

section two
narrative structure
and aesthetics

PICTURE-SOU.





narrative structure and aesthetics

The writing of stories: the hidden frame, the hidden harmony.

Okri, 1997, (p. 121)

introduction

Kellner (1995) argues that the postmodern view of television is that its image often decenters the importance of narrative. In music video and certain types of television commercial,

the signifier has been liberated and image takes precedence over the narrative, as compelling and highly artificial aesthetic images detach themselves from the television diegesis and become the centre of fascination, of seductive pleasure, of an intense but fragmentary and transitory aesthetic experience. (p. 235-6)

There is clearly evidence of this profile in music video, and indeed because of it, the media form was a source of much postmodern analysis in the 1980s and 1990s. However, such broad descriptions can be misleading. This is because within the medium, there are significant variations of form. In many cases, where music video deviates from the flat, one-dimensional flow of superficial, detached signifiers, devoid of referent or meaning, its diverse forms have often been ignored by theorists¹.

Obviously, different viewers watch television videos in different ways. For some audiences, music video may be a continuous flow of fragmented images that they fitfully scan in pursuit of saturation. However, it is an exaggeration to claim as Baudrillard (1983) does, that television, relentlessly undermines meaning and collapses signifiers without signifieds into a one-dimensional hyperspace devoid of depth, effects or meanings. While music video does include texts that string together images of little apparent meaning, it is also profiled by other forms, including the straight, edited performance (the song performed by the artist without added footage) and the narrative

¹Influential theorists whose genericised analysis of music video has failed to address this lack significant divergence within the media form include Acland (1988), Aufderheide (1987), Burns (1988), Kaplan (1998), Jones (1998), Kinder (1984), Rubey (1992), and Straayer (1990).

short². It is this latter form that is of particular interest to this study. The decision to locate the research inside a consideration of television advertising and music-video-storytelling (and not cinema), comes from a questioning of the commonly espoused belief that music videos have borrowed their ways of telling, primarily from the movies³. This I would suggest is an over simplification. Many features of music videos and similarly styled television advertisements, have been significantly shaped by television itself and the commercial, technological and programming environment associated with it. It is these features and their influence on the design of the short film *boy* that will be discussed in this section of the exegesis.

definition of narrative music videos

There has been little specific research into the narrative music video, and so from the outset it is important to define the media form we are discussing.

Because considerations of narrative come from fields as diverse as linguistics, semiotics, folklore, film theory, anthropology, education, business management, visual arts, and literature, definitions are often varied and inapplicable. In this present study, narrative is considered in three ways: the story, "what happens to whom", the diegesis, "the world in which the story unfolds", and discourse, "how the story is told".

Rimmon-Kenan's (1983) definition of a story as a "*series of events arranged in chronological order*" (p. 15), provides an insufficient basis for differentiating narrative music videos from those that either document an artist's performance, inter-cut a performance with other

² The narrative short represents one of the diverse forms of music video. Gow (1992), discussing the proportional representation of music video on television, suggests that at the beginning of the 1990s, performance based videos dominated this media form. However, in his sample it is significant that twenty-four percent of these texts also contained embedded narratives.

³ While this research is primarily concerned with the influence of television on the music video, it does acknowledge the impact of cinema and the contributions of pre-television music promos (Soundies and Scopitones).

footage, or create a text of non-sequential images that operate as an environment for the sound of the music. Todorov's (1977) description of a minimal narrative as a move from equilibrium, through disequilibrium to a new equilibrium, while providing a platform for consideration, is also too broad. His definition could be used to describe a music video that documents a performer's rendition of a piece of music, beginning with an establishing shot of the artist, following the act and the audience response to it, and closing with the song's last bars and public applause. Therefore, in demarcating narrative music videos, it is Bal's (1997) description of a narrative as a series of connected events, caused or experienced by actors and presented as a finite, structured whole, that is the most useful. This is because it allows one to differentiate videos that are finite and sequentially structured, where performers (actors, objects or musicians) affect and are affected by the unfolding story and diegesis. In these videos the story and its diegesis are prominently positioned in the text and there is a clear transactional relationship between the performer and the unfolding storyline.

Although a consideration of narrative music videos is a complex undertaking, this exegesis is concerned specifically with aspects of the media form that have directly influenced the design of the short film *boy*⁴. The significant features of narrative considered in this section are therefore: image, space and time, enigma and closure, sound, and narrative voice.

⁴Significant features like intertextuality, reflexivity, and repetition, which are clearly evident in some of these texts, are not addressed by this exegesis. However, Goldman and Papson (1994), offer an interesting analysis of the first two features in *Advertising in the Age of Hypersignification*. Repetition is discussed in depth by Kinder (1984), in *Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology and Dream*.

image

spectacle, secondary iconography, colour and character

The television image is substantially different to the one we generally experience in the cinema. Apart from scale⁵, it is of a much lower quality and lacking in the detail able to be stored on, and projected from a 35mm negative. Ellis (1992) suggests that,

being small, low definition, subject to attention that will not be sustained, the TV image becomes jealous of its meaning... background and context tend to be sketched in rather than brought forward... the narratively important detail is stressed by this lack of other detail. (p. 130)

Television's need to communicate its meanings with impact and clarity, to an audience whose attention is less focused, in an environment interrupted by environmental sound and activity, means that it has approached image construction in unique ways.

Ellis (ibid.) says,

[t]he broadcast TV image is gestural rather than detailed; variety and interest are provided by the rapid change of images rather than richness within one image. (p. 131)

This use of rapid change in imagery is indicative of much narrative music video and narrative television advertising. Images are generally short and carefully woven into a continuous flow, where spectacle and transition present information in tightly edited sequences. While Ellis suggests that television's images are generally not rich, this observation could not be extended to a description of narrative

⁵ Ellis (1992) suggests that television has a greater tendency to emphasise close-up and intimate framing of its story than cinema. This is partly due to the fact that on television, the close-up presents to the viewer a nearer approximation of human dimension. Conversely, cinema's treatment of the close-up accentuates a dramatic difference in scale.

music video or advertising. In these areas one is generally relying on spectacle to appellate and maintain the attention of the audience. As both forms of text exist in visually, highly competitive environments, one often sees within them, powerful iconography used in a very intense fashion.

spectacle

Darley (2000) suggests that music videos, “are definitely conspicuously about image: about creating an image for a sound, a performer or performers and (often as not) for a performance” (p. 116).

Narrative music videos exist as stories, embedded in a continuous flow of other (television) texts. Videos are reliant on the power of the image to excite a level of spectacle that will not only hold the glance of the viewer, but also call them back to repeated screenings⁶. Common devices used in this form of storytelling include the performer who moves back and forward between identities, the narrative that oscillates between familiar and fantastic environments, and story-lines that contain illogical relationships between events.

Stories told in the world of the music video channel work constantly to demarcate themselves from the highly competitive texts that surround them. While there is a high level of conformity in these videos, there is also a constant need to make each text distinctive and memorable. Sometimes this is achieved through the use of technological spectacle, sometimes through the use of unique imagery or arresting camera work, but rarely through the power of the story itself. Commercially driven censorship (that applied by the marketing companies) excludes highly controversial subjects that may lead to the non-distribution of the video.

⁶In New Zealand a very successful music video can have an initial airplay rotation of up to eight weeks. An unsuccessful video, can have anything between three and five screenings. The effectiveness of a clip is affected by a range of variables, including the marketing company’s relationship with the programmer, the amount of mobile telephone text message requests a programme receives, voting on websites and the success of the song on radio. After the initial exposure, music videos tend to be scaled down in decreasing levels of rotation.

Reiss and Feineman (2000) suggest that a

video has to be densely textured so it can hold up over repeated viewings. It has to be edgy enough to be noticed, but palatable enough to satisfy the often divergent demands of the performer, the record company and the public. (p. 11)

One of the methods employed to meet the limiting requirements of these diverse interests is the relatively safe approach of increasing the level of spectacle in the imagery. Both music video and television advertising are renowned for utilising or developing new imaging technologies as part of their currency.

In the last twenty years music video has profiled a range of hi-tech effects. The use of ADO (Ampex Digital Optics) in videos such as *Only the Lonely* (Mulcahy, 1982) illustrated the potential of optical distortion and movement; new developments in Paintbox, which enabled an image to be painted over live action, were developed in work Michael Geoghegan directed for Enya between 1991 and 1998. The transformation of live-action characters to and from animated characters, was first presented in the video *Take On Me* (Barron, 1985). Michael Gondry's direction of *Like a Rolling Stone* (1995) profiled the first public use of modeling movement from still camera shots⁷, four years before the technique's more celebrated appearance in the film *Matrix* (Wachoski & Wachoski, 1999).

secondary iconography

Narrative music videos establish their impact through a unique construction of rich, enigmatic, and spectacular imagery. However, within the environment of the music channel, a less discussed

⁷BUF Compagnie developed this technique by using two synchronised, still cameras and modelling intermediate forms employing a virtual computer camera (a process based on stereophotogrammetry). To achieve the effects he wanted in *Like a Rolling Stone*, Gondry worked with the company as a model for the experiments. The six minutes of effects in the video were constructed from several freeze sequences and over a thousand morphings. Details of this initiative are available at: <http://www.director-file.com/gondry/Dxxxii.html>

method of demarcation is also achieved by understatement. Videos or television commercials with minimal edits or simple imagery, often seek to draw attention to themselves through this stylistic antithesis. A distinctive example of this is the use of embedded, secondary iconography⁸. This technique is sometimes used to ensure the non-fatigue and revelation in the narrative. It is also designed to create a greater sense of engagement with the text as it begins to expand its meaning over repeated viewings⁹.

Reiss and Feineman (2000) believe that because videos are produced with the aim of holding attention over heavy rotation, a director must embed multiple levels of meaning, into densely textured texts. They say, *"because many videos harness these embedded and often deceptively sophisticated layers of texture and meaning into their veneer, watching video is not a passive experience"* (p. 27).

The viewing of *boy* was not designed to be a passive experience. In the narrative the use of spectacle is more restrained, but it is still clearly evident. For the film to maintain interest over multiple viewings I employed dramatic imagery in the opening title sequence, the shrines and in the images of dolls, whose portraits punctuate the story. This approach was also profiled in the strange sets designed for Sam's bedroom.

However, it is the film's less obvious detailing of images that creates its densely layered visual profile. These images often contain elements, not noticed on first exposure. The details subtly connect to upcoming material, creating a cohesive undercurrent designed to become evident over repeated viewings (fig 2:1).

⁸ By secondary iconography I mean features inside an image that appear insignificant at first, but may take on a greater level of meaning when the video is examined over repeated viewings.

⁹ Secondary iconography may be likened to Barthes (1981) concept of "punctum" in photography. Punctum describes the non-central signifier that one notices outside of the main message of the image. This detail in the picture, when it becomes evident, enriches the image by opening it up to an expansion of meaning.



Fig. 2.1 The silenced sign.

Themes like silence are subtly woven in to the text of boy, using an integrated system of signifiers embedded in typography, sound and image. The muted, covered road sign, blinded and silent in the film's establishing shot, references the New Zealand's practice of shrouding signs with old cloth at sites of road-ing disruption. However, in boy it is this secondary iconography that subtly transfers the title sequence's poetic reference to silence out into the environment where the hidden accident will occur. Details like this are generally missed on early viewings, but as undercurrents, these signifiers contribute to the sense of brooding silence that infiltrates visual and audio voices in the film.

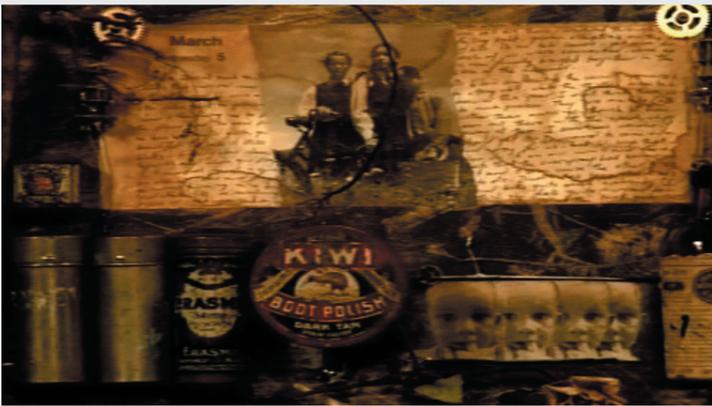


Fig. 2:2 Comparative stills from *The Coopers* (1997) (above) and *boy* (2004) (opposite). Although I am not driven by a desire to establish auteur signature in my work, it is noticeable when comparing treatments of iconography used in *boy* and *The Coopers*, that despite the significantly different subject matter, both films make visual and textual reference to angels and obsessive construction. Interestingly, these texts also feature two of the same actors. The childhood Sam on the road also played the baby boy in *The Coopers* and Tammy Warwick who was cast as the barmaid in *boy*, acted the part of Peachy in the earlier film. (Her image appears in the photograph embedded in the tracking collage above).

Using signifiers that gather meaning over multiple exposures or through intertextual references that may surround a video during its release, is a common method of heightening the impact of the artifact. The use of secondary iconography has also enabled music video directors to establish levels of signature and continuity across their work¹⁰.

While Reiss and Feineman (2000) have argued that despite directors working with feature-film scripts having more flexibility with developing signature in their work,

video directors have compensated by becoming extremely good with the time they have. Despite the compressed format, they have managed to stamp their videos with personalized styles, looks and themes. In the process they are increasingly treated as auteurs. (p. 24)

Simmons (2004) suggests that between the auteurism of certain directors and the marketing and aesthetic requirements of the medium, music videos have continued to develop an escalating aesthetic of the spectacle. These images she suggests,

have to work harder to hold attention of an audience that is easily distracted and already saturated by spectacle. As a result videos tend to over-tell and repeat themselves so that the seduction of the image often becomes more important than the story being told. These images are often over-blown to almost operatic proportions so they suggest more than they say. Rain looks wetter, shadows darker, wealth is richer, sex more seductive, and the world in which this happens, full of intense,

¹⁰Directors noted for this approach include Russell Mulcahy whose work is heavily embedded with intertextual allusions to cinema. Mulcahy also used actors from other videos as a form of intertextual, "in-house" reference. In *Total Eclipse of the Heart* (1983), he cast Michael Baldwin, (the wardrobe supervisor) in the role of the Headmaster. This continued a series of appearances by this member of the crew in videos like Billy Joel's *Pressure* (Mulcahy, 1982) and ABC's *The Look of Love* (Temple, 1983).

In terms of iconography, Chris Cunningham is noted for his recurring use of dogs as motifs in his videos. Significant examples are, *Come to Daddy* (1997) *Frozen* (1998), and *Come on My Selector* (1998).

strange possibilities. The picture has to both soothe and excite the audience and keep them coming back for more. (p. 25)

conclusion

Boy has therefore been affected by two distinctive approaches to iconography in narrative music videos. Television's embedding of arresting imagery, offset by relatively simple backgrounds, has developed as a way of compensating for the medium's inability to effectively transmit detail. Its use of spectacle has also been employed as a way of capturing and maintaining attention in an environment of constant distraction. Although neither of these situations impacts on



Still shot (above) and set design (below) for Sam's room from boy.



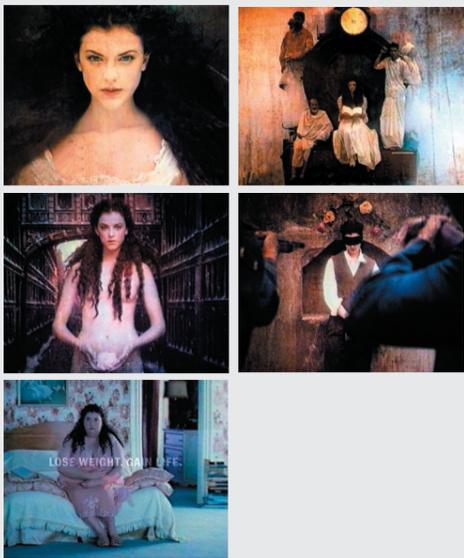


Fig. 2:3 Example of grading used to create continuity in Melanie Bridge's *Xenical* (1999). This commercial employs a blue/umber palette. When demarcating the "reality" from the fantasy sequence, the advertisement dislocates the palette, removing the brown and leaving the blue/pink sub-palette exposed. The blues and browns, running through the narrative also give it a visual cohesion.

the cinema projection of *boy*, the film's marketed version as a DVD, is generally screened in environments where there are distractions. As a way of addressing this situation, the film uses strong imagery in its opening sequences and continues the approach intermittently throughout the text.

Music videos and films like *boy* also share a common concern with durability of narrative over repeated viewings. As a result in both media forms, significant levels of secondary iconography are embedded. This operates as a device for developing visual themes and as a technique for creating density of iconography that will continue to unfold over repeated viewings of the text.

colour as a transitional device

Because music videos need to maintain impact over heavy rotations, these texts offer a level of colouration that might generally be perceived as heavy handed in cinema. Although grading¹¹ is used to enhance the impact of the image, it is also employed to effect smooth transitions between scenes, (fig. 2:3-4).

A comparison of grading transitions between scenes in *Xenical** (1999) and *boy* (2004), demonstrates how both narratives use subtle colour transitions to link sets of images.

The selection of palettes in *boy* was partly influenced by early sketches completed during the film's development. The consistent use of bruised greens, graphite greys and coffee browns in these drawings produced indicatives (profiling vastly different parts of the film's narrative), which presented a clear graphic cohesion. Because the film uses so many, stylistically diverse images, these sketches caused

¹¹ Grading is a technical term for the manipulation of light and colour from a film negative. Density and hue are altered in a digital environment. In *boy*, grading was done using an ITK Millennium scanning system with a *DaVinci* grader. Grading was used to develop an unique contrast range so the film would work equally well in cinema and on a television monitor. Because the film was shot in daylight, without filters, on tungsten film, specific approaches like crushing the blacks and converting daylight scenes to nighttime (as in the skinhead's running through the trees down to the hot pools) were achieved using this process. Grading was also used to create palettes for different sections of the film, to change levels of colour saturation, and to produce subtle blends of pigment across scenes.

me to look more carefully at ways colour was used in television commercials. This was because TV advertisements often condense a large number of spectacular images into visually concordant narratives. The use of consistent sub-palettes and the transporting of colours from the mid-tones of one scene into the background tones of another were subtle measures that profiled in many of these texts.

baseline palettes

Another determiner of colour that broadcast television brings to music video and advertising (and, by extension, to *boy*) is its ability to transmit certain palettes. Although 35mm film is capable of holding colours more effectively than video, the palettes I used for the film referenced the aesthetics of television. Television has difficulty maintaining stability¹² when it transmits bright reds and close patterned fabrics onto lower grade receivers that have had their chroma turned up. Effective palettes are also constrained because of television's limited contrast range. The level of differentiation available in terms of tone, is more compressed than on film or in RGB.

Music video and television commercials coming out of the United States may also be influenced by the country's use of the NTSC system. NTSC will generally hold its greens, greys and yellows but its reds and oranges have a tendency to be unstable. Therefore, in television texts designed for international markets, it is a logical decision to gravitate towards those palettes that offer a greater assurance of reliable colour transmission. Colour combinations that do tend to broadcast well are tertiary hues, pastels, greens, blues and golds. These colours are often evidenced in television commercials and music videos and, collectively contribute to what Aufderheide (1987) identifies as hermetic and global settings, "locked in to colour schemes in which colours complement each other but no longer reference the natural universe" (p. 126).

¹² In the 1970s and 1980s when videos and television commercials were assembled on analogue systems, certain colours, inside what were called "illegal colour space", could not be used without potential damage to the transmitter. These colours were identified during the grading of the images. Currently, colour space on television is still smaller than the RGB space. With computer-generated imagery, this can result (if colours are set in the 250 range) with details in white, being burnt out of the image.

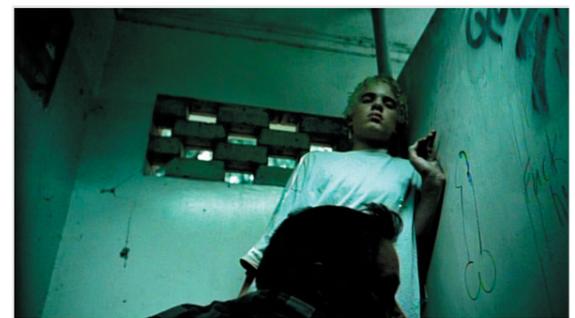
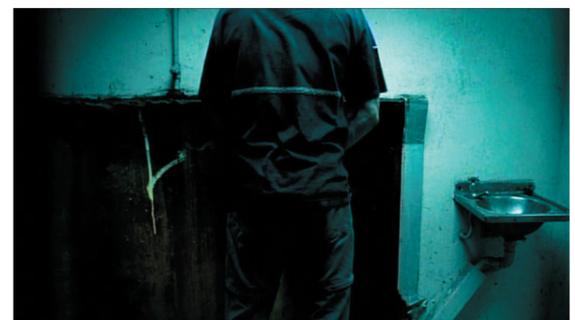


Fig. 2:4 Example of grading used to create continuity in *boy*. Where there is a smooth transition required in the story between scenes demarcated by warm and cool palettes, colours from one are often subtly transferred in to the first images of the other. In the scenes illustrated here, cool blues from the first shot are tinted with green in the next, and this green is embedded in the shadows of the scene at the dump. This transitional approach to grading produces a smooth undercurrent to the flow of images. This helps to de-emphasise the staccato effects of the rapid editing.

Within this distinctive colour profile, certain multi-national companies have adopted “brand palettes” that transmit seemingly high production values, which give brand continuity, and demarcate their narratives from the flow of other commercials. The National Bank of New Zealand uses a grading system, that employs a heavy use of greens in the mid-tones and shadows, offsetting relatively colour saturated, warm hued iconography.

The colour constraints imposed by television transmission have been influential in the design of *boy* because of their powerful role in determining how commercials talk about New Zealand identity through advertising’s distinctive colour reconstruction of our environment.

Boy uses two basic colour palettes. The first is a burnt golden brown (reminiscent of the parched, late summer sunlight). This palette is generally indicative of the over-ground of Sam’s world. The palette colours the road accident, scenes at the pub, and images of the small town where the boy lives.

The opposing palette employs a group of greens, ranging from cool, hospital tints (used antithetically in the toilet scenes) to the dense, gritty mid and dark-tones used in the angry world of flash-shots, the dump and its environs. Between golden-brown and green palettes, runs the spectrum of colours used in the scenes of the school.

Outside of this baseline nexus, there is a distinctive blue palette that demarcates sections of the film that have to do with Sam’s enigmatic behaviour with the coat. These blue areas of the narrative are essentially worlds of imagination.

None of the palettes used in the film are “natural”; they are indicative of the mediated colouring that music video and television advertising feed us about ourselves. These coloured images propose a kind of homogeneity that I have imported into the film to act as discord. This is a story about the “other”. It talks about a part of New Zealand culture that is never referenced in television advertising and music video’s hegemonic construction of our identity. The use of their colour systems is therefore transgressionary. We see an unfamiliar iconography, brushed with the smooth, transitional palettes that are used to assure us about who we are. The colour schemes of aspiration and desire are now used antithetically, to speak for the abject and the marginalised.

character

Because *boy* is a text that is cut very tightly and has a narrative that moves at a very rapid pace, characters are depicted very clearly. Shots are used that quickly tell us about an incident, then we are moved on to new bodies of information. As a result, the film has a method of character description very similar to that employed in highly compressed television texts. None of the characters in *boy* is deeply developed, and in general the main character is surrounded by almost archetypal portrayals. The cynical teacher, bullying students, red-necked skin-heads, doting grandmother, and benign minister are all cutout characters that undergo minimal transition during the film. Rubey (1992) argues that,

[c]haracter backgrounds and motivations that would require lengthy development in conventional Hollywood films are condensed into seconds in music videos... since videos move so quickly they have to refer to iconic themes and images to avoid degeneration into random incoherence. (pp. 242-243)

The characters in *boy* are clearly described, but they are in low relief. The glimpses we catch of them are concerned more with the movement of the narrative, than with revealing character through discourse (as is often the case in cinema).

In dealing with the effects of compression on character, music videos and television advertisements often build character profiles by structuring their appearance, so they are able to generate additional meaning off the back of other characters. In other words, character development is often achieved through its relationship either with the narrative, or with opposite archetypes. In *boy*, bad characters tend to be clearly demarcated and in many cases have their opposites in the story. The calculating driver has his antitheses in the innocent, non-descript, hitch-hiker's parents. The cool, innocence of the driver's twin daughters is also used, often in close proximity to his actions, to heighten the sense of his brutality.

Burton (2000), suggests that often on television, "*characters or words or behaviours are seen to be opposed to one another. The meaning of one, gains strength from its oppositeness to the other*" (p. 114).

Additional to this building of character through reference to its opposite, is the technique of revealing personality through the story line (rather than through discourse). A character, like the young woman who works at the hotel, is defined as much by the incidents that happen around her, as she is from information we glean from dedicated appearances. The exposed thread of her story is very short. Yet we understand her need to be liked, the routine of her life, her low self-esteem, her promiscuity and the vulnerable nature of her isolation. We know how the men in her world think about her, and we know about her almost childlike relationship with those she loves. We know she will probably not do anything about the rape. We suspect incidents like this may have happened before. We know all of this, despite the fact that in the film, she is on the screen for less than thirty seconds.

If one was to take the concept of ellipsis, used to describe the spaces left out in cinema's compression of time, and apply it to her character, one would say that there was a high proportion of what we know about her, that develops between the presented signifiers. Like most people in the story, the spaces between her exposures to the audience are also employed to embellish her character.

conclusion

Thus, treatments of imagery in the film are distinctive and draw influences from the nature and constraints of television. There is a proportionately high use of spectacle in the narrative. Small pockets of high-impact, pared-back imagery operate in a self-contained text that is designed to orchestrate narrative, iconography and technology into a film that generates a high level of curiosity.

Signifiers within images constructed for the text do not have to work in the same way as in cinema. This is because the film (like music videos and advertising) is designed for multiple viewing. As a result, imagery is constructed to avoid fatigue after repeated viewings. *Boy* is designed to keep unfolding nuance and detail, long after the first exposure to the text.

The way that images are coloured is also significant because grading works as a method of disguising the rapid pace of the narrative. This is achieved by bleeding colours subtly, between separate sections of

the film. The distinctive grading of *boy* also references palettes, partly determined by the physical limitations of television transmission. These palettes have become part of the way advertising presents the world to us, and the film exploits the cohesive and sometimes seductive properties of these schemes to add a tension to the way the story is presented.

space & time

vignettes, direction, linearity and compression

If colour and iconography contribute to the distinctive profile of *boy*, it is further affected by treatments of space and time employed in music video. Music videos are often described as presenting a rapid, profusion of unrealistically coloured iconography in sequence, but not necessarily in order.

Kinder (1984) said that it was this “*series of incongruous visual images, stressing spatial and temporal dislocations*” (p. 5), that made rock videos resemble dreams.

While at the time this view held some currency, its difficulty was that it failed to consider, in its generic discussion of music video, distinct forms like concert performances and videos where the music accompanied simple, linear narratives. Narrative videos promote music by using a series of connected events, composed of language signs, caused or experienced by actors. These events are presented as a finite, structured whole. Although their particular way of telling stories may contain dislocations and unusual treatments of time and space, one cannot realistically describe these videos as “*series of incongruous images*”.

Two distinctive treatments of space profiled in narrative music video (and also evidenced in some television commercials) have been influential in the design of *boy*. They are the vignette, and directional movement.



Figs. 2:5 Low relief, theatricised spatial treatments. Playing on the artificiality of the medium, both Melanie Bridge: *A better world* (1998) and *The glass is half full** (2002), and Tarsem Singh: *Losing my religion** (1991), tell stories inside shallow space that references the flattened dimensionality of the stage. In music video, these spatial treatments, with their artificial backdrops and compressed perspective, owe much to the studio sets designed for the television shows of the 1960s.

the vignette

While we have already considered Ellis' (1992) observation of simple, "sketched in" backgrounds in much television imagery, this aesthetic in some music video has been taken beyond the pragmatic need to draw attention to a dominant element in the frame. In shows like *Miami Vice*, Gitlin (1987) noted distinctive compositional features where,

place is a backdrop for free-hanging sound and velocity, as in the high-tech car commercials. In Vice's Miami, the players are regularly composed into fashion tableaux, and sequences of disconnected stills, as in the music videos that inspired the series. (p. 152)

These low-relief tableaux, designed as stills in which action occurs, have become a feature in the work of more recent advertising designers like Melanie Bridge and music video directors like Tarsem Singh (fig. 2:5). These designers tell stories by connecting a series of theatricised, low relief environments (vignettes). In each of these environments a small gesture occurs, the camera pauses or cuts to a detail, then moves on. This tends to establish a highly compressed, spectacle-saturated method of storytelling. Here, the feature of the shot has high visual impact but very short duration. The environments these shots use often reference the low-relief structure of stage sets. Through this aesthetic, both the artificiality and theatricality of the content is emphasised.

The use of powerfully graphic vignettes in which a brief action occurs, helps to create pictorial intensity in the film. Generally the low-relief scenes are used to heighten a sense of claustrophobia or disorientation in the narrative (fig. 2:6). These tableaux draw on television's tendency to focus on central action, rather than hold attention on detailed shots. Like the vignettes used in advertising and music video, with *boy* we are often taken into a dramatic space, only for a moment, shown a world, directed to a detail and then progressed into another scene.

Images like these serve to offset more open, cinematic sequences in the film, where heightened detail and perspective are integral to the film's more expansive ethos.

Fig. 2:6 Scenes in boy that use a low depth of field. The film opens and closes with these types of image. Both the titles and "Last Supper" sequences are treated as shallow, desaturated spaces. The scenes in the bogs are also filmed in low-relief. This device gives a slightly claustrophobic uniformity to the episodes, where attention is focused specifically on the action inside the scene.





Fig: 2:7 Spatial treatment of the shrines.



theatricality

The tableau-like treatment of space was also influential in the design of the two shrine sequences in *boy*. Each theatrical vignette is viewed as if through a proscenium arch (fig. 2:7). The eye moves into the central figure(s) on a subtle zoom, and each character makes a single gesture within the frame. The approach is a graphic translation of the literary device, *dramatis personae* (the listing of characters that generally precedes a play). However, I chose to compile these glimpses of personality as a visual chorus inside the story. Each actor was shot against a blue screen, clear-cut, then inserted between layers of the



illustration. By doing this, I was able to create a dreamlike world where characters were both contained within and separate from the surrounding space.

Each of these tiered spaces used in the film is unique, although at first glance they are designed to appear similar. Flanked by different statues I drew and photographed in the Auckland Domain, they contain desaturated palettes made up of layers of translucent flowers and small individual signifiers of identity.





Fig. 2:8 *Theatricised design in images. Sam's bedroom, the dump, and his angry flash shots, all profile a sense of drama through their use of cluttered detail or powerful iconography arranged across low-relief backdrops.*

Low-relief set design was a feature of early, studio-produced music videos. This distinctive approach to space is referenced in the treatments of interiors associated with Sam's intimate world. In general, these scenes are constructed using backdrops behind the dominant action (fig. 2:8). However, in a break from television's avoidance of complexity, these backdrops are also festooned with detail and lit in a manner that increases their theatrical impact.

experiments

heterodiegetic spaces

The journey to the film's final spatial treatments moved through a range of experiments.

Initial designs for Sam's heterodiegetic narration at the opening of the film drew inspiration from the spatial features of pared-back studio sets often used in music video.

These sets are normally designed as blank or contain minimal detail. This is so focus can be brought to bear on the performing artist after narrative episodes in the video that contain other characters. In terms of design, these almost two-dimensional sets often contrast markedly with the deeper perspective images used in the narrative's diegesis.

In early experiments with the film's introduction, I compressed space to almost one dimension (fig. 2:9). Initially, I intended to make his site of narration almost one dimensional, in marked contrast to the more filmic perspectives adopted in the movie. An early idea was to show Sam talking across layers of imagery. The difficulty with these designs however, lay in their complexity. Typographical voices would not work well on them and although spatially they were simple, the detail in the imagery was too distracting. Rather than being passive spaces, they began to compete for attention with the subject of the frame.

These images considered Sam's prostitution by exploring stylistic references to money. When early trials using New Zealand currency became too cluttered I began working with more generic references. However, the overall outcome still remained problematic.



Fig. 2:9 Experiment 1. Highly compressed space.

These designs also trialed a pictorial translation of Sam's existence as a boy who passes between worlds. In the film this happens in two ways. In terms of the narrative discourse he exists as the narrator in the heterodiegetic realm and also as a character inside the story. However, he also exists as a character who, because of his closeted lifestyle, fades in and out of the overground world of the town and the underground world of the bogs. While the idea of dissolving spaces was interesting, it was not in concord with the more hard edged aesthetic that was emerging in the rest of the film.





Fig. 2:10 Experiment 2.
Less compressed space.

For this trialing of compressed space in the film's opening I took photographs of funerary angels and studio shots of a model of Sam writing. Originally assembled in Photoshop, separate channels were later animated so the sequence presented illogical movement, with the angels and type moving but Sam's hair and body quite still. However, the treatment of movement, detail and space was too overworked and the design's increasingly Victorian aesthetic was moving too far away from the ethos of the film.

When these experiments failed to produce effective results, a second approach using slightly less compressed tiers of imagery was trialed (fig. 2:10). Layers of imagery were used to form a montaged backdrop, reminiscent of Victorian packaging. The typographical voice, designed to be carried on translucent strips of tape, made the written text very subtle. However, the sequence was still too heavy-handed and lacked the clarity I was seeking in an appellation. I was compressing space and filling it with detail, rather than compressing it and simplifying it.

Because both colour and space are used to demarcate the film's episodes, the opening sequence (as heterodiegetic) was designed to contrast with the deeper perspectives used in the rest of the story. All of these early designs with their flattened perspectives and reduced colour palettes aimed to achieve this, but they became too complex. As a result I decided to experiment with the close-up, monochromatic, broken-doll sequence that eventually opened the film.

spatial concerns in a film set

The decision to treat Sam's world in lower relief also resulted in the rejection of a complete film-set.

I constructed the initial environment for the dump scenes in the corner of a paddock in Putaruru. To build this I used window framing, corrugated iron and the husks of two old tramcars (fig. 2.11). This set was dressed so it appeared to be overgrown and neglected. The interior was littered with the flotsam and jetsam of Sam's presence; toys and curios were hung on walls, left on shelves, or scattered on the floor amongst the other debris. I tried to make a world that showed neglect and brooding resentment.

However, the design was not successful because it relied too heavily on perspective to effect its sense of watchfulness. The cramped, structure of the set also limited the flexibility of equipment needed to light and film effectively. As a result, images taken inside it emphasised the corridor-like space. These shots profiled too much perspective to work cohesively with Sam's low-relief worlds of the bogs, bedroom and Last Supper.



Fig. 2:11 Set developed for Sam's world at the dump. The interior with its tiered spaces referenced the structures of early studio sets for music videos. However, again the environment was too cluttered. To overcome this I redesigned the set in an old shed and blacked out large amounts of detail. By doing this I was able to create the sense of paraphernalia without large areas of distracting detail. Scenes were then filmed in a way that flattened the perspective, with the one exception being the climax where the driver finds and smashes Sam's trolley.



Fig. 2:12 Saatchi's *Lessons from Geese** (1995) and *Ribbons** (2000). *Lessons from Geese* employs a simple left to right directional emphasis, interspersed by subtly zooming images of Milford Sound. Over these pictures type is animated. The commercial is designed to flow smoothly towards Saatchi's brand association with caring values. *Ribbons* uses a strong emphasis on directionality with shots being dissolved into each other on a continuous flow inwards. Left-to-right movement occasionally disrupts this strong sense of direction, but these anomalies are rendered cohesive through the prominent use of dissolves.

direction

Narrative music videos demonstrate unique methods of achieving rhythmic cohesion in their stories. Directional flow of imagery is a technique used by some designers, to replace cinematic formulae for indicating spatial relationships. Vernallis (1998) says,

[i]n traditional Hollywood narrative, the editing techniques work to suggest the viewer's mastery of the space (through shot/ reverse shot, 180 degree rule, eye-line match and point of view, (Bordwell 1985, pp. 55-57). Music videos forego such mastery in order to create the sense of a continuous line. The editing attempts to keep the eye moving fluently through the space in a way that supports the directionality of the song. (p. 157)

In *boy* vignetted spaces like the shrines are linked cohesively and by the similar movements that occur within them. The characters in the space glance up, or they look from left to right in the same direction as we might read a book. The camera creeps subtly in and out of each picture like a rhythmic kind of breathing.

Vernallis (1998) has noted in videos like *Cherish* (Ritts, 1989) and *With or Without You* (Avis, 1987), the audience's disposition for reading left to right is used by directors to construct a text where images flow smoothly in the same direction. The use of this technique is common in advertising narratives where imagery is orchestrated into a flow towards a brand that will eventually appear in the closing frame of the commercial. These texts are profiled by a graceful sense of movement where spaces seem to logically follow each other in concord (fig. 2:12).

In *boy*, directional movement through space tends to be read from left to right; scenes are generally designed so that events flow towards the right hand side of the frame. This dominant flow of direction is then disrupted by "against the grain" movements that tend to occur at times of approaching conflict. These include scenes where the skinheads enter the hot pools prior to the rape, the boys leave the school changing sheds prior to the queer bashing, Sam scratches the car, or the young bar maid is watched by the men in the pub.

time

linearity

Directional flow through space is a device some narrative music videos use for giving a sense of unity and cohesion to their plethora of images. However, the treatment of time in narrative music video can also be seen as directional.

Burton (2000) suggests that

[i]f one takes on the idea of flow, television is a continuous narrative from the moment one cuts into it with the remote control and with one's consciousness... [however, it] has coherence and a structure for each viewer which makes it more than a collection of sounds and images. (p. 95)

Within this flow, videos and commercials seek to demarcate themselves as unique texts because they are not seeking to simply entertain, but also to sell. Narrative music videos while sometimes referencing the look of cinema and television drama, generally contain less complex narrative structures. Their story lines are comparatively simple and chronological, although they are often intersected by appearances of the performer singing in a heterodiegetic space.

The proliferating storylines evident in soapbox and television serials are generally absent from narrative music video, because videos cannot explain themselves in upcoming episodes. The story has to be self-contained. These videos also tend to be concerned with one main character, (either the artist or the group), and their heroic engagement with the narrative.

Video director Paula Simmons says,

[i]n three minutes you don't have the time or level of audience concentration to deliver a complicated story. People don't watch these things; they look at them. If you tell them a story you have to do it in a straight line. It's the images and the artist they expect to see. You can get away with jumping the singer around the video, but not the story. A story is there to carry memorable pictures. If people have to think about stream of consciousness or flashbacks in the middle of the video, they are just going to switch off. (Simmons, 2004, p. 26)

Like these videos, *boy*, is a simple, chronological story. It unfolds over four days during which it moves, in small bites, gradually forward. There are no flashbacks. Each scene occurs after the one before it. The only disruptions to this flow are the pauses for the shrines and the sporadic appearance of damaged dolls.

compression

Because of their simple, linear storylines, narrative music videos and television advertisements are able to elide significant amounts of time and still suggest cohesive meaning. Ellis (1992) argues “TV compensates for the simplicity of its single images by techniques of rapid cutting” (p. 131). This rapid cutting allows a director to link small, condensed nuclei of information into a story, told in a very short time. Ellis (1992) suggests that

[t]he standard attitude is that an image should be held on screen only until its information value is exhausted. Since the information value of the TV image is deliberately honed-down, it is quickly exhausted.
(p. 132)

While this is a valid observation, in television advertising, the rapid movement of images is also evidence of the need to compact, into a short segment of expensive¹³ broadcast time, a narrative capable of securing brand identification and message. Therefore, tightly edited stories¹⁴ profiling a high level of ellipsis, have become a ubiquitous form, because of the financial and programming features of the medium.

¹³ The cost in December 2004 of running a 30 second television commercial on prime time TV2 (6.00 pm-10.30 pm) ranged between (NZ) \$13, 000.00 and \$1, 500. 00 per screening. While many factors come into decisions regarding the life of a commercial, a client is normally aiming at three separate exposures to a viewer, to gain product recognition.

¹⁴ *Boy* contains on average 18.2 shots per minute. Fry and Fry (1987) in their comparison of edits per minute on television programmes, indicated a significant difference between the image change rate in broadcast drama and television commercials. Television drama averaged out at 9.9 shots per minute, while television commercials averaged 28.3 shots per minute. Music videos combining performance inter-cut with other imagery, averaged out at 22.90 edits per minute. For a full discussion of the methodology and structure of this research see: Fry and Fry, *Some Structural Characteristics of Music Television Videos*, (pp. 155-162).

The segmentation of highly elided sequences in music video and television advertising narratives, Ellis (1992) suggests “correspond to the regime of the glance”(p. 143). He argues that they are “relatively coherent and assume an attention span of relatively limited duration” (ibid.).

This form of narrative compression, designed explicitly for short periods of time, proved a challenge in the design of *boy*. This was because I was uncertain how long I could maintain the pace and intensity of this level of compression before the audience fatigued under its density. As it was, I believe the approach could not easily be extended to a full-length feature without embedding longer periods of “rest” in both the pace of the narrative and duration of some sequences. Audiences both in New Zealand and overseas, have tended to react in a relatively stunned manner at the end of the film (fig. 2:13). They comment after seeing the work, on its unusual density, strength and intensity of imagery. Further research will be needed into this form of narrative compression and potential adaptations necessary to it, if it is to be applied to longer texts.

The use of short, closely cropped episodes in *boy* draw their inspiration from a feature evident in many of television’s narrative forms. Kozloff (1992) says that

television narratives depend on ellipses. The habit of eliding routine events or non pertinent stretches of time allows television to present a story that supposedly has a duration of several hours, days, weeks, or months within the confines of a half-hour or hour long text. (p. 87)

While her comment relates to television drama and documentary, it can also be applied to music videos and television commercials. *Boy*’s four days of story engages with a range of disruptions to “real time” telling. Although ellipsis works in ways employed in cinema, the film also draws on a technique common in television advertising. In this, the editing style trims time off both the head and tail of a shot. This means that audience exposure to a scene is cropped back tightly, so that only what is necessary to tell the story, and secure a fluid edit change to the next sequence is used. As a result the average duration of a shot in this film is 3.2 seconds. *Boy* contains 277 edits in 15 minutes compared to the same number that might normally appear in a

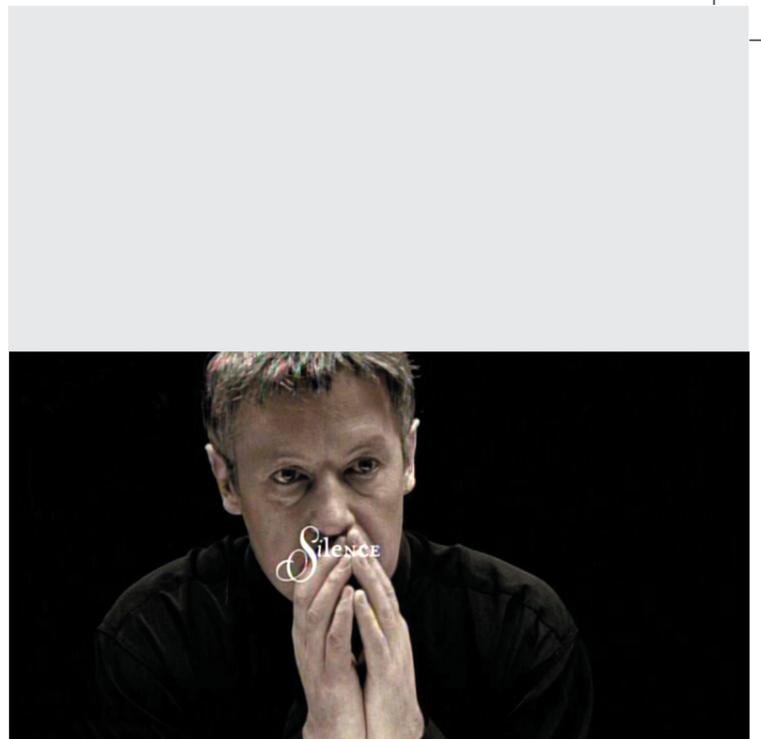


Fig. 2:13 Closing image from the story.

At the end of screenings in the New Zealand International Film Festival, the Montreal World Film Festival and at festivals in Hamburg, Chicago, Prague and Sweden, there was no applause until long after the credit roll had ceased. In general, the audience sits in silence for a few moments after the close of the narrative. This behaviour breaks the normal response to festival film, where applause generally occurs at the beginning of the credit roll.



Fig. 2:14 Transition between a time-lapse of the evening sky and supper. To smooth out the time transition, several devices are brought to bear on the ellipsis: a doll from Sam's world revolves across the scenes, the two sequences are graded off the same colour palette, and a typographic voice (interfacing with the lyrics of the background song) fades in and out, over the transition. While acting collectively as narrative and decorative devices on the ellipsis, these graphic features also help to smooth out the transition across several hours in the film's story. (In this transition, secondary iconography is evident in the subtle inclusion of replicas of the revolving doll, placed on the table).

television drama, twice its length¹⁴. This gives *boy* an almost muted, staccato effect that requires obscuring devices in sound and rhythm to temper the sense of visual fragmentation.

Two time devices used in narrative music videos, to achieve this end, are time lapse and jump cutting¹⁵. Both of these are compression systems that condense time in decorative ways.

Time lapse is employed in scenes like the cloud shift after the car accident, and the moving of evening into night when the policeman discusses the accident with the grandmother and the hitchhiker's parents .

In the car accident sequence, the sky is coloured grey against a burnt sienna foreground, time is momentarily dislocated from experience

¹⁴ For research in to comparative editing rates in different forms of television see Porter, (1983). *Applying Semiotics to the study of selected prime-time television programs*, (p. 73).

¹⁵ A jump cut is an abrupt transition inside the same shot. For example, a scene showing a woman walking in a straight line may have the middle section edited out. The result is that the woman appears to have jumped from one place and time on the street, to another. As a time-compression device, jump cutting is gen-

in a way similar to the unreality of shock. In the second, a bronze doll turns in the foreground, in a clockwise rotation during the transition from one scene to the next (fig. 2:14).

Both episodes appear to slow the narrative momentarily, despite the fact that they are just as tightly cut as other images in the film.

The other system for compressing time, borrowed from narrative music videos, is jump cutting. This is evidenced in the scene when Sam enters the John's cubicle for sex. While a common decorative device in music video, jump cutting is generally seen as poor editing technique when used in cinema and television drama. However in *boy*, it gives a halting fluidity to the movement while allowing the action to occur in half the time that the scene actually took.

conclusion

This film has employed a range of approaches to the design of space and time in the telling of its story. These methods allow for a high level of compression, tempered by illusions of fluidity.

Graphically powerful vignettes containing small actions that either cut to a detail or quickly move on, is a feature borrowed directly from television's method of storytelling. In *boy* these images tend to be low-relief constructions where attention is focused on a central action. A variation on this approach is the use of theatricised sets where the shallow depth of field is treated like a heavily decorated, low-relief backdrop.

Fluidity in the film is achieved through a range of devices. The generic movement of images is either inwards or from left to right. This method of constructing direction in the film is a device borrowed from television advertising, where the technique is used to create a relaxed and graceful forward motion. Against this subtle directional flow, the film often uses reverse-direction in scenes where a level of anxiety or discomfort is required.

Because of its compressed nature, *boy* has been constructed as a simple, linear narrative. This common feature of narrative music video allows for more enigmatic occurrences in the storyline or diegesis, without the text becoming overloaded and losing coherency. With a simple base-line narrative, running chronologically through the text, one is able to elide time and closely crop information into very tight bites of information. This enables a far more expansive, image-driven narrative to be presented in a limited amount of time.

enigma & closure

enigma, irresolution, bracketing and retrospection

Darley (2000) suggests that digitally constructed texts like music videos and television advertising profile

an aesthetic based on dense and complex forms of spectacular, playful and rococo-esque image effects. Such texts are designed to encourage multiple viewing on the part of the spectator, the formal tropes and devices, and the mise-en-scène produced, being just too elaborate to apprehend in a single screening. (p. 119)

While writers have discussed the distinctive imagery and dreamlike look of music videos, there has been very little attention paid to why these texts have been deliberately designed this way. Narrative music videos profile a comprehensible but often enigmatic form of story telling. Not all lines in the story are closed off and internally there is often a dislocation between signifiers that appear to suggest meaning, but then become disconnected and are left floating in the text¹⁷.

enigma

Narrative music videos tend to present chronological storylines that run cohesively through events, in a closed space of time. They generally profile the performing artist(s) within the diegesis of the video, but are distinguished by disruptions of event-logic. In Merit Avis's 1989 video *All I Want is You**, we follow the story of a circus dwarf who falls in love with a trapeze artist (fig. 2:15).

Although she has a lover, the dwarf seeks to declare his affection by buying her a ring. However, although she is clearly attracted to him, she is frightened of her current lover and when the dwarf's declaration of love is made, he is rejected. Up until that point, the story is relatively straightforward. However, the images that follow the rejection, suggest that the dwarf then commits suicide by falling from a trapeze, in front of the woman. The people in the troupe then bury

¹⁷ Indicative of narrative videos that use this approach are, *All I want is You** (Avis, 1989); *Vienna** (Mulcahy, 1980); *Oh Father** (Fincher, 1989); *Karma Police*, (Glazer, 1997); *Union of the Snake**, (Milne, 1983), and *Jeremy**, (Pellington, 1992).



Fig. 2:15 Still from *All I Want is You*, by Merit Avis (1989). This video, shot in Rome for U2, was based on an idea by Barry Devlin. It did not receive as much airplay as the earlier (non-narrative) version first broadcast on March 12th 1987. However, queries about the video's enigmatic ending still profile prominently in FAQ sections on U2's websites.

him. However, as the camera pulls away from the graveside at the close of the video, we see the dwarf physically standing among the mourners and there is no sign of the woman. We are left with questions. "Who died?" and, "What does it mean?"

The device of asking questions inside advertisements is very old and is commonly employed as either a form of appellation¹⁸ or as a method of eliciting a higher level of personal involvement from the viewer. If a designer can get an audience to question a narrative, it is much more likely that the text will elicit a greater level of concentration the next time it appears on the television.

Russell Mulcahy, the director of *Vienna**, quoted in Gow (1992) says,

I always stay away from a literal approach to a song and take it to another level, where people can take it wherever they want. You build that abstract, noncommittal quality in there to give it a more universal appeal, because if people can figure it out, then they get bored with it. You want to keep them intrigued. (p. 64)

Narrative music videos are deliberately designed so they do not fatigue. To avoid exhaustion they often embed enigma inside the diegesis, discourse or story. The disruptions these enigmas create are designed to continually call the viewer back to the text. Because in many cases narrative videos are so densely embedded with disruptions, the viewer may continue to search across a heavy rotation of the text for a level of resolution that may not be there. The aim of many of these videos is not eventual elucidation, but continued non-closure.

Enigmatic treatments of the diegesis often appear as illogical, protean changes of location or as rich, dream-like imagery. Changes in the position of the primary narrator, through shifting emphasis on the song's lyrics or imagery, and sudden shifts in the performer's

¹⁸ Appellation is a term used by Judith Williamson (1978) to signify the ways that advertisements "call out to" or address consumers. The idea is based on Althusser's concept of interpellation, (describing how cultural artifacts hail and position social subjects). In this exegesis appellation describes the way that specific images reach out to, and arrest the attention of the viewer. In doing so they also help to position the audience inside the film's developing narrative.

role between actor and heterodiegetic-storyteller, can all heighten the sense of enigma in the narrative discourse of these texts. However, in the actual story, the most common device employed is the disruption of event logic.

With this technique the flow of meaning established in the early part of the narrative, remains disconnected and unresolved at the end of the text.

Newcomb (1974) argues that in popular entertainment, interactions between content and form, to which audiences respond positively,

are widely copied by those producers who hope to cash in on the commercial success that accompanies them. The formulas that survive have wide appeal in a massive audience. (p. 36)

This may help to explain why it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that there was a sudden increase in a new form of music video that contained seemingly, cohesive storylines, disrupted by an enigmatic treatment of events¹⁹.

Boy, while constructed as a simple linear narrative, embeds enigma into the text²⁰. Because shifting points of narration will be discussed later, it is the discordances within the logic of the story line that are of interest here.

When Sam takes the driver's coat and hands it to a memory of himself as a child, we are presented with an act that contains a distinctly different kind of logic, to the pattern constructed for the rest of the film (fig. 2:16).

¹⁹ Influential, enigmatic, narrative videos during this period are, *Love is a Stranger* (Burbidge, 1983); *I Don't Like Mondays* (Mallet, 1979); *Let's Dance* (Mallet & Bowie, 1983); *Union of the Snake** (Milne, 1983), *Vienna** (Mulcahy, 1980), and *Allen Town* (Mulcahy, 1982).

²⁰ This film is designed with a dual purpose. While it has exhibitions internationally in festivals of short film and cinema (2004-2005), it is primarily designed as a text for multiple viewings. In this regard it has been formatted on DVD, for sale commercially from May of 2005 (US. Distributors, Film Movement: New York, European distributors, Canal+ and Universal.) It is its design as a text for multiple viewing, that influences many of the decisions taken regarding the subtlety and enigma embedded in its structure.



Fig. 2:16 Still of Sam handing the coat to his childhood. The two sequences in the film dealing with this relationship are demarcated from the rest of the text by their blue palette. In these sequences, characters dissolve into time and space, dead people are alive, the grass is static but the sky and people move, and a memory tells the audience about the death of Sam's mother.

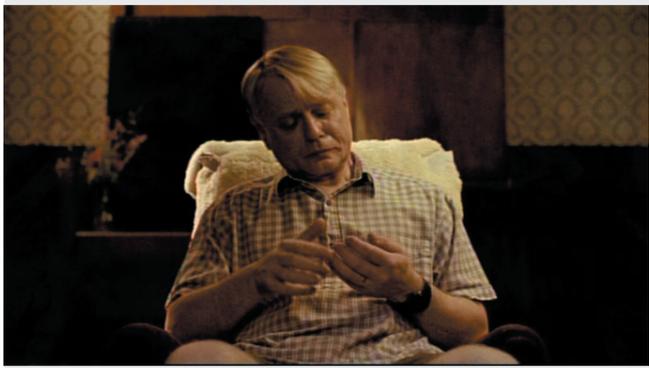


Fig. 2:17 Transitions from “real” to enigmatic sequences. By separating key shots in to layers, elements of the “real world” were sampled, then integrated into the ornamented world of the shrines. This technique is applied throughout the film as a method of smoothing over transitions between the film’s logical story and its enigmatic sequences.

Although there is a strong intra-textual reference to the site of the original car accident in the background of these scenes, the actions that occur in them are not normal. Kinder (1984) suggests that these types of image in narrative music video provide “the spectator with a prefabricated day-dream with varying degrees of space left for personal elaborations” (p. 5). However, because the coat handling episodes in the film do contain distinct developments of the story, Kinder’s space “for personal elaboration”, may be more clearly evidenced in the film’s use of shrines and the stills of sententious doll’s faces.

The shrines and stills appear to have no obvious purpose in terms of adding information to the story. However, they do serve to embellish the diegesis of the narrative.

Characters in the shrines dissolve smoothly, in and out of the film’s story (fig. 2:17), but they do not add information to the developing narrative. In the shrines, ellipsis is treated differently from the rest of the film. Normally, a substantial shift in time employs cinema’s visual grammar of a short fade to black. However, where shifts in reality occur, *boy* tends to *dissolve* the “real world” into the enigmatic. This enables the two worlds to meld together, into a more concordant flow.

irresolution

Narrative music videos (as texts designed for multiple viewings) often employ enigmatic constructions in their narratives. However, they also profile unique methods of closure quite different to those used in classical Hollywood cinema.

Ellis (1992) sees television narratives as essentially open-ended with certain segments containing internal coherence. Music videos and advertisements are among these texts. However, they exist inside the medium’s dispersed narrational form whose characteristic mode “is not one of final closure or totalizing vision; rather it offers a continuous refiguration of events,” (p. 147).

Burton (2000) argues that “soaps” represent one polarity of television’s continuum of narrative closure. These dramas are structured using a never-ending succession of enigmas and a never-complete solution. News on the other hand moves in the other direction, frequently describing events as facts and closing small segments off as

resolved stories. Because music videos and television commercials recycle their narratives through repeat screenings, their stories do not necessarily need to employ systems of closure indicative of the classical Hollywood cinema text. Videos and advertisements often have narratives that are profiled either by their cyclic nature or their open treatment of “ending”. Within this media form there are two types of closure that are of significance to the design of *boy*. They are bracketing and retrospection.

bracketing

Neupert (1995), in his study of narration and endings in cinema, offers a useful consideration of the role of bracketing in film. Bracketing describes the employment of similar opening and closing sequences in a narrative. While cinema texts are generally designed for a single reading, in music video, bracketing is a significant device because the text may be seen as repetitive. These videos exist in an environment of competing texts that appear stylistically to flow into each other. The employment of an essentially cinematic device like bracketing, allows a narrative video to demarcate itself from other texts that are generally less absolute in their approach to closure.

Although the technique is not ubiquitous it is employed in Fincher’s *Oh Father*,* (1989), Gondry’s *Cibo Matto* (1996), Lauper’s *Sally’s Pigeons* (1993), and Yukich’s *Do You Remember* (1990). (Fig. 2:18)

In *boy*, bracketing is used as a form of bookend on either side of the text. It appears as poetic text that opens and closes the film’s story. The written narration is almost identical and the worlds in which it unfolds both feature colour-desaturated images referencing a strangely distorted ecclesiasticism²¹.

However, such temporal closure in the film is not necessarily as absolute as it may appear. The enigma and dense imagery inside the developing narrative is designed to call the viewer back to repeated screenings of the text. So, although structurally *boy*’s opening and closing appear to bracket the narrative, the film’s internal iconography offers moments of irresolution that invite continued viewings as a way of creating meaningful connections and similarities.

²¹ The ecclesiastical ethos of the opening and closing sequence can be seen in the damaged angel-dolls and stylised Last Supper.

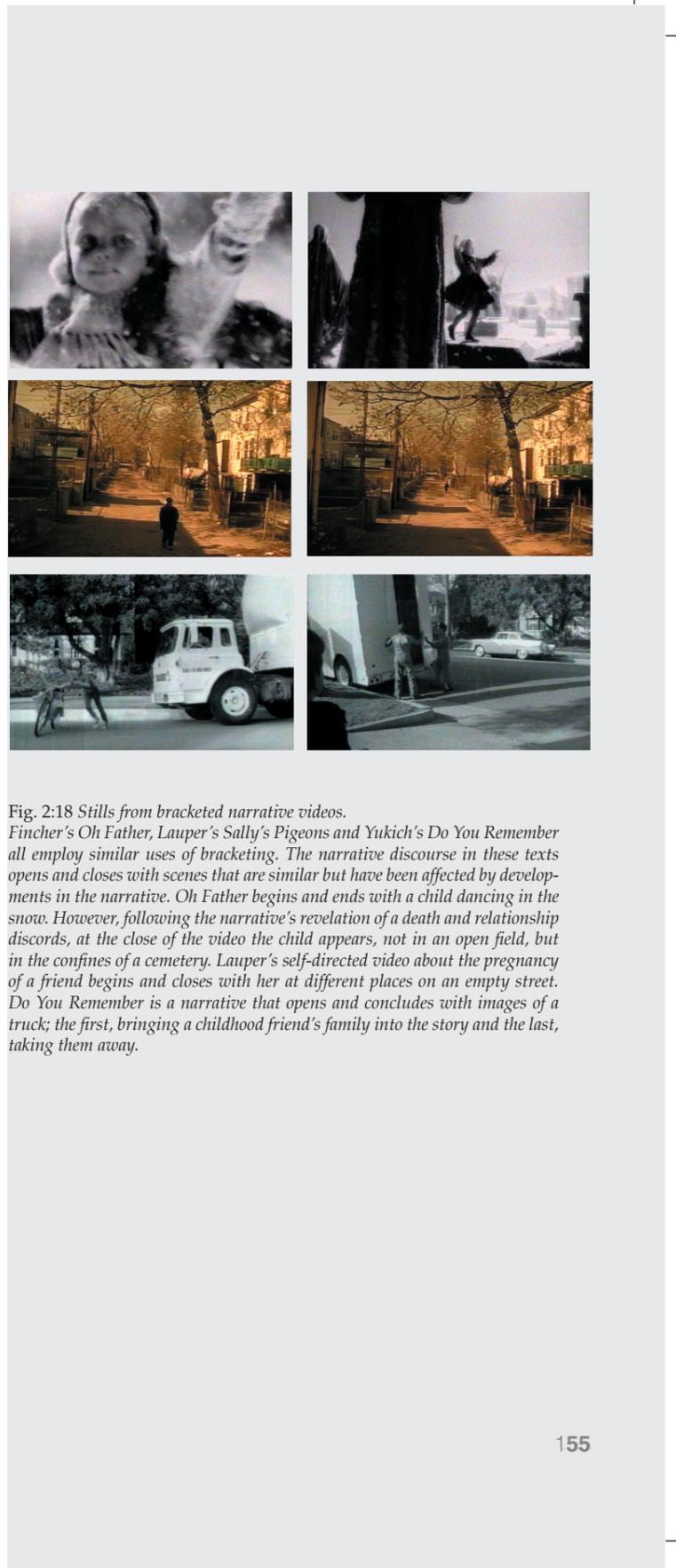


Fig. 2:18 Stills from bracketed narrative videos. Fincher’s *Oh Father*, Lauper’s *Sally’s Pigeons* and Yukich’s *Do You Remember* all employ similar uses of bracketing. The narrative discourse in these texts opens and closes with scenes that are similar but have been affected by developments in the narrative. *Oh Father* begins and ends with a child dancing in the snow. However, following the narrative’s revelation of a death and relationship discords, at the close of the video the child appears, not in an open field, but in the confines of a cemetery. Lauper’s self-directed video about the pregnancy of a friend begins and closes with her at different places on an empty street. *Do You Remember* is a narrative that opens and concludes with images of a truck; the first, bringing a childhood friend’s family into the story and the last, taking them away.

retrospection

Another form of closure, profiled in narrative music videos is the use of imagery from the narrative, compressed into prologues or epilogues at the poles of the text. Vernallis (1998), in her analysis of music video observes that often a narrative video's dominant imagery is represented in the closing shots. This, she suggests,

achieves its effect partly by providing a thematic payoff in the absence of any conclusion to the narrative. The enigmatic character of the final series of shots asks the viewer to return to the beginning and watch one more time, in order to see how the video could have arrived at this ending. (p. 173)

origin

Although this kind of visual overture is used memorably in videos like *Thriller* (Landis, 1983), and *Cherish* (Ritts, 1989), there may be a technical reason for the origin of the feature.

Allan (1990) says

[i]n music television, videos are analogously linked to the unfolding of programming; their beginnings often remain imprecise and they frequently do not quite end. As disc jockeys cross-fade music with similar beats to make a sound transition as nearly seamless as possible, so broadcasters use visual and sound techniques to bridge the end of one video and the start of the next. (p. 6)

This approach was evident even in videos from the 1970s. Goldstein, quoting Williams in 1983, says,

Mulcahy and other British directors have gravitated towards such a surrealistic visual style because the BBC has tended to arbitrarily cut off the beginnings and endings of videos to fit them into the show's time slot. So everybody figured if the BBC was going to ruin the narrative of the video, why not make a video that didn't make any sense anyway. (p. 19)

The decision to open *boy* using an extended title sequence that did not contain a significant event in the film's story came from this

convention of protecting music video's narratives from programming edits. The technique, while inspired by the limitations imposed on these music videos by television's pursuit of continuity, was employed in *boy* to create a distinctive appellation. Using reflective narration, set against unusual imagery, the sequence preceded the story with a first person reflection that only reached its elucidation in the closing sequence of the film²². This is a device Neupert (1995) calls retrospection.

The term may be understood as a form of re-viewing where "*connections and similarities are illuminated, and the reader perceives that seemingly gratuitous or random events, details and juxtapositions have been selected in accord with certain principles*" (p. 120).

In *boy* we do not know why there is a reference to dolls, or if broken wings and terms like "rejected pieces of other people's lives" will have any meaning. These signifiers only suggest connection as the narrative progresses. In classical Hollywood Cinema, retrospective patterning works towards a particular type of closure where "connection and similarity" are generally part of an expected resolve. In music video, however, signifiers may not necessarily suggest a pattern in the first screening of the text.

Fiske (1987) says

[t]he relative openness of the finish of each narrative leaves the viewer in a position of power vis-a-vis the text. She (the viewer) is invited to participate actively in the construction of the narrative and, using the same knowledge and the same conventions, as did the makers of the video, to write her own script from the narrative fragments provided.
(p. 65)

Narrative fragments in music video, unlike in cinema, are generally repeated. The viewer encounters them in a manner that allows for connections to be made either at the close of one screening or part

²² As a text designed for cinema and DVD, it is highly unlikely the opening or closing sequences of *boy* would ever be disconnected or disturbed. Discussion of the stylistic decision, therefore, relates to the inspiration for, rather than the purpose of, the technique.

way through others. This means that signifiers embedded in a text, may offer “connections and similarities” that are more obtuse, subtle or enigmatic. This is because narrative music videos do not need to reach the same form of closure expected of a cinematic text designed for a single exposure.

Music video’s particular application of retrospection operates as a method for continually calling the viewer back to repeated screenings of the text. It treats narrative as a unique patterning of information that reveals itself, both through single and multiple readings.

conclusion

The comparatively enigmatic nature of many narrative music videos is a result of both stylistic and pragmatic decisions. These decisions are born out of the need for a music video to hold the attention of an audience through multiple viewings. Narrative videos often profile inconsistent applications of event logic, and because of this, they pose questions to audiences. These questions encourage a greater level of curiosity and involvement in repeated viewings of the text.

However, because narrative videos generally exist inside a flow of more open-ended texts, they often employ cinematic devices to suggest levels of demarcation and closure. Bracketing is sometimes used to create a sense of visual conclusion, even when events are not brought into complete resolution. Where these devices are used, they often protect the narrative from disruptions to the opening and closing of the main story. This disruption is due to programmers conventionally deleting or broadcasting over the beginnings and endings of these texts.

The use of retrospection is another way that narrative videos protect their main storylines. This technique is generally used in one of two ways. First, sometimes narrative music videos will open or close with iconography that will be explained, or has been profiled, in the main body of the narrative. If this imagery is lost, then the narrative is only marginally compromised. Second, retrospection also creates a greater sense of cohesion inside these videos because it suggests patterns and connections within the story. This device, set against deliberately embedded forms of enigma, creates a tension designed to affect a greater attention to the text.

sound

homodiegetic sound and rhythm

Image and sound in *boy* are inextricably linked. While the film's use of silence is a dominant feature of its style, this silence is emphasised by its relationship to both the music and homodiegetic soundscape²³ that permeates the film.

Rubin, Rubin, Perce, Armstrong, McHugh, and Faix (1986) suggest that music performs three functions in film and television: it supplies essential or additional information, establishes a mood or aesthetic energy, or supplements the rhythmic structure of the screen event.

While music and sound serve all of these functions in *boy*, this exegesis is concerned with unique applications that have grown out of two specific profiles of sound in narrative music videos.

Sound operates in different ways in music video and cinema. Television receivers have inferior speakers and the transmitted signal carries a lower level of information due to the imposed restrictions of its broadcast band. Conversely sound in cinema is projected off the film's negative, read by a Dolby decoder and passed through a six channel system containing a front, left and right speakers, two side speakers and a sub channel for low-frequency audio.²⁴ Ellis (1992) says, "TV sets come with speakers that are massively geared towards acceptable reproduction of speech. Music, especially rock music, does not reproduce at all well" (p. 128).

²³ By homodiegetic sound I mean sound generated by characters, events or environments inside the story. The song is normally something laid over the story and as such is generally considered to be heterodiegetic. The use of homodiegetic sounds, compiled as a system of signifiers inside the narrative, I refer to as a "soundscape".

²⁴ There is a significant difference between sound that is broadcast, and sound that is projected off a 35mm negative in cinema. Broadcast sound passes through a transmitter and a receiver and both pose limitations on the amount of information received by a television audience at home. To keep the cost of this consumer electronics competitive, the bandwidth through a television receiver is generally lower than what is transmitted. To accommodate this loss of information, sound is often compressed before transmission, (the quiet areas increased and the louder range, flattened). This technique is used in a lot of music video and television commercials and is the reason why, although the volume has not been technically increased, these texts often give the impression of being louder and richer than the programmes surrounding them.

Broadcast sound operates in an environment of constant distraction when it appears on a television set. One is not seated in an acoustically designed theatre, but subject to visual and aural distractions that create particular needs for television to design sound as an effective method of holding attention. Ellis (1992) says, "sound can be heard where the screen cannot be seen. So sound is used to ensure a certain level of attention, to drag viewers back to looking at the set" (p. 128).

One of the methods narrative music videos use to draw attention to themselves is by embedding in their music tracks homodiegetic sound.

homodiegetic sound

In narrative music video, sound appears in two forms. The first is the music itself. This is normally the dominant feature in these texts and is embellished by images designed to arrest the glance. The music normally defines the length of the video and runs as an uninterrupted flow determining the editing rhythm and graphic atmosphere of the text. However, some narrative music videos also introduce homodiegetic sound that either precedes the music or acts as a form of atmospheric embellishment, coinciding with particular events within the story. While this technique surfaced in narrative videos in the early 1980s²⁵, it continues to function as an appellatory device that calls for additional attention to the text. If one is listening to a video as background noise and the music's expected audio-scape is disturbed by sound that is clearly not part of the song, it suggests that something curious and additional may be happening. This encourages renewed attention to the visual text.

In Spike Jonze' *Da Funk** (1997), and *Praise You* (1999)²⁶ this approach

²⁵ Significant early examples of these include, *I Know* (Cole, 1983), *Wild Boys* (Mulcahy, 1984), and *Material Girl* (Lambert, 1985).

²⁶ Both of these videos feature slice-of-life narratives set in unmodified urban environments. The first follows a talking dog (actor Tony Maxwell), around on a lonely night in New York. The second, *Praise You* features Jonze directing / performing with the "Torrance Dance Group" as "Richard Koufey". The seemingly impromptu dance sequence is performed before a group of unsuspecting patrons waiting in line at a theatre. During the video, the artist for whom the video was made, Fat Boy Slim (aka Norman Cook) can be seen in the background watching.

is taken to a level where the homodiegetic sound begins to supplant the music in terms of importance. In these works dialogue and atmospheric soundscapes introduce, conclude and permeate the musical event.

The film *boy* was concerned with a convention in these types of video, where audio is not recorded onto the original footage, but homodiegetic sounds are foleyed over the music during post-production (fig. 2:19).

isolated homodiegetic sound

Drawing on Jonze's renegotiation of the proportion of homodiegetic sound in narrative video, I sought to create a soundscape made up of both music and foley work. The sound design was very important in the film because there was no dialogue. The aim was to communicate aurally both the isolation and disconnection of the main character's world.

This disconnection builds as the film progresses and reaches a stylistic climax in the scene where Sam walks down to the hot pools to find the barmaid. At this point in the film, for a moment, all sound ceases. Something is wrong. We begin to travel through a time where revelation of the rape is punctuated by the desolate, echoing drip of a tap. These sounds are set against the silence.

This scene forms the anagnorisis of the film; the time when Sam realises that by doing nothing, the community's persecution of the marginalised, will become his story too. Because I wanted to show rape as a completely alienating, non-sexual horror, something that tears the humanity off a person and leaves them broken, I built this unusual approach to sound subtly through the film. It was designed to reach its most obvious dislocation at the most brutal part of the narrative. From this point on, the use of homodiegetic sound significantly decreases. As Sam follows the young woman up to her caravan, a hollow, tuneless wind drifts into the soundscape and gradually blends with the anonymous choral work, *Behold the Bridegroom Cometh*²⁷. It is this music that then flows, unbroken, through to the film's conclusion.

²⁷ This piece of liturgical music, performed by the St. Petersburg Chamber Choir, was directed by Nikolai Korniev and recorded in 1997. It is taken from the album *Russian Easter* (Philips #446662).



Fig. 2:19 Clanking chains.

Boy was recorded without sound. This meant that any atmos (atmospheric sound), or action-specific effects were created as foley. Often in the film, a third-level sound that might normally pass unnoticed is heightened and other more dominant sounds remain mute. In the build-up of tension in the scene where the driver follows Sam into the dump, we hear the tiny sound of the gate's latch amplified, but do not hear the driver's car arrive, nor its door slam. Inside the dump we hear chains clank but not the sound of the driver moving. We see the driver speaking but do not hear his speech. This approach to homodiegetic sound creates a disconcerting audio logic and becomes a method of building an atmosphere of dislocation and tension in the sequence.

rhythm

Whitely (1997) says,

with regard to pop videos, it is suggested that the implied rhythmic synchronicity between visual and musical content impacts upon the viewer to inform both the underlying structures and the surface details. As such, it is integral to the effective functioning of the narrative. (p. 261)

The fundamental relationship between rhythm in sound and rhythm in image is a recognised feature of both music video and television commercials. Cubitt (1997) discussing Fincher's (1990) video, *Vogue*, notes that this video often presents poses containing minimal movement that "succeed each other in time, thereby achieving motion" (p. 301). In these sequences, this non-narrative video employs the technique of cutting to the beat of the music and, in doing this, emphasises audio rhythm by making distinct the transitions from one tableau to the next. This technique is common in many rapidly-paced conceptual videos. However, the approach is not widely used in narrative music videos because as Whitely points out,

cutting to the beat is regarded by many editors as a cliché. Many prefer to use movement and action within the frame to monitor cuts or to employ more subliminal ways of marrying pictures to the beat. (p. 274)

Narrative music videos often employ movement within the frame as a method of complementing the rhythm of the audio track. This technique was significantly profiled in 1967, when Peter Whitehead directed *Lady Jane** for the Rolling Stones. In this video, the original film footage was slowed down so that movement within the frame emulated that of the audio track. This gave the video a seductively, dreamlike motion that belied the violence of its content. While this was not a narrative video, its longer sequences suited narrative approaches to music video because it allowed the rhythm of the story more freedom in terms of pace.

Boy generally employs this form of editing. In the film, there are very few cuts made on the beat²⁸. Events like Sam slamming his locker, the towel flicking at his legs and the ash-fall on the barroom table, are emphasised by synchronising actions to the beat, rather than edits. This synchronicity places additional emphasis on each of these images rather than on the cutting that separates them.

While audio rhythm generally forms a synchronistic relationship to the visual text of *boy*, the film is also marked by a dislocation of this relationship. The shrine and road sequences exist in a soundscape that has no discernable structure. There is no audio-influenced rhythm to either movement or editing.

When mixing the music for this film, I sought to bring together two almost antithetical pieces: a modern New Zealand pop song²⁹ and a piece of 18th century choral music. One piece represented the known world of a small town and the other, the strangely ecclesiastical distortions of Sam's vision. I sensed that in a potential synergy between these very different pieces of music, could be found a "harmonious discord" that paralleled the content and typographical treatments³⁰ of the film's story.

In the shrine and road sequences, sounds are sampled and disconnected from their original songs. In these scenes notes float into and across each other like a tentative form of breathing. As with the images, these sounds do not connect to the narrative structure, they are disengaged and are reconstituted as a remixed sequence with only tenuous references to the developing story.

²⁸ Where the film is cut to the beat of the music, it generally occurs in instances as Cubitt (1997) indicates, where a series of tableaux follow each other in close succession. An example of this is in Sam's early morning ride past a series of vignettes containing watchful locals. The approach is also employed irregularly during the stylised treatment of the film's Last Supper. In both sequences the technique helps to punctuate the iconography rather than the action contained inside each edit.

²⁹ I used two forms of the song *Anchor Me*. The Mutton Birds, released the lyric version for Virgin Records in 1994, and Don McGlashan produced the instrumental version in 1995. Don McGlashan composed both pieces.

³⁰ This consideration of type is discussed in the next chapter of the exegesis.

This approach to sound helps to demarcate these sections of the film. Yet, simultaneously it also serves to bind them into the greater narrative. This is because the mix used in these sequences is composed entirely of notes and atmos sampled from the preceding tracks.

conclusion

Whitely (1997) suggests “the majority of videos with their sequencing of images, seem to respond to the underlying rhythm which appears to lead both the ear and the eye. The primacy of rhythm would thus appear to be fundamental to the functions of the narrative” (p. 260).

This underlying rhythm is a significant concern in the design of *boy* because of the need to harmonise antithetical features like dislocation and continuity. In *boy*, sound and image are interwoven, each contributing in different and complementary ways to the flow and emphases in the narrative.

The arena of sound in music video is very broad and many of its features, unrelated to the design of *boy*, are not addressed by this exegesis. However, the project has drawn two specific features into its creative consideration. These have grown out of television’s need to create emphasis as a way of compensating for its comparatively limited spectrum of sound and the medium’s surrounding environment of distraction.

The use of homodiegetic sound is a method narrative music videos often employ to draw attention to themselves as dramas. In this film, homodiegetic sound and music operate side-by-side. But they also seep into each other. This approach allows one to orchestrate sound in unique ways and to heighten the intensity of specific moments in the film. By bringing these two forms of sound into discourse one is also able to develop more sophisticated rhythms within the flow of the narrative. Sound, and its absence, are therefore used to build tension, heighten a sense of dislocation, accent imagery, and draw cohesion between different worlds within the narrative.

The employment of an editing style that cuts scenes around the beat, means that one is able to emphasise action within the frame. This device borrowed directly from narrative music video, works against a convention, where images are often edited on the beat. Although

editing on the beat is effective when one is attempting to accentuate iconography presented as tableaux, the technique has a tendency to distract from action occurring within the frame. Editing on the beat however, is used occasionally in *boy* as a way of altering the rhythm of the story or subtly demarcating sequences within the film.

narrative voice

heterodiegetic, homodiegetic, embedded heterodiegetic, and oscillating narration

Narration in music video is a complex consideration. In this section of the exegesis I am primarily concerned with the oscillating position of the narrator and how this feature of the media form influenced design considerations in the film *boy*. Because the next chapter of the exegesis discusses typography's narrative voice and how this is applied in the film, this section concerns itself with the use of heterodiegetic and homodiegetic spaces and how these are used to position music video's storyteller³¹.

The terms homodiegetic and heterodiegetic are taken from Gérard Genette's (1988) terminology. Homodiegetic narration may be described as narration that is situated within the world the story tells us about. Thus a performer, acting a role in a story and singing in that role would be said to be narrating homodiegetically.

Heterodiegetic narration is that which occurs from another realm. In television it may be illustrated by the presenter of a documentary who introduces and narrates the story from an unmistakably different time and place.

While most television texts present clearly demarcated narrative sites, music videos are an exception.

³¹ The term diegesis has varying definitions, but in this exegesis it refers to "the world constructed by the story." Thus the road accident, bogs, pub, town, dump, school, funeral, and last supper scenes all lie inside the film's diegesis. What may be argued as lying outside of the diegesis, is the opening sequence and certain elements of typographical narration. This is because they do not occupy the same time or have a transactional relationship with the story.

The lyrics of a song may either be situated inside the narrative's diegesis (be about the story), sit outside of the diegesis (have nothing in common with the story), or tangentially intersect with it.³²

The music itself can normally be presumed to be homodiegetic because its sound and ethos have a transactional relationship with the narrative. This can be seen when the story is clearly edited to rhythms and emphases within the score.

A performer may move positions within the text, appearing at one point as an actor, or at another as a dislocated commentator on what is occurring in the narrative.

It is this oscillating relationship of the narrator with the story that is of interest to the film.

heterodiegetic narration

A few narrative music videos employ this system of storytelling. The performer, as the storyteller, only appears outside of the unfolding narrative. Kozloff (1992) suggests that heterodiegetic narrators are often omnipresent and "*merely observe from some more or less Olympian vantage point*" (p. 82).

The heterodiegetic position normally allows the artist to be portrayed uncluttered by the video's narrative. They can be lit more individually, shot with greater emphasis and often shown in the context of musicianship that might clash with the normal content of the story. This position also allows them to be associated with the diegesis, while simultaneously distanced from abject imagery or negative events that may occur inside the story's telling.

Heterodiegetic narration often employs direct address. Ellis (1992) says, "*direct address is recognized as a powerful effect on TV. Its most obvious form, that of an individual speaking directly (saying 'I' and 'you'), is reserved for specific kinds of people*" (p. 134).

³² Connections between the song and the visual narrative are often effected by synchronising images and words or hook-lines in the song. Thus if the word heart appears in the lyrics, a picture of a heart may appear in the visual narrative, although the image may be located in an obviously unrelated context.

He points out that the relatively objective status of heterodiegetic narration is one of empowerment, generally reserved for anchor-men and women and sometimes for politicians, but rarely for people being interviewed³³. Performers in narrative music videos who occupy the heterodiegetic site of narration, address the audience from a position of knowing. They often appear to be remembering or dreaming the sequence and are generally unaffected by developments within it.

Yukich's *Do You Remember?** (1990), is indicative of this form of storytelling (fig. 2:20). Phil Collins, for whom the work was directed, performs outside of the narrative. He does not appear in the story nor take part in its world. His heterodiegetic site of narration is coloured, but the story is presented in black and white. Cuts between these worlds operate as slow dissolves. When characters inside the story speak to each other, they do so without sound. Apart from the homodiegetic sound of the truck at the opening of the video, Collin's singing is the only voice in the text.

homodiegetic narration

Purely homodiegetic narrative music videos are also not common, despite the predilection for artists appearing as actors in their videos. In purely homodiegetic videos, the song is laid over the narrative and may be considered homodiegetic because its lyrics are actually telling the story. The artist is an actor inside the diegesis and may or may not sing as part of this role. The artist is in a transactional relationship with the diegesis; they cause or experience a series of connected events and do not engage in any commentary outside of the narrative.

³³ It is general practice on television that people interviewed are shot at three-quarter face. While the interviewer's introductions are often front-on, convention holds that the interviewee does not acknowledge the camera (thus the presence of the viewer). Dual discourse (with the audience and the interviewee) is normally reserved for the person in the position of power.



Fig. 2:20 Heterodiegetic and homodiegetic spaces in Yukich's *Do You Remember?* (1990). This video tells the story of a young boy's relationship with a girl who comes to live in his neighbourhood. In a simple linear fashion it traces episodes in their relationship, ending with her parents leaving and moving to another location.



Fig. 2:21 Still from Doyle's *Cloudbusting* (1985).
 The lyrics from this song interface with the unfolding narrative.
 The story concerns a girl and her father who experiment with a rain-making machine. His experiments cause him to be arrested by the authorities and taken away in their car. When the girl is too late to prevent his capture, a psychic connection causes her to help him by restarting the machine.

The reason this form of narration is not more widely used, Simmons (2004) suggests is because

generally the artist is the hero of a video. As a director one is required to elevate them to star status, completely immersing them in a narrative normally compromises that. Stories have a lot of other elements all vying for attention. If one confuses the star with other actors in the story, one has lost the purpose of the video. The story has taken over and we do not have an advertisement for a product anymore. Unless the star is already very well known (as with some brands like Coke) we need to position their brand (face) prominently. The product of the video cannot be confused. A great video, with interesting characters and enigmatic treatments can lose the whole battle if people remember the story and forget the artist. (p. 23)

Generally, videos with purely homodiegetic narration are produced for artists who have an already established following. While these may reach cult status amongst fans, they do not tend to launch careers or stand up to heavy rotation on television. Often, as in the case of Avis' production of U2's *All I Want Is You** (1992), the text is a follow-up version of a song, pre-released as a concert video.

Doyle's *Cloudbusting** (1985), is an example of homodiegetic narration. Both the performer and the song are embedded in the diegesis. The song tells the story and images are used to expand the narrative and give it more linearity³⁴. The singer, as an actor does not lip-synch the lyrics to the song. All of her appearances are related to developments in the narrative. At no time does she step outside of her character's role in the story. Because she plays a heroic role within the text, and is the only woman in the story, we associate the female singer's voice with the character.

³⁴ The song's lyrics remember both the spirit of her father and his innocence at the time of his arrest.

*You could see them coming
 You look too small
 In their big black car
 To be a threat to the men in power.*

embedded heterodiegetic narration

The spatial separation of diegeses is a convention in television. This is because the remoteness of the narrator generally helps to reinforce the sense of objectivity or knowingness in relation to the text. However, some narrative music videos disrupt this practice by embedding the heterodiegetic site of narration inside the world of the story. The site remains heterodiegetic because the narrator, while appearing inside the diegesis, does not interact with it. The artist(s) are generally unnoticed commentators, and events and characters inside the story are unaffected by their presence. Often, while sharing the same space, the artist appears in it, at a different time.

This compression of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration into the same space generally creates a densely layered form of story telling. It also affords greater opportunity for the artist, while remaining separate, to appositionally absorb the values or aesthetics of the narrative. Two influential examples of this approach, released in 1991, are narrative videos by Fincher, *Who Is It?** and Yukich, *No Son of Mine** (figs 2:22 & 2:23).

In both of these texts we see narrators occupying the same space as the story. In Yukich's video, the story is narrated through Phil Collins' performed lyrics. Collins sings about the conflict that unfolds around him. He is situated in the same living room at the same time as the argument. However, he sings about it retrospectively.

In a similar way, Fincher places Michael Jackson inside the world of *Who Is It?* The artist, while singing a song with lyrics that tangentially connect with the narrative, does not interact with any of the characters or events. He is narrating inside their world, but remains separate from it, occupying the same spaces but not the same time as the narrative's events.

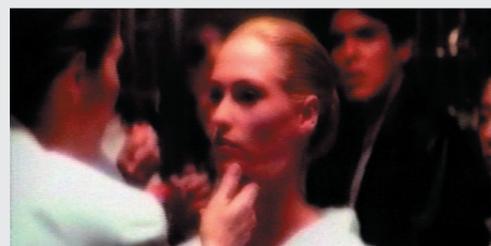


Fig. 2:22 Stills from Fincher's *Who Is It?* (1991). This story concerns a high-class call girl involved in espionage, who undergoes identity changes as part of a series of contracts. When she eventually refuses to fulfill an assignment, the people with whom she worked cast her out. Jackson inhabits many of the rooms where the story unfolds. He also picks up objects from the unfolding story (business cards) and contemplates them while he performs.



Fig. 2:23 Still from Yukich's *No Son of Mine* (1991). This story tells of a young boy's violent upbringing and his rejection by his father. Collins stands behind the child victim in the story.

oscillating narration

The final form of narration moves its narrative voices between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic sites in the text. Simmons (2004) says that in music videos,

the narrative element is not fixed. It not only moves between audio and visual registers but also between ways of telling. Often an artist will relate the story in more than one role, as both a commentator and actor. While this technique generally gives more video time to profiling the artist, the boundaries between what is observed and what is experienced become blurred. (p. 25).

Oscillation between these sites of narration not only helps to increase the textual density of a video but also allows the artist to deliver two quite different forms of narration; one more removed than the other. Glazer's *Karma Police** (1997), illustrates how this transgression of conventionally divided spaces operates. This video opens with an unpopulated homodiegetic space, showing the empty back seat of a car. Across this image we hear a performance of the song.

The heterodiegetic site of the musical performance is invisible and remains so for the duration of the video. We hear the band but cannot see them. The lyrics of the song suggest a form of retribution³⁵ that corresponds with the video's unfolding theme of punishment. However, the song is not about the story and remains coolly dislocated from the mounting tension in the narrative. As the video progresses, the camera observes, through the driver's window, a man running along an open road. Our attention is then returned to the back seat of the car and we suddenly see the performer, Thom Yorke, sitting alone. He indolently lip-synchs a few of the song's lyrics and at this point the heterodiegetic positioning of the audio narration slips in to the homodiegetic space of the visual narrative. The singer and lyrics are in the story and appear to be telling us something about it.

³⁵The song's opening lyrics are:

*Karma Police
Arrest this man
He talks in maths
He buzzes like a fridge
He's like a detuned radio*

*Karma Police
Arrest this girl
Her Hitler hairdo
Is making me feel ill
And we have crashed her party*

*This is what you get
This is what you get
This is what you get
When you mess with us.*



However, this is only for a moment as Thom Yorke soon tires of the narration and the lyrics slide back out into the heterodiegetic space. Videos like Mallet & Bowie's *Let's Dance* (1983) and Lambert's *Like a Prayer* (1989), also oscillate between sites of narration. However, in these videos the heterodiegetic site of the performance is not invisible and the artists are seen narrating the story both heterodiegetically and homodiegetically. The oscillation between these worlds gives the performers the ability to position their narrative, at different times, on a continuum of intimacy and dislocation.

conclusion

This continuum of intimacy and dislocation was an important consideration in the film *boy* because I needed to create both a sense of confiding with, and distance from, the audience. Sam is not an intimate person, he trusts nobody and lives in an underground and overground that do not acknowledge each other. Although his retrospective voice shares insights with the viewer at the opening of



Fig. 2:24 Stills from Galzer's *Karma Police* (1997).



the story, his character in the film survives by being closed off from things that might hurt him. Only once, fleetingly, does he show any spontaneous affection.

From the outset of the film, I was looking for a way of structurally dealing with this disjunction. My first approach was to simply place a heterodiegetic narration outside of an unfolding homodiegetic narrative. This is a common convention in television series like *Star Trek* and *The Waltons*, where a voice-over is used to introduce and occasionally comment on the narrative.

For the heterodiegetic site of Sam's commentary, I designed a world of clouds and out-of-focus shots of the boy (fig. 2:25). Sam spoke the story inside this space and these scenes were designed to be interspersed through the unfolding narrative. The visual theme of moving clouds was also to seep out into the diegesis of the story. Vestiges of this approach remain in *boy* and can be seen in the time-lapse sequences of clouds on the open road.

After experimenting with the balance of a single heterodiegetic voice commenting on the film, I abandoned the approach and began experiments with something a little more complex and enigmatic.

As a result, the final narration in *boy* can be seen as primarily as a homodiegetic model communicated through actors who experience or cause a series of connected events. These occur inside a story that is presented as a finite, structured whole. However, three heterodiegetic voices intrude upon this narrative.

The first belongs to Sam. It occurs in the opening sequence of the film and talks about the broken angels that inhabited the silence of his childhood. This narration is in the past tense so we are aware that it belongs to a diegesis outside of the present-tense narrative that forms the core of the film. However, this written voice slides into the homodiegesis at the end of the film when it effectively brackets the text. The words, now subtly altered, have gathered meaning through the film and relate to the angel in the torn cloth on the table and the culture of secrecy that has surrounded the driver's involvement in the accident.

Fig. 2:25 [Opposite]

Indicative of Sam's heterodiegetic site of narration (2001).

An early experiment with narration used blue-screen shots of Sam telling the story. Footage was clear-cropped and layered over billowing skies that gradually changed with the time of day. While the technique helped to underscore the changing time zones in the film, it lacked subtlety and created too high a level of intimacy with the boy's character. The use of the spoken word also undermined the theme of silence in the film.

The second heterodiegetic voice belongs to the song *Anchor Me*. While the lyrics of this song have nothing to do with the film's narrative, at two points hook-lines from it intrude upon action in the story. Once, when the words "anchor me" appear over Sam being mocked in the classroom, and once at the dining table, when the words "shivering skin" surface in the shot of the policeman discussing the car accident with the hitchhiker's parents and Sam's family. This leakage from the heterodiegetic voice of the music into the interior thoughts or internal narrative of the film, occurs as a form of underscoring of words or hook-lines in music videos. Vernallis (1998) notes that this technique causes words to have performative functions in the text. In *boy* they are used to emphasise interior thinking in the film.

The final heterodiegetic voice belongs to somebody we do not know, possibly the unseen narrator, or author of the text. This is the narrator Lasswell (1948) suggests pervades messages whether or not a visible presenter exists. It is the narrator beyond the heterodiegetic realm we have identified. This voice flickers words about Sam over his cruising in the bogs. It uses a language most of the audience does not know and makes comment on something that is happening in a way that is only partly accessible. Thus, "cottage", "gloryhole" and "trade" are descriptions that come from somewhere beyond the heterodiegetic sites occupied by Sam and the lyrics of the music. The typeface this narrator uses is the same one used to list the actors in the film.

Significantly, this credit sequence is not demarcated from the text as in normal short films, but simply flows into the film's development as a natural progression of the story. It draws our attention, at the end of the story to its construction and positions itself as part of the diegesis.

summary of influences

Music videos are essentially television texts. They have developed inside television's limitations and compensations, and their structure and aesthetics have been substantially affected as a result. While aspects of video's aesthetics may reference cinema, essentially their way of telling stories is designed to operate with television's world of the glance, the spectacle, and continual flow of information.

Boy draws heavily on television's way of constructing narratives. However, rather than simply borrowing them, the film tends to treat them in unique ways or contrast them against more cinematic approaches.

colour

Technological limitations within television have resulted in distinctive profiles of both colour and sound. Colour in *boy* has been influenced by television's need to create palettes that can be transmitted stably through local and international broadcast. As a result colours tend to be selected from specific areas of the spectrum and often hues from one scene are embedded into the palettes of another. This technique contributes to the richness of iconography and helps to demarcate sections of the narrative. The approach is also employed to create a greater level of continuity across diverse forms of imagery.

Boy's appropriation of euphoric colour systems, used in television advertising, is also a form of political transgression. The film's unfamiliar iconography is brushed with the smooth, colour-saturated palettes used to create identity, aspiration and desire in this medium. However, these palettes are used in *boy* to tell the story of the "other"; a story that sits outside of music video and advertising's hegemonic construction of gay identity.

sound

Sound in music video also works to compensate for its loss of quality as broadcast information. Often music videos and television advertising intensify the position of sound in their texts by disrupting demarcations between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic realms.

In *boy*, apart from the typographical intersections between the lyrics and the unfolding narrative, there is no significant bleed between

these areas of the audio. However, the film extends music video's practice of embedding specific sounds foleyed over the homodiegetic soundscape. In *boy* this results in a design where silence and third-layer sounds, dislocated from those that might normally surround them, are occasionally used to heighten attention to details in the text. They are also orchestrated in specific ways to build tension or pathos in the story.

rhythm

Synchronisation between audio and image in the film is also a feature borrowed from music video design. Images and events within the story are often emphasised by being linked to specific changes and rhythms in the accompanying music. By synchronising specific features of the visual narrative with emphases in the music, one is able to draw greater attention to specific actions in a shot. The opposite technique of using the beat of a song to accentuate changes in scene, is employed in *boy* as a counterpoint to this technique. Editing on the beat is generally used where attention is being drawn to the look of an image rather than the action occurring within it. The rhythm these approaches create in the film is used to temper the fragmenting effect its highly cropped imagery.

Creating a directional flow between the images also emphasises rhythm in the text. As a feature of many television commercials and videos, this technique is used to create a graceful, forward-motion that moves the action almost hypnotically towards the narrative's conclusion. In *boy* this technique is used to smooth together stylistically diverse sections of the narrative, and create a veneer of grace against which the more abject sequences in the text are contrasted. Movement against this smooth directional flow is generally employed as a way of heightening tension prior to conflict.

imagery

The use of imagery designed to capture the attention of the viewer, is a feature of both television and cinema. However, because television operates in an environment of distraction, it tends to use imagery in a different way. Television's pictures are generally less detailed and

shorter in duration than those in cinema. Because these images are often rapidly exhausted, they tend to last for a comparatively short time.

The use of highly cropped images in *boy* resulted from an analysis of this technique in both music video narrative and advertising. By adapting television's momentary attention to the image, one can condense a large amount of information into a very short space of time. To do this without fragmenting the text into a dislocated and frenetic clutter, one needs to carefully orchestrate devices like colour bleeding, audio/image rhythm, directional flow and distortions of time and space to create a seductively smooth appearance to the text. With these compensatory devices one is able to create an expansive, image-saturated narrative that tells a story in a limited amount of time.

Boy borrows from music video and television advertising, the use of vignettes that contain small actions. These vignettes are strung together in sequence and either act as one-off shots or as images that cut to a detail before quickly moving on. This particular method of storytelling is used as a way of intensifying the density of imagery in the film. In *boy* these images tend to be low-relief constructions where attention is focused on a central action.

character

Because characters cannot be built in this film through dialogue, they are constructed and portrayed as images that accumulate meaning from their surroundings. Narrative music videos tend to employ simple, linear storylines populated by archetypical personalities. Characters in the text are designed in such a way as to draw information about themselves from the unfolding narrative, or through comparison with archetypical opposites within the story. The people who live in Sam's world are generally painted in low relief and (apart from the driver's exposure) do not undergo significant transformations in the story.

enigma and closure

The need for music videos to hold interest over multiple screenings has also significantly affected the way they tell stories. Narrative videos often profile inconsistent applications of event logic and because of this, they pose questions to audiences. The use of events and iconography that may not be completely explained, are used in *boy* as a method of encouraging a greater level of curiosity and involvement with repeated viewings of the text. Closure is often treated differently in music video and television advertising because the purpose of these texts is more concerned with appellation than explanation. While *boy* adapts some of these devices, it is also employs some traditional systems of closure, including bracketing and retrospection.

Short films like *boy* are designed for marketing after the film festivals. At this point some are released through distribution companies as DVDs. These are generally bought and played a number of times. It is appropriate in the light of this growing domestication of the short film³⁶, that the changing use of these texts considers alternative methods of storytelling. Television advertising and music video as media forms, have developed specific techniques for preserving the durability of their stories over repeated screenings. Their structures, aesthetics and positioning of the storyteller, have been influential in the design of *boy*.

While these structural and aesthetic features are of significance to the text, in the next chapter I consider the typographical treatments developed as the other major profile of the film. These written words create the silent voice of the movie.

³⁶ In 2004, twelve New Zealand short films were sold for release beyond the cinema festivals. They were *boy*, *Kitty*, *The Platform*, *From Where I'm Standing*, *Fly*, *Infection*, *Water*, *His Father's Shoes*, *Two Cars One Night*, *Kitchen Sink*, *Signing Off* and *The French Doors*.