Popular Music and Society

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Cohesive But Not Coherent: Music Videos, Narrative and Culture

Steve Jones

Music videos are a pervasive feature of modern popular culture. They are everywhere; on television, in department stores and shopping malls, sports arenas, dance clubs. It can be argued that they are popular because they require little of the imagination (and intellect), are sufficiently mainstream to be within the competence of the viewer. However, I believe that the pervasive use of music video styles in television and across other popular forms (print advertisements, photography, film) points to a restructuring of traditional narrative forms via a change in spatial (and temporal) relations.

Music videos have an ancestry in other visual forms, such as pointillism, dada, and the film styles of directors similar to Bunuel and Antonioni. They place those styles directly into mainstream popular culture. MTV's "art films," which last only a minute or two and are shown between videos, are directly related to surreal film. The inclusion of such avant-garde forms on television and within the context of a form closely affiliated with advertising defines the experience of them as something new, something different. Music videos in general (and MTV in particular) are evidence of cultural bulimia in a society that is ravenously devouring images and regurgitating them at random. But what this paper is more concerned with, however, is the way music videos are profoundly restructuring visual perceptions of space and time.

Narrative, Space & Time

Music videos show a break from traditional notions of space and time. They are the most recent manifestation of our society's orientation to visual communication. Arnheim (1969) writes that:

> The great virtue of vision is that it is not only a highly articulate medium, but that its universe offers inexhaustibly rich information about the objects and events of the outer world. Therefore, vision is the primary medium of thought.

Arnheim argues that the visual precedes, has primacy over, the linguistic. Combined with a familiar common sense idea, "seeing is believing," the privileged position of visual information in our society is readily...well, visible.

Vision, visual perception, and the electronic media's knowledge and use of techniques stressing the visual, are being exploited by a new narrative form in our culture, found most often in music videos. It is a narrative based primarily on sight (though occasionally relying on sound as well) which carries with it its own logic. Fiske (1986, p. 74) claims:

> Broadcast TV, approaching its half century, has just developed its only original art form—rock video or MTV. Its originality lies in three dimensions—the foregrounding of the signifier over the signified, the "openness" of its textual structure, and its popularity for a non-conventional, possibly oppositional audience.

The new narrative form is most evident in the structure of music videos. I wish to call it digital narrative. The term is derived from theories of symbolic communication which contend that human beings create and locate themselves in cultural patterns that are created by symbols. They interpret and transcend those patterns, and communicate with each other using mutually evoked images that acquire meaning through use and shared experience (Cassirer, 1944 and 1923, 1925, 1929). The term is also adapted from Burgin's (1983) analysis of photography:

> To speak of the "sense" and "story" of a photograph is to acknowledge that the reality-effect of a photograph is such that it inescapably implicates a world of activity responsible for, and to, the fragments circumscribed by the frame: a world of causes, of "before and after," of "if, then...," a narrated world. However, the narration of the world that photography achieves is accomplished not in a linear manner but in a repetition of "vertical" readings, in stillness, in a-temporality...which must be examined element by element—and from each element will unfold associative chains leading to a coherent network of unconscious thoughts.

When Fiske (1986) calls MTV "TV at its most typical...the segmented medium, a mosaic of fragments," what he addresses is its reality-effect. Television does not occur in a-temporality—but does occur in non-linear time. Burgin's argument applies to music videos in terms of their non-linearity, the associative chains they create, and the narrated worlds they produce.

Television, among other media, has utilized traditional narrative forms and is now evolving the digital narrative form evident in music videos. Harold Innis (1950 and 1951) and Marshall McLuhan (1964) have argued that technology has a bias toward either space or time. The evolution of digital narrative forms is evidence of one such temporal bias. It is the evolution of a common symbolic language made possible

by media technology, exploited by television to more quickly present information.

There are three types of representation pertinent to narrative; mimetic, analog and digital. Mimetic narrative is fundamentally imitative. In mimetic narrative if one wants to communicate the idea of seven men, one draws a picture of seven men. The second type is analog. In a system of analog narrative, one would draw a picture of one man, preceded by the number 7. In a system of digital narrative, one would simply write "seven men" (or "7 men").

The difference I want to establish here is not similar to the one found in Plato's "Republic." Plato attacks representation as being removed from the original. Each of these forms of narrative is, by Plato's standards, removed from the original. The difference among them lies in each form's ability to represent an object or idea, and in the experience of that object or idea via the narrative form. The sense of seven men conveyed by a picture is different from the sense of seven men conveyed by the words "seven men." The picture may include detail and nuance (for example, an identifying mark such as a beard) specific to a certain group of seven men. The words cannot convey the same meaning, they are abstracted further than the picture, and other words must be added (for example, "seven men with beards") to avoid ambiguity. The process by which the meaning is constructed is also different. Digital narrative requires a mental reconstruction from the basic units of meaning (in this example the basic units being the letters) through succeeding levels of meaning (men, seven, etc.) based on prior agreement. However, the advantage of using digital narrative is the standardization which accompanies it, the degree of abstraction which facilitates communication and saves space (the words "seven men" will, generally and under reasonable circumstances, take less space than a mimetic or analog representation).

It is the abstraction that creates the fundamental difference between digital and analog narrative. Analog narrative is continuous—that is, the information it conveys is presented as a whole. In digital narrative information is presented in discrete steps, bearing no resemblance to what it communicates. The discrete nature of digital narrative allows it to be easily manipulated via technology (the computer) that itself relies on digital codification.

It is Fiske's "mosaic of fragments" that the term digital narrative addresses. Perhaps the clearest analogy can be made by drawing from music. Traditional analog recording (phonograph or tape recording) relies on the physical correlates of sound to reproduce music (the grooves in a record are *analogs* of the recorded sound). Digital recording, however, breaks sound into bits which are processed via a computer and can be manipulated in the same way as any other computer data (the foundation

of modern recording techniques relies on just such manipulation). Upon reproduction of the recording, the ear hears a continuous sound though it is made up of many bits produced in rapid succession. The effect is similar to watching a film—though the action seems continuous, the film is made up of many still photographs projected in rapid succession.

Television, essentially an electronically analog medium, through extensive editing begins to concern itself with a digital visual style. The bits are exposed to the viewer through rapid cuts between wildly divergent images. But unlike audio and film, whose bits fit neatly in a coherent order (one following the other in such a way as to make possible a common, though reconstituted, meaning) this kind of television appears incoherent. The visual codes within each bit need to be reconciled with those in the bits that come before and after, and the discourse is thus fragmented, the narrative digitized.

Representation changes along with digital narrative and the elements of space and time in television programming become flexible as they become abstract. The picture, or frame, and the symbols within it are subjected to immediate juxtaposition. And the experience of television includes not only the viewing of a frame, but also the viewing of frames over time. It is not the relationship between symbols within a frame that is undergoing change (though it too changes as representation does), it is the relationship between frames, the external structure of the narrative form, that is undergoing critical change.

Ruesch and Kees (1956, p. 8) point out the bias of digital narrative:

> The principles of analogic codification as contrasted with digital codification have a central importance...that is still perhaps insufficiently understood. The use of words, whether in speech or in writing, has certain limitations....The fist of a prize fighter moves within a fraction of a second to strike the opponent's chin, but a considerably longer period of time is necessary to report such an event verbally. However, the idea of a moment in a prize fight can be quickly indicated by reenactment through gesture in approximately the same time sequence as the original event.

They also write that "words are particularly inadequate when the quality of space has to be symbolized." It is the symbolizing of space that is central to digital narrative, and to music videos.

In the medium of television there are examples of each form of representation and narrative. Early television programs, such as those in the 1940s, consisted largely of sports programs (boxing being among the most popular), some entertainment/variety shows, some news, and some children's programs. The dominant narrative form of these programs was realist, mimetic, insofar as the camera was primarily used to record events as they occurred, in the spaces within which they occurred. It imitated the reality that was being filmed (in the case of sports shows) or imitated an imaginary reality, constructed from a symbolic ideal, as

in the case of family programming (i.e. "Father Knows Best," "Leave It To Beaver.")

Through the 1950s and 1960s, narrative form in television moved toward analog. The emphasis was less on presentation of "the real" and more on presentation of the seemingly real, as evident in the work of Ernie Kovacs, or in the "Twilight Zone" series. Television became a means of altering space and time to fit creative needs, rather than a means of imitating the space and time of everyday life. Examples come from some of the most banal programming; CBS sports programs open with animation that starts with the CBS logo, melts/turns into a basketball, melts/turns into a basketball stadium (and then turns into Brent Musberger). Television was permitted to break the rules of the dominant realism since it was already set off from the natural.

With the emergence of digital narrative in television, traditional notions of space, time and representation have been altered not only to fit creative needs, to present what seems real, but to present the unreal—a reality specific to visual communication that exists apart from physical reality and makes no claims at representing the real. This is what Fiske (1986, p. 77) addresses when calling MTV

> TV at its most typical, most televisual. The segmented medium, a mosaic of fragments: not sense but sensation. Energy, speed, image, youth, illusion, volume, vision, senses, not sense.

A distinction between music video styles can be made based on the narrative forms found therein. Ones that consist of a performer or group filmed on a stage mimicking (or actually performing) a song, as in Simple Mind's "Once Upon a Time" video or U2s "I Will Follow," employ a form of mimetic narrative. The representation is of a pop music concert performance. Other videos, such as the Rolling Stones' "Undercover of the Night," or Bruce Springsteen's "Glory Days," which present a performer or group mimicking a song on a street or at a party, and include activities other than performance, employ a form of analog narrative. The structure of the narrative is such that, though the performance is a part of the video, it is not presented solely as an experience of a performance. Videos with digital narrative often entirely do away with performance of the song (recent videos by REM and Art of Noise do not include band members), or show a performance in many locations, cutting from one place to another as if time and space are irrelevant. For example, the Kinks' "Come Dancing" video has two characters (played by the same person) occasionally singing bits of the same song in different eras, one set in the 1940s and one in the present.

It should be noted that there are still few videos that fully develop digital narrative. Most music videos rely on traditional styles, and only bring in elements of digital narrative at a couple of points. Some groups

or performers seem to be more aware of new styles, such as Peter Grabriel ("Sledgehammer," "Big Time"), Talking Heads ("Road to Nowhere," "And She Was"), Art of Noise ("Paranoimia"), and the Cure ("Killing an Arab," "A Forest"), as do some directors, like Zbigniew Rybczynsky (Art of Noise, Alan Parsons Project). This conservative tendency may be evidence of what McLuhan (1964) calls "rearview-mirrorism," a new medium (in this case digital narrative) exploring its potential and limitations in terms of the medium that it is in the process of supplanting. Or, perhaps more likely, television is in a transitional period. As Arlen (1981, p. 7) states:

> Television, the most conservative of all the popular arts...the most deeply rooted in the logic of non-visual information...has been moving its great weight into the new (visual) terrain. Right now, it is in midstride; one foot still planted in the Old World, where visual signs exist mainly to express narrative stories or writerly information, and one foot now pressing into the New World, where visual forms have their own logic.

One of the identifying characteristics of digital narrative is its non-linear structure—in a sense, its own form of logic. Music videos are *cohesive* but not *coherent*. They do not rely on a linear, chronologically-based system of storytelling. Information is provided in pieces, rather than presented as a whole. For example, a cop show such as "Hawaii Five-O" presents its story in a linear form, in sequences that are time-based. The program's narrative relies on visual coherence. In the first scene of a show, for instance, a crime is committed, and the rest of the show chronologically follows the events leading to the solution of that crime.

But in a show that exhibits characteristics of digital narrative, as "The Equalizer" did in its first several episodes, scenes do not necessarily follow an established time frame. The methods for time-shifting are subtler than typically used devices such as the flashback. A crime is committed halfway through the program, although earlier scenes show the main character working to solve the crime. Different moments of a crime may be shown throughout the program. The show occasionally ends without a resolution.

Non-linearity is also evident in another communicative sphere, in the relation of lyrics and video narrative. In general, the visual images relate to the lyrical images. However, it is a trait of videos incorporating digital narrative techniques that the connection between lyrics and visuals becomes more and more tenuous. In such videos, the visuals leave the relationship to the lyrics open. For example, in a video grounded in a traditional narrative style, such as Don Henley's "Smuggler's Blues," visuals act as a reinforcement to the lyrics. In a video exhibiting characteristics of digital narrative, such as Eddy Grant's "Electric Avenue," the visuals virtually tell a story of their own. It is a story that

is connected to the lyrics, but only indirectly. The actions, events and images described in the lyrics are not recreated in the visuals. There may be a reinforcement or juxtaposition of meanings, depending upon the interpretation of the viewer. It is in this relation that one finds cohesiveness. It operates at the level of connotation, of the association of ideas that are partly new-born conventions and partly dependent on the common cultural store of congruent or related ideas.

Videos become more connotative by allowing differences in interpretation. Though this is to some extent true for all texts, digital narrative seems to be more open. There is a sense of levels of meaning, one that perhaps corresponds more closely to daydreaming and other forms of dreaming. Associative links, like the ones Burgin mentions in his analysis of photography (1983), are a key feature of digital narrative, visual thinking and visual literacy.

Sight and Sound

A brief look at precursors to music videos is now in order, as is a discussion of their production, to help illustrate the evolution of digital narrative.

Movies have historically relied on some elements of digital narrative. Sklar (1975, p. 22) writes that by 1895 films' "ability to give viewers access to events that happened when they were not there, to the dangerous, the fantastic, the grotesque, the impossible, at a close but safe remove" had been discovered. He goes on to describe the work of French magician and cinematographer George Melies, who "explore(d) the capacity of motion pictures for a magical form of spectacle...to produce the appearance of effects beyond the bounds of human power." Melies' films would end with a return to normalcy, for, as Sklar writes, "Melies sensed or knew that fantasy and magic, like dreams and nonsense language, have a structure and logic of their own, and to deviate from their forms is a sure way to lose an audience." As audiences have become accustomed to the structure and logic of those forms, and as technology has enabled their manipulation, it has become possible to extend both their structure and logic. Digital narrative is the result of a thorough familiarity with the structure and logic of television (and other) visual forms combined with the ability to reconfigure those forms virtually at will. We can now "Stop Making Sense," as the title of the Talking Heads' film and album says (or requests?).

Music has throughout history been linked to visual forms, the opera being a prime example. Rock and roll has always been aware of visual possibilities. Rock has crossed over into visual media (in film: the Beatles' "Hard Day's Night" and "Help," the movie of "Woodstock"; in television: the Beatles' "Magical Mystery Tour," "Don Kirshner's Rock Concert," "Midnight Special," etc.), and emphasized visual images for its stars.

Such emphasis on the visual is not limited to rock and roll, nor was rock and roll the first to invent the visual image. Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and many others performed in media other than music and had strong visual images. Rock and roll may, however, place more emphasis on visual image than other entertainment forms.

Aufderheide (1986) examines the pervasiveness of music videos and their style in popular culture, describing their dream-like appearance and situating them within the sphere of postmodern art. Music videos (and video art) occupy an odd position in the art world at large. They can be both on the fringe of the avant garde (the work of Peter Campus, Nam June Paik, Zbigniew Rybczynsky, and others) and appear squarely within the mainstream—on television, *at home*. MTV's recent use of "art breaks," short films shown between videos, acknowledges the connection between music video and the avant garde. That music videos appropriate (dissipate, and subvert) a politically active form of modern art is undeniable (and it is equally undeniable that modern art appropriates, dissipates and subverts primitive art forms as well). It is quite possible that the dream-like quality of music videos is a product of the detachment of political struggle from the visual sphere, creating a free-floating signifier adrift in a sea of meanings. If that is so, then digital narrative, by allowing easy manipulation of discrete bits of information, has aided in the process of detachment.

Production

Perhaps the clearest example of the manipulation of discrete units in digital narrative is the direction of time. Television programs consistently alter linear time for creative purposes. Flashbacks are common on many programs, serial television shows occur in a discontinuous time (or ambiguous time—how long has it *really* been since last week's episode of the Cosby show?), and women regularly get pregnant and give birth in anywhere from six weeks to three months on soap operas. Time itself is then an undulating signified in the sea of meanings, to which the floating signifiers (production techniques, codes, conventions) which "mean" passage of time get periodically attached.

But music videos show a more complete disregard for linear time. The aforementioned TV shows at least assume that events occur in a certain, traditionally linear and forward-moving, chronological order. A recent Talking Heads video, "Road to Nowhere," takes a man and woman through infancy, adolescence, marriage, and old age within the space of about 20 seconds. A man crawls into a box and crawls back out a baby. The Eurythmics' "Missionary Man" video shows singer Annie Lennox moving in discrete time intervals as if a slave to the ticking of a clock—she moves with each tick, and her hair, eyes, and other physical

features assume entirely new positions with each moment and each movement. Members of the group Wang Chung flicker on and off the screen in fast strobe-like motion in their "Everybody Have Fun Tonight" video, though their lips are synched to the song (suggesting the primacy of a "super discourse," the song). The computer-enhanced figure of Max Headroom, in the Art of Noise's "Paranoimia," moves his head, body, and speaks in ways that are impossible in real time.

One of the constraints operating in the production of videos is precisely that of time. Almost without fail a video lasts as long as its song (although there are exceptions). Combined with the constraint of time is the constraint of money. Videos are expensive to produce, and certain stylistic tendencies (i.e. the extensive use of editing and signal processing instead of a great deal of filming) may arise from a lack of money for creating videos in a traditional television or film style. Goodwin (1987, p. 26) writes:

> Directors working under enormous pressures of time will...often shoot some material that can be edited at random to the beat, without any great regard for realism or narrative closure.

The technology of video production may also be biased toward utilization of the video studio instead of the camera, most notably in the growing use of computer graphics (as in the Cars' "You May Think" video), and in the heavy use of editing techniques. What is important to consider is that narrative is almost an afterthought for two reasons; first, editing technology allows for rapid combination of visually pleasing material and second, coherence is no longer requisite in digital narrative.

It is in the utilization of time that videos have a direct precursor: the television commercial. The most direct relationship between commercials and videos lies not, as some suggest, in the idea that each is selling something but lies instead in the way each uses time and space. In both cases the constraints operate in similar ways, which may be the reason that several directors of commercials have turned to directing music videos (most notably Bob Giraldi, director of Michael Jackson's "Beat It"). Though both commercials and music videos may indeed be intended to sell something, the key is that they are both produced within similar social, narrative, economic and technological limits.

Aufderheide (1986) credits music videos as being pioneers in video expression. Their ambiguous imagery is described, as is the creation of a world where image is reality (though we must remember that throughout rock and roll's history, reality is image). However, the assumption that "music videos are now key to a musical group's success" is unfounded. It is true that "in 1984...only three of the top one hundred 'Billboard' albums did not have a promotional video." The music industry undoubtedly pressured performers to make videos, under the assumption

that videos helped sell records. But as Traub (1986) points out, "groups who considered videos superfluous and potentially distracting...felt compelled to make them....These bands and artists are now beginning to think for themselves and turn off the visuals."

Fry and Fry (1986) argue that MTV's purpose is to serve as a promotional medium for the recording industry. However, they do not present evidence supporting a relationship between music videos and recording sales. It is true that the recording industry appears to be out of the slump that occurred in the late 1970s. But to attribute the industry's recovery to videos because they are "commercials" for the industry's product(s) is misleading. In that sense, all songs, whether on the radio, television or a record, are commercials.

A report in *On Cable* (May, 1985) turns the relationship between advertising and music videos around. It states that "General Electric is one of several dozen advertisers that have traded in hard-sell dialogue and simplistic jingles for foggy imagery, fantasy sequences and pulsating rock music." Paula Kahn, senior vice-president of the J. Walter Thompson advertising firm, is quoted in the same article as saying, "we wanted to create a fantasy experience the way MTV does." An article in the February 20, 1988 *TV Guide* also identifies the "video-like" quality of many ads. The advertising industry, it would appear, is (consciously or not) realizing the potential of digital narrative. That music videos are having an impact on the advertising industry is evident in the number of commercials sporting an "MTV" look (Swatch, GE, and Levi's are examples). It may be more worthwhile to think of MTV as Grossberg (1986) does, as a national music network that has provided the national audience radio never would. This would help account for a possible correlation between MTV and the music industry's recovery.

Making Sense

The critical issue in the distinction between digital and other forms of narrative lies in the presentation of information, and the subsequent ordering of that information into meaning. Information in digital narrative is presented in bits, atomized parts, much as a computer presents data in bits. The audience is left to make sense of those bits, and to associate each bit (as opposed to merely relate each bit) to another bit or bits. Similarly, each image in a video can be associated. But it is not necessary that each bit relate to the one immediately before or after it, and digital narrative is thereby non-linear. It is in this sense, that the bits must be put together by the audience, that digital narrative is not random, but may instead be a form of what, in computer technology, is called random access memory. For example, a successful music video could not consist of entirely random images, because those images could not be associated into a relevant whole by the viewer. That videos acquire

meaning means that there is an interpretive context within which videos operate, a context that may be specific to digital narrative.

The question of meaning and association is particularly problematic in music videos, especially considering the many different styles of music videos. They may be extremely liberating, as they let the audience actively construct meaning, or simply confusing, making it difficult for the audience to make any sense of what they view. Many videos seem to have no explicit meaning. They leave so much open to the imagination that the question of intended meaning disappears (which is also precisely why they can be thought of as a "cool" medium, in McLuhan's terms). Part of the problem of meaning in videos may be due to difficulty defining who it is that is communicating via the video. Is it the performer, director, producer, or, as Morse (1986) asks, "Who is the subject of enunciation of a rock video...who is speaking, youth culture, the music industry, or an anonymous subject of advertising?" This has been a problem rock and roll has continuously faced. As Frith (1981) notes:

> rock music, like other works of art in an age of mechanical reproduction, is not made by individual creators communicating directly to an audience—record making depends on a complex structure of people and machines...The image of the individual creator is quickly absorbed into the star-making machinery (this is the easiest aspect of rock ideology to exploit). All musical texts are, in fact, social products, and rock musicians, like any other mass artists, are under constant pressure to confirm their status, to provide their audience with more of the music that gave them that status in the first place.

People will try to put meaning to videos whether they reconstruct the intended one(s) or not, whether they have one or not. Sun and Lull (1986) report that MTV has a direct impact on adolescents' sense of the "meaning" of music. Rubin, et al (1986) found evidence of differences in meaning between audio and music videos of songs, establishing that a different cognitive process may operate for each form. However, they did not examine whether there were differences in meaning found within single music videos.

Music videos may acquire several meanings. One of the ways this occurs is through the association process mentioned above. Much of the discourse concerning music videos centers on their dream-like quality. Benjamin (1968, pp. 241-243) writes that we perceive dreams:

> in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise...the public (is put) in the position of the critic...(and) this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.

This change in the state of perception can be contrasted to hypnogogic imagery or to tales of people who cannot solve a problem while concentrating on it, but when they break away from their work

(allow themselves to become distracted from it) the solution becomes evident. Music videos are perceived in a similarly distracted state. Viewers of music videos commonly say that when they are watching videos their mind wanders, and they become entranced by the images.

It is precisely the ability to use one's imagination and participate in the creation of meaning that accounts for the popularity of music videos. Despite recent suggestions that music videos are on the wane (Traub, 1986, and Dixon, 1987), they continue to occupy an important place in popular culture. That there has been a decrease in viewership is undeniable, however, and 1986 Nielsen ratings show a drop of 25 percent (Traub, 1986). To counter the drop, Jo Bergman, vice-president for video at Warner Brothers, said "ambiguous clips with a sensual feel" are being sought, and "anything clear and obvious like pictures that tell the song's story (is avoided)" (Dixon 1987). The trend within the video industry would thus seem to be moving further toward digital narrative.

In some ways this is a narrative without narrative; it must be reconstructed associatively by the viewer from segmented bits (Carey, 1986). The implication for memory is startling. How can digital narrative effectively transmit culture if its meanings are so variable? How can shared meanings exist in such a narrative form? Is memory becoming less an organized set of experiences, meanings and images, and becoming more a fragmented collection of conscious and unconscious data triggered at will or at random? Carey (1975) writes that "reality is brought into existence, is produced, by communication; that is, by the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms." Yet by fragmenting meaning from frame to frame video technology is currently dismembering the visible, perhaps the yardstick by which we most often measure reality.

Carey (work in progress), in an analysis of Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan, describes the city in terms of digital narrative:

> The city is not only a visual experience—a deauralized experience—but is the social form in which tradition is displaced, which substitutes use value for exchange value, including the exchange value of art and sight. (Quoting Benjamin) "Experience is indeed a matter of tradition in collective existence as well as private life. It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data." The city is the site where this disassociation of experience occurs. It is the displacement of coherent narration by atomized information which makes the newspaper the dominant mode of urban communication. As Walter Bagehot said in a different context: "the city is like the newspaper. Everything is there and everything is disconnected."

Music videos are to television what the news story is to the newspaper—and digital narrative is to traditional narrative what the city is to rural life.

Digital narrative uses a different sense of space than is found in previous narrative forms and adds to the sense of "disconnection." Space no longer acts as a setting, a scene, for a story, but as an image, an isolated experience. As Vivian Sobchack writes in her analysis of science fiction films (1982, p. 232), "Space is now more often a 'text' than a context." In phenomenological terms, space is independent of causality in the narrative (Bachelard, 1969). For instance, at the end of Peter Gabriel's recent "Sledgehammer" video, Gabriel is sitting in a chair in a room. Suddenly the ceiling, walls and floor of the room turn into stars. In fact, Gabriel himself turns into a mass of stars, opens a door (made of stars) and begins walking, literally, in space. But not only is he walking in space, he is *made* of stars, he *is* space. Hallowell (1955, p. 184) writes that:

> there is no such thing as space independent of objects. Relations among objects and the movements of objects are a necessary condition of space perception.

The *image*-inary objects thus constructed and viewed are the condition on which the imaginary space of the image is contingent. The space of music videos, especially ones employing computer graphics and sophisticated editing techniques, is space-less, one in which space is always virtual, not actual.

The perception of space in digital narrative thereby becomes problematic. Hallowell (1955, p. 184) writes:

> the human individual is always provided with some culturally constituted means that are among the conditions which enable him to participate with his fellows in a world whose spatial attributes are, in part, conceptualized and expressed in common terms.

The conceptualization and expression of space in digital narrative is so fluid, so flexible, that it makes coordination between the perceived space and real space impossible.

But the real crux of the issue lies in the manner in which space is perceived in reality and via digital narrative. Most experience is mediated via a specialized sense (i.e. the ears for sound, the eyes for sight, etc.). Television, being generally a medium of sight and sound, is specific to those two senses. The experience of space is something that requires more than one sense, however, and more than a sense organ. It involves sight, touch, sound, kinesthesia, and perception of motion. McKimm (1972, p. 70) writes:

> fortunately for sanity, experience is not primarily optical. In everyday experience, which I will call "perceptual reality," we involuntarily adjust the ever-changing images of "optical reality"...perceptual reality...combines what you know with what you see, and that knowing is polysensory. By contrast, optical reality is only visual.

Digital narrative brings optical reality a step closer to perceptual reality (in the same manner as the Circlevision 360 display at Disney World gives one the sensation of flying or falling). The emphasis remains, however, on the visual.

Beyond the changes in the experience of space and time, digital narrative has deep and far-reaching implications in our culture. The word "idea" is derived from the Greek "ideein," meaning "to see," and as our experience of seeing changes, so does our thinking. Arnheim (1969) quotes Galton as saying that:

> an overready perception of sharp mental images is antagonistic to the acquirement of habits of highly-generalized and abstract thought, especially when the steps of reasoning are carried on by words as symbols, and...if the faculty of seeing the pictures was ever possessed by men who think hard, it is very apt to be lost by disuse.

Digital narrative is changing the experience of reality and, consequently, traditional abstract thought and reasoning. An article in the May 8, 1987 issue of *USA Today* regarding the Gary Hart/Donna Rice affair placed part of the blame for Hart's downfall on video. "You can dispute allegations made in print," the reporter noted. "It is hard to argue with a videotape." That video can be so easily manipulated and our experience of space and time so readily altered as we watch a video is antagonistic to the common sense notion that "seeing is believing."

David Byrne, member of the Talking Heads, was quoted in the September, 1986 issue of "Ms." magazine as saying, "Movies are a combination of sounds and pictures, and stories are a trick to get you to keep paying attention." Stories, one of the very roots of our culture both in its preservation and experience, are changing. Perhaps the postmodern description of the death of grand, global narratives is accurate. But perhaps the existence of culture is in itself "a trick to get you to keep paying attention."

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