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**The visual album as a hybrid art-form:
A case study of traditional, personal, and allusive narratives
in *Beyoncé***

A Master's Thesis for the Degree Master of Arts (Two Years) in Visual Culture

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The visual album as a hybrid art-form: A case study of traditional, personal, and allusive narratives in *Beyoncé*

The combination of visual art and music has resulted in many innovative audio-visual phenomena and provides an on-going exciting avenue of artistic production. This thesis explores one such phenomenon, the visual album. The visual album is a hybrid medium between music video and film; like music video, it promotes an audio album, and like film, it is conceived as a whole work of art. The visual album borrows formats, techniques and theories from genres, such as *direct address* and the *voyeuristic gaze*, and uses them in a hybrid manner. I here define the visual album in terms of formal characteristics and its presentation of visual content, delimit it against other media and place it in a wider visual and music-cultural context. Through a case study of *Beyoncé* (2013), I then investigate the visual album's narrative content. Inspired by the contestation of music video's capacity for narrative, I show that the visual album can contain both classic Hollywood cause-and-effect narrative and personal narrative within individual tracks. These narratives are implemented through the development of characters and their interaction with the artist's star persona. In the absence of a strong overarching narrative, the visual album creates continuity through the use of visual leitmotifs, which allude to earlier fictional and personal narratives, to the language of narrative, and to narratives outside the visual album. I conclude that the visual album is a new audio-visual genre separate from film and music video, and expresses several different types of narratives. As the first detailed investigation of the visual album, the results of this thesis provide insights to the fields of musicology and visual culture, and enable a deeper understanding of audio-visual phenomena within society's popular culture.

Keywords: Visual album, narrative, Beyoncé, character development, visual leitmotif.

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All images are from the visual album *Beyoncé* (2013), Copyright © Columbia Records

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the study

The combination of visual art and music has resulted in many innovative audio-visual phenomena and provides an on-going exciting avenue of artistic production. One such phenomenon is the **visual album**, a hybrid medium between film and music video; like music video it promotes an audio album, and like film it is conceived as a whole work of art. The collaboration between these media was assisted by technological advancements in the 20th to 21st century. For instance, the 1920s brought the synchronisation of sound and vision in cinema, after WWII television became popular in the home, during the 1960s and 70s the invention of the video tape resulted in the explosion of video art, and most recently the internet has become the latest site for digital art and media. Apart from the mode of production, the content in production is wide and diverse, although many audio-visual phenomena share similarities. The realisation of music as not only a sound event but a visual event has resulted in, for example, television variety shows, and Music Television (MTV) in the 80s, through to the array of audio-visual content available on YouTube in the “noughties”. Although the amount of content on YouTube and the internet in general is almost overwhelming, similarities between artistic practices such as television, photography, video art and cinema do remain. The evolution of the visuality of music takes many forms and sparks inspiration for new audio-visual innovations to be created.

My own inspiration for taking the visual album as a subject of study stems from the importance of music in my life. The ways music entered my life ranged from listening to my parents’ 70s records, to many years of playing the piano, to the joy and excitement of creating music with others, to forming my own weird and wonderful musical tastes. As such, my life has been surrounded by, immersed and invested in music in some form or another. This love of music, clichéd as it sounds, is the building block for this thesis. However, the realisation of music’s visuality came much later for me. As I took in the images associated with music around me, my curiosity for the visual album grew. This curiosity is informed by the interaction between different media. Media cross-over is not a new concept, especially in regard to audio-visual phenomena. In terms of music, the broadcasting of live performances has been around for a long time. The music variety shows of the 50s, 60s and 70s in various countries attest to the popularity of this format on television. In 1981, MTV was launched in the USA, leading to a proliferation of

music videos and the development of similar television shows in other countries. Inadvertently, I saw this proliferation first-hand. I grew up watching *Rage* (an Australian music video programme) on the weekends, but as a teenager I never thought about how the stories of music videos were told visually. My visual experiences of music were either live performances, images in my head connected to the music I heard, or stories associated with visual memories of certain times and events. It is only since moving away from my homeland that the significance of other forms of music visuality have become apparent to me.

In the 80s the music video was the new way to market an artist or band and drive record sales up. Music video became popular because of its easily accessible video format and low production costs. Now, music videos appear online, and the digitisation of music is creating a shift in how one listens to music. My own record and CD collection remain in Australia, and I only carry digital files with me. The loss of the physical items of music has actually changed the way I listen. I no longer sit and listen to a whole album from beginning to end after I have just bought it from a shop. I don't read the booklet from front to back to sing along with the lyrics or get some insight into the artists who made the album. Now I go online. My CDs and records are stored away in my digital library, my record shop is one mouse-click away, and my playlists are ready at a moment's notice. In some ways, the visuality of the music I listen to is restricted to the album cover that is displayed when a song plays. In other ways, it is expanded by the merry-go-round that is YouTube, where music videos are rampant and another video is always suggested. Although the music video's visual roots are in cinematography and video art, over time, music video carved out its own niche, audience, and visual language. It has become a clearly different entity from cinema, and in this paper is recognised as such. This evolution of music video, along with the decline in sales due to music's digitisation, are part of the reason why artists and record companies are creating new ways to audio-visually present music. Therefore, it is from this legacy that the visual album has come and, similarly, it also carves out its own place in the world.

Research objectives

The visual album is no stranger to borrowing formats and techniques from television, photography, video art and cinema. In fact the visual album crosses many media, art and culture boundaries all the way through to story-telling. However, it would be wrong to say that the visual album is just a culmination of these things. Rather, it incorporates them and presents them anew. This results in a visual expression of music rooted in film and music video traditions. This means that like a music video, the visual album promotes an audio album, and like a film it may express

narrative and be of long length. This is just a brief explanation of what a visual album seems to be and it does not begin to do it justice. Therefore the first research question that this thesis will tackle is: **What is a visual album?** Although this is a simple question, the answer is complex. The visual album, due to its hybrid nature, requires an in-depth examination to uncover its history, context, and content.

The visual album seems unique, and it exists as a part of a music industry that is continually changing due to the digitisation of music and its distribution. Recently, the music industry has seemingly focussed on making the largest amount of money with the smallest amount of product. Artists are making singles only, and listeners are responding to this: consumption of singles grows competitive with the consumption of a whole musical work, such an album.¹ However, in the last four years there has been a growth in artists who produce longer audio-visual products that could be classified as visual albums. This relates to the first research question, which aims to discover what influence film and music video has on the visual album and where it sits in relation to online media, video, and distribution. An objective of this paper is to understand the innovations that are occurring in the music industry, and to explore the changes in the type of audio-visual products that artists produce. Furthermore, I will define the visual album and delimit it against other media forms. Once the visual album is established as a singular phenomenon, important aspects of its content will be examined, such as the visual album's narrative content.

Narrative content brings me to the second research question to be undertaken in this thesis: **Does the visual album, as a hybrid between film and music video, express narrative? And if so, what types of narrative are there and how are they implemented?** The first part of this question is interesting because of narrative's cinematic and literature traditions, which may be more likely to arise given the visual album's visual and formal similarities to film. However, when these traditions are juxtaposed with the consistent criticism of music video's lack of narrative, then the visual album's capacity for narrative is up for debate. To investigate this second research question, I will examine the possibilities and implementation of narrative through a visual album case study.

¹ G. Peoples, 'Business Matters: The Track That Outsold an Album One Week of the Summer of 2012', <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/1083922/business-matters-the-track-that-outsold-an-album-one-week-of-the-summer-of>, 2012, (accessed 22nd May 2014).

Theoretical framework and methodology

The empirical material for this case study is the self-identified visual album *Beyoncé* (2013) by American R&B/pop singer Beyoncé Knowles-Carter.² Beyoncé's visual album was specifically chosen for the following reasons: it is recently released and the artist is well-known; it has sparked a lot of media attention upon its release; the artist herself has called it a visual album; it is visually and musically striking; it utilises separate tracks yet is presented as a whole work of art; and, last but not least, it builds upon film and music video traditions (including narrative forms) but claims to be something new. By analysing how narrative materialises in *Beyoncé*, I will address questions about the types of narratives that are present, the construction of narrative in individual videos versus over the whole album, if the format influences narrative, and how the audience is engaged with narrative. These questions seem particular to Beyoncé's visual album, but this thesis aims to present the analysis and interpretation as a model for investigating narrative in other visual albums and audio-visual phenomena in the future. To this end, two themes – character development and visual leitmotifs – will be used to analyse and interpret narrative.

In the past music video has been examined by different theoretical discourses other than the music video discourse. It is understandable that theorists have to start from somewhere and this somewhere has, more often than not, been film theory. Two theorists who will be referred to throughout this paper, Carol Vernallis and Andrew Goodwin, both write about music video but approach the topic rather differently. Vernallis, author of *Experiencing Music Video* (2004) and *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (2013) acknowledges previous work done on music video that uses film theory, but moves forward with it by establishing her own methods of analysis that are specific to music video. Goodwin, on the other hand, in his book *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, criticises the practice of applying one set of theoretical rules and analysis to any other medium than the one it was originally intended for.³ This seems highly contradictory, given that he is using music theory to discuss visuality.

² To be clear, when Beyoncé's name is used without italics, it refers to Beyoncé Knowles-Carter the person. When it is used in *italics*, it refers to her self-titled visual album.

³ A. Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 77.

It seems reasonable to ask why it is that we should want to use theories of the visual to understand pop's aural codes [---] but nonetheless I will suggest that it is useful to reverse that expectation and use musicology to illuminate the visual.⁴

Goodwin exemplifies this technique of theoretical displacement, by replacing one theory for another. Although this may bring to light some aspects of the analysis that were previously hidden, it also runs the risk of dismissing other aspects as failures. For example, Vernallis claims that narrative in music video often fails because it is subjected to film narrative criteria.⁵ She perceives the lack or failure of narrative in music video as something done on purpose to decrease the chance that the music in a music video will fade into the background. I mention this disconnect in regards to music video in order to contextualise how this thesis' theoretical framework will unfold.

When it comes to investigating and analysing the visual album, this thesis' methodology incorporates and acknowledges other discourses but does not concur that any one should replace another, rather that one can build upon another. This means that although theories from, e.g., film and music video will be used, the standards of those media will not define the success or failure of the visual album. A further reason for this methodological approach is that, to my understanding, there appears to be little or no academic literature on the visual album directly. However, this absence of scholarship makes this study all the more important as a contribution to the audio-visual, musicological and visual culture fields. Therefore, I will follow Vernallis' example and establish visual album analysis as a method in its own right. I will do this by contextualising and investigating the visual album as a popular culture phenomenon followed by applying a visual narrative analysis on the *Beyoncé* case study. My approach will be of an hour-glass configuration, whereby the visual album shall be discussed more generally in the beginning, followed by focussing on narrative in individual songs within a specific visual album i.e. *Beyoncé*, before moving on to an overall perspective of narrative applied to the whole of the *Beyoncé* visual album. This approach is used to see if narrative works in a different or a similar manner when developed on a smaller scale than on a larger scale. It is important to acknowledge the history and context of the visual album but not become limited by the surrounding theory. Thus, I will build

⁴ Goodwin, pp. 49-50.

⁵ Vernallis, 'The aesthetics of music video: an analysis of Madonna's 'Cherish'', *Popular Music*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1998, p. 153. Originally this article was published in 1998 and then republished in Vernallis' book *Experiencing Music Video* in 2004. In the latter publication, Vernallis still claims that there is a lack in detailed music video analysis, despite the six year publication gap. She goes on to note several examples that come close but further claims that '[n]one of these analyses, however, is sufficiently attentive to visual detail and to the flow of the music' (*Experiencing Music Video*, 2004, p. 310).

upon narrative theories by film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, and Laura Mulvey, through to music video theorists Andrew Goodwin and Carol Vernallis. These theoretical protagonists will enable me to highlight the visual album's unique narrative style.

Limitations

As with any study, there are certain limitations to take into consideration. First, the *Beyoncé* visual album case study is not representative of all visual albums. Unfortunately, due to length and time restrictions, a larger comparative study between different visual albums could not be undertaken. Nevertheless, the chosen case study provides an entry point to examining narrative in a visual album. Second, secondary sources have been used in lieu of direct contact with artists to deduce artistic intent and to understand the wider music culture and fan base. Third, while the reception of the visual album is interesting, it too is outside the scope of this paper, and thus an audience study was not conducted. This could be an avenue of research for the future. One final point is that the analysis of the case study *Beyoncé* is primarily a visual narrative analysis. A deep musical analysis was not conducted due to the limited scope of this thesis, but I would like to acknowledge the importance of music and its role in the visual album. It is important to stress that music is fundamental to the visual album and can have its own narrative structure and influence. Therefore, as the description, analysis, and interpretation unfold, different aspects of the music/image/text relationship will come to the fore. This will, I hope, counterbalance and compliment the heavy emphasis on visuality, as the way music, image, and text relate to one another is very important when observing an audio-visual phenomenon such the visual album.

Significance of the study

The study of audio-visual phenomena and the visual album is important to visual culture and musicological discourses, and society's popular culture. The visual album is a unique audio-visual expression of art and product. Like music videos, it is a product that acts as promotional material for the whole music album. However, it is also an example of an attempt by artists and record labels to solve the problem of how to cut through an overwhelming amount of music and video content, especially online content available to their targeted audience. The format and narrative allusions may help such products be more artistically and financially successful.

Structure

This thesis is divided into two interdependent parts: the first part discusses what a visual album is, and the second part explores narrative through character development and visual leitmotifs through a case study of *Beyoncé*. This division allows me to best answer the research questions with clarity and logical flow. Chapter two focusses on the first research question, and thus the discussion focusses on the visual album as an audio-visual phenomenon in popular culture, beginning with the origin of the term ‘visual album’. I will consider possible formal characteristics that stem from film and music video, which will help determine a preliminary definition of the visual album. From this discussion, possible connections will be made between the characteristics and format of the visual album to narrative. Third, the visual album will be discussed in terms of technology and distribution, content and narrative, and contextually within a changing music culture. Chapter three and four are dedicated to the second research question about expressing and implementing narrative specifically in Beyoncé’s visual album. Chapter three discusses how developing different characters and personas can influence both traditional forms of narrative – classical Hollywood narrative and personal narrative – the latter of which is particularly popular in music video. By juxtaposing these types of narratives in the context of *Beyoncé*, we can see how they interact, what their differences are, and if they behave differently to their original media. This discussion will take shape through analysing three particular videos within *Beyoncé* – *Pretty Hurts*, *Partition* and *No Angel* – in terms of character development, before moving on to a larger analysis that focusses on visual leitmotifs in chapter four, which targets how narrative materialises in the visual album overall. Chapter four discusses how visual leitmotifs, such as an object, person, place, or camera angle can allude to four different facets of narrative: fictional and personal narratives presented earlier in the same album, the language of narrative, and narratives available outside of the visual album, for instance in popular culture, art and religion. Finally, in chapter five, I will conclude the thesis by discussing the visual album as a site of various narratives, both traditional, personal, real and alluded to. I will propose how this research can be used as a stepping stone to investigating audio-visual phenomena and their narrative components, and what possible effects visual albums have on the music industry at large, the fields of visual culture and musicology, and society’s audio-visual listening culture.

Chapter 2: What is a visual album?

The visual album is a relatively new and under-investigated audio-visual phenomenon that is worthy of being recognised as a legitimate art-form, product, and entity in itself. By investigating what constitutes a visual album, this chapter will set the context for the *Beyoncé* case study and analysis. Specifically, I will examine the origin of the term visual album, identify and explore the formal qualities of the visual album, explain the hybrid nature of the visual album in terms of film and music video's influence, and place the visual album in the context of a constantly evolving music culture. The first section determines where the term visual album originated from in relation to self-identifying visual albums. The second section, explaining formal qualities, will concentrate on two particular characteristics. The first characteristic is the relationship between the audio album and the visual album, which I will refer to as *direct relationship*. The second is the actual duration of the visual album, which I will refer to simply as *album length*. Album length brings up questions about visual album format. Therefore, this section will be further divided to explain two particular formats. Although this is not a definitive list of characteristics, it will contribute to a preliminary working definition of the visual album. The third section, on the visual album's hybridity, will highlight the visual album's relationship to film and music video in terms of sound and music, direct address, and repetition, in order to establish important content features within the visual album. This third section also initiates some narrative connections in preparation for the following chapters that concentrate directly on narrative. The final section of this chapter opens up the discussion of where the visual album sits in relation to music and visual culture, and to technology.

2:1 The origin of the term *Visual Album*

The term *visual album* became prominent in December 2013, when Beyoncé released her self-titled album on iTunes, which includes fourteen audio-only tracks and eighteen audio-visual tracks (including credits). She named the audio-visual part of the album a visual album, because for every audio track there was a corresponding audio-visual track. Essentially, if one were to play the whole *Beyoncé* album, then, with the exception of the song *Grown Woman*, one would hear each song twice. However, Beyoncé is not the only artist endeavouring to make large audio-visual expressions related to film or music video that showcase music from an audio album. In fact, the term visual album has been used previously by the experimental rock band Animal Collective on

their 2010 release, *ODDSAC*.⁶ The Animal Collective's previous use of the term went relatively unnoticed at the time. Recently, the reporting media have adopted the term, but it is largely connected with Beyoncé's visual album, rather than with other albums of similar concepts, such as *ODDSAC*.

The concept of Beyoncé's visual album initially sparked some controversy. At its release, tabloid media sources claimed that Kanye West, American hip hop artist, was annoyed by Beyoncé stealing his idea before he got a chance to make his own visual album. West's album *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2010) was purportedly going to be a visual album until advisers convinced him to make the 'short film' *Runaway* (2010) instead.⁷ *Runaway* consists of eight songs from *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*. However, *Runaway* was released before the full audio album. This early release date indicates that *Runaway* was intended as promotional material for the audio-only album rather than just a visual expression of West's music. West was not quoted directly about the Beyoncé visual album controversy, and thus his intentions of making a visual album are uncertain. Nevertheless, it is clear from these examples, *Runaway* and *ODDSAC*, that the visual album may have existed in some form or another before Beyoncé's *Beyoncé* album hit the digital shelves.

Upon the first viewing of Beyoncé's visual album (and here I mean the audio-visual tracks only), it seems that it is merely a collection of music videos. The audio-visual singles can be separated for individual promotion of the whole album, which is very similar to the purpose of a music video. Therefore, it prompts the question: what is it about Beyoncé's visual album, apart from the quantity of videos and their simultaneous release, which makes it a visual album? A likely answer to this is that in Beyoncé's case, the visual album was envisaged as a complete and connected piece of art, even though single tracks can be separated from the whole.

I wanted people to hear things differently and have a different first impression. Not just listen to a 10 second clip but actually be able to see the whole vision of the album. It was important that we made this a movie, we made this an experience. I wanted everyone to see the whole picture, and to see how personal everything is to me.⁸

⁶ 'ODDSAC TRAILER', [online video], 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2H48VtETngA>, (accessed 26th March 2014).

⁷ J. Paylor, "He wanted to do a visual album for Dark Twisted Fantasy": Kanye West "Feeling really defeated" and privately seething over pal Beyoncé's success', <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2539495/Kanye-West-feeling-really-defeated-privately-seething-pal-Beyonc-s-visual-album-success.html>, 2014, (accessed 26th March 2014).

⁸ B. Knowles-Carter, "Self-Titled" Part 1 . The Visual Album', [online video], 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcN6Ke2V-rQ>, (accessed 17th March 2014), author's transcription.

Whether Beyoncé makes connections through narrative or visual and musical consistency, the way they interrelate is important, and I will examine these relationships in a later chapter. The concept of a whole work of art, on the other hand is pervasive in all the visual albums observed. Therefore, it is equally important to identify the formal qualities and characteristics in the visual album to understand what makes a piece of audio-visual material, such as *Beyoncé*, a visual album.

2:2 Identifying formal qualities in the visual album

Devising parameters for what constitutes the visual album has not, to my knowledge, been previously attempted. Despite the visual album seeming to be a recent audio-visual phenomenon, considering *Beyoncé* and *ODDSAC*, there are some large audio-visual expressions related to particular audio albums, both in the last few years and in the 80s and 90s that are similar in structure. Kanye West's *Runway* is but one example of this. Therefore, I will define the visual album using the characteristics of *direct relationship* and *album length*. These characteristics were devised from observing possible visual albums. The purpose of these characteristics is to separate the visual album from music video and film and to highlight the visual album's singularity.

Visual album characteristic one: 'direct relationship'

The first formal characteristic observed in visual albums is that they have a *direct relationship* with an audio album by the *same* artist(s). The relationship seems to be in regards to musical content and to the artist(s) themselves. The artist is one and the same on both products. In the case of a band, the band name stays the same, but the line-up of the band can change. The year of release and the name of the visual album can differ from the name and year of the audio album. For example, Daft Punk's video *D.A.F.T: A Story about dogs, androids, firemen and tomatoes* was released in 1999, but the music it featured was from the album *Homework*, which was initially released in 1997. Here, the band name stays the same but the names of the products differ as do the release dates.

The direct relationship between the audio album and the visual album in terms of musical content is usually clear and obvious. The music from the audio album is featured on the visual album, thus creating a direct relationship. Nevertheless, it appears that the visual album is not limited by the audio album songs that it features. This materialises in some visual albums as the

omission, addition and manipulation of songs. For example, Beyoncé's visual album *Beyoncé* features a bonus audio-visual track (*Grown Woman*) that is not featured on the audio-only part of the album, lending an exclusivity to her visual album. Conversely, not all the songs from an audio-only album make it on to the corresponding visual album, as seen with West's *Runaway*. The direct relationship between audio and visual albums is important because it creates the link between the two products. This link enables the visual album to work as a promotional tool for the audio album and the artist. In addition to this, the link provides continuity between the two products and within the visual album itself. The songs on the visual album do not always seem to follow the same track order, or consist of full songs from beginning to end, from the audio album but still there remains a strong connection between the two products. For instance, West's *Runaway* features eight songs from the audio album *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, which has 13 tracks. *Beyoncé*'s visual album section features all tracks from the audio part of her album, and similarly Daft Punk's *D.A.F.T: A Story about dogs, androids, firemen and tomatoes* features at least seven songs from *Homework*, which has a total of 16 tracks.

An extrapolation of this direct relationship occurs in the Animal Collective's *ODDSAC*, where the video was made simultaneously with the audio album. Therefore, the *ODDSAC*'s audio album is a part of its corresponding visual album. The band's expectation was that the audio and visuals should be seen and heard together as that was how they were made.⁹ This expectation encapsulates the direct relationship by skipping the intermediate step of the audio album. Furthermore, the missing step seems to have changed the purpose of *ODDSAC*, if part of a visual album's purpose is to promote the sale of the audio album. *ODDSAC*, on the other hand, promotes itself, a culmination of the audio album and visual album. Beyoncé's visual album is similar to *ODDSAC* in that one half of *Beyoncé* is audio-only and the other half is audio-visual. However, because the tracks are separable, the audio-visual tracks can act as stand-alone music videos that promote the sale of the audio and audio-visual product.

Although the visual album has strong connections to the audio album in terms of the artist/band and music, the artists create the impression of freedom in how the music is realised within the visual album. Apart from the omission or addition of songs, partial songs and manipulated songs also exist. This leads to qualifying how those songs are manipulated and what direct relationship means in regard to musical content. Manipulation is used as a way of

⁹ K. Rich, 'Exclusive Interview: Animal Collective and ODDSAC Director Danny Perez', <http://www.cinemablend.com/new/Exclusive-Interview-Animal-Collective-And-ODDSAC-Director-Danny-Perez-16856.html/>, 2010, (accessed 21st January 2014).

redistributing the music from the audio-only album in a non-linear fashion. The manipulation can be, for example, a remix of the audio. A remix refers to the combination of ‘sections of existing recorded tracks in new patterns and with new material’, or a ‘radical reworking of an original track, leaving little of the original recording’.¹⁰ However, if the audio was reworked to this extent for the visual album, then the direct relationship would begin to crumble because the strong connection to the audio album would be missing. Incidentally, the visual albums observed in this study do not seem to do this. Instead, they fall in-line with the first part of the remix definition. Moreover, I would argue that adding new material to a remix is not always necessary; a reworking of the existing tracks would be sufficient for the purpose of the visual album. Effectively, the manipulation, remixing and fragmenting of the audio material allows the material to be used in different ways.

An example of manipulation by way of remixing and fragmenting is the American alternative experimental indie rock/pop band Dirty Projectors and their audio-visual product *Hi Custodian* (2012).¹¹ Under my working definition, this video is an example of a visual album. *Hi Custodian* uses nearly all of the music from the corresponding audio album *Swing Lo Magellan* (2012) in a highly fragmented way. For example, from 06:30 to 07:43 minutes, two female characters sing the first two verses of *Just from Chevron* followed by the last two lines from the outro-verse (of the audio track). Through editing, the entire middle section of the song, which is mainly sung by the lead singer David Longstreth, has been removed and the beginning and end have been spliced together. This is not unusual for this visual album, as the first six and a half minutes are comprised of various sections cut and pasted from the first three songs from the audio album. The rough order of the original audio track listing is followed until the fourth song, *Swing Lo Magellan*, which is completely skipped. However, the song then appears at the very end of the video and carries over until the final credits finish rolling. Throughout this visual album, whole sections of tracks are not only remixed, but the individually recorded audio tracks within songs (i.e. strings, guitar, drums, lead vocal, backing vocal) are separated and used as well. For example, at 4:05 to 5:24, the backing vocals from *Gun Has No Trigger* are separated from the other instrumental and vocal tracks within the song, and are used as a song on their own. Presumably, this is done to convey a certain mood or transcendental feeling after the main character has

¹⁰ W. Fulford-Jones, ‘Remix’, *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/article/grove/music/47227>, n.d., (accessed 2nd May 2014).

¹¹ ‘Dirty Projectors – “Hi Custodian”’, [online video], 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vncbG-QJlNg>, (accessed 21st January 2014).

supposedly died. In line with this, the unaccompanied two-part-harmony female vocals almost sound like a piece of church choral music and seem appropriate for the narrative. These remixes are demonstrative of the way music is used to highlight and potentially influence narrative.

These examples show that musical content in the visual album is used relatively flexibly. The direct relationship concept materialises in different ways, e.g. through omission, addition, and remixing of songs in various ways. The *Hi Custodian* visual album demonstrates how and why these manipulations of musical content convey the musical and visual narrative, if such narratives exist. There are logical reasons behind the editing and production choices that are made, or at least the audience perceives it this way, and the audience starts to make the narrative connections themselves. The audience's role in making narrative connections will be elucidated in the upcoming chapters. The fragmentation of audio tracks is just one type of formal manipulation that can occur within a visual album, but it does not detract from the main characteristic: that there is a direct relationship between the visual album and the audio-album, meaning that music from the latter is significantly featured in the former.

Visual album characteristic two: 'album length'

The second formal characteristic that is dominant amongst the given examples is *album length*. *Album length* is the duration of the visual album, and is usually longer than the standard music video length, and has no limit to the maximum length. A standard pop song is between 3-5 minutes long.¹² According to composer and musicologist R. Murray Schafer, the length of a pop song derives from 'the old ten-inch shellac disc', which could only hold just over three minutes of recorded sound.¹³ This average length did not change with the advent of the long-play record, and this is testament to the fast-paced nature of commercial radio stations.¹⁴ Often songs are edited down to a *radio edit* so that the song length fits into a regular time slot within standard radio programming, or it is modified or shortened because of explicit content.¹⁵ This short song audio trend has transferred to the average music video length, but in both music video and audio

¹² W. Straw, 'Popular Music and Post-Modernism in the 1980s', in S. Frith, A. Goodwin and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, London: New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 6.

¹³ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester, Destiny Books, 1994, p. 95.

¹⁴ Murray Schafer, p. 95.

¹⁵ 'radio edit', in A. Stevenson (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of English*, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199571123.001.0001/m_en_gb0995025, 2010, (accessed 21st May 2014).

songs there are many exceptions to this 3-5 minutes rule. Audio-only exceptions have occurred throughout the years with examples such as Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* (5:54), Daft Punk's *Around the World* (7:10), Led Zeppelin's *Achilles Last Stand* (10:25), Nick Cave's *Babe, I'm on Fire* (14:46), Jimi Hendrix's *Voodoo Chile* (15:00), Pink Floyd's *Atom Heart Mother* (23:41), and The Flaming Lips *7 Skies H3* (24 hours), among many others.

Furthermore, there are also audio-visual exceptions. A recent example of this in the extreme is Pharrell Williams' release of his hit single *Happy* in November 2013, along with what has now been dubbed 'the world's first 24-hour music video'.¹⁶ The video is hosted online and is an interactive platform,¹⁷ where the user can skip through the 24 hours of footage and view people (including celebrities) dancing to *Happy* in various locations in Los Angeles over a 24 hour period.¹⁸ There is no special remix of the audio; the track is just repeated for each dancer. This is not only an example of advancing standardised audio-visual formats but also represents a new trend towards interactive websites and videos that are becoming popular online.¹⁹

In addition to videos such as *Happy*, there has been an increase in what musicologist Fabian Holt calls 'cinematic song-video',²⁰ which he claims is a format that is pushing MTV's boundaries.

Song-videos such as 'Telephone' (2010) by [Lady Gaga] and the 'Imma Be/Rock that Body' (2009) by [Black Eyed Peas] are up to 10 minutes long and include long introductions without music, like a film scene, and the video creates a real cinematic experience of the artist and the music. Both extend the boundaries with a built-in cross-media sensibility, pertaining to such forms as sci-fi movies, computer games and installation art.²¹

These cinematic song-videos may push MTV's boundaries, and they are clearly heading in the direction of the visual album. Cinematic song-videos do share similarities with the visual album, and as Holt claims, to films. However, they usually only showcase one to three songs, which does not constitute an album's worth of work. Visual albums feature more musical content than

¹⁶ M. Ryzik, 'Round-the-Clock Giddiness in a 24-Hour Music Video', http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/26/arts/music/round-the-clock-giddiness-in-a-24-hour-music-video.html?_r=0, 2013, (accessed 3rd April 2014).

¹⁷ Pharrell Williams: *Happy*, <http://24hoursofhappy.com/>, 2013, (accessed 3rd April 2014).

¹⁸ The filming of the 24 hour period actually took a total of 11 days. See New York Times citation directly above.

¹⁹ See <http://video.bobdylan.com/desktop.html>, <http://www.theverge.com/2013/9/9/4711532/arcade-fire-release-just-a-reflektor-interactive-music-video>, <http://www.thejohnnycashproject.com/>, and <http://www.thewildernessdowntown.com/>, for other examples.

²⁰ F. Holt, 'Is music becoming more visual? Online video content in the music industry', *Visual Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2011, p. 52.

²¹ Holt, p. 52.

cinematic song-videos and make stronger connections to their corresponding audio album by utilising longer time frames. *Beyoncé*, *ODDSAC*, *Hi Custodian*, and *Runaway* all range between 20 to 75 minutes in length, which not only allows for more audio content but starts to push the visual album towards short film and feature film lengths. In doing so, the opportunity for larger, more coherent narratives, increases. Thus, the characteristics that the visual album exhibits do impact, to some extent, on the musical and narrative content of the visual album. This finding leads us to explore the two types of formats that are found in visual albums.

Two visual album formats

Of all the videos mentioned so far, there seem to be two distinguishable formats that artists are pursuing. These formats are different enough from film and music video to constitute a separate genre. The first format is what Beyoncé has used: **one audio-visual track for every audio track**. Other artists, such as the American band Bon Iver and Icelandic band Sígur Rós, have used the same format. Admittedly, this does seem like a collection of music videos, and one would have just means for arguing this point. In fact, Sígur Rós' *The Valtari Mystery Film Project* is an example of this. The band commissioned fourteen film-makers to create videos for each of the tracks from the *Valtari* audio album: one video per film-maker. They then opened it up to fans in a competition to do the same. The result were 14 official videos made with almost no restrictions and small budgets and two fan-made videos selected from 834 film entries.²²

Although the visuals were based on the audio album, and collectively the videos create a longer video, the individual tracks stay separate because of the way each video was made in isolation from the others. On the other hand, *Beyoncé* and Bon Iver's *Bon Iver (Deluxe)* demonstrate strong visual and textual connections between and within the audio-visual tracks. Therefore, *Beyoncé* and *Bon Iver (Deluxe)* remain visual albums, according to my definition, whereas *The Valtari Mystery Film Project* does not, showing that the direct relationship between the audio and visual albums is as important as the relationship between individual tracks within a visual album of this format. Musical, visual and textual links will be explored further in the following chapters, but at this point it seems clear that individual audio-visual tracks have a continuity between them. They show a strong sense of relatedness to each other and can be identified as belonging to one particular visual album.

²² 'The Valtari Mystery Film Experiment', <http://sigur-ros.co.uk/valtari/videos/>, 2012, (accessed 31st March 2014).

The second format features **one continuous video** that has a direct relationship to the audio album, as seen with *Hi Custodian*, *Runaway* and *ODDSAC*. The uninterrupted videos imply short film and feature film length, but there is more than just that. As with the previous format, there are strong visual and textual connections throughout the video. These connections and references, whether they are related to characters, lyrics, locations, or narratives, are usually easier to identify exactly because of the format. The continuousness and length of the video allow the viewer to more easily experience the visual album as a whole and in some cases, there is a strong, if simple, narrative drive that aids this experience.²³

These formats highlight the fluctuation between film and music video standards. A visual album may be separable like *Beyoncé*, or continuous like *Hi Custodian*, where the audience is presented with a film-like product in length. Both, however, are whole works and are each recognisable as one audio-visual product. It is also important to reiterate that the visual album is strongly connected to another form of media, the audio album. The direct relationship characteristic conjures up questions of intent and purpose of such visual albums. These questions arise because of the dual functions of the visual album: a work of art in itself, and a promotional tool for the audio album it is based on. Furthermore, when one watches a film that is based on a book, the film is not perceived as a promotional tool for the audience to buy and read the novel. The trailer is the promotion for the film as the music video is for the song and album. The visual album does promote the audio album, but because of its hybridity and its function as an artwork, it does not always behave like a music video or a trailer. The format, in combination with the direct relationship to the audio album and the artistic and promotional purpose of the visual album, creates a blurred line between film and music video. From this juxtaposition, a separate art-form emerges: the visual album.

A working definition of the visual album

From this exploration of visual albums, a working definition emerges that can be applied to identify visual albums among other visual material. **A visual album is an audio-visual product that has a *direct relationship* with the music from a corresponding audio album by the same artist(s). Its *album length* is more than the standard music video length of 3-5**

²³ R. Altman, 'A Theory of Narrative' [book excerpt], 2008, <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-14428-5/a-theory-of-narrative/excerpt>, (accessed 14th May 2014). Narrative drive is the causation of the film/text to be read as a narrative.

minutes, and strong visual and textual relations are present to form continuity throughout the whole album. This working definition may become increasingly useful given current online trends to push standard music video boundaries.

2:3 Exploring the visual album's hybridity: the influence of film and music video in visual album content

Visual albums cross media boundaries in terms of technology and format as well as in content. This section will discuss some commonalities that the visual album has with both film and music video and the elements that are unique to visual albums will emerge. Several elements, such as sound and music, direct address, and repetition play important roles in the content of the visual album, and are investigated through the lens of narrative.

Music and sound

Music is fundamental to the visual album. Without the music, the visual album would not exist, nor would the music video. The music is usually created before the images, yet the images do not always reflect the music. However, the images usually support the music structurally by synchronised editing or by repeating an image. For example, the same image may be shown each time a musical motif or a particular structural unit, such as the chorus, is heard. This gives the impression that the visuals are connected to the music. Film theorist Anahid Kassabian claims that music is equally important to film as are the narrative and visuals.²⁴ Kassabian deals exclusively with music rather than sound. This difference is important to note because film music can be categorised depending on how it is used, i.e. diegetic/non-diegetic.²⁵ Yet, in music video the music is always the most important and is foregrounded in the mix. Other sounds, such as distant talking, walking, birdsong, or traffic, do not usually undermine the foregrounded music.

²⁴ A. Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*, New York: London, Routledge, 2001, p. 1.

²⁵ M. Cooke. 'Film music' *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/09647>, n.d., (accessed 21st May 2014). Diegetic – sound or music that is intrinsic or on-screen, happening within the diegesis of the film, Non-diegetic – sound but usually music that is outside of the diegesis of the film, e.g. background music that isn't coming from an on-screen source.

The visual album, on the other hand, can make use of both diegetic sound and music. Diegetic sound may be used to illustrate a more filmic tradition of setting a scene or drawing the audience in to the narrative. Two audio-visual tracks on the *Beyoncé* album, *Pretty Hurts* and *Haunted*, are an example of this, where diegetic sound is heard in the beginning of each song. The sounds help set the scene, create different atmospheres and bridge the gap between music video and film.

The music in a visual album transgresses the boundaries of what Michel Chion calls *pit music* and *screen music*. Chion identifies the music in terms of where it comes from.²⁶ Pit music is ‘music that accompanies the image from a nondiegetic position, outside the space and time of the action’ and screen music is ‘music arising from a source located directly or indirectly in the space and time of the action, even if this source is a radio or an offscreen musician’.²⁷ Most often, the music in a visual album would be classified as screen music, because the viewer sees the source of the music. Take Beyoncé (or nearly any popular singer, e.g. Madonna, Pink, and Rhianna) for example: we see that her mouth is moving in time with the sound we are hearing. Therefore, we assume that it is her voice that we hear and she is singing to us. We also assume that the other music we hear but do not see (i.e. piano, bass, guitar, drums, etc.) is played by her band. While the band is offscreen, Beyoncé represents them all onscreen.

The previous example, the Dirty Projectors’ *Hi Custodian*, provides a contrasting perspective. The music in *Hi Custodian* gives the impression of alternating between pit music and screen music. Mostly the music is presented much like Beyoncé’s, where the lead singer is seen to be singing, the band alternates between onscreen and offscreen roles, and it is known that the music (even offscreen) is directly related to the time and space of the action. However, at times, when there are no vocals, and long shots are used to show the lead character in a desolate landscape, the music takes on the role of pit music. This is especially noticeable by the orchestration of the chamber ensemble (violin, viola, cello, saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, and French horn), which, along with the camera shots, almost relegates the music to an accompaniment or background music role. This fluctuation between screen music and pit music creates an allusion to a filmic language, and the viewer questions the format of what they are watching: a short film, a music video, or neither. This is not necessarily a problem, it is rather in-line with Chion’s thought about rejecting the idea of seeing everything in binary oppositions

²⁶ M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. C. Gorbman, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 80.

²⁷ Chion, p. 80.

when talking about the categorisation of film sound.²⁸ Chion states that ‘we must add new categories-not claiming thereby to exhaust all possibilities, but at least to enlarge the scope, to recognize, and define, and develop new areas.’²⁹ The visual album is representative of a new category of audio-visual phenomena that uses a combination of sound categories. The combination of film’s sound and music practices, and music video’s foregrounding of music does not create a binary structure in the visual album; on the contrary, it is demonstrative of its hybridity.

Direct address

Another technique used in the visual album is what Andrew Goodwin terms as *direct address*. According to Goodwin, direct address is the act of the actor, artist, or musician directly speaking to the audience.³⁰ This technique is often used in music video and can be seen in the visual album. For example, Beyoncé in *Beyoncé* sings directly to the camera sporadically in the audio-visual track *Ghost*, as do David Longstreth, Amber Coffman and Haley Dekle from the Dirty Projectors in *Hi Custodian*. Longstreth sings and looks directly down into the lens of the camera at 0.42-0.49, and 0.55-1.00. Coffman and Dekle, on the other hand are in shadow at 4.04 but are revealed to be singing into the lens of the camera from 4.57 to 5.19. The fascinating thing about the latter example is that Coffman and Dekle sing monosyllabic backing-vocal ‘aaah’ sounds with wide-open mouths and pained expressions. These elements, along with the singing that almost becomes a scream, heightens the effect of their direct address to the audience. This is because whenever the artist speaks directly to the audience, the spell of the medium is broken. The audience actively engages with the artist. This type of engagement is clearly an example of German playwright Bertolt Brecht’s *alienation effect*.³¹

Goodwin’s direct address emerges from Brecht’s essay called *Alienation effects in Chinese acting*. The *alienation effect* originated in the theatre and is, as stated by Brecht, the actor’s ability to break the ‘fourth wall’.³² This means that the illusory wall between the audience and the actor

²⁸ Chion, p. 75.

²⁹ Chion, p. 75.

³⁰ Goodwin, p. 74.

³¹ B. Brecht, ‘Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting’, in J. Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. J. Willett, Berkshire, Cox & Wyman, 1964, pp. 91-120.

³² Brecht, p. 91.

disappears. In doing this, the actor ‘expresses his awareness of being watched’, and the audience becomes aware of the construction of the play.³³ In essence, it is a ‘theatrical technique intended to remind the audiences that the drama is a performance’ and that the audience should maintain ‘a sense of critical distance’³⁴ instead of empathising with the drama in the play. Direct address is one way for the actor to remind the audience of the mechanics of the play and hinder the audience’s identification with the characters in the play.³⁵ This, in turn, alienates the audience from the fictional diegesis.

In the Brechtian sense, the actor does not completely morph into the character portrayed; rather, the actor quotes the character.³⁶ This effectively separates the actor from the character and allows the actor to hold up the action and lines for approval by the audience. Contrastingly, the traditional western way of acting requires the audience to be unseen, the ‘fourth wall’ to remain intact, and the drama to stay within the diegesis. It is not pointed out to the audience that drama is happening while it is happening. Brecht’s view of western acting is as follows:

The Western actor does all he can to bring his spectator into the closest proximity to the events and character he has to portray. To this end he persuades him to identify himself with him (the actor) and uses every energy to convert himself as completely as possible into a different type, that of the character in question.³⁷

Keeping Brecht’s alienation effect in mind, I will return to Goodwin’s theory about how direct address works in music video. Goodwin uses direct address to discuss the singer and the singer’s character’s dual role as icon and aural narrator of the story. He claims that a musician’s direct address to the camera, and therefore to the audience, would make the audience aware of the narration and mimic live performance.³⁸ The audience’s awareness of the narration is, in the Brechtian sense, an awareness of the mechanics of the music video. The narration, in this context, are the lyrics being sung to the audience. Goodwin says that the direct address technique reveals that narrative is told aurally rather than just visually, and that the singer is simultaneously a character within the music video, and themselves the pop singer.³⁹ This duality is apparent in the

³³ Brecht, p. 92.

³⁴ D. Chandler, and R. Munday, ‘alienation effect’, *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-0070>, 2011, (accessed 14th May 2014).

³⁵ Brecht, p. 91.

³⁶ Brecht, p. 94.

³⁷ Brecht, p. 93.

³⁸ Goodwin, pp. 74-78.

³⁹ Goodwin, p. 75.

earlier *Beyoncé* and *Hi Custodian* examples. Previously, I highlighted when direct address occurred by the singers looking straight into the lens of the camera. However, there are further instances of Goodwin's approach to direct address, where the singer is the narrator of the diegesis and also a character within the diegesis. For example, between Longstreth's first implementation of direct address and Coffman and Dekle's choral segue in *Hi Custodian*, it is apparent that Longstreth becomes the narrator of the diegesis. Longstreth's character lies on his deathbed awaiting death and his band-mates play concerned caretakers. As Longstreth's character dies, Longstreth the singer is narrating the character's death 'foolish I know, but I'm about to die. About to die'.⁴⁰ By narrating like this, the audience becomes aware that the singer is singing and acting, which is in-line with the alienation effect. Therefore, he breaks the illusion of the diegesis, and the mechanics of the visual album become apparent.

In Beyoncé's first audio-visual track *Pretty Hurts*, on the other hand, the traditional western way of acting is very apparent and the audience becomes swept up in the drama of the diegesis. At other moments within the video, however, *Beyoncé's* character directly addresses the camera. This switch reminds the audience that the singer Beyoncé is playing a character. This example is demonstrative of the definite shifts between the two types of acting within the visual album. These are not the only instances of such a shift. The oscillation between a traditional western way of acting and direct address occurs regularly throughout *Beyoncé* and *Hi Custodian*. The musical oscillation, between pit music and screen music, set a precedent for other oscillations in different areas, such as the shift between the two acting techniques. This oscillation shows the visual album's hybridity by how it continues to bring in elements from other sources and make them anew. Although Brecht and Goodwin have different uses and ways of understanding direct address, the visual album's use of the technique is an amalgam of those ways of understanding. Furthermore, we can begin to perceive how direct address can impact the narrative lyrically, visually, and musically via the dual roles the artist plays.

Repetition

Further disruptive to traditional film narrative is the cyclical and repetitive nature of songs. Both Carol Vernallis and Andrew Goodwin state that music videos are full of repetition. Visual albums are no exception to this, even though there may seem to be a linearity of narrative or flow of

⁴⁰ 'Dirty Projectors – "Hi Custodian"', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vncbG-QJlmg>.

images. Goodwin suggests that there are three types of repetition: (i) repetition within the song, such as in structure ABABACAB, lyrics, or chord progressions, (ii) repetition between songs, where one pop song reminds the audience of another; this says more about the pop song language in general rather than specific musical elements, (iii) and repetition across media sites for the utmost exposure and monetary potential, or as Goodwin puts it ‘until familiarity breeds either sales or contempt’.⁴¹ While Vernallis reiterates Goodwin’s repetition within the songs, which she claims can either breed boredom or ‘unrelenting excitement’,⁴² she also states elsewhere that repetition is important so that the audience is not overly engaged with the narrative, which would demote the music in favour of the story.⁴³

The visual album certainly invokes repetition in song structure and its exposure across media sites may certainly result in boredom and contempt. It also employs musical repetition within a song, like any pop song, but the difference to music video is that visual repetition between songs also occurs. Visual repetition of recurring visual objects, visual tropes, characters, or even light and colour provide continuity across the whole visual album. This is especially noticeable in the visual album format consisting of one audio-visual track for each song. Rather than breeding boredom as Vernallis suggests, it breeds understanding in this instance. Without these recurring visual images, the concept of continuity across the whole visual album would start to break down. This repetition and continuity across songs in *Beyoncé*, for example, is interesting because most videos have a different director(s), and one would therefore expect isolation and a lack of connectedness as with the Sígur Rós example.⁴⁴ However, the individual videos in *Beyoncé* retain a similar look regarding video quality and production. The main similarity is in their references to the language of film, music video, television, photography, art, and online videos. This invites viewers to engage with the visual languages around them and see cultural connections to the visual album. Both Kassabian and Goodwin recognise the competence and knowledge of the audience in relation to popular culture, films, music videos, and the languages that they use.⁴⁵ The competence of the audience is implied in the visual album through its complexity, which rather than the visual album standing alone, it provides a series of relations both, within the album itself and outside it in a visual culture context.

⁴¹ Goodwin, pp. 79-80.

⁴² C. Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*, [e-book], Oxford Scholarship Online, Sept 2013, p. 187.

⁴³ Vernallis, 2004, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Some directors are used twice in *Beyoncé*. However only Beyoncé and Jake Nava direct more than twice: Nava directs 3 videos, and Beyoncé co-directs 4.

⁴⁵ Kassabian, p. 8; and Goodwin, p. 90.

These sections – music and sound, direct address, and repetition – represent just a few features that the visual album uses from music video and film. The sections also show how the use of these features differs from their original sources. While film music and music video music seem to be situated at opposite ends of the media spectrum, the visual album presents the possibility of smoothly transitioning between them. The tradition of direct address and the repetitive nature of songs disrupt some film traditions, but they are also used differently to how they are used in music video. Direct address becomes more complicated with the addition of characters played by the one artist, and the repetition of visual elements stimulates continual interest in the audience as to how and why these elements appear throughout a whole visual album rather than evoking boredom in one song. Although these features come from different sources with different traditional uses, the visual album applies them in a hybrid way. Given these modified features and the recent increase in appearance of visual albums (2010-2014), this upcoming section will place the visual album in a wider visual culture and music culture context.

2:4 The visual album in relation to a changing music culture

The existence of the visual album prompts a discussion about the ever-changing music culture. As with most art-forms and culture, music culture does not remain stagnant but finds new ways of expression, which is what I believe artists and recording companies are trying to do with the visual album. Music culture has moved away from purely live performances to recorded music and the playing of that recorded music via radio. Now music proliferates on the digital market, and digital network media such as Youtube, Facebook, SoundCloud, and Spotify are creating a shift in music culture, according to media scholar Carsten Winter.⁴⁶ In describing this change in music culture, Winter states that:

Each historical formation of music culture alters when the conditions of process of music culture or their sub-processes (production, allocation, perception and use) or their relationship change, are substituted, supplemented or invented completely anew, to accomplish something that had not before been possible.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ C. Winter, 'Media Development and Convergence in the Music Industry', in S. Diehl and M. Karmasin (eds.), *Media and Convergence Management*, 2013, p. 264. Available from: ECONIS and EBSCOhost, (accessed 26th March 2014).

⁴⁷ Winter, p. 266.

These formations of music culture have not just shifted music culture online in terms of producers and consumers, connectivity, and communication, but have created new value in music. Expressed pessimistically, there is little surprise left in the music industry, and creations like the visual album, interactive websites or music videos are creating such new value and making up for this lack of surprise.

The strong impact that the digital market has on the music industry now is similar to the major role that television played in the development of earlier audio-visual products, such as the variety show. Live performance shows such as *Top of the Pops* (UK, 1964-2006), *Countdown* (AUS, 1974-1987), and later MTV (Music Television, USA, 1981- present), were prime movers in promoting artists on platforms other than radio. Today however, the internet is the new platform where music videos feature noticeably on video sharing sites such as YouTube. Sysomos.com reports that music is the most popular category of videos on YouTube, coming in at 30.7% followed by entertainment at 14.59% as of 2010.⁴⁸ User channels on YouTube range from media conglomerates, such as Vevo (jointly owned by Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Google, and Abu Dhabi Media) and Warner Music Group (WMG), to individual artists both well-known, such as Bon Iver, and unknown, such as the average YouTube user who uploads cover songs or their own compositions. Sites like YouTube can provide a link between the average user and large corporations promoting famous artists, or what comparative media studies scholar José Van Dijck calls ‘masses of aspiring amateurs and the “old” Hollywood media moguls’.⁴⁹ Furthermore, YouTube acts as a platform not only for music videos, but also for visual albums to be distributed, watched, listened to, and interacted with.

The visual albums that have been mentioned, so far – *Beyoncé, Runaway, Bon Iver (Deluxe)*, and *Hi Custodian* – have been distributed digitally on media sharing sites such as YouTube or iTunes. However, the black sheep of the family, *ODDSAC*, was distributed via DVD, although it was advertised on the internet. Even though it was distributed this way, it does not detract from *ODDSAC*'s status as a visual album. When music is distributed digitally, artists can and do ask their audiences, or consumers, to participate in collaborative video projects as Sígur Rós did with *The Valtari Mystery Film Project*. As I discussed earlier, however, this did not result in a visual album. Despite this, the project allowed consumers to interact with and interpret the music

⁴⁸ Sysomos Inc, 'Inside YouTube Videos', <http://www.sysomos.com/reports/youtube/>, 2010, (accessed 31st March 2014).

⁴⁹ J. Van Dijck, 'Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 31, no.1, 2009, p. 52.

themselves, and then create video content for the project, effectively turning them into co-creators or *producers*.⁵⁰ This type of interaction may very well result in visual albums in the future.

Screens and technology

Videos become highly mediated through the technology they are distributed on and the screens upon which they are viewed. The media by which visual albums are distributed, viewed on, and listened to, are an integral part of the visual album. By downloading or streaming a visual album via the internet, the audience receives it on an electronic device, e.g. a computer, tablet, mobile phone or mp4 player. Therefore, the screen size and, inevitably, the resolution of the image will vary considerably depending on the device. Furthermore, the quality of audio will also vary depending on the device's speakers and amplification, such as the use of headphones or connecting the device to a TV, stereo, or home entertainment system. This is worth mentioning because it shows how flexible and different the experience of interacting with a visual album can be. The mediation that screens provide and their different auditory options change the experience from one viewing to another, and from one person to another. Murray Schafer argues that the telephone and the radio enabled sound to be released from its 'original point in space', and phonograph from its original time.⁵¹ Similarly, experiencing a visual album through an electronic device releases the visual album from time and space, especially with the ability to repeat the experience *ad nauseam*. The visual album, like the music video, was made with this situation in mind. Fabian Holt claims that audio-visual digital convergence is responsible for relaxing the televisual and physical format (i.e. TV/DVD) restraints on music video.⁵²

In music, convergence has deregulated video practices from television and physical formats such as the DVD, so music video is produced for a wider range of platforms and devices, including computers, mobile phone and iPods. This also means that video can serve a broader range of functions because it is less limited to a music show on TV, for instance, but can have wider circulation across media spaces.⁵³

⁵⁰ Van Dijck, p. 41-42. According to Van Dijck, producers are users (active participants of the internet) who are increasingly producing online content.

⁵¹ Murray Schafer, p. 89.

⁵² Holt, p. 50. Holt defines audio-visual convergence as the following: 'convergence can be defined in terms of content integration across search engines, blogs, and playback devices.'

⁵³ Holt, p. 52.

If audio-visual digital convergence changes video practices, it does not appear to be limited to music videos but could be expanded to almost all videos shared on digital network media sites, including the visual album. The visual album takes advantage of the way digital network media work, and adapts to how the audience chooses to *use* the product. This does not imply that a visual album is only a visual album if it is available for download or streaming. On the contrary, the mediated experience of an older visual album, such as *ODDSAC*, is equally affected by the viewing device and medium it is produced on.

The Audio(video)-turn

Regardless of which media and what type of screen the visual album is viewed on, the performer and audience are temporally linked. Certainly, it is monetarily beneficial for the artist to be linked to their music visually. From live performances, record liner notes, album covers, music videos, documentaries, concert films, audio-visual art, to film soundtracks we, the audience, have been inundated with images related to music. The internet and digital sharing sites make these images and music easier to share, use, make, and interact with, and could be an indication of what both Holt and Vernallis refer to as ‘the video turn’ or ‘audiovisual turn’, respectively. Holt claims that the video turn in the music industry (around 2008) follows the upsurge in ‘user-generated video content’ in digital sharing sites such as YouTube, and is where agents such as artists, recording labels, and magazines are joining the video revolution and producing and circulating increasingly more online video content.⁵⁴ This is interesting to note because the more recent examples of visual albums seem to be a result of such production and circulation. Vernallis’ definition of the audiovisual turn, on the other hand, is that the malleable nature of media and our fluid disordered and mixed approach to the material is informed by music video. She attributes how an audience/user moves between online platforms and image types and creative use of the content, to the music video.⁵⁵ Vernallis therefore argues that ‘the sound-image practice developed in music videos, along with new audio software technologies that meld seamlessly with visual software, help produce a mediascape that foregrounds musical feature’.⁵⁶ Whether this mixed approach to media is due to music videos or not, foregrounding music and mixing media seems to be a pervasive idea. What Holt and Vernallis have in common is the observation that video (music

⁵⁴ Holt, p. 50-51.

⁵⁵ Vernallis, 2013, p. 4-5.

⁵⁶ Vernallis, 2013, p. 5.

video and other audio-visual videos) in online formats is influencing other audio-visual phenomena, their use, and the music industry in some way. Although I am hesitant to agree with all that Holt and Vernallis claim, this observation seems plausible. However, I would maintain that this influence is also cyclical. The visual album may be a result of a need to reinvent an audio-visual expression in the music industry, while simultaneously addressing the malleable nature of media and how it is used, but it in turn adds to the cycle. The visual album will also become further material that will influence future audio-visual phenomena, and so on and so forth. By using technological innovations, from radio to the internet, from media convergence to the role of the screen, the active nature of music culture is assured. Furthermore, the visual album begins to establish itself within the music industry and the audio(video)-turn.

This chapter has not only addressed the formal qualities that can be used to identify visual albums, but has also identified five visual album examples, *Beyoncé*, *ODDSAC*, *Hi Custodian*, *Bon Iver (Deluxe)*, and *Runaway*. The content of such albums were discussed in relation to three concepts: music and sound, direct address, and various types of repetition. These concepts allowed the visual album's connections to film and music video to be seen and yet separate it as an individual medium. In turn, this provided insight to the beginnings of the visual album's connections to narrative while also situating the visual album in a wider social and technological context.

Chapter 3: Narrative and character development in the case study *Beyoncé*

By considering the visual album as a hybrid medium between film and music video, we can hypothesise that it expresses qualities of both these media. One important quality that is essential to film, but has often been claimed lacking from music video, is the presence of narrative. Does the visual album, as a hybrid between film and music video, express narrative? And if so, what types of narrative are there and how are they implemented? In the following two chapters, I will discuss these questions using Beyoncé's visual album *Beyoncé* as an example. This chapter uses the theme of character development to discuss two types of narrative that appear in *Beyoncé*. The first type, cause-and-effect narrative, is predominantly found in film and builds a story based on the causal relationship between events. The second type, personal narrative, is widely used in music video, and focusses on stories people tell about themselves in order to invest actions and events with meaning.⁵⁷ By using two narrative theories from different art-forms and media, I will show how narrative can work in a visual album, and how that narrative's materialisation builds upon its original form in film and music video, and is made anew in a visual album. Thus, the results add further weight to the hypothesis that the visual album is a hybrid art-form and yet is a unique entity in itself. This analysis and interpretation will be exclusively about Beyoncé Knowles' visual album, but with the aim that the theoretical apparatus developed here can be applied to other visual albums (and potentially to other audio-visual media) in the future. Furthermore, the analysis will be selective by focussing on three songs, in order to more closely examine character development and narrative, before moving on to how narrative is addressed overall in *Beyoncé* in chapter four. Before delving into the examples from *Beyoncé*, however, we will have a short look at the origins and the contestation of narrative theory.

Contestation of narrative theories

Narrative theory was first developed to analyse literature, but it has been applied extensively to both fiction and non-fiction films. Today, film narrative theory is a distinct area of research, as

⁵⁷ S. Hawkins and J. Richardson, 'Remodeling Britney Spears: Matters of Intoxication and Mediation.' in *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 30, no. 5, 2007, pp. 606-607.

exemplified by the many publications by David Bordwell, a significant contributor to this area.⁵⁸ Films, especially classic Hollywood films, usually have forward momentum in the storyline, which are usually cause-and-effect related. Music video, on the other hand, has been under scrutiny for containing weak narratives, non-traditional narratives or no narrative at all. This criticism of music video was common in the 1980s, when music video first emerged. During these early years, music video was mainly discussed in relation to advertising, film and television. There were no serious analyses of music videos in themselves until the mid-1990s, partly due to the lack of theory about how the image/music relationship might work in this medium.⁵⁹ According to Carol Vernallis, film theory has played a vital role in understanding and analysing music video, so much so that according to film criteria, music video narrative fails as it is not up to films' standards.⁶⁰ I find this unsurprising, because the replacement of one theory for another on a completely different art-form and media can devalue that art-form. Much like it was clear to Vernallis that film theory could not answer all questions about music video, music video theory similarly cannot answer all questions about visual albums. Vernallis' distinction of music video as a medium in its own right allows this paper to follow a similar path and provides one more tool in the analysis of visual albums. It is precisely this point of contention between music video and film theory narratives that inspired my decision to investigate narrative in the visual album. Furthermore, there appears to be little evidence of either cause-and-effect narrative or personal narrative theory being applied on a visual album. This may be because current research on the visual album is negligible, as is research on visual album narrative. Furthermore, my intention is not just to apply these narrative theories, but to use them to establish how narrative techniques are used in a new context, and to discover elements that are unique to the visual album. First, however, the original context of these narrative theories will be addressed.

⁵⁸ David Bordwell has written several books on narrative in film including *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006), *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (1985), and *Film Art: An Introduction* (2008), see Bibliography for full details.

⁵⁹ Vernallis, 1998, p. 153.

⁶⁰ Vernallis, 1998, p. 153.

3:1 Classic Hollywood narrative: cause-and-effect, and music video narrative: personal narrative

First and foremost, we must ask what narrative is. Film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson describe it as ‘a fundamental way that humans make sense of the world’.⁶¹ Narratives are the stories we tell each other, the ways we connect moments in our lives, and the ways we understand a certain order of events. Narrative films are then simply ‘film[s] that tell a story’.⁶² Narrative music videos, on the other hand, are few and far between, and perhaps this is for good reason. Vernallis often refers to Bordwell and Thompson’s definition of narrative as a basis to depart from. According to this, narrative is

*a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space. [---] Typically, a narrative begins with one situation; a series of changes occurs according to a pattern of cause and effect; finally, a new situation arises that brings about the end of the narrative.*⁶³

One thing that must be clarified is that nowhere do Bordwell and Thompson claim that film narrative theory must or should be applied to music video. They use this definition to describe a type of narrative usually associated with classic Hollywood cinema, which is related to the viewers’ expectations – their narrative drive. Vernallis then tries to interpret the definition in relation to music video to rather point out why the two are not compatible. Furthermore, she says that the suppression of narrative can actually work to a music video’s advantage, because if narrative in music video is treated in the same way as in film, then the music's function would change to resemble film music, which she says is ‘usually unacknowledged, almost unheard’.⁶⁴ This is a bold statement by Vernallis considering that film music theory acknowledges that film music plays a significant role in narrative cueing, production of meaning, and viewer engagement in films.⁶⁵ Vernallis concludes that most music videos are non-narrative.⁶⁶ She lists several reasons why music video cannot always use traditional narrative form: the formal cyclical structure of songs, the need to promote and sell records, the need to continually engage the audience, and the multimedia nature of the genre.⁶⁷ This is a valid point from Vernallis: if music video music was relegated to background music, it would undeniably defeat the purpose of showcasing a song via

⁶¹ D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film Art: an Introduction*, 8th edn., New York, McGraw Hill, 2008, p. 74.

⁶² Bordwell and Thompson, p.74.

⁶³ Bordwell and Thompson, p. 75.

⁶⁴ Vernallis, 1998, p. 175.

⁶⁵ Kassabian, pp. 13 – 44.

⁶⁶ Vernallis, 2004, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Vernallis, 2004, pp. 13-15.

the music video medium in order to sell records. However, cause-and-effect narrative is not the only type of narrative available. Also, if only ‘most’ music videos are non-narrative, then there must be a way of solving the narrative/music balance problem. I do not propose that visual albums provide an example of a solution, but rather that as an audio-visual expression and product they carry over many techniques from both film and music video. One such technique, which is common to music video, is personal narrative.

Personal narrative

Star personas have personal narratives, which musicologists Stan Hawkins and John Richardson discuss in terms of Dan McAdams’ psychological definition as

[...] the stories people tell about themselves in order to invest actions and events with meaning. Personal narrative of this kind is about the narrative reconstitution of the self through an open-ended process of reflection and revision.⁶⁸

As a ‘star’, Beyoncé has the advantage of being able to pursue this sort of narrative in her visual album. Beyoncé in *Beyoncé* seems to make a point of telling her story and reflecting on her life. Perhaps this is due to her original visual concept of the album as a multisensory experience which evokes personal imagery.

I see music. It’s more than just what I hear. When I’m connected to something, I immediately see a visual or a series of images that are tied to a feeling or an emotion, a memory from my childhood, thoughts about life, my dreams or my fantasies, and they’re all connected to the music.⁶⁹

Beyoncé’s thoughts, dreams, memories, and fantasies are contributors to her personal narrative, which are visually apparent in her visual album. Hawkins and Richardson use personal narrative as a way of exploring identity and performativity. I, on the other hand, use it to explore how a star can use their personal narrative as one of the main narratives in a fictional diegesis, and even to self-reflect through another character that the star plays. This approach to personal narrative relates back to Brecht’s alienation effect and Goodwin’s theory about direct address because of the dual role of the artist being perceived as both the artist and the character.

⁶⁸ S. Hawkins and J. Richardson, pp. 606-607.

⁶⁹ Knowles-Carter, ”Self-Titled” Part 1 . The Visual Album’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcN6Ke2V-rQ>.

Beyoncé's visual album *Beyoncé* was selected as a case study not only for its high profile and relation to the term visual album, but also because – like music video – it uses one audio-visual track for every audio track and yet – like a film – it was conceived as a whole. This dichotomy begs the question of how narrative is implemented in *Beyoncé*. In fact, the two examples of narrative above show how narrative may materialise in different ways, possibly simultaneously and perhaps, at times, not at all. I will begin the *Beyoncé* analysis by discussing the development of characters and their roles in relation to their narrative function.

3:2 Developing characters in traditional and personal narratives

Characters are strongly linked to narrative as they help motivate it and propel it forward. In their analysis of film narrative, Bordwell and Thompson state that characters can act as causal agents of narrative '[b]y triggering and reacting to events' and thus 'play roles within the film's formal system'.⁷⁰ The roles of characters in the visual album and music video, however, are slightly different. Although they may be called upon to contribute to a cause-and-effect narrative, they have the extra responsibility of co-existing with the star persona and promoting the song. Bordwell and Thompson also state that characters usually have a visible body and have particular traits that can affect the story or help perform a narrative function.⁷¹ This is also true of characters in many music videos and visual albums, especially those of popular music singer/songwriters like Beyoncé who usually appear in front of the camera and visibly perform the songs themselves, thereby exposing particular character traits useful to that song or video. These character traits are purposefully chosen, exposed, and used within visual albums and music videos, much like they are in film. However, not all artists play characters with their own bodies. Some artists prefer to remain unseen and are represented by other means, e.g. avatars, animations, or abstract imagery.

The difference between film and the visual albums mentioned so far (*Beyoncé*, *ODDSAC*, *Runaway*, *Bon Iver (Deluxe)*, and *Hi Custodian*), is that a character in a film is usually played by an actor, whose personality or appearance is unseen.⁷² The character in a visual album, on the other hand, is tied to the star persona, and therefore the 'actor' or artist is usually seen at the same time as the character. Not surprisingly then, the line between Beyoncé the persona and Beyoncé the

⁷⁰ Bordwell and Thompson, p. 77.

⁷¹ Bordwell and Thompson, p. 78.

⁷² Goodwin, p. 76.

character (or other characters she invents in *Beyoncé*) is often blurred, both visually, lyrically and narratively. In a product like the visual album, Beyoncé will always be a star persona, even if she reveals personal information about her private self. These glimpses at the ‘true’ private Beyoncé are constructions, because she and her production team are selecting and assembling exactly what we, the audience, are *allowed* to see of this true self. Therefore, the true Beyoncé in the visual album context is actually the construction of her star persona. A result of such a persona construction is that any character that Beyoncé plays in her visual album becomes transparent, and the actor Beyoncé is seen. This is not to say that Beyoncé is not a real and genuine person or a bad actor, it is just that unless one knows her personally, one cannot claim to know her true self. The following example *Pretty Hurts* will demonstrate how a more filmic character can motivate a classic Hollywood narrative while conveying a personal message and a personal narrative. *Pretty Hurts* sets the scene of the visual album in a similar way to the exposition of a film. Not only does it develop and leave visual cues that will be picked up in later videos, it sets the tone in terms of character development.

In *Pretty Hurts*, there is cause-and-effect narrative. Beyoncé plays a character called Miss Third Ward. While the character’s name indicates a personal narrative, (Third Ward is a neighbourhood in Houston, Texas, where Beyoncé has spent her childhood), the narrative follows a typical cause-and-effect structure: Miss Third Ward prepares herself as she enters a beauty contest, she performs, she loses, and she commiserates and questions if all the emotional and physical pain was worth it. This sort of narrative closely resembles Bordwell and Thompson’s *goal-oriented* plot description, where a character takes steps towards achieving a particular goal or situation.⁷³ A goal-oriented plot is a subdivision of the cause-and-effect narrative form, where the plot ending changes depending on the completion of the goal. In this case, the character loses the beauty pageant (she places second), and the effect is that she violently smashes up her shelves of trophies and questions her life choices.

Pretty Hurts oscillates between three main locations that reflect three points in time: the beginning (preparing for the pageant backstage), middle (competing in the pageant on-stage) and end (at home in the lounge room after losing the pageant). Miss Third Ward, beauty pageant entrant, performs four sides of her character (**Fig. 1**): the first as just one of many self-critical (and judged) contestants getting ready backstage, the second as the performing Miss Third Ward on-stage, the third as the losing Miss Third Ward at home, and the fourth as “Defiant”, a character who seemingly rejects perfection and all the other facets of her character, as seen from

⁷³ Bordwell and Thompson, p. 86.

her violent behaviour and defiant direct gaze at the camera. These facets – self-critical, performer, rejected, and defiant – add to either the cause or effect in the *Pretty Hurts* narrative through actions and reactions to the progressing beauty pageant. The three main settings allow each character trait to be exposed in order to create narrative interest in the viewer. They also contribute to the narrative by representing the visual temporal shifts that occur throughout the video. Beyoncé uses the characters to collectively convey a personal message to her audience: '[m]y message behind this album was finding the beauty in imperfection'.⁷⁴ She thus provides the moral of the story in a neat narrative package.

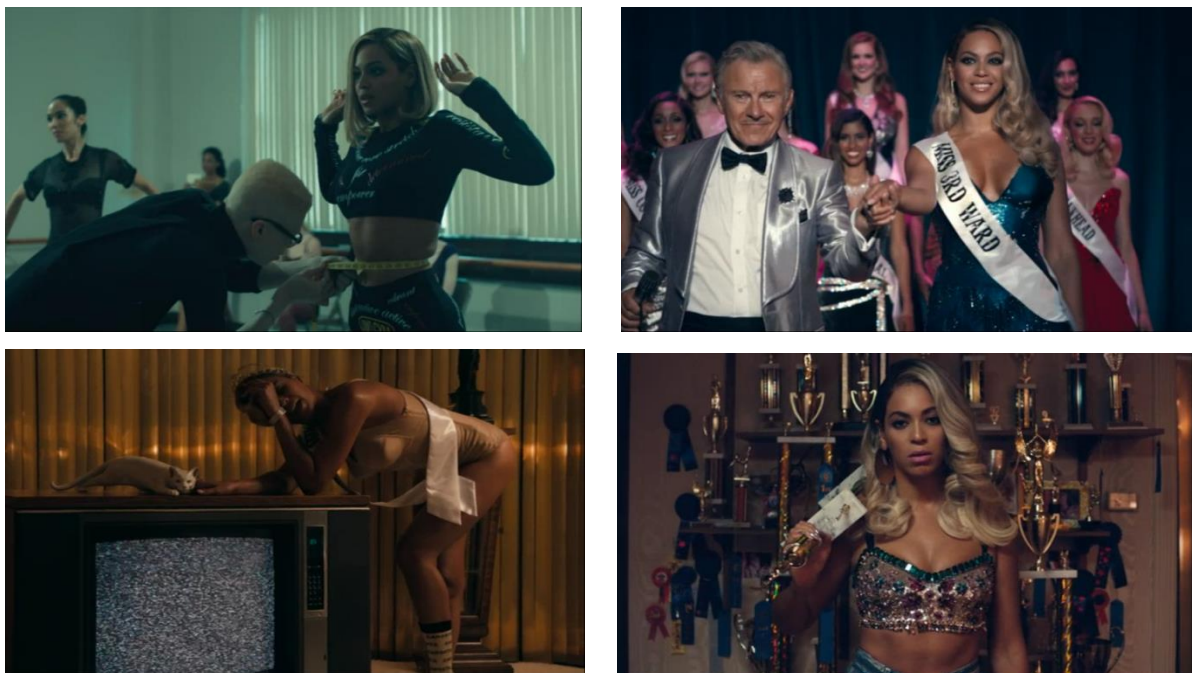


Fig. 1: Still images from *Pretty Hurts* demonstrating the different facets of the Miss Third Ward character played by Beyoncé. Self-critical (top left), performer (top right), rejected (bottom left), and defiant (bottom right). ©Columbia Records.

Several other techniques, sourced from film and music, are used to support the portrayal of the main character traits, and to strengthen the connection to the personal narrative. The lyrics and visuals, for instance, emphasise the superficial imperfections that the protagonist must overcome to compete. The musical tone, which generally alternates between two major chords and two minor chords (B, C[#]m, G[#]m, F[#]), is an indication of uncertainty. The number of trophies that appear on the shelves in the home setting indicates that the character has been

⁷⁴ B. Knowles-Carter, 'Self-Titled' Part 2 . Imperfection', [online video], 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1v1z6n3Xxo>, (accessed 17th March 2014), author's transcription.

competing in pageants for many years. This trophy scene is clearly fictional, but it is actually a recreation of a real picture taken in Beyoncé's childhood. This recreation, along with the Polaroid photos of Beyoncé as a child, which are stuck to the shelves, once again indicates the parallel personal narrative. This shows the character's transparency, thus revealing the artist through fictional diegesis. To represent the other parallel narrative, (cause-and-effect), an anachronic timeline is put in place. Even though we observe the beginning, middle and end anachronically, it is clear that the situation at the end of *Pretty Hurts* is different from the beginning. This is a prime example of how time or temporal order can affect narrative action – a technique not uncommon in film (e.g. *Pulp Fiction*; dir. Tarantino, 1994). The viewer must reassemble the events in chronological order to make sense of the plot, and by alternating between past and present the shots receive, as Bordwell and Thompson state, 'an emphasis they wouldn't have if they had remained in their chronological story order'.⁷⁵

Pretty Hurts allows Miss Third Ward to develop as a character throughout different time periods. Miss Third Ward represents how complex a person's character and emotions can be, and that one person is not limited to one character trait. The characterisation of Miss Third Ward contributes to the cause-and-effect relationship of the narrative by utilising temporal and spatial shifts. Already, we can see the meeting of film and music video narrative techniques in the visual album. Personal narrative is linked to music video, cause-and-effect narrative is linked to film, and yet both occur simultaneously in the visual album. As an exposition, *Pretty Hurts* provides the visual album with the means to create narrative momentum throughout the whole. Whether this momentum is carried on through the overall structure of the visual album will be discussed in the following chapter. The characterisation of Miss Third Ward contributes to the existence and types of narrative present in *Beyoncé*. Therefore, the next audio-visual examples will pay particular attention to the character Yoncé, a new and highly sexualised character whom Beyoncé introduces in the fifth song of the visual album. I will focus on specific appearances of this character in juxtaposition with Beyoncé's star persona that demonstrate how the artist creates connections between characters and narrative devices.

3:3 The transparency of the fictional character Yoncé

The distinction between stars, the characters they play, and how they relate to one another and the audience, has often been discussed by music video theorists. In this analysis, I will use two

⁷⁵ Bordwell and Thompson, p. 80-81.

videos from *Beyoncé*, *Partition* and *No Angel*, to further discuss the interaction between Beyoncé's star persona, the character Yoncé (played by Beyoncé), and personal narrative. Personal narrative in *Partition* and *No Angel* tends to stand out because there are no strong cause-and-effect narratives. Instead, the videos resemble a single scene or, put another way, a static situation that has a beginning and end but little traditional narrative momentum. This stasis comes about because neither video fully creates situations where the protagonist, Yoncé, reacts strongly to a cause. *Partition* is somewhat motivated by Beyoncé's own fantasy about performing for her husband but it is weak, and the opportunity for decisions to be made and alternative paths to be taken are negligible. *No Angel* has even less motivation and momentum as it merely revolves around placing Beyoncé/Yoncé in a particular location. Given this lack of momentum, Beyoncé's personal narrative seems to act as the main narrative in the videos' scenes.

Personal narrative's dominance, in this context, relies on the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality. *Partition* and *No Angel* maintain this juxtaposition through placing the fictional scenario and character against personal facts about Beyoncé. This opposition creates a situation where both the character Yoncé and Beyoncé's star persona are authenticated by their use of personal facts. This means that when Yoncé acts out a fantasy created by Beyoncé using known facts about Beyoncé's life, it gives credibility to Yoncé, Beyoncé and the fictional scene. The two main facts that are used in these videos are related to location and marital status.

Location

To better understand the personal narrative connections of location and marital status, I will first describe, then analyse the two videos. *Partition* begins in a large mansion where Beyoncé sits opposite an unknown figure reading a newspaper at a large dining table (**Fig. 2**, top left). The location of the mansion, at this stage, is unknown. The clock strikes four, which is misleading to the *mise-en-scène* as it appears to be morning: the table is set with breakfast food and Beyoncé is in a negligée and dressing gown. However, the clock acts as a four-beat count-in to the syncopated base line that starts on the fourth strike. The shots then alternate between Beyoncé at the table and Beyoncé wearing an extravagant jewel encrusted corset. Corset-Beyoncé holds a bejewelled mask to her face and as she slowly drops it, she reveals Yoncé both visually and lyrically. From this point forward until the last shot back at the breakfast table, Yoncé enacts the fictional scene.

The character Yoncé appeared in the three previous songs *Yoncé*, *No Angel*, and *Blow*, and therefore has already been introduced to the audience. Yoncé is nearly always introduced and called upon, by name. The name appears either verbally in the lyrics or on a necklace that

Beyoncé wears on-and-off throughout the visual album (Appendix A.1). If one misses these cues, then there are other ways of identifying when it is Yoncé who is performing, such as her sexualised erotic appearance through gestures and costume, the camera focus on the mouth and other body parts, and the invitation of the voyeuristic gaze (which will be discussed in further detail in chapter four). Following Yoncé's introduction, a new location is established. Yoncé rides in a black Rolls Royce accompanied by the mysterious male figure, from the mansion grounds to the city, where they arrive at "le Crazy Horse de Paris", a famous cabaret club in Paris. Yoncé reveals herself as a Crazy Horse cabaret dancer, and performs to the lone male figure who accompanied her in the car and who is revealed to be none other than Jay Z, American rapper and Beyoncé's real-life husband (Fig. 2, top right).

So far in *Partition*, we see a location that is not contextually placed, the mansion, and another location, le Crazy Horse, that locates the whole video in Paris. The inclusion of a real place in the fictional scene is a way of constructing authenticity. This authenticity arises through the audience's ability to not only experience le Crazy Horse in the video, but also at the real location, if one had the means and inclination. Le Crazy Horse does two things in terms of narrative and character development. The first is that it gives Yoncé a context. She is grounded in the context of Parisian cabaret dancer. Le Crazy Horse adds to the believability of Yoncé's highly sexualised character trait by giving her a place to show her personality and profession. It also shows her relationship to Beyoncé's star persona, because Yoncé is Beyoncé's fantasised character. Yoncé and Beyoncé are differentiated by showing that a fantasy is enacted to a higher degree by the characters Beyoncé plays rather than her star persona. However, perhaps one only realises that this is a fantasy in the final scene back at the breakfast table. The clock continues to strike and Beyoncé awakens from her day-dream.

The second thing that le Crazy Horse does is allow Yoncé to refer to Beyoncé's personal narrative. *Beyoncé* seems to use real people and places that have meaning in Beyoncé's personal life as a tactic to express meaning and allude to personal history. The following quote from Beyoncé demonstrates how a location such as le Crazy Horse has meaning in her personal life.

The day that I got engaged was my husband's birthday, and I took him to Crazy Horse. And I remember thinking, damn, these girls are fly. I just thought it was the ultimate sexy show I've ever seen. And I was like, I wish I was up there. I wish I could perform that for my man. So that's what I did for the video [laughs].⁷⁶

⁷⁶ B. Knowles-Carter, "'Self-Titled' Part 4 . Liberation", [online video], 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b1loWJfxaA>, (accessed 17th March 2014), author's transcription.

Perhaps *le Crazy Horse* represents a fantasy lived and fulfilled for Beyoncé, but it is also a case of the real informing fantasy. In the context of personal narrative, it is an example of a navigational beacon that allows her and the audience to make sense of her past while simultaneously creating a fantasy. Hawkins and Richardson state that navigational beacons ‘enable [the artists] and others to make sense of the past, while providing points of reference that will inform interpretations of future actions and events’.⁷⁷ This is not the only navigational beacon that is related to location in *Beyoncé*.

No Angel is set in the location of Fourth Ward, next-door to Beyoncé’s own childhood neighbourhood, in Houston, Texas (**Fig. 2**, bottom left). This location is similar to *le Crazy Horse* in that it makes a personal narrative connection to a place of meaning in Beyoncé’s life. It too is a navigational beacon of Beyoncé’s past. And it too is a place that is referenced through the character Yoncé. The video presents the everyday people that live in the neighbourhood by showing the activities they partake in, such as gathering with modified cars. It shows community relationships, such as friendship, children, and family, and the roughness of life in terms of death, and stab wounds. In contrast to this, Yoncé, who is identified by her necklace, stands outside a run-down old house in a white one-piece bathing suit, a white fur coat, and at times a white cowboy hat, for a large part of the video (**Fig. 2**, bottom right). However, it is Beyoncé’s personal narrative that shines through this scene and location rather than Yoncé’s fictional narrative. Although it is the Fourth Ward location that adds authenticity to the fictional scene, other visual cues, such as the letter ‘B’ tattooed on peoples bodies, are also present. The location and the tattoos indicate Beyoncé’s star persona and it furthers Beyoncé’s ability to ground herself in her past.

⁷⁷ Hawkins and Richardson, p. 607.

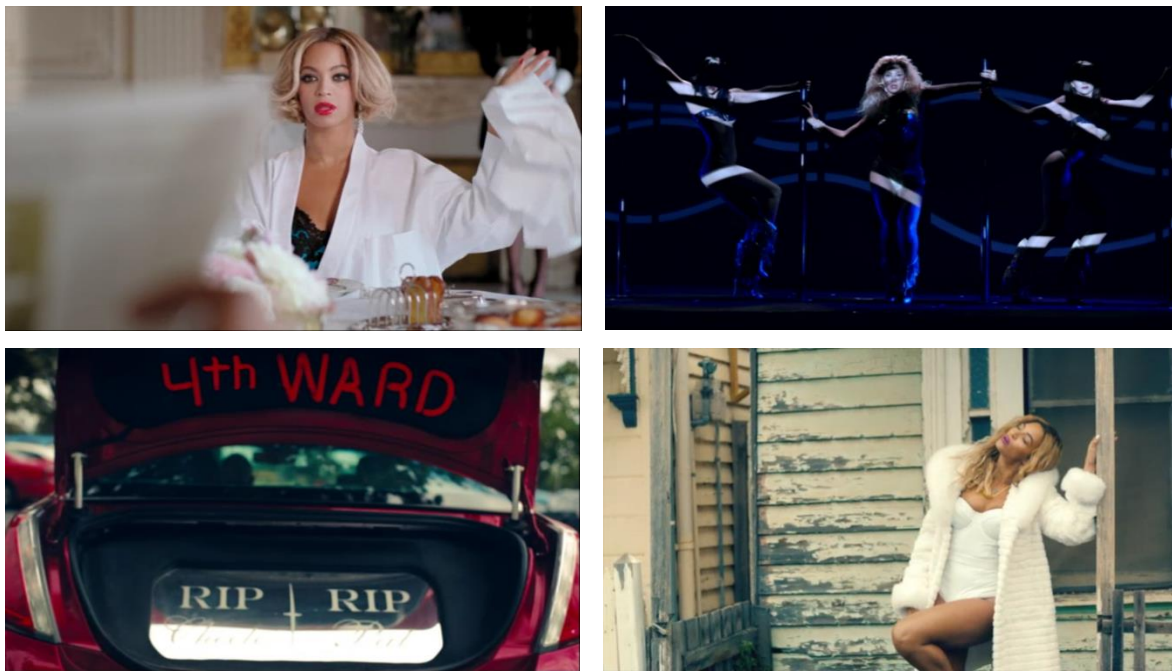


Fig. 2: Still images from *Partition* and *No Angel* showing both the Yoncé character and the indications of location. Beyoncé at the mansion in *Partition* (top left), Yoncé at le Crazy Horse in *Partition* (top right), a car in Fourth Ward in Houston in *No Angel* (bottom left), and Yoncé outside an old house in Houston in *No Angel* (bottom right). ©Columbia

Marital Status

Beyoncé’s marital status is a personal fact that is juxtaposed against a fictional scene. This personal fact does not just exist in Beyoncé’s private life, but it is also part of her star persona construct. The audience is only allowed to know and see Beyoncé and Jay Z’s marriage through the star persona construct that has been created by the artists and their fans. Jay Z’s appearance in *Partition* is significant because he exemplifies another navigational beacon in Beyoncé’s personal narrative. This time the beacon is a person, not a place. It is not the first time Jay Z is used in this way, nor the last. Jay Z appears in two other videos: *Drunk in Love*, where he actually sings, and *Blue*, where he joins Beyoncé and their daughter Blue Ivy in a family holiday-video styled video (Appendix A.2.). These other appearances by Jay Z and Blue Ivy essentially do the same thing that Jay Z’s appearance does in *Partition*: they foreground personal facts about Beyoncé to create a stronger personal narrative. These personal facts are once again presented through the character Yoncé. This creates an interesting character/persona dynamic because Jay Z’s real name is Shawn Carter. Therefore, Jay Z is just another star persona. In *Partition*, Jay Z plays a mysterious male love interest to Beyoncé’s character Yoncé. Yet, running parallel to this

fiction are the star personas. Jay Z's mysterious character is thinly veiled, because the video uses the relationship between Beyoncé and Jay Z to construct their characters' authenticity and the possibility that this fantasy could actually take place. Jay Z's presence, and the knowledge of a marital connection by the general audience, grounds this fantasy in reality.

Transparency

In both videos, *Partition* and *No Angel*, Beyoncé's personal narrative is referenced through the character Yoncé. This is done through direct address in the Goodwinian sense. Direct address in this context allows the duality of the character Yoncé and the star persona Beyoncé to be exposed. In both videos, a complete character transformation, suggestive of a traditional western acting technique, does not seem to occur because the personal narrative is so strong. The personal facts, le Crazy Horse, Fourth Ward, and Jay Z, relate to Beyoncé's personal narrative and add to the transparency of the character Yoncé.⁷⁸ Beyoncé's fantasies are enacted by Yoncé, and Yoncé's authenticity is granted through Beyoncé's personal narrative. Goodwin states that direct address can overwhelm the characterisation in a story, meaning that the narrator, in this case Beyoncé, is dominant over her character counterparts.⁷⁹ This seems to be true for Jay Z's mysterious love interest character who is dominated by Jay Z's star persona, because he has very little screen time and opportunity to engage the audience. However, I would argue that Goodwin's declaration that direct address can overwhelm characters is generally challenged in the *Beyoncé* visual album. This is because both the character and the star persona are exposed and not overlaid.

The referencing of personal narrative facts would provide a good case to argue that, because the personal narrative is so strong in these videos, the Yoncé character fades into the background. However, the strength of the Yoncé character is apparent from our ability to identify exactly when she appears. This identification requires us, the audience, to decode character traits, visuals, and lyrics, but it is the mere existence of this potential to decode that indicates that there is not always a dominance of the star persona over the character. Rather, the

⁷⁸ Transparency here should be taken to mean that another character or persona can be seen through the original character or persona. So that while you are seeing one character, for example, you can simultaneously see another character/star persona played by the same person.

⁷⁹ Goodwin, p. 76.

persona and character co-exist in a form of double identity, and narrative can exist on multiple levels.

In this chapter, I have discussed multiple examples from Beyoncé's visual album *Beyoncé* in relation to two types of narrative: cause-and-effect and personal narrative. These narratives are demonstrated through the characterisation of Beyoncé, her star persona, and the characters she embodies. Although much of the visual album is clearly fictional and fantasy-based, there always seems to be a connection to Beyoncé's personal life. These personal markers or navigational beacons of places and people lead the audience to believe in Beyoncé and her characters' authenticity. This visual album is constantly trying to give the feeling of authenticity, yet at the same time there appear to be multiple ambiguities in terms of narratives, characters and personas, which may be a way for fantasy and imagination to flourish for the audience and the artist alike. Thus the theoretical apparatus devised in this section, whereby different narrative theories are referenced and investigated, was achieved through understanding how these narrative elements work in a new context. After this detailed bottom-up analysis of narrative techniques in three example videos, I will move to a top-down analysis of *Beyoncé's* overarching narrative in the next chapter. This overarching narrative will be discussed in terms of how visual leitmotifs can indicate an allusion to narrative even if a classic Hollywood narrative is not present.

Chapter 4: Visual Leitmotifs in the case study *Beyoncé*

Goodwin states that '[a]nalysts of music video narrative have been all too eager to freeze the moment and study videos shot by shot, but here the problem is that this generates not too much but too little knowledge, because the individual narrative is highly intertextual'.⁸⁰ His idea inspires this analysis to not only examine the details but to engage the overall picture and see how Beyoncé's visual album relates to the world around it through the theme of visual leitmotifs. Visual leitmotifs are examined in this chapter because they are connected to narrative. They will be discussed in relation to the overall narrative structure of *Beyoncé*. This analysis and discussion will further answer how narrative is implemented, but on a larger scale than in the individual videos. Given this larger scale, the examples used in this analysis will be approached in an intertextual way.

Visual leitmotifs occur throughout Beyoncé's visual album *Beyoncé*, but what exactly are they and why do they matter? A leitmotif, most popularly associated with Richard Wagner's operas, is 'a theme [...] whose purpose is to represent or symbolize a person, object, place, idea, state of mind, supernatural force or any other ingredient in a dramatic work'.⁸¹ The term leitmotif is appealing because of its inclusiveness and its relation to narrative. I have adopted the term here to *visual leitmotif* because it can appear in many different forms and can encompass both references to *visual motifs* and *narrative motifs* under the guise of 'ingredients in a dramatic work'.⁸² A visual leitmotif could be an object, a character, a series of visual tropes that are related to each other, a visual narrative technique or even something more formal like a type of shot, camera angle, or editing technique. Visual leitmotifs are noticeably present and recur throughout Beyoncé's visual album.

Visual leitmotifs are considered in this chapter because they relate to and indicate narrative in four ways. First, some visual leitmotifs indicate a fictional narrative or event that has already taken place early on in *Beyoncé*. Second, a visual leitmotif can be placed within the visual album to reinforce Beyoncé's personal narrative. At times these visual elements are something

⁸⁰ Goodwin, p. 90.

⁸¹ A. Whittall, 'Leitmotif', *Grove Music Online*, n.d., <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/subscriber/article/grove/music/16360>, (accessed April 23, 2014).

⁸² D. Chandler and R. Munday, 'Motif', *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-1783>, 2011, (accessed 14th May 2014). 'Most broadly, motifs may include a theme, subject, idea, concept, or device. Visual motifs include images, patterns, figures, forms, objects, shapes, and colours [...] [n]arrative motifs include stock characters, situations, incidents, and formulas associated with a genre.'

personal from Beyoncé's past or present, such as a home video or her marriage to Jay Z. Third, visual leitmotifs can allude to the language of film narrative. This is a more abstract approach to narrative, but *Beyoncé* is rich with examples of such an approach. Finally, visual leitmotifs can allude to a narrative completely outside of the visual album. All four indications to narrative are allusions. There does not seem to be an overarching traditional narrative in *Beyoncé*, although this type of narrative does appear in individual tracks (e.g. *Pretty Hurts*). Therefore, the allusions to narrative that visual leitmotifs make actually conceal the lack of overarching traditional narrative. This is an effective and cunning technique, which, much like the anachronic timeline in *Pretty Hurts*, places the responsibility of connecting the dots on the audience. As previously mentioned, the audience is knowledgeable and capable of interpreting and connecting one medium to another or even to their own lives. This means that they can consistently interpret a narrative that may not be there by connecting it to something else that does have a narrative. Hence, the visual leitmotifs allude to another narrative and the language of narrative, rather than actually becoming a narrative unto themselves.

4:1 Allusions to personal and fictional narratives within in *Beyoncé*

The first song on *Beyoncé*, *Pretty Hurts*, does more than just tell a cause-and-effect fictional narrative, it establishes the visual album both musically and visually. Several visual leitmotifs are present in *Pretty Hurts* that then appear throughout the rest of the visual album, the first of which is the trophy that Miss Third Ward uses to smash the other trophies down from the shelf. In addition to this, there are appearances of television screens, the number 4, novelty head-bands, photos and archive video footage of Beyoncé as a child, and different characters other than the persona of Beyoncé herself. The trophy, for instance, is significant in indicating narrative when it appears in other songs, such as *Drunk in Love* and *Grown Woman*. It becomes a symbol that represents an earlier cause-and-effect narrative that was present in a previous song (*Pretty Hurts*). It reminds the audience of Miss Third Ward's struggle in a beauty pageant and eventual defeat. When placed in another video, that video adopts the meaning of that visual element regardless of its own narrative, if in fact it has one. For example, in *Drunk in Love*, there is no strong cause-and-effect narrative because the video only presents one scene where Beyoncé sings into the camera while dancing or lying on an unknown dark beach. There does not seem to be any progression or momentum within the video. However, as Beyoncé enters the scene she is carrying the trophy, a close-up shot is shown, and the connections to the narrative in *Pretty Hurts* are left to the audience.

In *Grown Woman*, the trophy also appears as part of the *mise-en-scène*, but in this video it simply acts as another navigational beacon to Beyoncé's star persona's personal narrative.

I had this image of a trophy and me accepting these awards and kind of training myself to be this champion. And at the end of the day, when you go through all of these things, is it worth it? I mean you get this trophy, and you're like, I basically starved. I have neglected all of the people that I love. I have conformed to what everybody else thinks I should be, and I have this trophy. What does that mean? The trophy represents all of the sacrifices I've made as a kid. All of the time that I lost, being on the road, in the studios, as a child. And I just want to blow that shit up [laughs].⁸³

Jay Z, le Crazy Horse, and Houston in *Partition* and *No Angel* were all markers of personal narrative, and the trophy in *Pretty Hurts* joins this list. However, when it is placed in *Grown Woman*, it becomes a part of a series of relations that indicates the personal narrative in present in *Pretty Hurts*. It is also possible that it indicates the cause-and-effect narrative in *Pretty Hurts*, like it did in *Drunk in Love*. The trophy contains multiple meanings and represents an ingredient in the dramatic work. Therefore, one visual leitmotif has the capacity to indicate two different types of narrative in the visual album. These visual leitmotifs and their narrative connotations contribute to the overall continuity of *Beyoncé*.

4:2 Allusions to the language of narrative

Above-mentioned allusions to either personal or fictional narrative within Beyoncé are fairly concrete. The third type of allusion is more abstract in that visual leitmotifs can refer to branches of film theory, which constitutes part of the language of narrative. Specifically, I refer to the voyeuristic gaze. Voyeurism is a relation of looks. There is the viewer, who looks and expects to remain unseen, and the object, which is necessarily looked at yet does not necessarily look at the viewer. These relations of looks also appear in the cinematic forms of voyeurism: voyeurism in film is 'the pleasure derived from looking at the image on the cinema screen, which by its nature is unaware of the spectator's presence'.⁸⁴ The voyeuristic gaze is a visual leitmotif that is readily

⁸³ Knowles-Carter, "Self-Titled" Part 2 . Imperfection', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIv1z6n3Xxo>.

⁸⁴ A. Kuhn and G. Westwell, 'Voyeurism', *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, 2012, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0762>, (accessed 20th May 2014).

prevalent throughout *Beyoncé*. Mainstream Hollywood film is known for, according to film theorist Laura Mulvey, ‘its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure’⁸⁵ through the types of looks it achieves. Even though Beyoncé’s visual album is narratively different from traditional film, it still engages in the manipulation of visual pleasure – as do many music videos. Beyoncé’s role is very similar to Mulvey’s description of the traditional exhibitionist role of women in film in that they are to be ‘looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*’.⁸⁶ Beyoncé and her *to-be-looked-at-ness* thus become a part of an erotic spectacle fantasy of the viewer.

Similarly, Goodwin discusses voyeurism in relation to narrative in music video. He uses a musical term to do this, but instead of the leitmotif, he uses the musical *hook*. A hook is a short, and usually “catchy”, phrase, chorus line, riff or motif that is repeated throughout a song and is used to entice listeners to engage with the song and listen again and again. Goodwin uses the term *visual hook* as the visual equivalent of a musical hook when talking about the influence of, and desire for, imbuing music video narrative with pleasure. He determines three types of visual hooks: close-ups of the pop stars face, Laura Mulvey’s ‘scopophilic male gaze’,⁸⁷ meaning the placement of images of objectified, fragmented or violated women throughout a video to encourage continued watching, and a visual image that only appears when a certain musical motif is heard that carries certain emotions and connotations.⁸⁸ Although the term visual hook is specific to the music video context, there are some interesting similarities with Beyoncé’s visual album, such as close-ups of her face and body and, at times, the voyeuristic gaze.

Goodwin states that his first two visual hooks, close-ups and the scopophilic male gaze are often used together.⁸⁹ As an example of this strategy, Goodwin uses Madonna’s music videos to demonstrate how erotic imagery, shown through close-ups and the scopophilic male gaze, work as visual hooks to encourage engagement and multiple viewings.⁹⁰ Beyoncé has much in common with Madonna in the ways they both allow themselves to be filmed, and in the types of videos they produce. For example, there are many similarities between Beyoncé’s *Drunk in Love* video and Madonna’s *Cherish*, which are both filmed in black-and-white on a beach. Their body movements in the water and on the sand are similar: at times they are both positioned with

⁸⁵ L. Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Mulvey, p. 11

⁸⁷ Mulvey’s scopophilic male gaze is taken to mean voyeuristic gaze in this context.

⁸⁸ Goodwin, pp. 90-94.

⁸⁹ Goodwin, p. 92.

⁹⁰ Goodwin, p. 92-93.

arched backs, on all fours, or resting their face near the ground. Their dance moves on the shore are also similar in their carefree, cheeky attitude (Appendix A.3.). Close-ups of body parts other than just the face mark what Mulvey would call an integration of eroticism into the narrative.⁹¹ This integration is facilitated by the hand-held camera movement present in both videos. Filming in this hand-held way lessens the distance between the gaze of the camera and the gaze of the audience, as the point-of-view of the camera is the point-of-view of the audience.⁹² The audience thus becomes a voyeur to the erotic imagery on the screen. The manipulation of pleasure remains a constant throughout *Beyoncé*, and like film, this visual album combines the erotic spectacle with the narrative.⁹³ Although the voyeuristic gaze visual leitmotif does not necessarily allude to an overarching personal narrative or cause-and-effect narrative, it does allude to the language of narrative associated with voyeurism in film. This association is interesting because it connects the visual album to a larger context. Through a recurring detail such as voyeuristic gaze, a bigger picture emerges and more connections are made, in particular, connections to the use of other visual leitmotifs and cinematic looks.

The role of the screen in relation to the voyeuristic gaze

The voyeuristic gaze is related to three cinematic looks that Mulvey identifies as ‘that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion’.⁹⁴ The visual album *Beyoncé*, and most likely many other visual albums and music videos, is similar to cinema in the types of looks that can be identified and optimised. The first two looks were briefly mentioned above with the hand-held point-of-view gaze that merges the look of the camera and the look of the audience. The third look – that between characters – is particularly interesting in *Beyoncé* because of the visual leitmotif of the screen.

Throughout *Beyoncé*, there are several television screens. The image of the screen is not an unusual element in itself as it has been commonly used in music video and film over the last few

⁹¹ Mulvey, p. 12.

⁹² Kuhn and Westwell, ‘Voyeurism’,

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0762>, ‘In feminist film theory, the term [voyeurism] is used in reflections on the construction of

women on the cinema screen as objects of a (male or masculine) voyeuristic gaze: in this sense both the film camera and the spectator may be regarded as voyeurs’.

⁹³ Mulvey, p. 11.

⁹⁴ Mulvey, p. 17

decades, e.g. *Ringu* (dir. H. Nakata, 1998). However, what is worth noting in *Beyoncé* is the set of looks that the screens allow for. The voyeuristic gaze is emphasised when put in conjunction with the visual leitmotif of the screen. The use of the screen first appears in *Pretty Hurts*. During the video, there is an analogue television in the home setting, which is showing black-and-white static. At the end of the video, the TV is switched on and archive footage of young Beyoncé winning an award appears. This occurs in two other videos: *Flawless* and *Grown Woman* (Appendix A.4.). Like the trophy, the footage anchors the videos in previous narratives and contribute to Beyoncé's personal narrative. The on-screen content in this context represents the past, and everything outside of the screen is the diegetic present. A further use of screens and framing of the video content is the surveillance-like camera perspective (including frame and time stamp) present in both *Haunted* and *Superpower* (Appendix A.5.). In the former video, the surveillance camera behaves surreptitiously and is viewing illicit content, and it is almost as if we, the audience, are getting a sneaky look at something that we should not have access to. In *Superpower*, the surveillance camera footage is much more street-surveillance oriented and the content is mainly action. However, the story is about a revolution and physical revolt against the state, and so we are seeing the illegal actions of the revolutionists from the perspective of the law.

The third use of the screen appears in the video *Haunted*. This video uses both the surveillance screen perspective in combination with an analogue TV screen that, rather than showing archive footage, shows a video of Beyoncé singing *Haunted*, and of other characters within the video. The video is set at a boutique hotel, where the character Beyoncé arrives to stay. The whole video is themed like a horror film (but more on that later in the chapter). Beyoncé walks down a hallway with many rooms, all with their doors open, and within the rooms different bizarre scenarios are playing out (**Fig. 3**, top left). As she walks down the hallway, Beyoncé looks in on all the rooms, and even occupies a room of her own and performs an erotic dance routine (**Fig. 3**, bottom left). In each room, there is an analogue television. In the very beginning, most are blank, but some flicker and show images such as an eyeball, a medical scan of the skull and brain, or a roaring bear. As Beyoncé passes each room, her face appears on each of the screens singing the song (**Fig. 3**, top right). At times, shots of other rooms and the characters within them, including the one Beyoncé occupies, appear on either TV screens within the room or via the surveillance screen. As the video ends, Beyoncé turns to leave the hallway, and the other characters smash the television screens that continue to show Beyoncé's face.

The interesting element in this particular video is the exchange of looks between characters, which are aided by the visual leitmotif of the television and surveillance screen. The surveillance footage immediately puts the audience in the position of the voyeur. Beyoncé

similarly becomes a voyeur in her own video by glimpsing bizarre and often overtly sexual scenes through the doorway (Fig. 3, bottom left). The looks that the characters exchange are in line with the Mulvey's third cinematic look. However, there is one more look that occurs in this video: the exchange between the different Beyoncé's, off-TV-screen and on-TV-screen As Beyoncé looks in each room, she is also looking at herself singing on the TV screen. It is almost as though her character has been split to achieve this exchange. This split is emphasised by the lyrics: 'I know if I'm haunting you, you must be haunting me'.⁹⁵ Beyoncé appears in three different ways in this video. She is singing the song on the TV screen, she is dancing in one of the bedrooms, and she is walking the halls, passively looking in at herself and at others. Thus the walking-Beyoncé's gaze is voyeuristic as she allows us to see what she sees and from the point-of-view camera angles, the audience is also included in this voyeuristic look. Guiding the audience in terms of what they are allowed to see is apt in this video as it is a concept that is followed through the whole visual album, which is especially apparent with the personal narrative markers. The voyeur exists here on multiple levels: in the characters, in Beyoncé, and in the audience through the camera.



Fig. 3: Still images from *Haunted* show the appearance of Beyoncé in different filmic spaces creating the possibility of different voyeuristic exchanges. Beyoncé walks down a hallway looking into different rooms (top left), Beyoncé's face on TV screens as she sings (top right), Beyoncé dancing in one of the hotel's rooms (bottom left), other characters occupying a hotel room with Beyoncé on the TV screen in the background (bottom right). ©Columbia Records

⁹⁵ Beyoncé, 'Beyoncé', ©Columbia Records.

Possibly disruptive to the voyeuristic gaze in *Beyoncé* is the direct address of the artist to the audience. Goodwin claims that the ‘system of looks operative in classic Hollywood cinema is broken up by the introduction of a direct mode of address from the female musician(s)’.⁹⁶ In Mulvey’s terms, this means that the illusion of the fantasy is broken, the risk that the audience would be seen to be watching would start to dissolve the voyeuristic gaze. The reason that direct address by *Beyoncé* in *Haunted* does not disrupt the voyeur’s gaze is that Beyoncé is directly addressing herself through the mediation of screens, and thus the direct address to the audience is diverted. However, in many other parts of the visual album, Beyoncé’s songs play on her desires and fantasies, and the desires of her audience, which are usually punctuated lyrically. For example, in *Rocket* she sings ‘Will you watch me? That’s mass appeal. Don’t take your eyes, don’t take your eyes off it. Watch it, babe’.⁹⁷ She invites us in to look at her, objectify her even, yet acts contradictorily to the voyeuristic gaze by directly addressing the audience visually and lyrically. The act of portraying other characters becomes a way for Beyoncé’s star persona to detach from the objectifying action in the videos. By doing this, Beyoncé’s characters can to be looked at in a highly objectified way. Vernallis might call this a model of ‘good and bad sexuality’, as she does when analysing Beyoncé’s 2008 song *Video Phone*.⁹⁸

Whether Beyoncé portrays good or bad models of sexuality, she does it through both the voyeuristic gaze and direct address. The visual leitmotif of screens enhances the voyeuristic gaze consistently in *Beyoncé*. Again, these examples allude to a larger narrative context: the theory of voyeurism in film, as well as the construction of cinematic looks as they relate to screens and the voyeuristic gaze. The additional cinematic look between a Beyoncé and herself achieves the voyeuristic gaze simultaneously with direct address. By splitting Beyoncé into three spaces within *Haunted*, where she conducts different actions, it allows the audience to continue their voyeuristic fantasy alongside the protagonist, while diverting the direct address of walking-Beyoncé. The screens that appear in *Pretty Hurts*, *Haunted*, *Superpower*, and *Grown woman* contribute to the continuity of the album through the language of narrative that they refer to, and help maintain the voyeuristic gaze.

⁹⁶ Goodwin, p. 92.

⁹⁷ Beyoncé, ‘*Beyoncé*’, ©Columbia Records.

⁹⁸ Vernallis, 2013, p. 181.

4:3 Allusions to narratives outside of the visual album

The final type of allusion by a visual leitmotif is to narratives outside of the visual album. These narratives are embedded in art and popular culture references. This means that an image, object, or scene is reminiscent of something else, such as a particular film, comic, photo, or sculpture which has a narrative of its own. Although this chapter predominantly discusses images, music and lyrics are, at times, making allusions to things outside of the visual album as well. Beyoncé has been criticised in online blogs and magazines for crossing boundaries when it comes to religious, feminist, and sexual references. This in itself is interesting because it shows that the audience is connecting elements within the visual album to outside beliefs, images, and culture. This thesis is not concerned with what the criticism is, but that the references were successfully made. In this section, I would like to stress that one image, object or scene is not the visual leitmotif, it is the set of relations that it belongs to; art and pop culture. Therefore, I will provide several examples of narrative allusions, starting with the video *Haunted*.

Haunted, which I have described above, alludes to the horror/slasher film genre consistently throughout. It uses horror film clichés to stand in for narrative. Clichés obviously originate from a specific source, but have been thoroughly overused in their particular contexts. One of the strongest connections this clip makes is to the subgenre of haunted-house horror films. The quiet idyllic setting, as Beyoncé drives up to the hotel, creates suspense for the horrors that lie within. As Beyoncé walks down the hallway and looks in on the various rooms filled with bizarre characters, costumes, and scenarios, Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film *The Shining* comes to mind with the fluid camera movement that follows Beyoncé down the hallway that seems longer than usual. A set of twin girls in black and white matching jumpsuits, and an androgynous figure in the bathtub reinforce the *The Shining* reference (Appendix A.6.). The difference between haunted house films and this clip is that usually the main characters do not see the bizarreness within the rooms. The rooms appear empty, and it is only after the character looks away that the viewers see the ghost, for example, which the characters discover later. Instead, the editing in *Beyoncé* reinforces the voyeuristic view by Beyoncé, and by extension the audience, because what she sees is what we see.

Other horror sub-genres are similarly referenced. For example, there are women in bondage attire occupying one room of the *Haunted* hotel, who claw the clothes off a man sitting on an opulent couch. This scene, combined with Beyoncé's crawling movement on the bed that she dances on, are reminiscent of the vampiric movement in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (dir. Coppola, 1992). The surveillance camera footage is also popular in modern horror films such as the *Paranormal Activity* films (2007-2014). However, this type of first-person perspective was probably

influenced by *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), where the distance between the diegetic looks between characters and the audience is decreased. This is similar to The Prodigy's 1997 music video *Smack My Bitch Up*, which coincidentally was directed by Jonas Åkerlund, the director of *Haunted* and *Superpower*; the two videos in *Beyoncé* that use screens in a surveillance-oriented way. Alongside The Prodigy video is Madonna's 1990 song *Justify My Love*. *Justify My Love* is set in a hotel where sexual deviants are exposed in their rooms. Madonna eventually joins them and is also exposed. *Haunted* seems to be a combination of a Madonna music video and *American Horror Story*.

The connection between all of these references are in their popular culture history. The references to films, whether they are explicit or vague, allude to the same thing: the narrative within horror films of the haunted-house genre. *Haunted* lacks traditional narrative, it along with each of the occupied rooms is just a curious scenario. Beyoncé arrives at a hotel and walks up and down a hallway, unaffected by what she sees, and with no objective in sight. Therefore, these films provide the narrative through association. By recognising twins, for example, in a weird spooky hotel, the audience fills in the narrative blanks, and concludes that they are ghosts who contribute to the madness of the protagonist who eventually meets a grisly end. In doing this, there needs not be any narrative in the video itself, because the pop culture references are so strong.

Pop culture or art references can be considered visual leitmotifs if they are present throughout Beyoncé's visual album. Already, film examples have been given and there are certainly more of those throughout the album. However, other popular culture references also exist. For example, in *Blow*, Beyoncé sports a Wonder Woman t-shirt (Appendix A.7.). Wonder Woman is an interesting reference, which could mean nothing and be just a random choice by the stylist at the time. On the other hand, it could indicate the narrative within the comic book series. If we were to take a symbolic look at the t-shirt, we might see the dichotomy of Wonder Woman at work in Beyoncé: a representation of power and vulnerability, domination and submission. These are aspects that are prominent in Beyoncé and her own characters throughout the visual album. In some ways, Wonder Woman's and Beyoncé's personal narrative of a strong independent woman who deals with her vulnerabilities every day are very similar.

Other allusions are to the classical and contemporary art world. Two particular instances come to mind. In *Mine*, Beyoncé enacts the Michelangelo sculpture *La Pietà*. She appears as the Virgin Mary, whose son Jesus lies un-moving at her feet (**Fig. 4**). The renaissance sculpture represents the story of Jesus' crucifixion and the grief of his mother Mary. This was a hugely significant moment for Christianity, but the symbolism is somewhat lost in this clip. The song is



Fig. 4: Still images from *Mine* showing Beyoncé imitating the Michelangelo sculpture of La Pietà. ©Columbia Records

about reaffirming status in a romantic relationship and the only lyrical connection to this religious visual is the lyric ‘I’m not feelin’ like myself since the baby’ in the first verse.⁹⁹ As the song continues, ‘Jesus’ and ‘Mary’ are seen dancing in the desert along with several ethereal back-up dancers. ‘Jesus’ wears white body paint from the earlier setting, and seems like a sculpture come

⁹⁹ Beyoncé, ‘*Beyoncé*’, ©Columbia Records.

alive, or the opposite: a ghost of someone that once was. The baby lyric could have personal narrative connotations to either post-natal depression or sadness after the loss of a baby. Therefore, the visual and lyrical connection is a mother's grief. However, this is a very weak association to Beyoncé's own miscarriage, which is never confirmed in the video. The meaning of this symbolism is eclipsed by the rest of the song as the visuals never return to this original setting after the 1 minute 30 second mark. Despite the ambiguous meaning the allusion to the crucifixion narrative remains. It is for the audience to make the narrative connections much as I have done above.

Another strong art reference occurs in the video *Rocket*, a sensual black-and-white exploration of sexuality set in a hotel room high above a city. The setting, black-and-white film, costume design, and angle of the camera lens become quite important as there are several instances that are reminiscent of Helmut Newton's photography, both in general and specifically, (Appendix A.8.). Newton has many hotel room-like settings, or city view settings, and both are referenced here where nearly all of the clip is filmed in a luxury hotel and, at times, the shots overlook New York City. Nudes in front of city skylines or in a room with a city view are common in Newton's work, and **Figure 5** alludes to such photos via the cinematography and Beyoncé's level of nudity.



Fig. 5: Still image from *Rocket* demonstrating the similarity to Helmut Newton's city scape and nude photographs. © Columbia Records.

The image has a very similar in angle, city content, and is almost like a close up of Newton's Bergstrom over Paris, Paris, 1976 photograph. These references to famous photographs and Newton's well-known style are not just references to narratives within individual photos but to the language of erotic imagery and cultural connotations. Like the Michelangelo sculpture above, it alludes to a set of relations that contain their own sets of narratives, which the audience must connect.

This chapter presented various visual leitmotifs and their relation to different types of narrative. *Beyoncé* provides ample material to explore this theme, and I expect that many more narrative connections could be found. The first section explored visual leitmotifs as representations of an earlier more complete narrative with the trophy. This was followed by an examination of the language of narrative alluded to through the voyeuristic system of looks that have transitioned from cinema to the visual album. Finally, I have explored how visual leitmotifs can allude to narratives outside of the visual album itself. These different allusions are interconnected and work in tandem to convey narratives that ground the album in the audience's knowledge. A lot of the decoding and deciphering is left to the audience, as it was with the shifting between characters and their relation to Beyoncé's personal narrative. However, the technique of alluding to the language of narrative, whether it is voyeurism, popular culture, art, cinema, personal, or religion, is very fascinating in the sets of relations it uncovers. Although this and the previous chapter have focussed on Beyoncé's visual album specifically, future research is necessary to explore how narrative is implemented in other visual albums, such as *Runaway* or *Hi Custodian*. I would predict that many narrative allusions would be made especially, to popular culture. However, the continuous short film-like format would surely have an impact on narrative associations and perhaps more traditional narratives would be present. My interpretation of these references are limited by my own knowledge and background, as is any other viewer's interpretation. This is an appealing notion because the interpretation will change depending on one's visual and cultural knowledge and one's ability to synthesise this with new audio-visual information such as the visual album.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The music video has invented and borrowed an entire arsenal of devices; it's a joyous rhetoric of images. And this is the paradox of the television-of-optional-images: it liberates the eye.¹⁰⁰

Liberating the eye through a joyous rhetoric of images is an exciting concept put forth by audio-visual theorist Michel Chion about music video, and it is a concept that I can see adapted to the visual album. Like the music video, the visual album has also invented its own devices, and borrowed elements from other sources. This idea that the visual album invents, borrows and makes anew, due to its hybrid nature, is pervasive throughout this thesis. The visual album can be delimited against other sources, specifically film and music video, and is thus rendered as a separate entity worthy of independent study and methods. This discovery was informed by observing the way that visual albums use techniques from these other media, and how they adapt those techniques to their own needs in terms of visual and musical expression.

In this thesis, I have defined the visual album in terms of common characteristics that I observed in potential visual albums. These characteristics are the *direct relationship* that a visual album has with its corresponding audio album, and a visual *album's length*, which tend to be much longer than a standard music video. From these characteristics, I found that there are two formats utilised by artists; the first is one audio-visual track for every audio track, and the second is one continuous video. Although these characteristics and formats helped determine a preliminary working definition for the visual album as an audio-visual phenomenon, they also raised many questions about content. Once again, the visual album's hybridity informed the rest of the study on content and narrative structures.

If the visual album already appeared in two different formats that had clear influences from music video and film, then it is logical that those influences would continue throughout the visual album in some form or another. Therefore, a brief but close examination of those visual albums, which were identified through my working definition, was undertaken. This revealed that music is used in two different ways: some visual albums' music is foregrounded like in a music video, and in others, it oscillates between Chion's film music categories *screen music* and *pit music*. In addition to this, the *direct address* technique, developed from Brecht's *alienation effect*, shows that not only is direct address present in the visual album but so is a traditional western way of acting.

¹⁰⁰ Chion, p. 166.

Furthermore, the repetitious structure of popular music songs resulted in the realisation that some visuals are also repeated, and instead of contributing to the cyclical nature of the song, the repetition of a visual element throughout a visual album contributes to an overall narrative. From these findings, both direct address and visual leitmotifs were used to further examine narrative structures. Moreover, these results confirmed that at the core of the visual album is its hybridity. This finding did two things: first it set a precedent for how a technique from one media can be transferred to the visual album, and second it identified that the visual album uses multiple techniques from different sources simultaneously, or it can smoothly transition between them. It is from these results that the analysis and discussion on narrative have stemmed.

In chapters three and four, I conducted a case study of Beyoncé's visual album *Beyoncé*. This case study allowed me to thoroughly investigate whether the visual album has the capacity for narrative, and if so, to see how it is implemented. Although the results of the *Beyoncé* case study are not representative of all visual albums, they do offer a strong example of how different narratives can exist within a visual album. My findings indicate that two types narrative exist in Beyoncé's visual album: a classic Hollywood narrative (cause-and-effect), and personal narrative. These results are interesting considering the opposing opinions about music video's capacity for narrative. Chion states that '[c]inephiles especially attack music videos as eye-assaulting; they dislike the stroboscopic effect of the rapid editing. That's because they are judging the editing according to cinematic criteria that apply to linear narrative.'¹⁰¹ This quote summarises much of the literature on music video in its early stages. Therefore, I took another approach inspired by Carol Vernallis, to combine music video and film theory and techniques to discover narrative similarities between all three media, but also to see the differences and adaptations as unique to the visual album. In short, although I used film and music video theory to flush out narrative, I did not apply the standards of those other media to the visual album. I used this approach to understand what types of narratives exist even if those narratives seem mutated in the eyes of the cinephile.

Cause-and-effect narrative and personal narrative co-exist in *Beyoncé*. At times, however, one type of narrative can be dominant over another, or one can become the main narrative if another does not appear. The development of the narratives is linked to the development of the characters and Beyoncé's star persona. I used Goodwin's approach to direct address to tease out information about how Beyoncé's characters and star persona interact. When Beyoncé plays a character, such as Yoncé, a complete transformation into that character does not occur, like it

¹⁰¹ Chion, p. 166.

does in classic Hollywood film. Instead, the character is transparent so that the Beyoncé's star persona can be seen through the character. This does not mean that the Yoncé character is weak, it means that both character and persona can be seen at once. Goodwin's conclusion was that the character could become overwhelmed by the star persona's narrative. However, I have found in *Beyoncé* that, although Beyoncé's personal narrative can be dominant in an individual song, the personal narrative markers or navigational beacons are referenced through the Yoncé character. Therefore, a visual album can have a very complex character and persona relationship.

Furthermore, it takes techniques from theatre and music video and adapts them in a new way. However, the existence and implementation of cause-and-effect narrative and personal narrative was at this stage only examined in individual videos.

In the final chapter, I discussed narrative as it related to Beyoncé's whole visual album. Again, given the preceding analysis, one could expect that either cause-and-effect narrative or personal narrative would be present throughout the visual album. Either of these narratives would contribute to the visual album's continuity: an element that relates back to the working definition whereby 'strong visual and textual relations are present to form continuity within the whole album'. However, what I actually found was somewhat different. Cause-and-effect narrative is not present as an overarching narrative feature. This is most likely due to the separable track format of *Beyoncé* and the use of different directors. Personal narrative, on the other hand, is present to some degree but is weak. What became very clear, however, is that the overarching narrative that is present is in fact an allusion to other narratives and language of narrative. This allusion was carried out through visual leitmotifs. These visual leitmotifs relate back to the earlier discussion in chapter two about how repetition of visual objects, tropes, or characters for instance, can contribute to the continuity of the visual album, and how it can thus be seen as one work of art. The function of these visual leitmotifs is to conceal the fact that there is no strong overarching narrative that could be applied to the whole of *Beyoncé*. The four types of narrative allusions that I identified – visual leitmotifs that indicate a fictional narrative or event that has taken place early on in *Beyoncé*, visual leitmotifs that act as a navigational beacons to Beyoncé's personal narrative, visual leitmotifs that refer to the language of narrative, and visual leitmotifs that refer to something that has a narrative outside of the context of Beyoncé's visual album – have one thing in common. They are all referencing another narrative rather than actually being a part of creating one. Whether the reference is to personal narrative, cause-and-effect narrative, or e.g. Wonder Woman's narrative outside of the visual album, the result is the same. Visual leitmotifs allude to the language of narrative by making references. This technique is advantageous in Beyoncé's visual album, because it allows shorter narratives to exist in the

individual tracks, while also maintaining an overarching continuity. The more difficult part of this technique is that it leaves the creation of narrative connections to the audience. This implies that Beyoncé's audience is well-versed in reading different types of narratives and confident in its ability to make connections to music culture, popular culture, visual art, and visual culture.

These results and conclusions target the general context of the visual album in society, music culture and visual culture, but also specific issues regarding narrative's implementation in the visual album. I have connected the general to the specific in some instances, such as repetition in visual albums and visual leitmotifs in Beyoncé's visual album, or direct address in visual albums to direct address in *Beyoncé*. Beyoncé was of great inspiration for this study as her self-identified visual album *Beyoncé* became an integral part my research. Her visual album inspired the search for others, and became a fascinating example of hybrid processes relating to form, content, characters, personas, film and music video theory, and of course narrative. The identified visual albums, *Beyoncé*, *ODDSAC*, *Runaway*, *Bon Iver (Deluxe)* and *Hi Custodian*, are representative of the products and art that are emerging from the music industry today. The visual album demonstrates innovation and hybridity, which can cut through the plethora of images in digital music culture and visual culture.

Significance

The visual album is a significant part of an ever-changing visual culture and visual world, and is worthy of continuing research. This thesis provides the first discussion on the visual album, and it is my hope that it won't be the last. My working definition of the visual album is essentially still a working definition. It would be interesting to see how this definition evolves with further study in this area. I believe my methodology of utilising the surrounding disciplines theories without imposing harsh standards from those theories is a way forward in understanding new forms of audio-visual media. This type of thinking and methodology is in-line with Michel Chion's ideas of adding, widening, recognising, defining, and developing new categories. He shows that just because one defines an area of study does not mean that it remains that way. That is the beauty of living in a world where the function, use, and creation of images changes on a daily basis. The visual album is just one more of these creations, it builds upon the old, makes them anew and interacts with its audience in a different way.

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Appendix

Supplementary images from *Beyoncé*, © Columbia Records.

A.1. This image from *No Angel* shows when the character Yoncé is announced via the necklace that Beyoncé wears.



A.2. These images of Beyoncé, Jay Z and Blue Ivy from the song *Blue*, foreground the personal relationships that Beyoncé has with her family to create a stronger personal narrative. The same is true for the third image of Beyoncé and Jay Z in *Drunk in Love*.

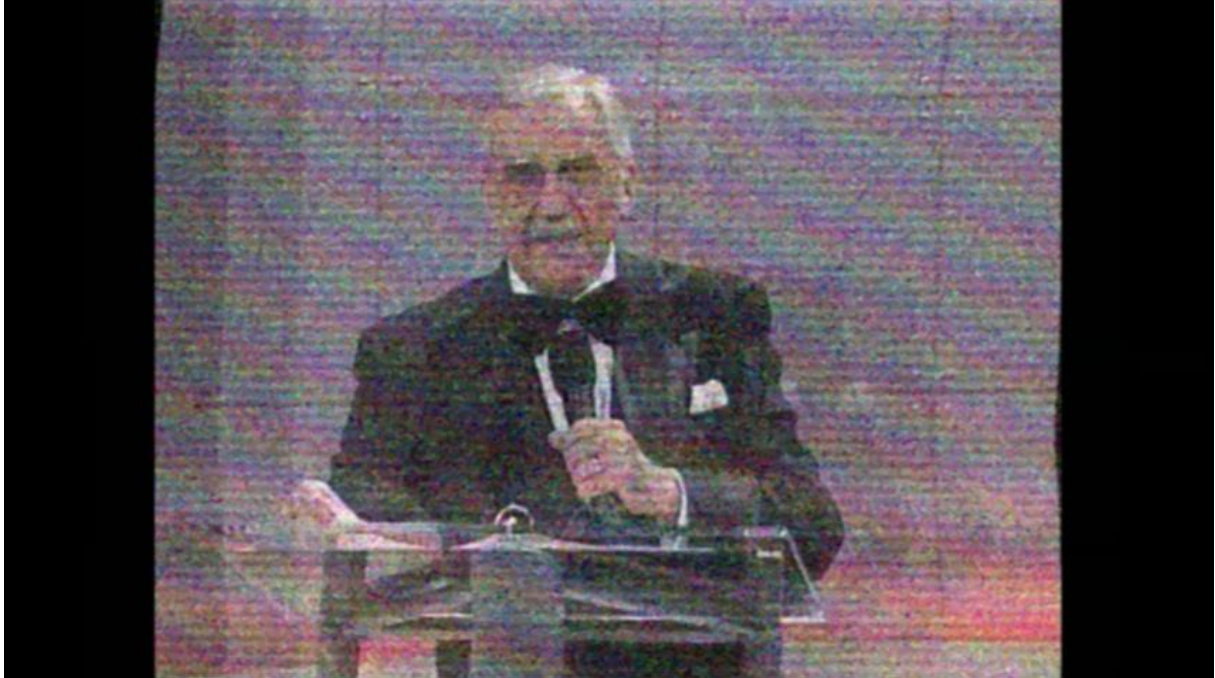




A.3. This image from *Drunk in Love*, shows Beyoncé in an arched back position, which is similar to Madonna's posture in *Cherish*, and is an example of integrating eroticism into the narrative.



A.4. The first image appears in *Flawless*, the second two images appear in *Grown Woman*. The first image is of a TV presenter of a variety show that Beyoncé was a part of in her childhood, and the second two images are of a young Beyoncé singing. The archive footage contributes to Beyoncé's personal narrative throughout the visual album.





A.5. These four images demonstrate the surveillance-like camera perspective present in both *Haunted* (first two image) and *Superpower* (second two image).







A.6. The following two images from *Haunted* reference Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*.





A.7. The image of Beyoncé from *Blow* references Wonder Woman and her dichotomy of power and vulnerability.



A.8. These two images from Rocket reference Helmut Newton's city scape and nude photographs.

