

Sound & Vision

The Music Video Reader

Edited by Simon Frith,
Andrew Goodwin
and Lawrence Grossberg



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SOUND AND VISION

Music video is one of the most important emergent cultural forms in contemporary popular culture. It has had a profound impact both on music, fashion and youth culture, and on the codes and forms that operate across television, film and advertising. But until now criticism has denied the specific nature of the form and its cultural history. *Sound and Vision* is the first significant collection of new and classic texts on video and brings together some of the leading international cultural and music critics writing today.

Addressing one of the most controversial forms of popular culture in the contemporary world, the book confronts easy interpretations of music television—as promotional vehicles, filmic images, postmodern culture—to offer a new and bold understanding of its place in pop music, television and the media industries. Moving debates on from such early preoccupations as whether videos are promotions of songs or simply mini-films, or whether they represent the destruction or the salvation of pop music, *Sound and Vision* acknowledges the history of the commercial status of pop music as a whole, as well as its complex relations with other media, to offer a new and refreshing interpretation which takes both terms—music and video—seriously. *Sound and Vision* will be an essential text for students of popular music and popular culture.

The editors: Lawrence Grossberg is Professor of Speech Communications and Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois. Simon Frith is Professor of English at Strathclyde University and co-director of the John Logie Baird Centre. Andrew Goodwin is Associate Professor of Communication Arts at the University of San Francisco.

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Kobena Mercer's essay was first published in *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1986.

Will Straw and Mark Fenster's articles originally appeared in *Popular Music*, 7/3 (1988), published by Cambridge University Press.

Lisa Lewis's article was first published in *Communication*, vol. 9, 1987.

INTRODUCTION

Andrew Goodwin and Lawrence Grossberg

Music television deserves serious attention from students of popular culture. We attempt to begin that task in this book, by bringing together a variety of approaches (many of them written specifically for this volume) that highlight the necessarily interdisciplinary nature of the work, whilst paying particular attention to the most debilitating neglect in music video research: the absence of attention to the music itself, and its location within the pop music industry.

Thus far, the study of music television has been dominated by research which originates beyond the parameters of popular music studies. Whether in the analysis of individual promotional video clips or in the study of televisual packages, much MTV (Music Television) work in this field has emerged from the disciplines of film studies, mass communications or literary theory, and from theoretical concerns with postmodernism and psychoanalytic theory. This is not the place to rehearse our reservations about much of this work (a critique that is addressed in the following pages by Andrew Goodwin, and—more obliquely—by Will Straw and Robert Walser). We do point out, however, that this collection differs in one central respect from nearly all the work published on music television so far: its concerns originate in the contributors' understanding of the place of music video in the popular music industry, and the social relations of production and consumption that centre on that cultural apparatus.

As Will Straw makes clear in the first chapter of this anthology, music videos and their relation to postmodernism can be explained in terms of an analysis of developments internal to the music and its culture. Straw locates the emergence of MTV in the context of the emergence of a new pop mainstream in the early 1980s. Both of these interdependent changes themselves were shaped by the music industry's attempts to respond to particular problems. These responses, which reshaped the roles of career and biography, celebrity and glamour, allow a more concrete understanding of the apparent proximity of music videos and postmodernist descriptions.

Jody Berland continues the logic of this argument by exploring the paradoxical relationship that exists between the image and the sound in music videos. Focusing on the symbol of the guitar in rock culture, she considers the historically changing relations between image and sound as tropes of new relations within the culture of popular music between music and technology, and community and space.

Andrew Goodwin addresses some of the more general limitations of the cultural studies approach to music television inspired by postmodern theory, and offers in its place a textual reading of the most widely discussed site of video distribution (MTV) that considers its historical development and the possibilities for counter-readings that defy the orthodox academic 'line' on MTV.

Simon Frith's consideration of the marketplace and audience research data on music television in a European context reveals the importance, for the analysis of music video, of the broadcaster's search for new audiences; and the centrality of changing notions of 'youth culture'. Embedded in these processes is an old debate—the question of whether television addresses its audience as citizen or consumer. While critics familiar with MTV and MTV Europe might assume that the latter has long since won out over the former, the British experience does suggest the possibility of alternatives.

Leslie Savan's US-based experience, as a writer for the *Village Voice*, unsurprisingly stresses the commercial basis of rock's new mass-mediated appeals. Here we have collected together three of her *Voice* 'Op Ad' columns, respectively dealing with Laurie Anderson, VH-1 (MTV's sister channel, established in 1985 to reach an older audience) and—inevitably—Madonna. While recent cultural studies' criticism has tended to focus on the transgressive and liberatory features of Madonna's career, Savan's article is a welcome reminder of some of the less empowering aspects of her work.

In Part III of this book, we offer four exemplary attempts to read the music video clips themselves. Kobena Mercer integrates his reading of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* tape into an account of the star-imagery associated with Jackson through his music and public, mass-mediated *persona*. Mark Fenster, on the other hand, looks at a much-neglected form: promotional videos which sell country music.

While Lisa Lewis considers the possibilities for proto-feminist uses of MTV clips, Robert Walser's account of heavy-metal clips offers a similarly complex attempt to refuse simple accounts of 'sexism' in music television. Both chapters wrestle with difficult issues of representation and sexuality, and both authors suggest an approach which transcends the limitations of content analysis studies of 'stereotypes' in music video. While music video's critics have been quick to register complaints about MTV's representations of sexuality, both Lewis and Walser argue that this new form is more complex and nuanced than popular criticism (and some academic scholars) imply. A particular strength of Walser's paper is his grasp of the music itself (he is a guitarist, as well as a scholar) and his ability to demonstrate concrete textual links between sound and vision.

Finally, Lawrence Grossberg returns to the themes raised by Straw, Berland and Goodwin, arguing that the particular forms and power of music video which emerged in the 1980s are icons of a new media economy, of a new ratio between sound and vision, within the disparate spaces of rock culture. This new economy, he argues, can be seen within the visual imagery itself by comparing, for example, different movies oriented to the rock audience. Ultimately, this new economy represents the decline of the ideology of authenticity and the emergence of new forms of relations between fans and their music.

Our aim in this book is thus two-fold: to provide a set of readings that may be used in teaching about music television in a broad and open-ended fashion, and at the same time to collect those analyses which have helped to move the study of music television forward, along with some new pieces which suggest future lines of research.

Part I
THE CONTEXT OF
MUSIC VIDEOS

1
POPULAR MUSIC AND POST-
MODERNISM IN THE 1980s

Will Straw

One of the striking things about recent writing on music video is its pivotal and symptomatic role within a number of disciplinary and theoretical realignments upon the larger terrain of cultural theory. At one level, music television is the latest in a succession of privileged examples invoked in the elaboration of scenarios about the development of the media and culture within late capitalist societies, joining a long list that has included jazz music and advertising. As well, the particular set of theoretical discourses brought to bear on music video signals new alliances and convergences across and within various disciplinary boundaries. It is to a significant extent within studies of music video that the internal crises and territorial disputes which currently mark film theory, television studies, the debate over postmodernism and the sociology of popular music are being foregrounded. Seen from a somewhat different light, recent treatments of music video represent the entry of post-structuralist thought into the American social sciences, where it has converged with sociological concerns and premisses of long-standing (those having to do with the status of mass culture) around the work and ideas of Baudrillard.¹

Writing on music video has had two distinctive moments in its brief history. The first wave of treatments tended to come from the culture surrounding rock music and from those who were primarily interested in music video as something which produced effects on that music. Here, two claims were most common, and generally expressed in the terms and the contexts of rock journalism:

- 1 that music video had made 'image' more important than the experience of music itself, with effects which were to be feared (for example, the potential difficulties for artists with poor 'images', the risk that theatricality and spectacle would take precedence over intrinsically 'musical' values, etc.);
- 2 that music video would result in a diminishing of the interpretive liberty of the individual music listener, who would now have visual or narrative interpretations of song lyrics imposed on him or her, in what would amount to a semantic and affective impoverishment of the popular music experience.

In retrospect, these fears seem to have been rooted, less in a specific concern about possible new relationships between sound and image, than in a longstanding caution about the relationship between rock music as a culture of presumed resistance and television as the embodiment of mainstream show business and commercial culture. It may be argued, however, that while the debate over celebrity, authenticity and artifice prominent within Anglo-American rock culture in the early 1980s was in part provoked

by issues surrounding music video, it was by no means confined to such issues. In particular, the complex of notions and practices which nourished the British 'New Pop' of 1981–3, and which were central to these debates, involved rereadings of popular music's history and relationship to other cultural forms which went far beyond a response to music video exclusively.²

The more recent wave of writing on music video has come both from those with more elaborate theoretical interests, and from people whose point of departure is an interest in television. The particular appeal of music video here is the extent to which it appears to magnify the characteristic functioning of television in general, itself now regarded as the medium most typical of postmodern culture. One finds within much of this writing the articulation of two themes with long and notorious histories within sociologies of the media and of culture: on the one hand, a view of television as embodying the very structure of knowledge and perception in the latter part of the twentieth century; on the other, a view of youth culture as either the most debased or most resistant of cultural forms.

What follows is organized around these two sets of concerns: the one having to do with music video's relationship to rock music, and the other addressing treatments of music video within characterizations of postmodern culture.

MUSIC VIDEO AND THE NEW POP MAINSTREAM

The dominant tendency in discussions of music video's impact on rock music is to exaggerate that impact, and to examine it in isolation from other, perhaps equally significant transformations within Anglo-American rock music and rock culture in the early 1980s. Music video was one of a number of innovations producing major structural changes in the music-related industries during that period, but it is unlikely that it was the most important of these, nor that many of them would not have occurred without it.

The most important of these transformations was the constitution of a new pop music mainstream in North America in the years 1982–3. This mainstream represented the convergence of a number of developments (each involving a partial resolution of problems which the recording industry had recognized since the late 1970s): the rebirth of Top 40, singles-based radio, and with it significant shifts in the relative influence of different music audience groups; an increase in the rate of turnover of successful records and artist career spans; the recovery of the record industry after a four-year slump; and the beginning of music video programming on a national scale.

Together, these developments displaced, if only for a time, what was widely regarded as a permanent structural crisis within the recording industry. By the late 1970s, it was apparent that the objectives of radio broadcasters and record companies were in conflict in important ways: advertisers urged radio stations to pursue audiences (those in their late twenties and older) who were not actively engaged in the purchasing of records, though their overall patterns of consumption made them attractive.³ By the early 1980s, radio stations were dominated by Adult Contemporary (light pop and soul) and country music formats, neither of which had significant reach among those most involved in buying records. At the same time, those stations directed at the core of recordbuyers (those in their late teens and early twenties) were increasingly playing music which was not

contemporary or in the charts (the ‘classic’ album-rock of the previous decade), and therefore not contributing to a significant extent to the innovation or turnover of performers, styles and individual records.

The new mainstream of 1982–3 had its roots in two developments on the margins of these overall trends. On the one hand, certain radio stations in highly competitive markets (most notably KROQ-FM in San Diego) found it feasible to target audiences encompassing disproportionate numbers of teens and females, rather than compete for a small segment of the traditionally more attractive audience of young male adults. A combination of the principles of Top 40 radio (reliance on local personalities, a ‘heavy’ rotation of music and constant innovation) with the specific musical styles of British post-punk music (ranging from the electropop of The Human League to the various revivalisms of The Stray Cats, Dexy’s Midnight Runners and so on) proved extremely successful. While this audience was attractive to advertisers only in a highly competitive and fragmented market, it was extremely useful to record companies inasmuch as it responded quickly and enthusiastically to musical innovation and became a significant force in record sales during this period.⁴

The other development, of course, was the emergence of music television. MTV and similar networks were at one level simply the latest in a series of encounters between television and popular music, encounters which had increasingly proved unsuccessful. Historically, the audience group most active in buying new records (males in their late teens and early twenties) is underrepresented within television audiences. While, in absolute terms, that audience was of limited appeal to television advertisers, the traditional impossibility of reaching it at all via television and the precision with which music television networks could target this constituency ensured some level of success. (MTV had as its original target audience the 12–34 age demographic, which overlapped significantly with that for album-oriented rock radio and included a similarly high proportion of males.⁵)

The emergent mainstream of 1982–4 had as its principal original demographic bases a radio audience (that of teenage girls) long regarded within radio broadcasting as insignificant, and a medium (television) which was for the first time able to attract the traditional core audience for rock music. This re-enfranchisement of younger teenagers, and especially adolescent girls, as radio listeners and record buyers should be seen as a crucial factor in the emergence of certain kinds of para-musical practices around the new musical mainstream.⁶ An intensification of the discourses of celebrity around pop music, and the proliferation of fan magazines, pin-ups and other forms of merchandise all signalled the renewed involvement of young adolescents within popular music culture.

At the same time, Anglo-American popular music underwent a process of generic stabilization. Certain formal characteristics came to be found in almost all successful examples of that music, and a mainstream with more stylistic coherence than any, perhaps, since the mid-late 1960s, could be seen to have arrived. The most important of these characteristics was no doubt the restriction of almost all musical practice to the format of the 3–5-minute pop song, but the use of dance-related rhythms and some combination of black-and-white rock idioms were almost equally common. Whereas in the early 1980s the pop/rock charts had consisted of heterogeneous, eclectic groupings of styles and forms,⁷ by 1983–4 they had come to manifest an almost unprecedented degree of homogeneity.

The most common way in which these developments have been understood is in terms of a narrative of recuperation: the new mainstream is seen to have enacted, for major record companies, the long-desired co-optation of the critical gestures and innovations of punk, its integration within the mechanisms of celebrity turnover and pop-chart homogeneity.⁸ The appeal of this narrative lies in its fidelity to the dominant conceptions of rock culture's politics: conceptions positing a dialectic or struggle between margin and mainstream, resistance and complicity.

What this account most obviously overlooks is the extent to which this emergence of a new mainstream had little to do with the life-cycle of punk/new wave, and much to do with certain structural changes within the production of rock music and the mechanisms through which it is disseminated and promoted. While the increased popularity of British acts within the new American mainstream is a significant phenomenon within the recent history of the recorded music industry, it itself may be viewed most profitably in terms of the ongoing negotiation of a relationship between white rock music and black-based dance music. The historically significant tensions and processes of incorporation within American popular music over the last decade, I would argue, are those between an album-based, predominantly white rock music and the idioms and institutional functioning of dance music. It is this relationship which is crucial to a useful historical understanding of the period in which music video came to assume importance, and to an account of change within the functioning of the music-related industries. Within these developments, the trajectories followed by punk music are of secondary importance, despite the extent to which they are privileged within most historical accounts.

The most important of these changes, I would argue, are (a) an increase in the rate of turnover of acts and records, and general intensification of the velocity of rock music and rock culture; (b) the resurgence of the 45-rpm single and the individual song as the basic units within the marketing of rock music; and (c) changes in the function of celebrity and performer identity within rock culture. Within each of these changes, the introduction of music video is one of a number of determinant factors.

Velocity

By the late 1970s, various mechanisms within the music-related industries had slowed down considerably. The elapsed time between albums by major artists was long, resulting in regular complaints about the shortage of new products. The markers of change and development within individual careers were infrequent, as the time spent on the charts by each successful record stretched into one to two years, and sales of several hundred thousand copies became virtually necessary to justify rapidly rising production costs. The time between recording was frequently taken up with lengthy, time-consuming tours, themselves necessary components in the successful promotion of an album.⁹ For the album-rock mainstream, neither AOR radio, increasingly reliant on playlists with a high proportion of 'classic' tracks of the decade, nor Top 40, which played singles subsequent to their release on albums, constituted effective channels for innovation.

This slowing down was not limited to certain measurable processes (recording, touring, etc.). Affected as well was the extent to which, for the radio listener or record-buyer, monitoring the turnover of music was useful and significant for the marking of cultural or social distinction. As I have suggested elsewhere, the album-rock culture of

the 1970s was one dependent upon a specific relationship to the passage of time: one in which records and songs from the previous ten years accumulated as acceptable musical resources of the present, rather than functioning as 'oldies' with specific reference to a highly calibrated succession of historical moments.¹⁰

In periods of little or slow innovation, the stratification of audiences according to the extent of their familiarity with new products obviously is limited. This slowing down of the velocity of innovation in the late 1970s accompanied the ageing of the core rock audience and its movement out of the age-ranges in which it is most involved in the purchasing of recorded music and in what might be called emblematic uses of rock music and information about it.¹¹

This slowing down applies only to album-rock as it developed throughout the 1970s. Alongside this mainstream, the sorts of functioning associated with disco music represented a much heightened velocity, based on a markedly different set of institutional relationships and audience positions. Whereas the promotional itinerary for album-rock involved the passage from record companies to radio-format consultants and from these to radio stations, that for disco involved much more immediate forms of feedback: more-or-less instantaneous reporting from record pools and retail stores to radio stations. The mechanisms for the promotion of disco by record labels involved a series of successive decisions as to the allocation of resources, each based on rapid information from those monitoring response in clubs or within the retail sector.¹²

The objective of major record companies in the late 1970s was frequently expressed as that of marrying the high rate of turnover and low production costs of disco records with the career stability and longevity of white album-rock.¹³ This would require a musical field in which feedback mechanisms (between airplay and retail sales, for example) were quick, but in which performer identities were distinct and marketable (which was considered not to be the case with disco performers). This distinctiveness was seen as necessary if disco's commodity value within the sales of albums and non-current catalogue products was to be enhanced.

When MTV was launched in 1981 in the US, it had as one of its principal goals the breaking of records which were unable to make the playlists of album-rock radio stations, and it expected to serve as a testing ground for records before their possible adoption by radio station playlists.¹⁴ It was one of a number of conduits which record companies would use, not only for alternative forms of promotion, but for what ultimately proved to be more efficient and inexpensive forms. Dance clubs and a variety of new record formats and merchandising tools (mini-LPs, specially-priced 12" singles, sampler albums, etc.) were among these.¹⁵

Arguably, one of MTV's most significant innovations was the institutionalization within North America of an equivalent to national network radio. It was not so much the reach of MTV that was important in this respect as the simultaneity of that reach, and subsequent direct measurable impact on sales. While the aggregate audience of the major FM rock stations in the US was likely greater than that for MTV, playlist adoption of a new record by these stations was likely to be staggered and uneven, while exposure on MTV was even across the country. Both MTV and dance clubs preceded radio in their adoption of new records for playlists; the difference between them, obviously, lay in the fact that dance clubs were for the most part inner urban phenomena, while MTV reached suburban and small-town areas. The impact of MTV should be seen as resulting, not

simply from the specific repertory which dominated its playlists at the beginning, but from the extent to which, in conjunction with a resurgent Top 40 radio, it increased the velocity of innovation.

Format

This increased velocity was accompanied by the resurgence of the single 45-rpm record as a commodity form and promotional material within rock music. As Top 40, CHR or Hot Hits radio formats and the dance-club circuit became important elements in the sequence through which a record was promoted, the selection of a single from an album as the focus of promotion acquired an importance which it had not had since the early 1970s. Even more significantly, perhaps, there was a return in many cases (usually those of so-called 'New Music' groups) to the release of singles before albums; an album might now, as it had in the 1960s, follow, rather than precede, a string of successful singles.

In this respect, perhaps the most significant development in which music video participated was the institution of the single-song as the crucial factor in the marketing of an album. Inasmuch as one cut must be selected for the production of an initial videoclip, this song becomes the pivot around which promotional strategies are organized. Even when several songs from an album are selected for single and videoclip release, these releases occur in succession and are based on calculations as to the speed of response of particular audience groups. This remains the case despite the slowing down of turnover on the major charts which has occurred since 1985. Increasingly, as specialized radio formats and charts (such as those for so-called Black, Dance and Adult Contemporary musics) have become integrated within the functioning of the mainstream, their distinctiveness is based on the rapidity and intensity with which their particular constituencies respond to innovation rather than on a set of substantive tastes which they manifest.

In this respect, the videoclip is one among a number of permutations of the basic single-song unit which circulate within the field of rock music today; dance mixes, instrumental versions and excerpts used as part of motionpicture soundtracks are other examples of this. As such, it is part of a more general tendency towards the dismantling of the link between song, album and performer-identity, a link and form of coherence which had been crucial to the meaning of rock/pop music in the 1970s.

Performer identity and the construction of celebrity

As suggested earlier, the warnings expressed about music video most often took the form of the claim that secondary aspects of rock music (performer image, visualization of song content) would come to dominate over primary elements (the elusive 'music itself'). The rise of what might be called a new 'pin-up culture' as part of the reconstituted mainstream of 1982-4 seemed to confirm this, inasmuch as rock music became surrounded, to a much more significant extent than in several years, with the accoutrements of celebrity. The renewed participation of adolescents within the audiences for Hollywood films and the mechanisms of fashion turnover is a further index of the revitalization of commodity production directed at this group.

This should, however, be seen as part of a more general process involving the proliferation and intensification of discourse around rock music. Musical styles and periods within the history of popular music may be distinguished according to the quantity and forms of information which surround the playing and consumption of music. This information may be as minimal as the identification of an artist whose record is played on the radio; it may extend to complex and on-going forms of gossip and biography, or to the contextualization of songs within performers' careers by radio announcers playing those songs. In periods marked by a high rate of turnover, information about the position of records relative to each other according to some measure of popularity generally is widely disseminated and monitored, and published sales charts and other means of monitoring relative success and marking change attract a high level of public interest. (A simple but extremely important factor in MTV's impact on sales, one which was part of its strategy from its inception, was the decision to label songs at their beginning and end. The failure of radio disc jockeys to identify records was seen as limiting the sales potential of country and adult contemporary records. Music video programmes, on MTV, Much Music and elsewhere have adopted as well, with few exceptions, the countdown format.)

These forms of discourse and information circulated around the artists active in the post-1982 mainstream to a significant extent. The role of music video in giving a high definition to the individual images of these performers was not negligible, but 'image', in this context, was simply part of the overall semiotic richness and high level of contextualization with which popular music in this period became endowed.

The paradox of popular music in the mid-1980s was this: while there had apparently been no time in recent memory when the institutions of celebrity and glamour seemed so crucial to it, the individual performer's identity was much less important as a guarantee of successful records than at any time in the last decade.¹⁶ The career patterns of Culture Club, The Human League and ABC demonstrate this: initial successful records were followed by clear failures. The explanation that this was due to over-saturation and burnout, and that this was now part of the permanent condition of celebrity in North American societies, missed the underlying structural reason for this phenomenon: that the record industry now functioned on the basis of songs and their turnover rather than an interest in artists and their unfolding biographies or careers.

In the white rock-music mainstream of the 1970s, the individual career and biography provided the dominant grid through which new records were interpreted and marketed. In the mainstream of the mid-1980s, it was rather the case that performer identity and the discourses of celebrity constituted the trappings through which songs acquired the distinctiveness necessary to their success in the turnover of the pop charts. Star performer figures remained at the centre of popular music, but these succeeded each other in rapid sequence, and this succession was a function of the success of individual records rather than of a sustained interest in the artists themselves. The acknowledged advantage for record companies of this mode of functioning was that it meant successful stars were usually in the early (and less remunerative) stages of contracts, and that their potential for success could be tested by the marketing of a single, a video or a mini-album before investment in an album was forthcoming.¹⁷ With some differences, this represented the successful integration of white pop within the institutional processes characteristic of dance music: processes characterized by a reduction of risk in initial stages, a

professionalization of craft roles (production, songwriting), an increased tendency to license products of foreign origin, and short-term strategies for success.

Bound up with these shifts were what might be called a disjunction between performer celebrity—and the contexts within which that celebrity circulated (those of gossip columns, fan magazines, and so on)—and the musical recordings themselves. It is important to note that, despite the proliferation of biographical and other information about the performers dominating this new mainstream, there is very little sense that this information was invoked in the interpretation or understanding of the music itself. The importance of performer biography and personal vision in the rock criticism of the 1970s (when it explicitly adopted many of the concerns of auteurist film criticism) has given way to a much greater autonomy of the discourses of celebrity from those of interpretation. In the new mainstream, the performer functions, either as the point of continuity between rather disparate musical and para-musical practices (as was the case, for example, with Culture Club), or as the point of coherence of a number of strategic operations upon the field of popular/musical culture (as with Madonna). There is little of the two-way passage between a performer's worldview and the meaning of his or her recordings which existed a decade previously.¹⁸

The dominant form through which popular music was heard or understood within this mainstream was that of the song, and its place within a sequence of songs in dance clubs, on Top 40 radio, or on music television. The frequent claim that music video enacts a dispersion of the authorial voice or performer identity needs to be qualified by the recognition that, even in 1987, this voice or identity are not significant points of departure in the experience of mainstream music video or popular music. Madonna's 'Open your heart' video exemplifies this at a number of levels. Clearly, it highlights the dilemma, familiar from film theory but more pronounced in pop songs (which almost always employ first-person narration), of the disjunction between a verbal narration which is first-person and the specularization of that narrator within a particular fictional space. This should be read, however, less in terms of a problematization or splitting of the enunciative voice, than as typical of an operation which displaces and reconstitutes that voice (however phantasmatically) as the point of origin of strategies which the video has deployed. These strategies themselves come to be judged according to the criteria of ingenuity rather than those of truth or affective investment.

MUSIC TELEVISION AND THE POSTMODERN CULTURE¹⁹

The remarks which follow are concerned with the status of music television within characterizations of postmodern culture. They are organized around a series of hypotheses which together argue against the ways in which notions of the schizophrenic or fragmentary text have come to function within those characterizations. In particular, I want to suggest that discussions of music video in terms of a politics of the signifier frequently conflate a number of premisses within recent cultural theory, in ways which might be considered misleading.

In a number of recent treatments of music video, one finds a confusion between two readings of the apparently self-conscious or self-referential quality of music television: a view of the postmodern 'hyper-real', as a cultural terrain which functions primarily in