blocked allows us not only to see what is really going on between the two characters, but also to see things from the landlord's point of view, such that her misinterpretation is perfectly understandable from our perspective. See Noel Carroll, "Notes on the Sight Gag," in Comedy/Cinema/Theory, ed. Andrew Horton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 26.

7 Ibid., 30.
8 Chion, Audio-Vision, 47.
11 This data is from http://www.filmsite.org/gosintro.html.

As one individual posted on a newsgroup, in response to a CNN headline stating that The Wizard of Oz would return to broadcast television on the WB (Warner Brothers) network: "This headline on CNN's website made my jaw drop and my heart jump for joy! It certainly brought back memories of the annual network telecasts of 'Oz' on CBS. This time the WB will be airing the classic film during the upcoming holiday season. We should all be happy that everyone with a television set will once again be able to watch Dorothy and her friends journey down the most famous road in movie history!" (http://www.beyondtherainbow2002.com/wwwboard/messages/1256.html).

Another indication of the film's overwhelming familiarity to viewers comes from an Instructional Web site for synching up the film and album. Step five, the author writes, is "Turn the volume on the TV off. You know the story (you've probably seen the Wizard of Oz at least 50 times!). Think of the music as the movie and the picture as the soundtrack. As if they have switched places" (http://www.dsom.com/features/features.html). Interestingly, the author's last instruction also suggests the way in which this audiovisual object reconfigures the conventional image-music hierarchy in films.

13 The information here is from http://ask.yahoo.com/ask/20011130.html.
14 This is reproduced at http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Studio/8571/darksidearainbow.html.
15 See, for example, http://www.synchronicityarkive.com.
16 For example, "The lyrics and music join in cosmic synch with the action, forming dozens upon dozens of startling coincidences the kind that make you go 'Oh wow, man' even if you haven't been near a bong in 20 years" (Helen Kennedy, "Follow the Yellow Brick Road," http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Studio/8571/darksidearainbow.html).

17 Goodwin, Dancing in the Distraction Factory, 87.

18 This applies to Radiohead's "Karma Police" and Amos's "Past the Mission" and "Spark," though in these videos the lip-synching is inconsistent and often deliberately undermines lip-synching conventions. In Radiohead's "Right," the narrative is crosscut with shots of the band performing the song, but, again, at points they stop performing while the music continues.
section and fusion, is thus the model I use in examining the current moment. Interaction and combustive reenergizing happens today between the popular and the avant-garde in most artistic realms, including echoing instances within contemporary video and music television.

It has become common, following Fredric Jameson, to view pastiche as a prime characteristic of the postmodern. By replacing citation, homage, and intertextuality, pastiche in this sense denigrates the work said to be performing the pastiche. Whereas other terms for textual interaction are less directly negative in their judgment, to say that a text is a pastiche implies the addition of “merely” preceding the term. This assumed qualification speaks to a lack of creative ingenuity and integrity, and in Jameson’s theory it corresponds to a flattening out of the entire process of historical causality and interpretation. Sometimes we use pastiche to refer to a satiric send-up, but Jameson holds to a distinction between parody and pastiche. Pastiches, as the very etymology of the term indicates, are replicas taken craftily from an original, and Jameson’s concern stems from the way pastiche may be experienced by new audiences without any sense of the context and history that brought about the original formation. He also bemoans the loss of an authentic language that could frame pastiche as a satiric citation.

Popular culture has always been fed by references (sometimes satiric, but as often elegiac or mimetic). It is not surprising that we can find correlations between past art movements and what is after all a form of commercial art. Equally, high art has collapsed upon popular culture, with pop art and hyperrealism finding their inspiration in the commercial commonplace. Preceding the music video works I will discuss in this essay, the Velvet Underground found their visual correlate in the sly graphics of their friend Andy Warhol, assuming for all alternative music to follow an inspiration in art movements that express a fringe outlook while eyeing mainstream culture.

In fact it is tempting to consider music video as an outgrowth of a present moment that the Japanese artist-curator-scholar Takashi Murakami calls “the superflat.” The superflat has as its very program the collapse of distinctions, a uniform culture in which the avant-garde and high art have ended and have been subsumed in a popular commercial culture of great vigor. Murakami uses his notion of the superflat as a very clever curatorial parti pris, in which he assembles a wide range of works linked to manga (Japanese comics), anime, and fashion, thereby mixing the commercial and experimental fine arts at will. Yet despite Murakami’s cleverness as a curator, and his highlighting of the omnipresence of the popular, the problem with the notion of the superflat is that it has ruled out a priori any process of naming difference. We can no longer recognize differential praxes in any creative activities.

My proposal here is to maintain differentiation without a blinding assumption of hierarchies. In what follows, I analyze music video works that propose references to the manifestations of past artistic avant-gardes. They may do so as strategic placement. If such references do not place them outside the mainstream of music television’s flow, they are often in quest of a deviation or a fringe. Theoretically, I hold that reference here may perform an intertextuality that in its most discerning inscriptions compels spectators to think about the histories of art and music, sound and image, poetry and performance.

I want to hold on to the notion of multiple countercultures and microcultures, many of which ascribe to some kind of “keeping it real” slogan in the face of forces of homogenization and commercialization. Some of these impulses are ethnic, some local, some ideological, and some a mixture of all three. Pressed, artists might acknowledge that their Promethean struggles for an essence they name reality evaporates by their very formation in a mediated, commercialized culture. Some might even mount a deconstruction of such essentialist goals. Still, the quest for identity, self-determination, and a nourishment from the roots of one’s metaphorical “hood,” precursors, or heritage becomes the mantra of many musicians and artists, trying to stay more real than at least the obviously manufactured and marketing-controlled pop groups.

The widespread use of avant-garde, experimental, progressive, and fringe as categories in music reviews and marketing signals much awareness, and much ambiguity, surrounding these terms, which carries over into any investigation of their relevance in speaking of music video. From a marketing perspective they indicate a niche market. The liner notes to her CD-ROM _Puppet Motel_ describe Laurie Anderson as the greatest “avant-garde diva.” Silke Tudor offers in the _SF Weekly_ a genealogy of Gogol Bordello, linking the band to a mixture of gypsy music, klezmer, avant-garde taste, and post-punk echoes:

Originally from Kiev, where his father played guitar in one of that country’s first rock bands, Huetz developed avant-garde tastes at an early age, visiting
the black market to buy tapes by Einstuerzende Neubauten, Suicide, Iggy Pop, and the Birthday Party. After the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in 1986, the Huetz family fled to the isolated climes of rural western Ukraine, where violins were still made from trees struck by lightning, and folk music and mysticism twirled hand in hand. There, Huetz discovered the musical richness of the Gypsy Diaspora, and followed its long, winding path through the refugee camps of Poland, Hungary, Austria, and Italy in which the Huetz family was interned. Eventually, Huetz made it to the United States and plunged into his lifelong dream of playing in a punk rock band. But while performing at a Russian wedding, he realized something was missing. After moving to New York, Huetz hooked up with two Russians, two Israelis, and an American with aural wanderlust, and formed Gogol Bordello. Together, the musicians raised a raucous whirlwind of sound that spanned centuries of tradition with post-punk sensibilities and nomadic ferocity.

David Sinclair in the London Times laments that Radiohead has abandoned popular “good tunes” in favor of avant-garde esoterica:

The most fervent British pop music has always drawn much of its impetus from kicking against the musical conventions of its day. Everything from punk to rave culture has evolved through a succession of musical and philosophical stand-offs between those who get it and those who don’t.

But Radiohead have taken the outsider concept to new extremes with Hail to the Thief, an album of dark, existential laments which draws the starkest of battle lines. Ranged on one side of the divide is a gaggle of high-minded alt.rock musicians, critics, students, their lecturers, the progressive art elite, media sophisticates and dabbler in the avant-garde.

On the other side stands anyone who simply wants to hear a good tune.

Taken together, these three journalistic uses of the word avant-garde to describe contemporary performers indicate a wide range of issues surrounding such categorizations. On one hand is the appeal to a particular audience already identified with the fringe; on the other hand is a disdain for leaving the accessibility of the popular; and in between is a linking of avant-garde aspirations to a historical research into authentic and politically inflected ethnic cultures.

When we turn to the making of images to accompany the presentation of music, all of these issues remain and are perhaps heightened. Music videos function largely as advertisements for a double-sided product: the artist as product through the sale of CDs and the concert tickets that fans will be lured to purchase. They also function to create the identity of a network through the accrual of a certain attitude or appeal; viewers tune in to VH1, MTV, MTV2, and BET with some rather set expectations: pop videos from the biggest pop stars, accompanied by a large amount of sexuality displayed in the narrative stagings and/or the dancers who accompany the act. Pop video staples are tropes drawn from action films and soft-core pornography, where soft sex is crosscut with the band’s performance or with sexually suggestive gestures from the performers themselves. Cars, action adventures, and chases may also be crosscut. The industry calls this type of work narrative or performance video, but this one-pony show is better called the “soft sex—action crosscut tease.”

Still, for some, these venues are not “pop” enough. The music video networks have embraced other programming to the detriment of what the British industry calls “promos.” In Britain, “The Hits,” from Emap, offers music “from the top 40 with a smattering of older, well-loved videos.” Its director, Simon Sadler, has been quoted as saying he requires “simple promos, because of the way people view music television these days. We tell record companies that videos will perform a lot better if they’re not complicated. I want something relatively straightforward that’s nice and colourful and looks sexy. I’m looking for videos that our viewers will find instantly attractive the minute they switch over. These days people just sit and flick, so you have to catch them.”

Another industry response is to create venues for what they view as a niche market for alternative music videos. The network MTV2 promotes itself as “the home of new music” and as a place to support artists who “haven’t yet made a big name for themselves.” On its Web site, blurbs such as the following are offered that treat mass-marketed groups as “alternative” fare:

Chemical Brothers Video Fantasy — Combat corporate drudgery with a trip down the ‘The Golden Path’

Wake Up to New Radiohead — Take a walk with a digitized Thom Yorke in “Go To Sleep”

All Hail the Kings of Leon! — Southern garage rock rules in the “Molly’s Chambers” video

What is Ina Robot? — In a word, this California new wave quintet is: “Dynamite”
Expect "Nothin' But a Good Time"—When you watch classic Poison videos right here

Within this directed marketing the network narrows further to specific programs such as Subterranean on MTV2, which offers viewer/listeners a chance to "every Friday night at midnight go underground with new and emerging artists."

As an alternative to serving as a niche market within a mass cultural media conglomerate network, those interested in the more experimental parameters of both musical and imagistic expression find themselves turning to the Internet. Sites such as Mavision.com, world art media television, and the Moment Factory offer venues for videos of performing artists that wouldn't otherwise be shown. Some bands such as They Might Be Giants have started their own sites, an outgrowth of their earlier innovative alternative "dial-a-song" that captured the imagination of a wide fan base after their advertisements of a phone number in the Village Voice.

David Kleiler and Robert Moses, in You Stand There: Making Music Video, also treat alternative music/imaging aspirations as just another way to appeal to audiences, and they subordinate any relation to historical avant-gardes to a larger category they call "appropriation." Thus the director Mary Lambert appropriates Howard Hawk's Gentlemen Prefer Blondes to stage Madonna in "Material Girl," and the directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Fariss appropriate Melies's Trip to the Moon (1902) to stage the Smashing Pumpkins' "Tonight, Tonight"—or as the authors put it in an amusing anachronism that itself displays postmodern ahistoricism: "Appropriating not only [Melies's] whimsical surrealism, but specific images." Kleiler and Moses see appropriation as a defining characteristic of music videos, and in terms that seem to imply a certain familiarity with theories of postmodernism: 'Appropriation renders all genre discussion pointless. There's no such thing as a 'Western' music video, or a 'film noir' music video: Music videos put genres in quotes.' Of course there are genres of video apart from those of film, but I cite this rather silly quote to emphasize how the authors' attitude here conforms to Jameson's fear of a leveling of history, reference, and specificity. They welcome these acts of theft that they take to be removed from referential citations. "If television programs and commercials reference movies, theater, literature, opera, history, art, photography and current events, music videos reference all of the above—and other music videos. Music videos rip off any recognizable art/pop cultural movement that gains more than a moment of the public's attention." These pronouncements aside, Kleiler and Moses speak elsewhere in the volume of various genres of music video: "Over the last 15 years, music videos developed their own aesthetics, genres and visual language." Cinematic versus photographic videos becomes their main genre distinction, which ends up boiling down to a contrast between narrative and nonnarrative music videos. They claim that narrative videos are characteristic of the 1980s and now are superannuated, yet they still group within narrative videos many directors they laud at other moments, such as Adam Bernstein, Spike Jonze, Jesse Peretz, and Sophie Mueller; consistency of argument is perhaps also superannuated. Kleiler and Moses use the term "progressive" to describe what we might call a stream-of-consciousness tone poem video. Further, they sometimes use "concept" video as a term seemingly standing for the Hollywood/Madison Avenue term "high concept," meaning a hook or gimmick. In other words, despite its assertion that "classic videos are one big exercise in the Kuleshov effect," and along with its brief homage to Sergei Eisenstein, the manual has trouble taking music video seriously enough to analyze its relationship to other art forms historically and critically.

In contrast, I want to suggest that many of the most intriguing music videos acknowledge a grand debt to historical avant-garde and progressive (in the usual sense of this term) art movements in all media. This debt is often acknowledged through citation. In other words, the past of the creative arts is not just "appropriated" but also is reread, and often it is clearly marked as intertextual reference, thus inviting viewers to make connections between the art making at present and its history.

Much of this work issues from musicians deemed "alternative." The directors of many music videos either have parallel pursuits as film and video artists, or once or future aspirations to the same. Like ad making, music video production attracts those we train in our art and film departments and schools, so that odd mixtures of purpose and pretense, and inspiration and calculated lifting abound. Some music video surrealism may be closer to Busby Berkeley than to Max Ernst. Striving to delineate a clear lineage back to the high arts' eroticism of an uncensored unconscious, rather than popular-culture naughty symbolic sexuality would
not only be futile but also involve aesthetic assumptions of art history contrary to the often playful mixing that gives life to new forms. Ranging from seamless integration to studied homage, the intertextuality I analyze here may sometimes seem to be postmodern pastiche, but I argue for its historical and theoretical reconceptualization. My working assumption is that it may be hard to tell the difference and is important always to theorize one's motivations for any such judgments.

As Greil Marcus has argued in Lipstick Traces, Dada serves as a background set through which to view the punk, garage band, and techno movements, although in what follows I draw the terms of the comparison somewhat differently than he does. Screaming noise as music recalls the Dada poetry of Hugo Ball by imitating industrial cacophony and war and by expressing rage. For all their excess of volume and anger, punks pursued a performance style that had an aesthetic that was rough and therefore in a certain sense pared down. A common spatial trope in punk videos consists of a marginality suggested by concerts in abandoned warehouse spaces. Similarly, some videos suggest apocalyptic narratives through their images of the collapse of surrounding architectures. In borrowing from the Dada ready-made, punk-inspired videos utilize found footage and collage imagery, though it should be noted that these two techniques have remained mainstays of experimental filmmaking and animation throughout a nearly hundred-year history.

Consider Tristan Tzara's intensity of spirit in his "Dada Manifesto" of 1918, in which he calls for a creativity that abandons any pretense at mass appeal, and where he mocks literary value in favor of a highly individualized, ritualized, and ultimately percussive refusal of meaning:

There is a literature that does not reach the voracious mass. It is the work of creators, issued from a real necessity in the author, produced for himself. It expresses the knowledge of a supreme egoism, in which laws wither away. Every page must explode, either by profound heavy seriousness, the whirlwind, poetic frenzy, the new, the eternal, the crushing joke, enthusiasm for principles, or by the way in which it is printed. . . . Behind them a crippled world and literary quacks with a mania for improvement.

If I cry out:
Ideal, ideal, ideal,*
Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge,*
Boomboom, boomboom, boomboom,
we should consider more indirect notions of how Dada’s collages of letters, words, and images were meant to disturb sanguine readers as well as those who would approach art from a traditionalist aesthetic. First, we should acknowledge that Dada has had a broad influence on many art movements that followed it; this lineage includes lettrist and situationist art. Alan Williams has performed a part of this genealogy in tracing the lettrist and situationist impulses in the films of Jean-Luc Godard. Dada is indeed an acknowledged predecessor of conceptual art; the relay to music video may come from these more recent branchings and their influences on advertising and the culture at large. For music video, the connection between Godard and the American artists Barbara Kruger, Laurie Anderson, and Jenny Holzer would help us continue along the lines of this branching.

If so, what is helpful about retracing the garage band movement’s debt to Dada? Consider Hannah Höch, speaking about Dada photomontages: “Our whole purpose was to integrate objects from the world of machines and industry in the world of art. Our typographical collages or montages set out to achieve this by imposing, on something which could only be produced by hand, the appearances of something that had been entirely composed by a machine; in an imaginative composition, we used to bring together elements borrowed from books, newspapers, posters, or leaflets, in an arrangement that no machine could yet compose.” In other words, Dada (along with other movements such as constructivism) has at its foundation a redefinition of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Dada has the distinction of coloring with a decidedly human inflection its assessment of the machine aesthetics. Our attention is drawn to Höch’s telling phrasing, “an arrangement that no machine could yet compose.” Since her writing, the ability of machines to engender compositions has so grown that at present the struggle of artists to define music or visual composition beyond the limits of mechanical creation proposes new challenges. Hence the attempt to return to more primal and expressionist forms; forms that by their very outrageous denial of orderly rules of composition invite an identification of human hand, minds, and vocal organs emitting these sounds and images directly.

In “Radiohead’s Antivideos: Works of Art in the Age of Electronic Reproduction,” Joseph Tate credits Radiohead’s work with undercutting the commodification inherent in the music video marketplace. Citing Walter Benjamin and Slavoj Žižek, Tate argues that Radiohead succeeds in a neo-Dadaist project. A check on such arguments, however, remains the art historical assessment that Dada could never really escape commodification the first time around. The found object and the antipoem have, of course, found their ways into the museums and canons, just as Radiohead’s videos are cablecast and reissued. In fact the marketing of Radiohead took an intriguing corporate swerve when the video “I Might Be Wrong” was released exclusively on the Internet in QuickTime. The group’s producer Nigel Godrich then took part in an Apple advertising venture disguised as a news story written by Stephanie Jorgi, in which he was quoted as saying, “We used a multitude of Macs for audio editing, manipulation and sequencing on pretty much all the tracks on ‘Kid A’ and ‘Amnesiac.”’

Adam Bernstein’s early work for They Might Be Giants seems to be a more contemporary way to pursue the antivideo, though perhaps its success is augmented by the framework of the famous anti-industry challenge by They Might Be Giants in their dial-a-song counterculture venture. That this rawly styled rendition of a day in Brooklyn recalled the Beatles’ romps in A Hard Day’s Night might force us to admit that even the most spontaneous and street-styled footage may be quite studied when it documents the frolics of emerging rock groups.

Dada visual collage is, however, more often read by current sensibilities as surrealism, which leads us to the consideration of music video’s proper debt to the historical surrealist movement. In music video any grotesque or demonic (as in anti-Christan) imagery may also evoke from both critics and the public the label “surreal.” Given that the paintings of Salvador Dali remain the popular image of surrealism, this tendency becomes understandable. Consider Joan Lynch’s “Music Videos: From Performance to Dada-Surrealism,” which is an attempt largely to evaluate music video as a form and to legitimize those efforts she deems superior. Because she is naive as to what constitutes “Dada-Surrealism,” Lynch actually addresses under this rubric any creative flows of images that she takes to be nonnarrative. She champions the poetic-symbic use of imagery yet bemoans the random.

Here I wish to be far more specific about surrealism as a theory and a method of image creation. Much surrealism seeks uncanny images of displaced desire. It aims at unleashing an unrestricted unconscious. Consequently it often performs corollary attacks on institutions of repression. In undercutting Christian imagery, it highlights the erotics of that
religion so often denied in Christianity's role as censor. If the surrealists were fascinated with inner organs, death, and the body turned inside-out, they also explored half-beast representations of human beings, thereby melding predatory and victimization roles to uncanny crossings between the natural world and that of society. Surrealism explores the liminal states between life and death, dreaming and waking.

The cult of the demonic in goth, punk, and hard rock may seemingly present some of the same obsessions as those of surrealism. Yet the demon quest is less for an exploration of the poetry of the unconscious than it is for a bold violation of decorum and rectitude through embraces of evil powers. Similarly Marilyn Manson's imagery of martyrdom, filled as it is with masochistic religious imagery in which he commits the sacrilege of substitution (the self for Christ and for John Fitzgerald Kennedy), uses such imagery, without much ironic distance, as pure wish-embodiment.

Even if the obvious signifiers seem too direct and lacking in irony to be taken as surrealism, the case of the director Floria Sigismondi represents a challenge to those of us who would otherwise try to delineate the gulf separating goth from surrealism. Raised in Canada by Italian parents whose career in opera led to her own early devotion to the arts, Sigismondi's photographs stage the goth scene yet also recall the ethereal, haunted, yet threatening women of such female surrealists as Leonore Fini, Leonora Carrington, and Dorothea Tanning. Her Web page borrows constructivist graphics, but the bandaged Ophelia-like subjects of her art work contrast with this background. Insect-like, her subjects also seem to inhabit hospital corridors in a medical imagery that provides a hint of institutional oppression evoking the dissipated and distressed poses she prefers. Sigismondi's two videos for Marilyn Manson have been described as "dark, surrealistic, fantastically costumed." Her most effective imagery is perhaps the dental brace that both fills and imprisons Manson's mouth in "Tourniquet." The Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art presented Sigismondi's first solo exhibition in Canada, titled "COME PART MENTAL," in September 2001. Sculptures and installation works use manikin-like female figures often bearing strange animal-claw genitalia, nipples, or simply dragon-like protrusions. Minerva, Rome's multi-breasted goddess, figures here as well in a slightly transformed incarnation. As a tag for the exhibit the museum offered this quote by the artist: "In order to find ourselves we must destroy ourselves. The human race craves the experience."

It may be hard for rock stars to clothe themselves in the direct exposure of the unconscious coupled with the ironic distance that is a necessary element of the best historical surrealism, such as that of Luis Buñuel, Max Ernst, and Leonore Fini. The structures of the video music industry overlay with a too palpable aura of studied pretension the forceful honesty and self-exposure associated with such historical artists. In undercutting by its commercial exhibition the tone fundamental to surrealism, the music video form remains weakest when it strives for the revelation of the collaborating artists' depth. As Lisa Zeidner puts it in her essay "No Mo Po Mo, Or: I Had a Dream":

Tex-Mex dim sum. Bacon ice cream. Black bean soup with chocolate croutons.

For some time, I have wanted to disgorge myself of a piece of criticism called "No Mo Po-Mo," in which I deride the pathetic state of what passes for postmodernism in contemporary culture. The typical pomo gesture now consists merely of shoveling together two seeming absurd, mismatched, contradictory entities. It is the impulse mocked in the pitches in Robert Altman's The Player (the Bride of Frankenstein meets Pretty Woman). . . .

Meaninglessness is not clever. Arbitrariness is not clever. Dreams—which seem, at first glance to be arbitrary—turn out to be deeply moored. And art should be more artful than your average sladoosh dream. Compare the shocking but deeply revealing juxtapositions in a Buñuel film with MTV.

Art requires commitment.20

Some videos come closer to a certain surrealist spirit simply because they acknowledge in multiple ways their pop culture play, just as Zeidner chastises the pop juxtaposition of pomo while she herself is clearly a self-conscious postmodernist—blending high and low, fiction and nonfiction, with the best of them. Through a humorous engagement with all that undercuts the earnest, even while maintaining at another level direct access to teenage angst, such works constitute what I would call pop surrealism—actually a blending of surrealism and pop art. This may sound like one of Zeidner's absurd, mismatched, contradictory entities, but the movements do conjoin through their twin interests in performing a good joke.

This sort of pop surrealism emerged in some of the videos done for
Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Petty offers a humorous take on the legacy of Bob Dylan's symbolist poetics lyrics and on the Beatles of the Sergeant Pepper album. Jeff Stein, in directing the 1985 video "Don't Come around Here No More," drew on Petty's penchant for hats to transform his end-of-relationship-lyrics into the classic misogynist tea party scene between Lewis Carroll's Mad Hatter and Alice. Petty, whose greatest charm remains his roots-rock acknowledgment of influences without any concomitant anxiety, can pull off both a lyric and a video filled with homages. The opening of the video bows to Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" by offering a pictorial interpretation of "a hookah smokin' caterpillar tells you where is at," which is of course itself an interpretation of Carroll. Petty's lyrics replay the same terrain as Bob Dylan's "It Ain't Me, Babe" ("Go away from my window, leave at your own chosen speed") with the irony of the internal name rhymes of Paul Simon's "Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover" ("Get a new plan Sam, set yourself free"). Petty and Stein use humor to pursue the altered-consciousness scale shifts, as saucers in the shot/reverse shot pattern range from too large to too small, then large enough to become a pool in which Alice struggles to sail afloat, assailed by the bombardment of a giant sugar cube. The humor ironically situates the misogyny, culminating in the moment when Alice looks on in amazement as her body, transformed into a themed birthday cake, is sliced up by Petty and served for tea.

A similar surrealist play with the female body as eroticized corpse occurs in Petty's video "Mary Jane's Last Dance." The lyrics alone suggest a struggle with marijuana addiction, but the video literalizes the last dance with a seductive woman. Opening in a morgue, a man (Petty) steals away the corpse of his beautiful girlfriend for a last dance in a gothic castle. The necrophilia inherent in this action is consumated only through a dance draped with the ambience of a dark fairy tale. Our hero then buries his love at sea in his own private ritual by hurling her off a gothic cliff. Borrowing eroticism here from the obsessional Edgar Allan Poe of "Evangeline," Petty still manages to retell his lyrics as an allegorized premon night disaster story, evoking the sort of surrealism that revisits the gothic illustration and symbolist poetry, while amplifying the force of unconscious desire.

Petty's videos cultivate a tongue-in-cheek approach to such loaded imagery. "Runnin Down a Dream" (1989), for example, retraces the free-floating imagination of early black-and-white line cartoon films in its "Little Nemo" homage. In this universe, Petty becomes a cartoon character bemused by Nemo's lead through sprouting buildings, transforming landscapes, and the fluid changing sets of a world subject to constant reinvention. Here a popular art form that prefigured surrealism offers the music video its access in the same way that others have cited Méliès and Busby Berkeley. These citations reveal the historical give and take between popular and high culture, especially as various forms address such basic attributes as desire and imagination, and as the historical con-
ditions governing popular cultural production for one reason or another open to a freedom of symbolic representation.

Makers of rock videos often cite surrealism when they are asked about their inspirations or when they describe their own works, and it sometimes signifies any introduction of the bizarre into the everyday. It is in this sense that Spike Jonze uses the term to describe his Daft Punk video “Da Funk,” in which a man with a dog’s face and a broken leg wanders through a New York neighborhood, echoing, in slower pace, John Travolta’s neighborhood jaunt in Saturday Night Fever. Jonze says the video was inspired by his desire to present a “surrealistic element and treating it very naturally.”21 Jonze’s videos cull ideas both from the art world and from Hollywood. “California” shows in slow motion a man on fire running down a street in L.A. The result evokes video artist Bill Viola’s elemental imagery of slow motion transformations, as well as a send-up qua homage to Hollywood special effects. Jonze also flirts with surrealism in his video for Fatboy Slim’s pulsing “Weapon of Choice” by staging the gravity-free dancing of a sternly unflappable Christopher Walken dressed in a business suit. It is the deadpan acting here that introduces the ironic commentary on the hotel environment.

More blatant surrealist bows are made in Chris Cunningham’s digitally altered images that depict bearded and buxom bathing-suit models in his “Windowlicker” video for Aphex Twin (1998). Special effects video editing, as well as masks, makeup, and prosthetic devices characterize Cunningham’s work. There is often a tension between figurative bodies and narratives on one hand, and abstract visual impulses on the other.

Cunningham’s treatment for “Afrika Shox” indicates the narrative lines and suggested interpretations that underlie that video:

Suddenly out of nowhere a city-type carrying a briefcase bumps hard into him (the black man who has been wandering, alone) and his arm is knocked clean off at the elbow. We see it hit the floor and shatter in slow motion.

It gives us the impression that this strange crumbling disease is a voodoo curse of some kind.22

Thus the shots of a body breaking apart that resonate so strongly with surrealism, and are presented in a stunning black-and-white image tinged with just elements of color, are edited to accentuate the shock and fascination with this extraordinary treatment of the body in the city. It is debatable whether this narrative (as well as other images of blacks by Cunningham) reiterates a stereotype without much consciousness of its social implications or rather strives for a symbolic reading of urban racial relations. Clearly, any such interpretations seem somewhat secondary to the effects fetish that Cunningham has with dispersed body parts as well as his striving for grotesque humor: by the end of the video the lead character has lost all of his appendages, only to be asked “Do you need a hand?” Similarly, in “Frozen” (1998) Cunningham morphs an image of Madonna falling apart into dozens of flying ravens upon her impact with the ground.
The tendency toward abstraction informs several videos, but it foregrounds the 2002 remix of Autechre’s “Second Bad Vilbel.” Having removed the elements of an earlier narrative involving an alien, the only clearly representational image is one of a robot insect that is always filmed in such a way as to emphasize its abstract qualities. Still, it is possible to interpret the montage of abstract images corresponding to the beats of the techno music either as close-ups of certain elements of the creature or as the world seen through its eyes.

Flex, a seventeen-minute piece set to music of Aphex Twin, was commissioned by the Anthony d’Offay Gallery in 2000 as part of a month-long exhibition with the sculptor Ron Mueck. The piece was subsequently shown later in 2000 as part of “Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art,” an exhibition by the Royal Academy of Arts. Naked bodies figure in abstract patterns, often reduplicated as overall image patterns or stretched to distortion by image manipulation. At other points the bodies are quite discernible in highly suggestive poses and positions, and a narrative emerges about an abused woman’s fear of rape. If abstraction struggles with the symbolically loaded surreal in Cunningham’s work, in its movement from music video commissions to the fine arts world it revives surrealism’s taste for controversy and ability to shock in both contexts.

When the singers themselves are artists, the relationship between their lyrics and artwork can stimulate an imagistic encounter of neosurrealist dimensions. The Incubus singer Brandon Boyd and drummer Jose Pasillas were responsible for the cels in the animated sections of their video “Drive.” Floria Sigismondi’s direction of a new video for Incubus adds a Dada-like political montage to her signature stylized surrealism. This mix proved provocative enough to occasion viewings that were restricted to late evening on cable venues, especially since the video was read as comparing George Bush Jr. to Hitler and Stalin, in the tradition of John Heartfield.

In contrast to the often saturated signifiers and baroque onslaught of imagery associated with neosurrealism, many more music videos find their inspiration in two more contemporary forms of art making—minimalism and performance art. Stand-up comedians, storytellers, circus and side-show performers, and dancers provide the historical precedents for performance art. Music video performance, in its carnivalesque, choreographic, and narrative modes thus becomes the perfect site for the migration of museum and stage performance art.

From the start Laurie Anderson’s work signaled its potential for music video, notably relative to video’s graphic reproduction. Beginning in 1972 with her performances in New York’s Soho district, Anderson was one of a group of performance artists and video producers who haunted such venues as the Kitchen, the Paula Cooper Gallery, and 112 Greene Street. Her United States began taking form in the performance of some of its parts, such as in the 1981 show at the Orpheum. In 1983 the debut performance at New York’s Brooklyn Academy of Music of all four parts of United States (“Transportation,” “Politics,” “Money,” and “Love”) made this “talking opera” of eight-hour’s duration the talk of the downtown scene. Driving and flying, maps, landscapes and astronauts, dreams and biblical references all float as reference points between words and images in this multimedia stage production. Big Science’s 1981–1982 “From the
"Air" would haunt anyone who had witnessed it on every airline flight taken in the 1980s and since. In 1985 "Zero and One" from The Home of the Brave explored computer language as yet another language that the poet-musician-visual artist would bring into play. As multimedia performance shaped the 1980s, it would compel recording and mass distribution. The live stage event expanded beyond the television screen through myriad projections of timed simultaneity and juxtaposition, but in order to reach larger audiences, the form ironically had to turn back to cinema and television—the framed formats in which most it was seeking to escape.

The combination in 1994 of Anderson's The Nerve Bible as a touring show and The Puppet Motel CD-ROM represented the different platforms for her work during this period. Both the live act/rear projection format of her staging and lighting magic and the computer graphics/computer allegories demonstrate how an imaginary poetic world can be generated by the simplest of means. For all of her comic flamboyance, the repetition of phrases and the minimalist means by which illusions are overlaid also offer a minimalist aesthetic to be emulated.

Anderson's work in the late 1980s and early 1990s was preceded by, then coincided with, the growth of the playwright, designer, and director Robert Wilson, another artist for whom the Brooklyn Academy of Music proved an important site for innovative staging. In 1969 The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud premièred at the Brooklyn Academy. Deafman Glance in 1971 links Wilson to the surrealists; as Louis Aragon wrote of Wilson: "He is what we, from whom Surrealism was born, dreamed would come after us and go beyond us."23 In 1976 Wilson and the composer Philip Glass launched their landmark work "Einstein on the Beach," which was revived for two world tours in 1984 and 1992. More than Anderson, Wilson reframes the stage in reference to the cinematic screen—though it is one in which perspective and figuration allow for perceptual paradoxes and visual puzzles. These visual ideas are translated to video in Stations, Wilson's hour-long 1985 experimental performance-art-meets-narrative video. Here the appearance and disappearance of elements in the image, along with their layering, substitute video keying for the transformative stage-lighting effects of Wilson's live works.

Both Anderson and Wilson, along with many video artists not necessarily connected to theater, performance, or music, affect a music video world seeking visual correlates for bands that were emerging from the same Downtown club scene. The bands of an earlier 1960s New York underground scene, stretching back to the rise and demise of the Velvet Underground (Sterling Morrison, Mo [Maureen] Tucker, Lou Reed, John Cale), limited their visual signatures mostly to staging and to posters and album covers. The Velvet Underground famously took as their minimalist pop visual emblem Andy Warhol’s banana record jacket. Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable, an environmental performance space and dance floor, was saved for posterity in Ronald Nameth’s film bearing its name. The Ramones, Patti Smith, and Television followed in this tradition of stylish presentation, yet without fully developing as audiovisual artists. The Talking Heads would take this period’s studied stylistic signature more completely into a visual realm corresponding to the minimalist, performance art, and conceptual installation realm that surrounded them.

Stop Making Sense, Jonathan Demme’s 1984 feature release concert film, chronicles the Talking Heads’ stage act. Storytelling Giant, a compilation of ten music videos made by the Talking Heads during the 1980s, complements the performance documentary by allowing a comparison between the use of visual symbols in performance and in music videos. "Once in a Lifetime" highlights David Byrne’s evangelical send-up, as his new wave angular dancing (complete with ticks and jerks of nervous system overload) retains an admiration for a preacher’s exuberance while substituting irony for religiosity. The video water forms an abstract ground; multiple Byrne bodies float up at diagonals, recalling Magritte’s
rain of bureaucrats; and banks of monitors echo images. Byrne's dancing body at points echoes four other versions of himself operating in a separate image plane. The piece, directed by Toni Basil (as was “Crosseyed and Painless”) borrows many of the experimental techniques of video art in use at the time. “Wild Wild Life,” directed by Byrne (as were the Robert Wilson-influenced “Burning Down the House” and “Road to Nowhere”), uses the minimalist construct of band members sporting stage harnesses that lift them up against a silver-curtained background. This pared-down image is joined by later images of the band members in the harness performing large dance jumps off the rungs of a ladder, which in turn leads to other variations recalling bungee jumping and frame drift.

The animator Jim Blashfield created some wonderful circulating images of household objects for “And She Was.” For “The Lady Don’t Mind,” Jim Jarmusch provides a black-and-white minimalist image of a woman in a kimonos in a bare room, in montage with night shots of the New York cityscape and the band performing informally but with rear projection.

The Talking Heads clearly believe that imagery in the music video should have a life of its own, following traditions of the visual avant-gardes for which the band’s word imagery plays in counterpoint. As Byrne remarks, “We made a couple of Tom Tom Club videos that were purely animation which I was really proud of, but they didn’t get shown much because they didn’t show the band.” Sally Stockbridge notes the similarity between the abstract visuals of the Tom Tom Club videos and the films of Otto Fischinger. In Wired magazine, David Byrne speaks also of a project making fun of the iconography of PowerPoint: “This whirlwind of arrows, pointing everywhere and nowhere—each one color-coded to represent God knows what aspects of growth, market share, or regional trends—ends up capturing the excitement and pleasant confusion of the marketplace, the everyday street, personal relationships, and the simultaneity of multitasking.” The relationship of Byrne’s experiments to some of the arrow images of Paul Klee strikes a note for which perhaps we should have been prepared: the dancer on the ladder of “Wild Wild Life” may also be an homage to Klee’s figure famously climbing a ladder to abstraction.

With “Human Behaviour” in 1993 Michel Gondry launched what would become Björk’s long pursuit of the avant-garde visual arts in her video corollaries for what she conceives of as the avant-garde pop song. Björk plays Goldilocks in a color-saturated narrative that uses animated stuffed bears in much the same way that various installation artists have mobilized toys as elements of symbolic confrontations, for example, Jeff Koons, Kelly Heaton, Fred Wilson, Chris Burden, and David Beck. We might wonder if Gondry had the Porter film of 1903 as a conscious reference, but either way the intertextuality across ninety years of cinema is a fetching avant-garde rhyme.

Gondry’s “Isobel” (1995) and “Bachelorette” (1997) are music video’s version of the film narrative and sequel, telling the story of a wild child in lush superimposed imagery discovering urban culture through instal-
lations of toy fighter planes, after which the same girl becomes a woman reacting to her life in the city. In “Hyperballad” Björk continues as a character running through a landscape that simulates that of a computer game, only to throw herself off a cliff. In “Army of Me” (1995) Gondry collages images of Björk driving a vehicle that alternately looks like an overgrown SUV and a science fiction tank; the surrealism is provided by dental imagery that builds toward the blowing up a of a museum. “Jóga” (1997) features a computer-modified ride over the landscape of Iceland. Gondry’s videos for Björk increasingly steeping in video art image processing are both dreamlike and loosely narrative.

Björk’s videos also have been outlets for other creative videomakers attracted to her mix of pop and artfulness. In “Venus as a Boy,” directed by Sophie Muller (1993), Björk’s dreamy culinary adventure was purportedly inspired by Georges Bataille’s Story of the Eye but it is hardly an equivalent eroticization of the egg; in many ways it is more like a version of Martha Rosler’s “Semiotics of the Kitchen” colored in hot pink and orange, though Björk’s video attempts to rival the look of fashion photography. Similarly, “It’s Oh So Quiet” (1995) directed by Spike Jonze riff’s on the film musical. Its off-beat send-up of the glamour choreography stage takes a decidedly commonplace setting. Much installation art, including installation video pieces, shares this preoccupation with popular culture, so the two forms seem to easily slide into one another, especially now that some museums have started to curate installations of music videos.

This has been the case especially with Chris Cunningham and Floria Sigismondi, who make installation work in addition to their music videos.

Björk’s videos seem most successful, however, when they brush against the conceptual installation. “Violently Happy” (1994), directed by Jean-Baptiste Mondino, features stereotypes of the insane asylum as snake pit, with a padded cell colored in bright baby blue. Its three-wall design seems to present these characters, including Björk, as performers within an installation environment. One of the most avant-garde of Björk’s videos, Eiko Ishioka’s “Cocoon” (2002), plays with minimalist white for both costume and bleached eyebrows, treating Björk as a geisha whose makeup extends over her entirely nude body. Red translucent threads circulate between her breast and nose, only to finally envelop her in a cocoon.

In “The Erotic Life of Machines” Steven Shaviro addresses the treatment of the posthuman in Chris Cunningham’s Björk music video “All Is Full of Love.” The video offers another example of white-hued minimalism, while conceptually offering us the love life of identical robots in uncanny symmetry. A strong visual statement, the work operates as if it were an installation piece, with the same sly sense of humor that is evoked by the presence of such setups in museum spaces.

In the preceding pages I have explored how some of the best work in music video is in dialogue with the history of twentieth-century art and current trends in video art and installation. It would be dangerous to end this essay with some high/low polarity—a danger that I have acknowled-
edged as latent in much postmodernist art criticism. Yet this polarity is even more pronounced in those who react against postmodernism, and thus other strategies are needed to overcome such latent oppositions.

Let me suggest, instead, the dialogue that is occurring between music video and the art world—both of which clearly share their audiences. Through this dialogue we can perhaps move past the notion on the part of the most naive voices within those audiences that each innovation in music video was "invented" by the most recent clip to use it. Perhaps music video's audience will take a new interest in the vital history of the forms they discover through their most recent and most accessible manifestations.

NOTES


2 In 2001 "superflat" was shown at the MOCA gallery, the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The bilingual catalogue of the exhibit was published as Takashi Murakami, *SUPER FLAT* (San Francisco: Last Gasp Press, 2003). See also Dana Amanda and Frisch-Hansen Cruz, *Takashi Murakami: The Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning* (New York: Harry Abrams, 2000); and the interview with Murakami by Mako Wakasa at http://www.jca-online.com/murakami.html.


7 Ibid., 38.

8 Ibid., iv.

9 Ibid., 26.


13 Ibid.

14 Alan Williams, "Pierrot in Context(s)," in David Wills, ed., Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).


21 Spike Jonze, quoted from the booklet accompanying his DVD titled The *Work of Director Spike Jonze* (New York: Metropolis DVD, 2003).


24 David Byrne, quoted at http://www.talking-heads.net/archive.html#interviews.
Although the field of music video studies has always been richly contested, two central arguments stand out. The earliest writers on the genre, such as Ann Kaplan, David Tetzlaff, and Marsha Kinder, emphasized the discontinuity and strangeness of music video, along with its departure from traditional ways of organizing visual materials. Ann Kaplan's Rocking around the Clock, for example, stressed the genre's fragmentary narratives and unusual forms of characterization. The second generation of scholarship, including Andrew Goodwin, John Fiske, and Lisa Lewis, dismissed the earlier readings by stating that they were inattentive to the institutional modes of production and historical practices of musical performance. By focusing on the contexts in which videos were produced and consumed, each writer sought to make sense of what Kaplan sometimes characterized as schizophrenic texts: Goodwin naturalized music video's apparent incoherence by connecting its production practices with those of popular music; Fiske read music videos as standard narratives; and Lewis described the ways that young women—usually regarded as passive viewers—reused the videos they found on MTV. Having looked closely at the ways that videos create visual structures in relation to music and lyrics, and having interviewed directors and others in the field, I believe that the earliest writing had one idea essentially right: music video is irreducibly strange. However, the early writing neglected the music's role in shaping a music video's form and shielded away from close textual readings. It was therefore unable to account for the ways that the genre's individual parameters function independently and in concert. In this essay I reveal the strangeness of music video through an analysis of three individual parameters: