vision of music video excess while Vernallis, by the time she writes *Unruly Media* in 2013, puts certain audiovisual techniques (understood as common to many music videos and movies but arising from music video initially) in the foreground of understanding of excess. I then looked into an older set of questions about audiovisual excess, this set in relation to cinema instead of music video, in order to place Kaplan’s and Vernallis’ ideas about music video excess into a broader context. I emphasized, with Thompson and—implicitly expanding on her ideas—with Ndalians and Walton, that each author initially positioned excess on the side of the non-narrative, the anti-narrative, or the counter-narrative, since narrative is a system of meaning and excess somehow exists beyond or outside of such systems. At the same time, however, I noticed that each writer could not entirely dissociate narrative from excess and ended up negotiating the problem of narrative excess through the idea of a vertical element to narrative, excessive not on the surface but in depth. Since none of these writers make this vertical narrative element the main focus in their conceptions of excess and since a non-Classical Hollywood narrative exists in art cinema and art music video that seems to emphasize exactly the sort of vertical narrative or excessive depth that Thompson, Ndalians, and Walton can’t help but mention, it’s important to more fully explain the idea of narrative’s vertical dimension by examining the feedback loop between art cinema and art music video and specific examples that exist within that loop.

However, even if we’re able to point out certain connections between art cinema and the excess that Thompson, Walton, and Ndalians describe, all three writers still associate excess with play, while the traditional understanding of art cinema is to see viewing it as a sort of tedious chore. Even the description above of art cinema as overemphasizing mystery and

uncertainty may make art cinema seem pretentious rather than entertaining. Williams' take on excess helps move us beyond this idea. Traditionally, art cinema has been seen on the polar opposite end of the bodily genre spectrum examined in Williams' piece: art cinema has usually been seen as a thinking cinema, a mind genre as opposed to a body genre. But there are two problems with this view. First, art cinema often works within particular genres (Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, giving Claude Chabrol as an example, notes that, even in the art cinema boom of the 1960s, "[s]ome directors...moved increasingly towards the genre film [567]), sometimes deconstructing them but sometimes involving viewers in those very same bodily agonies and ecstasies as horror (as *Trouble Every Day*, above, indicates), melodrama, and pornography. Sobbing, shuddering in fear, and sexual arousal can occur in response to art films ranging from *Walkabout* (1971, dir. Nicolas Roeg) to *Norte, the End of History* (2013, dir. Lav Diaz) to *Morvern Callar* (2002, dir. Lynne Ramsay) to many others. In fact, some art films—most famously Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1953)—have been marketed towards audiences for their scandalous, titillating approach to sexuality.¹²⁹ Additionally, the labeling of melodrama, horror, and pornography as body genres does not preclude their also provoking thought, so both art cinema and body genres act as testament to the ridiculousness of a Cartesian approach to film studies, whereby certain movies *only* make one think or *only* elicit a physical response.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith describes how "the popular appeal of the New Wave and associated cinemas was...based less on their properties as 'Art' than on features such as their openness to a variety of experiences and (compared with mainstream British and American cinema, still mired in restrictive censorship codes) their sexual frankness" (567).

¹³⁰ This understanding also governs Masha Salazkina's understanding of Eisenstein's filmmaking practices in her book, *In Excess: Sergei Eisenstein's Mexico*. For Salazkina, the baroque in Eisenstein's films provokes a response from both the intellect and the senses; it does not make sense, in her view, to separate the two. Although her focus is on Eisenstein's *¡Que Viva Mexico!*, this claim is especially provocative for Thompson's claims about *Ivan the Terrible*, as it suggests that while there may be purely visual, sensual excess in the film, there is also intellectual excess.

Second, critics have not written nearly enough about art cinema as a cinema of excess that audiences (and many critics) have derided for similar reasons to their derision of body genres. That is, instead of art cinema eliciting a physically excessive response on the part of film viewers, art cinema elicits an *intellectually* excessive response on the part of film viewers. Art films are films of too much thought, of a kind of cerebral excess, especially because they provide no final answers. Many of my own students and friends, as well as those critics who deride art cinema for being boring or for having merely limited appeal, tend to see art films as involving too much mental activity, from having to read subtitles to trying to figure out how various scenes go together to understanding what the ending means. Art cinema may (sometimes) inhabit a different plane than body genres do, but it can provoke the same sort of derision as those genres from critics and viewers, who denounce art films as *art* (pronounced in a British accent) films and understand them as somehow less important for that reason. Yet here, too, a pattern similar to the one Williams describes is clear (wherein excessive narrative features prompt excessive readings): it's elements of art cinema's narratives (that they're confusing or slow) and the identification of audience members with characters---or a *lack of* identification with the characters---in these narratives that unleash derision or simply boredom on the part of audience members. At the same time, it's those narrative elements of art films that provoke exactly those cerebral (as well as emotional and physical) reactions I've described above. Those who love art cinema can't stop thinking about it: How *did* that shot relate to the rest of the narrative? What *did* that ending mean?

This has quite an interesting effect for art music video, since music video is usually understood as being a "low" genre alongside the body genres Williams discusses. Art music videos go against this grain, provoking the same kind of excessively cerebral response on the

part of viewers and forcing an unlimited number of questions on their part that art cinema does. At the same time, many of their elements make them more approachable than feature-length art films: their (often) short running time; the presence (sometimes) of popular, accessible music genres or popular songs; the presence (sometimes) of celebrity musicians. Art music videos, like body genres, feature what critics generally consider to be excess, but in their case the excess is too much visual information in a short runtime as well as rhythmic and lyrical patterns that are too loud, too trite, and perhaps too likely to provoke toe-tapping, head-nodding, and dancing on the part of viewers. On the other hand, like art cinema, they feature narratives that are too confusing or require “too much” thinking.

Art music video sits in a unique and uniquely marginalized space: relegated to low-art status for being music video, relegated to “over-artsy” status for being a kind of art cinema. This is important because it allows both the formation of a new possible category—that of the art music video itself, in a genre, music video, usually categorized solely in relation to music genre—and the rethinking of “art” as an adjective for cinema and other media. It also complicates the interrelation of body, mind, and media, troubling simplifying categorizations of “high” and “low,” “enriching” and “escapist.” We have seen, from Thompson, Williams, Ndalianis, and Walton, that one can understand visual excess as a reading strategy—a set of mental, physical, or affective responses to that which is on screen—or as a textual element—something that appears on screen either from a conscious decision by filmmakers or from a sort of accident, appearing on screen regardless of or even in spite of the filmmakers’ efforts—or as a combination of the two. While each of these writers emphasizes certain zones within these possibilities—for Thompson, excess is a reading strategy, mental but not intellectual; for Williams, it’s both a textual feature and a reading strategy, physical and affective; for Ndalianis,

excess is prompted by a textual feature that leads to perceptual play; and, for Walton, it's a textual feature, placed there by the auteur, that provokes an affective, tactile response—my understanding of excess negotiates all of these zones, seeing it as existing in a space between reading strategy and textual feature that taps into mental/intellectual, physical, affective responses and arises both because of filmmakers, responsible for producing and organizing the images on screen, and in a way that exceeds their control (it is still excess, after all).

What I add to this discussion of excess, however, is an emphasis upon narrative. Although each writer mentions narrative, none emphasizes it as absolutely central to excess, not even within certain contexts. My argument here is that the excesses of art cinema and art music video have narrative at their core, a particular sort of narrative that emphasizes ambiguity, irresolution, and lasting mystery. The excesses of art cinema and art music video are not the only kind of excess; but excess is absolutely central for understanding art cinema and art music video, as well as their singular importance as thought-provoking, unsettling categories. I'm choosing to emphasize the narrative aspects of excess because of the centrality of (ambiguous) narrative to art cinema and the tendency of critics to overlook narrative aspects of art cinema (caught up, usually, in the equation of narrative with an idea of Classical Hollywood Narrative as rigid and limiting) in favor of auteurist or stylistic ones. The goal here is not to divorce filmmakers and visual style from art cinema and art music video excess but rather to emphasize the importance of narrative to the excess present in these works of art.

It is instructive, now, to look at two key examples, one of art music video excess (the music video for Ben Khan's "Youth" [2014, dir. BRTHR]), one of art cinema excess (*Mysteries of Lisbon* [2010, dir. Raúl Ruiz]). The excess of each, I will argue, has narrative at its core; both aggressively prompt viewers, through their textual features, to consider and reconsider their

mysterious, ambiguous narratives. This kind of consideration and questioning allows a kind of vertical expansion for their narratives, clueing viewers in to their excessive depth (their excessive surfaces offering merely a glimpse of their stories' implications). For both texts (*Mysteries of Lisbon* and "Youth"), this vertical expansion provides for us a fuller understanding of each text, individually; of the two texts' thematic interrelation and of the feedback loop between music video and cinema excess more generally; and of the connection between excessive texts and lived realities.

5.2 EXCESS IN ART MUSIC VIDEO: "YOUTH"

Beginning with a high-definition, slow-zoom long shot of waves crashing against a series of jagged rocks (the yellow words, "BEN KHAN "Youth,"" superimposed over the image briefly, followed later on by the words, "Directed By BRTHR"), the music video for "Youth" goes on to show us a quick succession of images over its 3-minute and 44-second duration. All in all, the video contains about 181 shots, but this count can only be approximate, as some shots appear in such quick succession and in such intense superimpositions and other combinations that it's impossible to come up with an exact count.

The images are set to the electronic reverberations of synthesizers and Ben Khan's baritone voice on Khan's track, "Youth." The song begins slowly, with a simple descending synthesizer riff, while Khan sings, "Changes / My memories retain us / While their vibration's / Intuition / From starlit vision / Ooh, I'm foolish." The swimming slowness of the synthesizers gives this first part of the song a pensive vibe, especially when combined with this first passage of the song's lyrics, meditating on memories and regrets both personal and celestial. The song

shifts drastically when the drums kick in and the song speeds up at the 0:45-second mark, as Khan sings, “I’m so foolish.” Here, the track becomes more dense, with synths, an electric guitar, multiple drum patterns, and vocal improvisations (“shoo-doo-DOO-doo-doo-DOO-doo-doo-doo,” Khan sings) combining with a sampled shout that provides additional percussion (alternating between “Yeah!” and “Woo!” in equal intervals). The sound of a gun cocking followed by its muted blast mixed with a cash register’s “ding” also moves in and out of the track’s mix.

Khan’s lyrics don’t pick back up until the 1:14 mark, when he sings, “Soul sensation / I’m blessing from patience / Vanishing prisms / Of thoughts in prison / Inhibitions / Stressing wisdom / Your future’s tainted / Darling, escape it / Tasteless / We are so tasteless / Dark of the evenings / Delusion feelings.” These lyrics build on the first section of lyrics, still closely related to thoughts, memories, and feelings, but beginning to address someone directly (“Darling”), perhaps from afar or somehow not able to communicate what he feels (the speaker is, it seems, “in prison”). The references at the end of the segment to “dark” and “delusion” add a sense of danger to the song, as if the tastelessness mentioned were somehow criminal or violent (especially because the percussive gunshot continues to ring out in the background). This section of lyrics ends around the two-minute mark, when the song returns briefly to the vocal improvisations and layers of the 0:45-1:14 section, before Khan sings, “Beware of your youth, darling / Beware of your youth, darling / Beware of your youth.” This adds to the menacing danger of the previous lyrics, although it’s unclear whether the person being addressed here should be cautious about their own youth (“beware of your youth” acting as gently seasoned advice) or actually cautious about the speaker (“beware of your youth” acting as a veiled threat). Khan repeats this passage (“Beware of your youth, darling / Beware of your youth, darling /

Beware of your youth”) before the drums exit the mix again, this time at the 2:27 mark; they return at the 2:38 mark. Khan sings the three-pronged “beware of your youth” section again here, a third time; then the high-range percussion and much of the other instrumentation drops out at 2:58, the bass and a couple of synth lines remaining, as Khan sings the “beware of your youth” section a final time before the song ends.

Pitchfork describes the track this way, in a brief review:

Ben Khan operates with woozy R&B affairs, heavy on the low end and decorated with squelching synths and bluesy guitar lines that are equal parts Prince and Cliff Martinez. In contrast, the London producer-songwriter’s latest track, “Youth”, from his recent 1992 EP, is a brighter, more expansive cut than his other work; what begins as a sparse, atmospheric track blasts into a cacophonous, funk-infused pop jam with an infectious bass line accentuated by soft synth stabs that gather around the beat, lingering like a warm mist. “Youth” takes Khan’s formula for sultry soul and adds a few more hooks, an earworm-y melody, and a glossy production finish.

I quote this at length to provide a slightly different, if less extensive, take on the song’s sound and structure, to give a fuller sense of how the song sounds.¹³¹

My description and *Pitchfork*’s together help demonstrate the video’s indebtedness to the song’s structure. *Pitchfork* describes a “sparse, atmospheric track” that “blasts into a cacophonous, funk-infused pop jam,” which matches up with how the video moves from relatively long shots (ten shots in the video’s first forty-six seconds) to very quick shots (the next

¹³¹ It’s also interesting to note that the Cliff Martinez mentioned in the Pitchfork description is best known as a composer for a number of films, including *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989, dir. Steven Soderbergh), *Drive* (2011, dir. Nicolas Winding Refn), and—with Skrillex—*Spring Breakers* (2013, dir. Harmony Korine). The reference to Martinez here seems to suggest something cinematic about the song itself, perhaps an element on which the video attempts to build.

ten shots take place in only fifteen seconds; the ten after that fill just five seconds) back to a slow final segment that coincides with the moment when, as I describe it, “much of the other instrumentation drops out..., the bass and a couple of synth lines remaining, as Khan sings the ‘beware of your youth’ section once again before the song ends” (the final ten shots last around 30 or 40 seconds). The song’s average beats per minute is a hurried 129, which also indicates the connection between the song’s velocity and the average speed at which its cuts occur.

However, the song is almost thirty seconds shorter than the video because the video begins and ends with waves crashing against the shore (we hear their sound, too), before the song begins and after it ends. The video expands, by a few seconds on each end, the slowness of the song’s beginning and ending, accentuating the pensiveness and (relative) “sparse[ness]” of these sections. The rest of the video, on the other hand—its 144-second middle section—is all speed, an obvious example of the audiovisual tendencies that Vernallis describes as common to music video in *Unruly Media*. Drawing from the passage in *Unruly Media* that I quoted at length above, the video for “Youth” has many “close shots,” for example, of a man in the shower with water dripping from his white skin and full head of hair, of a switchblade, of a woman’s face (or parts of her face, like her lips or eyes), of an animated red gun against a television static background, of a young boy’s face as he gazes into the camera; “wide-ranging camera movements,” like zooms, cantings, tilts, the movement of the landscape from inside a moving car, handheld shots, and various combinations of these; “rapid editing,” which I’ve already described; “blocks of image” that “highlight song structure,” also described above, in the way that cuts and other editing techniques occur at more extensive intervals during the song’s quieter and/or slower moments; “intense colorization,” the video predominantly featuring burning red and contemplative blue indoor lighting and washed-out grey outdoor lighting; “visual motifs” that

“speak to musical ones,” most obviously the repeated images of guns, both digital and real, speaking to the gunshot’s sound in the song’s percussive beat and to the violence or danger implied in the song’s lyrics; “strobing,” at the video’s 1:00 mark, for example, when the screen flashes red and blue, showing an image of the man with the switchblade pressed to his lips and then its inverse and the image again, repeatedly; “flash frames,” like when an inverse image of the man’s face rapidly enters the frame at 1:47, in a smaller frame, placed against a black background (a moment later, the video cuts again to this image but it then fills out the entire frame); and countless (sometimes multi-layered) “superimpositions,” such as the one that occurs at 2:54, when multiple alternating red and blue outline silhouettes (of the man holding the switchblade) on either side of the frame layer back into a blurry black-and-white background.

On top of these, BRTHR, the director duo behind the video for “Youth,” made up of Kyle Wightman and Alex Lee, innovate further, performing (as they describe in an interview with *Internet Music Video Database* [IMVDb] camera movements in post-production “internally, zooming and rotating within the [software] program.” This has an effect, as BRTHR explains, that “smoothens out the motion,” a necessary step since the footage the duo shot was all handheld and shot in slow motion: during the three-day shoot, “none of the footage,” they elucidate, “was shot at 24 frames per second.” In these three days, the duo shot “five or six hours of footage” and then “turned the edit around in three weeks.” Watching the video, one also sees many different grains or qualities of footage: some is crystal-clear HD, other shots are VHS quality, blurry and grainy. The duo address this as well, remarking that they wanted the video to feel “vintage, but super-futuristic in a way.” The video also features, at various moments, a television screen or computer screen within the frame, multiplying images further.

These kinds of effects intensify the surface audiovisual excess that Vernallis describes: post-production camera movements occur on top of any camera movement that occurred during production; hours of footage condense down to fewer than four minutes; slow motion footage speeds up; many different image qualities bump up against each other and layer over each other. It also seems a very obvious example of Ndalianis' neo-baroque aesthetics (referenced by Vernallis and Walton), as described in Ndalianis' essay, "Architectures of the Senses: Neo-Baroque Entertainment Spectacles." Here, Ndalianis refers to the contemporary media moment as drawing upon the baroque (and in fact extends the baroque out of the time period to which it is usually contained to describe the contemporary moment as well, hence *neo*-baroque), immersing spectators in a maze of overwhelming technologies that seem to stem out into eternity from the viewers who experience them. She writes that "the baroque system is dependent upon dynamic forces that expand, and often rupture borders" (361). Although Ndalianis focuses mainly upon theme park rides like *The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man* ride in the Islands of Adventure section of Universal Studios, her comments connect quite closely to the many different technologies mashed up in the video for "Youth," which no longer allow for "borders" between different shots, frames, images, sounds, or aesthetics. Colors, frame rates, image qualities, and sounds blur into one another, almost impossible to isolate.

While the passages above may seem to indicate a view of new media wherein spectators are lulled into passively being entertained (i.e., if new media forms have no borders, one might think that viewers have no way to grasp or contemplate these new media), Ndalianis instead emphasizes that the neo-baroque elicits questions on the part of viewers, who ask, "How did they do that?" She mainly connects this to matters of technology: viewers want to understand what

software programs and devices created the effects they see on screens. But she does also consider matters of narrative, noting,

Rather than reflecting a classical concern for the static, closed and centralized, the baroque system is dependent upon dynamic forces that expand, and often rupture borders (Calabrese, 1992, 66). Differentiation, polycentrism and rhythm are central to baroque storytelling strategies and...neo-baroque entertainment media of the late twentieth / early twenty-first-century also introduce “a taste for elliptical form provided with real centres and multiple potentials” (Calabrese 1992, 44) (361).

“Static, closed and centralized” are adjectives commonly used to describe Classical Hollywood Cinema (the “classical” indicating not only an era in Hollywood history but a certain kind of narrative emphasized in many of the Hollywood films released in that era), while art films—and art music videos—generally have narratives described as “elliptical,” built around ambiguous images that have “multiple potentials” or can be read in multiple ways. Terms like “[d]ifferentiation,” “polycentrism,” and “rhythm” apply especially well to the narratives of art music videos, with their shifting tempos, speedy image flows, and percussive registers. There is a special kind of narrative in neobaroque media (a category into which an art music video like “Youth” fits quite well), Ndalians suggests, one that’s both elliptical and multiple and one that prompts viewers to ask questions—not only *how?* (How did these narrative events occur?) but *where?* (Where are the narrative’s centers and potentials?) and *why?* (Why do these events occur and why do many possibilities exist?).

The matter of narrative takes us beyond the excessive surface of “Youth”—our focus so far, via Vernallis and Ndalians—to its excessive depth. It is a video that uses its complex, jarring stream of imagery to craft a mysterious, unresolvable, troubling narrative, a narrative that

draws viewers into a state of disturbed confusion. It pulls viewers into thinking through notions of desire and violence, precipitating deeper resonances of affective and reflective response. Some of its narrative elements are already obvious from the descriptions of audiovisual elements I've provided above: a gun, a switchblade, a man, a young boy, a woman. Enmeshed with these objects and characters are more specific images: a blue-lit close-up of the man's back, glittering with drops of water; the woman sitting on the edge of a floral duveted bed, the pleats of her skirt tumbling out along her bare upper legs; the blurry screen of an old computer, unstably projecting black and white; a car along a twilit road, hidden headlamps emerging. From these, one can put together a kind of story, something about a man who remembers/desires his past, represented by the boy and a woman in his memory, and who kills (or fantasizes about killing) himself and the woman (the video features many shots of the man holding the gun to his head, and the video's penultimate shot is a long shot of the man floating above the ocean, the woman draped over his arms like a garment).

There is ambiguity in these images, as well in the loose story I've outlined here. The first set of questions has to do with the relationships among the characters: Were the man and the woman ever romantically involved, or is his obsession with her purely that of a voyeur or stalker? Does the appearance of the young boy suggest the occurrence of a childhood trauma that continues to affect the man? The song's lyrics further complicate these questions. Whose youth is worthy of caution here, the man's or the woman's (or both)? Is there an important age difference between the man and the woman, one not visible to the naked eye? The second set of questions has to do with what actually happens: Does the man commit real acts of violence against the woman or just imagine these acts? Does he take his own life? Is the image at the end of the video—the man floating out over the ocean while holding the woman in his arms—

suggestive of some fantastical reality (wherein the world of the video expands to include possibilities that exist outside our own, like the ability to float) or is it affirming that the story occurs only in the man's fantasies? Here, too, the lyrics exacerbate these questions. The words "memories," "sensation," "thoughts," and "delusion" all appear in the lyrics, hinting towards the possibility of the video's events being only imagined. However, the commanding clarity of the line, "Darling, escape it," possibly negates these other, floating terms: he speaks very directly to her in this line, suggesting that he himself violently provides the escape he demands, taking her life.

There is nothing in the video to concretely or decisively answer these questions. Instead there are ambiguous, dense images that complicate the narrative further and prompt further questioning. Take, for instance, an image from near the video's end, of the young woman lying on a bed. The image is a medium close-up, so we only see her from the chest up. She is wearing a floral pattern shirt and is supine, the arm closest to us bent back to support her head. We can see the white, wrought iron of the bed frame and the red and white stripes of the pillows that she rests between. But the most curious element of the image is her face, mainly for the fact that her eyes are drawn over with a graphic of brightening pink-yellow flowers. The flowers bar us from reading her expression. They also are an obvious addition to the image, in post-production: the flowers do not look real. And, in fact, they are only one part of an image that is awry with falling digital pink blooms that cover portions of her room and bed and body.

The excessive surface of this image is obvious, its digital gaudiness glaring. It is spectacular, striking and strangely pretty with its garish pinks and reds. It also rhymes with other images in the video of flowers (real or digitally animated, superimposed), of which there are many: a close-up of a burning rose, held in the hand of the boy; an antique television, seen in the

background, with three vases of flowers on the flat surface of its top; and, the image that most closely relates, a collage of sorts that pictures the man with the gun to his head at its center and an array of images projected behind him, to his right and left: a close-up of the woman's face, of the switchblade, of the man's face. It, like the image of the woman that is my main focus here, is partially covered by a shower of digital flower petals, this time purple, pink, and white. There is so much visual information in this image and the image of the woman lying on a bed, and they stay so briefly on screen, that it's tempting to see them as all excessive surface and nothing more, a combination of neon digital animation and conventionally attractive human figures.

Thompson's "The Concept of Cinematic Excess" defines excess as that which is unmotivated by the narrative, and a device or element can exceed motivation in a number of ways: its shape and color—that is, its specific form; its duration on the screen; its relation to redundancy of motivation;¹³² and its repetition/variation. The image of the flower-eyed girl easily fits into the first and the fourth of these: the shape and color of the flowers and the pink hue of the room grab our attention, while the presence of the flower-eyed girl as one instance of bright-colored flower petals among many other instances of bright-colored flower petals also garners notice. For Thompson these elements take our image of the girl on the bed and turn it to excess: there's no (or not enough) motivation for all of these flowers. It works quite differently, however, for Williams, who sees excess and narrative as inextricable: the narratives of pornography and horror films and melodramas use their excess to prompt bodily excess (tears, ejaculate, other bodily fluids). The genre of art music video to which "Youth" belongs crafts its

¹³² Thompson's least clear mode of excess: she seems to be describing what occurs when so many different objects, textures, etc. are meant to communicate the same idea. In the context of "Youth," this might look something like the way that violence is (hyper)communicated by a gun, a knife, a menacing glare, a bloody thumb, a flame, red light, and so on.

narratives from the dense—sometimes gaudy, always striking—images at its center, images that prompt intellectual excess (thoughts, questions, musings, rethinkings).

The image of the flowered girl on the bed ties to the narrative, prompts intellectual excess, and points to excessive depth in a number of ways. Part of the image's richness and terror ties to the flowers: they obscure the eyes and prevent us from reading her expression. The image could represent a happy moment of intimacy that existed between the man and the woman. Or it could represent the moment of her death. This ambiguity echoes out into the video, as we're forced to wonder about the way in which memory, desire, violence and reality tie together in the mind of the young man, whose mind may generate many of the video's images. And then why are the flowers there? Are we seeing an attempt by the young man to forget and beautify her expression? Or do the flowers work to obscure something he's attempting to remember? Furthermore, are the flowers an intrusion of the man's real, floral world, or are they an irruption of virtual reality, a digital image in an analog world? Such questions do not remain on the video's surface: they are not only about how the special effects work or where the colors come from. Instead, they are about the video's conceptual bearing and its narrative, the movement together of the many ideas it portrays, including desire and memory and violence.

"Youth," then, uses its excessive surface to draw viewers towards excessive depth. It is excessive and neo-baroque in the fullest sense of those terms, in that it begins on the surface but insists that viewers think beyond the surface forever, adjusting and readjusting their reading of the video. It emphasizes the vertical element of its narrative, pulling viewers into its deep, its ideas about concepts like desire, violence, and memory; it prompts many questions, none of which ever become settled. The song that soundtracks the video is important to these processes insofar as the song deepens and complicates these questions through its sung lyrics and other

sonic elements, especially the clicking of the gun (perhaps a sound that occurs only in the man's head, perhaps a sound that accompanies his murder of the woman and/or his suicide).

5.3 EXCESS IN ART CINEMA: *MYSTERIES OF LISBON*

But a pushing of viewers towards excessive depth, intellectual excess, and vertical expansion of narrative does not require a pop song, as *Mysteries of Lisbon* indicates, even as it presses towards similar themes as those in the video for “Youth.” Dissimilar from “Youth” in many ways, *Mysteries of Lisbon*, based on a Camilo Castelo Branco novel—*Os Mistérios de Lisboa*—published in 1854, is a 266-minute feature film that features only 329 shots. Each shot is, for the most part, discernible from others, and many last for several minutes (i.e. longer than the whole music video for “Youth”). It features a great deal of dialogue, in both Portuguese and French (optionally subtitled in English, which is the language in which I’ll quote it), a score by Jorge Arriagada (which mainly fills out the opening and closing credits, as well as the film’s interlude) and additional music composed by notable early 20th-century Portuguese composer Luís de Freitas Branco (the film includes pieces of all four of his symphonies, as well as his *Suite Alentejana No. 2* and *Vathek*). All of the music is orchestral in nature, predominantly featuring strings.

The film seems, at first glance, to be constructed as any other period drama (it is set in the mid-nineteenth century), highlighting elegantly costumed characters and luxurious historical settings like castles and estates. One could accuse it of being a kind of Portuguese heritage

film,¹³³ allowing audiences to escape into the trappings of a captivating story glossed attractively in a veneer of Portuguese history (and certain parts of French history as well). The story here is of a teenager named João (later known as Pedro da Silva) and his origins: his family, conception, birth, arrival at a Jesuit school where a priest, Father Dinis, watches over him, and first adventures in adulthood. Yet the story also moves far beyond João to a whole cast of characters whose connections to João become tenuous at best. At certain points, João disappears from the narrative entirely, such as when Father Dinis (who at other parts of the film goes by Sabino Cabra and Sebastião de Melo) meets his own father, Friar Baltasar da Encarnação (also known as Don Álvaro de Albuquerque), and discovers his own origin story; when Father Dinis provides Elisa de Montfort (also known as the Duchess of Cliton) with the story of her origin (in which he was involved); and when we find out about the past interactions of Alberto de Magalhães (also known as Heliodoro, Knife-Eater, and the Brazilian) with Elisa de Montfort (although eventually João does, unknowingly at first, get caught up in these). The connections among and origins of characters loosen or remain unknown: Dona Antonia seems at first to be Father Dinis' sister, but João's mother, the Countess of Santa Barbara (also known as Ângela de Lima), hints otherwise; it's unclear how Father Dinis came to be a priest (if he is actually a priest at all, as his many disguises and costumes have nothing to do with the priesthood); we never definitively find out how Alberto de Magalhães amassed a fortune from the money Father Dinis gave him (to save João's life), although some characters hint that it is through the slave trade; and we also never

¹³³ Sean Griffin describes “British ‘heritage films’” as films that “exude...nostalgia for the era before World War I, reveling in well-groomed manor grounds, lavishly appointed drawing rooms, and tuxedos and satin ball gowns” (310). He describes the appearance of these sorts of films in other European countries, too, especially Italy and Spain, that look “like cinematic postcards, packaging the country...for tourists to purchase” (310). The 19th-century, picturesque settings of *Mysteries of Lisbon*, as well as the centrality of the upper class to its narratives, tie *Mysteries of Lisbon* to the heritage film tradition, at least on the surface.

find out how the character of Eugenia, initially the mistress of the Count of Santa Barbara, meets Alberto de Magalhães and becomes his wife.¹³⁴

All of this is enhanced and complicated by the film's visual excess. First and foremost, there are the film's long takes, often featuring a gracefully arcing camera that seems able to move through walls (as in shot 201, when the camera moves through a wall separating the room where Don Alvaro de Albuquerque waits from the room where his mistress gives birth). Although sometimes critics have tied the long take to economical sparseness or stillness,¹³⁵ here it clearly provides an additional complex visual register, constantly revealing new views and previously unseen characters as it moves. For example, in shot 25 (about fifteen minutes into the film), João converses in his room with Bernardo, his mother's servant. The camera protractedly moves left and forward, forming a kind of semicircle, before stopping, briefly, after about thirty seconds; following this stop, the camera retraces its steps, so to speak, circling back towards the right. As it continues this movement, we suddenly see Father Dinis, who had not been visible from the same angle earlier, in the room, looking out the window.¹³⁶ However, the characters it most often reveals are servants, usually seen eavesdropping on the conversations of their employers. For instance, in shot 63, a maid from earlier in Angela's life, Deolinda, is spotted eavesdropping on a conversation between Angela and her lover (eventually João's father), Pedro

¹³⁴ Michael Goddard describes the film as giving off the "impression" that Father Dinis' "identity, along with that of other key characters," is "strictly undecidable" (38).

¹³⁵ Dominique Nasta's sentiments in his book, *Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle*, are indicative of this trend. Here, Nasta writes that "[d]econstruction of violence and examination of the banality of evil follow the minimalist line, and so do the 'slow cinema' techniques: long takes and sparse dialogue, features of a varied strain of austere cinema that favours mood over event" (7).

¹³⁶ A shot similar to this, another where Father Dinis suddenly and quietly appears in a room, is shot 144, when the Count of Santa Barbara visits a chapel on the eve of his wedding to Angela. Here the camera moves forward into space as the count kneels at the altar but then moves back after several moments to reveal Father Dinis (here, going by the name Sebastião de Melo) sitting in the previously empty space.

da Silva.¹³⁷ The film brings moments like these to a tee in a section of the film (shots 191-194) detailing Father Dinis' origin story, when Don Alvaro de Albuquerque and the woman with whom he's having an affair, the Countess of Viso, cannot understand how anyone knows about their relationship (even though they're in the constant view—and within earshot—of servants). Here, however, the film does not use the moving camera to reveal the servants; rather, we see point of view shots, from behind curtains or through a crack in a door, and hear giggling, to reveal the servants' presence. (We also see a servant very obviously standing at a glass door, watching the Countess and Don Alvaro converse, from the perspective of another servant, looking from behind curtains.)¹³⁸

Another register of the film's visual excess is the regular appearance of a miniature theater, in close-up, with paper-doll cutouts of characters in the film portraying a selection of the film's events. It appears initially in the background of João's room (in shot 12, about six minutes into the film), after another boy at the Jesuit school severely injures him (to the point where João needs bed rest for several days). We see the first close-up of the theater in shot 14, a shot bookended by two low-angle shots of João in close-up, looking down and straight ahead, almost directly into the camera. This initial close-up of the miniature theater reveals a man in a gondola moving across a canal and another man welcoming him. Although the canal and gondola have no direct relation to the film's narrative, each of the miniature theater's later appearances do portray happenings from the film's story. For example, when the miniature theater next appears in close-

¹³⁷ For a strikingly similar moment, see shot 236, when the camera pulls back to reveal a maid listening to a conversation between Alberto and the Duchess of Cliton. Another similar moment, this time with subservient monks instead of actual servants, occurs in shot 202, when the opening of a window to another room opens up to reveal a number of monks listening to the (supposedly private) conversation between Friar Baltasar da Encarnação and Father Dinis.

¹³⁸ For another example of a shot that begins from a servant's point of view, see shot 135, when the camera shows, briefly, the point of view of a pointing man. He is discussed, later in the same shot, by the Count of Santa Barbara and Angela's father, the Marquis of Montezulos, as being a deaf-mute butler who has started a trend of impolitely pointing.

up, in shot 20, we see a paper cutout resembling Father Dinis standing next to a paper cutout resembling João, standing in front of a drawing of the estate of the Count of the Santa Barbara (an estate whose photographic, “real” depiction we first see in the next shot, shot 21). We see close-ups of the miniature theater thirteen more distinct times (in shots 45, 59, 81, 125-6, 150, 198-200, 220, 258, 260-1, 281, 299, 307, 319), and it reappears in the background of a scene or as a prop in shots 294-5 and three of the film’s final shots (326-8).

The seventh time we see the theater in close-up, in shot 150, is notable for its combination of real events with those portrayed in the theater. The previous shot, 149, portrays João in profile, indoors (on the left side of the frame), but somehow still conversing with Father Dinis, João’s mother, and Dona Antonia, who are outdoors, in view through a window. In shot 150, however, as João demands that his mother not leave to forgive her dying husband, we suddenly see João standing inside the miniature theater (still on the left), shouting his demands to paper cutouts of Father Dinis, João’s mother, and Dona Antonia. The ending of the film highlights the matter of the miniature theater further. Here, João/Pedro da Silva, now much older (it would seem¹³⁹), convalesces in the room of an inn in Tangiers, the miniature theater set out on a desk. The room bears a striking resemblance to the one where the miniature theater first appeared, in the Jesuit school, and the film, in its penultimate shot, suddenly takes us back to this room in the Jesuit school, the miniature theater still set on a desk. This points up the centrality of the miniature theater to João’s life and to the film as a whole.

¹³⁹ I say “it would seem” here, because of the confusion spurred by João’s voiceover at the beginning of the film versus João’s voiceover at the end of the film. At the beginning of the film, João remarks in voiceover that “I was fourteen, and I didn’t know who I was at all...” However, at the very end of the film, when João speaks in voiceover again, he says, “I was fifteen years old, and I didn’t know who I was at all.” Has only one year passed from the beginning of the film to its end, somehow still absurdly transitioning João from one appearance to another? Or is the change from one actor to another merely a comment on the character’s transition in name from João to Pedro? A third possibility: Is his voiceover at the film’s beginning actually emanating from the future, when João is fourteen, speaking over images/memories of his childhood (with a year passing before he completes his voiceover in the film’s final scenes)? *Mysteries of Lisbon* leaves these questions unanswered, open.

The miniature theater also seems closely related to the appearance in the film of artworks, usually in the background but sometimes foregrounded as well.¹⁴⁰ The most notable of these artworks is a sketch of João, which an English-speaking character creates at the very beginning of the film (a character who never appears again). This woman remarks that João “acts like he doesn’t see me” and oddly observes that “his hands look like nightingales.” Additionally, when Dona Antonia presents the sketch, now in a circular frame, to João, in shot 12 (when the miniature theater also first appears), she asks, “Do you recognize?” João sincerely responds, “Is it a horse?,” while Dona Antonia only laughs.

Also, many paintings appear in the background of scenes, both in the rooms of Father Dinis’ school and in the many estates featured in the film. This tendency reaches a kind of saturation point in shots 208-10, when Don Alvaro de Albuquerque visits his cousin Paulo’s estate, to ask Paulo to care for his son. The walls of the room where he converses with Paulo are completely and totally covered in a painted mural, wall to wall and ceiling to floor. As Alvaro and Paulo talk, the camera moves closer and arcs, left to right, in a semicircle, revealing more of the mural around the room; once Paulo leaves the room, the camera retraces its path, showing once again the original view of the mural. We get a sense from this shot of the mural’s visual chaos, featuring hundreds of figures—painted in a neoclassical style—in battle, wrestling, fainting, falling, fighting. The next shot, following Alvaro’s gazing around the room, features a superimposition: one part of the superimposition moves closer to a portion of the painting, while the other part of the superimposition (imposed on top of the other) moves horizontally, left to

¹⁴⁰Michael Goddard describes “the relations between art and life” as central to many of Ruiz’s films, especially in Ruiz’s *Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (1978), in which Ruiz creates a number of tableaux vivants (much like the one of which we see fragments in shots 35-44) meant to represent the fictional paintings in the film’s plot.

right, over another portion of the painting. Shot 210 returns to the final set-up of shot 208, with Alvaro looking around the room; soon after, he faints, falling to his side on the floor.

Another moment when the film engages very directly with artwork occurs in shots 35-44, when João first enters the home of the Count of Santa Barbara, to visit his mother. Here, João enters a sort of foyer with Father Dinis and looks around the room. João notices a painting on one of the walls, located in the center of the shot's background. Although the painting is far away, we can make out a portrait of four figures posing in a semicircle, a dog sitting at their feet. João walks towards the painting, and, suddenly, shot 36 shows us a closer, but blurry,¹⁴¹ view of the painting. Shot 37 returns to the setup of shot 35, with João moving leftward but still gazing up at the painting. Shot 38 returns us to shot 36, the blurry view of the painting, while shot 39 shows João in a medium close-up, his eyes directed above the camera. Shot 40 portrays a close-up of a young woman looking to the camera's left; shot 41 shows a close-up of child with a baby doll, moving its hands, lying in greenery on a table in front of him, looking in the same direction; shot 42 shows a close-up of a dog looking in the opposite direction; and shot 43 provides a close-up of a man looking directly into the camera. The man raises his gun and points it at the camera, seemingly at us. Suddenly, shot 44 appears, taking us back to the view of shot 37, João not able to avert his eyes from the painting on the wall. The figures in shots 40-3 seem to be those in the painting, as we see the painting from afar again (in shot 44).

Other odd or surprising visual moments occur in the film, too, like in shot 62, when the text of a letter that Angela is reading appears to take up the background of the room where she sits;¹⁴² shot 146, when the camera pendulums slowly, dizzily, from left to right above the

¹⁴¹ The blurriness here is reminiscent of the blurry, swirling view in shots 10, 11, and the film's final shot, shot 329.

¹⁴² This may tie to the opening shot of Ruiz's *3 Crowns of the Sailor* (1983), which shows a close-up of a hand writing a journal entry.

Count of Santa Barbara's bed, but along the y-axis, so that the count seems to be floating; shots 177-8, when the Countess de Viso and Alvaro seem to move by gliding above the floor; shot 196, when a skull briefly appears inside a clock resting on a table before fading away; shot 229, when the note Alberto tears up rests upon and obscures the camera's view; shot 236, when the Duchess of Cliton points a small gun directly at the camera; shot 255, when Alberto and Eugenia needlessly converse beneath a table; shot 257, when a reflection of Father Dinis' face in a close-up of a cup of tea takes a central position in the frame; and shot 262, when a floating reflection of the teacup from 257 appears suddenly. These—as well as the film's camera movements, point of view shots, use of the miniature theater, and multiple artworks—all represent the film's visual, surface excess.

While this visual excess is strikingly different from the visual excess of the video for “Youth” (*Mysteries of Lisbon* features only a handful of “close shots”; longer and more graceful “wide-ranging camera movements”; very little “rapid editing”; “blocks of image” that “highlight” music, occasionally, but not song structure, since no songs, per se, appear in the film; no “intense colorization”; only a few “visual motifs” that “speak to musical ones,” such as the film's many shots of the horses and carriage moving across the screen [often] to the sound of stringed instruments; no “strobing” or “flash frames”; and only a couple of “superimpositions,” which I've described in the sections above), the film still relates closely to Ndalianis' descriptions of the baroque and to Thompson's cinematic excess. I've noted above that Ndalianis writes, drawing from Omar Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, about the baroque as “dependent upon dynamic forces that expand, and often rupture borders” and as characterized by “[d]ifferentiation, polycentrism and rhythm” (361). While it is easy enough, in the context of *Mysteries of Lisbon*, to separate out one shot from another, the film uses camera work and

editing to burst borders between rooms and characters, as the camera moves through walls or characters magically appear in spaces where they were not before; to interrelate play and reality through multiple appearances of the miniature theater; and to dissolve art into the characters' reality and vice versa. The film also features many shots that are not as easy to relate to its common visual patterns, such as the shots of the teacup or of Alberto and Eugenia conversing under tables. These seemingly out-of-place shots compose the film's differentiation and polycentrism, while the many long shots of the horses and carriage traveling through the Portuguese countryside and close-ups of the miniature theater set up the film's rhythm. Thompson describes shape and color, duration, redundancy, and repetition as important to excess, and these, too, are hypervisible in *Mysteries of Lisbon*. The colors of the many paintings in the film; the long duration of many of the film's shots; the many shots of eavesdropping characters; and the repetition, with variation, of the miniature theater all provide examples of its excess in Thompson's terms.

Michael Goddard discusses excess and the baroque as being central to *Mysteries of Lisbon* (and to Ruiz's cinema more generally) in his piece, "Impossible Cartographies: Approaching Raúl Ruiz's Cinema" (leading up, eventually, to the publication of his book, *The Cinema of Raúl Ruiz: Impossible Cartographies*). Goddard, drawing from the work of Walter Benjamin, writes that "[w]hat characterizes the Baroque most of all is an emphasis on the fragment over the whole and a resulting complexity in which there are multiple levels coexisting within the same work, which are not reducible to an overall scheme or perspective" (32). Goddard sees this especially in Ruiz's *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (1978), noticing in the film a "specifically postmodern form of the Baroque, a Neo-Baroque aesthetics also evident in writers such as Borges and Gombrowicz, in which the complexities of Baroque systems are

explicitly played with and pushed to a point of dissolution into chaos” (33). Goddard also draws upon Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s essay, “The Baroque Eye of the Camera,” and her description of Ruiz’s cinema as “a second degree Baroque cinema, or Baroque of the Baroque.”

Buci-Glucksmann writes,

A Baroque look of opening up..., where a film is always several films, in a sort of arborescent and proliferating structure respecting no chronology, no dramatization of the action, no Euclidean space: To cite everything, mix everything, passing through all the regimes of the image and of the visual (painting in a free state, immobilized photo or postcard, theater open to the space of cinema, cinema theatricalized). As if in this gigantic combustion of forms, cinema could no longer be only a Baroque palimpsest, a theatre of shadows and memory. Because if the Baroque implies a cinema of seeing and no longer of acting, the cinema of Ruiz would be a sort of Baroque to the second degree (qtd. in Goddard 33).

These passages from Goddard and Buci-Glucksmann helpfully expand upon the work of Ndalianis by getting at the specific form of the Baroque visible in *Mysteries of Lisbon* and Ruiz’s cinema more generally. Buci-Glucksmann’s comments in particular help us understand the appearance of the miniature theater and multiple paintings in *Mysteries of Lisbon* as inexorably connected to a form of the Baroque visible in many Ruiz films, whereby many different forms of art mingle together. Additionally, while understanding the Baroque merely in terms of its fragments (a reading encouraged by Goddard’s reference to Benjamin) may encourage us to overlook the overall “differentiation, polycentrism, and rhythm” described by Ndalianis that we can observe when we see *Mysteries of Lisbon* as a whole, the second part of Goddard’s reference to Benjamin is important for distinguishing “differentiation, polycentrism, and rhythm” from “an overall scheme or perspective” that is concrete or settled. The complexities and ambiguities of

Mysteries of Lisbon, although they are organizable—at least in part—into different rhythms and centers (and I have attempted just this sort of organization in my description, above, of the various categories of the film’s visual excess), resist any sort of completed meaning, whereby the work of thinking through the film’s striking images is finished. Furthermore, while we may be tempted to see only “dissolution into chaos” in the many movements and characters in *Mysteries of Lisbon*, Buci-Glucksmann’s comments are important for differentiating Ruiz’s cinema from those forms of the baroque that allow the viewer nothing to latch onto, no way to grasp any meaning at all. Instead, Buci-Glucksmann describes the importance of both “seeing” and “acting” to Ruiz’s cinema, thus implying that *Mysteries of Lisbon* encourages the viewer to act via thought, prompting intellectual excess towards a depth beyond mere form.

In *Mysteries of Lisbon*, as in “Youth,” the visual excess of the surface prompts a vertical movement towards narrative, excessive depth: it prompts intellectual excess, a searching deeper. The shots in which Father Dinis, for example, suddenly appears increase the mystery surrounding his character, prompting viewers to wonder if he may have some sort of supernatural element to his existence, while the shots of servants eavesdropping ask that we consider the actions and lives of characters otherwise marginal to the story: lives that we imagined as peripheral to the narrative suddenly become central to both its occurrence and circulation to ears beyond those of the initial participants. Even more important is the question of João’s imagination elicited by the appearance of the miniature theater, his response to the sketch of his face, his interaction with the painting in the Count of Santa Barbara’s house, and the return to the Jesuit school and João’s youth at the film’s end. The film’s penultimate shot not only features João in the same room where he recovered after his fight with another child at the school, it shows him lying the wrong way on the bed, his feet at the pillow, his head hanging off

the bottom of the bed. Father Dinis and Dona Antonia find him like this; when Dona Antonia touches his head, she remarks that “he is cold.” Although João stirs slightly, the possibility of his being dead or dying is real, a possibility equally real in the shots leading up to this one, with João (here, going by Pedro) suddenly pallid and sick in his Tangiers hotel. This could be indicative of the film’s entire narrative existing in João’s imagination, as his interactions with paintings, the sketch of his face, and the miniature theater seem to enforce: he sees whole other worlds, other lives, in a painting, imagining them looking at him, threatening him; he sees in himself a horse; he interacts with life as if it were on a play’s stage, and a play’s stage as if it were his life. Conversely, the film’s return to João’s earlier bed rest could merely be indicative of João’s memory of a youthful moment, pleasantly naïve, before he knew anything about his mother or past; it could be that João wishes he *would* have died then. It could be that the centrality to the film of the paintings and the miniature theater enrich the very real dramas and traumas of his life (and the lives of those around him), allowing João to read his life through art. The images themselves never settle these questions but rather ask us to continue considering them, playing with possibilities for new connections and paths.

One remarkable, visually excessive shot in the film that I have not yet discussed—relating, like the film’s ending, to the possibility of João’s death—is shot 308 (which occurs about thirty minutes before the film’s ending), one of the most powerful and mysterious in the film. It illustrates the way that the film uses its visual excess to guide us towards excessive depth, to burrow into narrative possibilities. The main focus in this shot is the forthcoming duel between João (going by Pedro at this time) and Alberto de Magalhães. It begins with a left-to-right horizontal movement of the camera from a stone wall around an estate, through a thicket, into a meadow (part of another stone wall is just barely visible on the left side of the frame; tall

trees fill the shot's background). This initial camera movement tracks the motion of a carriage (seen in the middle background of the shot, in front of the trees but behind the meadow), out of which Alberto emerges. The camera continues to move, beyond the carriage, right and in a semicircle path, eventually finding João (in the foreground, but—still not very close to the camera—in medium long shot). Other figures (helpers and seconds in the approaching duel) mull around in the area between Alberto and João. One of these helpers nears João and nods to him, prompting João to move closer to Alberto; the camera follows João's leftward movement but does not move forward as João does. The two characters, after being handed rapiers by their seconds, begin fencing, in the middle ground of the meadow and the left-central portion of the frame; they fight in front of the carriage, which stands there motionless while the two horses at its front fidget for a while. The camera continues to move left very slowly and slightly forward, too, while they do so. After about one minute, Alberto uses his sword to force João's sword from his hand. Defenseless, João stares at Alberto's rapier in fright. Nonetheless, João yells "Arms!" and in voiceover goes on to describe how the two then decided to continue their duel with pistols. Their helpers retrieve their pistols, but while Alberto cradles his in his hands, he remarks, "Unfortunately, my dear friend, one cannot duck bullets the way one ducks a sword. One of us will end up staying here forever."

João, confused, responds, "Isn't that the idea?" But Alberto prompts João to move with him towards the foreground for a private discussion. The camera reframes and tilts up, capturing João and Alberto in medium shot from a low angle. Alberto then reveals to João that Father Dinis gave him money to save João at his birth, a sum that Alberto now feels that he should give to João. João, not even knowing, prior to this, that Alberto and Father Dinis knew each other, stands there in bewilderment. Alberto suggests to the seconds and helpers, standing behind them,

that, if João agrees, they postpone the duel; as Alberto does this, the two characters move back towards the men that had been standing behind them. João agrees to Alberto's terms, and their seconds/helpers retrieve João and Alberto's top hats and overcoats, which João and Alberto put on before moving towards and getting in the carriage, which promptly moves away (leaving behind the helpers/seconds). In voiceover, João avers, "Suddenly, I felt lost. I was once again the João of Father Dinis' school, before I ever found my mother or knew my name [Pedro], or my history. A mere puppet, manipulated by invisible hands at the mercy of some other will. I didn't know what to do or what decision to make." Soon after this voiceover ends, the four doubles/helpers who had been standing there walk out of the frame, forward and to the right.

One would imagine that the shot would end here, as its main action has concluded and its characters have all departed the frame. However, barely noticeable and first appearing about twenty seconds into the shot, a man in a top hat and overcoat has been pacing back and forth, in and out of the frame, on the road behind the carriage. He looks like another second/helper but never interacts with the other helpers or with João and Alberto. As the helpers/seconds move out of the frame, this man comes closer to the camera (which has not moved since tilting up slightly to show the conversation between João and Alberto), into the meadow, near the spot where João and Alberto dueled. The man, now closer to the camera but still only visible from a distance, removes his top hat and then pulls a pistol from the inside pocket of his coat. He points the gun at his chest, sits on the ground, and then pulls the trigger. Its force violently presses him to the ground, his body splayed out there for only a couple of seconds before the film cuts to a medium shot of the carriage that had just departed moments ago. Altogether, before this cut, the shot lasts eight minutes and thirty-five seconds.

The relation of this final figure in the shot to the rest of the scene remains tentative for several reasons. At first, a particularly observant viewer might assume that his presence is entirely random: it's just some person who's waiting for the meadow to empty before he commits suicide there. If this is the case, his presence reinforces the presence of the servants and monks, whose seemingly peripheral stories and lives the film sometimes centralizes. However, the first time I viewed the film, I thought the figure was João (especially since the figure wears a similar coat and top hat to those that João wears), who kills himself once his life is thrown (back) into chaos upon hearing Alberto's information. While one might label this reading incorrect, there does seem to be more to it than that. First of all, João has plenty of reason to despair, as he was going to kill Alberto out of desire for Elisa de Montfort, who pretends also to desire João in return. The postponement of the duel leaves João at an impasse, having to either take the life of the man who saved his or lose the affections of his first love. Second, it does seem notable that we never see João's pistol during the actual duel: the seconds/helpers hand a pistol to Alberto but not to João. This perhaps indicates that the pistol is already somewhere on João's person, ready to use as he pleases. Third, the film's ending with João's (possible) death indicates that death lingers around him throughout the film, from the death of his father (also named Pedro, the name João eventually assumes) to the death of the Count of Santa Barbara to the head injury that forced him to take bed rest in the first place. This moment may hint that death is coming for João—or has practically already come, if the entire film takes place in his imagination before he dies in bed at the Jesuit school.

The character who commits suicide might also simply hint simply that the *film's* ending is near, especially if we understand the film not as João's imaginings in the moments before he dies, but as the playing out of his imagination over the course of his life. This is a more playful

vision of the film, one that sees João as acting out or dramatizing various possibilities through the paper dolls in a miniature theater or through the figures in a painting. In this reading, he imagines his suicide here as a way to cope with the adult complexities of life; the sudden appearance of his voiceover in the very next shot, almost immediately after the character commits suicide, may confirm that the suicide here is merely a passing thought, a momentary impulse never actually realized. We might, additionally, relate this moment of suicide to moments in the film that prominently feature guns, such as when the figure in the painting points his rifle at the camera or when Elisa de Montfort similarly points her pistol towards the camera.

Also, even though we know that technically João does not die here, since he goes on to have a conversation with Alberto, after the duel, we might also understand this moment as one when João is re-entering a moment from his life (or perhaps an imagined moment from his life), deciding to commit suicide upon remembering it. This version of João's/Pedro's suicide lends many possible readings to this scene and to the film as a whole, whether João has killed himself as a child or Pedro kills himself once arriving in Tangiers. In this reading, the character in the meadow who commits suicide is either João re-imagining the scene, choosing a different path, or Pedro re-entering a scene that happened (at least in some sense), choosing to kill himself upon witnessing it. This would make the film's narrative recursive and add further to its excess, as if the film replays itself indefinitely, characters from past and future entering and re-entering its scenes at will.

But no matter which reading we consider, *Mysteries of Lisbon* refuses to settle these questions. While we can't help but consider aspects of the film's entire narrative when trying to understand the meaning of the suicidal figure, the narrative itself never becomes entirely stable or final. Instead, we continually work through various possibilities by considering the film's

many different strands: we may relate the moment to the film's temporary centralizing of otherwise nameless, unknown characters (like many of the film's servants); we may relate it to João's particularly active imagination; we may relate it to João's potential death; we may relate it to other scenes of violence, especially gun violence, in the film. The shot's excess—visually (its many different camera movements; its duration; its deep-space aesthetic, whereby we see a great deal of space and people and nature and actions all at once) and narratively (its portrayal of a duel, a revelation, an agreement, and a departure; its inclusion of four nameless seconds/helpers whose identities never become clear and who are peripheral to the scene yet the last to depart before the pacing man comes closer to the foreground; the appearance of the pacing man who kills himself after everyone else has departed the frame)—exists on the surface but prompts deeper questions about the shot and its relation to the rest of the film. When one remembers the film or re-watches it, they continue to consider the mysterious moment of suicide in relation to the film's many other mysteries (some of which may not have been clear upon initial viewing or upon first remembering).

A critic going by only the name Quintín, writing for *Cinema Scope*, interprets the suicide scene in *Mysteries of Lisbon* in the context of two other Ruiz films, asking, Could this be [*Mistérios de Lisboa* author] Castelo Branco (who killed himself in real life), watching his characters? After all, in Ruiz's adaptation of *Le temps retrouvé* (1999), Proust is a character in his own right, living alongside his creations; in *Ce jour lá* (2003), two characters walking along a Chilean beach encounter Le grand Meaulnes, the protagonist of the novel by Alain-Fournier, even though the scene takes place before the novel was written (41).

This provides a further complication of the possible readings I have considered above, adding the character of the author of the novel on which *Mysteries of Lisbon* is based, Camilo

Castelo Branco, into the mix of interpretations. This is especially complex for a film in which imagination—a kind of creative authorship in its own right—plays such a central role. As Quintín suggests, the scene may not show us João entering or re-entering the scene to kill himself: it may show us Castelo Branco. Alternatively, it's possible that João is a stand-in for Branco already, as he is in some sense the source of the film's narratives. The film then becomes a comment on the limits of fiction and creative capabilities, with João imagining the film's happenings but only to a point, when the film stops suddenly (at its ending) or perhaps re-starts (by going back to João's childhood in its final shots) or when the film becomes too much (too much information, too many events) and death is the only way out. It's also significant that Quintín poses his view as a question, placing it among other possible readings of the scene (and thus of the film as a whole).

Jonathan Romney complicates Quintín's perspective further in his review of *Mysteries of Lisbon for Sight and Sound*, when he writes that “[o]ne could see *Mysteries* as a disguised autobiography, ‘Ruiz’ almost rhyming with ‘Dinis’ – for the Chilean was himself a disguise artist as well as a manipulator of story, masquerading variously as a French, a Portuguese, even an American filmmaker.” His comparison here of another creative personality, that of Ruiz himself, with not João but with Father Dinis, raises further possibilities for the film and for the suicide scene. Perhaps the film originates more with Dinis than it does with João, the suicide scene a sign of Dinis's influence over João rather than a sign of João's own powerful imagination. This would affirm João's sentiment, stated in voiceover, that he is a “mere puppet, manipulated by invisible hands at the mercy of some other will.” That other will, in this reading, is Ruiz's/Dinis', who controls the shape of his existence (and saves him from certain death twice,

both times at the hand of the same man [Knife-Eater/Alberto], perhaps only to ultimately kill him off).

Quintín writes further, about the suicide scene:

For me, these examples illustrate one of the Ruizean bridges, connecting points, or passages—in this case, the bridge between fiction and reality, more specifically between writers, characters, and the material of literature in general. Ruiz seems to believe that film is the medium where literature comes alive and resists the effects of time. It is not that cinema is a way of preserving the memory of the living after their deaths, as people used to think a hundred years ago, but rather the memory of those who never existed—which is a much stronger statement about what we call reality (41).

Building upon Quintín's comments, we can recognize other aspects of *Mysterries of Lisbon* by thinking about not only its relation to fiction, authorship, and creation but also the many other aspects of the film (about which I've written above) as kinds of bridges: bridges between painting and cinema; bridges between the lower classes (represented by servants) and the audience, who see them even when the upper-class characters do not; bridges between film and audience, such as when we experience the shock of a gun pointed directly towards us.¹⁴³¹⁴⁴ We may also consider these bridges as invitations to crossing points in what Michael Goddard

¹⁴³ Lúcia Nagib, in her piece "Reflexive Stasis, Scale Reversal and the Myth of Modern Cinema," builds on Quintín's notion of bridges, seeing scale reversal in a number of so-called post-modern films as a way to enhance audience participation: the miniature theater makes us aware of our position as engaged, experiencing spectators. In Nagib's reading, the miniature theater and João's interactions with it turn João into a kind of spectator himself (albeit a very involved one), rather than an author or creator in his own right. This reading would see João as ultimately powerless to make meaningful changes to his own reality, drawing attention to the aspects of the suicide scene that are outside of João's control (either understanding the figure as an existence beyond João's own or seeing him as a manifestation of Father Dinis' control over João's life and death).

¹⁴⁴ Michael Goddard also describes Ruiz's cinema in terms of its bridges, describing Ruiz's "engagement with Portugal as a type of memory bridge to Chile and Latin America," from where Ruiz fled to Europe after the Chilean coup d'état that eventually put Augusto Pinochet in power (122). This also opens up readings of João's character as a kind of exile in his own right, pushed away from her mother and his origins more generally.

calls the impossible cartographies of Ruiz's cinema. Goddard writes that the cartography of Ruiz's cinema "is not a representation of already existing spaces or cinematic forms but is rather oriented towards the new" and "could be described as a cartography of the virtual; as Ruiz's work made a point of departing from the normative rules of cinematic construction as a first principle, Ruiz's cartography of images is also a cartography of the impossible" (22). Putting these comments next to Goddard's comments about the baroque in Ruiz's cinema, we understand Ruiz's films as *nearing* excessive chaos, *almost* impossible for anyone to read or navigate, made up of fragments and of chasms between those fragments. But just as Buci-Glucksmann points out the importance of the acting spectator to Ruiz's cinema, we can see in Ruiz's cinema (and in other writing about that cinema) that bridges exist to help viewers explore its many facets and that striking images like the one of the man who kills himself in the meadow do not drown us but instead invite us to survey their connections to the film's potential narratives and themes.

5.4 ART MUSIC VIDEO, ART CINEMA: INTERTEXT AND FURTHER DEPTH

Such bridges also exist for connections to other texts, connections that *Mysteries of Lisbon* encourages explicitly through its baroque display of many different artworks, its central positioning of the miniature theater, and its references to moments in European history. *Mysteries of Lisbon* is, in other words, a text that encourages intertextuality. While its most obvious reference points arise from the 18th and 19th century, its excesses can guide us to look anew at the music video for "Youth," with its displays, too, of thwarted romantic desire, explosive violence, and haunting memories. However, the two texts share not only these themes and ideas but also a similar way of structuring their exploration of these themes around certain

indelible images—whether fragments of or revelations in long takes (as in *Mysteries of Lisbon*) or glimpses of figures/settings/objects visible only momentarily (as in the music video for “Youth”)—that prompt viewers to further consideration of each text’s narrative and its implications. These indelible images make up the texts’ excessive surfaces, while the texts’ narratives and implications, considered and reconsidered by spectators, make up their excessive depth, their vertical dimensions. Certainly the music video for “Youth” intensifies this excess, loading hundreds of images into the space of a few minutes, set to the tune and lyrics of a pop song. But this does not make it more or less excessive than *Mysteries of Lisbon*, a film whose slower excess accrues its own velocity and weight over the course of its four-hour-plus runtime.

Both texts craft their excess with and through narrative, a move that both directly contradicts those music video scholars who emphasize music video’s excess as something stylistic and anti- or extra-narrative and necessarily expands upon the work of those film scholars who—with the exception of Linda Williams—only briefly refer to narrative in their descriptions of what can constitute cinematic excess. The positioning together of these two texts complicates “high”-“low” distinctions while also showing how excess that looks very different in terms of duration and the role of music can still share a similar sort of structure, a structure that I see as indebted to—but developing alongside—the ambiguous, question-eliciting narratives of art cinema. I have chosen these two texts specifically not only because of the surprising connection they share in terms of structuring their excess through narrative but also because of the themes they share and the way the two texts, beside each other, develop these themes and ideas further, expanding their excessive depth even further. What follows, below, is one route into better understanding their excessive depth, especially as it relates to the possibility of death and suicide, as well as the texts’ relation to gender, sexual, and racial politics—concerns that also become

clearer when placing the texts next to one another. The implication here is that the excess of art cinema and art music video necessarily moves the viewer beyond narrative worlds and beyond the merely conceptual into that which is material and into matters of real political consequence; surface, depth, and narrative work together in art cinema and art music video to prompt the viewer's thinking towards matters of real political consequence.

Thinking about the suicide scene in *Mysteries of Lisbon*, for instance, inevitably takes us back to the violence portrayed in the music video for "Youth." In both we have guns and knives and violence attempted (or completed) for the sake of romantic desire; in both, the relation between this violence and death is ambiguous. It is unclear whose death we witness and, if we do witness a death, whether this death actually occurs or is only metaphorical. Watching "Youth", one clearly sees that the world of duels and carefully refereed feuds, with their channeling of emotion into a set of enforceable rules, that characterizes *Mysteries of Lisbon* has passed. Instead, there is in the video for "Youth" an intensification of emotion and only undefined and problematic social norms that channel violent emotion into something particular, something seemingly transgressive yet perhaps a kind of disturbing norm.

While there are very different sorts of affects caught up in viewing the two different texts—the video for "Youth" involving a condensed narrative, *Mysteries of Lisbon* involving an extended narrative; the flower-eyed girl startling in the vivid brevity of her garishness, the suicidal figure startling for being a moment of violent death in the context of a film that tends to avoid death's *direct* portrayal—the two works both place these striking images in the context of many others while keeping the relation among these images both suggestive of possibility and definitively unclear. Both texts establish the foundations for a narrative but neither one provides the audiovisual information we need to concretely figure out what this narrative is or what

exactly happens in it. Instead, the viewer digs, considering and reconsidering possible configurations, building bridges among characters, themes, and affects. The mind and its evocative hold becomes significant in the context of the two texts, compelling us to wonder from whose mind the images arise and when/how they are happening. Perhaps they are memories or fantasies arising in the midst of a shower; perhaps they are fantasies or memories imagined from a deathbed.

These incredibly complicated matters jam themselves into the space of pop song in the music video for “Youth” (and they are complicated further by the song itself, with its rhythms and lyrics adding more layers to the images) and echo out over four hours in *Mysteries of Lisbon*, but it is together—each occurring next to the other, in high definition and available to stream—that we get a better sense of their concerns and the way their particular excessive surfaces guide us into vertical aspects of their narratives. And what we find in both texts enriches their concerns, highlighting what it is they show already. The feedback loop between music video and cinema is not merely on the surface or stylistic, then, but thematic, too, occurring at a deeper level. Art cinema and art music video inform each other, intensifying and/or expanding one another across time.

For example, the two texts can only together, only looping into one another, suggest that a kind of brooding masculine violence against women directly and a kind of brooding masculine violence committed on behalf of women are so closely related as to be almost identical. While the former is more obvious in the music video for “Youth” and the latter more obvious in the duel/suicide scene from *Mysteries of Lisbon*, putting the two texts together helps us to see what was previously latent in both. The protagonist in “Youth” may kill the object of his desire, but in the song’s lyrics, Ben Khan warns (seemingly on a woman’s behalf), “Beware of your youth,

darling.” He also commits or contemplates committing violence against himself on her behalf, either out of shame for what he has done to her or regret that he cannot ably show affection for her. The specter of violence against women haunts the scene in *Mysteries of Lisbon*, too, especially since Alberto, whom João fights, in a previous scene chokes and almost kills Elisa de Montfort, *for* whom João fights. Also, if the figure who commits suicide is in some sense João, it becomes obvious that he channels the violence intended on Elisa de Montfort’s behalf towards himself, since Alberto, his savior, becomes an inappropriate outlet.

While emphasis on an excessive surface and a playful relation to the happenings on screen may be important for taking some of the self-seriousness out of film studies (certainly playfulness is part of the goal for Vernallis, Thompson, and Ndalians), the matter of violence for/against women present in both “Youth” and *Mysteries of Lisbon* clarifies both the importance of moving beyond this surface into depth and the way in which these texts—on either end of the high-low spectrum—already encourage this sort of movement through their particular excessive structures. They do not portray violence for sheer pleasure but instead compel viewers to see and contemplate violence anew. This may be part of the reason that Vernallis, Thompson, Ndalians, and Walton do not throw aside narrative completely, even as their focus on excess threatens to do so. All four writers place within excess an active spectator, whose thoughts about the surface prompt something further—and this entails not only a movement deeper into a film’s narrative, but deeper into the world existing around each spectator, a world consisting not only of media or images but of lived relations and consequential politics.

Thompson, in her piece on cinematic excess, writes that “[t]he critic and his/her reader must resist the learned tendency to try and find a narrative significance in every detail, or at least they must realize that a narrative function does not exhaust the material presence of that detail”

(57). The former goes against my argument here, as do all those parts of her essay that claim the totally anti-narrative function of a film's excess. However, the second part of this passage opens further her gesture towards "expand[ing] the narrative 'vertically.'" The material presence of a thing is real and leaves a real mark on a film, fictional or not, digital or not—there is a trace. Excess is something material, something to be touched, to be felt (but not as pure abstraction, Walton reminds us).

Still, it's Williams that emphasizes this most clearly, in her emphasis on the real bodily excess tied up in the excessive narratives of supposedly "low" genres. She writes that "[w]hat seems to bracket these particular genres from others is an apparent lack of proper aesthetic distance, a sense of overinvolvement in sensation and emotion" (163). Tying this together with Thompson's excessive reading strategy that emphasizes material presence, the excess in all films opens itself up to exactly this sort of "overinvolvement": an overinvolvement of intellect that cannot be untied from that which is bodily, that which is material, that which is felt. This is especially important to consider when exploring the possibilities in the music video for "Youth" and in *Mysteries of Lisbon* for white male perspectives that concern themselves with the lives and bodies of women. Williams notes that "even when the pleasure of viewing has traditionally been constructed for masculine spectators, as in most traditional, heterosexual pornography, it is the female body in the grips of an out-of-control ecstasy that has offered the most sensational sight" (162). The memories and desires of the heterosexual white male perspectives in the music video for "Youth" and in *Mysteries of Lisbon* are tied to the female body, too: that of the mother (Angela de Lima in *Mysteries of Lisbon*, appearing magically at João's bedside; the absent mother for the motherless child in "Youth"), that of a lover or desired one (Elisa de Montfort in *Mysteries of Lisbon*, as well as her narrative predecessors: Angela de Lima with her lover and

husband, Blanche de Montfort, the Countess of Viso; the woman in “Youth,” sitting on the edge of the bed). While the white heterosexual male gaze structures these texts (to the point that their events may be entirely imagined by a white male heterosexual character within them), excess at the same time deconstructs and challenges such a gaze, reminding spectators across genders, sexualities, and races of material realities, even if the specificities of these material realities will be in some way unique for each individual viewer and their lived experiences.

Neither the music video for “Youth” nor *Mysteries of Lisbon* settles these experiences: their excessive ambiguity always unsettles, confuses, disturbs. Although the death and suicide they portray are parts of fictional narratives, the shocking images they present take us back to material and bodily reality. Their possible deaths haunt their narratives and us beyond and within them while at the same time reminding us of our intellectual and physical limits (i.e. what we experience is never exactly what others, real or fictional, experience, and thus we can never see or feel exactly as others see or feel; nonetheless, we die). We create, upon viewing these two texts, memories of “those who never existed,” and while we cannot exist within the material realities of fictional worlds, our own material realities necessarily create a bridge—or, better yet, a linkage, as between cells—between fiction and us, especially when narratives remain unsettled, ambiguous, in our minds and bodies.

The excess represented by the flower-eyed girl in “Youth” and by the suicidal youth in *Mysteries of Lisbon* push us towards excessive depth—here, questioning and reconfiguration of desire, violence, and memory. For *Mysteries of Lisbon*, we wonder who this character is, why he kills himself, and how his decision relates to João’s desire and imagination. The text works in such a way that we can’t not ask such questions: the presence of this mysterious character is too glaring—unmotivated, in Thompson’s terms—for us to ignore. It doesn’t pull us away from the

narrative but more deeply into it, to the point where, as Quintín implies, the narrative becomes part of reality. To wonder about an image in art cinema or music video is to wonder about the narrative in which it exists and the excessive depth towards which it gestures, and to wonder about narrative and excessive depth is always, eventually, to wonder about the material world full of material detail in which we live and desire.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Each of my four chapters has taken up a key concern related to the concept of the art music video. The first two chapters took a broader perspective, examining major terms and key developments in postwar art cinema and its connections to art music video: Chapter 1 sought to define art music video, in part by reimagining art cinema, and Chapter 2 sought to provide a kind of historical perspective on art music video by examining a number of pop music moments in the history of art cinema. Then, my final two chapters honed in on a small group of films and music videos in order to consider, respectively, the importance of hip-hop aesthetics to the art film and the art music video (Chapter 3) and the necessity of reconsidering the concept of excess in the context of art music video (Chapter 4).

Each chapter involved close readings of films and music videos to examine their particular disruptions and the effects of these disruptions on spectators. What particular images or moments send spectators into a kind of tailspin, unable to fully or concretely understand the relationship between what they're seeing now and what they've seen previously? Narrative has taken center stage in these close readings, even as aesthetic strategies have played a key role in my examination of how these films' and videos' narratives transform over time. I find this foregrounding of narrative to be an important intervention in art cinema discourse, which has tended to favor an auteurist and/or institutional approach. By foregrounding narrative, I've hoped to allow art cinema, as a category, to open itself up to new possibilities for connection and

inclusivity. If the disruptions of art cinema and their resulting ambiguity are important, and not merely part of a meaningless game, then we should consider all of the possible audiovisual contexts in which such disruptions exist or may exist, refusing to limit our concern to the traditional, auteurist, festival-bound objects usually included under the umbrella of art cinema.

It has been equally important to open up traditional understandings of music video, to historicize it differently. As my introduction pointed out, most histories of the music video begin with *The Jazz Singer* (1927, dir. Alan Crosland) and the Hollywood musical, eventually working their way up through video jukeboxes to *Blackboard Jungle* (1955, dir. Richard Brooks) and The Beatles and Queen. But it is only two years after *Blackboard Jungle* and its use of “Rock Around the Clock” that *Le Notti Bianche* appears on the scene, with its Bill Haley number suggesting—as Chapter 2 points out—another route along which to trace the history of music video. While *Le Notti Bianche* was not as popular or profitable as *Blackboard Jungle*, its unsettled, rock-and-roll disruption—in terms of narrative, not in terms of the supposed riots in the theater aisles that came along with *Blackboard Jungle*—is arguably equally influential, particularly on the strand of music video that I have considered at length in this dissertation.

In sum, my goal has been to commence a reimagining or—to invoke the Surrealists again—a dreaming anew of both art cinema and music video. The key word here is *begin*. The four chapters included here have purposely left a number of strands and possibilities for future consideration, in order to keep this dissertation from becoming too unwieldy. There are three I would like to consider, very briefly, in this conclusion: the possibility of a Classical Hollywood Music Video; a deeper notion of intensified discontinuity; and the specific effects of streaming on art cinema and art music video spectatorship.

First, I've noted how Bordwell describes art films as "altogether different from *Rio Bravo* on the one hand and *Mothlight* on the other" (94). If we're using his terms to consider art music video as a kind of ambiguous narrative music video (in a way similar to that in which, say, *8½* is an ambiguous narrative film), then what represents the categories of music video between which the art music video sits? What is the music video equivalent of *Rio Bravo* or, more generally, Classical Hollywood Cinema? What is the music video equivalent of *Mothlight* or, more generally, the non-narrative avant-garde?

The latter question is—at first glance—much easier to answer, since critics have tended to understand non-narrative as the norm, past and present, for music video. If this is truly the case, it means that something like the Classical MTV Music Video is more like the *Mothlight* end of the spectrum than the *Rio Bravo* end of the spectrum. This would leave music videos "dependent on the articulation of space, time, and causality...in mainstream narrative cinema" in a very small minority (Shaviro 15). But I don't think it's fair to describe the majority of music videos—in the MTV or post-MTV eras—as predominantly interested in a similar set of concerns to *Mothlight* (the ephemeral, the structural, the experimental, etc.). While these concerns are not alien to the music video, I would hypothesize that most music videos *are* interested in articulating space, time, and causality, just not in the same ways as mainstream narrative cinema or Classical Hollywood Cinema.

Consider, for instance, the way that many music videos of the 1980s and 1990s included two main parts: the artist performing (lip-syncing, dancing, and so on) and some other sort of event or character. Such videos move between these two parts, which usually intersect in some way. For example, the video for Dru Hill's "These Are the Times" (1998) moves back and forth between Dru Hill—an R&B group popular in the late 1990s—performing the song and a

narrative involving the attempts of Sisqo—Dru Hill’s leading man—to win over the woman he loves. Both involve costumes and settings meant to invoke a medieval setting, even though the song sounds much like other R&B songs from the late 1990s. While this video does not operate in the same way as Classical Hollywood Cinema, it is still interested in portraying the group in a somewhat coherent space and time and in allowing a coherent narrative to play out in parts loosely connected to that space and time. Another video from 1998, for Backstreet Boys’ “I Want It That Way” (dir. Wayne Isham), does not feature this kind of dual structure, but is still interested in coherent space and time nonetheless. In part, this seems to be an excuse to move the band’s members through a variety of costume changes, but the video suggests a kind of very simple narrative, too: the Backstreet Boys arrive at an airport, where eventually a group of screaming fans greets them exuberantly (before the band gets into a plane and departs).

There are plenty of interesting aesthetic strategies involved in these two videos, but the videos don’t foreground these strategies (or the structures these strategies form) in the way that the avant-garde traditionally does. So, provisionally, I would argue that the Classical Hollywood Music Video—perhaps more aptly dubbed the Classical MTV Music Video—does feature some sort of narrative or narrative elements, just not in the same ways that mainstream cinema tends to do so. The art music video disrupts such elements to unsettle spectators, while the music video avant-garde, then, would be videos that do not include these narrative elements at all (e.g. the music video for The Soft Moon’s “Give Something” [2018, dir. Kelsey Henderson]). However, this is only a loose hypothesis, and scholars must investigate a wider range of music videos in their specific historical contexts in order to get a fuller sense of how the art music video connects to the other categories of music video between which it uncomfortably sits.

Second, I say this about intensified discontinuity in Chapter 1: "...I do not use the term *intensified continuity* to refer to specific differences in technique; instead, I use it to refer merely to the way that art music videos shorten the time in which narrative/spatial information appears and is interrupted, becoming discontinuous." As this quote indicates, this understanding of intensification is less exact than Bordwell's understanding of intensified discontinuity, which he not only ties to specific changes in filming/editing technique but also historicizes by describing many changes in technology and culture that have led to the intensification of "principles which crystallized in the 1910s and 1920s" (24). To nuance my use of the term "intensified discontinuity," I would need to make similar sorts of connections, considering not only changes in technique from classical (and contemporary) art cinema to art music video but also consider changes in technology and culture as these pertain to art cinema and art music video specifically.

On the other hand, I would also argue that part of the problem is with Bordwell's formulation of intensified continuity in the first place, as he does not convincingly distinguish between those filmmakers who use the "stylistic tactics" discussed in his piece—more rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, more close framings in dialogue scenes, a free-ranging camera—for coherence, pure and simple, and those filmmakers who use these stylistic tactics for the sake of disruption and ambiguity. Bordwell starts out by saying, "In representing space, time, and narrative relations (such as causal connections and parallels), today's films generally adhere to the principles of classical filmmaking" (16). But, by the end of the essay, Bordwell has mentioned a number of films and filmmakers (such as Werner Herzog/*Aguirre: The Wrath of God* [1972] and Tom Tykwer/*Run Lola Run* [1998]) that may "use the same expressive tactics [he has] highlighted" (21), but ultimately do something very different with narrative (and often with space and time, too), something we would more accurately call *discontinuous*. Bordwell

ignores that this is the case, lumping together films and filmmakers based solely on the filmmaking techniques they deploy without considering the specific uses of these techniques in the films themselves. He concludes by noting, "...the new style suggests that we can't adequately describe the viewer's activity with spatial metaphors like 'absorption' and 'detachment.' At any moment, stylistic tactics may come forward, but viewers remain in the grip of the action" (25). This may be true for many films that use the stylistic tactics Bordwell describes, but what about the films and videos that purposely take spectators out of—or purposely disrupt—"the grip of the action"? These films might deploy editing techniques, lens lengths, framings, and free-ranging camera to completely different ends than those Bordwell seems to take for granted.

Bordwell's term is, necessarily, a generalizing one, based largely upon norms within the mainstream. Outside of the mainstream, in the realm of art cinema, fewer norms exist, especially since those institutions traditionally associated with art cinema are transforming or crumbling rapidly (as I describe in Chapter 1). For music video, YouTube's anything-goes approach means that norms are even more difficult to locate and describe. This does not mean that scholars should not seek to do so (the work of Shaviro and Vernallis is admirable in this regard), but it does mean that film and video artists can use the tactics Bordwell describes—as well as many others—to undermine instead of enforce any sense of continuity. Still, a more nuanced understanding of intensified discontinuity—including a fuller sense of where it exists beyond the art music video—requires further research into the history of music video and the technologies and tactics videomakers have used to create music videos.

Third, and finally, there is the closely related matter of what exactly constitutes the "streaming era" of this dissertation's title and how it affects spectators' responses to art cinema

and art music video. In my introduction, I note, “The circulation of art cinema and art music video on the internet, in high definition, *heightens* [disruptive thoughtfulness] instead of acting as obstruction to it, in large part because the internet exists at a junction where users must already negotiate a number of different ideas at once and be prepared to work through the very kind of disruption present in art cinema and art music video.” Such a claim is largely, at this point, an intuitive one and requires a further fleshing out. In what ways are the negotiations and disruptions of art cinema and art music video similar to the disruptions of the internet?

A number of recent art films and art music videos that include digital- or web-based disruptions provide one possible answer to this question. The concluding moments of *By the Time It Gets Dark* (*Dao khanong*) (2016, dir. Anocha Suwichakornpong), for example, feature a kind of pixelated glitching that leave viewers wondering—if they’re watching the film online, that is—if they’re seeing an actual, web-connection-based error or something placed there purposely by filmmakers. The music video for Sonny Digital’s “We On” (2018, dir. Louieknows) takes a similar approach, most noticeably in certain of its shots that show Sonny Digital driving a convertible. Here, the right third of the frame is filled with a number of blurry horizontal lines. This effect is strikingly similar to moments when a video has trouble loading or can’t quite transition to full screen. One might also look to films like *Ouroboros* (2017, dir. Basma Alsharif) and *The Human Surge* (*El auge del humano*) (2016, dir. Eduardo Williams), which at times seem to directly imitate web-surfing logic and tools, including several moments that backtrack, incorporate drone/webcam footage, and move in the blink of an eye from gauzy slowness to neck-breaking speed. A comparably eclectic, web-surfing-based approach appears in videos such as Skooly’s “Habit (feat. 2 Chainz)” (2018, dir. Howard Ross), Sorry’s “Twinkle” (2018, dir. Asha Lorenz), and Tierra Whack’s “Whack World” (2018, dir. Thibaut Duverneix).

But just because the disruptions of art cinema and art music video *can* mimic the disruptions and discontinuities of the internet doesn't mean they necessarily do. It's also frustrating that many of the art films I've discussed in this dissertation are not available to view on the most popular streaming services, like Netflix and Amazon Prime (at least not without paying an additional fee). This means that the digital reach of (at least) classical art cinema remains limited in some ways, even if the art music video circulates rapidly and widely on YouTube. This partially explains why certain scholars emphasize new media over old in their examination of ideas like accelerated and glitch aesthetics. However, it remains important to consider and reconsider possible genealogies of new disruptions, as well to consider how the old and the new intersect with one another in an era where streaming media is the norm. For furthering our understanding of streaming spectatorship—as well of music video history and intensified discontinuity—we would do well to dream, lucidly, even as we dive into the dizzying archives and lived realities of the people who watch and wonder.

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