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“The Choice of a New Generation”:

“Pop” Music, Advertising, and Meaning in the MTV Era and Beyond

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Musicology

by

Joanna Katherine Love-Tulloch

2012

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2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“The Choice of a New Generation”:

“Pop” Music, Advertising, and Meaning in the MTV Era and Beyond

by

Joanna Katherine Love-Tulloch

Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Robert W. Fink, Co-Chair

Professor Timothy D. Taylor, Co-Chair

Prior to the 1980s it was uncommon for marketers to incorporate pre-existing popular music into television commercials. But following the rise of MTV as an innovative commercial endeavor and Pepsi-Cola’s groundbreaking 1984 “Choice of a New Generation” campaign featuring Michael Jackson, musicians and corporations began to realize the benefits of incorporating *new* songs into commercials. Once considered taboo by many musicians and fans, television commercials have now become such a lucrative medium for the dissemination of new popular music that by the second decade of the twenty-first century, performing songs in them has become commonplace. Despite the fact that discussions about the use of popular music in commercial culture have proliferated among music critics and trade press publications for three decades, music scholars largely continue to overlook this phenomenon. This dissertation contributes to the small amount of academic literature available on this topic and engages with recent publications by ethno/musicologist

Timothy D. Taylor and sociologist Bethany Klein that warn that the convergence of popular music and corporate brands will have detrimental consequences for future of cultural production and reception. I hypothesize that what Taylor has termed as advertising's "conquest of culture" is a result of the industry's attempt at appropriating and *reforming* musical texts by manipulating their structures and signifiers in commercials to change their meanings and serve branding imperatives. This dissertation focuses on Pepsi's attempts to inscribe itself into music history, using its 2011-12 *X Factor* commercials as bookends for historicizing the corporation's pioneering transition from jingles to the use of new popular music in its 1980s television commercials. More specifically, the project analyzes the aesthetic effects of rearranging songs to fit branded environments, examining how advertising forges new contexts for familiar songs by focusing on 1980s spots that borrow MTV tropes and "re-present" musical and visual signifiers from the biggest pop stars of the day, Michael Jackson and Madonna. I integrate interdisciplinary methodologies that combine formal musical analyses, historical research, archival work, and ethnographic interviews. This dissertation draws from musicological studies on musical meaning and cultural and social theories about popular culture, music, advertising, and media.

The dissertation of Joanna Katherine Love-Tulloch is approved.

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2012

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I end with a nod to the countless friends, teachers, and colleagues who have influenced me prior to my years at UCLA. They are too many to name here, but they hold a special place in my heart.

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Introduction:

An American B(r)and: Madison Avenue claims the “Radio Star”

During the premiere of the *X Factor* reality talent-show on September 21, 2011, contestants were promised a “prize” that indicated just how much the interests of the music and advertising industries had converged by the second decade of the twenty-first century.¹ In addition to a lucrative \$5 million recording contract, the winner was promised a starring role in a Pepsi-Cola commercial set to premiere during the Super Bowl that February. The Super Bowl remained the most watched sporting event in America, making its commercial breaks the most coveted, expensive, and newsworthy advertising space on television. During that first night of the *X Factor* show, Pepsi premiered a 45-second cross promotion spot titled “Music Icons” that teased the potential exposure afforded by this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.² A visual mash-up of Pepsi commercials done by pop legends over the previous 27 years was set to a “Pepsi Exclusive Remix” of the hook to “Tonight is the Night,” a single by up-and-coming rapper Outasight (Richard Andrew)³ Despite the fact that Outasight isn’t shown onscreen, the presence of his music was meant to inaugurate him into the well-known iconic line-up while simultaneously reinforcing Pepsi’s self-proclaimed status as

¹ *X Factor* is the latest of the spin-off franchises for vocal talent programs began by the *Idol* shows at the turn-of-the-millennium. Both *X Factor* and *Idol* have shows throughout the world. PepsiCo., “New Pepsi Television Ad Features Music Superstars Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, Kanye West, Ray Charles and Mariah Carey,” *PR Newswire: United Business Media*, September 21, 2011, accessed December 5, 2011, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-pepsi-television-ad-features-music-superstars-michael-jackson-britney-spears-kanye-west-ray-charles-and-mariah-carey-130254388.html>.

² Ibid. PepsiCo. Inc., “Music Icons,” 2012. The version I discuss here can be found at: YouTube, “Watch Britney Spears, Kanye West, and Michael Jackson in New Pepsi Commercial,” accessed January 15, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksA6a4WkCGA>.

³ Ibid. An online booklet, “Pepsi’s Music Heritage: Pepsi and Pop Music through the Years,” chronicles the company’s history, slogans, and collaboration with pop stars. According to the booklet, each of the “Icon” clips represent what soda giant considers to be its most memorable and significant of its co-branding deals. “Pepsi’s Music Heritage” was originally found on December 5, 2011 at <http://pepsi.com/>. As of February 2012, it had been taken down. “Pepsi Legacy Book” can still be found at the same site and includes similar information, but covers a larger scope of the company’s history. Outasight, “Tonight Is the Night,” Warner Bros., B005P5OHF4, 2011, MP3.

a purveyor of cutting-edge popular music trends.⁴ And as the commercial's music and images suggested, it also promised to induct the would-be *X Factor* winner into the musical legacy achieved by the soda giant's past and present endorsers.

"Music Icons" opens to the sonic backdrop of a screaming crowd and the bass line to "Tonight Is the Night's" up-tempo, synthesized, G-major pentatonic hook. Set in a dimly lit backstage corridor, a faceless, hooded (presumably male) figure picks up a Pepsi can, drinks from it, and pauses to take in the moment (Figure 1). The can's logo lures him into Pepsi's world and takes him on a historical tour of endorsements done by the biggest names in popular music since the mid-1980s. The lyrics, "Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night/That we're losing control," give way to a glimpse of Michael Jackson's iconic sparkly socks and black shoes followed by a close-up of his performance in a 1988 campaign that promoted his album, *Bad* (Fig. 1).⁵ The spot then shows images from Jackson's first Pepsi campaign in 1984, which featured a young impersonator and a re-worked version of his biggest hit, "Billie Jean (Fig. 1)."⁶

⁴ Richard Andrew's affiliation with Pepsi substantially boosted airplay and iTunes downloads of his single, especially after his live performance of "Tonight Is the Night" on a later episode of the *X Factor*. Andrew Hampp, "How Outasight's 'Tonight is the Night' Got Tapped for Pepsi's 'X Factor' Campaign," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 3, 2011, accessed on January 16, 2012, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/x-factor-outasight-pepsi-tonight-night-257360>.

⁵ This commercial was the first-ever multi-part episodic commercial and also the first designed to promote a new album, concert tour, music video, and television special. See the lyrics to "Tonight is the Night" in Appendix A.

⁶ The two commercials that came out of this campaign, "The Concert" and "Street" became the first successful commercials featuring new popular music. The campaign was so groundbreaking that Roger Enrico, the CEO of Pepsi at the time, wrote a book about it. See *The Other Guy Blinkered: How Pepsi Won the Cola Wars*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986). See also Richard Harrington, "Pepsi & The Pop Star; Michael Jackson's \$15 Million Cola Deal," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1986, C2.



Figure 1: Commercial Stills—Future *X Factor* winner sees Michael Jackson’s 1980s commercials in Pepsi’s logo⁷

Scenes from Ray Charles’s 1991 Diet Pepsi spots accompany the song’s next verse: “Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night/We set it off.” Originally designed to promote the release of Charles’s greatest hits album, shots of the soul singer and his 1960s-era back-up group reminded experienced viewers of the famous “Uh-Huh” jingle sung in that campaign (Fig. 2).⁸ A stop-time fill then gives way to images from Britney Spears’s 2001 “Joy of Cola” and Kanye West’s 2009 “Timeline” commercials, both created to hype the artists’ latest albums (Fig. 2).⁹ A now higher G-major pentatonic melody carries the commercial to shots from Mariah Carey’s unique 2006 endorsement of Pepsi and Motorola phones in which fans were offered downloads of 20 ringtones written, produced, and sung by the pop diva (Fig. 2).¹⁰

⁷ PepsiCo. Inc, “Music Icons,” 2011.

⁸ Horton M, “Ray Charles Sings for Diet-Pepsi,” *Herald Sun*, July 31, 1991, 70.

⁹ Drew MacKenzie, “Britney’s a \$21 Million Pep Star; Teen Queen Signs for Drink Advert,” *Mirror*, February 8, 2001, 24. PepsiCo, “Kanye West and Pepsi Take a Trip Around the Globe,” *PR Newswire: United Business Media*, August, 2009, accessed December 5, 2011, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/kanye-west-and-pepsi-take-a-trip-around-the-globe-55011207.html>

¹⁰ PepsiCo., “Mariah Carey Hits Perfect Note with Pepsi,” *PR Newswire: United Business Media*, April 9, 2006, accessed December 5, 2011, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/mariah-carey-hits-perfect-note-with-pepsi-56454402.html>.



Figure 2: Commercial Stills—Ray Charles, Britney Spears, Kanye West, and Mariah Carey round out Pepsi’s iconic line-up

A final wink from Britney Spears snaps the shadowy figure back to reality (Fig. 3). The musical track is then engulfed by the commotion of a screaming audience. The words “who’s next?” accompanied by the *X Factor* logo are superimposed over the figure’s entrance onto a stage, revealing his role in the commercial as a stand-in for the eventual winner of the competition and, presumably, the next in line for the kind of mega pop stardom that leads to Pepsi ads. The scene transitions to a digitized version of Pepsi’s logo and closes with an image of the product, the slogan “Where there’s Pepsi, there’s Music,” and the soda giant’s Facebook URL (Fig. 3).

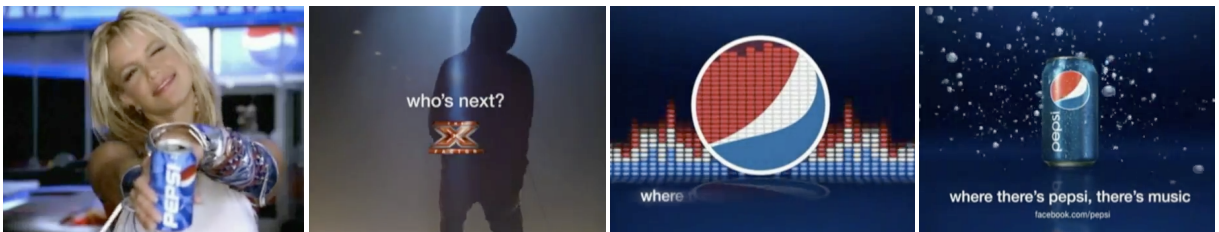


Figure 3: Pepsi builds excitement for its future star

“Music Icons” must set some kind of record for displacing and rearranging pop music signifiers in the space of a 45-second commercial. Even though the music of Jackson, Charles, Spears, and West are silenced in favor of a track from the soda’s newest endorser, the images alone are arguably enough to conjure up multiple memories of their collective musical output and careers for experienced audiences of all ages. Michael Jackson’s image might remind fans of *Thriller* or *Bad*, his *Motown 25* performance, his once-astronomical fame, and even his recent death. Ray Charles’s image appeals most to aging baby-boomers and seeing him might evoke his 1960s oeuvre, his controversial secularization of gospel songs, and the recent movie about his life. Glimpses of young

Britney Spears might remind 20-somethings of the school girl image she donned in her break-out video for “Hit Me, Baby, One More Time,” its #1 spot on MTV’s late-’90s hit show, *Total Request Live*, and the train wreck her life became in the early 2000s. Even younger audiences might see Kanye West and think of his outburst at MTV’s Video Music Awards’ in 2009 and his recent string of hits, including his collaboration with Kid Cudi and Rhianna on “All of the Lights.” Mariah Carey’s long-standing presence as a pop diva would allow women to remember two decades of hits from her first self-titled album in 1990 to *Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel* in 2009, her role in the movie *Precious*, her marriage to Nick Cannon, and possibly even her recent Jenny Craig commercials. The list of possible referents goes on and on. Pepsi’s *X Factor* commercial thus stands as a testament to the soda giant’s mastery in incorporating pop’s visual codes into its branding agenda, demonstrated in the ad by doubly displacing these pop stars into a commercial *about* commercials past, and re-imagining music history as the history of (soda) branding.

Pepsi’s treatment of the actual soundtrack to this spot demonstrates another aspect of its skill in remapping signifiers, in this case, musical ones. Most obviously, the phrase “Tonight is the Night,” which has nothing to do with the soda or singing competition in Outasight’s original song and video, is re-positioned to align with the commercial’s onscreen images.¹¹ Outasight’s hook is therefore re-contextualized in “Music Icons” to refer literally to that very evening, the night that the *X Factor* program and soda giant would make someone a star. Additionally, the sparse arrangement of the hook’s simple lyrics and generic pentatonic lines provide the perfectly bland backdrop for highlighting the more culturally significant and musically interesting acts depicted onscreen. The silent images of these “music icons” are powerful enough to override Outasight’s audible soundtrack, thus driving home Pepsi’s claim that the next *true* superstar, the next Michael Jackson or Britney Spears, was not Outasight but the mystery performer who would emerge from amongst the

¹¹ The whole of the lyrics suggest upward mobility while the video portrays the desire to party and “hook-up.” For a complete list of lyrics, see Appendix A.

contestants on the *X Factor*. In this way, the re-written track to “Tonight is the Night” functions like a traditional advertising jingle, catchy enough to remember, but simple enough to be subservient to the intended message of the brand.

Furthermore, “Music Icons” is a peculiar commercial not only in terms of what it suggests—that Pepsi has played a key role in pop music’s history—but in how it positions Pepsi as an *authority figure* in the music business. A 45-second version of pop history according to a soda brand, “Music Icons” paints Pepsi’s commercials as equivalent to playing the Apollo Theater or winning a Grammy: a necessary right-of-passage for successful musicians. Of course the underlying message is, as always, “drink Pepsi” with an added “watch the *X Factor*” plug, but it proves innovative in its additional call to viewers to help Pepsi anoint a future pop star. No longer merely a sponsor of pop music, the soda giant claims to join the *X Factor* franchise in being a *tastemaker* and *producer* of pop. Thus, Outsight’s re-contextualized lyric, “We’re losing control,” can be read ironically as a comment on the eventual demise of the icons pictured in the commercial and even of the music business as a whole—a sly proclamation that *Pepsi* has taken charge of pop music’s future stars.

This point is made explicit in the actual *X Factor* Super Bowl commercial Pepsi released a few months later. “King’s Court” depicts the *X Factor* winner, Melanie Amaro, literally dethroning musical giant Sir Elton John from his “tyrannical” rule over a make-believe kingdom’s music making and soda consumption.¹² As will be discussed later in this dissertation, “King’s Court” represents a larger metaphor for the fall of the “arbitrary” rule of music industry insiders and the rise of a “democratic” consumption-driven regime controlled by “the people’s” choice—i.e. the reign of the reality show competition and advertising industry, embodied by Amaro. Not surprisingly, the “freedom” Pepsi promises to consumers is empty of truth, value, and innovation, as indexed by Amaro’s performance of her newly released re-mix of Aretha Franklin’s version of Otis Redding’s

¹² PepsiCo. Inc., “King’s Court,” 2012.

1966 “Respect.” Amaro, literally *brand new* to the music scene at the time, had yet to acquire any significant cultural status on her own. Pepsi therefore portrays her as a visual and vocal ringer for Franklin in her youth. By co-opting Franklin’s signifiers, most prominently her curvy figure and powerful voice, the soda giant hoped to portray its new star as equally, if not more, culturally impactful than Franklin and the ousted “King John.” But as I will discuss, the commercial only re-established the soda giant’s skill at *recycling* pre-existing cultural texts, not in *creating* new ones.

As a self-proclaimed leader in using new popular music in commercials, Pepsi demonstrates through its pair of recent *X Factor* commercials the extent to which twenty-first century advertising has become adept at manipulating popular music and the meanings it holds for fans to serve branding imperatives. These spots thus raise important questions about contemporary relationships between popular music and advertising: How can a corporate brand claim to have played a major role in the success of twentieth-century pop music icons? Why do commercials represent pop music in a way that is so aesthetically reductive and commercially perverse? When and how did this type of advertising become the norm? For what reasons did advertising get involved in the creation, production, and dissemination of popular music? And what does all of this mean for the future of popular music?

Cultural and social theorists have agonized over advertising’s power to appropriate cultural texts since at least the late-1950s. By the early ’80s, when it seemed that few forms of artistic output were off-limits to marketing agendas, theorist Michael Schudson posited that, “...abstraction is essential to the aesthetic and intention of contemporary national consumer-goods advertising.”¹³ He likened this generic nature of advertising to socialist realism, dubbing it “capitalist realism.” Dependent on borrowed signs and signifiers, but with its own goals Schudson noted, “American

¹³ Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 214.

advertising...*simplifies* and *typifies*” the texts it borrows.¹⁴ Long-time media theorist, Sut Jhally agrees, saying, “Advertising draws its materials from the experiences of the audience but it *reformulates* them in a unique way. It does not reflect meaning, but rather constitutes it.”¹⁵ Taken together, Schudson and Jhally argue that advertising co-opts the people, places, and things that matter to target audiences and manipulates them and their meanings on the terms of the products they sell. Popular music is one of the texts that matter most to demographic groups targeted by American advertising, and thus this dissertation engages with the questions raised by the Pepsi commercials above to examine the process by which *advertising has appropriated popular music and reformed its meanings in television commercials over the past 27 years.*

Popular Music and/in Advertising

Trade press journals and music critics have argued about the origins of the relationship between popular music and advertising for almost three decades now. Scholars have just recently joined this critical debate, which tends to get more heated as an increasing number of brands like Pepsi lay claim to the once-sacred territory of pre-existing pop-rock music. Some sources say it all started with the Rolling Stone’s 1981 tour, underwritten by Jovan perfume.¹⁶ Others point to the advent of MTV.¹⁷ Some attribute it to the music industry’s greed and resulting decline.¹⁸ Still others

¹⁴ Ibid, 215.

¹⁵ Sut Jhally, “Advertising, Gender, and Sex: What’s Wrong with a Little Objectification?,” in *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2006), 165. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶ Journalist Leslie Saven cites the Stone’s ’81 tour as the turning point. See *The Sponsored Life: Ads, TV, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 288.

¹⁷ Music cognition scholar, David Huron makes explicit links between the practices of MTV and commercials in “Music in Advertising: An Analytic Paradigm,” *Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1989), 571.

¹⁸ Industry insider, Steve Knopper, gives a candid account of the ups and downs of the music industry from the late-’70s through the first decade of the new millennium. See *Appetite For Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Clash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

argue that popular music has always been “commercial” and point to past mixed-media formats that functioned as advertisements for records, including television shows such as *Ed Sullivan* and *American Bandstand*, and films like Elvis Presley’s *Viva Las Vegas* or the Beatles’ *Hard Days Night*. Proponents of this last theory argue that popular music’s appearance in actual commercials was simply the next logical step.¹⁹ While all of these events and conjectures certainly contributed to the kinds of co-branding deals prevalent today, I argue alongside ethno/musicologist Timothy D. Taylor that there was a definitive moment when the relationship clicked.²⁰ As Pepsi’s own “Music Icons” commercial brags, this turning point was the soda giant’s 1984 “Choice of a New Generation” campaign featuring Michael Jackson in which he was hired for an unprecedented \$5 million to perform a re-worked version of his then-hit “Billie Jean” in two television spots. This campaign both ignited and solidified a lasting relationship between corporate brands and *new/up-and-coming* popular musicians and their music, via crucial mediation from the advertising industry.

Academics have been slow to take up the topic of popular music in commercials beyond a few passing remarks, despite the public chatter that has surrounded these relationships since the mid-’80s. Only in the last ten or so years have publications on the subject appeared in scholarly circles. Timothy D. Taylor and sociologist Bethany Klein offer the most comprehensive analyses to date.²¹ Their recent and seminal publications explore how and why today’s musicians now rely on brands not only for exposure but to establish the recognition and status popular music once gained through radio, record sales, and music videos. Their ethnographic and sociological research focuses

¹⁹ Simon Frith implicitly makes this point in, “Look! Hear! The Uneasy Relationship of Music and Television,” *Popular Music* 21, no. 3 (2002): 277-290.

²⁰ See *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), forthcoming. Co-branding is the term used to describe the practice of advertising two or more products simultaneously.

²¹ See Klein’s *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 136-139. Refer also to Taylor’s, “The Changing Shape of the Culture Industry; or, How Did Electronica Music Get into Television Commercials?” *Television & New Media* (2007): 235-258; *The Sounds of Capitalism*, forthcoming; and “Advertising and the Conquest of Culture,” *Social Semiotics* 4, (2009): 405-425.

on changes in the mode of production for both the music and advertising industries and offers an insider's perspective on the practical and logistical aspects of placing popular music in commercials. They thus consider co-branding deals from the vantage points of marketers, music industry executives, and under-represented musicians to give valuable critiques that point out the problematic aspects of these arrangements. In particular, both authors warn that relationships between music and advertising have fundamentally re-defined how popular music is produced and consumed in the new millennium.

Klein's 2009 book, *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising*, focuses on licensing arrangements made for specific commercials that aired from the late-1980s to the early-2000s and examines the controversies that have surrounded them. She notes that an ideological shift had taken place by the early years of the twenty-first century as taboos over "selling out" gave way to face of the need for exposure. She worries, though, that listeners have simply surrendered to such claims of necessity and have failed to act as "cultural wardens" for advertisers who go too far in reinterpreting songs for branding purposes. More generally, Klein fears for the future of popular music and its ability to convey cultural meanings to new generations of audiences.²²

Taylor echoes similar concerns but examines advertising practices through theories of capitalism. In "The Changing Shape of the Culture Industry: Or How Did Electronica Get into Television Commercials?" he notes how at the end of the twentieth-century, baby-boomer professionals who shared a habitus akin to what Bourdieu once called "the new petite bourgeoisie" occupied decision making roles in the advertising industry.²³ According to Taylor, they brought the music they loved into commercials, acting as "cultural mediators" by disseminating musics

²² Klein, *As Heard on TV*, 136-139.

²³ Taylor frames his argument with Pierre Bourdieu's theories from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). See Taylor, "The Changing Shape of the Culture Industry," 247-253.

underrepresented on the American market, such as the mix of mid-1990s house, techno, breakbeat, and ambient music called “electronica.”²⁴ His argument in a more recent article, “Advertising and the Conquest of Culture,” postulates that American cultural forms have become inextricably linked to corporate interests to the point that he claims to no longer see a distinction between popular music and advertising music.²⁵ More specifically he argues that in an attempt to be “trendy” (what Thomas Frank once referred to as the “hip” and the “cool”) advertising is shaping culture in a way that not only influences the dissemination and even production of music, but notions of “legitimate culture.”²⁶ Taylor’s forthcoming book expands upon this argument by supporting it with a historically broad and ethnographically rich foundation that traces jingles from early radio through recent television commercials to demonstrate how the balance of musical expertise and business once privileged by music industry executives has been gradually displaced by strategic imperatives of marketing professionals.²⁷ His body of work thus theorizes the process by which musical culture—and cultural forms in general—have been and continue to be dominated by advertising’s capitalist interests.

This dissertation engages with Taylor’s focus on co-branding’s logistical and economic imperatives and expands upon Klein’s analyses of cultural consequences that result from “articulations” between brands and musicians by contributing musicological perspective to the ways

²⁴ Taylor gleans the term “cultural mediators” from Bourdieu. Ibid.

²⁵ Taylor, “Advertising and the Conquest of Culture,” 409-415.

²⁶ Thomas Franks’s seminal book is discussed below and in chapter two of this dissertation. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). The term “legitimate culture” is from Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, cited above. Taylor also expands Bourdieu’s term, “cultural capital,” saying that it can encompass social elites in contemporary American society that have eclectic knowledge of “trendy” music—a claim which he supports by citing sales of unique classical music recordings. “Advertising and the Conquest of Culture,” 415-421.

²⁷ I would add that Keith Negus’s earlier account of the music business and its adoption of corporate and branded models provides further perspective on what he terms as the industry’s “corporate culture.” He postulates “*industry produces culture and culture produces an industry*”—a concept that can certainly be applied to advertising as much as the music business. See *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1999), 14. Emphasis his.

in which advertising has acted as a mediator between *new* pop music and audiences, specifically as it mediates and *reforms musical meanings*.²⁸ In particular, this project speaks to Taylor's theories about advertising's "conquest" of musical culture by highlighting a series of seminal episodes in that process and demonstrating how advertising's ability to get inside the texts themselves eventually allowed the industry to take part in popular music production. While there has been a considerable amount of academic work done on the topics of meaning in advertising and meaning in music, very little attention has been paid to musical meaning *in* advertising, and even less to commercials that employ *new popular music*. This dissertation therefore brings formal musical analysis into considerations about popular music and musical meaning in advertising in context with prominent cultural and social theory, studies of popular culture, advertising, film, media, archival documents, and ethnography. More specifically, I situate Pepsi's 1984 "Choice of a New Generation" campaign with Michael Jackson as a watershed moment when popular, and particularly "pop," music and images were officially adopted into the language of advertising. In chapters two through four, I examine this and two other significant Pepsi campaigns that followed—Jackson's 1987-88 "Choice of a New Generation" campaign and Madonna's 1989 "A Generation Ahead" spot—as pivotal historical markers of the era in which superstar popular musicians and marketers first tested the terms of their relationships. I investigate how each of these three deals had profound impacts on the way popular music was appropriated in future advertising contexts; their progression highlights a gradual logistic and aesthetic transition from jingles to the use of new popular music in commercials, advertising's increased involvement in the dissemination of new musical texts, and the repositioning of capitalist and aesthetic boundaries between corporate and "artistic" industries. My opening discussion of Pepsi's "Music Icons" promo and chapter five's examination of the *X Factor* Super

²⁸ Klein defines "articulation" as "both an expression and a joining together" saying that it "provides an entry point to understanding the process of branding." Klein, *As Heard on TV*, 82. She uses Stuart Hall's definition of "articulation" as the basis for her hypothesis. See his "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Race Critical Theories: Text and Context*, eds. Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 38-67.

Bowl commercial, “King’s Court,” frame these analyses and illustrate that despite apparent shifts in patronage and production practices for popular music, advertising continues to poach pre-existing cultural texts as it seeks approval from increasingly savvy audiences. My project thus tells the story of the *reformation of culture* as instigated by Pepsi-Cola’s mid-late 1980s commercials featuring the two biggest pop stars of the day, to examine *how* the brand has historically appropriated meanings from celebrity musical endorsers and their hit songs, *what* new meanings these seminal commercials attempted to create and emit, and *why* they shaped the future of both the music and advertising industries.

Rationale and Methodology

As potent cultural texts, advertisements borrow, amplify, and even shape ideologies that pervade American society. Pepsi’s ’80s campaigns featuring Michael Jackson, Madonna, and their hit songs therefore offer unique perspective into the historical moment when the music video reigned supreme, youth could watch their favorite artists perform their favorite songs 24 hours a day on a new cable network aptly named “Music Television” (MTV), and “pop” stars not only topped international music charts, but also set trends in fashion and choreography. Pepsi and its imitators adopted the look and sound of MTV and its stars in an attempt to integrate household products with cutting-edge youth trends. But despite the company’s recent claims to make “artistic” commercials and play an essential role in the success of the musicians it financially sponsored, Pepsi and its advertising firm, Barton Batten Durstine & Osborn (BBD&O), were newly introduced to music industry practices in the 1980s, relegating the soda giant’s commercials to a sometimes clumsy *reformation* of existing pop music signifiers.²⁹ Hence, from the very beginning, advertising’s

²⁹ Taylor also argues that this was once the case, but has changed in the new millennium. The commercials I discuss either pre-date the twenty-first century spots Taylor examines or, in the case of the *X Factor* spots, blatantly recycle pre-

relationship with pop music has been dependent upon piggybacking on the genre's aesthetics. The obvious reality of pop music's incorporation in advertising, then, is that in a Frankenstein-like fashion marketers strip songs down, harvest their most memorable themes, and stitch them back together in a way that best serves the brand's needs. In the pages that follow, I thus demonstrate how in the late-twentieth century, advertising not only attempted to re-imagine people's relationships to goods and each other—as theorized by cultural scholars like Stewart Ewen—but it also attempted to *re-define people's relationships to new popular music* by reinterpreting the genre's signifiers on the terms of the brand and mediating those self-serving significations to audiences.³⁰

To investigate advertising's reformation of musical meaning this dissertation employs methodologies from musicology and ethnomusicology. I incorporate extensive historical research about the music and advertising industries including tell-all autobiographies, first-hand primary source accounts, pop culture magazines, and advertising trade press articles. I also integrate primary source multimedia materials, including archived VHS tapes of interviews, commercials, and award shows. In particular, print and media materials I gathered from research at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Fred/Alan MTV Network Advertising Collection in Washington D.C. support arguments I lay out in chapter one about the similarities between commercials and MTV. The sources I gathered there demonstrate that MTV intentionally and methodically fostered a commercialized performance aesthetic by pairing corporate products with musical performances in innovative ways.³¹ Additionally, this project includes information from footage I viewed at the

existing texts from twentieth-century “icons.” See Taylor's discussion in “Advertising and the Conquest of Culture,” 405-425.

³⁰ See Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

³¹ 1981-1982, Fred/Alan MTV Network Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Washington D.C. Research done there also demonstrated the extent to which the commercials and visual art created by the Fred/Alan Advertising Agency contributed to the network's postmodern aesthetics. Most prominently, the agency

University of California, Los Angeles Film and Television Archive. Tapes I watched there included '80s-era Grammy Awards shows and accounts of Pepsi's commercials recorded from nationally syndicated television programs.³² These materials give historical specificity to print media discussions I've found about advertising's involvement in popular music culture at the time.

My project is informed at key moments by ethnographic research. I incorporate information from interviews with Bob Giraldi, the director of Pepsi's 1984 Jackson campaign, and Roberta Cruger, the clips coordinator, manager, and director at MTV from 1981-89.³³ Their professional insight provides first-hand accounts of how the music and advertising industries interacted with popular musicians and appropriated their music in the 1980s. This dissertation also includes statements from interviews I conducted with a cross-section of 18-24 year old college students from November 2010 through October 2011, who are targeted members of Pepsi's 18-39 year old upper-middle class demographic.³⁴ Their insight is particularly useful for this dissertation's fifth chapter, since their experiences as twenty-first century music consumers suggest that changes in the industry's ideologies and patterns of production haven't necessarily created an era of mindless and passive consumers. Further, their reactions after viewing Pepsi's '80s commercials proved equally informative as they demonstrated considerable familiarity with advertising codes as well as the product, musicians, and music, which allowed them read these older commercials as complexly meaningful cultural texts.

came up with the MTV logo (which was also the station ID) and the idea that it should be animated and constantly change colors and forms. See Series 4: Box 12.

³² "Grammy Awards: 31st" and "Pepsi Commercial," University of California, Los Angeles Film and Television Archive, VA 7132 and VA 7495, Los Angeles, CA.

³³ Bob Giraldi, Phone interview by author, October 8, 2010. Roberta Cruger, In person interview by author, June 7, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles. I attempted to contact the director of the other two '80s campaigns, Joe Pytko, for an interview as well, but my efforts were unsuccessful. In addition to the interviews noted above, I am particularly indebted to autobiographies published by Pepsi's CEO, Roger Enrico, and BBD&O's creative director Phil Dusenberry.

³⁴ In person interviews with author, University of California, Los Angeles.

Most distinctively, my project brings formal musical analysis into theoretical conversations to demonstrate how and why pop's historically and aesthetically specific tropes and structures have played a particularly strong role in the production of meaning in commercials. The analyses I employ incorporate semiotic and hermeneutic approaches similar to those taken by prominent music and media scholars including Susan McClary, Robert W. Fink, Andrew Goodwin, Robert Goldman and Steven Papson. In my analyses, I take into consideration the subjective pitfalls of these methodologies, which include the polysemic nature of music in particular and cultural texts in general, the fact that diverse cultural groups read understand texts differently, and the fact that semiotic analysis has tended to view cultural artifacts as fixed rather than fluid and changing forms. Keeping these issues in mind, I frame my analyses of television commercials and their meanings within the bounds of the historical and ethnographic documents I have compiled and exercise caution in grounding my analyses in the particularities of each commercial's historical and cultural moment, context, creation, and reception. I gear my readings towards what members of a musically "experienced" and "American" (U.S., generally middle-class) audience *has* and/or *might have* gleaned from these texts based not only on specific signifiers in the commercials, their history, and the accompanying evidence of their reception in media and ethnographic sources, but also on the premises of what their creators (corporate executives, marketers, directors, and the musicians) claim to have "intended" to convey with the music and images.

This project also pays special attention to issues of genre and context as I have limited the scope of this dissertation to only '80s commercials and the two recent ones that reflect on them and feature *young superstar musicians performing new "pop" songs in Pepsi commercials*. While my original conception of this project wasn't limited to any one musical genre, corporate brand, or time period, I quickly realized that Pepsi's 1980s "pop" commercials provided such compelling and rich objects of study that narrowing my scope would allow me to perform the close analysis necessary for

properly investigating how and why advertising reforms musical meaning. Furthermore, as a self-proclaimed and widely regarded leader in new music marketing, Pepsi's commercials have become the litmus test (both good and bad) for music co-branding endeavors. This project therefore examines advertising's reformation of musical meaning by examining the three commercials with the earliest impact on co-branding arrangements and the two twenty-first century commercials that re-voke their significance—or in the case of Madonna's spot, intentionally leave it out.

I would add that this dissertation is *not* meant to be an overview of the use of pre-existing popular music in commercials. A single study of that magnitude is not possible within the confines of a dissertation—or a few books for that matter—due to the sheer number of popular songs used in advertising and the countless possible avenues for investigating its roles. Instead, this dissertation attempts to engage with emerging studies by focusing in on a pivotal set of historical moments that helped define contemporary relationships between music and advertising.

Overview

The interdisciplinary nature of this project will require an extensive framework for untangling concepts of meaning, musical genre, advertising, media, and their relationships to one another during the 1980s. Chapter one, “‘Money for Nothing’: Framing Meaning and Defining Pop in the MTV Era,” establishes this project's theoretical and historical parameters. The bulk of the chapter is divided into two sections. The first discusses theories of meaning as they apply to advertising and music and defines my application of them to music *in* advertising. Here I position the aims of my project at the crossroads of leading socio-cultural and musicological theories and methodologies. The chapter's second half is historical, telling the story of popular music's place in advertising and outlining “pop's” ties to visual media (including advertising and television) as well as the underlying neoliberal forms of capitalism that pervaded the 1980s.

Chapter two, “When Soda Met Pop: Michael Jackson and Pepsi Make the Deal of the Century,” investigates Pepsi’s pioneering 1984 “Choice of a New Generation” campaign. This new relationship was intended to boost Jackson’s visibility and lend cultural credibility to Pepsi. In this chapter, I outline how this deal drastically changed the look and sound of celebrity endorsements. I provide an analytical model for examining the aesthetic reworking of Jackson’s image and pre-existing pop song, “Billie Jean” within the overarching framework of Schudson’s notion of “capitalist realism.” I also expand upon Theodor W. Adorno’s critique of the “fetish-character of music” under capitalist reproduction, and Judith Williamson’s concept of “re-presentation.”³⁵

Chapter three, “The Day the Jingle Died: Reconstructing Temporality and the Celebrity in Michael Jackson’s ’88 Episodic Pepsi Campaign,” investigates Pepsi’s second deal with Jackson and expands upon theories of capitalist realism and its reformation of cultural meanings. In particular, I focus on marketers’ re-shuffling of “Bad’s” teleological structures to bolster the incredulous action sequences displayed onscreen. I also extend cultural theorists Robert Goldman and Steven Papson’s discussion of celebrity “simulations” in advertising to demonstrate how the soda giant re-presented Jackson’s controversial androgynous appearance and the media-generated legend of his reclusiveness in their spots.³⁶ This chapter further illuminates the historical precedents set by the ’88 commercial since it incorporated a hybrid of Jackson’s original lyrics and Pepsi’s slogan, was the first-ever episodic spot, looked more like music videos than any other to date, and was integral to publicizing Jackson’s newest album, video, and tour.

Chapter four, “Pepsi’s Unanswered ‘Prayer’: Failed Capitalist Realism in Madonna’s 1989 ‘Make a Wish’ Commercial,” investigates Pepsi’s missteps in its final attempt to move away from the

³⁵ See Adorno, “On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1982), 281. See also Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1978), 178.

³⁶ Goldman and Papson, *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 31-32.

jingle and branded slogans. As perhaps the most notorious campaign in advertising history, this chapter addresses how the soda giant's commercial with Madonna broke all of the rules of capitalist realism and unintentionally positioned Pepsi's brand at the center of the pop star's controversial agenda for her newest single, "Like a Prayer." This chapter demonstrates how Madonna's stylistic choices for the song were intended to question dominant racial and religious ideologies and how the commercial's images also appear to grapple with the same tropes. Pepsi's naïve approach to Madonna and her music—including its agreement not to change any of the song's provocative lyrics or re-order major aspects of its structures—caused marketers to lose control of "Like a Prayer's" densely coded sonic signifiers. The commercial then, inadvertently, stands as an echo of the obviously modern and Brechtian music video version of the song, ultimately causing what Goldman and Papson would term as the spot's failed "metacommunication" and making its reception highly controversial.³⁷

Chapter five, "Implications of a Material World: The Reign of Multi-branding and the Reformation of Pop in the New Millennium" considers Pepsi's 2012 Super Bowl commercial featuring the inaugural winner of the *X-Factor* reality show, Melanie Amaro, to examine how relationships between brands and musicians have expanded in the twenty-first century as Pepsi now flaunts its ties to the production of music. I investigate advertising's "claim" to musical culture, but use McCracken and Adorno's theories, among others, to demonstrate the falsehood to Pepsi's promise for musical "freedom" and innovation.³⁸ But as media sources and my ethnography suggest, Pepsi's offer of innovation is in itself a capitalist realist fantasy that many audiences can see right through.

³⁷ I use Brecht's theory of "alienation" to discuss how familiar musical and visual signifiers are placed (unintentionally) in a way that forces viewers to engage with the commercial's social and political tropes in much the same way as Madonna intentionally juxtaposes them in the video. See Berthold Brecht, "New Technique of Acting," in *Brecht on Theater*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964). For Goldman and Papson's use of the term "equivalence" see *Nike Culture*, 35.

³⁸ Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 11.

Finally, a brief conclusion offers closing thoughts and reflects briefly on the dynamic and changing role of music in commercial contexts. I end the dissertation by considering possible avenues for further inquiry as co- and multi-branding deals have become increasingly sophisticated in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1:

“Money for Nothing”: Framing Meaning and Defining Pop in the MTV Era

When Nike used the Beatles’ “Revolution” in 1987, fans were ready to hit the bricks in rebellion. It was a flashpoint moment—but not as intended. Rather than validating the inseparable connection between the lyric content—and context—and the tune, that moment separated *music and meaning* forever, in ad terms.³⁹

The appearance of the Beatles’ 1968 hit “Revolution” in a Nike commercial caused a vicious backlash from fans outraged that an iconic song penned by a martyred musician—one that encapsulated the privileged relationship between the 1960s counterculture and musical authenticity—was being used 20 years later to sell sneakers. As Bethany Klein describes in her book, opposition stemmed from rock ideologies formed around the time of the song’s conception, which sought to resist the corporate world and demand that musicians maintain a specifically anti-commercial value of artistic integrity in (mostly “white”) popular genres.⁴⁰ Decades of baby-boomer ideology thus encouraged music lovers well into the 1980s to hold on to the belief that “authentic” forms of popular music—namely rock—should represent rebellion, originality, and above all, “sticking it to the (corporate) man.”⁴¹ Artists in this generation, even some in genres peripheral to rock, who willingly placed themselves or their music in ads were likely to be disowned, first by critics and then by their fans. So prior to the 1980s, even considering an appearance (much less a performance) in a commercial signaled the end of their careers.⁴² Musicologist Joanna Demers

³⁹ Mark Lepage, “Who Doesn’t Sell Out?,” *Gazette (Montreal)* November 24, 2007. Culture section. See also Nike’s commercial, “Revolution in Motion,” 1987.

⁴⁰ These views stem from countercultural rock ideologies in the 1960s that extended into and progressive rock in the 1970s. See chapter two in Klein’s *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009).

⁴¹ Jack Black’s wanna-be rock star character in the movie *School of Rock* echoes this sentiment to his students. DVD, directed by Richard Linklater (Hollywood, CA: Paramount, 2004).

⁴² See Joanna Demers’s account of Nancy Sinatra, Bette Midler, and Tom Waits’ lawsuits against major companies such as Goodyear Tire for using their musical style, songs, and image in commercials without their permission. Waits explicitly stated that he feared his audience would think that he “had ‘sold out’ to corporate interests after insisting on

summarizes this prevailing wisdom: “entertainers appeared in commercials when they could no longer perform in more lucrative gigs like music recordings and films.”⁴³ As a result, many “self-respecting” musicians *never* appeared in ads and fought to keep their likenesses and musical facsimiles out of openly commercialized contexts. Additionally, corporate businesses rarely considered using popular music in advertisements following a string of lawsuits and an overhaul of intellectual property law in the ’70s.⁴⁴ So despite the reality that the Beatles actually began their careers as a publically commercialized “brand” of rock ‘n’ roll, many fans believed that the group’s later albums—including the controversial “white album” (*The Beatles*) on which two different versions of “Revolution” appear—had reached an aesthetic autonomy akin to works by major figures iconic in “classical” music genres.⁴⁵ As a result, critics like Mark Lepage (cited above) alleged that the Nike’s “Revolution in Motion” campaign violated all prior meanings it held for fans who grew up with the song and felt personal connections to it. Written twenty years after the commercial aired, Lepage echoed the complaints that had infiltrated the popular press for decades: he accused marketers of ripping “Revolution” apart, separating “lyric” from “tune,” and placing the broken fragments it in a context they didn’t belong, thus destroying the song’s musical structures and altering its meanings from the inside, out.

I’ve opened this chapter with the quotation from Lepage because I find both his comment and the notorious Nike campaign he reflects on useful points of departure for clarifying this

his own artistic autonomy” 65. Refer to pages 59-70 in *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Effects Musical Creativity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

⁴³ Ibid, 65.

⁴⁴ Most notably, the Sound Recording Act of 1971 was extended to all sound recordings published on or after February 15, 1972. Additionally, advertising agencies and their clients who neglected to ask permission to use original recordings or cover versions of pre-existing songs were slapped with harsh monetary penalties. Ibid, 21-30.

⁴⁵ Numerous scholarly writings discuss the Beatles’ albums as high art forms. One of the first was written by Richard Poirier titled, “Learning from the Beatles,” first published in the *Partisan Review* (1967): 526-546. The fact that many institutions of higher learning (including UCLA) devote entire courses to the Beatles’ music attests to the status the band holds in intellectual communities. As a side-note, the version of “Revolution” used in the Nike commercial was released on the B-side of the single for “Hey Jude.”

dissertation's parameters. Not only does Lepage's argument directly address this dissertation's thesis—stating that Nike's marketers *reformed* any meanings “Revolution” might have held for its fans—but it also brings up a point that I find essential to discuss upfront, namely the fact that examining *old rock* songs in commercials requires different methods of inquiry than those needed to unpack *new pop*'s roles in commercials. Nike's “Revolution in Motion” campaign therefore presents a useful counter-example to the contemporary 1980s Pepsi campaigns that I examine, as indicated by the distinct reactions they received from audiences.

Setting the Terms Straight

Although Klein discusses general concepts of meaning for co-branding arrangements in *As Heard on TV*, my work proves distinct from hers in terms of its historical scope and inclusion of musicological perspectives and methodologies.⁴⁶ Save for the nostalgic “Music Icons” and “King's Court” commercials noted in the introduction, my project focuses on pivotal 1980s commercials that featured *new pop musicians singing their latest hits*. More specifically, my discussions locate “pop” as a specific and unique genre of popular music. In her book, Klein's analyses conflate popular musical genres and she never addresses the crucial differences between putting old rock standards and new pop songs into commercials. While these two genres may be difficult to distinguish absolutely, they should be considered separately since they're steeped in different ideologies of “authenticity,” performance, and “selling out.” Furthermore, they appeal to audiences with distinct social, economic, and political backgrounds.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Klein, *As Heard on TV*, 97-120. The commercials she analyzes are two particularly problematic co-branding deals: Royal Caribbean's use of Ziggy Pop's “Lust for Life” and Wrangler Jeans' appropriation of Creedence Clearwater Revival's “Fortunate Son.”

⁴⁷ These distinctions are unpacked further in the sections below.

Despite the fact that Pepsi's commercials treated Michael Jackson and Madonna's songs similarly to Nike's handling of "Revolution," audience reactions to the soda giant's uses of pre-existing popular music proved more favorable. As chapters two through four discuss, audiences responded approvingly to Jackson's 1984 campaign and somewhat ambivalently to his '87-88 campaign. And while the reception to Madonna's commercial proved less-than positive for many audiences, opponents weren't protesting what Pepsi *did to* her song, but what they *didn't do* to it: the soda giant's marketers didn't adequately strip it of its structures and stylistic nuances to make it banal and suitable enough for a global advertising campaign. I would argue then that the music used by Pepsi wasn't (yet) canonized into cultural history, unlike "Revolution," which brought decades of historical and cultural baggage into an advertisement for sneakers. Hence, aligning the new(ish) single "Billie Jean," just released song "Bad," and not-yet released single "Like a Prayer" with soda was less of an affront to fans' *predetermined* notions about the songs' meanings and/or place in cultural history. In fact, one could argue that Pepsi had the potential advantage of *shaping* each song's meanings to permanently align with its brand since the music was just making its way into consumer consciousness. Thus, these distinctions prove important for analyzing musical meaning since the experiences of their audiences prove different: older music has had ample chance to accumulate meanings in other contexts, while new songs don't carry the same cultural weight nor provide/provoke the same resistance. This is especially true when the new songs are pop, which as I'll argue below, has historically embraced its status as a commercialized (and televised) genre.

The issue with Nike's campaign that further pushed audiences over the edge was the fact that the members of the Beatles still living at the time—Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, and George Harrison—didn't authorize the song's use. It was actually Michael Jackson, who owned the song and licensed it to Nike.⁴⁸ This brings me back briefly to my point about ideology, since Jackson, an

⁴⁸ Klein, *As Heard on TV*, 28.

African American '80s pop star, didn't subscribe to the same white, countercultural principles held by rock musicians and fans. His rejection of rock ideologies that advocated the maintenance of artistic autonomy from corporate institutions was confirmed by his willingness to lend *his own* image and music to Pepsi's commercials both before and after his licensing of "Revolution" to Nike.⁴⁹

In addition to considerations of genre, this dissertation will also be careful include the commercials' *images* in discussions of meaning. Additionally, I will associate each commercials' unique mixture of sound and visuals with other prominent cultural texts, including album versions of the songs, music videos, and live performances. I argue then that *context* is hugely important to considerations of meaning in multimedia formats and also to discussions of pop, which has historically been a visual *and* a musical medium. The fact that Klein leaves out discussions of what the commercials she examines *look* like means that she ignores key information necessary for deciphering the possible meanings audiences may take away.

My work perhaps differs most sharply from other work on the topic in that I employ *formal musical analysis* to investigate how cutting and re-combining musical structures to fit commercial contexts often disrupts traditional (and expected) teleologies, and by extension, meanings, in American pop music. I don't think it's enough to simply say *that* musical meanings are reformed, but I would argue that music scholars should use their expertise to investigate *how* its done. Klein's own methods for analyzing musical meaning in her book prove problematic as she identifies only four registers in which meaning can be located in musical forms: linguistic, instrumental, personal, and sociocultural.⁵⁰ In particular, I find her perspective on "instrumentation" unhelpful, since it limits her discussion of the music's sonic properties to simple descriptions of the timbral changes

⁴⁹ Note also that there were no rockers in Pepsi's progression of ad-validated "Music Icons," and most of the artists are either African American or perform in a style strongly marked as "black."

⁵⁰ Klein, *As Heard on TV*, 101.

that occur when songs are played on instruments other than the ones heard in original recordings. Changes in instrumentation are certainly important for examining meaning, but a discussion about timbre barely scratches the surface of how musical meanings are re-directed when placed in commercials. Analyses of formal structures, including harmony, melody, rhythm, texture, and cadential points as well as considerations of the historical significance of the aural tropes employed, prove equally essential to unpacking their semiotic functions. And as I will demonstrate, it is the structural changes *within* musical forms, not simply the new context of advertising, that has the potential to alter the perceived meanings of pop songs used to sell branded commodities.

Klein justifies her inattentiveness to the formal construction of music by following a similar premise as sociologist Tia DeNora, saying that it's shortsighted to locate meaning primarily on the terms of musical text or authorship. Like DeNora, she argues that such a narrow view has the potential to dislocate audiences from the process of meaning making.⁵¹ While I agree, I postulate that musical structures shouldn't be *ignored* either, since the arrangement of notes, rhythms, harmonies, and melodies are signifiers borrowed from historical, social, and cultural practices to convey meaning to audiences. Even DeNora acknowledges that the music itself is important, noting: "music is a referent (with varying degrees of conventional connotations, varying strengths of pre-established relations with non-musical matters) for clarifying the otherwise potentially polysemic character of non-musical phenomena (social circumstance, identities, moods and energy levels, for example)."⁵²

The pages below clarify my approaches to unpacking musical meaning in this dissertation. In my close analysis of Pepsi's commercials using *new pop* music, I pay special attention to issues of genre, context, and formal analysis. The remainder of this chapter is broken into two parts. The first

⁵¹ Ibid, 97-98. See Tia De Nora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵² De Nora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 44.

establishes a theoretical scaffolding for discussions of musical meaning in advertising. The second untangles the history of late-twentieth century “pop” by discussing its emergence onto MTV, its place as an often parallel but distinct genre from “rock,” its blatant ties to television since the mid-twentieth century, and its ideological suitability for 1980s advertising contexts.

Part I: Frameworks of Meaning

It’s tricky to unpack the “meaning” of cultural texts since, as De Nora notes, they are fundamentally polysemic, shifting unpredictably from person to person, context to context. In what follows, I subscribe to a basic tenet of semiotic theory that argues that the range of meanings audiences glean from cultural texts are decoded from the signs and signifiers that the creators of those texts (intentionally or not) use to construct them. A text therefore communicates to an audience through the historically, culturally, and socially determined signs and signifiers of which it consists—a concept convincingly demonstrated by music semiotician Philip Tagg in his meticulous deconstruction of the 60-second theme to the 1970s television show, *Kojak*.⁵³ As noted by Klein and DeNora above, the experience of the interpreter is essential to decoding those signifiers and if he/she is unfamiliar or misinterprets them, the “intended” meanings can be altogether lost.⁵⁴ Because both American advertising and pop music texts are created to circulate widely, they generally operate within the presumed boundaries of their target audiences’ pre-existing experiences and decoding capabilities. I would argue then that examining a text’s signifiers and considering them within larger cultural contexts allows one to deduce possible meanings audiences might glean from

⁵³ See Tagg’s, *Kojak, 60 Seconds of Television Music: Toward the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* (Larchmont: Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, 2000).

⁵⁴ I do not claim that “authors” have a finite set of “intended” meanings, but I am saying that they operate within a general set of ideas that they hope to communicate. Michael Jackson’s discussion of his reasons for writing “Billie Jean” (cited in chapter two of this dissertation) and Madonna’s discussion of intentions behind writing her song “Like a Prayer” (quoted in chapter four) are just a few examples of musicians claiming to convey specific agendas through their music.

it. And as this project demonstrates, when coupled with firsthand accounts from the texts' creators (marketers and pop stars) and/or audience receptions (consumers and fans), it's further possible to unpack how and why the combination of popular music and advertising exemplify a particularly complicated and volatile source of meanings, especially in cases when intended messages are incongruent with how they are received.

Examining meaning in commercials that incorporate popular music requires the integration of discourses from the study of culture, media, and music. Despite the differing approaches of these fields, I find that they depend on three overarching and unifying ideas about how meaning, and specifically musical meaning in advertising, works: 1). Advertising *borrow*s meanings from cultural texts, 2). The meanings emitted and received depend on *context*, 3). Meaning is dependent on how visual and musical signs and signifiers are *structured*. Examining meaning on these terms allows me not only to investigate music's role in specific commercials, but also to consider the socio/political ideologies that surround specific music and advertising texts.

Theories of Meaning in Advertising

As an instrument of capitalism, an advertisement's only purpose is to get people to buy things. Over the course of the twentieth-century, the look and sound of the cultural forms devoted to this goal have changed considerably. Among the fundamental shifts in its approach has been the rise of an advertising aesthetic: especially since the 1960s, marketers have increasingly sought to make artistically ambitious advertisements that appeal to savvy consumers.⁵⁵ Likenesses of "hip" pop cultural images and sounds began to infiltrate the advertising world during the 1960s in order to

⁵⁵ Cultural theorist Stuart Ewen argues that the use of aesthetics in advertising dates back to the early 1900s. See, *Captains of Consciousness*, 61-68. For discussions about how art and music became increasingly prevalent in advertising as the century progressed, see also Frank's *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) as well as Klein's *As Heard on TV*.

attract the (supposedly) hard to reach “youth market.”⁵⁶ Approximately twenty years later, when popular musicians were willingly lending their images and songs to campaigns, the expressed aim of advertising changed to “entertainment.”⁵⁷ As exemplary models for this new genre of advertising, Pepsi’s Jackson and Madonna commercials illuminate how in the effort to “entertain,” advertisers grew increasingly ambitious in reforming potent pop cultural texts and re-directing their meanings.⁵⁸ In order to investigate this process, I rely on semiotic analysis done by mid-late twentieth-century theorists that follow the work done by Jean Baudrillard.⁵⁹

Since the 1980s, sociologist Grant McCracken has theorized the ways in which meaning circulates in a consumer society through goods. Building on Veblen’s theory of the leisure class and Baudrillard’s theories of the symbolic exchange of commodities, he postulates that the “mobile quality” of meaning is a circular process from culture, to products, to consumers, and then back to culture.⁶⁰ Within this system, he locates advertisements as a primary facilitator (next to fashion) for the transfer of meanings from culture to individuals.⁶¹ In the sequel to his first book, he describes the process in usefully synoptic terms:

⁵⁶ Thomas Frank discusses how Pepsi adopted the look and sounds of the counterculture in the ’60s. See his *Conquest of Cool*, 174-178. See also my discussion of it in relationship to Pepsi’s 1980s commercials in chapter two of this dissertation.

⁵⁷ Chapter two of this dissertation discusses this in depth. A Marxist interpretation of this trend would argue that advertising’s focus on “entertainment” further concealed the means of production for goods hawked as well as people’s relationships to each other and material commodities. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990).

⁵⁸ As chapter two will discuss, Pepsi executives and marketers claimed that the campaigns with Jackson were meant to be entertaining above all else.

⁵⁹ Ideas underlying this project come from Baudrillard’s: *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. George Ritzer (London: Sage, 1998); *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 2005); and *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

⁶⁰ Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 71-72, 89. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, Macmillan, 1912).

⁶¹ McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 72-73.

The transfer process begins when the advertiser identifies the cultural meanings intended for the product (i.e. the type of gender, status, age, lifestyle, and time and place meanings)...the advertiser decides what he or she wishes the product to say.

Once this change has been made, the advertiser surveys the culturally constituted world for the objects, persons, and contexts that already contain and give voice to these meanings...However, the advertiser must portray the elements and the product with consummate care and skill. This care is necessary for two reasons. First, elements come charged with more meanings than are wanted for the produce, so the advertiser must evoke some, not all of the meanings of the elements. Second, elements must be presented in such a way that the similarity between them suggests itself irresistibly to the viewer. This precise combination of elements sets the stage for the transfer of meanings from the product to the consumer. Imprecise or unsophisticated combinations discourage it.⁶²

As McCracken notes, the process of re-mapping meanings is tricky and advertisers are sometimes clumsy in their attempts to co-opt culturally rich signifiers. This dissertation therefore addresses not only the meanings that marketers captured and re-worked from the music and images they co-opted, but also those that they weren't able to eliminate or re-direct. As chapter four will enumerate, Pepsi learned the hard way from its failed collaboration with Madonna—whose image, by the way, is notably absent from its historical survey of cola-enabled “Musical Icons” discussed in the introduction—that musical signifiers are particularly slippery, and have the potential to escape even the most determined attempts to control them.

This dissertation also engages with Judith Williamson, Sut Jhally, and Raymond Williams who all consider advertising to be a form of “magic” that animates inert commodities with personal and social meaning.⁶³ Jhally postulates that the breakdown of the family and religious institutions

⁶² McCracken, *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 104.

⁶³ Raymond Williams, “Advertising: The Magic System,” in *Media Studies: a Reader*, eds Paul Marris and Sue Thronham (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 704-709. Williams adds that advertising is a “cultural pattern,” a “highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies, but rather strangely co-existent with a highly developed scientific technology.” 221. See Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1978) and Jhally, “Advertising as Religion,” in *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2006), 85-98.

have allowed a space for advertising to step in and offer guidance to the general population. He claims that “advertising derives its power from providing meaning that is not available elsewhere.”⁶⁴ To Jhally, the “use-value” of a cultural commodity “stem[s] from the *meaning* it generates.”⁶⁵ He continues, saying “[r]ecords, films, newspapers, paintings and the like provide meaning for their consumers. If a cultural commodity did not provide this, then it would not be capable of being sold.”⁶⁶

Jhally follows Williamson, who as early as 1978 used semiotic analysis to discuss the meanings conveyed by print advertisements. She summarized viewer’s relationships to advertising with the statement: “ads produce a universe of puzzles—one that we cannot move in without ‘deciphering,’ one that requires us to stop and work out a solution.”⁶⁷ McCracken’s work shows signs of her influence since Williamson had already argued that advertising works a mediator for meaning and that it produces a “‘metastructure’ where meaning is not just ‘decoded’ within one structure but *transferred* to create another.”⁶⁸ She concluded that advertising’s meanings are ideologically constructed and can (and should) be resisted since advertising uses meaning as a kind of currency to “re-present” culturally constructed signs.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Jhally further discusses how in the modern and post-modern worlds the commodity is empty from production. He hypothesizes that advertising has stepped in to fill the commodity’s emptiness with magic and meaning. See “Advertising as Religion,” 89.

⁶⁵ See Jhally “The Political Economy of Culture” in *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 59. Jhally obviously takes a Baudrillardian and not a Marxist stance on the issue of use value. I too subscribe to the notion that the use-value of an object lies in its symbolic meanings. Emphasis his.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 59.

⁶⁷ Williamson. *Decoding Advertisements*, 71. Emphasis added.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 43.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 178. While I borrow this terminology from Williamson, I re-situate it in the context of images and music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century commercials I discuss.

Along the same lines, Roland Barthes once argued that advertisements promote “myths” and as such they work to *distort* that which they seek to signify.⁷⁰ Elaborating on Barthes’ and Williamsons’ work, theorists Robert Goldman and Steven Papson provide an examination of visual signifiers from which I extend to the musical signifiers in pop songs. In particular, their re-coining of the terms “appellate” (how ads invite audiences in), “alreadyness” (what ideological assumptions and experiences audiences bring to ad), and “equivalence,” (the link made between the product and result promised) prove helpful for considering audiences’ relationships to musical meaning in commercials.⁷¹

Most notably, Michael Schudson’s notion of “*capitalist realism*” provides *the* overarching theoretical construct for this dissertation. Like the rest of the theorists surveyed here, Schudson hypothesizes that visual “art” placed in advertising *borrow*s from other cultural forms to abstract and re-direct previously formed aesthetic meanings to fit branded contexts.⁷² He goes on to note that advertising “more often flattens than deepens experience.” In the chapters that follow, I will extend his insight to pop music to discuss how marketers have attempted to flatten out complex musical structures and exploit emptied-out sonic signifiers as they build the fantasy worlds of consumption over which Pepsi’s “Musical Icons” rule.

Theories of Music and Meaning

My investigation of how formal musical structures signify in commercials builds on analyses of musical meaning and advertising pioneered by David Huron, Nicolas Cook, Lawrence Kramer, Susan McClary and Robert Fink, among others. In “Music in Advertising: An Analytic Paradigm,”

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 121.

⁷¹ See their *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996) and *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 35.

⁷² Schudson’s, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 215.

music cognition scholar David Huron defined six ways in which jingles contribute to the effectiveness of a commercial: entertainment, structure/continuity, memorability, lyrical language, targeting, and authority establishment.⁷³ Huron labeled advertising agencies as “research institutes for social meanings,” due to the immense amount of meaning-directed demographic research marketers do. He concludes saying, “But it is the overt knowledge of objectives and the consequent desire to control and handle the tools of musical meaning which make advertising such a compelling object of musical study.”⁷⁴ I find this statement to be a useful point of departure as it is this dissertation’s explicit task to engage with the various ways that marketers have attempted to “control and handle” the meanings of pre-existing music not originally created to sell products. Jingles are created solely for the purpose of selling a particular brand’s goods and are constructed on to fit the product as well as the visual and temporal parameters of the spot. Pre-existing music, on the other hand, is created and circulated (or in the case of new music that premieres in commercials, *intended* to be circulated) *outside* the commercial. Marketers therefore have to cut down, re-arrange, and re-mold pre-existing music to fit both the time constraints of the spot and the affective imperatives of the brand. Throughout this dissertation, I will analyze the how marketers have attempted to “jingle-ize” popular songs to fit established advertising parameters. This process begins by pulverizing a song’s distinctive structures of tension and release and then “fetishizing” its most memorable portions: a fate all too similar to that lamented by Theodor W. Adorno when famous themes like the opening motive of Beethoven’s Fifth or the lyrical moments of Schubert were plucked from their classical symphonic works to accommodate popular solo and small ensemble transcriptions.⁷⁵ I read Adorno

⁷³ Huron, “Music in Advertising: An Analytic Paradigm,” *Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1989), 560.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 572.

⁷⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1982), 281.

against the grain here to address the *structural* consequences of corporate sponsorship when songs are stripped of their dialectical depth and complexity and then reworked to fit within 30- to 45-second spots.⁷⁶

My analyses are a continuation of work begun by music theorist Nicolas Cook, who was the first music scholar to consider the use of pre-existing music in commercials—specifically *classical* music in car commercials. Cook offers one of the first attempts to examine what happens to pre-existing music when used in multi-media forms, including commercials, music videos, and films. While I find Cook’s neglect of cultural theory, audience perceptions, and social context problematic, I do find his interest in investigating musical meaning in specific multimedia contexts—“what the music means here”—a practical first step.⁷⁷ Lawrence Kramer builds on Cook’s argument to posit that while music absorbs some meanings from its association with the “imagetext,” a song also brings its own significations into the mix.⁷⁸

Because it stands outside the imagetext, music is semantically absorptive, or, to change the metaphor, a semantic chameleon. Under certain common conditions, it becomes replete with meanings ascribed to it on the basis of the imagetext, *while also holding over a remainder that exceeds those meanings. At the same time both the ascriptive process and the remainder will affect the imagetext in kind. This process may also work in reverse, though its reciprocity is limited by the power or privilege of the imagetext to set the terms of meaning. That conceded, the music can modify the semantic agenda by conveying meanings of its own into the imagetext, which also holds over a remainder that exceeds them.*⁷⁹

While I disagree with Kramer’s language here since it assigns agency the music and imagetext, I do think he makes a valid point in saying that in the process of deciphering meanings—something that

⁷⁶ Adorno talks discusses the “dialectic” of construction and expression in *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 55-57.

⁷⁷ For Cook’s analysis of classical music in car commercials see chapter one in *Analyzing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). I would argue that isolating a commercial’s music and images cannot offer complete perspective of the many layers of meanings available in a commercial text.

⁷⁸ Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Kramer’s arguments are elaborated in chapter two.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 149. Emphasis mine.

can only be done by *audiences*—the music and images have the potential to bring various chains of signifiers into an “imagetext,” and that when taken together, they effect how each might be perceived. As mentioned above, musical meaning is dependent both on the significance of music’s role with the visuals and on the aural experiences (as well as the decoding capabilities) of the listener. For well-known celebrities like Michael Jackson and Madonna, prior audience experiences with their images and their music undoubtedly proved key to their reception.

Along these same lines, popular music scholars Carol Vernallis and Andrew Goodwin each provide useful ways of considering meaning in MTV videos. I find Vernallis’ method of considering the flow of images in relationship to musical structures valuable for considering those same relations in commercial texts. I also borrow her term “direct word painting” to describe moments when lyrics are literally depicted in the onscreen action—a practice marketers seem to favor.⁸⁰ Goodwin focuses more on the images that accompany pop music and argues that they are equally necessary for decoding musical meaning. He postulates that young 1980s audiences specifically looked to music videos to learn artists’ interpretations of their songs.⁸¹ While I disagree with his premise that pop ideologies that favored visual images were necessarily new in the ’80s, I concur that the increased amount of visual representations of popular musics made audiences even more reliant on sight as part of their musical experience.⁸² Sociologist Jaap Kooijman echoes Goodwin in his analysis of Jackson’s *Motown 25* anniversary performance, documenting that audiences favored the spectacle of MTV videos in live performances.⁸³ I extend these theories to consider how the images of Jackson

⁸⁰ Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 217.

⁸¹ Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 24-48. His arguments will be elaborated in chapter two.

⁸² I will elaborate on this more below.

⁸³ See Kooijman, “Michael Jackson: *Motown 25* Pasadena Civic Auditorium March 25, 1983,” in *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, ed. Ian Inglis (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 119-127.

and Madonna were depicted in commercials in ways that complimented the product and examine how the images compare or contrast those circulated in the other cultural contexts in which they participated.

My work builds most obviously on texts by musicologists Susan McClary and Robert Fink who have both written extensively on meaning in popular and art musics.⁸⁴ Both authors illustrate how formal musical structures create a sense of motion and can effect how music is perceived. While the majority of McClary's work focuses on more traditional teleological practices that date back to Renaissance Western art musics, she also uses Madonna's music to demonstrate how tonality, structure, and teleology might effect the reception of contemporary popular songs. Fink supports and extends McClary's discussion about teleology by demonstrating how minimalism and disco intentionally subvert expected musical trajectories, generating what he calls "recombinant teleologies" that work to delay gratification.⁸⁵ Since the music in commercials is integrated *on the terms of the commercial*, and not on the telos of a given song, I build on these discussions to demonstrate how popular songs are re-worked in commercials to rush toward, delay, or suspend musical resolution in order increase desire for the product. By reordering the inherent goal-directedness of musical structures, marketers have the power to influence musical meanings by picking and choosing which musical moments to include, which to discard, and in what order to arrange them. These factors ultimately effect the song's ability to move coherently through time. And as my analysis indicates, just by interfering with a song's melodies, harmonies, textures, and rhythms, marketers have the ability to change how audiences perceive it.

⁸⁴ McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Fink, *Repeating Ourselves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). See chapter three of this dissertation for more on how I apply their work to my own. I also discuss McClary's work in chapter four.

⁸⁵ Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 42-47.

Part II: Historical Framework

MTV Beginnings

Because Music Television encompasses both pop music and advertising, I'll begin the historical portion of this chapter with a brief examination of the network in its early years. In August of 1981 MTV debuted to the sounds of The Buggles' semi-prophetic song, "Video Killed the Radio Star." According to Roberta Cruger, who held various positions at the network in its formative years, MTV was originally designed to play only "album-oriented rock" videos.⁸⁶ Cruger relayed that the network's preference for rock was partially due to the fact that MTV was reliant on the videos sent by the labels for free, of which (she claimed) happened mostly to be rock. I would add, however, that MTV's initial focus on AOR was also financial. At the time of the network's inception, cable television was still relatively new, and most subscribers were located in rural mid-western regions.⁸⁷ In an effort to maintain the attention of their small, white, middle-class audience, MTV chose to stick to rock in its early years. Accordingly, it focused on getting the scarce "white" rock videos it could from American labels, and eventually branched out to British new wave acts who gratefully handed over their videos and attain exposure that was otherwise impossible in the U.S.⁸⁸ As the story goes, the network's preference for white genres soon got it into trouble, especially since videos by African American artists were repeatedly refused airplay.⁸⁹ But once

⁸⁶ Roberta Cruger, In person interview by author, June 7, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁸⁷ Many who purchased cable in the late '70s and early '80s did so out of necessity because they lived too far from large cities to get reliable transmission. Cable took awhile to catch on in urban areas because people didn't see a need to pay for television when they already got so many stations for free. See John Covach, *What's That Sound?: An Introduction to Rock and Its History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2009), 451-452.

⁸⁸ It's widely believed that the main reason for new wave's success in the U.S. was its exposure on MTV. See Covach, *What's that Sound?*, 463-466. Cruger also confirmed that the success of the new wave groups in rural regions that had MTV caught everyone off-guard. In person interview by author, June 7, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁸⁹ Cruger told me that Rick James was denied airplay for his "Super Freak" because it was too risqué and it didn't fit the station's AOR vision. She also said that their decision to play Michael Jackson's videos ("Billie Jean" in particular) was

Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" video secured a constant rotation on the channel in 1983, its success made the music and cable industries realize MTV's potential, not only financially, but artistically as well.

MTV forced rockers back in front of the camera, making the less attractive and less charismatic onstage performers look awkward and causing die-hard rock fans to detest MTV in its early years.⁹⁰ But Jackson's high-budget pop videos set the bar higher with their impressive cinematography, creative narratives, elaborate costuming, and choreographed dance routines. Within a few short years, MTV thus offered musicians from a variety of genres a space to be more creative with their performances. It also allowed musicians to add more layers of meanings to their songs. As Cruger confirmed, the most successful videos by the mid-'80s were simultaneously good "programming" (i.e. creative) and a convincing advertisement for the record.⁹¹ So along with providing an advertising space for musical acts, MTV provided a (generally) no-holds-barred medium for the kinds of experimentation and spectacle that in preceding years had become central to other forms of pop (like disco) and its fringes.⁹²

As the network gave musicians new opportunities for creative performances, it also gave audiences more ways to experience musical performances outside of the standard "live" rock-concert look. Unlike the teenagers of the 1960s, the number of young audiences who watched

based on the fact that they were innovative, well made, and his music fit within the aesthetics of the rock tradition. In person interview by author, June 7, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles. Steve Knopper tells a different version of the story in his book, alleging that a lawyer for Jackson's record label demanded that "Billie Jean" be put on air. He does however confirm that MTV co-founder Bob Pittman remembers it differently. I find it noteworthy that Pittman's story closely resembles the one told to me by Cruger, since he was her boss. See *Appetite For Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Clash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 8-11.

⁹⁰ Cruger, In person interview by author, June 7, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Some acts who had mastered the spectacle by the late-'70s, including David Bowie, Queen, and Elton John, also claimed to be rockers. Funk and new wave are examples of other genres that embraced the visual and physical aesthetics that pop helped cultivate in the early years of television.

television in the mid-1980s had grown exponentially, especially by 1983 when MTV had branched to large markets like New York and LA. Television programming itself had also changed considerably with the proliferation of cable television since new networks had the luxury of marketing to much narrower audiences than the majors on broadcast channels.⁹³ Accordingly, MTV didn't have to appeal to parents or young siblings and could stick to their intended 18-34 year old demographic. Being able to cater to this specialized market allowed it to become what many scholars have dubbed the ultimate postmodern medium.⁹⁴ And as Cruger's comment implies (and scholars have noted), MTV mixed its programming and commercials in a way that often made separating the two difficult.⁹⁵

Pop and Advertising

Goldman and Papson argue that in the 1980s, the advertising industry realized that older advertising ploys no longer worked for contemporary audiences and thus marketers intentionally made their branding efforts look like MTV's "postmodern bricolage" of images.⁹⁶ The need to revamp the ad business came not only from pressures that had been mounting since the 1950s—increases in technology, industrial growth, and more generally, the amount of goods available to the

⁹³ J. Fred Macdonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 221-288.

⁹⁴ The network even defined itself as being indefinable. Posters I found in the MTV archive read: "Just when you think you know what it is, it's MTV." 1981-1982, Fred/Alan MTV Network Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Series 1: Box 4, MTV Folder, Washington D.C. Fred/Alan MTV Network Collection, National Museum of American History.

⁹⁵ Jhally notes, "While on network TV it is relatively easy to distinguish between programme and advertisement, narrowcasting such as MTV dramatically intensifies the 'blurring.'" See *Codes of Advertising* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 97.

⁹⁶ See Goldman and Papson's "Advertising in the Age of Accelerated Meaning" in *The Consumer Society Reader*, eds. Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 88-98. These authors discuss how the public was bored with old advertising practices and how marketers worked to create new meanings for brands by aligning logos with images seemingly unrelated to them or their products. This article is a continuation of the arguments they lay out in their two previous books cited above: *Sign Wars* and *Nike Culture*.

public in an ever-more affluent society—but also thanks to the American audience’s mastery of, and increasing resistance to, the language of advertising, which had trained them how to consume for four generations.⁹⁷ Author Thomas Frank notes in his influential book *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, that ’80s marketers (specifically the ones working for the soft-drink giants) went back to practices they had used in the 1960s, appropriating music and images from the counterculture. Once again they sought new “hip” and “cool” ways to entice young audiences, eventually leading to the adoption of MTV’s aesthetic practices that focused on visual montage and performance.⁹⁸ Roberta Cruger confirmed this saying that advertising agencies repeatedly called the network to ask for the contact information for directors of their music videos.⁹⁹ Pepsi’s executives also admitted they sought out and hired Bob Giraldi to make Jackson’s first campaign look like the video for the pop star’s video hit “Beat It,” which he had just directed.¹⁰⁰

Numerous social and cultural theorists have mentioned the implicit and explicit connections between MTV and advertising in the 1980s, but most analyses focus on the images and barely mention music: they don’t adequately address reasons why the connections between popular, and specifically “pop,” music and advertising work so well beyond the standard argument that music videos look and act like commercials. Although MTV was certainly an essential bridge, I would argue that pop music and advertising have much more in common than a penchant for turning up on MTV. I postulate that pop worked well in 1980s commercials because: 1) Both “pop” and

⁹⁷ Advertising histories written by Stuart Ewen, Jackson Lears, and Roland Marchand illustrate how Americans were taught how to consume and became increasingly savvy and skeptical of advertising practices as the twentieth-century progressed. See Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Jackson Lears’s *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Roland Marchand’s *Advertising The American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁹⁸ Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 174-178. More on Frank’s argument and how it relates to this dissertation is discussed in the next chapter.

⁹⁹ Cruger, In person interview by author, June 7, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

¹⁰⁰ Bob Giraldi confirmed this in a phone interview I conducted with him on October 8, 2010.

commercials had perfected their practices in the televisual medium in the decades prior to their merger and 2) They both foster the type of consumption central to neoliberal ideologies at the time. Given its long history in television entertainment, pop music in the '80s, like advertising—and unlike progressive rock, jazz, or classical art music—was steeped in a culture of manipulating *visual* signifiers as much as musical ones. As we'll see, this is why Pepsi's marketers were as interested and successful in integrating Jackson's "look" as well as his sounds into their first commercials.¹⁰¹ And once marketers had become skilled at reworking them into commercials, snippets of pop's well-crafted song structures functioned as quickly and efficiently as jingles once had. As Huron observes of the jingle:

...It must be acknowledged that, on a second-for-second basis, advertising music is perhaps the most meticulously crafted and most fretted-about music in history. Nationally produced television advertisements in particular may be considered among the most highly polished cultural artifacts ever created.¹⁰²

So too does the musical arrangement in Pepsi's commercials sound "meticulously crafted" and "polished." In this light, I would posit that previous arguments made by scholars about relationships between MTV and advertising should actually be inverted: by the late-'80s, advertising's mastery of visual signifiers and its ability to manipulate pre-existing musical texts *made commercials highly-efficient music videos*.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ This not only worked for Jackson, but also for subsequent pop music endorsements for Coke done by Whitney Houston and George Michael—although neither of them were as extreme with their visual iconography as the "King of Pop."

¹⁰² Huron, "Music in Advertising," 572. This may not hold true as much today since markets and media have become irretrievably fragmented and commercials are pumped out at a much faster pace. Huron's statement does relate, however, to the 1980s commercials described in the body of this dissertation. In fact, Phil Dusenberry, BBD&O's creative director, describes the painstaking process he took in re-appropriating "Billie Jean" to fit the 1984 campaign. See his *Then We Set His Hair on Fire: Insights and Accidents for a Hall of Fame Career in Advertising* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005). See also my in depth discussion of the commercial and its music in chapter two.

¹⁰³ I also think this statement explains the proliferation of popular music in commercials to this day, as the status of the music video has considerably declined.

My second point here is that pop's intimate and usually unabashed ties to commodity culture made its ideological base congruent with advertising's aims under the umbrella of Reagan-era neoliberalism. Social theorist David Harvey argues that 1980s neoliberalism, as a way of strengthening a faltering system of economic production, promoted the consumerization and commodification of "everything."¹⁰⁴ More specifically, it encouraged *technological innovation*, valued the *upward economic mobility of individuals*, and pushed for *globalization*, thereby encouraging the proliferation of commodities that could appeal to the "masses."¹⁰⁵ McCracken's notion of "expansionary individualism" and "status transformation" explains how consumers internalized these ideologies. He postulates that subjects under capitalism create their identities through consumption and theorizes that at the end of the twentieth-century they embraced what he calls "expansionary individualism" which allowed them to have *multiple* avenues for defining and expanding their notion of "self."¹⁰⁶ As one of the facets of "expansionary individualism," he locates "status transformation" as "supplying the underlying logic of status competition, conspicuous consumption, social mobility, and the consumer revolution."¹⁰⁷ These ideals surely align with the neoliberal agenda.¹⁰⁸

Pop stars like Michael Jackson and Madonna epitomized these core values as they defined their "individuality" through goods, used and promoted synthesizers, music videos, cassette tapes,

¹⁰⁴ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165. The construction of mega-malls is another symptom of this ideology. Economists Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy concur that neoliberal capitalism has taken over all parts of society, including culture. See *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁵ See especially chapters one through four in Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

¹⁰⁶ Grant McCracken, *Transformations: Identity Construction in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 305.

¹⁰⁷ Of course this particular aspect of defining "self" isn't so much new—as Veblen (cited above) argued at the turn of the twentieth-century—as it is more quickly acquired and as McCracken puts it, "more individual, competitive, and various than traditional [routines of] transformation." Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ McCracken, *Transformations*, 305

and compact discs (technology), were models of the “rags to riches” ideal (upward economic mobility), and were by all accounts the most famous international (globalized) superstars in history.¹⁰⁹ So by the mid-’80s, pop’s ideologies aligned well with those that advertisers were tasked with promoting.¹¹⁰ By the same account, MTV was also able to thrive because of pop’s success in its formative years and its ability to promise sponsors access to a portion of the youth demographic that had traditionally been difficult to tap.¹¹¹ It’s logical then that the “King” and “Queen” of pop—celebrities that defined their star personas through consumption—simultaneously became the biggest stars on MTV and re-defined celebrity endorsement advertising.

I postulate then that the success of Pepsi’s 1984 campaign with Michael Jackson wasn’t an accident (although a certain degree of luck was necessary) nor merely an extension of MTV aesthetics, but the marriage of two cultural forms that both happened to be cultivated by the mass media and driven by commodities under the umbrella of neoliberal capitalist ideologies that pervaded the decade. MTV didn’t *cause* pop to be successful in ads, just as it wasn’t much of a stretch for ads to appropriate pop signifiers into their existing practices. MTV merely helped the process

¹⁰⁹ Michael Jackson came from a lower-middle class black family of nine children from Gary, Indiana. Madonna also came from a large family of second-generation Italian immigrants living in Detroit. Both were from marginalized backgrounds: he was an African American Jehovah’s Witness and she is an Italian Catholic woman. See Michael Jackson, *Moonwalk* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) and J. Randy Taraborrelli, *Madonna* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001). More about these artists’ biographies are discussed in the next chapters. I would add that, in theory, what has allowed “pop” remain in the realm of art was the notion that musicians were as interested in the aesthetics offered by commodities as much as their capitalistic use, which is a premise that can certainly be debated.

¹¹⁰ In addition to popular music, commercials of the era upheld the neoliberal agenda by featuring computers and space age themed spots (technology), broadcasting to world-wide markets (globalization), and promising consumers products that would help them define themselves (individuality). The “1984” Apple Computer commercial is a memorable example of advertising’s promise to provide cutting-edge technology that will define its consumers. Pepsi’s second set of Jackson campaigns in 1987 and ’88 were the first to be broadcast around the world. See chapter three of this dissertation from more on this campaign.

¹¹¹ As mentioned above, MTV didn’t stretch past rural markets until a few years into transmission. Its adoption in New York and Los Angeles created a much bigger and more diverse market. Around the same time, Michael Jackson released videos for *Thriller* and Madonna would soon appear on the scene. Cruger discussed these notable events with me during her interview. June 7, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

along. Pepsi's 1980s campaigns are therefore simply a visible symptom—good or bad—of what happens when music (or any cultural form) is nurtured in a late-capitalist society.

Why Pepsi?

Bethany Klein notes that Pepsi's relationship with popular music worked in large part because the company was willing to take risks.¹¹² Her argument draws on Frank's history of the soda giant and its constant battle to stay relevant as a "parity product."¹¹³ Pepsi, the perennial "number two," was never able to challenge Coca-Cola's reputation for quality or weaken its grip as a promoter of "traditional" American values. Pepsi finally found its edge on the market in the late-'50s by promoting itself as the product for young and energetic consumers, eventually dubbing those that drank it "the Pepsi Generation." (During the rise of rock and roll, Pepsi's status as the lower-cost choice of African Americans in the South also worked in its favor). Thus, Jackson's invitation to collaborate with the soda giant played perfectly into the company's vision for itself. What made this and Pepsi's subsequent deals with famous musicians innovative were the risks it took in allowing its young celebrity endorsers' highly volatile music and racialized personas to appear unfiltered in a historically conservative and fickle industry. At the insistence of their stars, Pepsi was forced to loosen its usually tight grip on the creative aspects and content of endorsed commercials, allowing the celebrities' songs and images to become the guiding forces of their new campaigns. As a result, Jackson's 1984 and 1987-88 campaigns, as well as Madonna's single 1989 commercial, were the most highly publicized, watched, and remembered commercials to date. They also represented both ends of the spectrum for success: Jackson's 1984 and '87-88 commercials became the most acclaimed (as

¹¹² See her discussion of the "cola wars" and the two soda giants' appropriation of popular music in chapter five of *As Seen on TV*.

¹¹³ See Frank's discussion in the *Conquest of Cool*, cited above. Parity products are those that are fundamentally identical to others on the market.

noted 27 years later in Pepsi's "Music Icon's" commercial) and Madonna's, pulled after only a few airings, remains the most controversial to date. Pepsi's collaboration with these pop superstars thus established new relationships between the music and advertising industries, changed the game for celebrity endorsements and the use of new popular music in commercials, and simultaneously established the ground rules for future co-branding deals.

Defining Pop

As noted above, I find it important to unpack the distinction between the all-encompassing term "popular music," as it has been used in America and parts of Britain the twentieth and twenty-first century, and the genres that fall within it: namely "rock" and the type of "pop" epitomized by Jackson and Madonna in the 1980s. In the *Oxford Music Online* dictionary, musicologist Richard Middleton notes how hard it is to pinpoint the origin of "pop."

Generalization about the musical characteristics of pop is difficult except at the most basic level. It is equally hard to separate what is specific to pop (amplified and electronic sounds, for instance) from features that are typical of popular musics generally: for example, a focus on dance genres on the one hand, and short songs on secular themes (often to do with love), on the other (and often both at once)...What is clear is that the single most important pop music sources lie in black American vernacular music genres, and that consequently the success of Western pop represents in one sense a remarkable cultural triumph of the African diaspora.¹¹⁴

As the entry goes on, he and other prominent musicologists trace the many genres that fall under the rubric of "popular music." They agree that, the term popular music can encompass any genre that has circulated among a wide audience. Further, if there is text, which is more common than not, it's usually in the vernacular. The wide range of genres that fall under the category of popular music thus range from jazz to country and western, heavy metal to rap.¹¹⁵ Additionally, "popular" often gets

¹¹⁴ Richard Middleton, "Pop," *Oxford Music Online*, accessed February 27, 2012, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

¹¹⁵ I would add that in some cases, even some Western classical music pieces can be considered popular, although some fans might vehemently object. An example of this is a recording titled *Aaron Copland: The Populist*, which features the

conflated with “mass,” especially during the consumption driven twentieth and twenty-first-centuries, when popular musics have been largely distributed via technologies—like albums, radio, television, film, and the Internet—that have the potential to reach larger groups of people than traditional and more intimate performance settings.

Within the larger category of popular music, “pop” often gets conflated with “rock.” Middleton explains that this happens because it “originat[ed] in Britain in the mid-1950s as a description for Rock and Roll and the new youth music styles that it influenced, and seems to have been a spin-off from the terms pop art and pop culture, coined slightly earlier, and referring to a whole range of new, often American, media-culture products.”¹¹⁶ Pop and rock have therefore always been tricky to separate because of the fact that the characteristics that defined early rock and roll were similar to those of mainstream pop as well as other forms of popular musics in the mid-twentieth century.

However, as the 1960s approached the differences between pop and rock and roll (which later became known simply as “rock”) became more distinct in terms of style and ideologies. Music scholar Simon Frith, argues that the principles that emerged in the ’60s (and to some extent remain prevalent today) about “authenticity” and fighting the corporate “man,” occurred because rock was cultivated on television alongside pop.¹¹⁷ Thus, since at least the mid-twentieth century both pop and rock have always had intimate ties to *visual* media formats, but what separates them are the ideologies and aesthetics that formed as a result of their televisual statuses.

composer’s most well known works that were meant to depict American landscapes and peoples. *Aaron Copland: The Populist*, Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, 2000 by BMG Entertainment, 63551, compact disc.

¹¹⁶ Middleton, “Pop,” <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

¹¹⁷ See Frith, “Look! Hear!,” 277-290.

Pop as Television Genre

In his discussion of shifting musical ideologies in the 1980s, Goodwin argues that the rise of MTV uniquely defined the pop aesthetics that acts like Michael Jackson embodied. I would clarify that these aesthetics go much further back to 1950s television and even to Tin Pan Alley songs that pervaded film soundtracks. So while MTV was essential to refining pop's visual characteristics, I would argue that the cable network merely provided a space for the genre's existing traits and ideologies to expand. A brief look back at mid-century relationships between popular musics and television clarifies this point.

The success of rock and roll in the mid-'50s prompted broadcast television networks to realize the enormous potential gain in ratings and corporate sponsorship when new, specifically young, musical acts appeared in their programs. Frith observes that television executives wanted to capitalize on the excitement offered by the rock and roll craze, but had to be careful to minimize potential controversy.¹¹⁸ Stations therefore attempted to control the genre by subduing performances and audiences, going so far in some cases as to replace "black" musicians with more family-friendly "white" acts. This resulted in television-made *pop* stars like Pat Boone and Ricky Nelson who soon appeared on the charts next to their African American counterparts, which included pioneers such as Fats Domino and Chuck Berry. The replacement of rock and roll artists with pop stars ignited a trend that (I postulate) had lasting effects on the ideologies of audiences and performers. Since pop placed emphasis on the visual aspects of performance rather than the sounds, the "cleaning-up" of rock performances actually created a genre that many audiences heard as a boring and decidedly not "cool."¹¹⁹ Visual attractiveness and creating a spectacle was the primary concern for these new pop acts who performed in a medium that obviously favored appearance

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 285. See the Thomas Frank's examination of ideologies of "cool" in his *Conquest of Cool*, noted above.

over sound.¹²⁰ Pop performers not only had to be physically striking, but were enhanced by glamorous (or at least polished) clothing and beautiful performance spaces. Because pop stemmed from African American rock and roll traditions, dancing also became an essential component of the genre and audiences and performers were typically shown (tastefully) grooving to the music, especially during variety shows like *American Bandstand*. Sets, costuming, and dancing were therefore *as* important, if not *more* than, the creative content of the songs sung.¹²¹ As Frith argues, television's emphasis on the visual aspects of musical performance, the "whitening" of musical structure and language, and the focus on all-ages mass entertainment drove many teenagers (especially white, middle-class, males) back to the radio where they could hear a greater variety of music that operated on a less restrictive aesthetic plane—i.e. rock.¹²²

Consequently, since its days on early television, pop has divided the teenage audience, which was a distinction that was already new in the late '50s. This split between markets has been ideological as much as aesthetic. From the '60s onwards, rock fans have favored musicians who can create and play their own music. They also leave little room for technology (synthesizers in particular have been frowned upon), don't welcome musical contributors or producers outside of the

¹²⁰ While television was originally viewed as "radio with pictures," Frith argues that television's sound quality has always been poor and that its programming rarely prioritized sound over sight. Ibid, 279-280. I would contend however that the medium's cultivation of pop perhaps evened the playing field.

¹²¹ I don't mean to be reductive here about the parameters of pop. I am aware that it not only continues to have intimate ties to rock, but through-out the later half of the twentieth-century pop has encompassed and overlapped many other genres, especially those by African American artists. My point is that many black artists from Brill Building Girl Groups to later Motown soul artists used television to expand their audience by appealing to white audiences with their polished looks and dance moves and that these acts have traditionally been labeled as "pop." Over the following twenty-plus years, countless variety shows including *Soul Train* and *Saturday Night Live*, have allowed acts from various genres to operate within the visual parameters of pop, and equally to reject them. (Recall Syd Barrett's refusal to perform on camera when Pink Floyd appeared on *Bandstand*. For an account of this performance see Frith, "Look! Hear!," 282.)

¹²² At this time, television offered only a few channels and watching television in the '50s and '60s was a family event in many homes. It's also important to note that those who could afford televisions at the time were in the middle and upper classes. Macdonald, *One Nation Under Television*, 65-191. Fortunately for teenagers wanting to hear different kinds of music, radio technology had improved, making them more portable and even available in cars. This allowed teenagers to listen out of earshot from their parents. See Frith, "Look! Hear!," 282-283. I would add that the shelf life of TV-made acts usually didn't last long since a large portion of the record industry's target demographic wasn't being catered to.

performing group (besides George Martin, lovingly referred to as “the fifth Beatle”), have *zero* tolerance for lip-syncing (often a necessary evil of performing on TV), and don’t consider choreographed dancing integral to the musical experience.¹²³ Frith even argues that because television taught audiences how to watch rock (along with pop) and created an expectation for the grandiosity of the TV stage, rock musicians and fans increasingly hated musics that thrived on television.¹²⁴ Mid-late twentieth-century pop had therefore often been the aesthetic and ideological antithesis to rock in terms of its creation, performance, and the role that the body plays in the experience of “musicking.”¹²⁵ Considered primarily as an “entertainment” genre, pop has generally appealed to young girls and minority groups. Rock, on the other hand, has largely appealed to white teenage boys and college aged youth.¹²⁶

Coming back to my original point, as a televisual medium, pop has always had intimate ties to advertising through its place on television. It’s common knowledge that TV programming is funded largely by advertising, meaning that televised pop too has always had connections, whether explicit or implicit, with corporate sponsorship.¹²⁷ I postulate that this is a primary reason why the

¹²³ See Goodwin’s discussion about pop ideologies in the 1980s in *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, 24-48. He argues that while rock enthusiasts once considered “authenticity” to be the bond between creativity and live performance, ideologies about authenticity for pop music centered on the “ability to manipulate and construct media imagery.” Ibid, 34-35. He further notes that pop’s ideologies in were impressed upon rock since MTV blurred the boundaries between these genres by providing a world stage for them both to occupy. This caused audiences to listen “between” genres more than ever before. Middleton’s argument is also useful here: “briefly, though the distinction—as made in particular contexts—often has stylistic validity (‘rock’ is generally thought of as ‘harder’, more aggressive, more improvisatory and more closely related to black American sources, while ‘pop’ is ‘softer’, more ‘arranged’ and draws more on older popular music patterns), the boundary is fuzzy, moveable and controversial. Fundamentally, it is an *ideological* divide that carries more weight: ‘rock’ is considered more ‘authentic’ and closer to ‘art’, while ‘pop’ is regarded as more ‘commercial’, more obviously ‘entertainment.’” “Pop,” <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>. Emphasis added.

¹²⁴ Frith, “Look! Hear!,” 284-287.

¹²⁵ Christopher Small argues that any level of engaging with music from modes of performance to listening involves people in the act of “musicking.” See *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

¹²⁶ Over the past fifty-plus years this aesthetic divide has splintered exponentially, creating new musical markets (including reality singing competitions) that cater to various gendered, sexual, racial, regional, and age preferences.

¹²⁷ Middleton further acknowledges that pop is “marked by the effects of ‘consumerism’.” “Pop,” <http://www.oxford>

placement of new, specifically pop, music in commercials was successful in the mid-'80s. I would add that both television and pop have also used commodities to define their "styles." As a result, accusations of "selling out" don't work the same for pop and rock since proponents of the latter claim to have maintained an anti-authoritarian, anti-corporation, musically "authentic," and socially conscious stance since the 1960s.¹²⁸ My point is that, from at least the 1960s, pop musicians and fans have embraced the genre's place as a televisual, and therefore commercially-sponsored entity and have developed different notions of "authenticity" than rock fans, who have claimed to favor dedicated listening to records and radio.¹²⁹ By the 1980s, pop's aesthetics thus rested in *seeing, dancing,* and *consuming*, in addition to hearing, while rock's remained devoted to the listening experience.

Michael Jackson, Madonna, and MTV

Because television, a corporate sponsored entity, helped create an image-based aesthetic in pop, the genre's connection with consumption and goods has always been obvious. Once MTV came along, the connection between *all* popular musics (not just pop) and consumption became impossible to ignore (a criticism that ranked at the top of the list of grievances against network). While MTV was certainly after "the hip and the cool," it was open and vigorous in its pursuit of corporate sponsorship. The network's advertising firm, Fred/Alan, worked tirelessly during the network's first years to attract not only branded sponsorship, but to get cable providers to pick up the channel. The firm even leveraged its audiences to ask for MTV by name.¹³⁰ Most famously the "I

musiconline.com/.

¹²⁸ Klein lists these as ideologies of rock and conflates them with her discussions of pop. In fact, she uses Madonna's "Like a Prayer" (a song that certainly falls outside white rock categories) to explain the ideologies she pinpoints as essential to rock and roll. *As Heard on TV*, 91. I will unpack this song's ties to religious, soul, and pop genres in chapter four of this dissertation.

¹²⁹ Proponents of '70s glam rock and mid-'80s heavy metal are an obvious exception.

Want My MTV” campaign, which featured top-acts like Bon Jovi, Cyndi Lauper, and Cher to encourage viewers to prompt their cable companies to offer and/or keep MTV in their basic channel packages, continues to live on in pop culture history as a tongue-in-cheek motto for music-based consumption.¹³¹

With its reliance on the visual aspect of performance and ties to commodity endorsement, it’s no coincidence then that the two biggest names to come out of MTV in its mid-late ’80s prime were also pop musicians. The traits intrinsic to pop, which Jackson brought from his Motown roots and he and Madonna had refined in their disco years, were choreographed dance, forward-thinking fashion, and catchy, danceable and repetitive music. Like the pop musicians that came before them, Michael Jackson and Madonna formed their superstar personas through the material goods as much as through the music itself. Concepts of “authenticity” for ’80s pop consequently rested not only in the music, but also in stars’ appearance as “celebrities.” Hence, how they looked and performed was considered “pop” as much their songs: Jackson, his glove, and moonwalk are as “pop” as “Billie Jean” and Madonna, her crucifix, and voguing are as “pop” as “Like a Virgin.” Sociologist Kobena Mercer writes that imitations of Jackson’s hair, clothing, and dance styles appeared throughout the world in the 1980s: “Jackson’s individual style fascinates and attracts attention. The ankle-cut jeans, the single-gloved hand, and above all, the wet-look hairstyle which have become his trademarks, have influenced the sartorial repertoires of black and white youth cultures and been incorporated into mainstream fashion.”¹³² His influence on fashion continues to be evident in movie representations of the ’80s, like *The Wedding Singer*, and even in clothing stores today as his

¹³⁰ 1981-1982, Fred/Alan MTV Network Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Series 1: Subseries A and H, Washington D.C.

¹³¹ Ibid. Series 2: Box 6, Reel 10. This slogan also became the intro material for the song quoted in the title for this chapter, “Money for Nothing” by Dire Straits.

¹³² Kobena Mercer, “Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*” in *Sound and Visions: The Music Video Reader*, eds. Simon Frith et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 93-94.

bandleader jackets, sequin shirts, and black loafers have made a comeback following his death in 2009.

Madonna has also had a profound impact on promoting goods to consumers, as indicated by the fact that cultural scholars have focused on her appearance and influence on teenage fashion for upwards of 25 years. McCracken re-theorizes Georg Simmel's "diffusion effect" to postulate that celebrities like Madonna are positioned on the top tier of commodity appropriation, passing their tastes down through the echelons of society. He specifically labels her evolving image as an example of a "postmodern transformation."

She has been able to keep a careful eye on innovations both in art and dance circles and on the street. Her strategy has been to adopt and release these innovations at precisely the right moments. She has found a way to tread water in the diffusion stream, not rising so high as to bewilder the mass of fashion-sensitive consumers, nor sinking so low as to seem out of touch and insufficiently hip.¹³³

Even Madonna herself has publically recognized the economic potential of her image and music saying in an interview: "What I do is total commercialism, but it's also art. I like the challenge of doing both, of somehow making art that is accessible and making commerce something artistic."¹³⁴ Experienced audiences are thus likely able to associate Madonna and Jackson's apparel and dance moves to their superstar personas as much as their songs. So, much like the fact that the term "hip-hop" covers more than music, I would argue that fashion, dance, and commodities were also important parts of the whole aesthetic package in '80s "pop" and that this designation continues with many acts today.¹³⁵

Consumer goods were thus an important part of creating and selling what cultural theorist Douglas Kellner calls the "media spectacle" that maintained Michael Jackson and Madonna's fan-

¹³³ McCracken, *Transformations*, 228.

¹³⁴ Stephen Holden, "Madonna Re-creates Herself—Again," *New York Times*, March 19, 1989, accessed January 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/19/arts/madonna-re-creates-herself-again.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

¹³⁵ Chapter five will discuss how new forms of pop stemming from reality vocal talent television shows play up the commodity aspect of pop in increasingly sophisticated ways.

base in the 1980s. Kellner agrees that the cultural output of these stars proliferated past their music. He expands on Guy Debord's use of the term "spectacle," re-defining it as "those phenomena of media culture which embody contemporary society's basic values, serve to enculturate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of conflict resolution."¹³⁶ Relating this to Jackson and Madonna, he says:

Popular music too is colonized by the spectacle with music-video television becoming a major purveyor of music, bringing spectacle into the core of musical production and distribution. Madonna and Michael Jackson would have never become global superstars of popular music without the spectacular production values of their music videos and concert extravaganzas. Both also performed their lives as media spectacle, generating maximum publicity and attention (not always positive!)

...And one cannot fully grasp the Madonna phenomenon without analyzing her marketing and publicity strategies, her exploitation of spectacle, and her ability to make herself a celebrity spectacle of the highest order¹³⁷

Thus, MTV provided the perfect platform for Madonna and Michael Jackson's visual and musical texts to play out. In particular, it aided the process of turning their celebrity into economic gain. I should clarify that this doesn't necessarily mean that their music and images catered to the status quo (as Kellner points out). To the contrary, it was actually both artists' *ironic* appropriation of musical and visual signifiers that gave them staying power. These stars were able to maintain their "individuality" on MTV because unlike the broadcast networks, MTV didn't have to cater to the widest possible audience, which (within the bounds of FCC regulations) allowed it to permit greater artistic freedom to celebrity videos and performances.¹³⁸

MTV had no direct role in *creating* the look or sound of these stars (i.e. the production of their music and videos wasn't done in-house), but the network simply gave them the stage as much

¹³⁶ Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 8-9.

¹³⁸ Even today, the network prides itself on its cutting-edge, controversial programming with shows like *Teen Mom* and *Jersey Shore*.

as possible.¹³⁹ And the opportunity provided for *repetitious consumption* of these stars' videos and performances on MTV proved reminiscent of advertising ploys exemplified on broadcast networks in the thirty years prior: Just as repetition has proven key to hyping products in an advertisement, so too was it central in hyping the pop star spectacle on MTV in the 1980s. For this reason, MTV and advertising have shared skepticism from critics and theorists who conflate them. But as I've argued, the cultivation of pop on television created its easy appropriation in both forms. Despite their similarities they are not the same: while MTV videos feature images created by the artist on the terms of the *music*, advertising privileges the *product* and reworks the music and its meanings to satisfy *corporate* imperatives.

Looking Ahead

Now that I've defined the parameters of this project and relationships between pop, advertising, and MTV in the 1980s, I can move into a formal analysis of Pepsi's most well-known commercials. As the next chapter will establish, the soda giant's unusual deal with Michael Jackson demonstrated the untapped potential of pop music's relationship with corporate advertising. But beyond the financial benefits of the deal, it also showed just how skillful marketers could be in picking-apart cultural texts and reforming them to align with corporate agendas. Further, the immense success of campaign led to Pepsi's creation of more artistically ambitious commercials, which by the end of the decade, resulted in campaigns that increasingly looked and acted more like MTV videos than traditional advertisements for soda.

¹³⁹ One could argue that MTV helped these stars to get big, thereby fostering the spectacle that surrounds them, but I would counter that the network didn't have a hand in creating the actual content of their videos or performances.

Chapter 2

When Soda Met Pop: Michael Jackson and Pepsi Make the Deal of Century

On February 28th 1984, Michael Jackson was at the pinnacle of his success. That night he won a record eight Grammy awards, including Album of the Year for *Thriller* and Record of the Year for “Beat It.”¹⁴⁰ Jackson was also recognized for his mastery in a variety of musical styles and took home awards for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance (“Billie Jean”), Best Male Rock Vocal Performance (“Beat It”), and Best Pop Vocal Performance (“Thriller”). But arguably the most groundbreaking event of the evening happened *between* Jackson’s repeated trips to the stage: During the commercial break Pepsi unveiled its latest attempt to win its decades long battle to beat Coca-Cola with a pair of television commercials, titled “The Concert” and “Street,” that featured Jackson and his brothers singing the praises of Pepsi over an edited version of the instrumental backing track to “Billie Jean.” Months of media hype turned the unveiling of the commercials into an “event” not to be missed by Grammy viewers and fans—all 83 million of them.¹⁴¹ Earlier that week, MTV contributed to the excitement by devoting a half-hour special to the premiere of the now infamous “Concert” commercial.¹⁴² The craze for all things Michael Jackson had also been fueled by heavy rotation of his music videos on MTV and his riveting performance of “Billie Jean” less than a year earlier during the *Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, and Forever* television special.¹⁴³ Fortunately for Pepsi,

¹⁴⁰ Michael Jackson, *Thriller*, Epic, EK 38112, 1982, vinyl LP.

¹⁴¹ Roger Enrico was the CEO of PepsiCo, Inc. at the time and Phil Dusenberry was the creative director for the campaign. Both men describe the commercials as an “event.” See Roger Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked: How Pepsi Won the Cola Wars* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 135 and Phil Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire: Insights and Accidents for a Hall of Fame Career in Advertising* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 232.

¹⁴² The special was a response to the publicity storm that followed the legendary pyrotechnics disaster that severely burned Jackson’s scalp when it set his hair on fire. The MTV Premiere of Michael Jackson Pepsi, YouTube, accessed November 3, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njNwQPrpacs&feature=channel>.

¹⁴³ Enrico notes that “Billie Jean,” “Beat It” and “Thriller” were being played “to death” on MTV. See *The Other Guy Blinked*, 134. Jackson debuted his now infamous “moonwalk” during the *Motown 25* performance. See “Michael Jackson Biography,” MTV Networks, accessed November 3, 2010, http://www.mtv.com/music/artist/Jackson_michael/artist.jhtml#bio.

they chose to unveil their new campaign at the precise moment when fans couldn't get enough of their favorite pop star.

The "Choice of a New Generation" commercials became so popular that according to Roger Enrico, Pepsi's CEO at the time, a year after their premiere, 97% of the American population had seen the commercials more than a dozen times.¹⁴⁴ In less than a month, Pepsi's sales had climbed high enough to make their product the fastest-growing regular cola on the market and the most purchased soft drink from grocery retailers.¹⁴⁵ The campaigns were also notable accomplishments in the advertising world: Barton Batten Durstine & Osborn (BBD&O) garnered 74 creative awards for the spots.¹⁴⁶ The venture also paid off for Michael Jackson as *Thriller* remained on the charts for over two years, spent 37 weeks in the number one spot on the charts, and became the best-selling album of all time.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, the buzz generated by the campaign was unmatched as networks begged for small clips of the commercials to air before their premieres at the Grammys and on MTV.¹⁴⁸ Phil Dusenberry, the campaign's creative and musical director, believed it was "perhaps the first time in

¹⁴⁴ Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 134. See also Thomas Frank's history of Pepsi's struggle to beat out Coke. According to Frank, Pepsi's aim at targeting the youth culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s helped the company to make significant gains over its competitors. The sections below will elaborate on this process and its relevance to the Jackson campaign. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 104-131.

¹⁴⁶ Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 232-233.

¹⁴⁷ *Thriller* unloaded 25 million copies in the U.S. and approximately 20 million overseas. "Michael Jackson Biography," http://www.mtv.com/music/artist/jackson_michael/artist.jhtml#bio.

¹⁴⁸ While Pepsi did their fair share of marketing, Jackson's on-set accident made the commercials front-page news. Phil Dusenberry, the commercials' creative director, attributes much of their success to publicity from it. He writes: "Just as Michael's insistence on limiting his face time in the commercials ended up making his appearance more magnetic and alluring, so did the accident. It made the unseen backstage filming of a commercial a news event. It made the commercial itself, which aired a few months later on the Grammy Awards, an event too..." See his autobiography *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 232.

history when a commercial was more anticipated than the television show surrounding it.”¹⁴⁹ In Jackson’s own words, the deal was “magic.”¹⁵⁰

Peeking Behind the Curtain

This chapter unpacks this pivotal campaign to examine when and how relationships between pop music and advertising began and how new pre-existing popular music was first appropriated and reformed in television commercials. Scholars who examine music’s role in multimedia contexts, generally agree that the transfer of meanings is a two-way street, where the music brings outside associations to the images, and the images have the potential to give new meanings to the music. As Lawrence Kramer argues in *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History*, how much and what meaning the music contributes to the reception of an “imagetext” depends both on how much prior experience the listener has with the music, and how subordinate the soundtrack is to the visuals.¹⁵¹ Pepsi banked on the fact that much of its national audience would recognize “Billie Jean” and therefore attempted to encapsulate the “essence” of Jackson’s superstar persona by co-opting and controlling as many of his signifiers as it could. Pepsi was also clever to pick on a trend noted by musicologist Andrew Goodwin and sociologist Jaap Kooijman that audiences favored “the re-

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 232. While it can be argued that Apple computer’s “1984” commercial was equally as influential that year, hype for that commercial occurred *after* its run during a commercial break for the Super Bowl. Pepsi worked for months *prior* to the airing of the Jackson commercials to get the word out to bottlers and media outlets about the impending premiere, which was a novel idea at the time.

¹⁵⁰ Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 102. It’s fitting that Jackson used the word “magic” to describe these commercials since cultural theorists frequently liken advertising to a magical system that works to attribute social and personal meaning to goods. As mentioned in chapter one of this dissertation, Sut Jhally and Raymond Williams provide useful discussions of this. See Jhally’s “Advertising as Religion,” in *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2006), 85-98. See also Williams’s “Advertising: The Magic System,” in *Media Studies: a Reader*, eds. Paul Marris and Sue Thronham (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 704-709. Sociologist Michael Schudson notes further that advertising, “pictures *magical* moments we would like to experience.” *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 221. This lies within the category of what he calls “capitalist realism,” which I describe below. Emphasis added.

¹⁵¹ Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 8, 149. Kramer argues that while music absorbs some of the meanings from its association with the “imagetext” it also brings its own significations into the mix. Kramer’s ideas are discussed more in the pages below.

enactment of the imagery of the music video.”¹⁵² Pepsi’s marketing team thus hired music video director Bob Giraldi to film the campaign in a way that embraced the facets of performance spectacle most important to the emerging aesthetic of MTV, such as extravagant costuming, elaborate sets, up-beat dance music, and modern choreography.¹⁵³ At the same time, the soda giant had to be careful to bring in only positive aspects of Jackson’s iconicity and to leave out any undesirable meanings the music might contain in other contexts, that could potentially hurt the brand’s image.¹⁵⁴ In her seminal analysis of 1970s advertisements, cultural theorist Judith Williamson demonstrated just how skillful marketers had become at spinning culturally constructed signs and signifiers to fit branding agendas. She argued that “advertisements use ‘meanings’ as a currency and signification as market...they can always exchange them, take anything out of its context and replace it: *re*-presentation.”¹⁵⁵

The pages below examine the ways in which Pepsi’s campaign skillfully “*re*-presented” Jackson’s celebrity image and song “Billie Jean” to serve its branding agenda. More specifically, I demonstrate how Jackson’s iconic performances of “Billie Jean” are re-imagined within Pepsi’s spots to imitate emerging MTV aesthetics, perpetuate the company’s historical representation of

¹⁵² This quote is taken from Kooijman who argues that the visual aspects of Jackson’s performance give evidence that aesthetics about musical authenticity that had pervaded rock genres of the past had faded with the rise of MTV. See “Michael Jackson: *Motown 25* Pasadena Civic Auditorium March 25, 1983,” in *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, ed. Ian Inglis (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 127. More on this and Andrew Goodwin’s text, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), are discussed in the pages below. Refer to my discussion of differences between rock and pop ideologies in chapter one of this dissertation.

¹⁵³ In an interview I conducted with Bob Giraldi he told me about his experience filming videos for Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, Paul McCartney, and Pat Benatar. Giraldi also disclosed that the commercials were intended to look like mini-music videos. Bob Giraldi, phone interview by author, October 8, 2010.

¹⁵⁴ As noted in chapter one, Grant McCracken discusses how marketers must be skillful in their appropriation of outside “elements,” including people, places, things—or in this case, music—because they come charged with more meanings than are desired for the advertising the product. See his *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 104.

¹⁵⁵ Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1978), 177. Emphasis hers.

“youthfulness,” and further, to put “Billie Jean” into circulation with very different “meanings as currency” than carried by the original single.¹⁵⁶ Jackson’s song about deceit and lies is re-worked, not only by changing the lyrics, but by shortening it and eliminating key moments of dialectical tension built into the original track—a practice labeled in other contexts by musicologist and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno as the “fetish” character of music.¹⁵⁷ I extend and pair his theories with Schudson’s notions about “capitalist realism” in the 1980s, which posit that advertisers borrow cultural texts and “simplify” and “typify” them to fit within the abstracted and banal contexts of commercials.¹⁵⁸ I thus argue that “Billie Jean’s” tale of betrayal is replaced with blander, positive, and family-friendly storylines about consuming soda and being entertained by the “King of Pop,” becoming *the* model capitalist realist text that solidified advertising’s lasting relationship with popular music.

¹⁵⁶ Pepsi has an online booklet that describes its campaigns from the company’s beginnings to present times. With slogans like “Now it’s Pepsi, For Those Who Think Young,” “Come Alive! You’re the Pepsi Generation” and “You’ve Got a Lot to Live. Pepsi’s Got a Lot to Give,” the soda giant claims to have uniquely catered to the “spirit” of the youth generation. PepsiCo. Inc, “Pepsi Legacy Book,” accessed February 15, 2009, <http://www.pepsi.com/>. See pages 9-10. Thomas Frank also discusses these campaigns in chapter eight of *Conquest of Cool*. His discussion of Pepsi’s attempt to capture the 1960s counterculture demographic by trying to emulate aspects of their presumed lifestyle through face-paced images and energetic music demonstrates the company’s belief that they could effectively attract young consumers with tropes that “defined” their generation. The 1967-69 psychedelic ads are a great example of these targeting efforts since the images used were intended to appeal to those who participated in specific counterculture lifestyles. See pages 172-173 and 178. In the same way, Pepsi’s Michael Jackson commercials attempted to cater to his fans by simultaneously representing them onscreen and privileging the viewer who is off-screen.

¹⁵⁷ Adorno, “On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1982). See my reading of Adorno in the pages below.

¹⁵⁸ Schudson hypothesizes that visual ‘art’ placed in advertising borrows from other cultural forms to abstract and redirect previously formed aesthetic meanings to fit branded contexts: “...American advertising, like socialist realist art, *simplifies* and *typifies*,” 215. For a complete discussion on Schudson’s theory of “capitalist realism” and “capitalist realist art” see *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 209-233. To see how I’m applying Schudson’s theories to the music and images in commercials, see below and chapter one of this dissertation.

*Pepsi's New Challenge*¹⁵⁹

In *The Other Guy Blinked: How Pepsi Won the Cola Wars*, Roger Enrico gives an entertaining account of how, under his leadership, the second largest soda manufacturer in America collaborated with the biggest musical superstar of the 1980s to create the most popular and expensive campaign to date. According to Enrico, an entrepreneur named Jay Coleman called his secretary one day and said, "I'd like to come in and talk to [Enrico] about sponsoring Michael Jackson."¹⁶⁰ Coleman had just started a business called *RockBill Magazine* that contained pictures and articles about the latest musical acts and featured advertisements from their corporate sponsors. Enrico claims he took the meeting because he had heard of Michael Jackson but was completely unaware of the pop star's success with his new album, *Thriller*. Two hours into their first meeting, Enrico decided that the five million dollar figure requested by Coleman for the endorsement was ridiculous and nonnegotiable. But after a follow-up (and rather farcical) meeting with Jackson's now-infamous manager Don King, as well as dozens of conversations with various men along Pepsi's chain of command, Enrico finally agreed to the unprecedented price tag.¹⁶¹ In return Pepsi was promised two commercials starring Michael Jackson and his brothers, sole sponsorship of their upcoming tour, and personal appearances at press conferences.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Prior to this campaign the soda giant was growing weary of their international taste test called "The Pepsi Challenge." Consumers were asked to "Let Their Taste Decide" and drink Pepsi against Coke in a blind test. Pepsi claimed that their product was the preferred choice. Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 89.

¹⁶¹ Don King was also famously the manager of the controversial boxer, Mike Tyson. Enrico describes King's visit as an "entrance." King is noted wearing a long white fur coat, a crown with his name on it and a "blinding shiny necklace." Ibid, 94.

¹⁶² This dissertation will be consistent with other accounts of the campaigns and focus on Michael Jackson as the main character and driving force behind these commercials. By all accounts, Joe Jackson prompted the addition of the pop star's brothers into the commercial deal. The career of The Jacksons as a group was on a steep decline and their father attempted to use Michael Jackson's fame as a solo artist to keep the group going. During the Victory Tour, which was sponsored by Pepsi, Michael Jackson announced that he was leaving the group for good.

Soon after the contracts were signed there were major glitches in the deal, including offers from other sponsors to hire Jackson for more money, the pop star's notorious insecurity about his appearance, and dire warnings from other celebrities that doing the commercials would be career suicide. After some coercion by his lawyers and family (mainly his dad, Joe), Jackson finally sat down with Pepsi to re-negotiate a deal that worked for both parties. During the meeting, Jackson claimed he was worried about overexposure. He also didn't like the jingle Pepsi had written for him and was concerned with the excessive amount of time he would be onscreen. In a simultaneous attempt to encourage Pepsi's marketers to be more creative and meet them halfway, Jackson offered them the use of "Billie Jean" and his "symbols"—his iconic glove, red jacket, spats, and shoes made famous in his performances and MTV videos—in exchange for four total seconds of face time, one close-up, and only one of his iconic dance spins.¹⁶³ Elated that Jackson would offer the company his most popular song, Pepsi gladly took the deal along with the many months of headaches that followed (including the negative publicity that followed the singer's trip to the hospital).

By all accounts, Jackson's desire for creative perfection was the ruling force for the campaign.¹⁶⁴ Everyone admitted that Jackson's input was essential to the project's positive reception and acknowledged that his willingness to lend the soda giant the full force of his image and music was what made these spots appealing to its targeted youth demographic.¹⁶⁵ This could be attributed

¹⁶³ Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 109, 135. Phil Dusenberry alleges that Jackson's time on-screen amounted to even less time—about a second and a half. See *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 225.

¹⁶⁴ To clarify, Pepsi was "technically" in control over the whole deal. They hired BBD&O to create the storyboards and music and Giraldi to film the commercials. While BBD&O and Giraldi did the majority of the work, Pepsi executives approved any and all decisions. But Pepsi, its marketing firm BBD&O, and even the director Bob Giraldi (who had also worked with the pop star on "Beat It") all conceded to the pop star's demands. In the end, the soft-spoken, stubborn, and incredibly difficult to pin-down superstar held all of the cards. Pepsi's CEO seriously considered pulling the plug on the whole deal because of numerous setbacks, that is until he realized that the same attention to detail Jackson had put into his recordings, performances, and public image was what he sought after in the commercials. See chapter seven in *The Other Guy Blinked*.

¹⁶⁵ The section below will discuss Pepsi's history of marketing to teenage audiences. Pepsi's surge in retail sales, as documented by Roger Enrico and Phil Dusenberry, and the fact that Jackson sold out concerts and had number one

to the fact that Jackson challenged Pepsi to represent him as a performer and icon rather than showing clichéd close-ups of him “enjoying” the product. In the end, a careful wedding of Jackson’s “symbols” with Pepsi’s slogan proved flattering for both parties. Phil Dusenberry noted: “Michael’s instincts were right. The more you hold back the more people will clamour. The brief, lightning-quick flashes of Michael’s face actually made viewers eager for more of the sudden glimpses that had been so carefully portioned out.”¹⁶⁶ Pepsi’s marketers thus worked to meticulously interweave visual and musical tropes that showed the superstar doing what he did best: entertaining audiences.

Soda and Pop: The Logistics

In a phone interview I conducted with Bob Giraldi, the director for the “Choice of a New Generation” commercials, he confirmed that Jackson’s tight control over the project made it a hit. He also admitted that the storyline or message of the commercials wasn’t as important as its novelty as a source of *entertainment* for fans.

Well there was no real storyline. I mean that was silly. It was all a vehicle for a performance by Michael and a presentation of a song, with lyrics [that] were put to the melody of “Billie Jean” and its high profile and its newness in the industry was what made it popular. And Michael, is what made it popular. I mean, a lot of other things accompanied it, you know. The whole idea of signing Michael and his brothers to a big contract to do a commercial for Pepsi was unprecedented at that time because it was one of the biggest deals ever made. It’s silly, it’s paltry by today’s standards. But then it was a big deal—a lot of money.¹⁶⁷

Dusenberry corroborates Giraldi’s statement and explains how “entertainment” was a central idea for Pepsi’s campaign with Jackson.

singles until the end of the decade confirms that teenage audiences were eager to consume both Pepsi and their icon’s music. See Dusenberry’s *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 232-233.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 225. Enrico notes that the campaign’s creative team grew frustrated with Jackson’s demands, especially his constant insistence that they reduce the amount of his time onscreen. *The Other Guy Blinked*, 109.

¹⁶⁷ Bob Giraldi, phone interview by author, October 8, 2010.

Pepsi's advertising would exalt the user rather than sanctify the product...Pepsi was the first to use celebrities in a way that went beyond their celebrity...*the first to use entertainment as the primary appeal of a commercial, more primary than the selling proposition.*¹⁶⁸

Although Pepsi's focus on musical entertainment was a novel concept for the company at the time, it actually fit well within with the company's long history of depicting "vitality," "liveliness," and "leisure" in visually and sonically edgy commercials—a strategy that aligned with its concept of lifestyle advertising.¹⁶⁹ The soda giant's 1984 "Choice of a New Generation" commercials portray these youthful qualities by pairing quick-paced images with energetic sounds that lend excitement to both the performers and the product.

This campaign was thus the first set of television commercials to successfully co-brand a musician's *current* album and *upcoming* tour with a household product. Television endorsements prior to 1984 used *previously* popular musicians and their songs to connect with customers who might have felt nostalgic when hearing an old classic they remembered. Such commercials rarely catered to teenagers and young adults who continue to be an important consumer demographic for many brands.¹⁷⁰ Even Pepsi, who had targeted teens since the late-1950s and had twenty years of experience establishing its image as the "youthful, hip, and rebellious" soft drink of choice, had never before hired a pop star or used pre-composed popular music to endorse its soda.¹⁷¹ So when Jackson collaborated with Pepsi, the venture worked largely because both the sponsor and

¹⁶⁸ Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 220. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁹ Frank uses these adjectives to describe how Pepsi envisioned the youth culture. *Conquest of Cool*, 174-178.

¹⁷⁰ For over sixty years, eighteen to twenty-four year-olds have spent the most money on leisure goods and represent a substantial segment of the population interested in buying music. This trend began when baby-boomers were targeted by the record industry in the early days of rock and roll. See chapter two in John Covach's *What's That Sound?: An Introduction to Rock and Its History*, 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 449-485. It's also important to note that marketers who used older popular music to appeal to more mature demographic groups never expected to have a significant influence on record sales, which made those deals less lucrative for artists.

¹⁷¹ See Frank's detailed description of Pepsi's strategies and tactics to beat Coke, *Conquest of Cool*, 169-183.

endorser's products were carefully aimed at consumers who had a greater potential to buy both.¹⁷² The soda giant's optimistic sales projections were also realistic considering the fact that a consumer could drink a Pepsi, and do it more than once, while listening to Jackson's record and watching his videos—i.e. audiences could consume Pepsi just as often as consumed Jackson's music.

More generally, the soda giant was after what author Thomas Frank calls “hip consumerism” to entice youthful patrons to purchase their product.¹⁷³ What better way to represent the “New Generation” than to use the very music their target audience already loved—music whose energy could pump them up enough to buy a soda? “Billie Jean” was considered “hip” at the time due to the input the single received from Jackson's entourage of old-school talents like Quincy Jones and the pop star's success as a young black artist. Additionally, Michael Jackson was a trendsetter in fashion and choreography, making him one of the most influential artists on MTV. In his discussion of how the pop star's fashion had been appropriated into the mainstream by his fans, cultural scholar Kobena Mercer notes: “Jackson's individual style fascinates and attracts attention.”¹⁷⁴ MTV viewers thus literally bought into his image as much as his music. By extension, then, Pepsi hoped they would also buy their product.

It's also important to note that the concept of youthfulness in this campaign extends beyond the teenage years, up into adulthood, and even down into childhood, thus allowing Pepsi's target demographic to come from a broad spectrum of possible consumers. Michael Jackson and his brothers appealed to many age groups, from baby-boomers familiar with Motown and the Jackson

¹⁷² Pepsi's marketers banked on the fact that Jackson could sell his audience to them. Sociologist Dallas W. Smythe argues that the mass media sells audiences as commodities to advertisers and that by watching television they are also “workers” for media and advertisers. See “On Critical and Administrative Research: A New Critical Analysis,” *Journal of Communication* 33 (1983): 117-127.

¹⁷³ Frank, *Conquest of Cool*, 17-33.

¹⁷⁴ Kobena Mercer, “Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*,” in *Sound and Visions: The Music Video Reader*, eds. Simon Frith et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 93. His ideas are discussed more in the pages below.

5, to their teenage children who watched Jackson's MTV videos, and also to younger siblings exposed to these musics and media in the home.¹⁷⁵ MTV had even expanded its definition of "youth" in the 1980s by ten years to include 18-34 year olds.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, author Thomas Frank notes that Pepsi "manufactured" a concept of youth that was intended to reach anyone who wanted to *feel* young.¹⁷⁷ So rather than an age designation, "youthfulness" in these commercials applied to anyone who enjoyed Jackson's performance.

In order to compliment the energetic pace of Jackson's musical track, a considerable amount of visual movement is incorporated into the spots. The decision to edit the film to look like MTV programming was likely based on the presumption that Pepsi's target audiences would respond well to visual stimulation because of their assumed experience as music video viewers. Like the music video, Pepsi's commercials aim to flatter the otherwise passive viewer by constructing them as spirited consumers who live at a fast pace.¹⁷⁸ Frank observes that Pepsi had used "manic visual effects" in their representations of the youth culture for decades, noting that Pepsi spots in the mid-1960s looked similar to scenes from the Beatles' movie *A Hard Day's Night* and *The Monkees*

¹⁷⁵ I was introduced to *Thriller* at young age through my parents who grew up listening to Motown and the Jackson 5. My cousin, who was born in 1983, provided entertainment at family gatherings by mimicking all of Jackson's moves. While I don't claim to that my experiences are universal, I do know that many of my peers tell similar stories. It's also worth noting here that Jackson's ambiguous race, gender, and sexual orientation were often diffused in mainstream media at this time, making his androgynous and non-racially specific image a friendly one that appealed to diverse audiences. Mercer's "Monster Metaphors" discusses how these facets of his personality were campily portrayed in his *Thriller* music video, 80-93. Chapter three of this dissertation elaborates on how his appearance had drastically changed in the years following *Thriller*, which prompted the media and fans openly confront his "eccentricities."

¹⁷⁶ Posters and promotional materials I found in the MTV archive say "MTV 18-34: They Can't Outgrow It. It's Just Too Enormous." 1981-1982, Fred/Alan MTV Network Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Series 1: Box 4, MTV Folder, Washington D.C. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁷ Frank quotes from marketing historians Stanley Hollander and Richard Germain's *Was There a Pepsi Generation Before Pepsi Discovered It?: Youth-Based Segmentation in Marketing* (Chicago: NTC Business Books, 1993), 101 & 109. Frank's discussion of this concept is on page 25 in *Conquest of Cool*.

¹⁷⁸ MTV was conceived as a commercial endeavor and many of its videos looked like commercials and vice versa. MTV videos generally fell into a few formats, including performance footage (real or imagined), narrative, and the artistic/avant-garde dream world. Analyses below will demonstrate that Pepsi's 1984 campaigns mimicked the concert footage and narrative/fantasy styles. See E. Ann Kaplan's discussion of MTV video types in *Rocking around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 54-88.

television shows.¹⁷⁹ He adds that the soda giant also used vivid colors and rock-anthem jingles to target countercultural youth, dubbing them the “Pepsi Generation.”¹⁸⁰ He also specifically argues that the energy and rebelliousness portrayed in Pepsi’s 1960s ads carried over into the “Choice of a New Generation” campaigns: “In the 1980s and 1990s, Pepsi would symbolize itself with then-daring stars like Madonna and Michael Jackson, monarchs of massified hip.”¹⁸¹ Pepsi’s incorporation of pop stars and their music into commercials was thus an attempt to associate its soda with their “daring” (i.e. rebellious) and “massified hip” (widely appealing) status.¹⁸²

Jackson’s commercial performances confirm Frank’s hypothesis. Analyses below demonstrate how in “The Concert” commercial, “Billie Jean’s” energetic track is paired with Jackson’s costuming, dancing, and extravagant pyrotechnic entrance to suggest his “daringness.” The pop star’s “wide appeal” is shown in the eager expressions of the staged concert’s audience, which is made up of all-ages men and women, as well as various racial groups.¹⁸³ The “Street” commercial reinforces the representation of Jackson’s mass popularity by showing kids from various ethnic backgrounds dancing together to his music. The campaign thus follows historical trends established in past Pepsi spots by showing young, spirited people enjoying leisure time and “living

¹⁷⁹ Frank is talking specifically about the 1963-1966 “Come Alive” television spots where young people rode around on motorcycles, cars, and boats to exemplify their lust for life. *Conquest of Cool*, 177.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 174-178.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 173.

¹⁸² What Frank fails to mention here is that using “Billie Jean” could have proven disastrous for the soda-giant if consumers would have had as much of a problem with the images in Jackson’s videos as those in Madonna’s. The author leaves out the fact Madonna’s Pepsi spots were met with opposition by some audiences. As chapter four of this dissertation will discuss, the controversy caused from the song’s racial and religious tropes, as well as the commercial’s similarities to the provocative images in her music video, forced Pepsi to pull its spot after only one day on-air. Phil Dusenberry claims that marketers mistakenly didn’t preview the video before releasing the spot and that Pepsi had to pull it because audiences had trouble distinguishing the advertisement from the video. *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 234.

¹⁸³ See figure 2.3.

life to the fullest” while they simultaneously take pleasure in Jackson’s performance and Pepsi’s product.¹⁸⁴

“Billie Jean” and Pepsi Entertain the “New Generation”

“The Concert”

In his autobiography, Roger Enrico described how Pepsi and BBD&O designed “The Concert” to look:

The commercial starts with the Jacksons—but not Michael—drinking Pepsi and relaxing in their dressing room before a concert. There’s a flash of Michael in front of the makeup mirror, and then we move behind the stage, where Michael’s about to make his entrance, and we are tantalized anew with glimpses of Michael’s look—his symbols. Then the set opens, and with a flash of fireworks, Michael dances and spins into a full-fledged concert, singing the reworded “Billie Jean” to a mob of screaming kids in the audience.¹⁸⁵

Enrico’s account captures the commercial’s attention to spectacle and movement. As a whole the spot cultivates excitement by rapidly progressing through a montage of frames that depict a youthful audience gearing up for a concert, the Jacksons getting ready to perform, and Michael Jackson’s symbols interspersed with Pepsi’s. The camera works to keep the images moving at a pace equal to that of the music’s soundtrack by cutting sporadically between the bustle backstage, screaming fans, and the staged excitement of the concert. The piecemeal style of editing used here is reminiscent of those in music video in that the cinematography doesn’t focus on any one scene for more than a few seconds as it works to manipulate the viewer’s sense of moving through time.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ For more on Pepsi’s concept of “living life to the fullest” see its online “Legacy Book,” 9-10 and chapter eight in Frank’s of *Conquest of Cool*, 172-173.

¹⁸⁵ Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 110.

¹⁸⁶ Hillary Lapedis argues that film editing in the mid-late 1980s was imitative of music video’s use of montage and fast-paced movement to displace time and teleology in movies like *The Big Chill*. See “Popping the Question: The Function and Effect of Popular Music in Cinema,” *Popular Music* 18 (summer 1999): 367-379.

In an effort to increase anticipation and to ease the audience into the soundtrack, “Billie Jean’s” aggressive opening drum-kit groove is replaced with a much lighter snare figure that gently accentuates beat one instead of the original emphasis on two and four. As the first percussive phrase unfolds, the camera pans out over a massive crowd. On the downbeat of the second phrase, the shot cuts to make-up artists helping the Jacksons get ready for the show. “Billie Jean’s” distinctive bass riff enters next to accompany Michael Jackson and his brothers in their preparations (Figure 2.1). Jackson’s white-sparkly glove soon appears onscreen. Quick glimpses of his other iconic symbols are interspersed with longer clips of his brothers sipping from Pepsi bottles and cups.



Figure 2.1: Commercial stills—Michael Jackson’s iconic glove; The Jacksons drinking Pepsi backstage¹⁸⁷

The energy of the backstage action is aurally matched by the high-hat and bass drum groove. The drum kit supports a snaking bass lick reminiscent of those used in Motown arrangements (Example 2.1). Here, the bass line winds around what we can assume at this point are the tonic and fifth degrees ($f\sharp$ and $c\sharp$). The addition of syncopated synthesizer chords on $f\sharp m$ and $g\sharp m$ work to perpetuate the song’s edginess by reinforcing the instability of the movement between the minor tonic and minor supertonic. The introduction of the $d\sharp$ indicates that the bass line’s hint at $F\sharp$ minor was misleading and that $F\sharp$ Dorian is actually the rightful key area for this section.

¹⁸⁷ “The Concert,” PepsiCo. Inc., 1984.

Example 2.1: Opening groove¹⁸⁸

“Billie Jean’s” opening groove works through constant syncopation and oscillates between modal chords that sound a major second apart, making the synthesized chords and the groove as a whole memorable for fans. In the original version of the song (analyzed below), these synthesized chords perpetuate the anxiety expressed in “Billie Jean’s” unsettling storyline. Here they have a *positive* connotation as they correspond with the images to aurally complement the energy and anticipation displayed by the performers and the crowd.

The first two stanzas of Pepsi’s slogan enter two measures later (Ex. 2.2). These lines are mapped onto the pre-chorus of the original song. Notably, Pepsi mixed the instrumental track at a higher volume than its new lyrics to increase the likelihood that audiences familiar with Jackson’s music could recognize the tune and make the association with the hit single.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ The low f#s in the bass line are also doubled an octave below what’s notated here.

¹⁸⁹ During the interviews I conducted with college students, everyone who viewed this commercial knew the song was from *Thriller* and all but one knew the title. In person interviews by author, University of California, Los Angeles, November 2010-October 2011.

The image shows a musical score for the instrumental pre-chorus of 'Billie Jean' by Michael Jackson. It consists of three systems of staves. Each system includes a Voice staff, a Keyboard Synthesizer staff (split into Treble and Bass clefs), and an Electric Bass staff. The lyrics are placed below the voice staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: 'You're a whole new generation, you're dancing through the day, you're grab - bing for the mag - ic on the run. You're a whole new gen - er a - tion, you're lov - in what you do, put a Pep - si in the mo - tion, The choice is up to you. He - e - ey!'

Example 2.2: Pepsi's lyrics placed over the instrumental pre-chorus to "Billie Jean"

BBDO executive Phil Dusenberry worked closely with Jackson to rewrite the lyrics to "Billie Jean" and ensure they complimented the company's long-standing history of lifestyle advertising:

You're a whole new generation, you're dancing through the day. You're grabbing for the magic on the run.	You're a whole new generation, you're lovin' what you do. Put a Pepsi in the motion, the choice is up to you (hey).	You're the Pepsi generation. Guzzle down and taste the thrill of the day, and feel the Pepsi way... ¹⁹⁰
---	--	---

Notice the action words present in each line: *dancing*, *grabbing*, *run*, *lovin'*, *motion*, *choice*, *guzzle down*, *taste*, and *thrill*. Each one attempts to describe the energetic actions of the "New Generation." The motion

¹⁹⁰ PepsiCo, Inc., "Choice of a New Generation," 1984.

implied by these words is perfectly complimented by “Billie Jean’s” instrumental track, which drives the words forward to reinforce Pepsi’s message of vitality and exuberance. Just as in the original song, Jackson lends metrical accent to specific words by starting each phrase on a pick-up note. This allows the action words and the company name to fall on the downbeat, making them stand out. (Ex. 2.2) The fact that important chordal changes also happen on the downbeats lends even more weight to the slogan’s key words.

During the first lines of Pepsi’s slogan, the opening riff drops out. The substitution of $d\flat$ here highlights the $\flat VI$ and changes the key from $F\sharp$ Dorian to $F\sharp$ minor. Throughout the pre-chorus, the harmony oscillates steadily from VI to i and waits until the last possible moment to reach the dominant $C\sharp$. Despite the fact that the D-major chord isn’t working as a $\flat VI$ in this section, it still works to build nervous excitement by frequently subverting the anticipated dominant arrival (Ex. 2.2). The vocal track here lies somewhere in what Robynn Stilwell has termed the “fantastical gap” as Michael Jackson acts out the slogan’s line, “Put a Pepsi in the motion,” while running through a tunnel of fans holding Pepsi cups.¹⁹¹ A tracking shot follows Jackson’s sparkly white socks as he dances down the corridor. The camera then cuts to images of his brothers running onstage. Just before the stars come into view, an announcer’s voice cuts through the music to introduce them, causing the crowd to go wild (Fig. 2.2). Michael Jackson’s sequined jacket

¹⁹¹ Stilwell talks about how the terms diegetic and non-diegetic aren’t always sufficient in explaining particular scenes or transitions between them. Since Jackson and his brothers are not yet actually performing either onscreen or onstage, this is an instance of being “in-between” diegeses. Jackson’s voice thus seems to narrate the scene, but also to foreshadow his upcoming performance. See Stilwell’s “The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic,” in *Beyond the Soundtrack*, ed. Daniel Goldmark et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 185-202. Additionally, Jackson’s recognizable mid-range, smooth-timbred voice stands in as what Michel Chion termed as an “acousmatic” symbol for his physical presence. This voice-over thus works as a meta-diegetic narrative of the scene from Jackson’s perspective. It also foreshadows and builds anticipation for his performance later in the spot, by giving viewers a taste of what’s to come. Chion discusses how “acousmatic” sounds can be heard without seeing their source and how that source may be revealed before or after they are heard. In the case of these commercials, experienced listeners will know that the source is Jackson and that he’s mixed into the action by his symbols. Therefore, his voice stands in for him until viewers can actually see his performance later in the spot. See *Audio-Vision: Sound On Screen*, ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 221.

(reminiscent of the one he wore in the *Motown 25* special) comes into focus while the subsequent phrase, “the choice is up to you,” is harmonically highlighted, marking the *first and only* time that the structurally significant dominant chord is heard in the commercial (Ex. 2.2).



Figure 2.2: Commercial still—Michael Jackson’s sparkling white socks and black loafers

The images help to push the action forward to the commercial’s climax while the camera shows the audience jumping to their feet to welcome Michael Jackson onto the stage. By putting harmonic and visual emphasis on this key phrase (in which the name of the brand is spoken for the first time), Pepsi hopes to encourage viewers, identified in the diverse faces of its onscreen audience, to take action and buy their product (Fig. 2.3).



Figure 2.3: Commercial stills—The camera reveals the “New Generation” of Pepsi and Jackson’s fans

In the midst of the pandemonium Michael Jackson finally appears at the top of the stairs (Fig. 2.4). His silhouette is illuminated by pyrotechnics on either side of him. His entrance corresponds with the downbeat of the jingle’s chorus, where he labels the audience as “the Pepsi Generation.”¹⁹² By

¹⁹² The phrases “New Generation” and “Pepsi Generation” are paired with images that show how Pepsi’s product is integrated into the excitement expressed by the audience members depicted onscreen. The camera’s focus on the crowd during these moments identifies them as the target audience. Because the setting isn’t intimate, but packed with thousands of people, it can be inferred that viewers at home are included as a part of the crowd. What sets home audiences apart however, is the fact that unlike onscreen fans, they get to see what’s going on backstage. Home viewers are therefore structurally privileged over the audience portrayed in the commercial and are made to feel special from this vantage point. Making consumers feel like members of a special group has historically been a key trope in lifestyle

now the music is finally diegetic as the Jacksons sing the remainder of the chorus to the adoring crowd.



Figure 2.4: Commercial stills—Michael Jackson enters the stage and sings with his brothers

During the chorus, the Jacksons build up the soda giant even further by enticing fans to “taste the thrill of the day, and feel the Pepsi way” (Ex. 2.3). The syncopation in this phrase draws attention to the new words. Furthermore, the word “thrill” is sung on the highest note heard thus far (b4), aurally elevating excitement for the product and subtly alluding to Jackson’s new album, *Thriller*. Two measures later, the vocal range extends even further to a high c# on the word “feel.” The emphasis on “feelings” here directly correlates with Dusenberry’s claim that Pepsi had finally “learned the power of music—and we made people look at a commercial in a new way: with their feelings. This was a real ‘first’.”¹⁹³ Thus, this pairing of elevated musical range and textual enticement work simultaneously to intensify the excitement of seeing the Jacksons perform and reinforce the commercial’s message to “guzzle down” Pepsi-Cola.

advertising. Marketers generally assume that the desire for the product will be increased when viewers have a positive feeling of belonging and can identify with the commercial’s setting. Frank’s discussion (noted above) of Pepsi’s attempt to capture those in the 1960s counterculture demographic is one such example. See *Conquest of Cool*, 178. In much the same way, Pepsi’s Michael Jackson commercials attempt to cater to the pop star’s fans by simultaneously representing them onscreen and favoring the viewer who is off-screen. As the next chapter will show, this privileged position is extended even further in Jackson’s later Pepsi campaigns as viewers are allowed to witness his daydream.

¹⁹³ Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 218.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson. The score is divided into four systems, each containing three staves: Voice, Keyboard Synthesizer, and Electric Bass. The lyrics are overlaid on the voice staff, showing the chorus repeated with the Pepsi slogan. The lyrics are: "You're the P - ep - si Gen - er - a - tion. Gu - zzle do - wn and taste the thrill of the day, and fe - el the Pep - si way. Taste the thrill of the day and fe - el the Pep - si way! You're a who - le new Gen - er - a - tion. FADE OUT: You're a who - le new Gen - er - a - tion." The music is in 4/4 time and the key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

Example 2.3: Pepsi's slogan placed over the chorus track to "Billie Jean"

Following a close-up of each performer, the vocal line loops back to the opening measures of the chorus to reiterate: "You're a whole new generation." The music fades out as the words "Pepsi. The Choice of a New Generation" slide to the center of the screen over the sea of fans (Fig. 2.5). The commercial's soundtrack ends the same way as the album version of "Billie Jean," by

fading out on the repetition of the hook, underpinned by rhythmic guitar vamp that reinforces the $f\sharp$ tonic note.

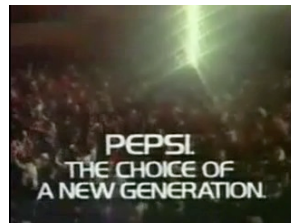


Figure 2.5: Commercial still—Pepsi’s slogan slides over the sea of fans

“The Concert” thus carries the viewer through a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the Jacksons’s backstage preparations into the concert setting itself. This commercial operates like MTV fictionalized performance videos that use close-ups and tracking shots of backstage footage to put the viewer on a more personal level with the musicians.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, Pepsi’s concept of youthfulness is displayed onscreen in the faces of concertgoers and the performers and perpetuated by the energy expressed in the lyrics and musical track. By ending on a shot of a pumped-up crowd the images leave the audience hanging in suspense, unable to experience the entirety of the performance that’s presumed to continue after the camera stops rolling. In this way, the underlying themes of delayed gratification and choice that have pervaded the images and soundtrack—the postponement of seeing Michael Jackson’s face, the anticipation of him entering the stage, the delayed dominant chord, and the fact that viewers have to make the effort go out to buy the soda—carry past the confines of the commercial and into the future experiences and desires of viewers.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Van Halen’s “Jump” came out the same year as these commercials. The band is filmed onstage, but there is no audience. As the band members dance around the stage, they each have an intimate relationship with the camera. David Lee Roth frequently looks directly into the camera and smiles, which creates perspective that he’s gazing directly into the viewer’s eyes. The viewer is thus given the opportunity to experience the group as an onstage participant in the action.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Fink discusses how “recombinant teleologies” in minimalist music and disco work to delay gratification and create desire for audiences. See chapter two of his *Repeating Ourselves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 62-119. I would argue that Pepsi created a “recombinant teleology” for “Billie Jean” in the commercial by cutting it up. I will elaborate on this more in chapter three as it applies to the use of *Bad* in Jackson’s second Pepsi campaign.

“Street”

“Street” is reminiscent of music videos that incorporate hit songs into fantasy worlds and allows audience members to have personal encounters with the performers.¹⁹⁶ The Jacksons are therefore removed from the limelight of the concert setting and placed in an urban neighborhood. Much of the music in this spot is the same as “The Concert” except for an extension of the opening groove that allows more time for the camera to set the scene. Prior to the groove’s entrance, extra musical sounds such as car horns and video arcade noises sonically place the action in a city street.

“Street” begins with a glimpse of Michael Jackson wearing a black and white leather jacket, sparkly white socks, black shoes, pegged pants, and his famous white glove as he stands next to Pepsi’s logo in the pizza-place window (Fig. 2.6).



Figure 2.6: Commercial stills—Pepsi and Michael Jackson’s symbols are shown together¹⁹⁷

A quick cut to his sparkling white socks and black loafers set off the re-worked drum-kit rock groove to set an energetic pace for the ensuing bass riff (Ex. 2.1, above). About a dozen children then bounce into the street wearing “hip” clothes, sunglasses, and bandanas that resemble the outfits worn by the rival gangs in Jackson’s “Beat it” video. One of them carries a boom box, signaling that the music in the scene is diegetic and that they are fans of the pop star’s music (Fig. 2.7). Because

¹⁹⁶ Poison’s “Nothing But a Good Time” video ushers a fan out of the doldrums of everyday life and into the brightly colored setting of the band performing just for him. See Robert Walser’s discussion of this video in *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 124-128. E. Ann Kaplan identifies the main types of music video in *Rocking around the Clock*, 54-88. (See also footnote 39). Within these distinctions she describes possible subcategories. Based on her designations, “Street” commercial can be considered as a romantic narrative where the Jacksons act as parental figures. “The Concert” commercial can be classified as both a romantic narrative and a nihilistic performance since both happen within its storyline.

¹⁹⁷ “Street,” PepsiCo. Inc., 1984.

only the drum kit and bass riff can be heard at this point, the viewer is led to believe that the original version of “Billie Jean” is blaring out of the portable stereo. Multiple shot-reverse-shots occur between images of the Jackson brothers hanging out and visuals of the kids drinking soda while they dance.



Figure 2.7: Commercial stills—Kids carrying a boom box playing “Billie Jean” and drinking Pepsi; The Jacksons size-up their brother’s impersonator

Michael Jackson’s glove comes into focus the moment the synthesizer chords enter the soundtrack (Ex. 2.1). The linkage of his most famous symbol with the opening Dorian riff solidifies his iconicity and confirms for the viewer that the song is indeed “Billie Jean.”

A young boy then slides out of a doorway dressed identically to Jackson’s character in his “Beat It” video.¹⁹⁸ He emerges wearing one white glove and Jackson’s famous red leather jacket (Fig. 2.8). As he makes his way into the street, he performs all of the pop star’s signature moves. Jackson’s voice enters at this point with the first phrase of Pepsi’s slogan (Ex. 2.2). The words, “you’re dancing through the day,” work to perfectly compliment the children’s action onscreen. The kids dance around the street until one of the Jackson brothers spots them from outside the pizza place. Michael Jackson and his brothers walk out to meet them. Just before the two “gangs” collide, the phrase “Put a Pepsi in the motion” is piped over the scene. In that same moment, the boy begins to moonwalk as he dramatically gulps from a Pepsi can. The impersonator’s reward for literally putting his Pepsi into “motion” is that he unknowingly slides into his idol. When he turns around, Michael Jackson sings the hook, “You’re the Pepsi Generation,” directly to the astonished youth. After

¹⁹⁸ Alfonso Ribeiro later played Carlton on the TV show *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

getting over the shock of literally bumping into his favorite pop star, the boy and his gang eagerly dance side-by-side with the famous brothers (Fig. 2.8).



Figure 2.8: Commercial stills—Jackson identifies the young impersonator as a member of the “Pepsi Generation”; The Jacksons dance with their new friends

The Jacksons and the children dance in sync to the slogan’s chorus in the middle of the street. It’s no coincidence that the performance here is reminiscent of the final dance number in “Beat It” since the commercial’s director and choreographer had also worked with Jackson on the video.¹⁹⁹

“Street’s” direct reference to the video thus demonstrates yet another attempt for Pepsi to align itself with the “hip, cool, and rebellious,” aesthetics favored by the MTV generation. What’s noticeably different here is Pepsi’s replacement of violent street gangs with *children* accompanied by one of America’s most friendly family acts.

Like “The Concert” this spot was edited so that the images of Jackson’s fans were placed over the phrase “You’re a Whole New Generation.” In this case, the children are clearly the focus, indicating Jackson’s “massified” appeal to all age groups. As the commercial comes to an end, the “King of Pop” takes a moment to pose for the children as he walks away, which causes them to high-five one another in excitement. At this point, the slogan’s hook is repeated over the same tonicized rhythmic guitar riff heard at the end of “The Concert” commercial.²⁰⁰ The performers’

¹⁹⁹ In fact, some of the moves are taken directly from the “Beat It” video. In my interview with the commercial’s director, Giraldi told me that Michael Peters was the choreographer for “Beat It” as well as the Pepsi commercials. Giraldi had met Peters when he directed Broadway shows. Giraldi said he believed that the dance Peters choreographed for Jackson for “Beat It” was the one dance that Jackson didn’t create, or at least help to create, during his entire career as a solo singer. Giraldi, phone interview, October 8, 2010.

²⁰⁰ The vocal lines heard at the end of “The Street” lie somewhere in the “fantastical gap” since the Jacksons have noticeably stopped singing.

musical and physical movement off-screen carries the commercial into the future, to other potential encounters with Pepsi and the Jacksons. “Street” closes with Jackson’s impersonator performing one last move. As the music fades out, Pepsi’s slogan slides to the middle of the screen.

Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean”

Obviously Pepsi attempted to encapsulate Michael Jackson’s superstar iconicity in these spots by integrating its product with as many of the pop star’s signifiers as it could—everything from his apparel and dance moves to his music and videos. But there is an obvious incongruence with Pepsi’s representation of Jackson’s song in these settings and the way it existed outside the commercials. It’s no secret that “Billie Jean” bemoans the consequences of heartbreak, lust, revenge and implied irresponsible promiscuity. In his late-1980s memoir, *Moonwalk*, Jackson claims he wrote the song to reflect the awkward situations his brothers found themselves in during their fame as the Jackson 5.²⁰¹ He also admits to having the same situations happen to him as a young adult. “Billie Jean’s” lyrics thus lay out the scenario of a “girl” causing a “scene” (i.e. court battle) when she tracks down a former lover to tell him he’s the father of her child.²⁰² The song is the clichéd tale of the celebrity who falls prey to a dissatisfied ex- or wannabe lover and evokes betrayal and lies through a skillful pairing of poetic lyrics with harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic instabilities. As the story unfolds, Jackson shifts between the narrative of his past experience, flashbacks to his encounters with Billie Jean, and the story’s moral lesson. Contributing to the seriousness of the storyline, the backing track continually gravitates towards the bVI —a key area historically used in Western music to indicate deceitfulness (as in deceptive cadence). The bVI (represented by the pitch $d\sharp$) frequently disrupts sections in the $F\#$ Dorian mode, causing a strong pull towards $F\#$ natural minor and

²⁰¹ Michael Jackson, *Moonwalk* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 192.

²⁰² For a complete listing of the lyrics to “Billie Jean” see Appendix A.

making it unclear which of the modalities is correct. Constant moves to the bVI also cast doubt on Jackson's claims of innocence by appearing at critical points in the story and subverting expected resolutions. In fact, resolution is something that the song never attains, as the storyline is left open-ended and the harmonies never reach a satisfying cadence on a tonic.

When considering the implications of the song's message, it's highly unlikely that Pepsi would *ever* be willing to associate its brand with the situation described in "Billie Jean." But, for Pepsi (and even many fans), the plausibility of the storyline wasn't as much the point as the fact that the groove and tune were *catchy and easily identifiable*. The company agreed to use the song simply because Jackson offered it to them and it was a huge hit. Obviously Pepsi's marketers hoped that the simple act of replacing "Billie Jean's" controversial storyline with a slogan about soda would distance the song's original meanings from the commercial's context. But it was more than the new words that changed the song's meaning. Pepsi was actually able to eliminate much of the tension and ambiguity built into the single by cutting out key *structural* moments.

In the original track, Jackson's precarious situation is set-up by a slow introductory build-up of textures, rhythms, and melodies. A synthesized drum kit plays for two full measures before the introduction of the bass riff notated above (Ex. 2.1). The laid-back riff cycles coolly for eight bars until the $f\sharp m$ and $g\sharp m$ synthesizer chords are layered on top. As mentioned above, the introduction of the $d\sharp$ in the $g\sharp m$ chord instead of the expected $d\flat$ sounds peculiar since the preceding bass line sets the stage for $f\sharp$ minor, and not $F\sharp$ Dorian. Furthermore, the constant rubbing between $f\sharp m$ and $g\sharp m$ doesn't allow the song to move forward, becoming the musical equivalent to the act of running in place. The careful and slow mapping-out of the groove indicates that these individual parts prove structurally important for conveying the song's tenuous storyline.

Once Jackson's vocal line enters the track, he skillfully intersperses his tale of deceit and lies with metaphorical visions of dancing "in the round" (Ex. 2.4). These visions noticeably interrupt the

storyline and move somewhere into Jackson’s sub-conscious to float ambiguously between past, present, and future encounters with Billie Jean. During the first few instances, Jackson states “I am the one...who will dance on the floor in the round.” In the second verse he admits the problem arose “‘cause we danced on the floor in the round.” He then offers “advice”: “just remember to always think twice,” which is abruptly contradicted by a voice somewhere in the back of the sound box that pleads, “Don’t think twice! Don’ think twice!” In the end Jackson asks, “Can we dance on the floor in the round?” confessing his willingness to engage with his accuser. His vocal line here reveals the dizzying aspect of these passages by oscillating quickly between two notes, f# and g#.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson. The first system includes a vocal line, a keyboard synthesizer part, and an electric bass line. The lyrics for this system are: "SHE WAS MORE LIKE A BEAU - TY QUEEN FROM A MO - VIE SCENE I SAID DONT MIND BUT WHAT DO FOR FOUR - TY DAYS AND FOR FOUR TY NIGHTS, LAW WAS ON HER SIDE. BUT WHO CAN STAND WHEN SHE'S IN". The second system includes a vocal line, a synth part, and an electric bass line. The lyrics for this system are: "YOU MEAN I AM THE ONE? WHO WILL DANCE ON THE FLOOR IN THE ROUND? DE MAND HER SCHEMES AND PLANS? 'CAUSE WE DANCED ON THE FLOOR IN THE ROUND. IN THE ROUND." The notation shows a complex rhythmic pattern with many eighth and sixteenth notes, and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Example 2.4: Dancing around the \flat VI

The harmony reinforces the ambiguous nature of “dancing in the round” by fixating on $bm7$. These passages bring the song’s tension to the fore. By opting for the d^{\flat} to become the third degree of the subdominant, it acts as a \flat VI and momentarily subverts the Dorian mode. Additionally, the bass line abandons its smooth eighth-note pattern by jumping over beat three to land safely on the familiar $f\sharp$ —a move that seems to rhetorically “dance around” the $bm7$ intrusion. These interruptions happen three times in each verse (six in total) seeming to prod at the veracity of

the storyline. I would argue then that the $\flat VI$ and syncopated bass-line work in conjunction with Jackson's narrative asides to cast doubt on the Dorian mode, and further that these "dancing" visions can be interpreted as either a euphemism for their past sexual encounters or simply as contradicting testimonies between Jackson and his accuser. Structurally speaking, these harmonic deviations foreshadow an upcoming move to $f\sharp$ minor in the pre-chorus. It's important to note here that Pepsi's commercials all together leave out the verses, effectively eliminating the tension set up by the $\flat VI$ in those sections.

The $\flat VI$ makes its most intrusive appearance on the downbeat of the pre-chorus where Jackson tells moral of his story (Ex. 2.5). Here the groove drops out and the $\flat VI$ becomes the root of D-Major chords that temporarily change the key to $f\sharp$ minor. Up to this point Jackson's voice has sounded reserved in a comfortable middle range, but here he musically highlights his message by singing an octave higher and changing the metric accent from the off-beats to the downbeats. Stagnant block chords support his warning not to mess with "young girl's hearts."

The image shows a musical score for the pre-chorus of "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson. It consists of five systems of staves. The first system includes a Voice staff with two lines of lyrics, a Piano and Synthesizer staff, and an Electric Bass staff. The second system includes a Voice staff with two lines of lyrics, a Piano and Synthesizer staff, and an Electric Bass staff. The third system includes a Voice staff with two lines of lyrics, a Piano and Synthesizer staff, and an Electric Bass staff. The fourth system includes a Piano and Synthesizer staff and an Electric Bass staff. The fifth system includes a Piano and Synthesizer staff and an Electric Bass staff. The lyrics are: "PEO - PLE AL WAYS TOLD ME, BE CARE - FUL OF WHAT YOU DO, AND DONT GO A - ROUND BREAK - IN YOUNG GIRLS' HEARTS, AND PE - PLE AL WAYS TOLD ME, BE CARE - FUL OF WHAT YOU DO, AND DONT GO A - ROUND BREAK - IN YOUNG GIRLS' HEARTS, BUT YOU MO - THER AL WAYS TOLD ME, BE CARE - FUL OF WHO YOU LOVE, AND BE CARE - FUL OF WHAT YOU DO, CAUSE THE LIE BE - COMES THE TRUTH HE - E - EY! CAME AND STOOD RIGHT BY ME, JUST THE SMELL OF SWEET PER - FUME, THIS HAP - PENED MUCH TO SOON, SHE CALLED ME TO HER ROOM HE - E - EY!"

Example 2.5: "Billie Jean" pre-chorus

Jackson's vocal line creates even more tension by singing the word "careful" on the dreaded sixth-degree. The d^{\sharp} acts even more deceptively here as the VI chords resist cadencing through the dominant until the last possible moment. Once the C^{\sharp} chord finally appears in the final measure of the pre-chorus, it offers little resolution and instead heightens the dramatic action by illuminating the phrases: "The lie becomes the truth" and "She called me to her room." These two assertions of the dominant provide the only "true" cadential points in the song. The song's resistance to harmonic resolution thus supports the apprehension Jackson describes in the storyline. Ironically, in the Pepsi commercials replaces Jackson's lyrics here with, "the choice is up to you," essentially diffusing another highly volatile moment. Pepsi's re-contextualization of the music in this section is perhaps one of *the* most emblematic examples of the way that advertising forges new contexts for familiar musical signifiers.

At the arrival of the chorus, the opening groove is reinstated to push the song back into F^{\sharp} Dorian, making the pre-chorus sound like a temporary detour. The decision not to stay in f^{\sharp} minor renders the song's turmoil irresolvable since the bVI continues to reappear and get suppressed. It's unclear whether this tug-o-war between key areas represents conflicting sides of story or is a simply larger metaphor for the concept of deception.

Despite the lack of an alibi, Jackson repeatedly pleads his innocence, calling Billie Jean "just a girl" he denies caring about and possibly even knowing.²⁰³ The harmonic motion from the verses returns here to alternate between measures of $f^{\sharp}m$ and $g^{\sharp}m$ with two-bar insertions of $bm7$. During the $bm7$ passages, Jackson attempts to distance the child as a stranger by referring to him as "the

²⁰³ The way that young women express their fandom has been historically brushed off as immature and "crazy." "Girly" is the word that often accompanies this stereotype. In the cases of Elvis Presley and the Beatles, it was surprising for conservative American families to witness the sexual angst expressed by young women who screamed, fainted, and tore out their hair when they saw their idols. See Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs's "Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun" and Stephen Hinerman's "'I'll Be Here with You': Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture in Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 84-106 & 107-134. The Jackson 5 received the same reactions, as did Michael Jackson during his solo career.

kid.” He sings the phrase “the kid is not my son” in a highly syncopated manner and places “my” squarely on the $d\sharp$ (Ex. 2.6). Jackson thus takes ownership of the bVI here, perhaps revealing the extent of Billie Jean’s betrayal. In the commercial remake, this note actually highlights *product* name—again reforming the transgression suggested here by the music’s tropes to instead attempt to incorporate the soda brand into Jackson’s iconic track.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Voice, Keyboard Synthesizer, and Electric Bass. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The voice part has the lyrics "but the ki - d is not my son". The note for "my" is highlighted in yellow. The keyboard synthesizer part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The electric bass part has a steady eighth-note pattern.

Example 2.6: Jackson sings the bVI ($d\sharp$) to assert his position as the accused protagonist

Adding to precariousness of the score, peculiar-sounding synthesizer flourishes interject periodically to dance around the $d\sharp$ (Ex. 2.7).²⁰⁴ The nature of this falling $f\sharp$ minor chord sounds foreboding as it resists stopping to rest on $c\sharp$ (the dominant) and is repeated numerous times following Jackson’s declaration of innocence. These little melodies thus seem to become musical echoes of the protagonist’s struggle to save face.

The image shows a musical score for a Keyboard Synthesizer flourish. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The flourish consists of a series of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note on C#, a quarter note on B, a quarter note on A, a quarter note on G, a quarter note on F#, a quarter note on E, a quarter note on D, a quarter note on C#, a quarter note on B, a quarter note on A, a quarter note on G, a quarter note on F#, a quarter note on E, a quarter note on D, a quarter note on C#, a quarter note on B, a quarter note on A, a quarter note on G, a quarter note on F#, a quarter note on E, a quarter note on D, a quarter note on C#.

Example 2.7: Synthesizer flourish

Jackson leaves listeners guessing how the story ends while the song fades out on his infamous denial, “Billie Jean is not my lover,” accompanied by a guitar riff that moves between the tonic and bVI

²⁰⁴ These fleeting melodies make an octave leap on $c\sharp$ followed by a fast descent back down an inverted $f\sharp$ minor triad, with an added bVI appoggiatura.

degrees. The ability for “Billie Jean” to maintain dialectical harmonic tension throughout the whole song, thus effectively supports the mysteries and anxieties posed by the storyline.²⁰⁵

Unpacking Musical Meanings

Adorno once argued that:

...the works which are the basis of the fetishization and become cultural goods experience constitutional changes as a result...Irrelevant consumption destroys them. Not merely do the few things played again and again wear out...but reification affects their internal structure. They are transformed into a conglomeration of irruptions which are impressed on the listeners by climax and repetition...²⁰⁶

While Adorno was talking specifically about transcriptions of Western canonical works, I’d like to read him against the grain here, and postulate that this argument actually works well when extended to advertising’s adaptations of pre-existing popular songs. Adorno would likely argue that popular music should submit easily to advertising, since he believed that pop songs lacked the dialectical struggle and structural intricacies necessary to be on par with canonical works. While my analysis of “Billie Jean” proves contrary to this theory in its demonstration of a complex dialectical form and sophisticated harmonic structure, I do think there’s validity Adorno’s argument that the repetitive “consumption” of themes has the potential to change musical structures and effect meanings when it comes pre-existing popular music’s role in advertising.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Jackson’s music video for “Billie Jean” does little to resolve questions raised by the song. If anything, the video heightens uncertainty by depicting the pop star as a mysterious yet magical man who’s impossible to pin down. The final scenes of the video even seem to bring Jackson’s proclaimed innocence into question by showing him getting into bed with an unknown person and disappearing. He eventually emerges as a tiger, enacting the metaphor of a man’s sexual appetitive being like that of a wild beast. *Michael Jackson: Video Greatest Hits—HIStory*, “Billie Jean,” DVD, directed by Martin Scorsese (New York: Epic Music Video, 2001).

²⁰⁶ Adorno, “On the Fetish Character of Music,” 281.

²⁰⁷ The harmonic sophistication of “Billie Jean’s” score isn’t surprising considering the fact that Jackson’s producer Quincy Jones is a classically trained composer and musician.

It's clear that Pepsi attempted to distance itself from implications of deceitfulness and legal obligations laid out in "Billie Jean's" original storyline by showing positive images and changing the lyrics. The company also preserved the song's most distinguishing musical features like the opening bass riff and synthesizer chords, pre-chorus, and chorus because it knew experienced audiences could recognize them. More importantly, I postulate that Pepsi re-arranged these snippets of the score in a way that didn't allow harmonic and melodic subversions worked into the original to function in the same way. As Adorno noted, what makes a "work" complete is not just its memorable melodies, but also the *transitions* that make them fit within the musical structure as a whole.²⁰⁸ He claimed that the "reification" of themes strips away the music's "mysteries of personality, inwardness, inspiration, and spontaneity of reproduction."²⁰⁹ I would argue then, that "Billie Jean's" track is disassembled into "fetishized themes"—the parts are separated from the whole—and arranged in a way that re-interprets their structure. And thus, as Adorno reminds us, their meanings are also reformed in the context of this campaign. This was done in Pepsi's commercials, first, by *changing the metric accent* to make the drums sound less aggressive and subdue the opening groove. Second, small phrases, like the opening groove and synthesizer flourishes were *made into isolated ornaments* and lost their rhetorical functions to function instead as recognizable sound bytes. Most prominently, the spots simply *left out* the backing track to the verses, *eliminating* the immanent *conflict* created by the opposition between the natural minor and Dorian modes. And because the song's tension is understated from the very beginning, the introduction of the major

²⁰⁸ Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music," 281. Adorno talks about the dialectic of construction and expression in *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 55-57.

²⁰⁹ In this particular passage, Adorno scorns the creation of instrumental arrangements and other adaptations of canonic Western Art music. Ibid, 281. We will see in other chapters that Adorno's premise—that the repetitive "consumption" of themes not only has the potential to change the music's structures, but also can render it banal for audiences—holds true for many songs. A real-world example of the consequences of advertising's reworking of pop songs came from my college aged informants who said that if they heard a song in commercials too many times they would change the radio channel and even delete it from their iPods. In person interviews by author, November 2010-September 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

bVI chord on the downbeat of the pre-chorus wasn't strikingly volatile, but *exciting and positive* when paired with the onscreen images. And even though some harmonic tension and ambiguity is preserved in the sections left intact, in its new context, the pivotal bVI works to *delay gratification for the product* instead of manifesting unresolved anxiety. Finally, the subsequent pre-chorus arrival on the dominant achieves at least a partial *resolution* as viewers finally get a good glimpse of Michael Jackson and learn the moral of the commercial: "Put a Pepsi in the motion. The choice is up to you." Pepsi is therefore able to combine its friendly slogan and exciting onscreen images with bits and pieces of the song's most memorable moments to promote an excited energy for the product and performers rather than an anxious stewing about deception and illegitimacy. Thus, Pepsi's ability to pick "Billie Jean" apart, harvest the song of its themes, and stitch it back together effectively altered its meanings to fit the commercials' branding imperatives.

However, Pepsi's *re*-presentation of "Billie Jean" presents a paradox that's difficult to reconcile. On one hand, Pepsi felt the need to disassociate itself with the song's suggestive material. On the other, the company hoped to align itself with the energy encapsulated in Jackson's track. But when music has circulated outside of a commercial setting, even the most skillful advertisers can't prevent culturally constructed "meanings" from surfacing. The challenge for Pepsi, then, was that the less-desirable meanings associated with "Billie Jean's" musical signifiers couldn't easily be separated from the sounds and re-arranged. It's impossible to pick and choose certain parts of a song over others and expect the omitted portions to disappear completely from the listener's memory. But somehow Pepsi was successful in getting its intended message across, which brings up the question: How did marketers accomplish this?

Lawrence Kramer's work is a useful starting point for considering meaning transfer in multimedia texts. He notes: "In sum: musical meaning consists of a specific, mutual interplay

between musical experience and its contexts.”²¹⁰ His work proves helpful here as he postulates that music and images have the potential to bring various signifiers into an “imagetext” and that when taken together, they effect how each might be perceived. He also rightly points out that audiences decode meanings based on their prior experiences with the music and images. Arguments made by cultural theorists Stephen Goldman and Robert Papson about viewers’ experiences with commercials align with Kramer’s. They hypothesize that audiences decipher meaning based on their “alreadyness”—i.e. the previous knowledge they bring to a commercial’s sounds and images. Therefore, viewers’ “alreadyness” is what made Pepsi’s commercials’ soundtracks readily identifiable for experienced listeners.²¹¹ Taken together, Kramer, Goldman, and Papson’s theories indicate that “Billie Jean’s” tropes allowed audiences to bring what they knew about it into context with the campaign—a cognitive action that had the potential to simultaneously associate the song’s connections to the original, storyline and all, with the branded context. Accordingly, the college students I interviewed about these commercials all recognized the song as “Billie Jean.”²¹² Most didn’t notice (or at least comment on) the fact that Pepsi had changed the words. Media accounts of the campaigns during the 1980s also fail to talk about the new words, even when they mention the original.²¹³

The song’s association with Jackson was also undoubtedly solidified by his appearance onscreen. It’s possible that even experienced fans might have had trouble recognizing the track if

²¹⁰ Kramer, *Musical Meaning*, 8. Emphasis mine.

²¹¹ Goldman and Papson define this term as referring to the knowledge and/or experiences audiences bring into their interpretations of advertisements. See *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 35.

²¹² I was surprised by the fact that only two of my informants noticed (or at least mentioned) that the lyrics had been changed. In person interviews by author, November 2010 and September 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

²¹³ Press releases sometimes noted that the commercials featured “a version” of “Billie Jean” but didn’t talk about specifics. A telling example is the VJ’s introduction to the commercials during the MTV premiere of “The Concert.” “MTV Premiere of Michael Jackson Pepsi,” accessed November 3, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njNwQPrpacs&feature=channel>.

Jackson or his symbols weren't shown in the commercials. Jackson as the performer therefore adds an important level of signification to the music. As I discussed in chapter one, for the pop star and his fans the music was an aural representation of the spectacle of his performance, making Jackson's onstage displays just as important as the sounds themselves. Andrew Goodwin confirms this premise and argues that musical aesthetics in the 1980s had become increasingly dependent on images after MTV and other video formats had appropriated musical meaning from the sounds themselves to the visual aspects of an artist's performance.²¹⁴ While I don't wholly agree that these ideologies were entirely new for pop, I do agree with Goodwin that new music-making technologies further established musical performance as a *visual* experience that centered on *image*.²¹⁵ Kooijman echoes Goodwin's arguments in his analysis of Jackson's *Motown 25* performance and subsequent re-enactments of that night saying that Jackson's performance during the special marked a turning point in popular music aesthetics, where the audience was fascinated not by Jackson's musical skills (considering the fact that he lip-synced his hit song), but by the way he looked and moved onstage.²¹⁶ Authenticity in '80s pop was then realized more than ever before through the onstage "spectacle" of costuming, elaborate sets, and dancing—all of which are heavily emphasized in these commercials.²¹⁷

Kooijman further argues that in the years following *Thriller's* release, the pop star had become a "postmodernist sign, a visual representation."²¹⁸ Mercer and Kooijman have both noted

²¹⁴ See Goodwin's *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, 24-48.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 33. I would argue that pop music has been a televisual medium since at least the late-1950s and that image has always been central to its success. See my discussion of this chapter one.

²¹⁶ Kooijman, "Michael Jackson: *Motown 25*," 127.

²¹⁷ Douglas Kellner argues that the construction of the "spectacle" became a defining trope for MTV artists like Michael Jackson and Madonna. See *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and Postmodern*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 263-296. See also his *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-33.

²¹⁸ Kooijman, "Michael Jackson: *Motown 25*," 127.

that isolated aspects of Jackson's appearance (his costuming in particular) and his bodily movements and gestures (especially the moonwalk) work to signify him.²¹⁹ Kooijman concludes that the pop star's visual signifiers had the ability to work separately from his voice and music to act as representations of his performances and/or performing self.²²⁰ Pepsi's "Choice of a New Generation" campaign puts this theory into action. In both "The Concert" and "Street" commercials, Jackson's presence is merely implied. The camera focuses primarily on what the star referred to as his "symbols." He is further re-presented in "Street" when the young impersonator dresses like his "Beat It" character and recreates his dance moves to signify his iconic performances in videos, concerts, and the famous *Motown 25* special. These signifiers allowed the commercials to be well received and accepted as featuring Michael Jackson himself, despite the fact that his face appeared onscreen only for a few seconds.

The fact that Jackson openly acknowledged his "symbols" could stand in for him and offered them in exchange for less of his physical presence in the spots, demonstrates that he knowingly and carefully crafted his image to become representational parts of his star-persona. Jackson borrowed signifiers from other contexts and applied them to his image in new ways, which enabled his body, appearance, and music to be broken down into a series of detachable parts. Jackson's single-white glove, for example, has remained one of his most powerful signifiers. While white gloves can be traced back to formal wear and servant's uniforms, Jackson took this signifier and adapted it by wearing a single elaborately jeweled glove, thereby allowing it to float more-freely as representation of him and/or his music.²²¹ His single glove also drew attention to his right hand,

²¹⁹ See Mercer's "Monster Metaphors," 93.

²²⁰ Kooijman, "Michael Jackson: *Motown 25*, 127.

²²¹ There has been a lot of speculation about what Jackson's glove signifies, which further proves my point. Regardless of its intended "meanings," when the glove is associated with Jackson it is broken free from its previous historical representations and significations.

making it appear as though it moved independently of the other parts of his body, thus further detaching the glove from its original significations and its corporeal function.²²² Jackson's mid-'80s star-persona had therefore become a combination of many signifiers freed from their original sign-objects by the superstar himself, becoming fetishized parts of his persona.²²³ Advertising's long history of skillfully re-ordering signifiers therefore made it easy for Pepsi to take these symbols and recombine them to fit alongside their product in a *family-friendly* way.²²⁴

Specific tropes within his music and vocal style also act as signifiers for his image. In fact, I hypothesize that any of his three primary areas of signification—his physical appearance, dancing, and music—can stand in for or represent the other aspects of his performing persona.²²⁵ Videos of audience reactions to performances like the *Motown 25 Special* and even Pepsi's commercials make it clear that Jackson's music incites the desire to dance and allows listeners to imagine him when he isn't physically present.²²⁶ In fact, one of my informants observed that seeing Michael Jackson

²²² Google Images has countless pictures of Jackson's white glove. The fact that Jackson himself isn't wearing the glove in most of the pictures, but that it has meaning even when not attached to his body, proves that it alone can signify him. Scholarship on the "gaze" in feminist cinema studies, especially the "male gaze" theorizes how women's body parts are broken down into detachable parts. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" begins this dialogue. *Screen* 16, no. 3 (autumn 1975): 6-18. This same principal can be modified to apply to the way audiences view Jackson's glove and other prominent articles of his clothing.

²²³ Timothy D. Taylor's discussion of the reification of player pianos and canonical "art music" works in at the turn of the twentieth-century gives context for thinking about music's place in capitalism. See "The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of Mechanical Music," *Journal for the Society of Ethnomusicology* (spring/summer 2007): 281- 305.

²²⁴ Chapter one talks more about the history of advertising and the transition to postmodern aesthetics and neoliberal practices that mirrored those employed by MTV. See also Goldman and Papsion's, "Advertising in the Age of Accelerated Meaning," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000): 88-98.

²²⁵ My arguments are supported by work done on James Brown, to whom Jackson openly credited as his idol and "biggest inspiration." Musicologist David Brackett talks at length about Brown's performance style and how audiences can essentially "see" Brown when listening to his recordings. See Brackett's *Interpreting Popular Music*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 126. Citations are to the University of California edition. Also see Jackson's declaration of devotion for Brown at his funeral in 2006. Shaheem Reid, "James Brown Saluted by Michael Jackson at Public Funeral Service," MTV Networks, accessed March 13, 2012. <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1549061/jackson-speaks-at-james-brown-funeral.jhtml>.

²²⁶ Evidence of this lies in the thousands of cultural representations of Jackson's image and music—most obviously examples the countless replications of the choreography for *Thriller* at weddings, in television shows like *Glee*, and even in a YouTube video of a Philippine prison. I would argue that this choreography has been reproduced so frequently that

dancing and singing while the crowd cheered for him helped give *energy* and *new life* to the product—a statement that simultaneously demonstrates the power of these images and that Pepsi’s attempt to align itself with Jackson in a positive manner *was* indeed successful.²²⁷

Capitalist Realism and Pepsi’s Commercial

The presence of both the visual and musical elements of Jackson’s persona in Pepsi’s commercials, offered audiences a convincing and entertaining depiction of the star. But because Jackson’s images and music brought their own significations into the commercials, Pepsi’s version of “Billie Jean” didn’t replace but *contributed* to meanings that had already been individually or culturally constructed by listeners’ previous encounters with the song and Jackson’s performances.²²⁸ My informants who viewed the commercials all agreed that Pepsi’s message was clear: that Michael Jackson was telling the “New Generation”—i.e. Pepsi’s conception of “youthful” people—that to be “cool” like him they should drink Pepsi.²²⁹ They all found the commercials entertaining as well, despite their generational distance from the commercials’ airdates. 1980s media reports also confirm the campaign’s positive reception and indicate that audiences experienced and absorbed Pepsi’s version of “Billie Jean” as a part of the whole package of Jackson’s persona as an entertainer. They

the song is rarely heard without witnessing a recreation of the moves. *Thriller* has even inspired a Broadway musical production. Hollywood movies such as *The Wedding Singer* also feature scenes that portray notable aspects of Jackson’s dancing and attire. The extent of Jackson’s appeal is portrayed through the character Sammy, who is a somewhat-pathetic white, middle-aged, man living in suburbia. He often wears one white glove and a replica of Jackson’s red-leather jacket, and tries (but fails) to “moonwalk” in one of the scenes.

²²⁷ In person interview by author, November 8, 2010, University of California, Los Angeles.

²²⁸ For an example of how this practice has the potential to backfire see my discussion in chapter one about the backlash against Nike’s 1987 sneaker commercial featuring the Beatles’ “Revolution.” Fans insinuated that Nike tried to replace the song’s countercultural meanings with its banal message about selling shoes. See also chapter two of *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 23-39.

²²⁹ In person interviews by author, November 5-12, 2010, University of California, Los Angeles. It’s fitting that they used the word “cool” since, as discussed above, notions of the “hip” and “cool” were precisely what Pepsi’s commercials were trying to emulate.

further indicate that experienced audiences had little problem interpreting the commercial's soundtrack in the context of the friendly onscreen images.

But how is it that audiences could reconcile the contradictory “meanings” created by Pepsi's re-presentation of Jackson and his music? How can the appearance of Jackson and portions of his backing track bring authenticity to Pepsi's reconstruction of the pop star with their product, while simultaneously adding an ironic twist to Jackson's celebrity by showing him as an endorser of a product he doesn't drink, dancing in the streets with children, and changing cautionary lyrics to something more inclusive about an ideologically constructed “generation” of consumers? How can the commercials signify “Billie Jean” without *being* “Billie Jean”? As theorized by Schudson, these discrepancies can only be reconciled in the fabricated world of the commercial under the ideology of what he terms as “capitalist realism.”²³⁰ As noted above, he argues that American advertising borrows cultural images, including the notion of the celebrity, and “simplifies” and “typifies” them. He postulates that advertising works to flatten out cultural forms in order to appeal to the widest possible audience, thereby rendering those forms banal. Accordingly, his argument about the manipulation of visual cultural texts in advertising proves similar to Adorno's ideas about the “fetish character” of music. While Schudson doesn't include music in his discussion, it's useful to extend his ideas to consider popular music's role in advertising, as marketers strip songs down into their most recognizable bits and rearrange them to fit 30 to 60-second spots. I postulate then, that the success of Pepsi's commercials indicates that viewers accepted what was presented to them on the terms of the commercial, knowing on some level that the scenes weren't real, that Jackson's life as an entertainer was fabricated, and that the song in the commercial stands in as what Williamson would

²³⁰ Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 209-233. He argues that national advertising campaigns do this to appeal to the widest possible audiences, 214.

call the “*re*-presentation” of “Billie Jean.”²³¹ The song’s structures are further flattened out and its dialectic is destroyed to make (what Adorno has termed) a “regressed” version that celebrates passive consumerism. I thus argue that by effectively “fetishizing” Jackson’s music and iconicity through “simplifying” and “typifying” his most prominent signifiers, Pepsi provides an effective model of capitalist realism that fit well within their constructed fantasy world of youthfulness, energy, soda, and pop.

Future Implications

The “Choice of a New Generation” campaign became an idealized model for future attempts by corporations, advertising agencies, and musicians looking to capitalize on the interaction between popular music and brands. These commercials created a template for a new kind of celebrity endorsement—one that featured top performers singing new and current hit songs to endorse their own recordings *beside* corporate products. These co-branding efforts proved for the first time that celebrity endorsements could be lucrative for both parties since the skyrocketing of sales of Pepsi products were achieved without harming sales of Jackson’s albums and concert tickets.²³² Their overwhelming success also indicated that consumer sentiment about musicians appearing in commercial contexts had begun to shift. It was obvious that teenage MTV viewers were not only eager to consume music and material goods together, but also that they offered notably fewer criticisms of these endorsements than previous generations had showered on past artists and

²³¹ It can be argued that “The Concert” looks like it could be real concert footage. However, the media hype that surrounded the incident (which caused the burning of Michael’s scalp during filming) informed most audiences well before viewing the spots that the concert was staged.

²³² In 1960, the Kingston Trio performed some of their hits in a commercial for 7up. Few other artists followed suit until Michael Jackson’s Pepsi commercials re-ignited the trend in the 1980s. See Taylor’s *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), forthcoming.

marketers who had similarly “sold out” iconic images and music to advertisements.²³³ Additionally, the company’s decision to hire the star for such an extraordinary amount of money significantly increased the level of prestige for endorsements and sponsorships for big names. In the desire to match the quality of advertising Pepsi had acquired, other companies immediately poured more money into their advertising budgets.²³⁴ Many companies (including Coca-Cola) scrambled to hire well-known musicians for their own campaigns and some businesses offered two to three times what Pepsi had paid Jackson in an attempt to gain the same level of notoriety.²³⁵ The increase in cash flow resulted in good press for highly paid musicians and corporations that could shell out big bucks, allowing brands that offered the right deal at the right price to beg less for endorsements by successful musicians. For the first time, up-and-coming artists began actively seeking out opportunities to appear in commercials. Celebrities who appeared in commercials in subsequent years were no longer viewed as “has-beens” but talented entrepreneurs at the peak of their appeal.

Most importantly, Pepsi changed the way that the advertising industry did business by appearing to work as diligently to support the Michael Jackson and his music as much as selling their own product. The level of control Jackson maintained in the production of this campaign allowed future stars to have more input in the creative aspects of the spots in which they appeared. By forcing Pepsi to work harder than ever to please their star, Jackson persuaded marketers to be more

²³³ Pepsi’s “Choice of a New Generation” campaigns quieted fears (at least temporarily) that celebrity endorsements would cause overexposure and ruin a young musician’s career. See my discussion of rock ideologies in chapter one. For complete accounts see Joanna Demers’s, *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Effects Musical Creativity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006) as well as the second chapter of Klein’s *As Heard on TV*.

²³⁴ The quantity and quality of big names that were attracted to the advertising industry increased dramatically in the years following this campaign. The hype was aided by the fact Apple computer’s successful “1984” preceded the Pepsi spots by a month and also used big-name director Ridley Scott. Apple’s campaign demonstrated, albeit on a smaller scale, that big names and big budgets had the potential to pay off handsomely.

²³⁵ Roger Enrico believed that the pressure Pepsi had put on Coke by hiring Michael Jackson forced them to immediately go out and hire Julio Iglesias for \$10 million and even to reformulate their recipe to create New Coke. Neither move proved successful and Pepsi ended up finally (temporarily) beating Coke in sales. *The Other Guy Blinked*, 121.

imaginative in their endeavors and proved that celebrities didn't even have to touch a product to represent it well. This new marketing style replaced older unnatural and staged endorsement techniques and increased the likelihood that both musicians and marketers could be happy with the outcome.

Finally, the attention that Jackson's sponsorship attracted indicates that his commercials were not viewed simply as product endorsements, but as highly efficient mini-music videos.

BBD&O's creative director Phil Dusenberry reflects:

Critics say that when an ad agency resorts to celebrity advertising, it's a sign that the agency is out of ideas. That's true if you're still locked into the 1950s, plunking a familiar face...in front of the camera to read provocative lines....But we...[used] the biggest one we could find and put him or her in a carefully scripted scenario that functions like a mini-movie, with a beginning, middle, and end.²³⁶

While the commercials' director, Bob Giraldi, claimed the storyline was less important than its entertainment value, my analysis above demonstrates that the commercials did indeed have a prevalent storyline that matched common MTV formats of performance videos and narratives. The costuming, sets, dancing, and performance of a hit song all helped these commercials look like music videos. The energy evoked by the melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and new lyrics coupled with the fast-paced editing, the enthusiasm of the performers, and the excitement of the audience emulated the very essence of MTV programming.

The next chapter will illustrate how, three years later, Pepsi and Jackson would take these tropes even further, creating a four-part episodic commercial meant to coincide with the release of the pop star's newest solo-album, *Bad*. Everything from the music to the images are intensified in these spots, making them look more like music videos than any other commercials to date in the history of advertising.

²³⁶ Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*, 218.

Chapter 3:

The Day the Jingle Died: Reconstructing Temporality and the Celebrity in Michael Jackson's '88 Episodic Pepsi Campaign

By the spring of 1986, Pepsi was riding a colossal wave of celebrity endorsements. Since their successful partnership two years prior with Michael Jackson, the soda giant scored commercial cameos from other big names in the music industry, including Lionel Richie and Glen Frey, as well as giants from television and the silver screen like Michael J. Fox, Don Johnson, and Billy Crystal.²³⁷ Pepsi's CEO, Roger Enrico, was satisfied with the company's marketing and sales achievements to date and confident that Pepsi had reached its pinnacle—that is, until he received another fateful phone call from Jay Coleman, the publisher of *RockBill* magazine and the man responsible for initiating the company's first deal with the “King of Pop.” Enrico vividly recounts the conversation:

“...I just got a call you're not gonna believe...*Michael Jackson wants to make more Pepsi commercials!*”

After New Coke I thought I was pretty unshockable. But I have to tell you, this news jolts me.

“Michael's got a new album coming out and he's going to do a tour,” Jay continues, “and they want to make a major deal for him.”

“What did you say?”

“The obvious—that we all thought Michael couldn't stand it the last time.”

“What did they say?”

“That it wasn't true. Back then, he was forced into the Victory tour and the ‘New Generation’ commercials, but he's all on his own now—and he *wants* to do this.”

“Why? He doesn't need the money.”

“They had an answer for that too,” Jay says. “Michael's definitely not adverse to making more money—but what really gets him going is the idea of topping himself.”²³⁸

Not long after the call, Enrico jumped on a plane to Los Angeles to discuss the possibilities of a second arrangement. After promising Jackson a more extensive partnership that included more money, safeguarding against his over-exposure, and giving him the option of directing or co-directing a future commercial, the mega-star agreed to another landmark deal to create another set

²³⁷ Roger Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked: How Pepsi Won the Cola Wars* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 271.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 269. Emphasis his.

of “Choice of a New Generation” spots under the direction of the legendary commercial and filmmaker, Joe Pytko. This time Jackson appeared without his brothers and the campaign was scheduled to *coincide* with the unveiling of his much-anticipated third solo album, *Bad*.²³⁹ Quoted as a “multiyear creative partnership,” the pop star received yet another incredible sum from Pepsi for the use of the title track—estimated somewhere around \$10 million—and a sponsorship of his first-ever solo tour.²⁴⁰ The conditions of the new agreement allowed the commercials and Jackson’s concert tours to expand to an international market. The spots were eventually released in the UK, Canada, Japan and Russia and the tour covered much of the U.S., Great Britain, Europe, Japan, and Australia.²⁴¹

As they did with the previous campaign, Pepsi’s marketers expertly crafted a publicity storm around the new commercials. What the soda giant didn’t know at the time of the arrangement was that Jackson would delay the release of his album numerous times, postponing the airdates of completed versions of the spots until almost a year and half after announcing the deal.²⁴² Having become experts in weathering the pop star’s ever-changing demands, the soda giant took the setbacks in stride publically stating that: “One of the things we’ve learned in association with music

²³⁹ Michael Jackson, *Bad*, Epic, OE 40600, 1987, audio cassette.

²⁴⁰ Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 272. Media reports vary in their accounts of how much Jackson received for this deal.

²⁴¹ Jeffrey Scott, “Pepsi Buys Commercial Time on Soviet Television,” *Ad Day*, May 5, 1988, 1. “Jackson Commercial begins in Canada,” *Globe and Mail (Canada)*, November 16, 1987, accessed February 13, 2011, <https://www.lexisnexis.com>. Tour dates and venues can be found at: Michael Jackson: King of Pop, “Michael Jackson Concerts,” Sony Music Entertainment, accessed March 29, 2011, <http://www.michaeljackson.com>. The fact that these commercials extended to a global market makes this campaign a prime example of the influence neoliberal capitalist agendas had on the advertising and music industries at the time. Among the many facets of neoliberal ideologies, it advocated for the expansion of the marketplace through international sales of mass produced goods. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4 and all of chapter one. Also see my discussion of pop music’s relationship to neoliberalism in the first chapter of this dissertation.

²⁴² The deal was first publicized in May of 1986. See the timeline for each commercial’s creation and release date listed in Table 1 of Appendix B.

marketing is that music is an art, and art shouldn't be rushed."²⁴³ Despite Pepsi's supportive stance about the delays, the media and Jackson's fans were less forgiving. Trade press publications at that time reported that the public complained just as loudly about waiting for the spots as the music itself: "For endless months, newspapers, magazines and broadcast outlets have been reporting on the progress of the Michael Jackson album, 'Bad,' the Michael Jackson tour and the Michael Jackson Pepsi commercials. It was a publicity bonanza that played right into Jackson's hands—the multiple delays, of course, having been calculated to create pent-up demand."²⁴⁴

More than six months after it was promised, Jackson's album finally hit shelves on August 31, 1987. That same day Pepsi aired teasers of the new campaign during a CBS special titled *Michael Jackson—The Magic Returns*, which was designed to unveil the music video for the title track.²⁴⁵ The simultaneity of these events marked a pop culture milestone: For the first time in advertising history, commercials for a household corporate product became key a promotional tool for a top artist's *newest album, solo tour, documentary special, and music video*. The '87-88 commercials were therefore innovative in their attempt to converge traditionally disparate media and technologies.²⁴⁶ While

²⁴³ Michael Lorelli, senior-VP of Marketing at Pepsi-Cola USA, said this in an interview reported by Nancy Giges in "Pepsi Rekindles Cola War: Bottlers Want 'Sure-fire' Effort to Counter Coke Gains," *Advertising Age*, May 4 1987, 3. Instead of bemoaning the fact that its blockbuster campaign wouldn't air as originally planned during the summer of '87, the company took the opportunity to showcase its latest commercial featuring a duet by Tina Turner and David Bowie to stand in for Jackson's spots. Gail Belsky, "Pepsi Challenge Back; Jackson Spot on Hold," *Adweek*, March 23, 1987, 2.

²⁴⁴ Bob Garfield, "Cola War's TV Extravaganzas; Jackson Gives Pepsi Bad Rap," *Advertising Age*, November 2, 1987, 3. Other sources that bemoaned the delay of the commercials, include: Belsky, "Pepsi Challenge Back," 1987; Sally Rowland, "Pepsi Banks on Jackson as Cola War Fizzes," *Marketing*, September 3, 1987, accessed January 21, 2012 <https://www.lexisnexis.com>; Richard Harrington, "Pepsi & The Pop Star: Michael Jackson's \$15 Million Cola Deal," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1986, C2; Betsy Sharkey, "Pepsi Grammy Plans: Tale of Two Michaels," *Adweek*, January 19, 1987, accessed January 21, 2011, <https://www.lexisnexis.com>.

²⁴⁵ The video for "Bad" was famously directed by Martin Scorsese and featured cameos by Jackson's long-time producer, Quincy Jones, and the up-and-coming actor Wesley Snipes. Jon Pareles discusses the television event in "Pop: Michael Jackson's 'Bad,' Follow-up to a Blockbuster," *New York Times*, August 31, 1987, accessed June 17, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/31/arts/pop-michael-jackson-s-bad-follow-up-to-a-blockbuster.html>. After the CBS special aired, it was sold internationally as a documentary. Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 41-42.

²⁴⁶ With the significant rise in sales of VCRs, cable television, and compact discs, popular music and video were becoming ever more entwined in the pursuit of capitalist gains. See J. Fred Macdonald's account of the rapid rise in cable

Pepsi's 1984 commercials adhered to more conventional marketing practices that mainly served the needs of the brand, the '87-88 commercials were conceptualized *alongside* the pop star's album and video, becoming an important tool in the promotion of the music and its associated commodities. During the time it took Jackson to finish the *Bad* album and create the video for its title track, Pepsi worked closely beside him to carefully intertwine his most prominent musical and visual signifiers into their spots. As a result, the album, video, and commercials seem to collapse into one another, which helped to further erode aesthetic and corporate boundaries between the three mediums.

Even more impressive, this was the first time a popular song had ever been licensed for a commercial *before* it aired on the radio—a practice that would become mainstream a little more than a decade later.²⁴⁷ The spots also significantly raised the creative and economic investment for future co-branding arrangements with a production budget that far surpassed any other to date. An article in *Advertising Age* summarizes these achievements, saying:

The Pepsi/Jackson spots mark a number of firsts. For one, the song that Pepsi expects to be the album's biggest is featured in one Pepsi spot. It is unusual to buy the rights for a TV commercial before the song has proved itself on the charts. Pepsi bought the rights as part of the \$10 million deal it made with the entertainer... Another first: The two Jackson commercials cost a record \$2 million-plus to produce, double the amount Pepsi spent in its earlier Jackson commercials.²⁴⁸

and VCR sales in the 1980s in *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 221-263. Following the success of MTV and VH1 on cable television and the astronomical success of the soundtrack to *The Big Chill*, the music, television, and movie industry worked closer than ever to converge their mediums and entice audiences to buy multiple versions of what was essentially the same product in different formats. For a film like *The Big Chill* and those that attracted younger audiences with new music, like *Sixteen Candles* and *Footloose*, consumers had the potential to buy the movie VHS cassette, soundtrack compilation album, and the artists' original singles/albums. In order to watch MTV, viewers had to purchase the cable service. Consumers who could afford cable also had a greater potential to buy an album and video after being exposed to it on MTV. I would argue that this convergence of traditionally separate media further aligned with ideologies of the neoliberal marketplace that advocated for growth through the mass consumption of technology. See Harvey *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3-4.

²⁴⁷ Moby achieved radio success for his 1999 album *Play* after licensing all of the songs to commercials and films. Bethany Klein and Timothy D. Taylor discuss him and other unknown musicians in under-represented genres who also received coveted airtime after licensing their music to commercials. See Taylor's, "The Changing Shape of the Culture Industry; or, How Did Electronica Music Get into Television Commercials?," *Television & New Media* (2007): 235-258. Also see Klein's discussion of Moby in *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 59-78. Chapter five of this dissertation talks further about co-branding practices in the twenty-first century.

²⁴⁸ Nancy Giges, "Pepsi-Jackson 'Spectacular' Set for Spring," *Advertising Age*, February 16, 1987, 2.

Furthermore, Michael Jackson's 1987-88 Pepsi campaign became *the* turning point for popular music's displacement of the jingle by creating a template for a new kind of celebrity endorsement—one that featured top performers singing *new* songs to endorse their recordings, tours, and videos alongside corporate products. While Pepsi's 1984 campaign with Jackson proved innovative in the way it featured some of the most prominent elements from "Billie Jean's" backing track, the words were *completely re-worked* into a Pepsi jingle re-recorded by Michael and his brothers. Although the track for "Bad" was also shortened and re-recorded, much more of its musical structures and phrases were appropriated into the commercials as well as many of its original lyrics.²⁴⁹ In particular, the song's *hook*—the most identifiable and structurally essential portion of any pop song—was largely *retained* (see Table 3.1, below). By incorporating more new pre-existing music than ever before, this campaign moved the ad industry to the brink of its transition away from jingles.

In the pages below, I focus on the third and final full-length commercial made for Jackson's second campaign titled, "The Chase."²⁵⁰ I examine this spot as a historical text to consider how it *reforms* and "re-presents" signifiers of "badness" Jackson employs in his single and video.²⁵¹ As the first-ever episodic commercial, "The Chase" drew inspiration from MTV videos and Hollywood action films.²⁵² The spot re-works Jackson's image and music into a cinematic-like work that's far

²⁴⁹ See Appendix A for the original lyrics to "Bad."

²⁵⁰ I have chosen not to include a discussion about the campaign's other two commercials "The Concert" and "Backstage" in this dissertation. Prominent clips from the first commercial, "The Concert," are actually interspersed throughout "The Chase," making a separate discussion redundant. "Backstage" is visually similar to the 1984 campaign as Jackson's "symbols" are the camera's main focus. There isn't much to say about the music in "Backstage" other than the fact that it crudely flattens out "Bad" by using only the opening riff and closing material, making it clear that the visual signifiers take precedent over musical ones.

²⁵¹ Chapters one and two explain how Judith Williamson uses the term "re-presentation" to describe how advertisers position ideas, objects, and/or people in commercial contexts to generate new meanings. See her *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1978), 177.

²⁵² PepsiCo. Inc, "Pepsi Legacy Book," accessed February 15, 2009, <http://www.pepsi.com/>.

removed from run-of-the-mill celebrity endorsements. Traditional advertising tropes that emphasize product placement and a catchy slogan are united with MTV's postmodern visual aesthetics of performance vignettes and dream-like montages to oppose real and fantastic worlds. The four-and-a-half minute spot was broken into four parts—"The Chase," "The Chopper," "The Museum," and "The Finale"—and spread over *multiple* commercial breaks as a mini-drama that premiered during the 1988 Grammy awards on CBS (Figure 3.1). The promos ended with a teaser that encouraged viewers to stay tuned-in to the awards show.²⁵³ By making the commercial an integral part of the program, CBS once again benefited from the publicity alongside Pepsi and Jackson, adding yet another layer of convergence and profitability to the already media saturated campaign.²⁵⁴



Figure 3.1: Commercial stills—Opening Title Cards for “The Chase”²⁵⁵

The preceding chapter demonstrated how Pepsi “simplified” and “typified” Jackson’s iconicity in their 1984 campaign by co-opting his symbols—his white glove, red leather jacket, etc.—

²⁵³ BBDO, “Pepsi Pops TV Spot Touting Jackson Ad,” New York, *Adweek*, February 29, 1988, 3.

²⁵⁴ Recall that Jackson’s 1984 commercials also premiered during the Grammy Awards show on CBS. See chapter two.

²⁵⁵ PepsiCo, Inc, “The Chase, 1988.

and borrowing recognizable clips from his music.²⁵⁶ By re-assigning his iconic symbols to a branded context, cutting out undesirable harmonies, breaking apart key structural moments, and rewording the lyrics, Jackson's commercial performance of "Billie Jean" had the potential to take-on a family-oriented bent that fit well within Pepsi's constructed fantasy world of youthful optimism. In this chapter, I again unpack "The Chase" through the lens of what sociologist Michael Schudson refers to as "capitalist realism" to investigate how Pepsi once more blurs Jackson's legacy and music with their brand in an attempt to entice the pop star's fans to consume their product. What's different, however, is that I frame my analyses around specific aspects of Schudson's arguments that point out how marketers manipulate notions of "time" and "flatten" portrayals of "the celebrity" in national advertising campaigns.

In my discussions of the music I attend not only to the mechanics of the general *aesthetic* "simplifying" of "Bad's" musical structures, but specifically discuss how Pepsi's marketers manipulated the song's form by *re-shuffling its teleological motion*. The stakes were noticeably higher for this campaign, so significant chunks of the original track and lyrics had to be included to effectively promote Jackson's newest album. Marketers couldn't rely on audiences' "alreadyness" with "Bad" in the same way they had with "Billie Jean" since the new single had circulated for considerably less time than its predecessor.²⁵⁷ Therefore, Pepsi didn't have the luxury of counting on fans to recognize a stripped down version of the song. This new scenario forced Pepsi's marketers to deal head-on with the possible meanings the song contained—in this case, Jackson's self-affirming notion of

²⁵⁶ Schudson theorizes that the visual art placed in advertising borrows from other cultural forms to abstract and redirect previously formed aesthetic meanings in order to fit branded contexts—hence it "simplifies" and "typifies." *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (Basic Books: New York, 1984), 209-233. I extend Schudson's theories throughout this dissertation to include *music's* role in advertising, as familiar bits from pop songs are cut-up and re-arranged to compliment onscreen images, 215.

²⁵⁷ Goldman and Papon define "alreadyness" as the knowledge and experiences audiences bring into their interpretations of an advertisement. *Nike Culture*, 35. This term is discussed in chapter two of this dissertation. Notably, "Billie Jean" had circulated for a little over a year prior to the airdates of the '84 commercials. "The Chase" commercials aired only seven months after the album's release.

“badness”—and they had to *reform* them to fit the brand. Analysis below will demonstrate that marketers achieved this by manipulating the song’s temporality (or movement through time) by splicing and re-ordering substantial sections of “Bad’s” underlying track and lyrics.

According to Schudson, advertisements are typically “set out of time and out of place.”²⁵⁸ He notes that, especially for national commercials, concepts of “time” are intentionally distorted to create the illusion of a brand’s “timelessness” and to encourage viewers to consume the product on a regular basis.²⁵⁹ In opposition to this, “time” and the *ordering* of it, is an important trope in Western musics, not only in terms of tempo (speed) and style (characteristics that define a period or era), but as described by musicologist Susan McClary, in its movement through points of tension and resolution, climax and release.²⁶⁰ McClary specifically argues that different methods of attaining resolution (i.e. major and minor key areas and rushing toward or delaying cadences) can affect the “meanings” it produces.²⁶¹ Musicologist Robert Fink builds upon discussions of “classical” (or traditional) teleologies made by McClary and other music scholars to posit that some musics, like disco and minimalism, possess what he terms as “recombinant teleologies.” He posits that while these musics’ teleologies don’t work toward the same clear-cut means to achieve similar goal-directed ends (i.e. they don’t move through typical harmonic progressions to reach regular cadential points), they nonetheless have the potential to produce desire, pleasure (*jouissance*), and meaning for

²⁵⁸ Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 216.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁶⁰ Most music in Western cultures creates a sense of forward motion and desire by gradually moving away from an opening area of stability through a series of harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic variables that work to build tension and lead to a musical climax. This climax is usually synchronized with a return to harmonic stability, thus providing a standardized trajectory of desire and satisfaction for the piece, which competent listeners use to interpret the music’s expressive meaning. Obviously not all popular music works precisely in this way, but most American popular songs played on the radio, in music videos, in films, and in commercials follow this pattern. The topic of teleology runs throughout McClary’s book as she demonstrates how goal-directedness, or the lack thereof, alludes to specific gendered subjectivities. See *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the listener.²⁶² Fink's ideas are particularly useful for considering Pepsi's '87-88 campaign as he examines musics with recombinant teleologies against advertisements and commodities. Among the correlations he draws between advertising practices and musical forms with non-traditional teleologies (I would include commercial music here), are their similar abilities to induce trance-like states through their repetition and lack of goal-directed resolution. He further cites Vance Packard's account in the 1957 landmark book, *The Hidden Persuaders*, in which Packard notes that the repetition of goods on grocery store shelves had hypnotizing effects on housewives in the 1950s. Fink uses this anecdote to drive home his point that repetition indeed induces desire.²⁶³ Taken one step further, advertising, musics with recombinant teleologies, and commodities can all work to suspend audiences in perpetual states of want.²⁶⁴ For Western musics, these desires are typically fulfilled through harmonic resolution (usually through the tonic), which contributes to listeners' abilities to decipher meanings. For advertising and commodities, the act of buying is supposed to fulfill desires, which (as Jean Baudrillard theorized) allows the symbolic "meanings" that come from consumption to be realized.²⁶⁵ As I demonstrate below, the radical re-organization of "Bad's" units in Pepsi's commercial proved integral to re-directing its meanings to compliment onscreen portrayals of fantasy and reality, celebrate the brand, and to suspend audiences in a state of desire.

In regard to the commercials' images, I engage directly with Schudson's argument that "the person played is not the actor or athlete as a *human being* but the actor or athlete *flattened into a celebrity*

²⁶² Fink, *Repeating Ourselves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 42-47.

²⁶³ Ibid, 77. Packard's book was one of the first to examine the consequences the advertising industry and on American culture. See *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: McKay, 1957; reprinted with new introduction and epilogue, New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 93.

²⁶⁴ Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*. See page 77 and all of chapter 3.

²⁶⁵ Baudrillard postulates that the process of consumption and the attainment of material goods operate within a symbolic system that helps people to define themselves and their relationships to one another. See *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. George Ritzer (London: Sage, 1998) and *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 2005).

persona.”²⁶⁶ While the ’84 campaign simply “flattened” Jackson into his status as an “entertainer,” “The Chase” noticeably pulls from more complicated contemporary cultural and media readings about the peculiar aspects of his life both on and offstage and plays on his iconicity by “deifying” him for fans.²⁶⁷ I would argue then that this campaign’s means of “deifying” Jackson proves congruent with Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson’s theories about how advertisements depict “simulations” of celebrities. In their examination of athlete-endorsed Nike campaigns they build upon Baudrillard’s notion of “simulation” to conclude that commercials appropriate “not the biography of the man himself, but rather the *media representations* of him.”²⁶⁸ Analyses below will demonstrate how “The Chase” presented audiences with a “hollowed out” “simulation” of Jackson’s mid-’80s media-created persona as a hardworking yet mysterious and superhuman star.²⁶⁹

I further argue that the music is not only key to supporting the simulation of Jackson’s “performer” and “daredevil” personas in the spots, but that the reorganization of its structures allowed Pepsi to convey its own messages about “badness” to viewers. As I briefly unpack each episode, I postulate that the commercial’s projected messages and “meanings” lie somewhere between the juxtaposition of “fantasy” and “reality.” Of course, “reality” is a loose term in the context of advertising. Schudson remarks: “...abstraction is essential to the aesthetic and intention

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 213. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁷ Journalist, Bob Garfield, notes that another commercial in the ’87-88 campaign, “Backstage,” “humanizes” the pop star, and that its predecessor, “The Concert,” “deifies” him. Because the “The Chase” contains clips from “The Concert” and because the spot bestows Jackson with superhuman capabilities, I would extend Garfield’s claim to argue that “The Chase” too “deifies” him. Garfield did not include “The Chase” in his review because it had not yet aired. “Cola war’s TV extravaganzas,” *Advertising Age*, 1987.

²⁶⁸ Goldman and Papson specifically describe Nike’s appropriation of Vince Lombardi, through the comedian Jerry Stiller’s impersonation of him. Although Jackson technically represents himself in “The Chase,” I would argue that he acts out the *media version* of himself—his simulation. Papson and Goldman define “simulacra” and “simulation” as follows: “simulacra’ is based on the distinction between a real world ‘out there’ and a set of appearances governed by codes. In the simulacra the latter displaces the former and we gauge our notion of what is real by the codes that supposedly represent it. The term ‘simulation’ suggests that distinctions between the original (the real) and the image (the representation) have become more and more hazy.” *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 31-32.

²⁶⁹ Goldman and Papson note that advertising “hollows out” celebrities. Ibid, 32.

of contemporary national consumer-goods advertising. It does not represent reality nor does it build a fully fictive world. It exists on its own plane of reality, a plane I will call capitalist realism.”²⁷⁰ I would take Schudson’s ideas a step further to posit that advertising’s abstracted reality is also a “simulation.” In the case of “The Chase,” it is a simulation of Jackson’s “real” life as an entertainer. This simulation of reality is musically and visually set apart from his “fantasy” (also a simulation) to get away from his fame, which is ultimately supported by the re-ordering of the musical track. As musicologist Carol Vernallis argues, “...music-video image creates its *meanings within the flow of the song*. The clarity and stability of these meanings remain subject to the song’s *temporal unfolding*.”²⁷¹ Accordingly, analyses below demonstrate how Pepsi’s breaking down and blurring of “Bad’s” teleological “stabilities” compliment the storyline’s progression into various levels of Jackson’s trance-like state and furthermore, how the song’s structural stability is eroded to accompany the pop star’s onscreen descent into his fantasy world, thereby taking on various new meanings as the series unfolds.

“The Chase”

A Brief Overview

Functioning more like small-scale music videos than ads, “The Chase” depicts a metaphorical narrative of Jackson’s life as an entertainer. The pop star is represented as a paradox: He’s depicted as the most popular man in the world, yet completely alone in his fame. Being the capitalist realist text it is, a “surreal” world is constructed around his iconicity and Jackson himself is

²⁷⁰ Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 214

²⁷¹ Because the aesthetics of “The Chase” closely resembles that of music video, I think Vernallis’s ideas work well within this context. Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 223. Emphasis mine.

allowed to become the dreamer.²⁷² Viewers follow Jackson as he slips between fantasy and reality. His “reality” is loosely defined in the moments during and just after his concert performance—i.e. the spectacle he puts on *is* his reality. Additionally, these commercials place the viewer inside his imagination while reinforcing the notion that his day-to-day life is one that most people can only dream-up. The spots thus blur Jackson’s concert performance with his trance-like dream where he moves from being an entertainer to a Hollywood stuntman as he carries out dangerous and extraordinary feats to escape the clutches of the media and overzealous fans.

As discussed in previous chapters, interpretations of Jackson’s music were contingent upon the visual signifiers he appropriated into his performances. This was no different for *Bad*. Pepsi’s marketers once again had to borrow signifiers from his look as much as his sound to simultaneously align the product with his iconicity and successfully promote his new album. “The Chase” visually departs from Jackson’s previous Pepsi commercials in that close-ups of his face are equally, if not more, prominent as his symbols (which had noticeably evolved past his white glove and sparkly socks). Despite the fact that he pushed back the commercials’ release dates numerous times, accounts of Pepsi’s second deal report that Jackson was much more obliging about lending his image to the spots.²⁷³ His newfound willingness to become *the focus* of the camera’s gaze permitted Pytka to film extended tracking shots, which made this campaign look more like performance footage and action sequences common in music video formats than traditional commercials.

As he developed as an artist, the pop star attempted to create a more “mature” look and sound to showcase his newest album—a move that the soda giant appreciated as it too was

²⁷² *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 216. Schudson contends that surrealism is typical vehicle for television commercials.

²⁷³ Nancy Giges reported: “Those working on the deal say the feeling between the two parties is much more cordial this time. [We’re] not a bunch of strangers. You get the sense that this is going to be a true collaborative effort,” said one source close to the talks.” Giges, “Pepsi and Jackson,” 1986. Pepsi’s CEO, Roger Enrico, and BBDO creative director Phil Dusenberry also reported in their autobiographies that the second deal went more smoothly. Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 269-273 and Phil Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire: Insights and Accidents for a Hall of Fame Career in Advertising* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 222-252.

extending its marketing to reach slightly older audiences.²⁷⁴ Jackson was careful to stay out of the limelight leading up to the album’s release so that details of his reinvention could be revealed all at once. But many audiences were surprised by the result, due to the fact that Jackson’s newly “chiseled” face, lighter skin color, and long hair made him look more androgynous than ever. Kobena Mercer confirms that even in Jackson’s *Thriller* days, his appearance questioned prominent African American ideologies of masculinity and sexuality.²⁷⁵ He reflects:

He may sing as sweet as sweet as Al Green, dance as hard as James Brown, but he looks more like Diana Ross than any black male soul artist. The media have seized upon these ambiguities and have fabricated a “persona,” a private “self” behind the image, which has become the subject of speculation and rumour.²⁷⁶

Despite the rumors that surrounded Jackson’s new look, Pepsi fully adopted it into its commercials. Figure 3.2 demonstrates that shots of Jackson’s onstage performances in Pepsi’s spots were identical to the image he donned on his album cover and in the video for “Bad.”



Figure 3.2: *Bad* album cover; “Bad” Video still—Jackson and his “gang”; Pepsi Commercial still—Jackson’s onstage performance²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ *Advertising Age* reported that Pepsi’s second deal was with the so-called “new” Michael Jackson who was “more mature and possibly will appeal to a slightly older audience than the teenyboppers he attracted during the popular, yet problem-filled, 1984 tour....” Nancy Giges, “Pepsi and Jackson in New Link,” *Advertising Age*, May 5, 1986, 1, 94. Prior to its second deal with Jackson, Pepsi also produced a campaign featuring Lionel Richie that showcased the “New Generation” as 20-30 something professionals. See Debbie Seaman’s discussion of those commercials in “Richie for Pepsi: All Grammy Night Long,” *Adweek*, February 25, 1985, 4.

²⁷⁵ Mercer specifically argues that the change in Jackson’s hair from the “huge ‘Afro’” he sported as a kid to “a shock of wet-look permed curls” donned on the cover of *Thriller* made him a “paragon” of racial and sexual ambiguity. “Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*,” in *Sound and Visions: The Music Video Reader*, eds. Simon Frith et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 94.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ “Bad,” *Michael Jackson: Video Greatest Hits—HIStory*, DVD, directed by Martin Scorsese (New York: Epic Music Video, 2001).

During “The Chase’s” offstage dream-sequences, Pepsi’s marketers reformed the signifiers most essential to Jackson’s androgynous “Bad” persona to reinforce the surreal nature of his soda-induced trance.²⁷⁸ Most obviously, Jackson doesn’t wear his “Bad” leather costume nor sing and dance during the “action star” portions of the commercials (Fig. 3.3).²⁷⁹ His dressed-down look becomes a *new* signifier for the simulated “daredevil” persona he takes on.

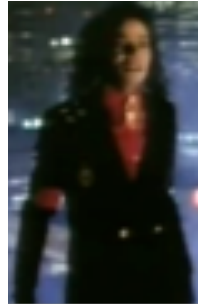


Figure 3.3: Commercial still—Jackson’s fantasy wardrobe

Pepsi also manipulates Jackson’s lyrics in obvious ways. Most prominently, the added words work to re-map Jackson’s “badness” onto the brand (Table 3.1). While the lyrics on the album challenge bullies to live up to more honorable notions of man-hood, the commercials support a more generic notion of what being “bad” means: they equate “badness” to danger and the literal and figurative “coolness” of Pepsi.

²⁷⁸ I will discuss his new appearance more in the pages below.

²⁷⁹ During the action sequences Jackson wears a red shirt underneath a black sport coat with a red armband above his right elbow. His pants and shoes are still black, but are less form fitting and not made of leather. Additionally, his coat and shirt are sparsely ornamented with gold details that prove considerably less gaudy than his stage costume.

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Bridge</u>	<u>Chorus</u>
<p>Gonna tell you right, just show your stuff.</p> <p>Don't ever stop, 'till you get enough.</p> <p>The feelin's good, tell me don't delay. Your reachin' up, the choice is made.</p>	<p>Well they say the sky's the limit, and it's never stoppin' you.</p> <p>You're a brand new generation, and Pepsi's comin' through!</p>	<p>You know I'm bad, I'm bad. (Shamore) And Pepsi's cool, it's cool. You know it.</p> <p>You know I'm bad, I'm bad, you know it, you know.</p> <p>And the whole world has to answer right now, that'll tell you the Pepsi way. It's cool!</p>

Table 3.1: Hybrid of “Bad” and Pepsi lyrics in the 1988 episodic commercials²⁸⁰

Jackson exhibits “badness” in “The Chase” not by standing up for truth or honor, but more generically through the improbable and life-threatening stunts he performs to escape an ensuing mob. The spots venerate his ability to be daring (and to dare to “be himself”), therefore insinuating his “coolness” in the “hip” or “awesome” sense of the word.²⁸¹ By extension then, Pepsi associates its product with Jackson’s “coolness.” Pepsi makes this connection a literal one, by altering the second line of the hook to say: “Pepsi’s cool, it’s cool.”²⁸² Jackson’s personal accolades are thus followed with praises to his sponsor, directly correlating Pepsi with positive aspects of the pop-star’s image: “You know I’m bad, I’m bad. And Pepsi’s cool, it’s cool.” The word “cool” then becomes the ideal pun to describe this product, which is aimed at a young (or at least youthful thinking) “hip” generation of consumers.²⁸³ Viewers can easily deduce that the temperature of a cold Pepsi is

²⁸⁰ Bolded words indicate portions taken from “Bad’s” original lyrics.

²⁸¹ Chapter two of this dissertation describes how Pepsi directed their marketing at youth and used specific images and music to persuade young audiences that Pepsi’s product was “hip” and “cool.” See also Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

²⁸² One could imagine that marketing executives were quick to veto simply inserting the word “Pepsi” at key moments and leaving the rest of the song intact. Hence, saying “Pepsi’s bad” would no doubt send a negative message to consumers, perhaps unintentionally communicating that something was wrong with the product.

²⁸³ Recall that Pepsi’s concept of youthfulness extends to “Those Who Think Young” as exemplified in their 1950s campaign. See chapters one and two of this dissertation as well as Frank’s *Conquest of Cool*.

“refreshing” and that it’s also the “in” thing to drink. The commercials’ images reinforce this concept by showing attractive, hip music-lovers enjoying their cola as much as Jackson’s concert. By “flattening” the lyrics and blurring Pepsi’s “coolness” with Jackson’s “badness,” Jackson’s musical track is able to take on meanings connected to the product in each of commercial’s episodes.²⁸⁴

The improbability of the images and the redirection of “Bad’s” lyrical meanings are reinforced by shortening and re-shuffling prominent portions of the original track. As illustrated in the chart below, each episode in “The Chase” incorporates the opening groove, material from the verses, pre-chorus, and chorus in different ways, creating “recombinant teleologies” for each new version of the soundtrack. (Tab. 3.2)

The Chase	Crowd Noise	Opening Groove (4mm)	Verse (8mm)	Pre-Chorus (4mm)	Chorus w/ Stop time tag (8mm)	Crowd Noise	Opening Groove (2mm)
The Chopper	Opening Groove (2mm)	Pre-Chorus w/o Vocals (2mm)	Chorus Variation w/ Trans. tag (8mm)	Verse w/o Vocals (6mm)	Pre-Chorus (4mm)	Chorus w/ Stop time tag (4.5mm)	Opening Groove (2mm)
The Museum	Opening Groove (2mm)	Verse w/o Vocals (4mm)	Chorus Variation w/ Trans. tag (8mm)	Verse w/o Vocals (4mm)	Pre-Chorus (4mm)	Chorus w/ Stop time tag (8mm)	Opening Groove (2mm)
The Finale	Opening Groove (2mm)	Pre-Chorus (4mm)	Chorus Variation w/ Trans. tag (8mm)	Verse w/o Vocals (8mm)	Chorus w/ Stop time tag (4.5mm)	Crowd Noise	

Table 3.2: Music’s structural arrangement for each episode²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ This exemplifies Schudson’s argument that advertising “flattens” cultural texts to portray them in banal ways. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 209-233.

²⁸⁵ The abbreviation “trans. tag” means “transitional tag line.” I will explain the term below.

The reworked track supports the action onscreen by aurally reinforcing key moments of tension and resolution, “reality” and fantasy. “Bad’s” musical fragments only occur *in the correct order* (minus repeats) and as *completed phrases*, in the first episode, which focuses on the *realistic* aspects of Jackson’s onstage performance.²⁸⁶ In the second episode, “The Chopper,” Jackson’s daydream takes shape and the music follows suit by moving sporadically between varied fragments of the track. Episodes three and four take viewers even deeper into Jackson’s fantasy with increasingly outrageous stunts and more variations in the track’s teleology. Consequently, each episode’s distinct arrangement of the musical fragments—its recombinant teleology—supports the various scenarios the protagonist works through, helping to create new narrative continuities for each segment.

Episode 1: “The Chase”

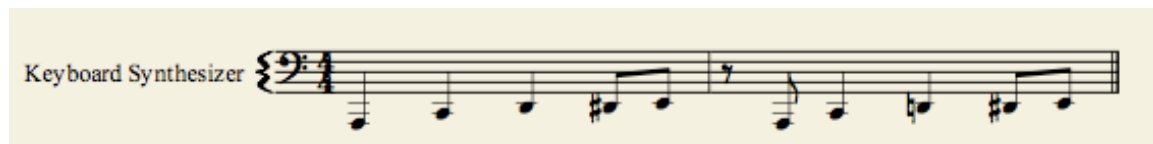
Episode one is the longest in the series and grounded both visually and aurally in the “reality” (or simulation of the reality) of Jackson’s role as an entertainer. Save for the very end of the episode, the pop star’s appearance here is virtually identical to his character in the music video for “Bad” and the cover of his album—complete with his black leather outfit, excessive buckles and chains, and long over-styled hair (Fig. 3.2). The clip is essentially one long close-up of him doing his signature hip thrusting, spinning, and James Brown inspired, fancy-footwork moves, thus creating a believable *simulation* of “Jackson as performer.” Additionally, Jackson’s musical performance here preserves much of the structural and harmonic integrity present in his single.²⁸⁷ This episode retains

²⁸⁶ This commercial uses the same footage that was filmed in early ’86 and depicted in both “The Concert” and “Backstage” commercials that aired a few months prior.

²⁸⁷ I find that a separate analysis of the album version of “Bad” unnecessary since the track for the first episode of the commercial contains almost all of the prominent sections from the original. The one section left out is an important lesson in African-American music history. Two-thirds of the way through Jackson’s original single, long-time jazz giant Jimmy Smith plays a solo on a Hammond B3 organ that seamlessly segues to a synthesizer solo played by the revered studio musician, Greg Phillinganes. These two prominent musicians represent a lineage of twentieth-century African American musical styles and technological innovation and showcase their virtuosity side-by-side. Standing-out as a

the musical styles and devices used in the track, including dissonant jazz harmonies, Motown horn lines, James Brown inspired vocalizations, and the emerging sounds of 1980s pop (including the latest synthesizers and drum machines).²⁸⁸ I would argue that the tropes employed in the original single—many of which pay musical homage to his African American musical predecessors—prove key to signifying his message of “badness.”

The commercial’s soundtrack opens with cheers from an adoring audience followed by a synthesized riff played on the first five notes of a blues scale on ‘a’ (Example 3.1). A syncopation on the up-beat of every other measure sets up a perpetuating two-bar cycle.



Example 3.1: Opening synthesizer riff

The drum machine adds a sense of aggression and virility to the riff by accentuating the rhythmic motion with a forceful bass drum and a steady subdivision on the tom-tom. Like “Billie Jean,” the groove for “Bad” remains virtually unchanged throughout the much of the song, making it contagious and *identifiable* for listeners familiar with the original. The riff in this and other popular

shining moment in the history of popular music, this section is a funky dance break that connects the first and second halves of the song.

²⁸⁸ The background call and response vocals in the chorus sections also reveal Jackson’s connection his African American musical roots. As Sheila Whiteley discusses in her essay about Motown’s girl groups, background vocals and instruments function in this particular genre to create a sense of community—one that I postulate would have closely resembled the singing style performed by Jackson and his brothers on the Motown label. See her “‘Love, love, love’: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Selected Songs by the Beatles,” in *Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism, and the Fab Four*, eds. Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 55-70. The same is true in James Brown’s music as David Brackett points out that observers of African American songs dating back to the 1850s indicate an “emphasis on group participation, on dance, bodily movement and expression: and in improvisation and antiphony.” Brackett asserts that Brown’s recording of “Superbad” can be heard as “live” due his interaction with his band, the soloists, and the fact that he addresses his audiences directly by asking them to take part in the music. Jackson’s “Bad” single also has a very “present” feeling as he asks his audience to participate rhetorically in the action with the chant: “And the whole world has to answer right now, just to tell you once again: Who’s Bad?” For more about “Superbad,” see the forth chapter of Brackett’s, *Interpreting Popular Music*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Citations are to the University of California edition.

Jackson songs not only have obvious ties to jazz, but also are a nod to his early days at Motown and to the music of James Brown. When used in Pepsi’s commercials, the cyclic nature of this riff—the fact that it ends on an upbeat of V and not the tonic—makes it the perfect trope to transition between each episode in the series (Tab. 3.2, above).

Following two cycles of the opening groove, Jackson sings Pepsi’s re-worded verse (Tab. 3.1, above). Here we get the full effect of the pop star’s vocal skills, complete with phrase elisions, syncopation, and James Brown-like guttural vocalizations.²⁸⁹ Jackson’s diegetic solo line noticeably clashes with the harmonic structure underneath it to create *grating dissonances* that underpin the song’s message of “badness.” Most notably, Jackson sings a c ♮ against the descending synthesizer line to create a tritone (Ex. 3.2). The c ♮ also conflicts with the d ♮ in the riff, producing a major 2nd. The pulsating sound of the synthesizer combined with the quivering waves produced by the tritone and major 2nd cultivate a noticeably rough and edgy, “bad” sound.

The image displays a musical score for two systems. The first system features a vocal line and a keyboard synthesizer accompaniment. The vocal line is in 4/4 time and contains the lyrics: "Gon-na tell you right, just show your stu-ff. Don't ev-er stop, 'til you". The keyboard synthesizer part consists of a steady, pulsating eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: "get en-ough. The feel-in's good, tell me don't de-la-y. You're reach-in' up, the". The synthesizer accompaniment remains consistent with the first system.

²⁸⁹ Jackson’s vocal chords function much like a percussive instrument as he vocalizes rhythms that work to signal the ends of phrases and beginnings of new ones. In this way, Jackson becomes a “vocal percussionist” akin to James Brown. Music scholar Anne Danielsen argues that Brown was famous for forcefully grunting “huh” and “hit me” to create rhythmic variations, phrase elisions, and distinct phrase groupings in his songs. Likewise, Jackson is best known for the iterations: “ow,” “uh,” and “shamore.” His vocal iterations work similarly to Brown’s as they reinforce the placement of the downbeat. Danielsen explains how Brown’s iterations create rhythmic diversity and act as a guiding “master drummer” for his band in *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006). See chapters four, five, and especially pages 82-84.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and a synthesizer line. The vocal line is on a treble clef staff with lyrics 'choice is made. Well they'. The synthesizer line is on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and features a tritone interval between the two staves. The background is a light yellow color.

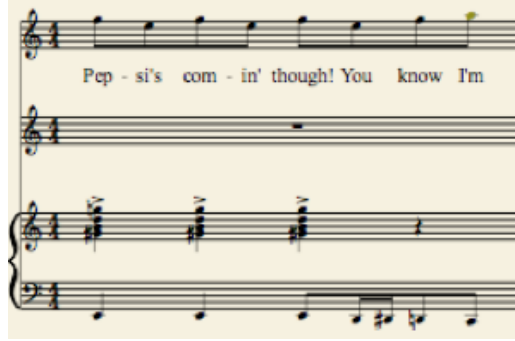
Example 3.2: Tritone+M2²⁹⁰

Jackson leans on these dissonances in the commercials as much as in the original track. This is important because these moments highlight key words in Pepsi’s slogan—like “right” and “good”—and reinforce the soda giant’s message about the positive qualities of their product. As they did in the 1984 campaign, Pepsi uses action words to encapsulate the energy and agency of the “New Generation.” Variations of the verse can be heard throughout the other episodes in the campaign, but the solo vocal line containing Pepsi’s hybrid lyrics can only be heard during this first episode. The omission of the lyrics in episodes two through four relegates the musical track to *transitional* material that not only becomes subordinate to the flashiness of the visuals, but aurally reinforces the *strangeness* of the pop star’s dream world.

In the following pre-chorus, “Bad’s” harmonies tease the listener and create desire by suspending resolution as they continually pace back and forth by a whole step between the minor ii and iii. At the end of this section, the harmonic motion finally moves to a half cadence on ‘e.’ Pepsi intentionally holds off naming their product until this moment—the *one and only time* the track reaches an aurally satisfying harmonic cadential point. (Ex. 3.3) Jackson thus sings, “Pepsi’s Comin’ Through,” on the downbeat of the dominant’s entrance, which is supported by a trumpet and saxophone horn line that blares E7#9 seventh chords on each word.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ The tritone occurs on beat three in every other measure.

²⁹¹ Here we again witness the influence that Motown and James Brown had on Jackson’s music, since prominent horn lines were an integral part of both sounds. James Brown’s performances were backed by the music played by his live and (mostly) wind band. Jackson’s familiarity with and affinity for brass and woodwind instruments was likely formed in his days with the Jackson 5 since studio musicians were employed to back all recorded Motown tracks. Jackson could have



Example 3.3: Product placement=Dominant bliss

Much like the material in the verses, the pre-chorus also makes various appearances throughout other episodes in the series, but it is often stripped of its vocal track and shortened to fit the onscreen action. Even without the vocal track, this cadential horn line still works to build *excitement* for Jackson’s stunts and, by extension, is intended to create *desire* for the product.

Up to this point, the camera has focused on Jackson’s onstage performance. Once the pop star begins the chorus, viewers finally get a good glimpse of his audience. Ethnically “diverse,” friendly-looking, youthful fans (ranging from ages 6-30) who hold Pepsi paraphernalia and scream for their idol are carefully edited between shots of the superstar (Fig. 3.4). It’s obvious from the attention that the camera pays to Pepsi’s “New Generation” that viewers are expected to identify with these simulations of “regular people,” who enjoy drinking Pepsi and listening to Jackson’s music.



Figure 3.4: Commercial stills—Jackson’s fans holding Pepsi cups as they marvel at his performance

chosen only to use digitized and synthesized sounds in “Bad” like many pop artists of the day, but his inclusion of wind instruments indicates he wanted their specific timbres to fill out his track—a feat that no technology at the time was capable of perfectly replicating. Of course the influence of Quincy Jones, an accomplished trumpeter himself, certainly weighed heavily on the production choices for the track.

During the ensuing re-worked chorus section, audiences finally hear tonic Am7 chord, however the harmonic progression here is anything but expected. Instead of moving between the usual IV-V-I progression, the harmonies simply pace back and forth between I and IV on every other beat. While the constant reiteration of the tonic chord should aurally ground the song in a stable harmonic “pocket,” striking dissonances that occur on every other iteration of the words “bad” and “cool” work to create an edgy sound that subverts any potential stability. These dissonant chords further perpetuate the harmonic motion and make the hook’s melody catchy and easily identifiable (Ex. 3.4). As illustrated below, Jackson’s vocal line pushes forcefully against its underlying harmonies to sing a dissonant ‘g’ over a D9 chord. In the absence of the rightful E dominant chord, Jackson’s ‘g’ grates against the ‘a’ sung by the back-up vocals as well as the ‘f#’ played below it, creating what I call “the ‘bad’ chord” (beat three, mm. 2 and 4).²⁹²

Example 3.4: The “bad” chord

²⁹² While this note could arguably be analyzed as the 11th of the chord below it, it’s better explained as a suspended 7th from the previous a minor chord due to the tension it creates. It’s also worth pointing out that the ‘a,’ ‘g,’ and ‘f#’ are cleverly recycled from the descending synthesizer line that conflicts with the upper voices during the song’s verse. Jackson further changes the rhythmic inflection here from beats two and four to one and three, which noticeably alters the song’s metric accent.

The “badness” of Jackson’s chorus section solo line is further intensified by the song’s reworked concluding rhythmic tag: “And the whole world has to answer right now just to tell you the Pepsi way” (Ex. 3.5). Underneath Jackson’s sung tonic note (‘a’), the harmonies continue to pace between IV and I and actually end on the subdominant instead of the tonic. The song’s resolution then comes *not* from a *harmonic* cadence that rests on ‘I,’ but instead from the vocal reiteration of the tonic and Jackson’s stop-time whisper: “It’s Cool.”

The image shows a musical score for a 4/4 time signature. The top staff is labeled 'Voice' and contains the lyrics: "And the whole world has to answer right now just to show you the Pep-si way! It's Cool!". The bottom staff is labeled 'Keyboard Synthesizer' and shows a harmonic accompaniment. The music ends with a stop-time cadence on the subdominant chord.

Example 3.5: Stop-time chorus tag line in “The Chase”

Other than the extra note added to accommodate Jackson’s recitation of the brand’s name, the most noticeable change is that the lyrical cadence, “Who’s bad?,” is altered to “It’s cool” for the commercial.²⁹³ I would argue that this moment becomes *the* most startling example of Pepsi’s efforts to appropriate Jackson’s badness. In the original version, Jackson uses this tagline to rhetorically assert that *he* is the one who’s “bad”—so much so, that he can create musical resolution using only his voice. In the commercial, Pepsi *reassigns* his agency to the product, insinuating instead that it’s the “coolness” of the soda that’s “bad.” As would be expected, marketers pair this crudely reworked section from the chorus—which stands as the soundtrack’s most quintessentially “bad” section—with images of his daring stunts in episodes two through four.

At the conclusion of his staged performance, multiple shot-reverse-shots cut to and from the screaming audience and footage of him racing outside to escape an approaching mob. Girlish shrieks

²⁹³ The added note is the second sixteenth note of beat one in the last measure.

make up the soundtrack as he runs onto a rooftop and into a dead end. (Fig. 3.5) A title card reminiscent of those once used in silent Hollywood films is superimposed over his distraught face, indicating that the story isn't over and to stay tuned. Two measures of the opening groove re-enter the soundtrack to aurally reinforce the fact that there's more to come. It's obvious from Pepsi's positioning of its logo on the card that its product will somehow become Jackson's saving grace.



Figure 3.5: Commercial still—A freeze frame and title card signal there's more to come

Episode 2: "The Chopper"

In episodes two through four, Jackson performs various impossible feats as he runs from his fanatic pursuers. As always, Pepsi paraphernalia is prominently distributed in various forms, including cups, cans, bottles, vending machines, neon signs, etc. The later episodes rely even less on the pop star's "Bad" signifiers (i.e. the black leather costume and crotch grabs), however, the camera's view of Jackson is still fragmented since it often focuses on isolated parts of his body—most prominently his face, hands, and feet.²⁹⁴ Throughout the remaining episodes, he also has multiple flashbacks to his performance in part one.²⁹⁵ During these flashbacks Jackson's voice is diegetic but it becomes non-diegetic during the action sequences. This movement between diegeses

²⁹⁴ Obviously, part of the reason for showing only certain parts of his body is that he didn't perform the stunts himself. Nonetheless, the camera's focus on specific parts of his body reinforces the notion talked about in the previous chapter that portions of his body had become detached signifiers for his music and iconicity. In this case, parts of his body are actually freed from the costuming that worked to isolate them in the first place. Refer to chapter two for a discussion of how the wardrobe from his *Thriller* years worked to isolate parts of his body. It's worth adding here that the positioning of Jackson's fedora, sunglasses, and jacket in the '87 "Backstage" commercial further reinforces the semiotic function of his costuming.

²⁹⁵ This footage is more of what was filmed by Pytka in early '86.

indicates that his onstage performance *narrates* his daydream. Accordingly, the music plays a central role in these later episodes since it doesn't follow the original song's trajectory, but instead is *truncated and re-arranged* to emphasize the implausibility of the images.

Episode two begins with a quick statement of the opening groove and then unexpectedly cuts to the last two measures of the pre-chorus. (Tab. 3.2, above). The now-familiar cadential E7#9 chords that blare from the soundtrack lead to a *premature* musical climax. These chords mimic the energy Jackson exhibits onscreen in his jump from the rooftop to grab the landing skid of a hovering helicopter (Fig. 3.6). A move to an abbreviated chorus—complete with its re-worded hook and “bad chords”—enter while Jackson dangles from the chopper to narrate the incredulousness of the scene. As a few more measures of the chorus play out, the camera tracks the helicopter's move upward into the sky and Jackson's plunge onto a zip-line that carries him safely to the street below. Pepsi once again manipulates the chorus' tag line, this time changing the nature of the stop time whisper by *extending* the IV chord to play through the chant, “It's Cool.”²⁹⁶ This continuation of the harmonic motion pushes the soundtrack seamlessly into a wordless variation of “Bad's” verse.

Once on his feet, the pop star frantically surveys his surroundings to locate his next mode of transportation. The verse's funky guitar and synthesizer groove serve as transitional material that parallels the visual editing between flashbacks to the concert footage and Jackson racing through city streets in a Ferrari. (Fig. 3.6)



Figure 3.6: Commercial stills—Jackson jumps from a rooftop and speeds around in a Ferrari

²⁹⁶ From now on I'll refer to this as the reworked chorus tag as the “transitional tag,” abbreviated in Table 3.2.

As the fugitive pop star approaches a construction zone, the pre-chorus once again sneaks into the track. Cadential horn stabs build to a *second* aural climax and follow Jackson’s high-speed donut and subsequent escape from the car. At the repetition of chorus’ final bars and the stop-time tag line, the mob catches up to the pop icon and chases him to the roof of a Pepsi delivery truck. The soundtrack then abruptly loops back to the opening groove. A still frame that reads, “Next, The Museum,” suspends Jackson in the air as he jumps from the vehicle (Fig. 3.7).



Figure 3.7: Commercial still—Title card superimposed over Jackson’s leap from a Pepsi delivery truck

The soundtrack to this episode demonstrates that the laws of Western tonality are equally as breakable as the laws of physics in Jackson’s fantasy. Not only are phrases cut short, but harmonic movements through “natural” cadence points are *repeated* multiple times and eventually *suspended* to compliment the action onscreen. By modifying and shuffling “Bad’s” musical fragments, Pepsi once again reduces Jackson’s music into “themes” that take on new functions and meanings when aligned with commercial images.²⁹⁷ In this and subsequent episodes, it becomes clear that each of “Bad’s” themes take on a specific role: the opening groove works to introduce and suspend each episode, the verse serves as transitional material, the pre-chorus signals impending danger, and the chorus indicates that Jackson is in the midst of completing another “bad” stunt. Pepsi’s overarching

²⁹⁷ See my discussion of Theodor W. Adorno’s criticisms of reducing symphonic works to fetishized “themes” for piano editions in chapter one of this dissertation. See Adorno’s, “On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1982), 281. I extend his argument to popular songs that are cut up into fragments for television commercials.

message for this and subsequent episodes thus reads clearly: “Drink our product and it will allow you too to accomplish extraordinary feats.”

Episode 3: “The Museum”

In episodes three and four, Jackson’s actions and the accompanying soundtrack take him even further away from the ordered and rational world. Following the now-standard two-measure lead-in with the groove, Jackson is chased into a museum to the sounds of a short, four-measure snippet from the verse’s instrumental track (Tab 3.2). The camera switches between shots of the chasing mob and back to a dead end where the pop star disappears and leaves his pursuers confused. The track then *skips over* the pre-chorus and goes straight into the chorus’ hook and transitional tag. The accompanying shot reveals the star’s hiding place inside a painting of a 1950s soda fountain (Fig. 3.8). During another jarring return to the verse and a quick transition to the final bars of the pre-chorus, Jackson realizes his hideout has been discovered. In the next shot he becomes a “simulation of his simulation” as he materializes into a black and white television set positioned above the counter.²⁹⁸



Figure 3.8: Commercial Stills—Jackson runs into a painting, hides in a television set, and launches off a ski ramp

The screen changes abruptly from black and white to color when the camera follows him into the set, removing one of the many layers of distance that’s been built up between him and the fans he

²⁹⁸ I would argue that the fantastic scenarios that play out in each episode of this commercial rival the multifaceted levels of consciousness portrayed in the 2009 movie *Inception*.

runs from.²⁹⁹ The shot then pans out to show the pop star on a mountain, positioned to ski down a steep ramp (Fig. 3.8). As he makes his way down, the chorus and Pepsi's stop-time tag are again cued up. Jackson literally leaves himself (and viewers) hanging with a still frame that suspends his jump, accompanied by another return to "Bad's" opening groove.

Jackson's actions in episode three not only offer an entertaining storyline, but also make explicit references to his place in popular culture. His ability to jump into the painting suggests his "immortality" as a cultural figure, while his appearance in the television set is representative of the voyeuristic way that the media and audiences had tracked his every move. Ironically, the TV in this commercial becomes a place of *refuge* instead of scrutiny for the star. Instead of gazing at Jackson as a passive viewer, the camera unexpectedly follows him into the set, giving insight to the "realities" of the situation. The perspective outside the TV not only shows Jackson's face, but from within, the viewer takes on *his* vantage point from his precarious perch to the giant ramp below. While the commercial as whole can be viewed as liberating for the star since it appears that Pepsi gives him the (fantasy of) "freedom" to escape the pressures of his fame, this scene in particular sends a strong (yet ironic) message to viewers by demonstrating that what's shown on television and in the media as a whole isn't representative of the whole story or "truth" about Jackson's life.³⁰⁰ Consequently, the "moral" of episode three can be read as a cautionary tale about judging the superstar's life choices without having a grasp on the perils he actually faces. I would therefore argue that the entrances of the chorus during the painting and ski jump scenes strengthen the idea that the superstar's "badness" comes from his ability to handle pressure and to adapt to any situation. A surface-level reading of this episode also commends his ability to wow audiences and defy expectations—a claim Pepsi associates by proximity to its product.

²⁹⁹ It could be inferred that Jackson is running from the commercial's viewing audience as well as his onscreen pursuers.

³⁰⁰ Media portrayal at the time painted Jackson's life as a bizarre circus. I discuss the particulars in the pages below.

Episode 4: “The Finale”

The sequence concludes with Jackson soaring through the clouds, parachuting from the sky and landing right back on stage (Fig. 3.9). Direct word painting reinforces the images as Jackson sings the first lines of the pre-chorus, “Well they say the sky’s the limit,” during his launch into the stratosphere. The chorus accompanies his journey into the sky and final flashbacks to his concert performance. Portions of the verse accompany his parachute landing and once on the ground, the icon is immediately surrounded with spotlights to illustrate the fact that he has arrived right where he started. The final bars of the chorus enter the soundtrack one last time. Realizing he can’t escape his fame, the “King of Pop” poses for the camera, re-embodies his performing persona, and finishes his song for the adoring onscreen crowd (Fig. 3.9).



Figure 3.9: Commercial stills—Jackson parachutes from the sky, lands onstage, and finishes his performance

It’s unclear at this point whether Jackson’s re-emergence onto the stage is “real” because he isn’t wearing his “Bad” costume, but the outfit that defined the simulation of his daredevil persona. The incongruity of the final scenes might easily be chalked-up to capitalist realism. I would point out, however, that this confusion of reality and fantasy is actually a common trope in Jackson’s music videos, one that neatly situates these commercials within the rest of his oeuvre.³⁰¹ In Mercer’s analysis of *Thriller*, he writes: “‘Thriller’ incorporates the pop video convention of switching from realist to fantastic modes of representation, but binds this into continuity and closure through its narrative.” “The Chase” works in a similar way, but as I have argued all along, it’s the *music* that leads

³⁰¹ Recall, for example, that Jackson reveals his cat eyes to the audience at the end of *Thriller* after the video has established that his girlfriend’s “haunting” was imagined.

the viewer/listener towards, and frequently away, from a perceived “narrative continuity.” Thus, “closure” in the final episode of “The Chase” comes from finally hearing the musical track come to an end after the stop-time tag line. The cheers that follow the soundtrack’s resolution force viewers to accept that Jackson’s trance-like sequence is over and that at least some part of his physical or mental being has returned to the stage, where he belongs.

In this final episode, Pepsi once again plays on public views of the star by depicting the stage as his “home.” Jackson’s onscreen simulation exemplifies this by embracing his return, accepting who he is, and in doing what he’s best at: performing. According to episode four *this*—his ability to *entertain*—is what ultimately makes him “bad.” Pepsi therefore encourages its viewers to realize their own potential success, their “badness,” with the help of its soft drink.

Really, Really Bad?

Despite the fact that “The Chase” proved visually stunning and contained more pre-existing music than any other commercial to date, the campaign attracted its fair share of criticism. Some audiences were unsatisfied with the way Jackson’s track was re-worked. Unlike the media reports that barely mentioned the lyrics to the pop star’s 1984 campaigns, those that covered the ’87-’88 spots zeroed-in on Pepsi’s changes. A writer for *Advertising Age* derided the concert footage used in each of the campaign’s commercials and dismissed the soundtrack, saying:

The first spot, called “Concert,” is a 90-second on-stage spectacular that isn’t all that spectacular. We have a glittery, black-clad Jackson, bathed in the smoky pastels of stage lighting, singing and dancing in his spasmodic signature style—what has now become your basic, Michael Jackson simulated-concert outtake spot. “You’re a bad new generation, and Pepsi’s comin’ through,” he sings (I think, because the sound track has a strangely distant quality). “I’m bad, I’m bad”³⁰²

³⁰² Garfield, “Cola war’s TV extravaganzas,” 1987. I would add that students I interviewed about the commercials had similarly disdainful reactions. In person interviews by author, November 2010 through October 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

In his description of the “simulated-concert outtake spot,” this critic alludes to the fact that cramming bits of Pepsi’s slogan into a pre-existing text sounded less coherent and forced. What audiences seemed to appreciate about the 1984 spots was that even though the words had been completely reworked into a Pepsi slogan, the selling point was disguised by the innovative and entertaining quality of the advertisements. However, in the ’87-88 campaign, the hybrid of original lyrics and slogan material noticeably disrupted the anticipated flow of the words for audiences familiar with the single, making the new version awkward. A notable example occurs at the very beginning of “The Chase,” when the original lyrics, “Your butt is mine, gonna tell you right,” are replaced with fragments that actually occur later in the song: “Gonna tell you right, just show your stuff.” Here marketers substituted the strong, arguably masculine, nature of the opening phrase (slang for “I’m gonna kick your ass”) with something more innocuous (show me your potential).³⁰³ Further, the substituted phrases sound odd since they’re placed over the wrong rhythmic and melodic lines. This holds especially true at the end of the opening phrase when the last word is slurred, causing Jackson to stretch-out the word “stuff” to sing: “stu-uff” (Ex. 3.2, above). Thus, that what Vernallis deemed as “flow” proves important not only for a song’s harmonic movement, but also for its syntactic correlation with the rhythmic and melodic phrasing. Pepsi’s clumsy reworking of this and many of the campaign’s other hybrid phrases arguably made the soundtrack cheesy and decidedly un-“hip” for audiences.

The negative press that surrounded Jackson’s new album and look also impacted the campaign’s reception. When Jackson finally released *Bad* in August of 1987, he was under enormous pressure from his new contract with Sony, the media, and worldwide fans to produce an album

³⁰³ It does make sense that marketers omitted this first phrase so that Jackson wouldn’t come across as threatening the campaign’s antagonists, which were the fans he ran from. I would argue, though, that Pepsi could have skipped to another verse that works more smoothly with the song’s melodic phrasing.

equally as successful as his 1982 mega-hit.³⁰⁴ Prior to its release, critics were openly skeptical that it could reach the musical “perfection” and popularity his previous record had amassed.³⁰⁵ Many also thought Jackson’s seclusion from public view and his rumored eccentricities indicated that his star had fallen. Once released, *Bad* earned mixed reviews. Some critics recognized the hard work put into the album’s creation and considered it a success. *Rolling Stone* declared: “*Bad* is the work of a gifted singer-songwriter with his own skewed aesthetic agenda and the technical prowess to pursue it.”³⁰⁶ Others who expected the pop sensation to far exceed the musical ingenuity of his previous work felt his creativity had run out. A writer for *Time Magazine* shrugged off the title track calling it a “‘Beat It’ redux, a spectacularly snazzy hang-tough tune that warns against macho excess.”³⁰⁷

Many also found Jackson’s attempt to showcase himself as a tough, “bad-ass” difficult take seriously. In a *New York Times* review Jon Pareles wrote: “[Jackson] portrays himself in conventional pop terms, as a lover and as a rather tame outlaw; when he insists he’s ‘really, really bad’ in ‘Bad,’ he’s not too believable.”³⁰⁸ Reactions such as this are understandable considering that the whole of Jackson’s “Bad” image was largely contradictory: On one hand he appeared androgynous, sporting gender bending “hair-band” locks, makeup, and ornamental buckles and chains, while on the other, aspects of his performances were hyper-masculinized as indicated by his motorcycle-gang leather

³⁰⁴ *Thriller* became the best selling album of all time, with 45 million copies sold worldwide. The record was a continuation of his collaboration with Quincy Jones who had also produced *Thriller* and *Off The Wall*. *Rolling Stone*, “Michael Jackson,” accessed March 17, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/michael-jackson/biography>.

³⁰⁵ Almost every source at the time questioned whether or not Jackson could top *Thriller*. Even Pepsi’s CEO had his doubts. See Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 270. An interview with Enrico in *Adweek* reported: “Is the thriller in Jackson gone?. Enrico admits: ‘None of us will know that before the fact. But we decided to go ahead, because our feeling is that if you look at Michael over the last 15 or 20 years, he repackages himself as a new product... We decided that he could do it again.’” Jeffrey Scott, “Roger Enrico, CEO Author: Cola Wars Stir Innovation,” October 13, 1986, 24.

³⁰⁶ Davitt Sigerson, “Michael Jackson: Bad,” *Rolling Stone*, 1987, accessed December 14, 2011, <http://www.rockbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=10382>.

³⁰⁷ Jay Cocks, “The Badder They Come,” *Time Inc.*, September 14, 1987, accessed February 20, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,965452>.

³⁰⁸ Pareles, “Pop: Michael Jackson’s ‘Bad,’” <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/31/arts/pop-michael-jackson-s-bad-follow-up-to-a-blockbuster.html>.

outfit and the frequent forceful gestures he made towards his crotch.³⁰⁹ Accordingly, it seemed to many that the wholesome image he had maintained in his youth had waned under the pressure and scrutiny from the media and fans. It appeared that Jackson blurred the boundaries between how he was expected to live his “real” life and the spectacle of the performance space he embodied in his music videos and concerts.³¹⁰ Oddly enough, Jackson’s identity as a “performer” continued to receive praise and admiration from colleagues and fans, despite the fact that media criticism about his appearance and his private affairs was harsh (to say the least).

Pepsi’s new spots didn’t attempt to address the incongruities of Jackson’s public reception, but simply took his signifiers at face value and transferred them into the commercials. Consequently, the spots reflect the conflicting views the pop star by playfully confronting accusations of him being a loner and simultaneously glorifying him as an entertainer. Some critics found Pepsi’s neutral stance problematic. One reporter was openly skeptical about the campaign’s potential success, saying:

“Pepsi is confident the spots will be a hit, despite negative publicity that depicts the star as an

³⁰⁹ Jackson’s leather costume implies associations with rock music, motorcycles, and rebellion. His over-styled wet-look hair and obvious make-up prove contemporary to the gender-bending looks worn by other top rockers of the day, including The Cure, Mötley Crüe, and Whitesnake. Robert Walser argues that many metal bands used their androgynous appearances to fight patriarchal codes while simultaneously re-inscribing gendered stereotypes against women. See “Forging Masculinity: Heavy-Metal Sounds and Images of Gender,” In *Sound and Vision The Music Video Reader*, ed. Simon Frith et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 153-181. I would argue that Jackson doesn’t use his look for the same ends.

In both the video and Pepsi’s commercials, Jackson fuses prominent choreography in innovative ways. Many of his moves reflect the latest urban and hip-hop trends. He also imitates James Brown’s “fancy footwork” with small, quick steps that draw attention to his ability to move impressively within a confined space. An example of Jackson’s imitation of Brown occurs when Jackson is called to the stage during a concert. See YouTube, “James Brown and Michael Jackson,” accessed March 20, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opVmR5H8jGU&feature=related>. Jackson’s dancing is also derivative of giants of musical theater, especially Fred Astaire, to whom he was compared and dedicated his memoir. Michael Jackson, *Moonwalk*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988). Because “Bad’s” lyrics take a stance against violence and bully-behavior, the video and commercials are devoid of any of the “fighting” gestures similar to the punches, kicks, and stabs choreographed into the routine for the “Beat It” video. Jackson does include forceful pelvic thrusts and crotch grabs, both of which are kept at a minimum for Pepsi’s family-friendly commercial.

³¹⁰ Rumors of him sleeping in a hyperbaric chamber and purchasing the Elephant Man’s bones widely circulated in British and American tabloids. Jackson also bought acres of property in Santa Barbara County, CA and fabricated his own amusement park, called the “Neverland Ranch,” with rides and iconic memorabilia that rivaled Disneyland. To many, Jackson seemed like a child trapped in a man’s body. Mercer quotes other fables about Jackson’s life (including the idea that zoo animals were his closest friends) from an article in the *London Sun* from April 9, 1984.

androgynous recluse.”³¹¹ Another poked fun at Pepsi and Jackson, zeroing in on a scenario depicted in another commercial in the ’87-88 campaign in which Jackson discovers a young fan in his dressing room and laughs off the situation. The critic contends: “Now, never mind that in real life [the boy would] be instantly apprehended and maybe hermetically sealed in a giant, nitrogen-filled thermos bottle for display in Jackson’s game room. This is fantasy, you know.”³¹² In sum, many weren’t buying Pepsi’s lighthearted version of Jackson or the company’s awkward appropriation of his music and media-generated image.

Another Case of Capitalist Realism

At the expense of public opinion, Pepsi’s practices once again fit neatly within the modes of capitalist realism as marketers re-established their skill at “typifying” and flattening out Jackson’s iconicity to serve their objective to promote goods to an international audience. This time they re-worked Jackson’s celebrity persona into simulation of an allusive superhero and re-ordered the teleological “flow” of his newest single. The rearrangement of the song’s form and the addition of a few key lyrics about the soda giant allowed the track to support the commercials’ journey through various fantastic narratives. More specifically, Pepsi re-presented media portrayals of Jackson’s struggles to get away from constant public scrutiny and *reformed* “Bad’s” meanings by stripping out his cautionary message, adding slogan material to transfer his agency to the brand, and chopping up

³¹¹ Patricia Winters, “Pepsi ‘Bad’ Spots Get Good Timing,” *Advertising Age*, November 2, 1987, 103. I think it’s useful to note here that the commercial visually diverges from Jackson’s video by leaving out his “gang” of back-up singers and dancers. Although we can hear other musicians playing in the background, we never see anyone but him performing onstage. Jackson chose to sing all of the harmonies for the single and commercials himself, encapsulating a sense of solitude into the track. By portraying Jackson as a loner, Pepsi’s spots ironically represent the music more accurately than the video. Reviewers of the album commented on the fact that many of the songs lament and justify his isolation from public view. A *New York Times* critic writes: “Beyond those poses, he seems isolated and glad of it. ‘Man in the Mirror,’ written by Siedah Garrett and Glen Ballard, declares that the way to ‘make the world a better place’ is to ‘take a look at yourself and then make that change’; it’s activism for hermits. The compact disk of ‘Bad’ has an extra, closing song with an unmistakable message: ‘Leave Me Alone.’” Pareles, “Pop: Michael Jackson’s ‘Bad,’” <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/31/arts/pop-michael-jackson-s-bad-follow-up-to-a-blockbuster.html>.

³¹² Garfield, “Cola War’s TV Extravanzas,” November 2, 1987. I should add that this commercial came out before Jackson faced allegations of child molestation.

and reordering the track's patient and carefully crafted musical build-up through points of tension and resolution. In this way, Jackson's demonstration of musical prowess and message of personal affirmation is co-opted by the brand.

I postulate then that "The Chase," offers a lesson in *crafting musical teleology to suit consumer patterns of desire*: sections taken from "Bad"—a song with a distinctive teleological form—are recombined in each episode to build to (sometimes multiple) premature aural climaxes and intentionally inhibit the song's resolution. When paired with the onscreen images, the "recombinant teleologies" created leave audiences hanging in suspense about the outcome of Jackson's scenario, creating desire for the next episode, and by extension, the soft drink. More literally, the commercials depict Jackson in his own dream world—a trance-like reality that seems to be induced and perpetuated by the Pepsi commodity itself. Ultimately, this set of "Choice of a New Generation" commercials reforms the song's meanings by using Jackson to invite consumers to demonstrate a *capitalist's* version of "badness," the kind that comes from consuming soda and buying Jackson's music.

Lessons Learned

While it's tempting to dismiss Pepsi's second deal with Michael Jackson as unsuccessful, the 1987-88 commercials mark an important moment in the history of advertising. Regardless of the lukewarm press surrounding them, the fact that they received so much attention was a testament to the future potential that co-branding new songs with corporate brands could offer. After all, the publicity from Pepsi's sponsorship helped Jackson's tour become the highest grossing of all time and aided in making *Bad* the first ever album to produce five number one hits.³¹³ The campaign thus

³¹³ MTV, "Michael Jackson Biography," MTV Networks, accessed November 3, 2010, http://www.mtv.com/music/artist/Jackson_michael/artist.jhtml#bio.

proved that even if audiences didn't fawn over the commercials, their constant exposure to them kept Jackson's music and Pepsi's products fresh in their minds. Equally as important, Pepsi took a gamble in incorporating such a large amount of the pop star's new music in its spots.³¹⁴ The extensive re-working of Jackson's track revealed the degree to which pre-existing music could be manipulated for branding environments.

What the soda giant and other corporations also learned from this campaign was that the threshold for what audiences would allow their favorite music and musicians to do was still tricky to negotiate despite the fact that ideologies about the use of new popular music in commercials had, by this time, gradually shifted in marketers' favor. As the next chapter will discuss, audience approval in the late-'80s had much more to do with particularities of musical *content* and the *context* in which it was placed, and less about *how much* of the music appeared in commercials. Accordingly, the soda giant learned the hard way that some stars and their songs resist the kind of reformation that make it appropriate for general audiences.

³¹⁴ Pepsi did eventually let Jackson out of the contract following revelations that he was addicted to pain medication.

Chapter 4:

Pepsi's Unanswered "Prayer": Failed Capitalist Realism in Madonna's 1989 "Make a Wish" Commercial

By 1989, commercials that used popular music were inundating the airwaves. For the most part, these spots continued to use older hits to market products like alcohol and cars that appealed to adult consumers. Many brands still hesitated to show the artists themselves, and even when they did (as with Michelob beer commercials featuring Phil Collins or the George Michael Diet Coke spots), the brand's slogan and product overran the pre-existing musical track. Pepsi-Cola therefore continued to lead the way in terms of placing new artists and their hit songs at the forefront of its commercials. The soda giant's continued desire to partner with young and contemporary talents was evident in its ongoing sponsorship of the Grammy Awards Show. In 1989, Pepsi dominated the program's commercial breaks with three separate co-branding deals featuring new artists. The first in the line-up was a promo for Pepsi's forthcoming commercial featuring Madonna—the number one female pop artist at the time.³¹⁵ The 25-second teaser told audiences that: “No matter where you are in the world, on March 2nd get to a TV and watch Pepsi's two-minute Madonna commercial, featuring her latest release ‘Like a Prayer,’ for the very first time.” This “promo for a promo” featured images of an Australian aborigine roaming to find a television set in the desolate outback. His journey was spliced between glimpses of Madonna getting ready for the shoot, Pepsi paraphernalia, and images of her upcoming television appearance (Figure 4.1).

³¹⁵ Her chart-topping status was due, in large part, to the exposure she'd received from her MTV videos. The other two commercials that aired that night featured Robert Palmer singing a version of his hit “Simply Irresistible,” and Chayanne singing in Spanish to appeal to Latin American audiences. Pepsi also aired two non-music spots that looked like television mini-dramas. “Grammy Awards: 31st,” February 22, 1989, University of California, Los Angeles Film and Television Archive, VA 7132, Los Angeles, CA.

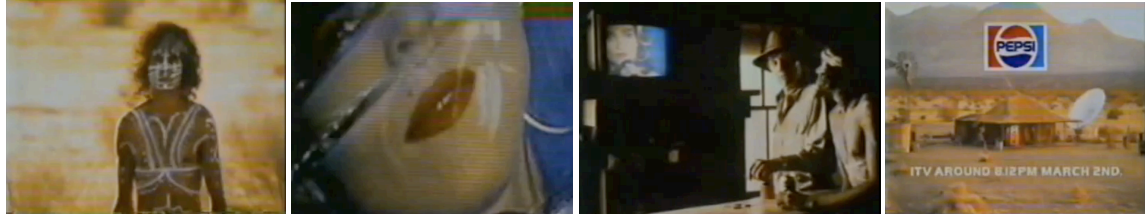


Figure 4.1: Commercial stills—Grammy promo for Madonna's forthcoming Pepsi Commercial³¹⁶

The visual montage interspersed a dark-skinned tribal figure with glimpses of Madonna's seductive lips and white face and was paced by audio cuts between the sound of a didgeridoo and snippets of "Like a Prayer's" chorus sung by an African American gospel choir.³¹⁷ Appropriately enough for a "teaser" ad, Madonna's voice never actually enters the track. As one reviewer put it, the promo was meant to invite "the global village into her living room," of which an imagined version would become the backdrop for her upcoming full-length commercial.³¹⁸ However, these "cold clues" did little to prepare audiences for the perplexing and controversial array of sights and sounds to come.³¹⁹

In Search of a Miracle

Despite the decent success Pepsi had achieved with endorsements from pop artists like Lionel Richie, Tina Turner, and David Bowie in the years between the Michael Jackson campaigns, none could match the acclaim garnered by the soda giant's original campaign with the "King of Pop." In 1987, Pepsi challenged BBD&O to brainstorm new ways to regain its status at the top of

³¹⁶ PepsiCo. Inc., "Madonna Commercial Promo," 1989.

³¹⁷ This juxtaposition of Western and "Other" musics was a common trope at this time. Timothy D. Taylor notes the "world music" boom and its effects on musical production and consumption in the late 1980s and 1990s in *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). As a testament to the popularity of this trend, Paul Simon's *Graceland* won the Grammy for record of the year just a few years prior to this promo. See page 129 in *Beyond Exoticism*.

³¹⁸ Barbara Lippert, "Pepsi-Cola's 'Make a Wish': Pepsi's Prayer Answered by Madonna's Pop Imagery," *Adweek*, March, 6, 1989, 21.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.* Lippert used this phrase to describe the music and images.

the celebrity endorsement market.³²⁰ The creative team eventually came up with the solution to make a global campaign featuring the second biggest pop star to date—Madonna. During a meeting at her California home in October 1988, the would-be “Queen of Pop” not only agreed to begin negotiations for the deal with Pepsi, but also offered them the title track from the new album she had in production.³²¹ Three months later, the soda corporation officially hired her to sing her yet-to-be released single “Like a Prayer” for its newest “A Generation Ahead” campaign. In return for a \$5 million fee and sponsorship of her upcoming tour, Madonna was also persuaded to lend her dance moves and image to the spot.³²² Most notably, she agreed to *market the song through the commercial* on network and cable television *before* the album was released. This reversed the traditional order for a record promotion—album, video, and then commercial—indicating the central role that visual promotions played in record sales by the late-1980s.³²³ So for the first time in music or advertising history audiences were exposed to new pop music through a television commercial *for a consumer product* before they could buy the record in stores.

As it had done for Jackson’s second campaign, Pepsi sought out Joe Pytko to direct Madonna’s first (and, as it happened, only) commercial in the campaign. The spot, titled “Make a Wish,” tells the story of a young girl (Madonna as a child) who gets a rare glimpse into her future with help of her 1980s superstar self. The commercial abides by MTV aesthetics, interweaving performance footage, colorful point-of-view shots, and nostalgic black-and-white dream sequences. A full two-minutes long—much longer than the standard commercial spot—Pepsi’s mini-video for

³²⁰ Betsy Sharkey, “Making a ‘Wish’: Pytko Directs Madonna for Pepsi,” *Adweek*, March 6, 1989.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² J. Randy Taraborrelli, *Madonna* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 165-166.

³²³ The standard marketing practice up to 1989 would have been to release the song, then the video, and once those two were released, make the commercial. See Table 2 in Appendix B, which lists the atypical timeline for the album’s release, the order of the commercial’s promotional practices and controversies, and the achievements Madonna’s song and video attained.

“Like a Prayer” premiered worldwide to create anticipation for the unveiling of the album and Madonna’s video for the title track.³²⁴ The hype paid off as media reports estimated that 250 million viewers in 40 countries watched the spot on the date of its premiere.³²⁵

“Make a Wish” thus set important precedents for the eventual and total convergence of corporate brands and pop music in the twenty-first century. This was the first *globally* advertised commercial to *premiere* a popular song in order to hype the *upcoming* release of an album and video.³²⁶ Even more importantly, Madonna’s Pepsi commercial was also the first to use *only the original lyrics and backing track* from a new popular song: The commercial contains *zero* slogan material and *the brand name is never spoken*, only integrated into the onscreen action. This deal thus marks the definitive end of the advertising industry’s sole dependence on adapted or custom-composed jingles, and a turn to co-opting the newest musical hits as a complement to increasingly sophisticated and indirect corporate branding imperatives.

But despite the commercial’s innovative business model and formal qualities, its content ignited a controversy that forced Pepsi to pull it off air shortly after its premiere. In perhaps the most memorable blunder of advertising history, Pepsi executives failed to view Madonna’s music video for “Like a Prayer” before airing “Make a Wish” and were caught off-guard by backlash from conservative groups outraged by the video’s sexually provocative, racially-charged, and borderline blasphemous religious imagery. Even though Pepsi’s version of the song was intended to be sentimental and family-oriented, featuring Madonna’s reflections back on her childhood, audiences

³²⁴ Although Michael Jackson’s Pepsi episodic commercials totaled four-and-a-half minutes in length, they were broken up so that none of the individual segments ran more than 90 seconds.

³²⁵ Taraborrelli, *Madonna*, 165. In the U.S., the spot aired during *The Cosby Show*. The fact that it premiered during a program about an African American, “wholesome,” middle-class family hints at the friendly message Pepsi hoped the commercial would emit. It also says a lot about Pepsi’s and Madonna’s target demographic at the time.

³²⁶ Richard Morgan, “BBDO Slated to Film Madonna for Pepsi Ads,” *Ad Day*, January 25, 1989, 1. Although some of Michael Jackson’s commercials for the soda giant were eventually shown overseas, they were created with U.S. audiences in mind. Madonna’s commercial also differed from the Jackson spots because it was created independently from the pop star’s video and was the first visual representation of the song to which audiences were exposed.

were unable to separate the commercial's re-presentation of "Like a Prayer" from the shocking images shown in her video. Outraged audiences therefore demanded that both be pulled from rotation.³²⁷ Following an onslaught of negative media attention, the soda giant released Madonna from her contract as spokesperson and pulled the commercial from most U.S. stations after only one day on air, thus leaving "Make a Wish" best remembered for the controversy that surrounded it.

(Re)Considering the Controversy

Most scholars who have critically engaged with "Make a Wish" are not music academics and read the commercial, the song, and the MTV video primarily through lyrics, Madonna's appearance, and onscreen imagery.³²⁸ Literary and cultural theorist Nancy Vickers and Renaissance scholar Carla Freccero have both produced compelling examples of this type of argument, using aspects of the pop star's biography to unpack the personal and religious themes within the spot.³²⁹ Additionally, Goldman and Papson have weighed in on the commercial's imagery, claiming viewers were able to interpret (what I would argue are neoliberal) "concepts" of "(pseudo)individuality and upward mobility."³³⁰ This chapter will supplement these analyses by bringing consideration of the music itself and its "uneasy" status in the context of late-'80s advertising back into the conversation.³³¹

³²⁷ The campaign's creative director, Phil Dusenberry (who had also worked on the Michael Jackson campaigns) reported: "Viewers were confused. They did not differentiate between Madonna's video and our spot." Phil Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire: Insights and Accidents for a Hall of Fame Career in Advertising*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 234.

³²⁸ Susan McClary is the exception. She deals briefly with "Like a Prayer" in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 163-165.

³²⁹ See Nancy A. Vickers, "Materialism and the Material Girl" in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, eds. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 230-246, and Carla Freccero: "Our Lady of MTV," *Feminism and Postmodernism 19* (summer, 1992): 163-183. Musicologists Carol Vernallis and Ross Fenimore also engage critically with Madonna's music, although not this particular song. See Fenimore's dissertation, "Madonna's Confession: Sound, Self, and Survival in a Love Song" (PhD Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011) and chapter 11 of Vernallis's *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

³³⁰ Goldman and Papson continue their discussion saying: "Ideologically, it continued the well-established advertising tradition of appealing to our culturally constructed desire to articulate a distinctive and outstanding self. 'Make a Wish,'

“Make a Wish” can be seen as a unique case study of *failed capitalist realism*, and I will argue below that it was Madonna’s *musical track* that was ultimately responsible for the commercial’s failure. Her refusal to allow Pepsi to rework her song beyond the practical splices that parsed the song down from five minutes to two, made the capitalist realist imperative of “simplifying” and “typifying” “Like a Prayer’s” musical signifiers extremely difficult to pull off.³³² Even more of a problem was the fact that her single was hard-edged and polysemic, meaning that Pepsi’s marketers had to work harder than ever to distort, flatten, and simplify the music’s charged signifiers and couldn’t rely on pulling their usual tricks.³³³ In particular, the track’s prominent use of sexually, racially, and religiously coded lyrics and styles made it impossible for Pepsi to employ the traditional capitalist realist practices of providing a timeless, placeless, and faceless backdrop for its product and endorser.³³⁴ The music was full of sonic tropes that confronted contemporary political issues head-on and resisted the “abstraction” Schudson postulated to be the “aesthetic and intention of contemporary national consumer-goods advertising.”³³⁵ The conflicts and tensions encoded in the music of “Like a Prayer” became the ruling force of the commercial as much as it had for

Madonna counsels her younger self (who occupies the space in the ad for the youthful viewer to insert herself) as the ad concludes with an upbeat motivational message about achieving what we want.” See *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), 185. I would add that these ideologies also prove central to neoliberal politics at the time that encouraged individuality through consumption and socio-economic gains. See David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³³¹ A statement by Madonna’s biographer perhaps best sums up the “Make a Wish” debacle: “The circumstances under which the ‘Like a Prayer’ single and album debuted turned out to be one of the biggest controversies in the history of corporate advertising’s often *uneasy* liaison with pop music.” Taraborrelli, *Madonna*, 165. Emphasis added.

³³² Michael Schudson argues that advertisers borrow cultural images and “simplify” and “typify” them to fit within the abstracted and banal contexts of commercials. He calls this “capitalist realism.” *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 209-233. See my application of his theories to pre-existing popular music’s role in advertising in the preceding chapters.

³³³ Roland Barthes argues that advertisements promote “myths” and as such they work to *distort* that which they seek to signify. Barthes, *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 121. Emphasis mine.

³³⁴ Schudson claims that national advertising rarely pictures individuals other than the celebrity endorser, and is “set out of time and out of space.” *Ibid*, 215- 216.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 214.

Madonna's music video. I will therefore follow cultural theorist Douglas Kellner in arguing that Pepsi's spot doesn't operate like a traditional commercial but instead like an artistically driven and politically charged mini-music video in its re-presentation of liberated Catholic school girls, desegregated public spaces, and African American Pentecostal rituals in the 1950s and '60s.³³⁶

In the pages below, I inflect Schudson's theories on capitalist realism with a modernist tinge by invoking Berthold Brecht's theory of the "alienation effect." A self-proclaimed Marxist, Brecht believed theater shouldn't allow audiences to be passive spectators but prompt them to think critically about their social conditions.³³⁷ I argue that although Pepsi and Joe Pytko might have been aiming for comfortable capitalist realism, their commercial unwittingly enacts the Brechtian gesture of turning familiar "objects" (musical and visual tropes) into something "peculiar, striking, and unexpected."³³⁸ It's obvious that Madonna's MTV video is explicitly Brechtian: it deliberately evokes the anti-realist aesthetic of the epic theater, as the final framing shot—which shows a stage, closing curtain, and glimpse of the cast taking a bow—reveals its status as a morality play within a play.³³⁹ The "Like a Prayer" video is essentially a late-twentieth century multimedia attempt at epic theater, complete with hard-edged images and stylistic musical shifts that work to confuse and alienate

³³⁶ Kellner refers to it as "a complex modernist musical video." Kellner devotes an entire chapter in one of his seminal books on media to reading Madonna as "a constant provocation who reveals the primacy of fashion and image in contemporary culture and the social constructedness of identity." Although analyzing her Pepsi commercial wasn't a primary concern for the chapter, he discusses it briefly in an endnote. Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics between the Modern and Postmodern*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 292.

³³⁷ Brecht says of the "A-effect": "What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view." Ibid, 125. Fredric Jameson later re-translates and re-theorizes Brecht's original German term for this, *Verfremdungseffekt*, to "estrangement." See *Brecht and Method* (London, Verso, 1998), 35-88.

³³⁸ Brecht, "New Technique of Acting," in *Brecht on Theater*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 143.

³³⁹ The video uses the five minute and forty-one second album version of "Like a Prayer" to depict the scenario of a young woman (presumably of "ill repute") who witnesses another woman's assault and struggles with freeing a wrongly accused African American man for fear that she too will become a victim of the white perpetrators. Unfortunately I don't have the space in this chapter to give a full analysis of the video. See *Madonna: The Immaculate Collection*, "Like a Prayer," VHS, directed by Mary Lambert (New York: Sire Records and Warner Reprise Video, 1990).

audiences. My hypothesis is that the failed “Make a Wish” spot can be read “against the grain” in much the same way: its double coded and politically charged signifiers also create the “A-effect” and prevent the typical form of *passive* viewing encouraged by most advertisements.³⁴⁰ Judith Williamson posits that audiences construct meaning in the process of “deciphering” an advertisement’s signifiers.³⁴¹ This deciphering should be relatively effortless for most commercials (including those discussed in previous chapters), since they use re-formed signifiers that are efficient, “flattened,” and banal.³⁴² Accordingly most advertising depends on what Schudson identifies as “low involvement learning” which allows most people to decipher ads quickly and read them as “trivial or transparent or both.”³⁴³ But as the fierce debate over Pepsi’s commercial indicated, the perplexing array of musical and visual signifiers in “Make a Wish” proved anything but “trivial” or “transparent.” Fatally for the selling proposition, it made viewers *think*.

Of course alienating its viewers was not Pepsi’s intention. In fact, Pepsi representatives specifically claimed that they had attempted to create an “innocent” and “wholesome” commercial.³⁴⁴ While Madonna’s MTV video brazenly depicted the unresolved conflicts in the music, the family-friendly soda brand attempted to reconcile the music’s turmoil by employing an array of re-assuring capitalist realist modes of re-presentation. But as the analysis below will

³⁴⁰ To be clear, I intend to discuss the “A-effect” as a modernist gesture or trope that’s obvious in the video and more concealed, yet present, in the commercial.

³⁴¹ Williamson. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1978), 71.

³⁴² Schudson also acknowledges that advertising messages should be easily deciphered. He equates advertising to other systems of languages saying: “Recall again that languages differ not in what they can express, but in what they can express *easily*. This is also true in languages of art, ideology, and propaganda.” *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 233. Emphasis his.

³⁴³ Ibid, 227. Schudson quotes a market researcher for General Electric Co., Herbert E. Krugman. See “The Impact of Television Advertising; Learning Without Involvement,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29 (1965): 161.

³⁴⁴ Pepsi executive Tod MacKenzie uses these words when he questioned backlash against the commercial. I’ll discuss the fallout more later in the chapter. James Cox, “Boycott Aim: Pepsi; Madonna Ridicules Christianity,” *USA Today*, March 9, 1989, 1A.

demonstrate, a largely unreconstructed musical track steered the commercial's images towards the very kinds of religiously and racially specific storylines that national (and in this case, international) advertisements intentionally avoid. *Thus it was the modernist agenda Madonna encoded in the music* (on which Pepsi's storyline and images were built) that caused viewers to conflate it with the video, despite the soda giant's best efforts to re-direct the song's meanings.

It's worth noting here too that Madonna's "bad girl" and "boy toy" reputation further complicated the brand's promotion of a friendly image. Despite marketers' endeavors to focus on the more banal aspects of her iconicity, signifiers of Madonna's "postmodern individualism" also proved too charged for the world of advertising.³⁴⁵ Audiences familiar with her reputation for challenging the status quo couldn't (or wouldn't) accept Pepsi's optimistic re-presentation of her star-persona at face value. In its failure, then, "Make a Wish" offers a fascinating peek behind the curtain of advertising's often-clumsy attempt to mobilize culturally constructed aesthetic signs.

*Reading Musical Tropes: Similes and Structures*³⁴⁶

Prior to the *Like a Prayer* album, Madonna was known largely for her "carefree" upbeat dance music.³⁴⁷ But as many critics and scholars saw it, her 1989 album and title song demonstrated

³⁴⁵ As noted in chapter one, Grant McCracken theorizes that at the end of the twentieth-century, people practiced what he calls "expansionary individualism" which allowed them to define and expand notions of self-hood. One of the four "transformational routines" he lists is "postmodern" and he labels Madonna's image as the perfect example of this. I should note that this obviously creates a tension between Madonna's "modernist" video yet "postmodernist" image. As mentioned above, I would agree with Kellner that Madonna and her oeuvre fluctuate between and often straddle these two distinctions. See *Transformations: Identity Construction in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 305.

³⁴⁶ I begin with an analysis of the music here because (like most pre-existing music) the song was created prior to the commercial deal and plans for its music video. I posit then that the song's "meanings" weren't created on the terms of its later visual interpretations, but that the commercial and video's meanings were instead dependent on the music. Further, the fact that Madonna has released multiple versions of the song and continues to reinterpret it in live performances indicates that the structures of the track prove important to the meanings it holds for her and her audiences.

³⁴⁷ See Kellner's discussion of what he calls Madonna's "Who's that girl!" stage in her career in *Media Culture*, 275-279.

a new musical and ideological maturity that stemmed from her personal reflections as a now 30 year-old woman. No longer tongue-in-cheek dance pop, *Like a Prayer* addressed more “serious” issues as Madonna traded in her breathy, high-pitched girlish vocal delivery in favor of a smooth chest-voice that gave the album a more soulful sound.³⁴⁸ Scholars, fans, biographers, and even mainstream media outlets attempted to weigh in on what the album’s songs really “meant.” An article in the *New York Times* reported: “The songs, which deal directly and very emotionally with her failed marriage to the actor Sean Penn, her family, and her Catholic girlhood, transcend the brassy dance-pop of her three previous records to reveal Madonna as a vulnerable human being.”³⁴⁹

Many sources attribute the title track to Madonna’s well-documented public struggle with her Italian American upbringing. Freccero explains that the confused relationship Madonna claims to have had with the “proper” aspects of her faith stems from the fact that Italian American Catholics often mixed the iconography of popular mysticism (including ecstatic interactions between the carnal and divine) with the austere patriarchal practices of American churches.³⁵⁰ Additionally, her past struggles to “behave appropriately” as a headstrong and sexually aware adolescent have been credited to her strict upbringing, the death of her mother, and the limitations she felt were imposed on her while attending Catholic schools.³⁵¹ Media sources even reported that Madonna’s racial identity appeared fraught after she admitted in an interview that her childhood friends had all

³⁴⁸ A notable earlier exception is “Papa Don’t Preach” from *True Blue* (1986), in which Madonna tells the story of a young pregnant girl who pleads for her father to support her choice to keep the baby. In this song, she makes prominent use of her lower vocal range.

³⁴⁹ Holden, “Madonna Re-creates Herself,” 1989. Almost all sources cited in this chapter agree that *Like a Prayer* was meant to be an autobiographical album that, song-by-song, dealt with the pop star’s fraught relationships with her father, siblings, ex-husband (Sean Penn), the death of her mother, and personal quest for spirituality. McClary’s discussion in *Feminine Endings* demonstrates that Madonna’s vulnerability was also apparent in “Live to Tell,” which is also on *True Blue*. See 158-161.

³⁵⁰ Freccero talks about the iconography Madonna adopts in her look and videos in “Our Lady of MTV,” 163-183.

³⁵¹ Many scholars and critics read the *Like a Prayer* album as a direct confrontation with these issues. Madonna even dedicated the album to her deceased mother who “taught [her] how to pray.” See Vickers, “Materialism and the Material Girl,” 230-246 and Freccero, “Our Lady of MTV,” 163-183.

been black and that she once identified as black.³⁵² By the release of this, her fourth studio album, Madonna's complex racial, sexual, and religious identity had become a well-known part of her celebrity persona: as we'll see below, these issues bubbled to the surface of her musical output in equally complicated ways.

The lyrics of "Like a Prayer's" are constructed with long strings of similes, making it impossible to pinpoint from the text alone the object of the song's descriptive language.³⁵³ In some respects, "Like a Prayer" reads as a love song with its use of "like" before the words "prayer," "child," "angel," "dream."³⁵⁴ The title itself might then be understood as a simile for a romantic relationship that has the potential to save her from being "lost" to life's "mysteries." However, the numerous coded religious expressions used in the text (the "Midnight Hour," a biblical reference to choosing faith at the last possible moment in life) and her multiple calls out to a supreme being (her softly spoken question: "God?," at the beginning of the track, and later call for help: "Oh God, I think I'm falling/out of the sky./ I close my eyes,/Heaven help me!") all strongly suggest that her song is indeed some kind of a spiritual struggle.³⁵⁵

The allusive nature of the lyrics are further compounded by spiritual metaphors that hint at double entendre as Madonna exclaims: "I'm down on my knees,/I wanna take you there./In the

³⁵² Leslie Saven paraphrases from a *Rolling Stone* interview saying, "Madonna said that when she was little all her girlfriends were black and that she *feels* black." *The Sponsored Life: Ads, TV, and American Culture* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1994). Bill Zehme, "Madonna: The Rolling Stone Interview," *Rolling Stone*, March 23, 1989, 58.

³⁵³ Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of lyrics. See also, Madonna, *Like a Prayer*, Sire, 9 25844-2, 1989, compact disc.

³⁵⁴ The "like" qualifier indicates that these words don't reveal the actual action, person, or state that she names, but explain qualities she finds within the antagonist of her story.

³⁵⁵ Of course, the pop star's name is also a religious signifier. And if the spiritual allusions somehow aren't made explicit in the single, they certainly are in the commercial, video, and subsequent live performances, where religious symbols and pleas for unity and love between peoples of different faiths pervade the imagery. Twenty-years later, Madonna continued to play-up these images. In a 2008 concert I attended, she mixed scriptures and iconography from Hinduism, Muslim, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and her recent faith, Kabbalah, to impress the fact that the leaders of all these religions preached peaceful co-existence. See "Madonna- Like A Prayer [Live]—Sticky & Sweet Tour," YouTube, accessed December 15, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMiiwY5qpeo>.

midnight hour,/I can feel your power.”³⁵⁶ It’s not entirely clear whether the underlying “sexual tension” is meant to be physically or spiritually connotative, but as argued by both McClary and Freccero, it’s likely that Madonna intended to describe an experience evocative of *both* religious mysticism and sex. Using sexual terminology to describe ecstatic Christian religious experiences is by no means a new practice and accounts of “unions” with the divine are documented as back as far as the tenth-century to Hildegard von Bingen’s works. McClary notes:

In Saint Teresa’s writings, religious ecstasy is described through images of sexual ecstasy, for the intensity of her relationship with the deity could only be expressed verbally to other human beings through the metaphors of submission, penetration, even orgasm.³⁵⁷

Freccero adds that being raised as child of Italian immigrants would have exposed Madonna to a form of Catholic mysticism that would have embraced experiences of corporeal unions with the divine. In a 1989 interview Madonna herself concurred:

The theme of Catholicism runs rampant through my album. It’s me struggling with the mystery and magic that surrounds it. My own Catholicism is in constant upheaval. When I left home at 17 and went to New York, which is the city with the most sinners, I renounced the traditional meaning of Catholicism in terms of how I would live my life. But I never stopped feeling the guilt and shame that are ingrained in you if you are brought up Catholic.³⁵⁸

What both authors leave out (or at least don’t clarify) is that in popular musical practices like the blues, religious double-entendre isn’t only reserved for spiritual expression, but is consistently used to mask sexual prowess and carnal desires (think Big Mama Thornton, Mamie Smith, and Joe Turner). Growing up in the sixties in Detroit, Madonna wouldn’t have had to go further than her

³⁵⁶ One of Madonna’s biographers notes: “Indeed, double entendres and ironies abound in ‘Like a Prayer.’...While the song feels distinctively religious, the underlying sexual tension is undeniable.” Taraborrelli, *Madonna*, 162. Kellner reads double entendre in the same lines, saying they “could either refer to religious or sexual ecstasy.” *Media Culture*, 277. Additionally, the “midnight hour” lyric is also an obvious throwback to Wilson Pickett’s soul song of the same name that uses the Biblical trope to (thinly) veil a promise of his sexual prowess.

³⁵⁷ McClary further traces the practice through seventeenth century opera, Bach’s Cantata 140, and Jerry Lee Lewis’s “Whole Lot of Shakin’ Goin’ on.” McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 163-164.

³⁵⁸ Holden, “Madonna Re-creates Herself—Again,” 1989.

own living room radio to be exposed to soul traditions derived from gospel that also used coded language to secularize religious texts and tunes (like Ray Charles' "I Got a Woman").³⁵⁹ Accordingly, a secular interpretation of "Like a Prayer's" is still viable.

The superstar herself offers her interpretation of the song's meanings in an interview with the *New York Times*: "'Like a Prayer' is the song of a passionate young girl so in love with God that it is almost as though He were the male figure in her life. From around 8 to 12 years old, I had the same feelings. I really wanted to be a nun."³⁶⁰ If we take what she says at face value, Madonna's confession here supports the fact that the lyrics borrowed simultaneously from religious *and* secular musical idioms. The lyrics were thus intended to be provoking as she used them as a vehicle for questioning God's presence in her life.

As such, the song's backing track works to support and *magnify* the religious images evoked in the lyrics. The pentatonic vocal melodies maintain the church-like atmosphere by fostering a powerful dialectical tension that allows easy slippages between the two primary key areas—the solemn d-minor heard in the bridges and celebratory choruses that operate in the relative major, F.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ The song's co-writer, Patrick Leonard, would have also been familiar with these tropes. Historian Brian Ward talks specifically about the mixed reactions that African American audiences had towards soul music linked to the gospel traditions. See "Can I Get a Witness: civil rights, soul, and secularization" in *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (London: University College London, 1998), 173-216. For more on this see Robert Fink's article on Motown in which he discusses the double entendre and use of gospel tropes in "Smokey Robinson's 'Way Over There'" and asserts that "by 1960 the use of Pentecostal musical tropes to enact sexual tension was no longer as exciting and transgressive as it had been when pioneered by Ray Charles"—a statement that indicates its prolific use in pop music. "Goal Directed Soul? Analyzing Rhythmic Teleology in African American Popular Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64 (spring 2011): 179-238.

³⁶⁰ Holden, "Madonna Re-creates Herself," 1989.

³⁶¹ A technical note: The song's verses lie somewhere in the middle as a d-minor pentatonic melody is placed over harmonization in the subdominant region of F (B-flat). When the song is in d-minor (and also when harmonized in B-flat), the melody begins and ends on D and passes between F-G-A-C, with the C acting as a passing tone. When in F-major, the melody revolves around F and moves between G-A-C-D, using the D as a passing tone. The relationship between C (the rightful dominant of F-major) and tonic of d-minor becomes increasingly problematic as the song progresses, because the solo vocal line flirts with both key areas but resists completing a *satisfying* cadence in either one. McClary argues that Madonna does make a "decisive" cadence on F at the end of the choruses. While it's true that the cadence happens "technically," it lasts only for one to two beats. Further, the melody immediately descends back to d-minor pentatonic and the cadences elide over a harmonic move back down to either d-minor or B-flat. In light of this, I would argue that the aural "authenticity" of the cadential resolution is questionable.

Madonna's Catholic upbringing is evident here too as this opposition of major and minor pentatonic melodies and harmonies can be traced to the church's nineteenth-century compositional practices. The tropes used in "Like a Prayer" prove analogous to what musicologist Jeremy Day-O'Connell describes as the "religious pentatonic" in which opposing major and minor pentatonic melodies were used to aurally allude to divisions between humanity and divinity, earthly and heavenly, corporeal and spiritual, desire and transcendence.³⁶² "Like a Prayer's" pairing of traditional dialectical pentatonic tropes with the heavy use of the organ (an obvious sonic signifier for long-established forms of Christian worship) therefore act as strong musical gestures toward Western European forms of Catholicism.³⁶³ But the song's mash-up of sonic references and stylistic tropes don't end here.

The musical contributions of a real-life African American gospel choir led by the legendary Pentecostal singer Andraé Crouch bring even more religious tropes and actually complicate the *racial* signifiers in the song.³⁶⁴ Not coincidentally, the way in which "Like a Prayer's" pentatonic melodies oppose moments of solemn reflection and celebratory salvation, align as much with African American gospel music traditions as they do with Catholicism.³⁶⁵ The fact that Madonna chooses this African American Protestant (specifically Pentecostal) choir as a prevalent sonic force for the

³⁶² For a discussion of these tropes, see Day-O'Connell's third chapter, which traces the practice of composing "the religious pentatonic" into transcriptions of chant for nineteenth century audiences. See also his Table 3.2: "A structuralist interpretation of the religious pentatonic." *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 97-142.

³⁶³ Obviously, the prolific use of pentatonic melodies throughout the world makes them non-exclusive to Catholicism. But, I would point out that considerations of Madonna's professed aim for the song and the use of Catholic musical idioms here, the organ in particular, justify my interpretation.

³⁶⁴ See Horace Clarence Boyer's historical account of black Pentecostal musical practices in the early twentieth-century. *The Golden Age of Gospel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 24.

³⁶⁵ Throughout the twentieth-century, gospel songs have also used major and minor melodies to oppose the earthly world with the heavenly. Soul musicians called the relationship between the tonic and submediant the "major-minor" changes. See Fink's discussion in "Goal Directed Soul?," 183.

song rather than favoring idioms tied to her Catholic upbringing (such as sections from a mass or the sounds of a boy's choir) suggests the degree to which she questioned the church.³⁶⁶ Madonna therefore seems to signal her spiritual struggle in the song by contrasting textural, timbral, harmonic, and melodic forces to evoke the religious and racial confusion she felt in her solitary search for a usable faith. In fact, Madonna uses the choir's community of voices to enact yet another level of duality in the song, sonically representing guidance from a saved collective against the isolation of her admitted struggle with "sin" and spiritual uncertainty. The song seems to represent this through Madonna's soft opening monologue, especially through the lyrics "Everyone must stand alone," and in her repeated descents into d-minor. These sections are contrasted with uplifting passages that suggest the engagement with and guidance by an African American community of believers. Thus the Crouch choir plays an important role in the later half of the song as a *guide* for Madonna's languishing solo vocal line, filling out the sound box and attempting to redirect her to the celebratory key of F-major.³⁶⁷

Commenting briefly on the use of "Like a Prayer" in Pepsi's commercial, McClary ascribes its failure to tensions set up by the song's music-structural tropes and to general oppositions between Catholicism and Protestantism. She and Freccero also read the song as a confrontation with conflicting ideological perspectives about "appropriate" religious expression.³⁶⁸ McClary concludes: "...this song is about the possibility of creating musical and visual narratives that celebrate multiple rather than unitary identities, that are concerned with ecstatic continuation rather than with purging

³⁶⁶ The Rolling Stones use of a boy's choir for the introduction in "You Can't Always Get What You Want" is a prime example of how churchy sonic idioms have been used effectively in popular music. By Jagger's own account, the original conception of the song was to have featured a gospel choir. See The Rolling Stones, *According to the Rolling Stones* (San Francisco: First Chronicle Books LLC, 2009), 116.

³⁶⁷ The song's form is laid out in Table 3 of Appendix B.

³⁶⁸ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 163-165. Freccero, "Our Lady of MTV," 163-183.

and containment.”³⁶⁹ I would add however that the complex relationships between the numerous dialectical tensions set up here specifically juxtapose *musical, physical, and spiritual ideological divisions between black and white communities*—i.e. the song is as much about *race* as religion.³⁷⁰ “Like a Prayer” proved resistant to a commercial context because its musical tropes transgress the rules of capitalist realism. It musically depicts *specific demographics*—Madonna as a “white women” and lost soul, the African American choir, and European (specifically Italian and American) Catholics—and *places*—Protestant and Catholic Churches—and positions these traditionally disparate signifiers in a way that’s “peculiar, striking, and unexpected.”³⁷¹ Thus, the track’s overt confrontation with culturally policed boundaries—European Catholic mystical idioms *versus* black Pentecostal devotion; divine *versus* carnal love; and “dance” pop *versus* reserved religious devotion—made Pepsi’s project of “re-presenting” “Like a Prayer” as a capitalist realist text challenging from the very beginning.³⁷²

Wishful Thinking

“Make a Wish” opens with the sound of film moving through a projector. The camera moves from the back of a living room to focus on a black and white home movie (Fig. 4.2). As young children come into view, a boy holds up a sign that reads: “Madonna’s 8th Birthday.” The

³⁶⁹ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 165. Again, McCracken, would identify this as an obvious example of Madonna’s attempt to “expand” perceptions of her individuality. *Transformations*, 305.

³⁷⁰ For a more complete list of the many dialectical tensions at work in the song, see Table 4 in Appendix B.

³⁷¹ Recall Schudson’s claims that national advertising in the ’80s rarely pictured people who were distinct or stood out in any way (especially those who were racially distinct). He also notes that ads are set out of time and space. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 215- 216. The quotation is from Brecht, “Short Description of a New Technique,” 143.

³⁷² Refer to Table 3 in Appendix B for a guide to the song’s harmonic, melodic, and timbral structures. Williamson posits that advertising manipulates cultural signifiers and “re-presents” them. See my use of her term in chapters one and two as well as her book: *Decoding Advertisements*, 177.

camera allows a sideways glimpse of an undisclosed spectator and gives way to an onscreen close-up of a smiling child—a simulation of 8-year old Madonna Veronica Louise Ciccone (Fig. 4.2).³⁷³



Figure 4.2: Commercial stills—“Make a Wish” opening scenes³⁷⁴

The sound of a slamming door, taken directly from the forthcoming album, interrupts the track as the camera reveals a doll that the little girl has unwrapped.³⁷⁵ Acting as a musical catalyst, the image of the doll unleashes the sounds of “Like a Prayer’s” opening d-minor bridge (Example 4.1). Following an ominous two-measure organ drone, Madonna’s voice hovers over the scene with a non-diegetic d-minor pentatonic melody that heightens the concept of “otherworldliness” as it accompanies the young girl happily unwrapping her new doll. During the opening phrase, “Life is a mystery,” the onscreen viewer of this home movie is revealed and audiences get a close-up of the re-invented, svelte, and brown-haired Madonna of 1989 (Fig 4.2).³⁷⁶ Here the word “mystery” isn’t portrayed as a question about religious propriety (the concept made most obvious by the album track), but more literally about the identity of the spectator.

³⁷³ Goldman and Papson argue that commercials feature media representations of celebrities. I discuss this more in chapter three. See their *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 31-32. This little girl is obviously not the real Madonna as a child, but Pepsi’s version of her.

³⁷⁴ PepsiCo. Inc., “Make a Wish,” 1989.

³⁷⁵ The driving “rock-like” d-minor guitar riff that opens the original track is left out for the commercial.

³⁷⁶ Madonna probably looked odd to a lot of viewers because she had again reinvented herself by losing weight, toning up her body, and dying her hair back to its “natural” brown color. See Kellner’s, *Media Culture*, 275-276.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Opening bridge and chorus". The score is arranged in three systems, each with multiple staves for different instruments and voices. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4.

System 1:

- Voice:** "Life is a myst - er - y, ev - ery one must stand a - lone. I hear you call my name, and it feels like"
- Soprano:** (Musical notation)
- Alto:** (Musical notation)
- Tenor:** (Musical notation)
- Bass:** (Musical notation)
- Organ:** (Musical notation)
- Keyboard Synthesizer:** (Musical notation)

System 2:

- Vo.:** "ho-me. When you call my name, it's like a lit-tle prayer. I'm down on m - y knees, I wa-na take you"
- S.:** (Musical notation)
- A.:** (Musical notation)
- T.:** (Musical notation)
- B.:** (Musical notation)
- Org.:** (Musical notation)
- Synth.:** (Musical notation)

System 3:

- Vo.:** "there. In the mid-ni - ght hour, I can fe - el your power. Just li - ke a prayer, you know I'll take you there. Like a child,"
- S.:** (Musical notation)
- A.:** (Musical notation)
- T.:** (Musical notation)
- B.:** (Musical notation)
- Org.:** (Musical notation)
- Synth.:** (Musical notation)

Example 4.1: Opening bridge and chorus

The 30 year-old Madonna holds a Pepsi can and smiles with delight at the sight of her former self.³⁷⁷ Numerous cuts between the two Madonnas occur during the next phrase, “everyone must stand alone.” As she watches the film, grown Madonna appears to exchange glances with the on-screen version of herself (who also holds a Pepsi). The isolation expressed by the lyrics and soulful delivery of Madonna’s minor pentatonic solo vocal line is mirrored in Pepsi’s images to suggest biographical insight to the pop star’s climb to success. The opening bars thus suggest the innocence of the little girl unwrapping her doll and nostalgia felt by the pop star.³⁷⁸

The underlying organ and wordless choir lend a mystical timbre to the track and provide the sonic envelope for the fantastical situation that’s about to happen. On the following phrase—“I hear you call my name/and it feels like home”—the two Madonnas switch places. The color in grown-up Madonna’s face fades to black and white and she suddenly appears on the home theater screen (Fig. 4.3, below). On the word “home,” 8-year old Madonna, appears in color and looks curiously over the chair her older self had just occupied.³⁷⁹

The mysteriousness of the onscreen action is complimented by the harmonic strangeness of Madonna’s offbeat slide away from the implied F tonic of the following section to the lower third (d) on the word “home” (Ex. 4.1, mm. 11). This musical slide and exchange of the two Madonnas

³⁷⁷ Like Michael Jackson, Madonna was not a Pepsi drinker and extremely conscious about her health. While she agreed to hold the can and gesture to drink from it, she never actually takes a sip.

³⁷⁸ The fact that Madonna is the spectator here, is motionless (she’s always used her body as a site of power), and is visibly affected by these memories, exposes a more personal side of her that fans weren’t used to seeing. Viewers therefore get a rare glimpse of the pop star in an uncharacteristically mundane and private moment. Although Madonna was open about her past, once she was a celebrity she worked diligently to keep aspects of her private life from public view. Most circulating images of Madonna showed her “performing” or “celebrity” self and it was uncommon for the media to get glimpses of her doing day-to-day tasks.

³⁷⁹ The transfer of colors here reinforces the notion that “the time/space continuum” has been disrupted. This plays on an idea made famous by the *Back to the Future* movies that were popular at the time. Michael J. Fox, another Pepsi spokesperson of the 1980s, played the main character who travelled back in time to ensure that the future (his reality in the ’80s) wouldn’t change. The second movie in the series was released at the same time as Madonna’s commercial. In these movies he sees his parents as teenagers and himself as a middle-aged man. I see strong similarities between the scenes in Pepsi’s commercials and the *Back to the Future* movies for these reasons. Of course, the cinematic precedent to this nostalgic fade to black and white harkens back at least as far as 1969’s *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

indicate that they both are searching for a place to belong. As the following scenes indicate, grown Madonna seeks to change her past, while her younger version looks for hope and guidance in her future. The switch from color (i.e. the wisdom and freedom Madonna knows in the 1980s) to the constricting world of her 1950s-'60s "black and white" childhood, acts as an overarching concept for the spot.³⁸⁰

As in the original track, the organ and choir sustain their d-minor chord for four full measures to lend rhetorical weight to the vocal line's lingering in the solemn opening key. The pause on this minor chord adds gravity to the subsequent move to F-major, creating an effect known as the "miracle" cadence, a technique that aurally evokes the sound of heaven opening-up by moving directly from vi to I.³⁸¹ (Ex. 4.1, mm.15-16) This cadence and the ensuing F-major chorus work to establish the agency of the onscreen simulations that represent the pop queen. Grown Madonna sings the chorus herself, telling viewers that it is indeed her song and that she has agency over it in the same way she controls her success. This "major" sounding harmonic movement also subtly creates excitement for the product. Remaining true to the fictionalized and "magical" practices of advertising, the overt religious iconography the miracle cadence might evoke is replaced with a neon Pepsi sign that stands out in full color against the black and white street scene in the commercial (Fig. 4.3).³⁸² (The analogous moment in Madonna's own video is a riot of cross-cutting between actual religious icons, synchronized to the snare drum hits that kick off the song's groove.) The

³⁸⁰ Note that at this point in the music video, Madonna has entered the safety of a church to seek guidance in navigating the unjust outside world she fears.

³⁸¹ For the sake of time and to downplay the tension set-up by the opening minor bridge, Pepsi cuts the d-minor chord down to occupy only a few beats. Although the transition in the commercial takes less time, the potency of the miracle cadence is still powerful when paired with the visuals. Usually the chord moves upwards (to VIII) to sound like an "ascension," but here the F chord is inverted and actually moves downward. Despite this fact, I would argue that the chord progression still acts as a signifier of hope. Day-O'Connell, *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy*, 140.

³⁸² Cultural theorist Sut Jhally argues that advertising as an institution of advanced capitalism acts like religion. See "Advertising as Religion," in *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2006), 85-98 as well as my discussion of this in chapter one.

Pepsi commodity thus supplies Madonna with the opportunity for a “miracle” in the spot through its soda.



Figure 4.3: Commercial stills—Madonna's trades places; Pepsi as Madonna's “Miracle”; Dancing in the street

The track is then spliced to a transitional drum fill that generates a flurry of edits leading to grown-up Madonna diegetically singing the chorus outside a 1950s dime store soda fountain (Fig. 4.3). The placement of Madonna in the past during the upbeat F-major chorus reinforces the nostalgia hinted at in the commercial's the opening shots and, simultaneously, offers audiences a familiar taste of the pop dance style for which she is well known.³⁸³ The star's attire in this scene is “sexy” and noticeably out of place as she dons a black bustier, high-waist pants, heels and a rosary necklace that falls along her cleavage. Her body, and presumably her sexuality are prominently on display despite (or likely in spite of) the inappropriateness of her dress in this conservative setting.³⁸⁴

The uplifting quality of this musical moment is further reinforced as 8-year old Madonna looks on while her future self dances against a backdrop of African American and Caucasian youth in poodle-skirts, letterman's sweaters, and leather jackets (Fig. 4.3).³⁸⁵ The multiracial youth shown dancing together here allow the notion of “black and white” to occupy multiple levels of signification. Black and white vs. color is therefore not only a visual representation of the past and

³⁸³ McClary refers to this section as “funky” pop. McClary's *Feminine Endings*, 164.

³⁸⁴ Madonna's dress in the video is equally problematic since she wears only a short brown night slip and crucifix necklace once inside the church.

³⁸⁵ In regards to the pop star's biography, this scene can be interpreted a few ways: It can be seen as a revisiting of the year she was born (1958), an encounter with youth that would have been her parents or their peers at the time, or as Vickers's suggests, an embodiment of her mother by the same name, who incidentally died at the very age the pop star is in the commercial. “Materialism and the Material Girl,” 230-246. This moment also refers back to Madonna's previous work in *True Blue*, which has a tongue-in-cheek 1950s sound.

present, but literally refers to racial relationships—tolerance vs. intolerance in this and other desegregated scenes—and also to the notions of right vs. wrong—accepted forms of physical and (as we’ll see later) religious expression. In this way, the images echo the musical track to bring the politics of racial, physical, and religious conduct into circulation. Further, visual symbols “familiar” on their own are juxtaposed them in ways that make them unfamiliar (or at least unrealistic). Engaged audiences are thus required early in the commercial to question and decode the puzzling action onscreen.³⁸⁶

The street scene plays out while the pop star sings the entirety of the first F-major chorus. The track then transitions to a selected portion of the song’s solemn third verse (Ex. 4.2).³⁸⁷ Here the camera cuts to young Madonna wandering around her future house and Pepsi again interprets the lyrics literally by synchronizing direct word painting on “Like a child” with images of her spinning in her 1950s-style party dress in front of a grand piano (Fig. 4.4).³⁸⁸ Her actions in this scene allude to her future occupation as a musician and dancer. On repeat of the same phrase, young Madonna is caught looking at a sexy poster of her future self (complete with her signature bleach-blonde hair and flamenco-tinged attire).³⁸⁹ Despite the abrupt return to the disparaging minor pentatonic melody, her younger self finds gratification in her own dancing, the discovery of the piano, and sexy poster. It’s clear from the look on her face that she realizes her potential.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ I would argue this is an “alienating” gesture. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 143.

³⁸⁷ See Appendix A for the lyrics. This verse halts the celebratory action in the commercial just as in the original track by moving to stagnant chords in F’s sub-dominant region of B-flat and again foregrounding the ominous sounds of the organ and wordless choir. See Table 3 in Appendix B for a diagram of the song’s structures and performing forces.

³⁸⁸ Recall that direct word painting is Vernallis’s term. See *Experiencing Music Video*, 209-235.

³⁸⁹ This poster is also appropriately taken from the album art for Madonna’s remix compilation, *You Can Dance*, solidifying for experienced audiences that this girl would grow up to be a dance music icon. I’d like to thank Ross Fenimore for bringing it to my attention. It’s also worth noting here that, as Madonna’s attire suggests, she frequently brings in Spanish and Latino people and cultures into her music.

³⁹⁰ The Virginia Slims Cigarette slogan, “You’ve come a long way, baby,” comes to mind here. These ads from the mid-1960s (around the time Madonna would have turned eight) claimed to celebrate women’s abilities to be independent.



Figure 4.4: Commercial stills—Young Madonna explores her future house

Voice: there. Like a child, you whisper softly to me. You're in control just like a child.

Soprano:

Alto:

Tenor:

Bass:

Organ:

Keyboard Synthesizer:

Vo: Hea ven help me! When you call my name, it's like a lit tle prayer. I'm down on m y knees, I wan na take you

S: When you call my name, it's like a lit tle prayer. I'm down on m y knees, I wan na take you

A: When you call my name, it's like a lit tle prayer. I'm down on m y knees, I wan na take you

T: When you call my name, it's like a lit tle prayer. I'm down on m y knees, I wan na take you

B: When you call my name, it's like a lit tle prayer. down on m y knees, I wan na take you

Org:

Syn:

Williamson discusses the print ad version on page 166 of *Decoding Advertisements*. With the aid of Pepsi, Madonna also seems to promise little girls the freedom to use their bodies as they please. This scene could further be read as depicting Madonna's ability, even at a young age, to break free from the constraints of her surroundings.

The image displays a musical score for Madonna's song "Like a Prayer". It is divided into two systems. The first system covers the second chorus, with lyrics: "there. In the mid ni - ght hour, I can fe - el your power. Just li ke ' prayer you know I'll take you". The second system covers the chorus variation, with lyrics: "there. Just like a prayer I'll take you there. It's like a dream to me." The score includes vocal parts for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.), as well as piano (Org.) and synth (Synth.) accompaniment.

Example 4.2: “Like a Prayer” verse, second chorus, and chorus variation

While her younger self explores the future, grown Madonna looks displeased as she sits alone in a parochial school classroom (Fig. 4.5). These images most closely mirror the song’s somber minor pentatonic melody as she momentarily loses the jubilation of the preceding passage. Making a clichéd poke at the concept of authority, the words, “You’re in control,” support images of a hallway lined with uniformed girls walking in perfect rows.³⁹¹ The track is then spliced so that lyrics from the

³⁹¹ The pop star’s troubled encounter with her memories of Catholic school attempts to offer viewers a clearer glimpse of her past struggles. Reminiscent perhaps of Pink Floyd’s rock opera, *The Wall*, the commercial follows what Madonna would presumably be thinking during her reflection on these times. *The Wall* is set in a similar setting where the protagonist named Pink struggles against an oppressive society, and eventually against himself. Towards the beginning of the movie uniformed children are crushed under the authoritarian rule of their teachers and parents. See figure 4.5.

end of the second verse are tacked on to halfway through the third (Ex. 4.2).³⁹² The sudden cut to the phrase “Heaven help me” reinforces the song’s religious undertones. Contributing to the peculiarity of this moment, the camera moves to a glimpse of grown Madonna dancing the Charleston between the girls. In an ironic winking gesture, Madonna thus does what she was taught by the very forces that displease her—what any “good” Catholic would do in troubled times—she (metaphorically) “prays” by calling to God for help. In the next moment, the girls throw their hands up and break their lines, demonstrating their *own* empowerment and potential to “break free” from the conformity imposed upon them.³⁹³



Figure 4.5: Commercial stills—Future Madonna re-visits her Catholic girls’ school

Madonna’s call towards heaven invites more voices to join her in a repetition of the chorus (Ex. 4.2, above). The isolation portrayed onscreen is broken with the inclusion of a full gospel choir in the track that (in the commercial’s context) presumably signifies a general concept of “the people” and sends a message of unity and hope. The music is mirrored in Pepsi’s images, which depict Madonna dancing with people in various scenes, including the schoolgirls and multiracial youth gathered inside and outside the dime store (Fig. 4.6). While grown-up Madonna works to gather the

³⁹² Pepsi makes an odd choice in cutting to the second verse’s tag line, (“Heaven help me”) instead of the next line in the original (“Now I’m dancing,” which would provide a perfect instance of direct word painting) or even substituting the forth verse’s proclamation (“Let the choir sing,” which makes the most sense for the later scenes). Cutting to an overtly religious phrase is also risky move considering the spot is part of a globally advertised campaign.

³⁹³ Kellner analyses this moment saying: “Just as Madonna is the vehicle of morality and liberal integrationism in “Like a Prayer,” in the Pepsi commercial she ‘liberates’ a group of catholic schoolgirls who break into dance when Madonna appears, leading them to self-expression and drinking Pepsi, equated in the commercial with secular salvation and joy.” Kellner, *Media Culture*, 293. I think his interpretation is valid, but also believe that the significance of this moment extends to reading I’m discussing here. After all, future Madonna isn’t “actually” present in the scene: she’s replacing her younger self who *should* be in there and who also had the urge and the capability to break into dance (as depicted by the twirl she does in front of her future piano).

community she never had in her past—people who she presumably wants to guide her younger self and those with whom she claimed to identify—her younger version thoughtfully sips from her Pepsi bottle.



**Figure 4.6: Commercial stills—Future Madonna at the 1950s multi-racial soda fountain;
Young Madonna ponders her future**

The images here support the musical track in drawing attention to the rigidity of gendered, racial, and religious constructs by depicting an unrealistic “unification” of them during the climatic repeat of the upbeat, poppy chorus. In true Madonna style, she builds a sense of community by inviting everyone to join her in dancing out his or her frustrations.³⁹⁴ Though the references to crossing racial and gender lines are subtle, both scenarios would have been unlikely in the confines of a Catholic school and segregated public spaces in the 1950s and 1960s. But, Madonna’s ability to be in both eras simultaneously illustrates her defiance of past norms and her ability to transcend them. She is at once both a child and an adult in each era. As a child she has the potential to be something great, once she realizes that life is more than the cookie cutter world of her surroundings. As an adult she participates in all scenes as a confident 1980s woman, thus becoming *the* symbol of change and unity.

Pepsi aurally reinforces this uplifting moment by *creating an authentic melodic cadence* on “I’ll take you there.” The commercial thus deviates structurally from the original track at what is perhaps its

³⁹⁴ Shots of people dancing in a street had become a clichéd trademark of Pepsi commercials in the 1980s. The Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, and Turner and David Bowie commercials all had street scenes. Vickers points out that this moment could be a clichéd reference to Martha and the Vandellas’s “Dancing in the Streets.” *Materialism and the Material Girl*, 237.

most critical moment, by cutting directly to a gospel choir variation of the F-major chorus (Just like a prayer/I'll take you there). This splice “fixes” Madonna’s momentary cadence on the F tonic, which in the original proves ineffective because it’s unsupported by the tonic harmony. In the commercial, this melodic arrival is supported by an elision to a *different*, later tonic chord from the tacked-on chorus variation, thereby *producing* a definitive harmonic resolution that doesn’t exist in the original (Ex. 4.2).³⁹⁵ As the music completes a celebratory authentic cadence in F-major, it would seem then that both Madonnas have “resolved” their struggles in the realization of themselves as a personally empowered and socially impactful ’80s pop queen. As a token capitalist realist moment, this gesture towards easy plot resolution can only be suggested in the banal world of television commercials.

It would have made sense for Pepsi to end the commercial here since the images and musical track have resolved, but in a curious (and I would say, problematic) move, the spot keeps going. The sights and sounds are sutured together as we see an African American Pentecostal choir joyously singing and dancing along with the congregation (Fig. 4.7). At this point the choir takes over Madonna’s line, shouting: “Just like a prayer, *I’ll* take you there,” making it apparent that the diegetic musical track has become the taken over the commercial.³⁹⁶ Not only does shifting the focus away from Madonna’s voice change the subject position, but the choir takes possession of the protagonist’s calls to “you”—which up until now the commercial has suggested were a reference to her younger self.³⁹⁷ In the next phrase, the choir sings, “It’s like a dream to *me*,” revealing that they

³⁹⁵ Here we see Pepsi making the move that was so successful in Michael Jackson’s commercials: by reworking a complex tonal dialectic, the question about who or what will “take me/you there” is answered with a bland affirmation of the tonic chord.

³⁹⁶ “I’ll take you there” is another lyrical throwback. This time it’s to the Staple Singer’s song of the same name. Double-entendre abounds in the Staple Singer’s version.

³⁹⁷ Vickers notes that this “slippage” between “I” and “You” is a “traditional trope of grand authority, of ascent.” Vickers further reads that in the commercial this slippage is meant for her mother. While her reading is valid when taking the images into account, she leaves out the underlying musical tropes, which I think add more layers of meaning.

are not who or what Madonna is speaking to, but can offer guidance. The choir’s unison repetition of the celebratory F-major hook is embellished by the responding melismas of a large African American woman who fronts the group.³⁹⁸ In a striking and odd moment, Madonna thus confidently affirms her (Catholic?) faith and confidence in front of this Pentecostal congregation. The community of voices guides Madonna to the front of the church and she dances ecstatically before them.³⁹⁹ As she makes her way towards the choir, the group provides her with further musical (and obviously, spiritual) support in their completion of three half-cadences on C (Ex. 4.2, above).⁴⁰⁰



Figure 4.7: Commercial stills—Madonna Dances with the African American Protestant congregation

The commercial’s images confirm that Pepsi’s marketers couldn’t help but literally depict the gospel-inflected finish of “Like a Prayer’s” musical track. Unfortunately for them, the pairing of these images and Madonna’s music presents viewers with even more politically charged and conflicting tropes. The images in this scene appear wholly out of place in with the rest of the

In particular, I would argue that Madonna acts as she wishes her mother would have, but she still plays “Madonna the pop star” during the flashback scenes. “Materialism and the Material Girl,” 240.

³⁹⁸ Call and response is an essential component of African American musical traditions, including gospel. As noted in the previous chapter, David Brackett argues the African American songs dating back to the 1850s have an affinity for call and response. See page 113 in *Interpreting Popular Music*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Citations are to the University of California edition. It’s also worth mentioning that Pepsi plays down the importance of the role of the respondent to this section by opting for a heavier, older, and more “maternal” looking actress rather than the thin, young, and modern black woman shown in the video. Freccero attributes the replacement in the commercial as a move to de-center the respondent’s prominent role from the video’s text as the African American “Madonna.” She says that woman in the Pepsi commercial was likely considered “more ‘fitting’ for the traditional worship setting of the service.” “Our Lady of MTV,” 180-182. While her reading makes sense, I would argue that Pepsi never saw Madonna’s video, and therefore couldn’t have planned to decenter her.

³⁹⁹ In the Pentecostal community, these actions would signify that Madonna is in the ecstatic state of feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit. More generally, it could be argued that the commercial is actually a long dream-sequence, since the presence of the choir is placed out of context.

⁴⁰⁰ The reader should have noticed by now that Pepsi is resourceful at supplying a cadence on the dominant at key moments in their commercials. The same practice was used in both sets of Michael Jackson’s spots.

commercial, especially when shown opposite the Catholic girls' school. Additionally, it's strange that Pepsi's endorser is no longer the musical star and is situated in an environment that doesn't seem realistic as an autobiographical vignette. As a "re-presentation" of her childhood as she might have *preferred* it, the commercial's music and images indicate that Madonna rejects the restrictions imposed on her by her Catholic upbringing and embraces emotional and spiritual the "freedoms" offered by the African American Pentecostal traditions.

Further, Madonna appears as a confusing visual foil in the scene: a white woman who's scantily-dressed, wears a crucifix that lies strategically in her cleavage, and dances provocatively among African American Protestant families in their Sunday best.⁴⁰¹ This moment is not only strikingly similar to the setting of the same musical section in the MTV video, but it also becomes the most obvious Brechtian move, making the peculiarities of the situation undeniable by amplifying the social and political commentaries that ran through previous scenes.⁴⁰² It exemplifies Brecht's stage directions for one of his own works, *Die Rundkoepfe und Die Spitzkoepfe*, which also questions volatile issues of race (specifically anti-Semitism): "[c]ertain incidents in the play should be treated as self-contained scenes and raised—by means of inscriptions, musical or sound effects and the actors' way of playing—above the level of the everyday, the obvious, the expected (i.e. alienated)."⁴⁰³ I would posit too, that in the same way Brecht decentered the "inventor" character of

⁴⁰¹ The crucifix is the one piece of Madonna's iconography that's preserved in the commercial (other than the quick glimpse of the "You Can Dance" poster). It is a symbol that the pop star claims to wear "ironically" to contrast other aspects of her appearance, namely the "virgin-whore" dichotomy she sought to portray in her early career. Taraborrelli, *Madonna*, 19.

⁴⁰² A young informant whom I interviewed picked up on the strangeness of this moment: "I watched the video with the African American man being the martyr, and then her kissing him. So it was obviously a very controversial video...so that's why I was kind of confused why she brought that into a Pepsi commercial. Because I feel like that's a little, not risqué, but not something that Pepsi would normally associate with themselves, especially because it looked more like a gospel church...it kind of *alienates* other groups. So, I would think that would kind of be bad for Pepsi because you're not necessarily including everyone. And it's kind of pigeonholing who their customers might be." In person interview with author, September 26, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁴⁰³ See "Notes to *Die Rundkoepfe und Die Spitzkoepfe*" in *Brecht on Theatre*, 101.

Galileo by having him admit he was hungry at the end of a profound speech, this scene too momentarily decenters Madonna's "pop star aura," stripping her of her self-reliance and musical "strengths."⁴⁰⁴ As "white girl" who was raised under the conservative ideologies of the Catholic faith, but grows up to create, sing, and dance to black music, Madonna is musically, spiritually, and physically taken in by another community—an African American Pentecostal one—with which she most closely identifies: a community that has been historically portrayed as comfortable with their religious choices, their bodies, and their musical expression.⁴⁰⁵ And in Madonna's public demonstration of love for her new community, she encourages viewers to find their own happiness.

The commercial's gospel scene ends with Madonna spinning in slow motion at the front of the congregation, illuminated by a beam of light. With a huge smile on her face, the twirl sends her crucifix flying in slow motion around her neck. In the meantime, young Madonna continues to wander around her future house until she finds her birthday doll on a shelf and it breaks the fantasy's "spell" (Fig. 4.8). The final lyrics heard in the commercial, "it's like a dream to me," accompany the child as she looks back at the screen, remembering where she should be. Pepsi gives the spot a lighthearted resolution by prohibiting the return to d-minor with a sudden "slam" after a half-cadence on C (Ex. 4.2, above). This half-cadence in F-major allows the track to leave off with a *hopeful* gesture towards the future: the harmonic resolution and the return of each Madonna to their proper eras (Pepsi in hand), attempt to assure viewers that the entire sequence of events was a

⁴⁰⁴ See Berthold Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, ed. Eric Bentley, trans. Charles Laughton (New York: Grove Press, 1966).

⁴⁰⁵ See Mitchell Morris's article "It's Raining Men: The Weather Girls, Gay Subjectivity, and the Erotics of Insatiability" in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, eds. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Como: Carciofolio, 1999), 213-230. One of Morris's main points is that, for many gay men, the Weather Girls represented a positive model of transgression. As women comfortable with their weight, the song demonstrated that their sexual appetite was equally as voracious as their love for food. Their outsider role thus became a site on which gay men could identify. African American ties to church, food, and sexual voracity continue to be central to how the media, movies and books continue to portray black families (see *Big Momma's House*, *Death at a Funeral* and all of the Tyler Perry Movies).

fantastical re-presentation of the pop icon as a model for achieving the “American Dream.”⁴⁰⁶ The rattling film projector once again dominates the soundtrack, while grown Madonna smiles at her former-self onscreen (Fig. 4.8). The child again swaps glances with her older self and raises her 1960s Pepsi bottle as if to say, “Here’s to us.” The pop star returns the gesture saying, “Go ahead. Make a wish.” One last glance at the home movie shows the eight-year-old blowing out her birthday candles. The screen goes black and Pepsi reinforces Madonna’s iconicity with the slogan, “A Generation Ahead” (Fig. 4.8) Thus, the meaning of “prayer” in the context of the commercial suggests that little girls can grow up to achieve their dreams despite the oppressive forces that surround them. The commercial therefore *attempts* to paint the perfect picture of neoliberal status transformation by demonstrating that success, happiness, and the Pepsi commodity go hand-in-hand.



Figure 4.8: Commercial stills—Both Madonnas Return to Their Proper Eras

The Fallout

Less than 24 hours after the video’s premiere on MTV, Pepsi was flooded with calls from people who thought the commercial was taken from actual scenes in the video. Nationally syndicated shows like *Entertainment Tonight* found the controversy news worthy, showing some of the most contentious clips from the music video and saying that religious groups found it

⁴⁰⁶ All of my informants who watched the commercial picked up on these themes right away. One in particular noted: “For the Madonna one it was more like, ‘Follow your dreams, because you are gonna get there.’ It was like, ...the ‘American Dream.’” In person interview with author, September 23, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

“blasphemous.”⁴⁰⁷ A Canadian news source pinpointed the problem: “Some religious leaders were incensed with scenes of Madonna singing in a field of burning crosses and caressing a priest.”⁴⁰⁸

Action against the ad was formally taken in the U.S. when Reverend Donald Wildmon pushed the American Family Association to threaten a boycott of Pepsi products if they didn’t stop running it. Across the globe, an Italian Catholic group warned that they would sue the soda giant if commercials continued to be broadcast as planned.⁴⁰⁹ The confusion between the commercial and video was even extended to the ad industry itself; *Advertising Age* incorrectly conflated them in two separate reports: “The company broadcast a new commercial for regular Pepsi featuring rock singer Madonna and *using clips from her new music video* ‘Like a Prayer.’”⁴¹⁰

Pepsi and its sympathizers saw the commercial and Madonna’s video as two separate and incommensurate texts. In a public statement, Pepsi executive Tod MacKenzie questioned Reverend Wildmon’s actions: “Why isn’t he going after the video? ... Why has he targeted really an innocent, wholesome commercial people have responded favorably to?”⁴¹¹ The “people” whom MacKenzie noted had responded well to spot were largely people in the advertising world who recognized the work and ingenuity that went into the production. The same article added: “Madonna’s ‘Like A Prayer’ video—*not the ad*—shows her kissing a saint, writhing on an altar and receiving the wounds

⁴⁰⁷ “Pepsi Commercial,” March 7 1989, VA 7495, University of California, Los Angeles Film and Television Archive, Los Angeles, CA.

⁴⁰⁸ A discussion of the commercial arose in an article about MuchMusic (the Canadian version of MTV) and its attempt to surpass its U.S. rival with help of Pepsi’s sponsorship during their International Video Awards. Mark Evans, “MuchMusic at the Helm for International Video Awards,” *Financial Post* (Toronto, Canada), April 11, 1989, 16.

⁴⁰⁹ Fox 11 news in Los Angeles reported that the “sexual and religious imagery” was what bothered the Italian Catholic group. “Pepsi Commercial,” VA 7495, UCLA Film and Television Archive.

⁴¹⁰ This was first printed in *Advertising Age* in early March of 1989 and ran again a month and a half after the commercial aired. Scott Hume, “Pepsi Tops Ad Recall after Madonna Flap,” *Advertising Age*, April 24, 1989, 12. Emphasis mine.

⁴¹¹ Cox, “Boycott Aim,” *USA Today*, 1989.

of Christ.”⁴¹² An advertising trade press source concurred: “While ‘Make a Wish’ traveled back in time to the party on Madonna’s eighth birthday and was *light and joyful*, ‘Like a Prayer’ deals with a young woman struggling with sexual and religious guilt, and contains inflammatory images like burning crosses and a romantic alliance with a saint.”⁴¹³ *Adweek*’s Richard Morgan liked the spot so much that he praised its soft-sell approach and called it a “media ‘must-see’ for impossible-to-reach teens.”⁴¹⁴ He further criticized the fact that Pepsi eventually caved from the pressure put on it from religious groups saying, “...*The video ain’t the commercial, however, and never will be.*”⁴¹⁵

Never one to shy away from controversy, the pop queen herself was unapologetic about the outcry against the commercial and video and told one reporter: “Art should be controversial, and that’s all there is to it.”⁴¹⁶ MTV also held its ground. Now eight years old, the network had established a reputation for cutting-edge programming and refused to pull the video: “MTV has found the video, ‘Like A Prayer,’ to be acceptable for air...Ultimately MTV supports an artist’s right to interpret his or her music.”⁴¹⁷ Pepsi executives, on the other hand, didn’t feel the same way and

⁴¹² Ibid. Emphasis mine. Along these lines, Canada’s *Globe and Mail* confirmed: “Pepsi had paid the rock idol a reported \$5-million (U.S.) to star in a two-minute TV commercial featuring the same music as the video but showing a *wholesome* Madonna.” Aly Sujo, “Sexy Madonna Video Miffs Pepsi,” *Globe and Mail*, March 7, 1989, accessed September 11, 2011, <https://www.lexisnexis.com>. Emphasis mine.

⁴¹³ Douglas C. McGill, “The Media Business; Star Wars in Cola Advertising,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1989, 1. Emphasis mine.

⁴¹⁴ Richard Morgan, “In Being a Good Corporate Citizen, Pepsi Came to Wrong Conclusion,” *Adweek*, April 10, 1989, 2.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

⁴¹⁶ Stephen Holden, “Madonna Re-creates Herself—Again,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1989, accessed January 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/19/arts/madonna-re-creates-herself-again.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

⁴¹⁷ Reuter and Staff, “MuchMusic, MTV Playing Madonna Video,” *Globe and Mail* (Canada), March 8, 1989, accessed September 15, 2011, <https://www.lexisnexis.com>.

pulled the ad after realizing that the commercial's message was not read or received as intended by a large portion of its consumers.⁴¹⁸

Failed Capitalist Realism

Madonna's musical track clearly overran the brand's intentions. For the Michael Jackson commercials, Pepsi effectively neutralized his lyrics by substituting its own slogan, cutting up the backing track in a way that diminished displeasing harmonic motions, and placing important cadential moments on the name of the brand. But being the shrewd businesswoman she was, Madonna was able to preserve the "artistic integrity" of her song by refusing Pepsi's request to change the words. So despite marketers' attempts to splice and redirect important cadential points, the fact that they weren't allowed to make a jingle out of a song that could fundamentally never be "simplified" or "typified" caused marketers to fail miserably in rendering Madonna's richly polysemic text banal enough for a global audience. Consequently, more than in any other campaign examined in this dissertation, the *music itself* became the ruling force. The song's structures and stylistic tropes—its religious and sexually suggestive lyrical narrative, dialectical oppositions between major and minor key areas, pentatonic melodies, popular and religious performing forces, and textural expansions that move sonically from Madonna's singular experience to group participation by an African American gospel choir—controlled the commercial's images and transferred the politically charged signifiers of people and places into the commercial. Not only did this usurp advertising's traditional reliance on generalizing (and reproducing) oppressive social conditions, but the song's structural resilience prevented marketers from breaking up "Like a Prayer" into discrete

⁴¹⁸ It's worth noting that Pepsi executives hesitated to react at first, and only offered to pull the commercial from stations where the video was also in rotation. Ongoing pressure from the media and religious groups eventually changed their minds.

and “abstract” musical moments. In Adorno’s terms, the track couldn’t be “fetishized” enough for audiences to “hear regressively” over Madonna’s agenda to Pepsi’s.⁴¹⁹

As I’ve shown in previous chapters, Pepsi and BBD&O were able to “re-present” Jackson’s celebrity persona by portraying him as his own unique “brand,” in large part because he pushed them to use his musical and visual symbols rather than his face and full track (at least at first).⁴²⁰ But this was less possible for Pepsi to accomplish with Madonna’s more postmodern style of branding herself.⁴²¹ Her image and music was (and still is) not only politically charged, but her constant attempts to reinvent her image and sound made the signifiers available and/or desirable for Pepsi’s use in its family friendly ad virtually non-existent.⁴²² Consequently, the pop queen’s visual iconography, musical oeuvre, and reputation were considerably less ubiquitous and genial than Jackson’s. Other than the brief glimpse of the *You Can Dance* poster, the soda giant chose to ignore previous representations of the pop star as a retro Marilyn Monroe-like “bimbo.” Marketers opted instead to re-present her as a set of simulated semi-autobiographical and multifaceted characters. As a result, there’s nothing “flat” or banal in the re-presentations of Madonna in “Make a Wish.” In fact, Pepsi makes this Ronald Reagan-esque tale of “status transformation” and upward mobility non-cliché by placing her in increasingly extraordinary and potentially volatile social settings and

⁴¹⁹ Adorno discusses the how the “fetishism” of musical themes leads to a “regression” in listening practices of “great works.” Chapters one and two in this dissertation lay out my adoption and application of his theories. “On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1982), 281.

⁴²⁰ Taylor specifically mentions how pop stars like Michael Jackson were marketed as a brand by their labels and MTV in “*Beyond Exoticism*,” 136-137. Madonna created her brand through the same media outlets.

⁴²¹ In particular, Jackson’s signifiers were more stable and he used them throughout his long career to signify specific songs, performances, and videos. Madonna, on the other hand, chooses more fluid signifiers that are less easy to re-present. As noted above, I don’t entirely view Madonna as postmodern, but as Kellner argues, somewhere between the modern and postmodern. See chapter eight, “Madonna, Fashion, and Image” for Kellner’s complete analysis of what he terms “the Madonna phenomenon.” Kellner, *Media Culture*.

⁴²² See Ross Fenimore’s dissertation, “Madonna’s Confession,” and chapter 11 of Vernallis’s *Experiencing Music Video*. Both authors discuss Madonna’s commentary on volatile political issues like gay rights, marriage, and the AIDS epidemic in her music and videos.

situations.⁴²³ Madonna's individuality is thus made explicit by the forces she opposed (Catholic institutions) and the marginalized groups she embraced (girls, teens, and African Americans). Unfortunately for Pepsi, this backfired: their attempt to project the pop queen as a sentimental, vulnerable, and "wholesome" person went not only against experienced viewer's "alreadyness" of what they knew about her, but the religious right figured out that *their* ideals were the ones the spot appeared to target most directly as Madonna challenged white patriarchal doctrines of mainstream Christianity.⁴²⁴

In its attempt to stay on the cutting-edge of advertising and make a secular interpretation of a fundamentally religious construct ("prayer"), Pepsi failed in its "metacommunication" to consumers.⁴²⁵ As an inadvertently alienating text, it failed to sustain the comforting illusions of capitalist realism and operated outside the realm of what advertising could reconcile. This failure was compounded by the subsequent release of Madonna's video, a virtuosic piece of epic theater that strung together an even more politically charged barrage of religious, sexual, and racial images. Madonna's overt Brechtianism therefore overwhelmed Pepsi's unwitting foray into her agenda. Literary and cultural theorist Nancy Vickers summarizes the ensuing scandal as "a fascinating case of guilt by association: it demonstrates the operative power (be it consciously planned or unconsciously enacted) of one Madonna production to silence another."⁴²⁶ On a larger scale, the MTV video itself thus functioned as an alienation-effect in relation to the commercial that *preceded* it in the public

⁴²³ McCracken, *Transformations*, 305.

⁴²⁴ Harvey notes that the conservatives born out of the instabilities of the neoliberal state were the "disaffected white working class." He summarizes their "moral values" as centering on "nationalism, moral righteousness, Christianity...family values, and right-to-life" and their antagonisms against "feminism, gay rights, affirmative action, and environmentalism." "Make a Wish" certainly touches on many of these issues. See more of what Harvey identifies as "neoconservatism" in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 81-86.

⁴²⁵ Goldman and Papson theorize this in *Nike Culture*, 33. I lay out my applications of their theoretical framework in chapter one. The term "metacommunication" in particular, comes from Williamson. See *Decoding Advertisements*, 43.

⁴²⁶ Vickers, "Materialism and the Material Girl," 231.

sphere, stripping away the spot's attempts at capitalist realism and revealing the fundamental falseness at the heart of Pepsi's fantasy of hip consumerism.

Industry Reactions

Debates about the “appropriate” relationships between new popular music and corporate brands intensified in the wake of the campaign's fallout. Media chatter indicated that corporate executives and their advertising firms were thinking seriously about how far they could and *should* go in fusing the practices and aesthetics of the music industry with their own. Douglas McGill's 1989 article in the *New York Times* illustrated just how drastically the look, sound, and even the goals of late-1980s advertising had changed due to the recent flurry of soda commercials featuring pop stars:

In their relentless focus on celebrities even more than on the product being advertised, the commercials exemplify a shift in modern advertising—from sales pitch to pure entertainment. And they have generated a debate among marketing professionals, not only about the effectiveness of the ads but about the very purpose of modern advertising.

Many of the current cola spots present themselves as one-minute movies, rock concerts or music videos. In some, the soft drink is scarcely mentioned or even seen.

The cola companies say that in a global business climate, music and celebrities transcend cultural barriers and raise international sales. What is more, identifying products with youth and glamour helps to create a distinction between goods that are otherwise essentially identical, some marketing executives say.

“Coke and Pepsi aren't in the product business anymore,” said Clive Chajet, chairman of Lippincott & Margulies, a corporate identity firm, based in New York, that designed Coke's “wave” logo. “They're in the image business, in show business. There is almost no differentiation between Coke and Pepsi, so they have run out of things to say about their products. They have to do it via image.”

But some say the ads stray from tested advertising principles, betray a lack of creativity, and ignore the essential task of any commercial: to make a sale.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁷ McGill, “The Media Business,” *New York Times*, 1989.

A few important points stand out in McGill's reflection on the state of the late-'80s advertising industry. The first is his claim that *entertainment* had usurped the primacy of the "sales pitch." Recall that the stated purpose of Pepsi's first campaign with Michael Jackson was to entertain viewers.⁴²⁸ McGill thus confirms that this strategy continued to prevail in subsequent years as co-branding deals with famous musicians proliferated. Second, he observed that the newest spots didn't look anything like commercials, but they instead resembled "movies," "rock concerts," or "music videos." This attests to the degree to which late-'80s advertising had adopted the look and sounds of MTV, the music business, and contemporary movies.⁴²⁹ Third, the haphazard approach taken by soda marketers in infiltrating television sets all over the world with glitzy "spectacle" to achieve a hefty bottom line reveals the extent that imperatives for globalization had enabled the music and advertising industries to push their goods into international marketplaces.⁴³⁰ Finally, the fact that the ad industry was beginning to realize that incorporating pre-existing popular music in commercials challenged the fundamental way that advertising had worked for decades, namely its use of *generic* people, places, and scenarios to sell commodities to the largest possible audience. Marketers were clearly nervous about the fact that using superstar musicians and their pre-existing music brought an array of complex signifiers into commercials that shifted the sales focus away from the traditionally narrow scope of the household brand. The implosion of Pepsi's campaign with Madonna made the risks of this new strategy painfully clear.

⁴²⁸ See chapter two of this dissertation. BBD&O creatives, the commercial's director, and even Michael Jackson himself claimed that entertainment was the goal of the early commercials.

⁴²⁹ Following the success of the nostalgic soundtrack for *The Big Chill* in 1983, numerous subsequent movies featured rock songs in order to attract larger audiences and sell soundtracks. Many employed new music too. In fact, *Top Gun's* "Danger Zone" was the first song to premiere in a movie and do well before airing on the radio. The "Brat Pack" movies (*Sixteen Candles* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*) also featured the latest hits for teen audiences, which increased movie ticket and album sales.

⁴³⁰ See Kellner's *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003), which discusses how media fueled spectacles in the '80s, '90s, and early 2000s, influenced cultural, political, and ideological forces and assumptions. His discussions include spectacles that circulated through advertising and popular music. See chapter one of this dissertation for my application of his ideas and also my discussion of pop's relationship to neoliberal agendas for globalization.

Accordingly, corporations interested in continuing co-branding efforts between music and their products now had to consider whether advertisements could continue to harness popular music texts and still sell commodities in a way that wouldn't prove too compromising for either party. Brands and their marketing agencies had to ask themselves: At what point does a commercial become too "artistic," too bound up in the aesthetics, ideologies, and agenda of an individual artist, and lose its status as a piece of mass marketing? Obviously there are no definitive answers, but the media frenzy ignited by Pepsi's "Make a Wish" made it the litmus test for this question, as indicated by the positioning of McGill's article immediately following the fallout and the 15-plus years of academic and media chatter that has ensued.

"Make a Wish" demonstrated the worst-case scenario for what might happen when an advertiser abandoned capitalist realism for the hard-edged (post)modernism of late-twentieth century art. In its failure the spot demonstrated just how unwieldy musical signifiers could be when not adequately manipulated to fit the brand's agenda. Furthermore, it reignited the fears that had been raised in lawsuits during the 1970s with Tom Waits and Bette Midler about the consequences of merging art and commerce.⁴³¹ The key difference this time, however, was that the party at risk wasn't the artist but the *corporation*. Madonna wasn't embarrassed, *Pepsi* was. The concern, so dominant amongst fans and academics, that putting music in advertising contexts necessarily ruins it seems irrelevant to "Make a Wish" since *Madonna's song actually ruined Pepsi's commercial* and subsequent plans for its first-ever global campaign. Besides the usual grumbling and derogatory remarks Madonna had become accustomed to weathering, her losses were minimal. Pepsi still had to pay her \$5 million, the album generated five hit singles, her tour was immensely successful, and

⁴³¹ Joanna Demers discusses the how lawsuits in the 1970s halted corporations' uses of pre-existing popular music, musicians, and/or their likeness in advertising. See *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Effects Musical Creativity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 21-30, 59-70. Refer also to chapter one of this dissertation.

“Like a Prayer” even won the Viewer’s Choice Award that year at the MTV Video Music Awards.”⁴³²

As McGill notes, the commercial also revealed marketers’ naiveté about the inner-workings of the music industry and the practices of globalization. It’s obvious that Pepsi and BBD&O had no idea what they were getting into by hiring Madonna, attempting to control her PR, and allowing her to have the final say on all aspects of the deal. In a remark that reveals Pepsi’s complete obliviousness about the consequences of signing a controversial pop artist, Alan Pottasch, Pepsi’s senior vice president for advertising stated:

Music marketing is especially crucial to increase international sales...Internationalism is a major part of the soft-drink business and music is one of the three things that transcend cultural barriers—music, sports and sex. *We’re not about to use sex*, and we think sports has been somewhat overdone. *Music is 100 percent universal.*⁴³³

The belief that one could have Madonna associated with a campaign and somehow avoid selling “sex” was naive. Furthermore, Pottasch’s grasping at the “music is universal” bromide betrays the shallow assumption that musical meanings could easily be controlled not only to appeal to widely diverse U.S. audiences, but those around the world.

More generally, McGill’s article brings to light the quick moving and vast effects of the newly minted 1980s neoliberal capitalist society. Approximately ten years old, shifts in technology and aims at globalization were rapidly pushing the music industry towards a technologically saturated new millennium. The next chapter will demonstrate how Pepsi marketers re-focused their practices

⁴³² MTV Networks, “Music Video Awards, 1989,” accessed December 1, 2011, <http://www.mtv.com/ontv/vma/1989/>. Of all the possible categories the video could have taken, winning this particular one confirmed: 1.) Her message hit home with the right crowd—i.e. forward thinking youth who wanted a say in the culture industry and had the financial means to do it (those who could afford cable television and the phone call required to vote); and 2.) There’s no such thing as bad publicity for celebrities. During her acceptance speech she thanked her family, her manager, her label, and the video’s director. She concluded with a big smile saying, “And I’d like to thank Pepsi, for causing *so* much controversy.” The video of her acceptance speech can be found on: YouTube, “Madonna-1989 Video Music Awards,” accessed November 6, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djDSEMoU9zg>. Compounding the irony of the situation, Neil Young’s “This Note’s For You”—a song about the absurdity and shamefulness of “selling out” to Pepsi and Coke (companies he explicitly named in the song)—won video of the year.

⁴³³ McGill, “The Media Business,” *New York Times*, 1989. Emphasis mine.

but continued to tap popular musicians and their music to obtain an edge on the kinds of markets that Taylor has recently termed as “trendy.”⁴³⁴ A little over a decade into the twenty-first century, Pepsi has attempted to regain its status as a purveyor of popular music by teaming up with the vocal reality talent show, *X Factor*, to stake a claim in the selection, production, and promotion of new acts.

⁴³⁴ The term “trendy” is an updated version of Frank’s “hip” and “cool.” See Taylor’s “Advertising and the Conquest of Culture,” *Social Semiotics* 4, (2009): 405-425.

Chapter 5:

Implications of a Material World: The Reign of Multi-branding and the Reformation of Pop in the New Millennium

Back in the proverbial day—say, the Woodstock era, punk rock’s ’70s heyday, the slacker-era ’90s—a song was a song and a jingle was a jingle and rarely the twain did meet. But now, with CD sales in free fall and opportunities for radio or television airplay increasingly rare, the rules governing the interplay between pop music and advertising are being rewritten.⁴³⁵

In a 2007 *Los Angeles Times* article, journalist Chris Lee discussed the imperative for twenty-first century popular musicians (from all genres) to seek out corporate sponsorship. He noted that the convergence between the music and advertising industries in the new millennium had arguably surpassed what anyone in the final decades of the twentieth-century could have imagined. Over the past twenty-seven years, major shifts in technology, the music business, and advertising industries have facilitated opportunities for popular musicians to seek sponsorship from corporate brands and these collaborations radically changed the dissemination of new music.⁴³⁶ Today’s musicians make little money from album sales and have fewer opportunities to get their music on the radio, forcing them to turn to advertising and other media outlets, such as films, television shows, and the Internet for profit and exposure. The music industry’s failure to keep up with the times, the flood of technological innovation, and the race towards globalized consumerism have all facilitated this shift of musical “stock” to markets that previously had nothing to do with popular music.⁴³⁷ Despite the fact that advances such as the MP3 and Internet created opportunities for a novel kind of music consumption towards the end of the 1990s, many record labels attempted to conduct “business as

⁴³⁵ Chris Lee, “This music is sponsored by...,” *Los Angeles Times*, accessed March 7, 2010, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/.news/la-ca-commercials7-2010mar07,0,2074340.story>.

⁴³⁶ The main purpose of Bethany Klein’s book is to investigate this phenomenon. *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009).

⁴³⁷ As I’ve noted in previous chapters, the push for technological growth and globalization was initiated by neoliberal policies that pervaded the final decades of the twentieth-century. See David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

usual” by focusing on hard-copy album sales and tightening their grip on top-40 lists played by terrestrial radio stations.⁴³⁸ The music industry took another major blow when the Telecommunications Act of 1996 made it possible for a few national corporations to each take control of hundreds of radio stations across the country, relegating former concerns about offering creative and varied programming choices to take a back seat to the financial benefits of streamlining playlists.⁴³⁹ This meant that less airtime was available for fewer and fewer songs. And while music executives and radio programmers shrank the opportunities they provided for new talent in both regional and national markets, affordable technological innovations like Garage Band and ProTools have allowed “amateurs” to record, edit, and market their own tracks, thus enabling average citizens to take more control of their own careers. Technological advances have also allowed opportunities for alternative avenues of dissemination, including satellite radio, Internet streaming radio (Pandora and Spotify), and social networking sites (MySpace Music, Facebook, and YouTube).⁴⁴⁰ The once mighty and dominating record industry has thus lost its grip on the music market following what may have been its final sales surge in the early 2000s from the boy-band and Britney Spears gold mines.⁴⁴¹ As a result, other non-traditional distribution channels have stepped in to reap the

⁴³⁸ See Steve Knopper’s account of the music industry’s missteps in the later decades of the twentieth-century and the beginning of the twenty-first. *Appetite For Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Clash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

⁴³⁹ Timothy D. Taylor notes the consequences of the deregulation of radio stations in “The Changing Shape of the Culture Industry; or, How Did Electronica Music Get into Television Commercials?” *Television & New Media* (2007), 237.

⁴⁴⁰ Satellite radio was popular for a few years in the early 2000s and now Internet radio stations like Pandora and Spotify allow consumers to pay extra fees for the opportunity to create their own streaming playlists. As Taylor notes in his recent project on neoliberalism and the music industry, young consumers aren’t willing to spend much money on purchasing records. “Music and Neoliberal Capitalism: Culture, Power, and Social Change” (lecture, University of California Los Angeles, CA, February 2, 2012).

⁴⁴¹ The *Business Insider* published a series of record sales charts that demonstrate the years the music industry made the most money from album sales. The final peak was just before 2003. This is when boy-bands like *NSync and the Backstreet Boys, as well as former Mickey Mouse Club stars, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, were popular. This surge also happened just before iTunes made MP3s easily downloadable in 2004. See Michael DeGusta, “The REAL Death of the Music Industry,” *Business Insider*, accessed February, 18 2011, http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-02-18/tech/30052663_1_riaa-music-industry-cd-era. See also Knopper’s *Appetite For Self-Destruction*, 80-112.

remaining profits from music sales, including high technology (Apple Inc.) and beverage retailing (Starbucks Co.) among others.

In particular, broadcast advertising has continued to collect the lion's share of the revenue and corporate sponsors now have the privilege of not only breaking new singles, but introducing new acts into consumer consciousness. Sales figures confirm that for at least two decades, co-branding arrangements have provided an especially high pay-off potential for new and under-represented genres and acts.⁴⁴² Klein notes that advertising's recent role in popular culture has been re-imagined as "heroic" for struggling musicians.⁴⁴³ In 2000, Moby (Richard Melville Hall), a producer and DJ in the underground "house" scene, re-defined the potential for co-branding deals when he licensed almost all tracks from his relatively unknown album, *Play*, in more than a half-dozen television spots. Following the appearance of 18 songs in commercials, films, and television shows, the top-40 radio stations that once deemed Moby's music inappropriate for their audiences, caved-in to pressure from listeners who demanded to hear his music.⁴⁴⁴ As a result, *Play* received a substantial amount of airtime it could never have achieved otherwise, making it impossible for artists, corporations, and audiences to continue to ignore the benefits of aligning popular music with brand name products.

Countless brands have followed suit, and by now, the second decade of the new millennium, it's as common (if not *more*) to see and hear hit artists and their newest songs between breaks in primetime television shows as it is to be exposed to new music on the radio. Some corporations like Target and the Gap continue their quest to emulate Pepsi's 1984 success with Michael Jackson by

⁴⁴² As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, Taylor talks about the increased popularity of electronica in the U.S. following its placement in Volkswagen and Mitsubishi car commercials. See his "The Changing Shape of the Culture Industry," 235-258.

⁴⁴³ Klein, "As Heard on TV," 60.

⁴⁴⁴ For more on Moby's various corporate deals refer to pages 59-78 in *As Heard on TV*.

using the “softer-sell” approach of placing the music and artist at the forefront of their promos.⁴⁴⁵

Others, such as Apple Inc. and various car companies experiment with balancing less frenetic, “hard-sell,” and product-focused images with new musical tracks, allowing the music to play up the mystique of the branded product.⁴⁴⁶

Recent interviews I conducted with a cross-section of 18-24 year old college students confirm that commercials have indeed become a major avenue for disseminating new popular music to young audiences.⁴⁴⁷ The degree to which commercials continue to be influential in (what remains of) music sales was made equally apparent during my study. When I asked informants if they had ever purchased a song after hearing it in a commercial, they all answered, “yes.”⁴⁴⁸ Additionally, it took little prompting for each of them to rattle off musicians, bands, and pre-existing songs they had remembered hearing in recent commercials. Those they named fell within multiple genre categories, including alternative rock (Phoenix, Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros, the Pixies, U2), retro-rock (Eddie and the Flatheads, Jet, The Fray), pop (Jonas Brothers, Justin Timberlake, Beyoncé), and rap (Eminem).⁴⁴⁹ Their answers also revealed the extent to which American music, corporations, and advertising have become entangled globalized forces since they listed musicians, brands, and

⁴⁴⁵ Examples of this include Gap’s 2004 “How do you wear it?” commercial, featuring Lenny Kravitz singing a hybrid of “Are You Gonna Go My Way” and “Lady” to Sarah Jessica Parker, and Target’s 2009 commercial, which advertised the “Deluxe Version” of the Black Eyed Peas’ album *The End* and featured the band singing a their hit “I Gotta Feelin’.”

⁴⁴⁶ Apple’s various campaigns for their newest products have featured new artists since the launch of the iTunes MP3 service in 2004. Car companies have certainly embraced this practice as well. One such example is Edward Sharpe and Magnetic Zero’s song, “Janglin,” that appeared in 2011 Ford Fiesta commercial.

⁴⁴⁷ 18-24 is the target age range for most new popular music and many of the goods advertised in television commercials. In person interviews by author, November 2010-October 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ I found it interesting that they didn’t name country and western music in their responses. This doesn’t mean that this particular genre doesn’t show up in commercials, but is indicative of the fact that students’ exposure to commercials is affected by the region in which they live as well as their demographics. Accordingly, fewer “country” commercials are shown in Los Angeles, many of the students interviewed were international and/or raised in urban areas. Furthermore, it’s generally not “cool” to like country music right now (at least in LA). This hypothesis is supported by the fact that when I asked them what kind of music they listened to, none of them admitted to country and western.

commercials from countries around the world. Some examples include French-Israeli singer, Yael Naim's song, "New Soul," in a U.S. Apple Inc. MacBook Air commercial; Beyoncé's appearance in a commercial for a Japanese brand of bottled water; and the Japanese singer Namie Amuro's appearance in a Japanese commercial for Coca-Cola.

My informants were also quick to name not only the musicians featured in recent commercials, but also the brands and products endorsed in them. They listed beverage retailers (Vitamin Water, Pepsi, Coke, and Dr. Pepper), Apple products (iPods and iTunes), retail outlets (Target), and even make-up (L'Oreal). Additionally, almost everyone included car commercials in their lists, identifying Chrysler, Ford, Nissan, Kia and Toyota (specifically the Prius). When I asked one student why she thought car commercials had such memorable music. She responded: "I think the thing is with car commercials, it's a lot about seeing the car moving versus in advertisements speaking about it. So, the music plays a more prominent role..." She added: "I think they're selling, well the car, but how you'll *feel* when you're driving the car...music helps create the *mood*...and the *feeling*."⁴⁵⁰

Thinking back on her comments, two things stand out. The first is her opinion that the often clichéd footage of cars speeding along windy roads doesn't overpower the music, but instead compliments it by synchronizing car's action onscreen, its "movements," to the teleological motion produced by the music's structures. In this way, these commercials have "appellated" (invited) her with the symmetrical pacing of the music and images—what Carol Vernallis would call "flow."⁴⁵¹ The synchronization of the car's actions to the music's therefore allowed her to notice the *sonic signifiers* as much as the product itself. The second interesting part of her description stemmed from

⁴⁵⁰ In person interview by author, November 8, 2010, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁴⁵¹ Goldman and Papson use the term "appellate" to discuss how ads hail or invite audiences in to a commercial. See their *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 35. Vernallis posits that audiences deduce "meaning" from relationships between the music and images, which she terms as "flow." *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 223.

the language she used, particularly the words “feeling” and “mood.” These words came up a lot during my interviews. Another informant noted:

It’s been going on for a while (licensing popular music to commercials). And it works, because people look at commercials and they recognize the song and it makes them *feel* a certain way... So you’re trying to create a *feeling* with certain music, and then when you see the product you’ll think that *feeling* will come back with the song, and sort of work together and make you want to buy the product.⁴⁵²

These descriptions would surely make anyone in the advertising industry beam with pride.

Throughout this dissertation I’ve cited marketers’ and directors’ comments about their conceptualizations of commercials based on the “moods” or “feelings” the music had the potential to evoke—concepts I would argue are facets of meaning making.⁴⁵³ The fact that this and most other informants I interviewed used similar words to describe how commercials made an impression on them reflects the degree to which these young consumers have been trained in the “language” of advertising. Further, their ability to remember the specific songs, products, and brands in certain commercials demonstrates the effectiveness of popular music marketing on today’s youth.

But even as music marketing has expanded, it has also become more competitive. Simply licensing a song for a commercial doesn’t guarantee success. The onslaught of information available in the new millennium makes it not only difficult for commercials to stand out, but has allowed consumers to raise their expectations and become more selective in what they purchase. Brands with older and “classic” products like Pepsi’s have therefore branched out in increasingly innovative ways to surround themselves in what Douglas Kellner has dubbed the “media spectacle,” using various

⁴⁵² In person interview with author, University of California, Los Angeles, September 21, 2011.

⁴⁵³ The “feelings” or “moods” people detect from advertising are a result of the meanings they have gleaned from a commercial’s images and music. For instance, the 1984 Michael Jackson commercials created the feeling of “excitement” for audiences due to the energetic and positive signifiers onscreen that promised viewers they could be equally as “hip” and “cool” in witnessing Jackson’s iconic performances through the consumption of Pepsi products and Jackson’s album, videos, and concerts.

facets of the technology and entertainment industries to boost their exposure and keep their images from going stale.⁴⁵⁴

Pepsi in the New Millennium

In the years between its 1989 fiasco with Madonna and the 2011 “Music Icons” commercial, Pepsi’s strategies had become noticeably less provocative. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the soda giant largely abandoned the soft-sell approach they favored in the decade prior, choosing instead to display their product in a way that re-assured audiences that selling *soda* was the primary agenda for its commercials.⁴⁵⁵ The company thus reverted to older advertising styles to replace the one-time revolutionary visual and musical aesthetics that followed Michael Jackson’s challenge to make their spots more creative. Accordingly, most (if not all) post-Madonna musical endorsers have been shown explicitly drinking the product, their faces and bodies have occupied the center of the camera’s gaze, and the fictional and spectacular nature of the spots have become so exaggerated that their positioning as Hollywood aggrandizements of commercials for soda is made unmistakable.⁴⁵⁶

Pepsi’s commercials have also *sounded* different post-“Make a Wish.” Star endorsers of the 1990s and early 2000s have generally been restricted to performing or acting over *small* snippets of their songs (like Kanye West’s 2009 spot featuring “Heard ‘Em Say,” which is also shown in “Music Icons”), or re-contextualizing *older* pre-existing songs (such as a 2003 spot featuring Britney Spears, Pink, and Beyoncé performing a version of Queen’s “We Will Rock You” in a re-imagined Roman

⁴⁵⁴ Kellner defines “media spectacle” as “those phenomena of media culture which embody contemporary society’s basic values, serve to enculturate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of conflict resolution.” *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

⁴⁵⁵ This became the central complaint made by critics of Pepsi and Coke’s late-’80s ads featuring popular musicians. See Douglas C. McGill’s article, “The Media Business; Star Wars in Cola Advertising,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1989, 1. I discuss this article towards the end of chapter four.

⁴⁵⁶ The spots selected for Pepsi’s “Music Icons” commercial described in chapter one are perfect examples of this practice.

coliseum), or singing the latest *jingle* (like Ray Charles's 1990 Diet Pepsi "Uh-Huh" campaign and Britney Spears's "Joy of Pepsi" commercials, both of which were depicted in "Music Icons"). The "less-pre-existing-music-is-more" approach has enabled Pepsi's marketing teams to have better control over manipulating musical signifiers while still allowing the brand to align with cutting-edge musical acts. So as the era of the music video had passed, so too had Pepsi deserted the music video format for their campaigns.⁴⁵⁷

The soda giant has embraced the "digital age" by aligning itself with new technologies with the potential to allow for the consumption of both its products and the music of celebrity endorsers in sophisticated ways. Kellner notes that in today's American culture, the "synthesis of capital and technology and the information and entertainment industries...is producing an 'infotainment society' and spectacle culture."⁴⁵⁸ Pepsi therefore provides a compelling example of the new look (and sound) of corporate capitalism (or "technocapitalism") that fuels the modern-day "infotainment society" by positioning itself at the high-stakes crossroads of music and technology.⁴⁵⁹ Like many globalized corporations in the new millennium, Pepsi has worked to increase the visibility of its ventures by teaming up with other leading industries to sponsor new music. For example, in 2004 the soda giant paired with iTunes to hype the unveiling of the new online MP3 service by giving out 100 million bottle caps with promotional codes for consumers to redeem.⁴⁶⁰ The

⁴⁵⁷ MTV began farming out videos to sister channels like MTV2 in favor of reality programming in the 1990s.

⁴⁵⁸ Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 11.

⁴⁵⁹ "Technocapitalism" is a result of the move away from industrial models of production and towards the commodification of ideas, such as technology, culture, and even pharmaceutical research. Kellner says that "the emerging postindustrial form of technocapitalism is characterized by a decline of the state and enlarged power for the market, accompanied by the growing strength of transnational corporations and governmental bodies and the decreased strength of the nation-state and its institutions." *Ibid*, 13.

⁴⁶⁰ Despite the enormous potential for this deal, it was largely a bust. Pepsi consumers redeemed only 5 million of the projected 100 million codes. The loss was thought to be impacted by the fact that bottles with coded caps weren't distributed to enough markets before the promotion ended. Ina Fried, "Pepsi's iTunes Promotion Goes Flat," CNET News, http://news.cnet.com/2100-1025_3-5201676.html.

following year it teamed up with Mariah Carey and Motorola as part of a campaign that offered customers twenty free ringtones composed, sung, and produced by the pop star.

But by 2010, Pepsi's technological ventures still hadn't paid off and it took a major blow when Diet Coke pushed the signature product lower than its perennial number-two spot.⁴⁶¹ In what the media has called a re-instigating of the "Cola Wars," Pepsi executives decided to follow Coke in hitching itself to the reality talent show bandwagon and became the sole sponsor of the inaugural season of the *X Factor* on the Fox network in 2011.⁴⁶² Pepsi had obviously realized that a "multi-branded" effort such as this would give it the advantage of sharing not only the potential profits and exposure, but also dividing the costs and responsibilities of the venture. A financial report on the deal confirms, "the two brands [Pepsi and X Factor] will support each other on the Web and in stores."⁴⁶³ As a three-way split of the talent show and its publicity between the media mogul, soda giant, and international music franchise, this deal exemplifies the (often staggering) potential of multi-branding in the "infotainment society."

Yet even in its multi-branding efforts, Pepsi has maintained that it is the *music* that remains their focus. An article in *USA Today* chronicled Pepsi's self-heralding return to placing itself at the forefront of new popular music acts:

⁴⁶¹ Associated Press, "Back to the Future: Michael Jackson Featured in New Pepsi Promotion," *News One: For Black America*, May 3, 2012, accessed May 3, 2012, <http://newsone.com/2005818/back-to-the-future-michael-jackson-featured-in-new-pepsi-promotion/>.

⁴⁶² "A Not-So-Secret Recipe for Pepsi to Regain Its Footing," *Advertising Age*, March 28, 2011, 12. Due to the multiple corporate entities involved in modern-day endorsements like this, co-branding has become too narrow of a term. Reality talent shows like *X Factor* and their predecessors—*American Idol*, *Sing-Off*, and *The Voice* (which have become brands in and of themselves)—are prevalent examples of a growing trend: they have accrued so much corporate sponsorship that the term "multi-branding" is more accurate for these endeavors. In the case of *American Idol*, not only do corporate giants like Coke, Ford, and McDonalds show commercials during the program, but they also integrate their products into the talent show itself and even get the contestants to make mini-commercials for high-stakes results episodes.

⁴⁶³ Brian Stelter, "Deal with Pepsi Lets Fox Have It Both Ways; Agreement on 'X Factor' Adds the 2nd Cola Giant to Network's Sponsor List," *International Herald Tribune*, January 5, 2011, 15. The article also quotes a Fox executive saying: "Because of the way we want to co-promote this—being able to leverage some of *Pepsi's assets* to get the promotion out there to launch the show—we felt we needed to get out early on this." Emphasis added. Thus, Fox and *X Factor* intended to rely on Pepsi's marketing expertise and consumer base as much as the soda giant intended to use their programming know-how to attract new audiences to its cola.

So, it's back to the future for Pepsi. "We've made a conscious decision to go aggressively back into music," says Frank Cooper, chief global consumer engagement officer at PepsiCo Beverages. "*We have a rightful place in music.*"

Indeed, Pepsi's Jackson and Madonna ads from the 1980s and 1990s were each major events. But several years ago, Pepsi turned more socially conscious and went heavily digital with its Pepsi Refresh campaign.

Now, Pepsi's back re-embracing music. The cola brand makes that abundantly clear at the end of the ad with this new slogan: "Where there's Pepsi, there's music."⁴⁶⁴

Accordingly, Pepsi's CGCEO makes it known that the company intends to *take back* popular music, something it sees as *rightfully* belonging to the brand. In this way, Pepsi brazenly asserts itself as an *authority* figure over the production and creation of new popular music.

This chapter brings this dissertation full circle by considering Pepsi's recent claims of "conquest" over popular music first alluded to in the "Music Icons" *X Factor* commercial and depicted literally in its "King's Court" follow-up spot. I will investigate how "King's Court" promises a new and better future for popular music (specifically commercialized and televised "pop") and situate it within a larger nexus of twenty-first century corporate practices and consumer ideologies. I integrate an analysis of the spot with recent media reports, audience reviews, ethnography and theories of consumption, including the "obligation to decide" posited by Grant McCracken and "pseudo-activity" argued by Theodor Adorno, to demonstrate the falsehood in Pepsi's claim to artistic innovation and democracy.⁴⁶⁵ Despite being a model for multi-branded corporate agendas and neoliberal-turned-"technocapitalist" mythologies of "freedom," the pages below demonstrate how Pepsi actually relapses to the well-worn capitalist realist tricks it perfected in

⁴⁶⁴ Bruce Horowitz, "'X Factor' Brings Back the Pepsi vs. Coke Cola Wars," *USA Today*, accessed March 1, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/factor-brings-back-pepsi-coke-cola-wars/story?id=14568153#.T3iZA478kfs>. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶⁵ See McCracken's *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 112 and Adorno's "On the Fetish Character of Music and Regression of Listening" in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1982), 288-317.

the 1980s, and once again attempts to co-opt and reform pre-existing pop signifiers by “simplifying” and “typifying” them to inscribe its soda and the reality show it sponsors into music history.⁴⁶⁶ But this time marketers don’t borrow *new* cultural signifiers to re-map onto their product, they actually try to attach densely coded signifiers from *past* music icons to the newly created star, Melanie Amaro, who ironically is the very person the soda giant claims to be “revolutionary” in and of herself. So even though the commercial suggests a new prospect for popular music—a “conquest of culture”—Pepsi undermines its own assertion of musical authority and promise for revolution in its clumsy attempt to reform a confusing array of un-reconcilable signifiers. Accordingly, this final chapter demonstrates that despite the fact that the commercial might read as worrisome in its suggestion of a bleak (and bland) future for popular musicians under the thumb of a soda manufacturer and reality show competition, modern-day audiences remain savvy in their musical choices and many still refuse to be duped into buying recycled cultural signifiers at an inflated price.

“King’s Court”

On February 6, 2012 the soda giant finally aired its much-hyped commercial during Super Bowl XLVI. As an example of capitalist realism gone amok, “King’s Court” musically and visually attempts to illuminate a shift in power from the old regime of slowly cultivated, A&R (artists and repertoire) discovered talent to the new reign of (virtually) overnight, publically voted upon, corporate-sponsored, “reality” stars. As the soda giant had done so many times before, Pepsi attempted to make its commercial into an “event within an event,” airing its multimillion-dollar spot during the most watched sporting event on American television.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ More specifically, this chapter demonstrates how advertising in the new millennium continues to “simplify” and “typify” people, places, and ideas. Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 214.

⁴⁶⁷ Recall that BBD&O creative director Phil Dusenberry and Pepsi’s former CEO Roger Enrico called the premiere of its ’84 Michael Jackson spots an “event.” See chapter two of this dissertation; Dusenberry, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire:*

The commercial begins with a shot of Sir Elton John dressed as a gaudy Medieval King. John sits on a throne made of giant piano keys and ruthlessly presides over his audience while he searches for a court entertainer. In the staging of this fictional event, the court itself represents the campy mini-equivalent of the *X Factor* show (Figure 5.1). Experienced audiences might also recognize that John stands in as a parallel for Simon Cowell—the show’s executive producer and a member of the judging panel who’s notorious for his swift and harsh criticism.

The first “contestant,” to appear before King John is a ginger-haired twenty-something dressed like a jester. This jester also happens to be a recognizable supporting character on the hit Fox television show, *Glee*. The camera pans in to his awkward rendition of the hook to rapper Nelly’s 2002 hit, “Hot in Herre,” accompanied by period-esque recorders (Fig. 5.1).⁴⁶⁸ King John abruptly cuts off the garishly “white” performance of this African American song and dance club staple, declaring: “No Pepsi for *you*.” The defeated performer is then expelled through the floor by a trap door triggered by John. The jester’s expulsion causes the court to erupt in laughter at his fate.

X Factor winner, Melanie Amaro, then approaches the King. When asked, “And what do *you* do?,” she responds with a visibly and vocally inflected attitude saying, “I sing.” Through the sounds of John’s laughter at her confidence, the track to her newly recorded dance remix of Otis Redding’s “Respect” (made well-known by Aretha Franklin’s 1967 cover) emerges in the background.⁴⁶⁹ The track quickly crescendos into the foreground and Amaro begins her audition. The *X Factor* winner looks and sounds like a dead ringer for young Franklin as she belts: “All I’m asking for is a little

Insights and Accidents for a Hall of Fame Career in Advertising (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 232. See also Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked: How Pepsi Won the Cola Wars* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 135.

⁴⁶⁸ The lead-in material to Nelly’s hook (in the original song) is sampled from the 1979 funk and R&B song Bustin’ Loose by Chuck Brown & the Soul Searchers.

⁴⁶⁹ Amaro, “Respect,” Simco. Ltd./Epic, 2012, MP3 file, downloaded May 2, 2012, *iTunes*.

respect/R-E-S-P-E-C-T/find out what it means to me.”⁴⁷⁰ (Fig. 5.1) The whole court, including King John, bobs their heads to the music. The song is abruptly cut off and transitions to Amaro’s melismatic pyrotechnics on “Yeah!” (Fig. 5.1). The sheer force of her voice shatters an elaborate stain-glass window above the throne and silences the court.



Figure 5.1: Commercial stills—King John presides over his two “contestants”⁴⁷¹

King John then stands up and approaches the performer in his oversized electric blue-rim glasses and 1970s-inspired gold-disco platform shoes (Fig. 5.2). He begrudgingly says, “Alright, Pepsi for you,” and offers her a can. Unimpressed, Amaro refuses his offer. She instead grabs the goblet out of his other hand and declares: “Pepsi for all.” Acting as the “savior” to free her musically and cola-oppressed peoples, she then tosses the goblet at the trap door lever, sending John plummeting into the dungeon below.⁴⁷² The court rejoices at the dethroning of the unjust king and runs toward a large bucket of Pepsi. In an ancient looking, font the commercial’s slogan—“Where there’s Pepsi, there’s music”—is superimposed over the scene (Fig. 5.2).

⁴⁷⁰ A longer version of the spot aired during the Grammy Awards the week after the Super Bowl. In that version Amaro also sings the song’s opening lines: “What you want?/Baby, I got it. /What you need?/Do you know I’ve got it?”

⁴⁷¹ PepsiCo. Inc., “King’s Court,” 2012.

⁴⁷² A report in *Time* magazine’s online source, *Time News Feed*, sums up the moment: “But, naturally, this wouldn’t be a Hollywood production without a *savior*—enter *The X Factor* winner Melanie Amaro, not an inconvenient choice given the show’s oft publicized award of a role in a Pepsi Super Bowl commercial, alongside the \$5 million recording contract, of course.” Nick Carbone, “Super Bowl Spoiler: Elton John Rules the Middle Ages with Pepsi,” *Time News Feed*, accessed February 7, 2012, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/02/04/super-bowl-spoiler-elton-john-rules-the-middle-ages-with-pepsi/>. Emphasis added.



**Figure 5.2: Commercial stills—King John offers Amaro a Pepsi;
The court converges on the King’s Pepsi stash; The tag line**

At this resolution of the plot’s central conflict and the unveiling of the campaign’s tag line, the commercial could have easily ended here. Instead it continues, adding another twist to the plotline.

The camera cuts to John in the dungeon as he falls on a pile of broken classical instruments, including parts of an upright bass, cello, trombone, and bass drum (Fig. 5.3). In addition to the recently the ousted jester, Rapper Flava Flav is waiting below. He’s dressed in a Viking hat and sports his signature-oversized clock (Fig. 5.3).⁴⁷³ While John rolls around in pain among the instrument scraps, the former member of Public Enemy closes out the commercial by hailing the once-king with his famous late-’80s catchphrase: “Yeah, boy! Ha, ha, ha!” His Viking costume makes it unclear how long Flav had been down there (at least since his VH-1 reality shows flopped?) or if it was John who ousted him. What is clear is that the rapper revels in the irony that the King had finally met the same fate as himself, the jester, and the classical instruments that line the dungeon floors.



**Figure 5.3: Commercial stills—John meets a pile of broken instruments,
the expelled jester, and Flava Flav in the dungeon**

⁴⁷³ Flava Flav’s clock is a emblem of hip-hop irony that magnifies the “white” world’s tensions between work, leisure, and time. See Trisha Rose’s “A Style Nobody Can Deal With: Politics, Style and the Postindustrial City in Hip Hop,” in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 2004), 351.

Fighting the Power?: Realities of Multi-branding the Faux-Democratization of Pop

Despite its much publicized debut of Amaro and array of celebrity cameos, “King’s Court” fared poorly in the media. Most reviews of the Super Bowl XLVI commercials barely mentioned the Pepsi spot, and when they did, they glossed over or dismissed it. A review from inside the advertising industry itself offers one of the few noteworthy opinions of the spot:

Pepsi, the choice of a new generation, may look like it’s going old-school in its return to the Super Bowl, what with the castle and court and all. But there’s a certain “Hunger Games” vibe to the spot, which may resonate with the kids these days. Then again, Elton John and “X Factor” winner Melanie Amaro *aren’t exactly the cutting edge of pop culture*. And wouldn’t a *real* revolutionary have used *social media* to depose the king, rather than a *cheesy* version of “Respect”? The cameo by Flava Flav was worth a laugh.⁴⁷⁴

The un-“hip” and non-“revolutionary” nature of the commercial, was further criticized in a *New York Times* article that lumped Elton John and Flava Flav in a group of “overexposed celebrit[ies] whose sell-by date has surely passed.”⁴⁷⁵ The same article went on to condemn Pepsi for this and another one of its Super Bowl spots saying, “When the stars were not recycled, concepts were.”⁴⁷⁶ These reviews picked up on the lack of originality Pepsi demonstrated as it obviously hoped to garner credibility by clinging onto past celebrities and old ideas in commercials that promised innovation.

When Schudson theorized capitalist realism in the mid-1980s he might not have imagined advertisers would (or could) go as far as Pepsi did with “King’s Court” in claiming and appropriating so many cultural texts, stripping out their nuances and meanings, re-packaging them, and re-selling them to audiences. Despite the fact that there’s little music actually played in this commercial, layers of musical signifiers abound. As an obvious commentary on the state of music industry from the

⁴⁷⁴ Ken Wheaton, “Forget Ferris: Kia and Chevy Race to the Top; Few Surprises, but Budweiser, Chrysler, and GE Promise Us Things Will Get Better,” *Advertising Age*, February, 6, 2012, 1.

⁴⁷⁵ Stuart Elliot, “Judging Super Bowl Commercials, From Charming to Smarmy,” *New York Times*, February 6, 2012, 2.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.* The article notes that the other commercial Pepsi aired during the Super Bowl was for Pepsi Max.

perspective of a brand that had been involved in music promotion for almost three decades, this spot attempts to position Pepsi as a key force within the technocapitalist economy driven by brand recognition and active consumer involvement (i.e. voting) through multiple media sources (television, phones, computers, and MP3 players) that now “reigns” over musical production. Portrayed as the representative of the “new guard,” Amaro is bestowed with the powerful musical signifiers in “Respect” and those attached to the legendary performers who sang it, to offer an illusion of the “democratization” of musical taste that shows like the *X Factor* and their sponsors claim to offer viewers—a “freedom” that’s also equated in the spot to consuming Pepsi. However, as critics pointed out, the soda giant misses the mark due to its blurring of too many genres, celebrities, and tropes from popular music’s past.

Take, for example, the commercial’s co-optation of Aretha Franklin and her song. Franklin has historically been regarded as soul music royalty and many during the 1960s civil rights movement understood her version of “Respect” as a call for African American women (and feminists in general) to fight for equal and fair treatment.⁴⁷⁷ Interpretations of the song have extended beyond the bedroom (and the song’s specific demand for sexual satisfaction) and into the world at large. Accordingly, the sheer power behind Franklin’s vocal track combined with the added stop-time coda in which she belts out the letters that spell “Respect,” gave the song a sense of sincerity and made it an anthem for self-empowerment.⁴⁷⁸ Coupled with the earnest message in Otis Redding’s lyrics, these qualities propelled Franklin’s version to the top of the pop and R&B charts and have kept it alive in pop culture references for 45 years.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ Rob Bowman, “Aretha Franklin,” *Oxford Music Online*, accessed February 12, 2012. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁴⁷⁸ See the lyrics to Aretha Franklin’s version of “Respect” in Appendix A.

⁴⁷⁹ John Covach charts out the song’s form and lyrics in *What’s That Sound?: An Introduction to Rock and Its History*, 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 251. It’s relevant to note here too that in 1985 Burger King

Pepsi's commercial thus "fetishizes" the most iconic parts of Franklin's track and even her body.⁴⁸⁰ Amaro's vocal performance as well as her similar "ethnic" features and curvy physique thus emulate the soul singer in an uncanny way. Pepsi's marketers (and likely both Cowell and Sony who produced Amaro's single) intended to paint the up-and-coming starlet as a "re-presentation" (perhaps even a reincarnation) of Franklin. Pepsi's marketers likely hoped that the signifiers of her physical and vocal power would echo the call for "change" portrayed onscreen. She therefore sings forcefully enough to shatter the stained glass in the palace's façade—a likely metaphor for the music industry. Further, by impressing the king she weakens his power, prompting him to come to her. Once lured in, she rejects his offer for only a portion of the prize. While this is likely a commentary on crooked labels that dupe musicians out of pay and royalties, it can also be understood as a metaphor for the relationship that the advertising industry has had with the music business, as it (as well as the corporations that fund it) obviously want the *all* of the (financial) benefits. As the representative of the new guard, Amaro defeats the old regime (King John) with its own trap. In the confused time and space of the commercial's capitalist realist world (as a scene set in the Medieval past, but about the 21st century), Amaro thus becomes the model and "savoir" for the future of popular music as she defeats a tyrannical and broken system with the aid of Pepsi. Amaro therefore enacts her own "civil rights" movement by using her talent to persuade everyone in the court to dance along with her performance and rejoice in the Pepsi commodity.

As the commercial's scapegoat, Elton John stands in as a multifaceted signifier. He is not only a "re-presentation" of Simon Cowell who is one of the few remaining holdovers from the one-time iron fist of white, male, A&R talent scouts, but a "simulation" of his own celebrity persona

licensed the master of Franklin's *Freeway of Love*, which is believed to be the first licensing of the *master* recording of a hit piece of pre-existing popular music. Mark Lepage, "Who Doesn't Sell Out," *Gazette (Montreal)*, November 24, 2007, E1.

⁴⁸⁰ I extend the term "fetishism" from Adorno's argument about the "fetish character" of musical works when parts are separated from the whole. Pepsi accomplishes this with both the musical and visual signifiers for Franklin and her music. See "On the Fetish Character of Music and Regression of Listening," 288-317.

too—a “reigning” musical legend that has continued to draw audiences since the early 1970s: a singer-songwriter and classically trained pianist whose clichéd experience of putting in years of hard work eventually got him international recognition and acclaim.⁴⁸¹ And just as Cowell’s opinions are eventually usurped by the viewer voting process that determines which singers succeed on the *X Factor* show, so too are King John’s “old guard” values extinguished by a representative from that public force (Amaro) in the commercial. He and his musical aesthetics thus meet the fate of those who had “fallen” out of consumer taste before him—i.e. Western classical music, bad singers who audition for reality shows, and old-school rap. The allegory thus situates Amaro, Pepsi, and the *X Factor* as the champions and liberators of consumer taste.

But the commercial’s elaborate webs of signifiers do not and *cannot* ever reconcile. Unlike Michael Jackson’s spots that only depicted signifiers of *his* iconicity, which made the commercial’s meanings easy to decipher, “King’s Court” throws together a potpourri of signifiers that (somewhat like Madonna’s commercial) force viewers wrestle with them. In addition to the racist nature of this narrative which re-inscribes divisive ideologies between “appropriate” performances of white and black musics (thus living up to capitalist realist traditions of perpetuating social inequalities), the arrangement of hollowed out musical and visual signifiers offer a perplexing juxtaposition of people and texts that were at once vibrant in the music industry’s past.⁴⁸² The haphazard shuffling of signifiers reaches a chaotic climax during the final scenes with the positioning of the gay British ’70s singer-songwriter, Elton John, alongside the late-’80s African American social activist rapper, Flava Flav. The confrontation of these musicians from different eras, backgrounds, lifestyles, aesthetics,

⁴⁸¹ As with the other commercials discussed in this dissertation, the celebrity endorser is depicted as a media created simulation. The version of Elton John shown onscreen is an over-the-top campy simulation of his celebrity self. See Robert Goldman and Steven Papson’s examination of celebrity simulations in *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 31-32.

⁴⁸² Schudson notes that advertisements “reproduce and even sometimes exaggerate long-standing social inequalities.” *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 220. Note especially the opening scene with the white Jester singing an awkward version of Nelly’s “Hot in Herre.”

and political agendas is an attempt a humor, but it (unintentionally) becomes a Brechtian “alienating” moment that, on one hand renders the entire commercial ridiculous, and on the other makes Pepsi claim to usurping the music business more obvious (and perhaps more serious). Accordingly, the soda giant insinuates that it has ultimately *done away with the diverse and unique musical agendas of the past and reformed them to produce a much blander, “brand” of popular music for the future.*⁴⁸³ But replacing the old with the old (John and Flav with Amaro as a replica of Franklin) doesn’t work. As noted by the reviewer above, no one in this commercial actually occupies a place on “the cutting edge of pop culture.”⁴⁸⁴

Furthermore, the commercial’s open-ended conclusion begs the question: Are consumers to believe that Amaro has abolished the authoritarian pop culture royalty and instituted a democracy? Or does she merely become the new figurehead? The answer is actually *neither* because Amaro doesn’t have any cultural status of *her own*. The only cultural text she’s offered outside the confines of the show is the dance remix of Franklin and Redding’s hit. As a relatively unknown reality show winner, Pepsi felt its best option was to situate her among big names that had gone before her. However, throwing pop culture references at and around her reveals her precarious place among them. Consequently, critics picked up on the fact that she doesn’t have the power to push anyone aside or steal the spotlight: she’s merely a product of a staged competition that Pepsi and its fellow sponsors intend to cash in on. What’s more, Amaro isn’t unique and could actually be anyone, as indicated by the faceless figure shown in the “Music Icon’s” promo (discussed in the introduction) and the fact that she’s simply depicted as a newer version of someone else who’s already rich with artistic credibility (Franklin). Accordingly, *Amaro is treated like any other dispensable commodity*. For those

⁴⁸³ I’m using the term “alienation” akin to Berthold Brecht’s notion that audiences should be forced to engage with the action in epic theater (or in this case, a commercial) in which people, places, ideas, and/or things are placed together in a way that’s “peculiar, striking, and unexpected.” I don’t mean to imply that Pepsi *meant* to alienate its audiences, but that this scene is odd and impossible to make sense of. I explain my use of his theories in chapter four. See Brecht, “New Technique of Acting,” in *Brecht on Theater*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 143.

⁴⁸⁴ Elliot, “Judging Super Bowl Commercials,” February 6, 2012.

involved in creating the show—the network, producers, sponsors, etc.—attracting an audience and achieving a hefty bottom line is all they care about. Thus, the commercial’s claim that Amaro has any agency is a thinly-veiled sham. In the end, *she* is the product being sold to the audience and the *audience* is the product being sold to the sponsors and network.⁴⁸⁵

Further, the *music* (the actual product promised to viewers) is merely an added opportunity for revenue that simultaneously acts a smokescreen for the real conditions of labor—the “work” audiences do for the show. Pepsi’s sponsorship of the *X Factor* show exemplifies Kellner’s statement that “[c]ulture and technology are increasingly important constituent parts of global capitalism and everyday life in the contemporary world and permeate major domains of life, such as the economy and polity, as well as constituting their own spheres and subcultures.”⁴⁸⁶ Pepsi and the *X Factor* seek the kind of “subcultural” following that *American Idol* before it had garnered by leveraging devoted followers caught up in the spectacle of the competition and willing to devote their own leisure time to watching, judging, and selecting artists from whom they will purchase music in the future. On their own dimes, viewers put hours into watching and evaluating performances and dip into the minutes and texts on their personal cell phone plans to vote. The “work” required in selecting the winner thus essentially becomes a second job for consumers. This system not only gives sponsors the advantage of eventually selling viewers’ own work back to them for the wages they earn from their “first” jobs (i.e. selling music to them from the artists they chose), but offers the “multi-branded” conglomerates an added bonus of soliciting demographic information and ratings numbers

⁴⁸⁵ Dallas W. Smythe argued (well before viewer voted upon television programs became the norm) that the mass media sells audiences as commodities to advertisers and that the act of watching television makes them “workers” for media outlets. See “On Critical and Administrative Research: A New Critical Analysis,” *Journal of Communication* 33 (1983): 117-127. To clarify my larger point, I’m not implying that selling “the celebrity” to audiences is a new concept for endorsements, but pointing out that Amaro’s position is much more precarious than Jackson’s or Madonna’s since she has little artistic status or output of her own.

⁴⁸⁶ Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, 11.

that they can use to improve revenue. In the end, then, *X Factor*, Pepsi, and Fox network are promised a bigger bottom line from the work *viewers* do for the show.

The vocal talent reality show has therefore become a prevalent model for the selection and production of *musical* commodities, essentially “encompassing and restructuring both labor and leisure” in the way Kellner has posited.⁴⁸⁷ Hence, the “freedom” promised by *X Factor* and Pepsi’s commercial actually mobilizes consumers to perform labor in service of the three corporations, creating what McCracken calls an “*obligation* to decide” and to keep deciding.⁴⁸⁸ Adorno theorized this as “pseudo-activity”: when consumers attempt to take an active role in the culture industry, but end up “entangling” themselves more deeply in the existing system rather than subverting it.⁴⁸⁹ It’s no surprise then that the “freedoms” offered by Pepsi and the *X Factor* aren’t actually liberating as consumers use their own time and money to “choose” from the limited products (in this case, the “musical talents”) they are presented.⁴⁹⁰ It seems then that the new “infotainment” society has impressed upon the production and consumption of popular culture in disturbing ways in the twenty-first century as corporate brands have become increasingly sophisticated in selling consumers back their own work at a higher price. This system is not “democratic.” It’s autocratic.

So even though Pepsi’s commercial may paint Amaro as the symbol of the new guard, in reality it *re-inscribes* her within a patronage system that’s *not* much different and certainly, no better. Amaro’s \$5 million dollar recording contract from Sony Music (which was arranged through

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁸⁸ McCracken argues that this “obligation to decide” is what gets consumers excited about consuming, since many see it as an opportunity to appropriate the goods meanings for the creation of their own identities. *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management*, 112.

⁴⁸⁹ Adorno discusses this in “The Fetish Character of Music and Regression of Listening,” 291-292. He elaborates on it in “Resignation.” See *Adorno: The Culture Industry*, ed. Rolf Tiedman, (London: Routledge, 2001), 193.

⁴⁹⁰ Harvey claims that the concept of “freedom” is a falsehood perpetuated by neoliberal ideology: “The assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking.” *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 7.

Cowell's company, Syco), as well as her role in the commercial, position her in the same place as any other artist signed to a big label over the past 70 years.⁴⁹¹ In fact, her place as a television-made pop star, isn't that dissimilar from those made by the late-1950s and '60s television shows mentioned in this dissertation's opening chapter. What's different, is that she's now a product of multi-branded franchises that are *openly* as interested in pushing soda and cell phone plans as they are in selling music. There may be a new sheriff in town, but this one's not anymore interested in musical "quality" or "freedom," nor any less greedy than the one before. Like all promises made by advertising, Pepsi's pledge to incite revolution is a lie.

Choices of the New Generation: New Views on Corporate Sponsorship and Selling Out

Both Klein and Taylor assert that the current youth generation's views on popular music's role in advertising prove noticeably different from those held in preceding decades.⁴⁹² Recent media chatter and my own ethnography corroborate this claim. When I asked college-aged informants their opinions on popular musicians and new music appearing in commercials, they all said that they believed commercials prove *necessary* to achieve exposure and monetary compensation.⁴⁹³ They also admitted that simply licensing a song to a commercial or endorsing a corporate brand didn't bother them, confirming that the concept of "selling out" proves much different for them than for their parents' or grandparents' generations. Accordingly, most informants said they were aware of older definitions of "selling out," such as underground bands signing to a label and the general concept of

⁴⁹¹ Gerrick D. Kennedy, "Quick Takes; 'X Factor' Champ Signs with Epic," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 2012, 2. To clarify, Syco is a joint venture between Sony and Simon Cowell.

⁴⁹² See Taylor's "Advertising and the Conquest of Culture," *Social Semiotics* 4, (2009): 405-425 and Klein's *As Heard on TV*.

⁴⁹³ In person interviews by author, November 2010-October 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

“going mainstream.” When asked if these notions were still true today, they largely answered: “No.”

One student noted:

I feel that it’s just part of celebrity...

Like I said, that’s just how I was raised. That’s just, that’s all I know. In the past however many years I’ve been exposed to mainstream media, that’s all I’ve been seeing since the beginning. So that’s all I’ve known I guess. I don’t really, don’t feel too offended by it. Taken aback by it.⁴⁹⁴

The lack of concern they expressed towards licensing agreements indicates that for many young audiences, corporate sponsorship of new musical acts has become a fact of life. But I would argue that just because young generations are well-versed in advertising lingo and have accepted that co- and multi-branding is necessary for a musician’s survival, doesn’t mean they are necessarily slaves to advertising practices or undiscerning consumers. The response to Amaro’s remake of “Respect” in fact suggests otherwise.

Amaro’s single was released on iTunes four days prior to “King’s Court’s” airdate so that interested fans and viewers could preview and download it the weekend of the song’s television premiere. It appears that her *X Factor* fan base was eager to check it out, but unfortunately for her, they were equally quick to express their disappointment with it. A large portion of the reviews on iTunes blasted her, Simon Cowell, and *X Factor* for the cover.⁴⁹⁵ While most agreed that she indeed had a powerful voice, many decried the fact that a cover song, especially one as popular as this, was her first single. One reviewer who gave the single a poor rating (one out of five “stars”) commented:

Really...a cover song for her first release? This is where Simon and his artists *fail to connect* with American audiences. We know she can sing, but we have all heard this song a million times by a million different people. Why would we want to hear it

⁴⁹⁴ In person interview by author, December 10, 2010, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁴⁹⁵ Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to gather data on this commercial from personal interviews with informants because “King’s Court” was released after I had finished my ethnography.

again...and better yet...why would anyone *buy* this? I love Melanie...I was hoping for an *original* song.⁴⁹⁶

This fan was obviously annoyed not only with Amaro's musical choices, but with the Cowell and *X Factor* franchises as a whole, accusing them of selling the same old thing over and over again and not "getting" what American audiences want—namely something "original." This particular comment received 105 "likes" indicating that droves of other consumers felt the same way.

Another reviewer had a similarly disdainful reaction saying: "This is not Melanie Amaro. Too much autotune, an impossible song to cover perfectly and *no soul*. What happened to the Melanie we saw and came to adore on the X Factor? This isn't it."⁴⁹⁷ This dissatisfied customer criticizes what he or she sees at the over-production of Amaro's voice ("too much autotune") and an understatement of her potential creativity and artistry, her lack of "soul." This comment too hit home with other fans as it received 51 "likes."

Another slightly more forgiving fan gave the single three out of five stars, but noted:

Don't get me wrong, I LOVE Melanie Amaro. She has an incredible voice, and I'm so excited to hear her debut album. But this song is a disappointment. Yes, it's modern and dance-worthy. Yes, her vocals are good. But she's not on the X Factor anymore! We've already established that she can take other people's songs and blow them out of the water. Now I want to hear what Melanie can do with MELANIE'S music!⁴⁹⁸

This review is perhaps most telling, because while this person is clearly a devoted fan to the show and to Amaro, she or he has a discerning ear and makes it clear that s/he is *not* willing to accept just anything the newly minted pop celebrity creates as acceptable or "good

⁴⁹⁶ Brian Turner, comment on "Respect-Single" in Customer Reviews, "not sure what is going on here," February 2, 2012, *iTunes*. Emphasis added.

⁴⁹⁷ Anita Giuliani, comment on "Respect-Single" in Customer Reviews, "No....," February 2, 2012, *iTunes*. Emphasis added.

⁴⁹⁸ embracethecheese, comment on "Respect-Single" in Customer Reviews, "Melanie's back...kind of," February 2, 2012, *iTunes*. Emphasis in original.

enough” to buy simply because the reality show (and Pepsi) made her famous. This fan obviously expects artistry and wants to hear something new.

In a similar vein, the young consumers I spoke with claimed they were more concerned with how the music actually *sounds* than how it gets disseminated. To them, today’s notions of “selling out” have to do with musicians staying true to their audiences and *creative aesthetics*. One well-spoken student summed it up as: “compromising your artistic and aesthetic values for the sake of wielding a higher profit.” This, in fact, is something that Amaro’s reviewers indirectly to accuse her (as well as Simon Cowell and the *X Factor*) of doing.⁴⁹⁹ Another student called it “losing your vision.”⁵⁰⁰ Yet another elaborated:

I think it [selling out] means essentially...that you have the talent to make whatever music that you want, but you’re making music that someone else tells you to. So it’s...making music you don’t necessarily believe in the message, or music that you don’t enjoy playing...

I know a lot of people, when bands change, sort of go to a different direction, it’s considered selling out. Like I know Green Day, when they released *American Idiot*, and then the next album...people were disappointed or considered that selling out, because they were going in a different direction or they started appealing to a different audience...So people, I think, might have said that they’re changing their music because they wanted to appeal to more audiences, not because it’s the kind of music they want to write.⁵⁰¹

Additionally, all of the students I spoke with claimed that they were willing to evaluate commercials on a case-by-case basis before passing judgment. Being the “eclectic” consumers of music they are, they made it clear that the manner in which pre-existing popular music gets incorporated in advertising determines its effectiveness today as much as it did 27 years ago.⁵⁰² Thus

⁴⁹⁹ In person interview by author, November 5, 2010, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁵⁰⁰ In person interview by author, November 5, 2010, University of California, Los Angeles. This informant is not the same as the one cited in the previous footnote.

⁵⁰¹ In person interview by author, September 21, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁵⁰² Taylor expands on Richard A. Peterson’s work on the changing tastes of social elites at the end of the twentieth-century. He posits that cultural capital is based less on knowing “highbrow” music and more to do with staying up on a

the *context* in which music is placed in still matters. Reviewers of Pepsi's commercials (cited above) evidently felt the same way. In a discussion about the Black Eyed Peas' use of their hit "I Gotta Feelin'" in a 2009 spot for Target, one of my informants described a rather imaginative example of what she'd consider as an inappropriate context for the same song (which she claimed was one of her favorites):

I think it would be really weird if it was like, "I Gotta Feelin'" and they played it in a condom commercial. Then I'd be kind of weirded out...and I'd be like, "You just put the song that I enjoy in a really personal commercial."

...Or it becomes more funny, and I'm just like, "This is a really funny commercial and I'm not taking it seriously." And so I don't even pay attention to it

...I would kind of be disappointed in the band, that they would use their song in a commercial that makes the public feel more awkward.⁵⁰³

This comment echoes a common theme expressed by all my informants, namely it's still possible to place music in inappropriate contexts that go against audience's personal interpretations of songs, and when this happens, it leads to disappointment and dismissal.

Based on the reviews of Pepsi's commercials, reactions to Amaro's single, and the interview data I collected, it appears that musical *meaning* and issues of *artistry* and *context* still matter, even to today's audiences who seem less bound up in notions of creative "autonomy" than prior generations. Further, this evidence indicates that just because a song premieres in a commercial, or leading brands like Pepsi and *X Factor* promise new music, doesn't guarantee that consumers are going to buy into it (literally *or* figuratively).

large variety of "trendy" or "eclectic" musics. Peterson, "Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore," *Poetics* 21, (August, 1992): 243-258. See Taylor's discussion in "Advertising and the Conquest of Culture," 415-421.

⁵⁰³ In person interview by author, September 21, 2011, University of California, Los Angeles. This informant is not the same as the one cited above.

Conquest and Reformation

Where it was once taboo to for musicians to appear in commercials for fear that their careers were awash, commercials appear to have become *the* reward for that *proves* an artist has made it to the “big time.”⁵⁰⁴ A report in *USA Today* confirms this, citing Amaro’s admission that “just being in the Pepsi ad is a childhood dream come true.” The feature continues: “Amaro says that when she was very young, she’d watch the Super Bowl with her dad—and dream. He’d be watching the game, she says, while she’d be watching for Pepsi’s music-filled spots. She recalls thinking every year, ‘I can do a commercial like this.’”⁵⁰⁵ Amaro’s comments imply that doing *commercials* has usurped the dream of signing a record contract. While her affection for Pepsi ads is likely (at least a little bit of) an exaggeration, this article brings up a valid point: the roles have now reversed and instead of brands relying on the potential exposure and status they could garner from big-name artists, new acts now benefit from aligning themselves with recognized household brands. Put simply: *where artistic credibility was necessary to gain economic standing, now (more than ever) economic capital from a well-known brand is necessary to achieve mass cultural status.* Further, as noted in “Music Icons,” television advertising attempts to relay to today’s consumers that the “exchange-value”(worth) of a song is *the* indication of its “use-value” (meaning).⁵⁰⁶ But as audience reception cited throughout this dissertation has proven, this isn’t entirely the case.

⁵⁰⁴ Joanna Demers discusses how up until the mid-’80s, artists feared that they would lose credibility with their fans if they or their music appeared in advertisements. See *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Effects Musical Creativity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 21-30, 59-70. The “Music Icons” commercial was discussed in depth in this dissertation’s introduction.

⁵⁰⁵ Bruce Horowitz, “Cooking Up a Super Bowl Ad?; Spots Aren’t Cheap, Though, and Their Spots Aren’t Always All That Effective,” *USA Today*, February 3, 2012, 1B.

⁵⁰⁶ Sut Jhally postulates that for cultural commodities “the system of exchange value (worth) subordinates use-value (meaning).” I concur. “The Political Economy of Culture,” in *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2006), 59.

At the end of the 1980s, McCracken theorized that advertising *mediated* meaning between the “culturally constituted world” and consumer goods.⁵⁰⁷ In his analysis, he alluded to the fact that marketers could use only what was already present and that it wasn’t in the business of *creating* culture, only in re-presenting it. Jhally concurs, and as quoted at the beginning of this project, he posits that advertising works to “reformulate” meaning for the signifiers it borrows.⁵⁰⁸ Taylor has recently argued that marketing practices have changed in the new millennium, saying: “It is clear, however, that the gold standard for an advertising agency is for their client’s brand to *become part* of popular culture, not simply to *emulate* it; workers in this industry speak of this in matter of fact terms.”⁵⁰⁹ As a fantasy about its “reformation” of the music industry, Pepsi’s claim of immersion in and complete dominance over cultural output in “King’s Court” is certainly exemplary of Taylor’s arguments. What began with Michael Jackson’s 1984 “Choice of a New Generation” campaign as the promise: “Pepsi can help you *hear* your favorite pop music,” is now the declaration that: “Pepsi *owns* your favorite pop music.” The soda giant thus uses its prequel commercial, “Music Icons,” as a chance to congratulate itself on its role in the music industry. “Music Icons” further runs Pepsi’s twenty-some year experience of reforming musical signifiers against a mirror: in its question, “Who’s Next?,” the commercial implies a total “conquest of culture,” professing that Pepsi now is involved in the entire process of cultivating new talent. Even more profound is the fact that the modest amount of music actually used in “King’s Court” demonstrates Pepsi’s self-proclaimed mastery over owning the *artist* not just the musical texts anymore. Whereas all of the other musicians in the two *X Factor* commercials had careers independent from the ad industry—Michael Jackson, Britney Spears,

⁵⁰⁷ McCracken first documents the “movements” of meaning in *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 71-89. Fifteen years later, his follow-up titled *Culture and Consumption II*, refines his argument.

⁵⁰⁸ Jhally, “Advertising, Gender, and Sex: What’s Wrong with a Little Objectification?,” in *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2006), 165.

⁵⁰⁹ Taylor, “Advertising and the Conquest of Culture,” 414. Emphasis added.

Ray Charles, Mariah Carey, Kanye West, Elton John, and Flava Flav—Amaro will have always been inscribed within it.

I would point out, however, that *owning* a few artists and their music is not the same as *creating* new music or reforming the music business, and it is certainly no guarantee of quality or success. This is made glaringly apparent in “King’s Court” since it becomes a Frankenstein (or “Franklin-stein”) text as Amaro embodies musical signifiers created for *other* purposes. Her banal and poorly received performance of “Respect” further reveals the parasitic nature of advertising as a sign system that continues to rely on reconstituting what already exists. Pepsi’s commercial therefore pledges a new future for pop music not by actually contributing or *creating* anything musically innovative, but by using its same old tricks of “simplifying” and “typifying” to recycle cultural texts to sell soda.⁵¹⁰ Just as the shiny new can contains the same sugary syrup they’ve consumed for decades, the new star and music Pepsi promises is actually a *repackaged* version of older texts. In this way, the self-proclaimed leader of new pop music marketing, Pepsi-Cola, reveals its authoritative shortcomings. While it can financially sponsor artists, it can’t *make* hit pop records (save for a few catchy jingles) and further, it possesses no musical status on its own, despite that which it claims to glean from its superstar endorsers. In fact, Pepsi has never produced a musical text that has reached the same success that the artists featured in their commercials (giants like Michael Jackson and Madonna) have attained. Put another way, while Pepsi supplies the exposure and monetary support for young acts, nobody ever says: “Hey did you hear that new *Pepsi* single?” And as media reports, consumer reviews, and my ethnographic findings above verify, there are audiences sensible enough to know a “good” (or at least “original” and “artistic”) track when they hear it. Their testimony further implies that a significant portion of American audiences aren’t going to love a song solely on the premise that Pepsi, or any other corporation for that matter, sponsors it. Thus, *artistry* and

⁵¹⁰ Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 215.

meaning still matter, a fact that's substantiated by the countless fans, critics, and scholars who have decried poor quality and offensive licensing deals for more than three decades.

Despite the fact they may indeed facilitate a large portion of today's music industry, Pepsi's Super Bowl *X Factor* commercial demonstrates that corporate giants and their marketing firms remain reliant on the output of musicians and indebted to what/who's left of the music industry to please consumers who constantly "thirst" for something new. Put another way: since many audiences still won't accept sponsorship alone as an indication of talent, marketers struggle to co-opt what already exists and often stick to tried-and-true musical texts to squeeze out a certain amount of credibility for their brands. Pepsi's latest branding endeavor drives this point home: as of May 2012, it seemed that the soda giant had all together run out of ideas when it announced yet a *third* deal to milk Michael Jackson's once-iconic 1980s spots. In order to "commemorate" the 25th anniversary of Jackson's multiplatinum album, *Bad*, Pepsi will distribute one billion cans with an image of the pop icon on it, literally making Jackson's image a part of the product (Figure 5.4).⁵¹¹ What's more, Sony Music has partnered with Pepsi and Jackson's Estate to make remixes of songs from *Bad* available through codes printed on the cans that will be scan-able by smart phones—a multi-branded technological feat that truly indicates what many in the advertising industry call a convergence of content and commerce.⁵¹²

⁵¹¹ "Michael Jackson to Appear on Pepsi Cans: Soda Company Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of 'Bad,'" *Rolling Stone*, May 4, 2012, accessed May 4, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/michael-jackson-to-appear-on-pepsi-cans-20120504>. Placing Jackson right on the can will surely make him roll over in his grave considering the fact that he refused to *touch*, much less drink, the product in his original deals. See chapter two.

⁵¹² Associated Press, "Back to the Future," May 3, 2012.



Figure 5.4: Michael Jackson *Bad* 25th Anniversary Pepsi Can⁵¹³

Thus even for leading corporations like Pepsi, advertising's attempt to “conquer” the culture industry in the early decades of the twenty-first century continues largely to manifest itself in *buying out* musical acts to appropriate and *reform* musical and visual signifiers to suit branding agendas.

⁵¹³ Image copyrighted by PepsiCo. Inc. “Michael Jackson to Appear on Pepsi Cans,” *Rolling Stone*, May 4, 2012.

Conclusion:

Reflections on “Pop” Music

This dissertation has illuminated the process by which Pepsi, as a forerunner of new music marketing, has learned how to appropriate new songs (mainly pop) since the mid-1980s and has attempted to reform its meanings in television commercials to serve increasingly sophisticated branding imperatives. I have investigated historical, theoretical, and hermeneutic questions raised by Pepsi’s recent “Music Icons” and “King’s Court” commercials to examine how and why the company has positioned itself as a champion for pop music. This dissertation has unpacked pivotal moments in advertising’s transition away from the jingle to new pop music, as well as its increased involvement in the dissemination of new music, and the (not always successful) repositioning of aesthetic and capitalist boundaries in commercials. More specifically, I have discussed the various ways marketers attempted adopt MTV aesthetics by employing capitalist realist practices of simplifying, typifying, and re-presenting Michael Jackson and Madonna’s iconic images and music to fit within the fantasy worlds of their commercials. What began with the general aesthetic flattening of “Billie Jean’s” musical track and re-contextualization of Jackson’s *Thriller*-years symbolic imagery in two standard-length spots, grew increasingly sophisticated with the reworking of the teleological motion of “Bad’s” formal structures to support an action-hero scenario of Jackson’s late-’80s “simulated” persona in a four-part episodic spot. Pepsi’s innovative tactics reached their pinnacle (and breaking point) at the close of the decade with the two-minute “Make a Wish” spot, which depicted a semi-autobiographical modernist storyline and employed a largely intact version of “Like a Prayer,” complete with the volatile racial and religious tropes Madonna had composed into the original track. Accordingly, Pepsi’s “Choice of a New Generation” and “A Generation Ahead” commercials represent the most notorious and talked about deals in advertising history as they cover the spectrum of success from widely popular to epic failure.

In the new millennium, “Music Icons” re-invokes these commercials’ significance both in the inclusion of the two Jackson campaigns, and the conspicuous omission of Madonna’s. “King’s Court” further demonstrates the aggressiveness with which twenty-first century marketers continue to reform pop music signifiers. However, in its attempt to re-map older, well-worn iconic images and sounds onto someone who’s supposed to be the “pop star of the future” (Melanie Amaro), the soda giant fails in its promise to provide audiences with innovative music.

This project has also examined how the advertising industry’s relationship with pop musicians has undergone drastic changes from its early deals through present times. In the 1980s, Michael Jackson and Madonna used their cultural status to wield their influence over the advertising industry. The potential credibility these superstars lent to Pepsi’s brand through their endorsements allowed their own interests—their iconic images and music—to take precedent over the product. Hence, the cultural status Madonna and Michael Jackson had achieved as artists trumped the economic clout of the soda giant, allowing them to effectively trade their cultural standing for financial gain. These relationships further had the potential to revolutionize the leverage they and future musical endorsers had over their own careers and music sales, thus modeling the possibilities of bypassing the reputedly corrupt and monopolizing music industry and gaining exposure from a source willing (at the time) to overcompensate them for their time, efforts, and art.

Underlying these deals, neoliberal ideologies that prompted mass consumption and globalization encouraged Pepsi and its endorsers to rely on each other’s strengths. In this way, both parties essentially outsourced essential aspects of their businesses to one another: Pepsi displaced their jingles with pre-existing songs, and Jackson and Madonna used the soda giant for the kinds of far-reaching and world-wide publicity their labels couldn’t afford. Further, as marketers were forced to be more creative, these commercials tested the boundaries of accepted and traditional advertising practices, essentially blurring the line between hearing the “art” and the advertisement. For the

advertising industry, potential problems rested in their insufficient understanding of popular culture—demonstrated most prominently by the disaster Pepsi created with Madonna’s commercial, and later with the less-than-warm reception of the “King’s Court” spot. Even today, corporate and marketing executives misunderstand pop music and its fans. Despite its reputation for mass appeal, pop music devotees are members of specific demographic groups. For artists like Madonna, core audiences were (and are) often girls, young women, and gay men. Michael Jackson proved *the* notable exception as *Thriller* attracted audiences from his early Motown years, as well as fans of soul, R&B, and even rock. I would posit that it’s because of Pepsi’s instantaneous success with Jackson that marketers naively assumed that all ’80s pop stars would give them the same result (as indicated by its eclectic line-up of Lionel Richie, Tina Turner, David Bowie, and Madonna in subsequent years). Hence, Pepsi’s marketers ignored the nuanced relationships core fans had with these artists and their musics and instead set out to flatten sonic signifiers to appeal to the widest possible audience (a claim that aligns with Schudson’s hypotheses about advertising’s effects on visual art). Most ironic (and problematic) for the brand, was the fact that the songs offered to them—“Billie Jean,” “Bad,” and “Like a Prayer”—were anything but the benign pop songs that littered top 40 radio. In addition to Pepsi’s misunderstanding of the pop audiences, they also often underestimated the power of these song’s musical signifiers and the skill it took for musicians to wield them to their advantages. Thus, in this transitional and unstable historical moment, both parties realized potential gains and losses, and it was unclear who would come out on top.

In subsequent years, many brands have attempted to cash in on music marketing. While Pepsi recoiled briefly from its drama with Madonna, it continued to sponsor new acts and has embraced the age of technology with various musical multi-branding excursions. On the surface, collaborations like the Pepsi and *X Factor* deal might imply that advertising now governs pop music output as these brands ride the coattails of past and present cultural icons in an effort to initiate new

talent into their flock. But as discussed in the previous chapter, despite Pepsi's claim as the leader in new music marketing, the soda manufacturer fundamentally remains indebted to the cultural texts it can poach. This was made most clear when the soda giant's efforts to make what was old, new again, proved decidedly "un-hip" and non-innovative for pop music fans and critics. So while advertising has surely trained young generations how to consume, it hasn't yet created a completely mindless population of soda guzzling slaves. I argue that while some co- and multi-branded songs have indeed done well on the charts, those songs weren't actually *created* by marketers, proving that advertising has yet to truly demonstrate its dominance over creating *original* and *meaningful* musical texts. At least for now, that remains an illusion within a capitalist realist fantasy world.

What's Next?

This dissertation has attempted to engage with and expand upon the work that's been done on popular music in advertising and it provides a few possible sets of historical, theoretical, and hermeneutic modes for examining the aesthetic effects of a phenomenon that has been increasingly prevalent, and even worrisome, over the past 27 years. This project in no way claims to offer a comprehensive study of popular music's inclusion in television commercials. The gamut of social, political, cultural, historical, and aesthetic concerns that this topic covers are far too large for any one project to untangle. In part, this is due to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject: work on popular music, media, and popular culture is expanding at a staggering rate. Additionally, the possibilities for incorporating new music in commercials are endless, making no one analytical or theoretical model suitable for all cases. This is especially true since different corporate brands offer their own "unique" products, services and images, making the music they incorporate into their spots work towards the specific meanings, feelings, and ideas they hope to convey.

In the current moment, I propose that more can be done to investigate the aesthetic and formal reworking of various genres of popular music to fit advertising contexts. In particular, issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and even regionality should be examined more thoroughly. These studies would offer invaluable perspective on the ideologies perpetuated by America's technologically saturated "infotainment" society. Even as I write this, a new controversy has erupted over R&B singer Mary J. Blige's performance in a Burger King commercial. African American audiences have protested it, claiming to find the spot stereotypical, racist, and offensive. The singer herself, maintains that the commercial's re-presentation of her performance doesn't follow the concept originally presented to her when she agreed to appear in it.⁵¹⁴

Additionally, as the relationships between popular musicians and corporate brands are ever-expanding, attention needs to be paid to the non-traditional forms of advertising now pervading American culture. These include sports promos, television show soundtracks, and Internet ads. As we begin to gain some historical distance from the inception of these deals, I am confident that additional paths for inquiry will become clearer.

In the new millennium there seems to be no limit to advertising's reach. Even beach-goers in Southern California are bombarded with banners for beer and car insurance trailing behind noisy prop-planes that parade up and down the shorelines. I'm sure it won't be long before a pre-existing soundtrack accompanies those raucous planes and their unsightly banners. But even as popular music and advertising continue to get bound up in each other's priorities, I end as only an optimist such as myself can—with the hope that Pepsi's slogan continues to read: "Where there's Pepsi, there's music" and not the other way around.

⁵¹⁴ Mallory Russell, "Mary J. Blige Blasts Burger King Over 'Racist' Commercial She Stars In," April 5, 2012, accessed April 15, 2012, http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-04-05/news/31291831_1_blige-mary-j-blige-burger-king.

Appendix A: Song Lyrics

1. Outasight: “Tonight is the Night”

Verse 1:

I've been feeling real good,
came a long way from misunderstood.
Far away from the days where I wouldn't want to go home,
'cause I was afraid of the truth.

Verse 2:

See, I was scared to admit,
that failing was in the back of my head.
Comes a point when lying no longer works,
so you have to stand up for how you want to live.

Chorus:

Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night,
that we're losing control.
Oh-ooh-oh-oh.
Oh-ooh-oh-oh.
Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night,
we set it off.

Refrain: (2x)

Everybody go:
Whoa, whoa-oh-oh-oh,
Whoa, whoa-oh-oh-oh.
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Verse 2:

And I don't know better,
but as far as I came it felt like forever.
Seconds turn to hours, days turn to months.
Another year pass by, but don't feel like much.

Verse 3:

So, if I got one chance,
motherfucker I'm gonna make y'all dance.
I'm gonna have as much fun as I can,
and figure out the rest when I etch out a plan.

Chorus:

Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night,
that we're losing control.
Oh-ooh-oh-oh.
Oh-ooh-oh-oh.

Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night,
we set it off.

Refrain: (2x)

(If) Everybody go:

Whoa, whoa-oh-oh-oh,

Whoa, whoa-oh-oh-oh.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Bridge:

I'm feelin' better than I ever thought,

was possible but now I know.

Yeah.

I'm feeling better than I ever did.

Impossible don't exist.

No.

Impossible don't exist.

Refrain: (2x)

(Cause) Everybody go:

Whoa, whoa-oh-oh-oh,

Whoa, whoa-oh-oh-oh.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Chorus: (2x)

Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night,
that we're losing control.

Oh-oooh-oh-oh.

Oh-oooh-oh-oh.

Tonight is the night, is the night, is the night,

2. Michael Jackson: “Billie Jean”

Verse 1:

She was more like a beauty queen from a movie scene.
I said don't mind, but what do you mean I am the one,
who will dance on the floor in the round?
She said I am the one,
who will dance on the floor and in the round?

Verse 2:

She told me her name was Billie Jean and she caused a scene.
Then ev'ry head turned with eyes that dreamed of being the one,
who will dance on the floor in the round.

Pre-chorus:

People always told me,
be careful of what you do.
And don't go around breaking young girls' hearts.
And mother always told me,
be careful of who you love.
And be careful of what you do 'cause the lie becomes the truth.
He-e-ey.

Chorus:

Billie Jean is not my lover.
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one,
but the kid is not my son.
She says I am the one,
but the kid is not my son.

Verse 3:

For forty days and for forty nights, law was on her side.
But who can stand when she's in demand, her schemes and plans,
'cause we danced on the floor in the round.
So take my strong advice,
just remember to always think twice. (Don't think twice! Don't think twice!)

Verse 4:

She told my baby we danced 'til three and she looked at me,
then showed a photo.
My baby cried.
His eyes were like mine.
Can we dance on the floor in the round?

Pre-chorus:

People always told me,
be careful of what you do.
And don't go around breaking young girls' hearts.

But you came and stood right by me,
just the smell of sweet perfume.
This happened much too soon.
She called me to her room.
He-e-ey.

Extended Chorus:

Billie Jean is not my lover.
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one,
but the kid is not my son.

Billie Jean is not my lover.
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one,
but the kid is not my son.
She says I am the one,
but the kid is not my son.

She says I am the one,
but the kid is not my son.

Billie Jean is not my lover.
She's just a girl who claims that I am the one,
but the kid is not my son.

She says I am the one,
She says the kid is my son.

Billie Jean is not my lover.
(Repeat and fadeout)

3. Michael Jackson: “Bad”

Verse 1:

Your butt is mine,
gonna tell you right.
Just show your face,
in broad daylight.

I’m telling you,
On how I feel,
Gonna hurt your mind,
don’t shoot to kill.

Come on, come on,
Lay it on me.
All right.

Verse 2:

I’m giving you,
on count of three.
To show your stuff,
or let it be.

I’m telling you,
just watch your mouth,
I know your game,
what you’re about.

Pre-chorus 1:

Well, the say the sky’s the limit,
and to me that’s really true.
But my friend, you have seen nothin’
Just wait ‘til I get through!

Chorus:

Because I’m bad, I’m Bad, come on. (Bad, bad, really, really bad.)
You know I’m bad, I’m bad, you know it. (Bad, bad, really, really bad.)
You know I’m bad, I’m bad. Come on. You know. (Bad, bad, really, really bad.)
And the whole world has to answer right now just to tell you once again. Who’s bad?

Verse 3:

The word is out,
you’re doin’ wrong.
Your lying eyes,
gonna tell you right.
So listen up,
don’t make a fight.

Your talk is cheap,
you're not a man.
You're throwing stones,
to hide your hands.

Pre-chorus 2:

We could change the world tomorrow,
this could be a better place.
If you don't like what I'm sayin,'
then won't you slap my face.

Chorus:

Because I'm bad I'm Bad, come on. (Bad, bad, really, really bad.)
You know I'm bad, I'm bad, you know it. (Bad, bad, really, really bad.)
You know I'm bad, I'm bad. Come on. You know. (Bad, bad, really, really bad.) (Repeat)

Tagline/Coda:

And the whole world has to answer right now just to tell you once again. Who's bad?

4. Madonna: "Like a Prayer"

Intro/Bridge:

Life is a mystery,
everyone must stand alone.
I hear you call my name,
and it feels like home.

Chorus:

When you call my name,
it's like a little prayer,
I'm down on my knees,
I wanna take you there.

In the midnight hour,
I can feel your power,
Just like a dream,
You know I'll take you there.

Verse 1:

I hear your voice,
it's like an angel sighing.
I have no choice,
I hear your voice,
feels like flying.

Verse 2:

I close my eyes.
Oh God, I think I'm falling,
out of the sky,
I close my eyes,
Heaven help me!

Repeat Chorus

Verse 3:

Like a child,
you whisper softly to me.
You're in control,
just like a child,
now I'm dancing.

Verse 4:

It's like a dream,
no end and no beginning,
You're here with me,
it's like a dream.
Let the choir sing!

Repeat Chorus 3x

Bridge Variation:

Life is a mystery,
everyone must stand alone.
I hear you call my name,
and it feels like home.

Just like a prayer,
your voice can take me there.
Just like a muse to me,
you are a mystery.
Just like a dream,
you are not what you seem.
Just like a prayer,
no choice, your voice can take me there.

Chorus Variation 3x:

Just like a prayer,
I'll take you there.
It's like a dream to me.

Repeat Bridge Variation 2x

Outro-Bridge Variation Tag line: (Repeat and fadeout)
Your voice can take me there.

5. Aretha Franklin: “Respect”

Verse 1:

What you want,
baby I got it.
What you need,
you know I got it.

Refrain 1:

All I’m asking,
is for a little respect,
(Just a little bit)
when you come home.
(Just a little bit)
Hey baby!
(Just little bit)
When you come home.
(Just a Little Bit)
Mister.
(Just a Little Bit)

Verse 2:

I ain’t gonna do you wrong,
while you’re gone.
I ain’t gone do you wrong,
‘cause I don’t wanna.

Refrain 2:

All I’m asking,
is for a little respect,
when you come home.
(Just a Little Bit)
Baby.
(Just a little bit)
When you come home.
(Just a little bit)
Yeah.

Verse 3:

I’m about to give you,
all my money.
And all I’m asking,
in return, honey,
is to give me,
my propers, when you get home.

Refrain 3:

(Just-a, Just-a, Just-a)
Yeah baby,
when you get home.
(Just a little bit)
Yeah.
(Just a little bit)

Verse 4:

Oooh your kisses are,
sweeter than honey.
And guess what?
So is my money.

Refrain 4:

All I want you to do for me,
is give it to me, when you get home.
(Re(x8), Respect)
Yeah baby.
Whip it to me.
(Just a little bit)
When you get home, now.
(Just a little bit)

Stop-time Coda:

R-E-S-P-E-C-T,
find out what it means to me.
R-E-S-P-E-C-T,
Take care, TCB

Extended Refrain:

Ohhh
(Sock it to me (x8))
A little respect,
Whoa, babe
(Just a little bit)
A little respect
(Just a little bit)
I get tired
(Just a little bit)
Keep on tryin'
(Just a little bit)
You're runnin' out of foolin'
(Just a little bit)
And I ain't lyin'
(Just a little bit)
(Re(x8), Respect)(Fade-out)

Appendix B:

Table 1:

Timeline of Pepsi’s 1987-1988 Michael Jackson Commercials⁵¹⁵

May 6, 1986	Pepsi announces a second deal with Jackson.
Winter 1987	Joe Pytka films staged concert footage for the campaign.
Feb 24 th , 1987	Teasers of concert footage debut during Grammy Awards on CBS.
Aug 31, 1987	<i>Bad</i> album finally released.
Aug 31, 1987	More teasers of concert footage debut during commercial breaks of “Michael Jackson—The Magic Returns,” a CBS special designed around the premiere of Jackson’s music video for <i>Bad</i> .
Week of Sept 3, 1987	Another concert footage teaser runs during primetime to advertise forthcoming premiers of completed commercials
Oct 30 & 31, 1987	Two full-length commercials featuring the same concert footage (“The Concert” and “Backstage”) premiere on an MTV special: “Rockin’ the Pepsi Generations.”
Nov 1, 1987	The “Backstage” and “Concert” commercials run during network and local broadcasts of “Family Ties,” starring another Pepsi spokesperson, Michael J. Fox.
Jan 1988	Pepsi bottlers view “The Chase,” a four-and-a-half minute episodic spot that also incorporates concert footage
Mar 2, 1988	“The Chase” premieres during the Grammy Awards on CBS

Table 2:

Timeline of “Like a Prayer” Promotions, Controversy, and Album Release⁵¹⁶

May 5, 1988	BBD&O creative team is assigned the task of creating an international Pepsi commercial: Madonna’s name comes up during the deliberations
October 12, 1988	Madonna plays a “rough mix” of “Like a Prayer” for BBD&O creatives who fly to LA to discuss the deal. She offers the song for the commercial.

⁵¹⁵ Harrington, “Pepsi & The Pop Star,” 1986. Enrico, *The Other Guy Blinked*, 272. Garfield, “Cola war’s TV extravaganzas,” 1987. Giges, “Pepsi-Jackson ‘Spectacular’ Set for Spring,” 1987. Pareles, “Pop: Michael Jackson’s ‘Bad’.” Rowland, “Pepsi Banks on Jackson,” 1987. Winters, “Pepsi ‘Bad’ Spots,” 1987. Belsky, “Pepsi Challenge Back,” 1987. “MTV to Run Commercial-Free Pepsi Rock Special,” *Adweek*, September 15, 1986, accessed Lexis Nexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com>. Noreen O’Leary, “Pepsi Breaks Its ‘Chase’ for Michael Tonight,” *Ad Day*, March 2, 1988, 1.

⁵¹⁶ Mark Bego, *Madonna: Blonde Ambition*, (New York: First Cooper Square Press, 2000), 220. Sharkey, “Making a ‘Wish,’” 1989. Billboard.com, “Like a Prayer-Madonna,” accessed December 1, 2011, <http://www.billboard.com/charts#/album/madonna/like-a-prayer/10924>. New York Associated Press, “Pepsi Drops Madonna Ads Because of Boycott Threats,” *Pittsburg Press*, Wednesday April 5, 1989, D5. “Pepsi Cancels Madonna Ad,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1989, 21.

January 25, 1989	Madonna signs the contract with Pepsi. It's reported that she will make three commercials that will air worldwide.
January 26, 1989	The deal is publicized on the front page of USA today
February 22, 1989	Promo for "Make a Wish" airs during the Grammy Awards
March 2, 1989	"Make a Wish" commercial premieres globally
March 3, 1989	"Like a Prayer" video premieres on MTV
March 4, 1989	Pepsi pulls ads from U.S. market
March 10, 1989	The American Family Association, led by Reverend Donald Wildmon, calls for a one year boycott of Pepsi soft drinks; Two weeks later the Bishop of Corpus Christi Texas calls for a boycott of all Pepsi products (including Taco Bell and Pizza Hut chains)
March 21, 1989	<i>Like a Prayer</i> album hits stores
April 4, 1989	Boycotts end after Pepsi officials assure AFA and Texas Bishop that Madonna will no longer be used in their ads.
April 22, 1989	<i>Like a Prayer</i> hits #1 on the Billboard Top 200 and remains there for 77 weeks
September 6, 1989	<i>Like a Prayer</i> video receives the Viewer's Choice Award at MTV's VMA's

Table 3:

"Like a Prayer" Song Structure

Form:	<u>Instrumental Intro</u>	<u>Intro/Bridge</u>	<u>Chorus</u>	<u>Verse 1/2</u>
Measures:	1-2	2-15	16-23	24-39
Key Area:	d-min	d-min	F-Maj	Bb-Maj (IV/F)
Pentatonic Melody:	d-minor: octaves and block chords	D-F-G-A-C-D	F-G-A-C-D-F	D-F-G-A-C-D
Performing Forces:	Solo Electric Guitar	Prominent solo voice	Prominent solo voice	Prominent solo voice
	"Slam" Silences Guitar	Background Choir	Keyboard Synth.	Background Choir
	Wordless Choir "ooh" takes over	Background Organ	Drum Kit	Background Organ
	Organ Pedal Leads to Vocal Line			Triangle
Form:	<u>Chorus</u>	<u>Verse 3/4</u>	<u>Chorus (w/variation) 3x</u>	<u>Bridge Variation</u>
Measures:	40-47	48-63	64-75	76-95
Key Area:	F-Maj	Bb-Maj (IV/F)	F-Maj	d-min
Pentatonic Melody:	F-G-A-C-D-F	D-F-G-A-C-D	F-G-A-C-D-F	D-F-G-A-C-D
Performing Forces:	Prominent solo voice	Prominent Solo	Prominent Solo	Prominent Solo
	Mid-level Choir	Background Choir	Equally Prominent Choir	Contrapuntal Choir
	Background Organ	Background Organ	Keyboard Synthesizer	Electric Guitar
	Keyboard Synthesizer	Triangle	Drum Kit	Drum Kit
	Drum Kit			
Form:	<u>Chorus Variation 3x</u>	<u>Bridge Variation 2x</u>	<u>Outro</u>	

Measures:	96-111	112-128	128-135
Key Area:	F-Maj	d-min/V of F	d-minor/V of F
Pentatonic Melody:	F-G-A-C-D-F	D-F-G-A-C-D / F-G-A-C-D-F	D-F-G-A-C-D / F-G-A-C-D-F
Performing Forces:	Choir Only	Prominent Solo	Prominent Solo
	Choir Respondent	Contrapuntal Choir	Contrapuntal Choir
	Keyboard Synthesizer	Keyboard Synthesizer	Keyboard Synthesizer
	Drum Kit	Electric Guitar	Electric Guitar
		Drum Kit	Drum Kit

Table 4:

“Like a Prayer” Dialectical Tensions

Lyrical Tensions	
Literal Interpretation	Simile
Spiritual Devotion/Love	Human Devotion/Love
Religious Metaphors (Catholic/Pentecostal)	Sexual Metaphors (Religious Catholic/Secular Gospel- i.e. Pop Soul)
Hope/Salvation	Despair/Lost
Textural/Performing Forces Tensions	
Choir (Pentecostal) Community/Salvation	Solo Voice (Catholic) Isolation/Lost
Synthesizer/ Drum Kit Pop/Present	Organ Church/Past
Tempo/Rhythmic Pace	
Cut time (eighth notes) Rejoicing	Slow (quarter notes) Somber/Reflective
Structural Representation of Tensions	
<u>F-Major</u>	<u>d-minor</u>
F major Pentatonic- (Catholic/Pentecostal) Choruses	d minor Pentatonic- (Catholic/Pentecostal) Bridges; Verses
Divinity; Heaven; Spiritual; Transcendence	Humanity; Earthly; Corporeal; Desire
Hope/Salvation	Despair/Lost
Choir (Pentecostal)	Solo Voice (Catholic)
Community/Salvation	Isolation/Lost
Synthesizer/ Drum Kit (Secular Pop)	Organ (Church)

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