THE POLITICS OF PLEASURE:
THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN ADAM CURTIS' RADICAL JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

Today's digital environment features a growing circulation of repurposed archival audiovisual material. This dissertation builds on Jaimie Baron's argument that the repurposing of audiovisual footage forms the contemporary experience of history today. I expand on her framework of reception by examining the role of music in this process.

I analyze how popular, repurposed music in the films of Adam Curtis functions as a language of political and cultural critique. Using a method that integrates analytical approaches within documentary studies, affect theory, and sound studies, I present a broad analysis of Curtis' films, followed by a closer analysis of three works: *The Trap* (2007), *It Felt like a Kiss* (2009), and his most recent work, *HyperNormalisation* (2016).

I argue that Curtis' strategies function as a radical critique of dominant news narratives. In effect, Curtis uses music to interrogate the relationship between individual pleasure and political ideology. He structures the audience's identification with the popular culture as it is depicted alongside historical events. His devices of audiovisual juxtaposition foreground the music and compel the viewer to interrogate their own individual affective responses, memory, and social identification with it. Such interrogation challenges individuals to recognize how they operate as subjects of a popular culture in which the pleasures of the individual are intrinsically political.

Curtis' work demonstrates the capacity to which sound and music can structure affective interactions with archival footage. Through a more focused inquiry into the role of sound, this study extends Baron's framework of the archive effect. It raises important considerations regarding the use of music as a narrative device and as a point of historical signification.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Forward

It has been well over a century since we have been able to record our history through photography and moving image. The baby boomers, now entering retirement, have lived their entire lives in a television culture. A generation of young adults have no memory of a world without the internet or mobile media. They are nostalgic about the 1990s, a time in which they never lived, a time when there were no smart phones.

This project emerged out of my own personal interests in music, documentaries and media history. It is also highly informed by my background. I am a pianist, composer, and electronic music producer. A child of baby boomers, I was born in 1983 in the suburbs of Chicago, IL. I started attending music concerts in 1992, when my father took me to see R.E.M. Popular music plays an important role in my family. It is through stories about bootlegged Bob Marley tapes, Carly Simon concerts, and Chicago encounters with Jeff Tweedy of Wilco that I have come to understand more about my parents' past. Their experiences with music reveal essential aspects of who they are.

The same year I started attending music concerts was the year I got my first computer. I was on the internet by 1993, eventually devoting my personal phone line to service my dial-up 14.4k modem all day and all night. Coincidentally, my coming of age has run parallel with the development of the commercial internet. As I have grown up, the world has changed from a television culture into an internet and social media culture. The din of network television hasn't permeated the sound of my home for many years. As I get older, I encounter more and more documentaries that repurpose

televisual footage from the 1990s and 2000s, interrogating the televisual footage that was once an important part in shaping the way I understood the world. Television footage that was broadcast during my youth feels dated and sometimes even silly when I encounter it today.

We are now in an era where the repurposing of audiovisual footage is a central device in the representation of reality.[1] Today, techniques of repurposing can be located in anything— from Ken Burns documentaries to satirical or news programs devoted almost exclusively to the device of montage, such as *The Daily Show* and *The Rachel Maddow Show*. Employed by journalists, politicians, filmmakers, academics, documentarians, and critics, techniques of repurposing footage are becoming a common way for people to argue for their interpretations of media and reality. Though the necessary tools are no longer limited to professional artists or filmmakers. In today's remix culture, anybody can use techniques of reappropriation. People can edit and remix media content with different sounds or music using basic software or mobile apps.

Audiovisual footage shapes our understanding and experience of history and reality. Our cultural memory is increasingly based on how archival footage of events is shaped, narrated, and made accessible to us. Repurposing footage into new contexts can challenge and re-order dominant representations of history. However, this process is complicated by a continual overflow of information. News production teams struggle

[1] I use the term reappropriation to encompass a wide array of techniques including collage and remix.

to broadcast live, breaking news while the video footage is then recirculated on the internet at an incomprehensible rate.

There is a need to better understand the technique of repurposing, or reappropriation, as it functions as a language of new media. Scholarship should address how viewers can effectively produce, read, and critically interpret news and information as it circulates through corporately-controlled television networks, news media and digital platforms. Scholarship should also address the challenges that producers and viewers face in this context. The internet has a propensity to flatten the nuances of communication to a degree in which irony, satire, or subversion is lost on internet audiences. The speed at which subversive or counter-cultural aesthetics are co-opted through mainstream marketing and advertising feels instantaneous. It can be difficult to distinguish meaningful critique from the re-perpetuation of dominant narratives.

Addressing these challenges, this project applies a greater examination into how repurposed music functions to shape meaningful historical narratives. Since the development of sound recording technology little over a century ago, the music industry has come to play an essential role in the history of the 20th and 21st centuries. Repurposed and recognizable music, like historical footage, points outwards to social practices and discourse, drawing on the audience's memory and identification with it. In the documentary, music can be used to shape the audience's relationship with audiovisual footage of the past and the present.

1.2 Introduction

In this dissertation I examine how music can be used in juxtaposition with voice-over and news footage to create new meaning in the documentary. I consider how music refers outward to a history of social practices as well as to its own material, aesthetic, and cultural history. The repurposing of music can engender affective reactions, identification, and memory on the part of the viewer.

There is very little research on the specific role of repurposed music in the documentary genre. Specifically, I direct my attention to the sub-genre of the documentary called "the essay film." Works within the essay film or performative documentary genres have the potential to self-reflexively reveal how music functions to signify meaning and structure new experiences of the audiovisual footage. A study of repurposed music in the essay film can contribute to a wider discussion about how techniques of reappropriation function as key devices of rhetoric and critique.

In this dissertation I apply a multimodal analysis to the essay films of Adam Curtis. Curtis' body of work is especially salient for a project on the repurposing of music. Curtis reappropriates material from a wide array of sources including televisual news footage from the BBC, stock imagery, film clips and commercials. Music plays a significant role in how Curtis re-shapes the news footage into new narratives. His works have been referred to as essay films (Coley, 2018); radical mixology (Doyle, 2017); and counter-histories (Harris, 2016).

Drawing from a range of approaches within the fields of archive studies, sound studies, and multimodal textual analysis, I examine how Curtis uses music to disrupt conventions of traditional television news. First, I analyze Curtis' work ranging from

1993 to 2016. I then demonstrate three closer analyses of individual essay films: *The Trap* (2007), *It Felt like a Kiss* (2009), and his most recent production, *HyperNormalisation* (2016).

In *The Trap*, Curtis demonstrates how classical film scores can be used as a language of political critique. Simultaneously, the series exposes how the film industry is linked to broader political ideologies. In *It Felt Like a Kiss*, Curtis uses music to implicate the viewer into the rhythms of the television and popular culture industry, which, the film argues, compels cruel attachments to the promises of the "good life" when people's lived experiences greatly differ from its idealistic representations.

In *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis uses music to structure new affective relationships with audiovisual footage including news outtakes, viral videos, and social media. Curtis strategically juxtaposes the digital videos with music to reveal how people's individual experiences in the digital environment are shaped by larger forces of power such as algorithms and techniques of perception management. Using thoughtful musical selections from the "hauntological" electronic musical style, Curtis demonstrates the historiographical potential of music and its capacity to signify forces of power which are not visually representable.

I argue that music plays a central role in Curtis' radical critique of journalistic conventions. Curtis problematizes dominant narratives by interrogating how popular culture has functioned throughout the 20th and 21st centuries while drawing on the audience's subjectivity within the same cultural and media environment. The affective experiences created through different combinations of news footage, music, and

voiceover compels the audience to confront their recognition of the material as spectators and participants in the same mass media and culture industry depicted.

Curtis' work reveals a broad range of ways that music functions to make meaning and structure people's engagements with audiovisual footage of history and reality. This study of Curtis' techniques of appropriation raises important considerations about the affective and evidentiary power of sound and music in today's digital environment.

1.3 The Essay Film

To Bill Nichols, the documentary genre is organized around the principle of understanding reality. To Nichols, the documentary positions us to "*infer* that the images we see (and many of the sounds we hear) had their origin in the historical world" (1991, p. 25). If a narrative film is a fictional world, he argues, "the documentary is like you are in a room looking out at *the* world, rather than just a different world" (1991, p. 25). The pleasure of documentary viewing involves what Nichols calls "epistophilia": how we can know reality, and how that knowledge is acquired and processed (p. 25).

As a mode of representation, the documentary encompasses a broad range of formats and genres: essay films, experimental video, television journalism, reality shows, social media. The documentary can include both factual and fictional elements and can employ the same editing techniques as narrative films. Narrative films and television shows may feature archival footage to bolster a sense of authenticity or immediacy. Experimental videos often interrogate footage from the television or film industries. Contemporary documentaries can be self-reflexive, performative, or interactive. Personal, essayistic works often feature a sense of reflexivity about what it means to interact with an increasing number of archival documents of the past.

In our media environment today, movies, television, mobile technology, and the internet are major components of our daily lives. Works within the wide spectrum of the documentary mode increasingly feature repurposed audiovisual archival content from within this mediated environment: footage from movies, television, journalism, social media, and personal video.

Today, approaching many kinds of documentaries through a realist lens is inadequate. Alan Renov writes, “ruling out the naïve assertion that ‘objective truth’ has ever been attainable through filmic representation, the documentary structure represents various positions to reality that are by nature, almost reactions to or subversion of the promise of cinematic ‘realism’” (Renov, 1993, p. 7).

To Stella Bruzzi, the documentary can be approached as a performative “negotiation between the real event and its representation” (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 13) highlighting Lacan’s notion that “reality is what is beyond discourse” (Renov, 1993, p. 7). Works within the documentary mode that heavily re-purpose media footage can reveal insights about the epistemology and forms of mediating reality itself, causing us to question our own subjectivity within the mediated system.

Jaimie Baron has argued that the repurposing of audiovisual footage forms the contemporary experience of history today. Baron builds on Vivian Sobchack’s argument (1999) that the point of distinction of the documentary is not simply whether it is factual or fictional; rather, it is the viewer’s reception and their investment and identification with the work. Similarly, Baron locates the meaning of archival footage in the viewer’s reception and recognition of it. In her explication of the “archive effect,” Baron demonstrates that people read repurposed archival footage through sensed disparities

in time or intention. Audiences sense a temporal disparity from the content or the material aspects of the footage such as its graininess or VHS quality. A disparity of intention is evoked when footage is re-contextualized to create new meaning, while still containing a trace of its original context, intention, or mode of production. Between these two senses of disparity, viewers make sense of audiovisual representations of the past as "archival" documents.

While Baron focuses her analyses primarily on photographs and moving image, her framework of reception can be applied to music as well. Recorded music can have a strong temporal and contextual component to it. I expand on Baron's framework of reception by applying a more focused inquiry into how the repurposing of music in documentaries (the soundtrack) can function to create new meaning about the historical or news footage.

How popular music functions critically in films, documentaries and remix videos is an under-studied area of research today. However, music plays an increasingly important role in our society, which is reflected in the multitude of ways that it is reappropriated.

When popular music is repurposed with news footage it can reframe historical events and challenge prevailing conventions in the news media. The inclusion of music can also inspire new engagements with the audiovisual footage of the past. Looking to the essay film, I examine how music can be used in ways that problematize, interrogate or resist dominant representations of history. I consider the potential of repurposed music in the essay film to reflect ways in which individual subjectivity, popular culture, and historical events are inter-related.

1.4 The Essay Films of Adam Curtis

With unrivaled access to the BBC television archives, Adam Curtis' essay films feature an extensive and rapidly-executed repurposing of audiovisual footage.[2] Curtis mixes a vast array of archival news and historical footage with an equally substantial, often disjointed music selection featuring classical, pop, rock, industrial music, sound effects and film scores.

In a career that spans over three decades, Curtis has produced a prolific body of intricately-edited works that have garnered both praise and criticism. Curtis focuses on how history has been represented through dominant systems of power, including the political sphere, the commercial sphere, and the industries of media, technology, and finance. He juxtaposes BBC footage with strategically selected music, not just to bolster the emotional salience of the story, but often to constitute his arguments.

I focus my analysis on his key objective to draw attention to the enduring relationship between cultural hegemony and individual fantasies and pleasures throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Curtis explicitly states that one of his main goals is to show how individuality is a political idea. In describing *It Felt Like a Kiss* (2009), he

[2] Baron uses the term "audiovisual" to describe a range of "indexical audiovisual documents such as photographs, film, videos, and sound recordings" (Baron, 2013, p. 3). In this dissertation, my use of the term "audiovisual" refers to any combination of moving image and audio footage, in the way that Michel Chion has conceptualized it (Chion, 1994). While Chion has applied his audiovisual analyses to fictional, narrative films, I broaden the concept to analyze any media that combines audio and visual footage in today's digital environment.

has argued, "The politics of our time. . . are deeply embedded in the ideas of individualism. . . But it's not the be-all-and-end-all. . . The notion that you only achieve your true self if your dreams, your desires are satisfied. . . It's a political idea" (Qtd. In Brooker, 2009).

Curtis' depiction of the relationship between the personal and the political embodies Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony: popular culture has the propensity to reflect and reinforce the economic structure that serves the powerful, and do so in a way that can simultaneously be pleasurable, consensual, and naturalizing (Gramsci, 1926). This includes the extent to which the concepts of "individuality" and the "self" have been crafted and manipulated by advertising companies, politicians, and other systems of power, an argument which Curtis has centralized in *The Century of the Self* (2002). In subsequent works, Curtis has traced how radical individuality has resulted in a fetishization of the individual and has led to today's state of social media-manipulated passivity (Bourke, 2009; Curtis, 2009; 2010; 2016).

Music plays a significant role in constituting Curtis' intention to "show to you that the way you feel about yourself and the way you feel about the world today is a political product of the ideas of that time" (Curtis, qtd. in Manchester International Festival Theater Program, 2009). In an interview with Nathan Budzinski (2011) Curtis has described that too often, news articles are either focused on "you, you, you, what songs you like, what you feel today, where do you want to go today, or that" or they are focused on "big, grand narratives, but done in a very dry and boring way." There is nothing in between. To Curtis, music is an important means through which the individual and the political are linked.

Through his unique audiovisual style, Curtis attempts to bridge these two levels of discourse. He states, “What I'm intrigued by more and more is that increasingly we live in an emotional time, and people pattern in a much more emotional way than they used to . . . And the collage with music, they're much more open to that . . . The trick, in the future, will be to put them together . . . To be blunt, music’s probably the link” (Curtis, qtd. in Budzinski, 2011).

Curtis’ work has been analyzed in various ways. Paul Arthur’s (2007) and Errol Morris’ (2006) interviews with Curtis provide foundational examinations of his unique approach to journalism. Other significant interviews include Curtis’ aforementioned discussion with Nathan Budzinski (2011) in which he elaborates on his use of music. In his interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist (2012), Curtis expands on his literary inspirations, notably John Dos Passos. Curtis cites Dos Passos’ *USA Trilogy* (1930-1936) as one of his biggest influences.[3]

Another widely-cited article is Jonathan Rosenbaum’s 2008 critique of Curtis’ work in *Film Quarterly*. Rosenbaum presents a justified concern about the propensity for Curtis’ style of filmmaking to take on a conspiratorial or propagandistic tone.

In her master’s thesis, Maureen Jolie Anderson (2013) has analyzed the technique of familiarity and de-familiarity and its effect on narration in Curtis’ feature, *It Felt Like a Kiss* (2009). John Doyle’s 2017 article in *Studies in Documentary Film*

[3] Recently, Matt Hanson (2019, December 29) has re-examined the significance of Dos Passos’ literary work, arguing that the style excellently captures today’s media environment.

approaches Curtis' project as "radical mixology," invoking concepts from the field of remix studies. More recently, Rob Coley (2017, 2018) has examined Curtis' latest work as a form of essay filmmaking that functions to critique the Western, neoliberal mode of creative production.

Yet for such a unique voice and prolific output, there is comparatively little academic research on his films. Rob Coley acknowledges that "the work of Adam Curtis is notably absent from critical discussion of the contemporary essay film" (2017). No full-length study has been devoted to Curtis' unique audiovisual techniques and style. Sarah Keith's 2013 article, "Half of it's just finding the right music" in *Studies in Documentary Film* is the only journal article that scrutinizes Curtis' techniques of re-appropriating music (Keith, 2013). Neither has a recent analysis included a focus on his recent works (2015-2016) in addition to the broader chronology of his oeuvre, which begins in the early 1990s.

My method of analyzing Curtis' audiovisual juxtapositions builds on Claudia Gorbman's approach to film music (1987; 2014; 2017) and Michel Chion's (1994; 2014) method of audiovisual analysis. In this project, I extend a multimodal textual analysis to the role of repurposed music as it functions in the documentary. I focus on how repurposed music creates new meanings or perspectives in combination with other modalities including visual footage, captions and voice-over. To do so I synthesize approaches from within multimodal textual analysis, documentary studies, sound studies, and popular music studies.

First, I survey Curtis' techniques of audiovisual juxtaposition throughout his filmography ranging from 1993 to 2016. I then demonstrate three closer analyses of

individual works: *The Trap* (2007)*, It Felt like a Kiss* (2009)*,* and his most recent work, *HyperNormalisation* (2016). This selection, I believe, is representative of the broad range of styles and formats of his work over the last three decades. *The Trap* was originally broadcast as a three-part television series and *It Felt Like a Kiss* was originally shown as a 55-minute video installation. *HyperNormalisation* is Curtis' most recent work, and was released directly to the BBC iPlayer. It is composed of much more recent footage, digital videos, and music.

I argue that Curtis uses techniques of audiovisual juxtaposition to form a radical critique of television news journalism. Curtis uses music to engender affective reactions, identification, and memory on the part of the viewer and to compel them to recognize their own subjectivity in the historical and news narratives. His strategies open audiences up to new emotional and affective possibilities of engagement with the footage. This study aims to raise a greater consideration of the power of music and sound to signify meaning and structure people's experiences of the audiovisual representation of the past and the present.

1.5 Description of Chapters

Chapter Two examines various discourses of reappropriation. It begins by detailing strategies and theories of montage and radical juxtaposition in the historical avant-garde tradition. Then, it examines techniques of reappropriation in the genres of the essay film, the collage film, and the political remix video, with a consideration of the influence of the development of television and video. The chapter concludes by raising current theoretical concerns from within the contemporary field of digital remix theory.

Chapter Three presents the foundations of my methodological approach to multimodal textual analysis. First, I detail seminal contributions to the textual analysis of the image by Roland Barthes and WJT Mitchell. Then, I compare the framework to the multimodal analysis of the documentary. Building on Claudia Gorbman's insights into film music and Michel Chion's method of audiovisual analysis, I present an approach to the specific study of reappropriated music. I delineate my inquiry into how archival music, moving image, captions, and voice-over function together to make meaning in documentary film. I focus on three key considerations: affective reactions, social identification, and memory.

Chapter Four presents an overview of the audiovisual techniques featured in Curtis' filmography over the last three decades. First, I describe Curtis' notable style of pairing incongruous music and news footage. I then present existing scholarly approaches to Curtis' project. I delineate my focus on the audiovisual devices used to represent one of his main argumentative themes: that the personal, individual experience is shaped and connected to larger political and ideological forces of power.

I then present a chronological survey of Curtis' strategies of audiovisual juxtaposition throughout his filmography, beginning with *Pandora's Box* (1992) and concluding with *Bitter Lake* (2015).

Chapter Five continues with a close analysis of the audiovisual strategies deployed in *The Trap* (2007) and *It Felt Like a Kiss* (2009). In both films, audiovisual juxtapositions are used to illustrate how ideological forces shape people's understanding of freedom and individuality. *It Felt like a Kiss* features commercial television footage edited to reveal people's cruel attachments to its optimistic promises.

In *The Trap* (2007), Curtis cyclically repeats a selection of leitmotifs developed from classic Hollywood suspense movie soundtracks to signify sinister, underlying ideological forces.

In the three-episode miniseries, *The Trap*, Curtis juxtaposes the music with different examples of how Cold War ideology has influenced virtually every sphere of American life: economics, finance, politics, and individual freedom. Curtis argues that philosophical perspectives that developed out of the Cold War have led to a paranoid and cynical view of humanity and an obsession with predictability and control. He uses music to illustrate how various promises of freedom over the last six decades— such as personal freedom, economic freedom, or freedom from depression— have all been underpinned by the same Cold War ideology. Curtis inverts the function of the Hollywood film score; he uses the music to critique, rather than perpetuate the calculated, cynical way of thinking. Additionally, he deploys 1990s rock music to question a false senses of "newness."

In *It Felt Like a Kiss* Curtis features music and captions to interrogate dominant media representations of America during the 1950s and 1960s. Curtis centralizes the role of music to reveal how "The American Dream," as it has been manifest through dominant representations on television, sharply contrasts with people's lived experiences. His audiovisual juxtapositions highlight how the music and culture industry foster affective attachments to "the good life" in the face of uncertainty and chaos.

It Felt Like a Kiss is Curtis' only work in which there is no voice-over. Like the music video genre, music is the dominant modality which he re-contextualizes through captions and visual footage. Drawing on Jaimie Baron's analysis of the use of music in

Leslie Thornton's *Other Worldy* (1999) (Baron, 2013, pp. 86-87) I argue that Curtis uses music to implicate the viewer's own bodily reactions into the production of the media spectacle. His strategies compel a greater attention to how musical qualities such as rhythm, instrumentation, and vocalization can engender and perpetuate cultural values.

Chapter Six analyzes the audiovisual strategies deployed in Curtis' most recent essay film, *HyperNormalisation* (2016). I focus on several devices including longer music video-style montages, the inclusion of "hauntological" electronic music, and the strategic juxtaposition of YouTube videos to convey the experience of the infrastructure of the internet.

I analyze how the dynamics between the personal and the political are manifest in two major sub-themes of the work: how optimistic promises of computer utopianism have led to alienation, filter bubbles and invisible corporate power; and how individuals have retreated into themselves as a means to ward off chaos and unpredictability.

I argue that Curtis' foregrounding of hauntological electronic music demonstrates the historiographical capacity of musical recording. His deployment of the electronic music also demonstrates how sound can be used to signify elements of reality that are not visible.

Curtis' juxtaposition of digital videos raises concern about the role of invisible algorithms in structuring what people encounter and read in the digital environment. It also raises questions about the intended audience of self-performance online, in which digital home videos can be highly reactive to larger social forces. Last, it questions the evidentiary quality of digital videos today and points to their capacity to emanate a sense of unpredictability.

Chapter Seven presents a broader analysis of how Curtis uses audiovisual juxtapositions to foreground the dynamics between personal subjectivity, hegemonic culture, and political power. In all his works, Curtis demonstrates how popular culture has developed in relation to postwar social, political, and technological history. Curtis' devices of audiovisual juxtaposition demonstrate how music can function as a point of historical signification. Additionally, Curtis strategically uses music to support different points of view, such as his own authorial interpretation as well as the perspectives of the characters depicted. This also includes the viewer's own media subjectivity, as the musical juxtapositions force the viewer to recognize and identity the popular culture and news footage.

I approach Curtis' works according to the conceptual framework of the archive effect. Through intentional disparities evoked from the radical juxtaposition of image and news footage, Curtis compels the viewer to engage with the archival footage in new affective ways. The temporal disparities created through the juxtapositions confuse the audience's sense of pastness, allowing for the possibility of a greater sense of continuity between the past and the present. I also consider how his defiance of generic conventions functions to inspire new interactions with the representation of unfolding events as they occur (future events).

I conclude by arguing that Curtis' essay films serve to critique dominant news narratives through the interrogation of the relationship between individual pleasure and political ideology. Curtis' works demonstrate a critical navigation of the audiovisual archive through the dynamic insertion of human presence.

Chapter Eight presents a concluding overview of the study. I suggest further areas of research involving musical soundtracks and reappropriation including how the method of multimodal analysis of appropriated music can be applied to other contemporary genres.

The chapter concludes by posing questions about the future of the audiovisual experience of history and reality. I reaffirm how this subject addresses contemporary concerns of epistemology and ethics. Last, I consider the ongoing role of sound in constructing meaning and signifying reality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background

Since 1999, new media technology and a growing digital infrastructure have accelerated the production and distribution of audiovisual content to the extent that repurposing footage has become a common rhetorical device. Recent scholars in the fields of archive and memory studies (Baron, 2013; Brunow, 2013, 2015; Erll, 2011, 2017; Erll and Rigney, 2009) have used the term “remediation” to focus on how the repurposing of audiovisual footage can be employed in genres like the documentary. The concept of remediation was originally coined by Bolter and Grusin in 1999 as the appropriation or repurposing of forms, techniques, or social significance of other media in order “to rival or refashion them in the name of the real” (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p. 57). Memory and archive studies scholars have adopted the term to refer to the repurposing of audiovisual footage itself. Techniques of repurposing audiovisual footage, they argue, have the power to shape and revise cultural memory by evoking new audiovisual engagements with the past (Baron, 2013; Brunow, 2013, 2015; Erll, 2011, 2017; Erll and Rigney, 2009; Landsberg, 2015).

To Jaimie Baron, the ability to make sense of coherent narratives or patterns within the repurposing of archival content is central to our understanding of history and reality. She argues that in this new digital environment, traditional distinctions between what is “official” archival footage and what is “found” footage have eroded. The archival document is not “an indication of official sanction or storage location” but, rather, an “experience of reception” which she calls the archive effect (Baron, 2013, pp. 6-7).

Baron argues that the experience of something as archival, and a corresponding feeling of “pastness,” is affectively sensed. Baron articulates two key components to the archive effect: a sensed disparity of time (then vs. now) and a sensed disparity of intention (original source vs. appropriated context). The reception of archival disparities is based in part on the viewer’s cultural, extra-textual knowledge. A sense of temporal disparity may be elicited from the material quality of the archival footage (ie. it is black and white or grainy). An intentional disparity arises when the viewer perceives a difference between the original context of the footage and the new meaning derived from its re-contextualization. Archival footage, Baron argues, carries with it some excess beyond the filmmaker’s intentions, causing a sense of resistance with its re-contextualization; this contributes to “its aura of evidentiary authority” (2013, p. 25).

2.2 Reappropriation as Critique

This dissertation focuses Baron’s framework of the archive effect on the question of how filmmakers or artists can repurpose archival music to challenge or subvert dominant historical narratives. In this sense, it deals with a subset of the broad range of historiographical material to which Baron’s notion of the “archive effect” can apply. I focus on critical works that remix or reappropriate material as a means of political and cultural resistance. Specifically, I am concerned with musical footage that is deliberately reappropriated in dramatic, disparate, and unconventional ways.[4]

[4] I use the term “juxtaposition” to describe the relationship between music and footage or music and voice-over argument, as well as any multimodal combination of representational modes (image, text, voice-over, etc.).

Throughout the tradition of avant-garde art, artists have made use of materials available to them in their new media environment (such as the power of mechanical reproducibility offered through photography and film) to challenge dominant modes of perception and raise theoretical and ethical questions concerning the role of media technology in our society. Critical strategies of reappropriation can be located in various genres such as the remix, video art, and found footage or collage films, which have all been inspired by the historical traditions of avant-garde art.[5] My analysis explores the critical potential of the reappropriation of music by first contextualizing it within these traditions.

2.3 The Historical Avant-Garde

Adrian Danks (2006, p. 241) describes the tradition of filmic reappropriation as:

> A broad filmmaking practice encompassing the use of found footage in documentary cinema, stock footage in fictional cinema, home-movie footage in some feminist cinema and the often radical re-contextualization of a vast array of images and sounds in examples of avant-garde cinema.

He aligns found footage, compilation, collage or "archival' cinema" within this tradition.

Radical forms of juxtaposition and reappropriation can be located throughout the history of filmmaking. History's earliest filmmakers could not draw from a pre-existing archive of moving image footage. They experimented with capturing "found" subjects in the world around them, in a candid and un-staged way. Subjects for the camera were found accidentally, randomly, or deliberately collected or documented (Hicks, 2007).

[5] I use the term "reappropriation" broadly, which encompasses processes of remix and re-contextualization.

Practicing his Kino-Eye style of filmmaking, Dziga Vertov trained filmmakers to approach and embed themselves in the Russian streets. He blended both staged and candid shots to capture the daily lives of fellow Russian citizens.

In the early years of filmmaking there was no distinction between documentary and fiction film. Early films featured a single shot and frame, akin to a photo-play. All was a spectacle of light, which Tom Gunning refers to as the "cinema of attraction" (Gunning, 1990). This is exemplified in Louis Lumière's first film, *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* [*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon*] (1895).

As film techniques of cutting and splicing developed, state-sponsored newsreels appropriated various kinds of footage to form the first audiovisual accounts of the news. Newsreels were presented in a straightforward, explanatory way, guided by the voice-over. The footage was frequently recycled in different reels and mixed with sound and different narrative arguments often to bolster support for nationalist agendas.

The European avant-garde art world of the 1920s and 1930s became the main domain of the first creative reappropriations of film footage. Russian avant-gardists such as Dziga Vertov, Esfir Shub and Sergei Eisenstein, credited as the originator of the montage, embraced and refined techniques of editing different cuts of footage together to form a continuous whole.

Sergei Eisenstein (2014/1928-1945) developed the first theory of the emergence of new meaning in this form of image synthesis. Through his films and writing, Eisenstein demonstrated "the creation of a sense or meaning not objectively contained in the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition" (Bazin,

1990/1967, p. 25). The combination of the separate parts, Eisenstein argued, could lead to new, added meaning.

Working with Eisenstein as an editor for a Soviet state-run film company, Esfir Shub edited Western films to the Soviet standards of what was appropriate for audiences. Shub created original documentaries by re-editing newsreel footage according to Eisenstein's principles of montage theory. Paul Arthur writes that "the work by Esther Shub [and] Dziga Vertov . . . offers a politicized recalibration or inversion of scenes culled from the 'official' newsreels and more marginal materials" (2000, p. 59).

Through his position as a state journalist, Vertov also made use of his special access to official news content to reappropriate the footage into new forms. Vertov implemented kaleidoscopic montages of scenes of everyday life in Russia to empower people to better apprehend the mechanical pace of modernity and industrialization (Hicks, 2007; Vertov, 1984/1935; Nichols, 2001).

Vertov defined his philosophy of Kino-Eye as "the conquest of time (the visual linkage of phenomena separated in time)" and "the possibility of seeing life processes in any temporal order or at any speed inaccessible to the human eye" (1984/1929, p. 86).

Seth Feldman (1998) describes Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1928) as a "high-speed machine meant to shock the viewer into empathy with the industrial age."[6]

> Vertov was determined to show the world seen by the movie camera *as the entire cinematic apparatus sees it* (i.e., including the editing as well as the filming

[6] See Vertov, D., Kaufman, M., Tsivian, Y., International Museum of Photography and Film, & Alloy Orchestra. (1995/1928). *Man with a Movie Camer*a. BFI (British Film Institute) [Video File]

> process). In *the Man with a Movie Camera*, images are taken from every conceivable camera angle and distance, as well as employing numerous types of camera movement. (Feldman, 1998, pp. 40-41)

One evident influence on the avant-garde filmmakers was photographic collage, a method coined by artists George Braque and Pablo Picasso in the early 20th century. The collage technique would be embraced within modernist movements including Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism.

Photographic collage became one method by which Surrealists could subvert people's emotional and psychological investments in "realistic" photographic images as pure indexes of reality. Surrealist approaches to repurposing footage transformed seemingly "banal" everyday footage into a new light, inspiring viewers to rethink what is "ordinary." Surrealists often incorporated elements of chance and aleatory methods of re-assemblance as a means to circumvent conscious, rational conventions of thinking, which, according to Surrealist rationale, hampered access to the creative imagination.

These Surrealist techniques are comparable to what Paul Arthur describes as the "method of 'estrangement' found in films by Rene Clair, Hans Richter, Walter Ruttman, and Charles Dekeukeleire." Arthur writes that their filmic reworkings "emphasiz[e] fantastical, previously ignored, formal or metaphoric qualities in otherwise banal scenes" (Arthur, 2000, p. 59). A similar approach was subsequently adopted by the Situationists, as is evident in the films of Guy Debord and the practice of détournement (Creekmur, 2014).

In a 1962 essay, Susan Sontag argues that "the Surrealist tradition in all [the] arts is united by the idea of destroying conventional meanings, and creating new meanings or counter-meanings through radical juxtaposition (the 'collage principle')"

(Sontag, 1962).[7] The avant-garde continues to influence critical cultural production today. British art historian Julian Stallabrass (2003, pp. 8-9) writes that:

> Many of the actual conditions of avant-gardism are present in online art: its anti-art character, its continual probing of the borders of art, and of art's separation from the rest of life, its challenge to the art institutions, genuine group activity, manifestos and collective programmes, and most of all an idea of forward movement (as opposed to one novelty merely succeeding another).

However, the avant-garde art of the 1920s-1930s can be distinguished from postwar avant-gardist movements, the latter of which have come to be referred to as the neo-avant-garde. Hal Foster describes the neo-avant-garde as "a loose grouping of [postwar] North American and Western European artists of the 1950s and '60s who reprised and revised such avant-garde devices of the 1910s and '20s" (1994, p. 5). These movements included "Neo-Dada, Nouveau Réalisme, Fluxus, Pop, Minimalism and Conceptual Art" (Hopkins, 2006).

Peter Bürger first developed the distinction between the traditional avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde (1974). He argued that in the postwar environment, the neo-avant-garde artists made use of techniques that had already been culturally legitimized by art institutions. Eduardo Navas, a leading scholar on contemporary remix, argues that the neo-avant-gardists recycled media that already had cultural value (Navas, 2014a, pp. 116-132).

[7] "There is a Surrealist tradition in the theater, in painting, in poetry, in the cinema, in music, and in the novel; even in architecture there is, if not a tradition, at least one candidate, the Spanish architect, [Antoni] Gaudí" (Sontag, 1962).

To Navas, cultural production today is characterized by a metaloop that consists of two levels: the introduction of new material and its recycling or critique. The more a cultural text is recycled, the more cultural and capital value it gains; the greater the gain in value, the greater the likelihood that any strategies of resistance present in the text will be sublated through the process of legitimation. Today, this process is made almost instantaneous due to new media technology.

Navas states that there is still room for creativity and critique. Yet resistance can no longer come from the edges; it can only be produced from within this metaloop, "well within established paradigms. In other words, material is being remixed in terms of discourse in order to develop a deeper understanding of history" (Navas, 2014a, p. 125).

2.4 The Essay Film

The genre of the essay film, which originated in the work of the Left Bank "essayist" filmmakers, provides another context from which to approach Curtis' filmmaking techniques. Techniques of reappropriation have continued throughout film history since the 1920s and 1930s, albeit not as the privileged mode of representation in the non-fiction domain. Among the Left Bank experimental filmmakers of the 1960s onwards, the reappropriation of different footage would become a means to explore filmic, national, and personal memory.

Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 in a review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana.* Later, he expanded on the concept to define it as a "branch of film production which goes to the actual, and photographs it and edits it and shapes it. It attempts to give form and pattern to the complex of direct observation"

(2002/1946, p. 91). While acknowledging the concept of the documentary as a "clumsy" one, Grierson was attempting to distinguish the genre from both newsreels *and* Hollywood films. He referred to newsreels as "lecture films," absent of all dramatization. "They describe, and even reveal, but, in any aesthetic sense only rarely reveal" (1976/1932-1934, p. 20). On the other hand, he wrote that "studio films largely ignore [the] possibility of opening up the screen on the real world" (1976/1932-1934, p. 21).

Influenced by British traditions of Empiricism, state-building and the social theories of the Chicago school, Grierson largely eschewed avant-garde aesthetics in favor of a straightforward and pedagogical approach to non-fiction filmmaking known as socialist realism (Nichols, 2001). One technique that Griersonian documentaries shared with newsreels was the use of voice-over to explain the meaning of the footage and form the logical argument that drove the film.

In the 1950s and 1960s, newly accessible, handheld recording devices emerged within the context of a radically new postwar environment, inspiring filmmakers of all kinds to embrace a new aesthetic. "Realism," famously promoted by André Bazin in the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* which he founded in 1951, features long takes, direct sound, limited effects (cuts, added sound) and the absence of authorial voice-over or montage (Corner, 2009). For many filmmakers, Realism was a means to capture the ambivalent subjective experience of the postwar world. Filmmakers abstained from employing techniques of repurposing footage which had become a convention of national propaganda during the war.

Some documentarians during these decades took inspiration from neorealist films, such as *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), to produce more hybrid works of creative non-

fiction. Examples include *On the Bowery* (1956), *Exiles* (1961), and *Little Fugitive* (1953). The works incorporated a heavy amount of improvisation as they chronicled diverse human experiences. Simultaneously, they featured non-diegetic music scores to produce an interesting hybrid between genres.

The techniques of repurposing featured in the more experimental works of the Rive Gauche / Left Bank filmmakers added a scrutiny to self-reflexivity. Figures in this movement included Agnès Varda, Chris Marker, and Jean-Luc Godard, one of the leading voices of the Nouvelle Vague. They were of the first generation of filmmakers to have grown up with cinema. Their use of repurposing drew attention to the constructed nature of film and reflected an awareness of the historical film archive. Decidedly closer to the avant-garde, their essayistic films revealed how both personal and collective memory can be constructed through film, and how important meaning can be achieved through assemblages that exist between fact and fiction, the actual and the staged.

Alain Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard* [*Night and Fog*] (1956) made use of Holocaust footage to disarm viewers and simultaneously provide a point of identification with them. Chris Marker's re-editing of photographic footage into an imaginary narrative of a post-nuclear world in *La Jetée* [*The Jetty*] (1962) addressed the power of official narratives, characterized by authorial voice-over, to shape people's understanding of history. Composed almost entirely of appropriated still photos, *La Jetée* was a speculative account of an experiment in time travel in a post-nuclear world. The voice-over adopted an authoritative tone that mirrored how "official" history was told in expositive documentaries and newsreels of the previous decades.

Jean-Luc Godard juxtaposed non-actors and found footage with fictional characters in his narratives. This fragmented style of filmmaking emphasized the ambivalent, split nature of subjectivity. An example is Godard's *Masculin Féminin: 15 Faits Précis* [*Masculine Feminine: 15 Specific Events*] (1966) additionally sub-titled with an inter-title card as "*Les enfants de Marx et de Coca-Cola, comprenne qui voudra* [*Children of Marx and Coca-Cola, go figure*]". The film mixed interviews with real people and actors to explore disparities between gender roles in a quickly globalizing France (Giovannoli, 2016, p. 140). "Even though *Masculin Féminin* is a fictional movie inspired by documentary, it is probably the first 'cinematographic essay' by Godard" (Giovannoli, 2016, p. 141).

Hamish Ford argues that in *Two or Three Things I know about Her* (1967), Godard [flattens] the characters depicted on the screen and "draws attention to himself on the soundtrack as the only feasible subject, via trademark inter-titles and other characteristic reflexive flourishes – most notably, collagist editing of media images, paintings, and music (here fragmentary snatches of a late Beethoven quartet)" (Ford, 2012, p. 48). Drawing on a previous argument by Alfred Guzzetti (1975), Ford interprets the film as Godard's expression of a wish for any kind of access into the other's subjective experience; instead, the film shows that "there is only a way to point at it" (Guzzetti, 1975; Ford, 2012, p. 48).

In recent decades, the Left Bank films have been further analyzed through the concept of the essay film. A sub-genre of the documentary, the essay film has been the subject of a renewed scholarship (Rascaroli, 2008; Alter, 2007; Corrigan, 2011). Originally coined by Hans Richter in 1940, the essay film is a hybrid film form which

exists on a spectrum between the documentary and experimental video art. Scholars have analyzed the essay film according to Aldous Huxley's definition of the essay as drawing on "the three poles of description: the personal and the auto-biographical . . . the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular . . . and the abstract-universal" (Huxley, 1958, qtd. in Rascaroli, 2008). Paul Arthur describes how the use of found footage and the collage method are hallmark components of the essay film. He writes: "The emphasis is on converging angles of enquiry rather than historical nostalgia or pastiche . . . Essays prefer to gnaw at the truth value, cultural contexts, or interpretative possibilities of extant images" (2003, p. 164).

Adam Curtis' works are often labelled as essay films (Arthur, 2007; Budzinski, 2011; Coley, 2017, 2018; Darke, 2012; Doyle, 2017; Hatherley, 2017; Keith, 2013; Myerscough, 2007; Porton, 2014). Owen Hatherley argues that *Bitter Lake* and *HyperNormalisation* are even closer to the essay film tradition than his earlier works because they are composed entirely of archival footage (Hatherley, 2017).

Rob Coley's most recent work (2018) uses the term "infrastructural aesthetics" to evaluate Curtis' work according to Hito Stereyl's "second stage of the essay film" (2007):

> This encounter occurs in the apparent disjunction between content and form, between political argument and aesthetic operation. Indeed, insofar as these films express the abstract space that conditions their possibility — typically conceptualized in terms of a network — his method supports the claim that the essayistic form is now "a dominant form of narrative in times of post-Fordist globalization . . . symptomatic of post-industrial information economies, characterized by 'the compulsory manufacturing of difference' extreme flexibilization, and distracted modes of attention." (Steyerl, 2017, pp. 276-277)

I approach Curtis' works as essay films predominantly because they touch upon Huxley's three poles of the essay. The objective and factual can be found in the news footage; the abstract and universal poles are located in the narrative voice-over argument, and the personal, subjective element is endemic to his use of music, which reflexively draws attention to the audience as media subjects.

Unlike the essay films of the Left Bank, the pole of the personal and subjective is not Curtis' own self-reflexivity, but a reflexivity regarding the media environment in which the audiences are constituted as subjects. By re-contextualizing television footage with music and voice-over, Curtis' works can reflect how original news broadcasts situate the audience as "televisual subjects."

One important way Curtis re-contextualizes news footage is through his voice-over, which can provide a point of psychological and emotional identification with the audience as "living social actors" (Nichols, 2016). Yet it is Curtis' strategic use of music that bridges the divide in conventional news between the communication of grand historical narratives and a hyper-focus on the desires of the consumer-spectator, which Curtis refers to as "you, you, you." Curtis explicitly states that the task of the journalist of the future will be to put them together. To Curtis, music is the link.

2.5 The Found Footage Film

Curtis' techniques can also be observed in relation to the found footage films and political remix videos that developed in the 1970s. Found footage discourse was re-invigorated in the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by the growth of film studies departments; the introduction of historiographical theory; and the emergence of videotape (Corner, 2009). Video made it easier to access, copy and archive a growing body of film and

television footage. Prior to video, television content, if recorded from the live broadcast at all, was recorded and stored on kinescopes. Kinescope recordings were difficult to access and often limited to studios, many of which have since been lost or destroyed in warehouse fires.

For example, in his pioneering 1971 collage film, *Millhouse: A White Comedy*, Emile de Antonio edits together and condenses several television speeches that Nixon recorded over the rise and fall of his career, including the infamous “Checkers” speech. De Antonio’s reworking of the speeches satirizes Nixon’s capacity for deception and prevarication. De Antonio has since explained that the film could only be made due to “an anonymous delivery of hundreds of cans of news film—including a complete kinescope of the 1952 broadcast” (Whitney Museum of American Art, 2016).

For a new generation of film studies scholars, video would dramatically expand access to the film archive. Archival access became a crucial locus of power to be interrogated. Philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida emphasized that history is shaped according to dominant interpretations of archival documents, and that political power is facilitated by access to such records (Foucault,1972). According to Derrida, the essential criterion for democracy is “the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (Derrida,1996). This theory reflected and constituted an urgent need to reinterpret American history as it has been represented by dominant institutions (Arthur, 2000, p. 59). Thus, history became historiography: a fluid and constantly negotiated narrative which could be challenged, subverted, and redrawn.

With the advent of video, dominant narratives could be newly interrogated and critiqued through the reappropriation of television footage. Since its inception in the 1950s, commercial television has come to unite publics, legitimize cultural transformations and connect people through shared generational identities. The growth of the television industry was accompanied by new habits in viewership such as increased hours of watching, the use of television as an ambient background, and the adaptation of viewers' routines to the television broadcasting schedule. Robert Deming has explained that television culture involves choices of "what to look at (or not look at), where that choice is a result of habit, desire, and comfort, and seeing itself is regulated by the temporality of the television schedule" (Deming, 1985). Deming argues that "television, more than cinema or any other form of the mass media, is constructed to represent images of social reality and the subject's place in it" (Deming, 1985, p. 48).

Television journalism remains a powerful force unto people's sense of reality and history (O'connor, 1988; Edgerton, 2000; Wales, 2008). Television is the "principal means by which people learn about history today" (Edgerton, 2000, p. 7). Its form, formatting and conventions influence the "historical representations produced" and the embodied concerns of the present. "Television history as collective memory is the site of mediation where professional history meets popular history" (Edgerton, 2000, p. 9).

Sound plays an integral role in television which is markedly different from how sound functions in film. John Ellis writes that:

> The broadcast images [of television] depend upon sound to a rather greater degree than cinema's images. The image is characteristically pared down, and appears as though it is immediate or live. This generates a kind of complicity with the TV viewer, a complicity that tends to produce the events represented as an 'outside world,' beyond the broadcast TV institution and the viewer's home

> alike. . . . The viewer tends to delegate his or her look to the TV itself: it is as though the TV Institution looks, the viewer passes his or her gaze across the sights in the TV eye. (1992, p. 112)

Television is a significant site in which our imagined community (Anderson, 2006/1983) is produced (Mi, 2005).[8] This is especially true of news programming, which has heightened its temporal immediacy after the events of September 11, 2001 through a continual emphasis on breaking news.

As sound plays an integral role in television, the reappropriation of televisual content with different sound and music has a unique potential to draw attention to the way that the institution of television structures the viewer's identification, legitimizes social meaning, and frames historical and news events.

Television footage has been a key material used by artists and experimental filmmakers drawing on the collage tradition. Bruce Conner's *A Movie* (1958) heralded a new generation of collage films (Wees, 1993, p. 12; Museum of Modern Art, 2016).[9] In *Report* (1967), Conner plays and replays television coverage of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in different fashions, such as backwards and upside down.

> The objective of Conner's reworking of the source footage is to draw attention to the mass media coverage of the event, and his treatment parodies television's

[8] Today, television and news watching habits are changing with the advent of the internet and streaming platforms. An entire generation has little personal experience with the television medium before it converged with digital streaming platforms. Yet there is still a culture of "live" television news broadcasting (Auslander, 2008) which often produces the television news clips that are later recirculated throughout the internet.

[9] Paul Arthur compares Adam Curtis' work to the movies of Bruce Connor, Lynne Sachs and Craig Baldwin (Arthur, 2007, p. 16).

> obsessive documentation of every aspect of the Kennedy assassination as a news "story." (Beattie, 2004, p. 144)

Jay Leyda wrote the first dedicated text on the compilation film tradition in 1964, tracing the technique back to the early stages of filmmaking (Leyda, 1964).[10] Additionally, William Wees' (1993) *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* remains an authoritative source on the subject. Wees distinguished three forms of found footage montage: compilation, collage, and appropriation. Wees argues that all three methods "capitaliz[e] on the manipulations of montage and the equivocal nature of cinematic representation" (1964, p. 40). Wees defines appropriation as the least critical and deconstructive of the three, citing the example of the image of a nuclear explosion in Don Wilson's music video for Michael Jackson's "The Man in the Mirror" (1988, p. 40). Wees draws on Leyda's definition of compilation as "any means by which the spectator is compelled to look at familiar shots as if he had not seen them before, or by which the spectator's mind is made more alert to the broader meanings of old materials" (Qtd. in Wees, p. 36). According to Wees, compilation can interpret footage in new ways, but only the collage method "challenges the representational nature of the image themselves" (Wees, 1993, p. 36).

[10] Seth Feldman tells the story of the young critic Jay Leyda's first viewing of Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* at a New York City movie theater in 1930. It was the first Soviet film that Leyda had ever seen. "Leyda found himself reeling. . . . Too stunned to sit through it again" (Feldman, 1998, p. 4).

In recent years, scholars have come to view Wees' distinctions as inadequate to describe our current media culture. In her 2018 book, *Archiveology*, Catherine Russell writes that:

> As more media makers proliferate, not only is more media available for recycling and mixing, it has become more and more part of everyday life. The distinction between historical reality and its mediation is less of a critical issue than the recognition that media history is a reality. (Russell, 2018, p. 20)

For instance, Wees' main example in his critique of the compilation mode is *The Atomic Cafe* (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty, 1982). Produced over a five-year period, *The Atomic Cafe* repurposes United States propaganda films, news footage and military training videos from the 1940s and 1950s about the atomic bomb. Examples include footage from duck-and-cover instructional videos and various animations of how the atomic bomb would annihilate cities.[11]

Wees argues that while the film implies certain footage was used as propaganda, it does not continually interrogate the representational nature of the footage. He gives the example of its use of the images of the actual explosion, which "are presented as straight fact: *this* is what the explosion looked like, *these* are the signifiers of an event solidly grounded in reality. . . ." (Wees, 1988, p. 38). However, Catherine Russell

[11] *Atomic Café* and Adam Curtis feature some of the same footage, such as clips from "The Kitchen Debate," a conversation between U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev on July 24, 1959 at the opening of the U.S. National Exhibition in Moscow. The Exhibition, sponsored by the United States, featured new American consumer goods including vehicles, games, media, and kitchen appliances. The clip is also featured in *It Felt Like a Kiss.*

argues that “rather than a realist mandate, *The Atomic Cafe* is about how nuclear anxiety was represented in popular culture and educational media” (Russell, p. 20). To Russell, *The Atomic Cafe* is an example of Stella Bruzzi’s concept of the performative documentary: “films that in and of themselves acknowledge the inherent instability of representing reality. . . . [And which] acknowledg[e] and emphasiz[e] the hidden aspect of performance” (Bruzzi, 1999/2000, pp. 152-153).

Bruzzi has also written about *The Atomic Cafe.* She writes, “Out of propaganda, *The Atomic Cafe* constructs ironic counter-propaganda; out of compiled images from various sources it constructs a straightforward dialectic between the past and the present” (1999/2000, p. 35) Like the works of de Antonio, *The Atomic Cafe* plays on “the complexity of the relationship between historical referent and interpretation. . . . It enact[s] a fundamental doubt concerning the purity of [its] original source material and its ability to reveal a truth that is valid, lasting and cogent” (Bruzzi, 1999/2000, p. 13).

Popular music plays an important role in creating new meaning as it is juxtaposed with American propaganda and other footage from the Cold War. The music is contemporaneous with the events depicted. For example, the filmmakers pair the footage with upbeat popular and rock music that refers to the atomic bomb or the Cold War, such as “When the Atom Bomb Fell,” recorded in 1945, or Carson Robison’s 1952 release, “I’m no Communist.” The music augments the film’s humorous take on atomic culture.

2.6 Remix Theory

The most recent discourse in which to contextualize Adam Curtis’ work is the post-digital field of “remix studies” (Conti, 2014; Doyle, 2017; Gallagher, 2017a, 2017b;

Kuhn, 2012; Manovich, 2007; Navas, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2017; Smith, 2009). Eduardo Navas writes that remix culture refers to today's period of creative production which dates back to the early 1990s (the beginning of the commercial internet and the period in which Curtis first began producing television series). Navas defines remix as "specific forms of expression using pre-existing sources (sound, image, text) to develop work that may be considered derivative while also gaining autonomy" (2017). Owen Gallagher argues that "the presence of sampled source material is the defining aesthetic characteristic of remix" (2017a, p. 2). To Navas, remix is fundamentally a discourse. Rachel Falconer interprets that remix is "the dominant pattern of human behavior in mass communication and the Internet" (Falconer, 2013). Remix is a form of "cultural glue" in which "the compulsive, obsessive action of 'cut/copy & paste' [is] the new norm of creative behavior" (Falconer, 2013).

Remix culture has roots in the musical experimentations of producers and DJs (Navas, 2014b, p. 4). Having emerged out of the study of sampling and DJ culture, remix theory provides a multimodal framework that does not privilege image over sound. This equivalent treatment of sampled source material is exemplified in John Doyle's analysis of Adam Curtis as a "remixologist" (2017). Doyle argues that in a remix, any modality can be foregrounded and recontextualized. "Remixed media may quote sounds over images, or video over text, or text over sounds. The quotes get mixed together" (2017, pp. 48-49).

Catherine Russell considers that remix theory has the possibility to address that which Wees' distinctions inadequately account for in our convergence culture (Russell 2018, p. 10). Remix addresses the rapid pace of circulation and recirculation of content.

Eli Horwatt argues that while the political (or critical) remix video draws from avant-garde practices, it is distinguished by “a wholly new method of distribution, an open accessible archive of source material, and a much larger audience” (2009, p. 77).

Additionally, remix theory addresses another issue pertaining to today’s information age: the production of new physical content is no longer a necessary element to cultural production.

> The mapping of information is most important, not information itself. The content no longer matters, only its presentation in a way that appears digestible. This is a new form of remixing that is primarily about citing, not really caring what the citation means. Material sampling (taking actual parts of an object to combine it with other elements) becomes incidental and accepted, but it is no longer needed. There is plenty in the archive to revisit. (Navas, 2012)

Eli Horwatt acknowledges that remix is different from the video art and avant-garde practices that sought to “disrupt the grammar and narratives of plundered works.” Rather, “digital remixers overwhelmingly work within the structures of the images they appropriate. . . . As works of art, political remixes can be critiqued for their parroting of hegemonic visual discourses in mainstream media” (2009, p. 81).

Critical remix “concerns itself with contemporaneous archival interventions” into the digital archive and its modes of distribution (Horwatt, 2009, p. 86). Owen Gallagher argues that the critical remix video is one of the “most potent and powerful forms of remix, capable of educating, persuading, and enabling social and political change, similar in many ways to persuasive advertising, documentary filmmaking, and political propaganda” (2017b, p. xiii).

Remix culture also features a post-modern awareness of intertextuality. Remix is produced and consumed by people in different ways depending on their experience and extra-textual background. Gallagher describes how, in critical remix videos, “visual

semiosis occurs differently in remixed and non-remixed content" (2017b, p. xv). The meaning of a given sign in a new environment demands a different cognitive process, which involves the audience's memory of it. "In remix, echoes of visual signs in their original context are ever-present." Gallagher argues that the viewing of a remix with no memory of the source material is an incomplete reading. However, "when the source material is watched in its original context *after* viewing the remix, the meaning of the remix is updated in the viewer's mind to account for the new information" (2017b, p. 4).

The polysemic way in which remixes may be read by different audiences is important when considering their potential to perpetuate hegemonies rather than to interrogate them. In her analysis, "Political remix video as discourse," Olivia Conti argues that using stereotypes "even in a parodic manner risks perpetuating them. . . . This potential of remix to be read as unwittingly institutional [by re-perpetuating dominant meaning] calls up questions of how it is read as it circulates throughout online venues" (2014, p. 352). Conti draws on Virginia Kuhn's argument that "a speech act depends on a "shared lexicon and intent to communicate" (Kuhn, 2012, p. 3). Conti argues that remix's criticality should be judged by its "participation in a discourse community" (2014, p. 353).

Eduardo Navas argues that the remix today is part of a metaloop of cultural production. The metaloop consists of two stages: the production of new material, followed by its recycling and cultural sublation, in which the content is culturally legitimized or capitalized on. Today, he argues, these processes occur almost simultaneously; any resistance "thrives within the loops" (2014a, p. 128). A critical remix, he argues, requires a self-awareness of this process.

> Just as capitalists are well-aware of the metaloops within the two layers of the framework of culture, and make the most of them for profit, cultural producers must become self-reflexively aggressive in using and appropriating the very same metaloops for the realization of a future that is rich in cultural production (Navas, 2014a, p. 129).

There is no clear consensus as to how to critically evaluate a cultural artifact incorporating techniques of remix or reappropriation. However, a synthesis of issues within the various discourses presented— the historical avant-garde, the found footage film, the essay film, and the remix, can provide a strong foundation from which to structure and contextualize such an inquiry.

3. METHODOLOGY

> Today, wherever there is music, there is money. Looking only at the numbers, in certain countries more money is spent on music than on reading, drinking, or keeping clean. Music, an immaterial pleasure turned commodity, now heralds a society of the sign, of the immaterial up for sale, of the social relation unified in money. It heralds, for it is prophetic. It has always been in its essence a herald of times to come.
>
> -Jacques Atalli, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music, 1977*[12]

3.1 Framework

3.1.1 Background

Researchers on film sound and music[13] often assert that the goal is not to invert the image/sound dichotomy by placing music and sound in a superior position to image. Accordingly, I approach Curtis' works as multimodal texts, featuring television and video footage, music, sound, voice-over and captions. To form my method of analysis I integrate concepts from text-image analysis, documentary and archive studies, popular music and film sound studies.

Music functions in unique ways to make meaning in film. Music, as a form of sound, is experienced very differently than images. As R. Murray Schafer as written, we have no ear lids. We cannot close our ears to sound. In our daily lives, we often hear things before we see them, from the bell of a distant clock tower to the sound of a

[12] (Atalli, 1985/1977, pp. 3-4)

[13] In his most recent publication translated into English, *Words on Screen*, Michel Chion has argued that meaning is always audio-logo-visual (2017).

friend’s voice calling our name (2003). In reality and in films, sound can indicate information about spaces and interiorities. Steve Goodman has expanded on the fact that sound, unlike light, is a vibrational force in the world (2012, pp. 80-82). Recorded sound is a materiality structured by instruments, recording technology and structures of archive. Music is a socially constructed kind of sound. Music is emotional, and can be used to reinforce or construe the meaning of a film.

For many reasons, the textual analysis of music in movies and documentaries is difficult to systematize. With these considerations of the unique quality of music in mind, I first examine how image/text analysis can form a foundation to approach the interaction between sound/image/argument in the compilation documentary. I then delineate my approach to the role of reappropriated music, which adds a substantial intertextual dimension to the meaning produced. Reappropriated music refers outward to social practice and can compel identification and memory along with affective reactions. I also consider the role of captions and text as they interact with the visual footage and music. Together, the different modalities produce rhythms which elicit an affective experience while also signifying meaning.

3.1.2 Multimodal Textual Analysis

As Roland Barthes has shown, images can evoke a range of cultural connotations. In his classic text, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” Barthes analyzes how an advertising image communicates meaning in combination with an accompanying linguistic message. Barthes writes that text may constrain the possible interpretations of the image through “anchoring.” Or, text and image may function together to provide a joint meaning in the form of “relaying” (Barthes, 1977, p. 38).

While Barthes focused this famous analysis on an advertisement, WJT Mitchell's study of photographic essays (1994, pp. 281-322) is even more pertinent to a multimodal approach to the essay film. Mitchell argues that in the photographic essay, the modalities of text and image often work to collaborate or resist each other in a way that neither modality is dominant in meaning-making; they are co-equal. Mitchell suggests that the co-equality and independence of text and image, necessary for a rigorous interrogation of their interactivity, functions well within the essay form. He likens the essay to the medium of photography. The essay form is a subjective attempt at an argument, comparable to the incomplete imposition of the subjective framing of the photograph. Both essays and photographs can reveal how their medium or form is "speaking for something" as an interpretation (1994, p. 289).

In his examination of four photographic essay case studies, Mitchell argues that meaning is located in the *resistance* between text and image. Image and text can differ in equality and in the ways they collaborate to make meaning. The two modes can work together to reinforce shared meaning, or, there can be "a subversion of the textual strategies that tend to incorporate photographs as illustrative or evidentiary examples" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 290).

Barthes' and Mitchell's discussions of the collaboration between image and text provide a framework to apply to the interaction between the visual footage and the voice-over in the documentary. Paul Arthur describes the "two basic modes of re-contextualization" of footage in the documentary as the illustrative/analogical and the metaphorical (Arthur, 2000, p. 64). The visual footage can serve as an illustrative example of the voice-over argument. Or, the voice-over can be paired with generic

images that serve as visual metaphors. The illustrative or analogical tends towards a Realist usage. In his analysis of Craig Baldwin's *Tribulation 99*, Michael Zryd describes that in this approach, "the archival footage acts as evidence to support the soundtrack, usually a voice-over, that articulates the central argument and, in effect, 'captions' the image" (Zryd, 2003, p. 48). The metaphorical mode of re-contextualization is used when "there is often no existing or available footage to accompany a verbal description of events. . . . Filmmakers routinely adduce generic shots to approximate, allude to, or symbolically represent historical occurrences" (Arthur, 2000, p. 64). Often, Arthur describes, these two strategies are co-mingled in a film. Footage can function both metaphorically and illustratively, which Zryd argues is typical of "generic image[s] common to mainstream documentary" (Zryd, 2003, p. 48).

Critical found footage documentaries and essay films can feature more of a resistance between the voice-over and image as described by Mitchell. "The found footage artist critically investigates the history *behind* the image, discursively embedded within its history" including its "production, circulation, and consumption" (Zryd, 2003, p. 42).

Experimental works can feature further incongruity between the image and the voice-over. In her reading of Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* [*A Land Without Bread*] (1932), Vivian Sobchack argues that the disparate footage dialectically undercuts the authority of the voice-over and contributes to a sense of "Surrealist juxtaposition" (2013/1980, p. 52).

Words, image and sound can also function “asynchronously,” in which the “audiovisual contract,” a synchrony between sound and image that encourages the viewer to approach the work realistically, is broken (Chion, 1994).

The recontextualization of audiovisual footage can also be approached using concepts from literary theory. Maureen Jolie Anderson (2013) has analyzed Curtis' narrative techniques in *It Felt Like a Kiss* according to Russian formalist Viktor Shklovksy's concepts of “familiarity and defamiliarty.” In his 1917 manifesto, “Art as Technique,” Shklovksy writes:

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (1988/1917, p. 15)

Parallels can be drawn between Shkolvksy's literary theory and Bertolt Brecht's concept of the “alienation effect” in his philosophy of theater (1964/1949). Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism may also be invoked in considering how the juxtaposition of music, text, and image can represent a confluence of voices or perspectives on an issue. “Dialogic speech . . . involves a multiplicity of speakers and a variety of perspectives; truth becomes something negotiated and debated, rather than something pronounced from on high” (Tighe, 2012).

3.1.3 Music and Affect

It is self-evident that music functions differently than image and text. As Roland Barthes has written, music can only be described “through the poorest of linguistic categories: the adjective” (1977, p. 179). While there are various analogies to be drawn

between photographic essays and documentaries or essay films, the added role of music functions in unique ways that require further elaboration.

The nature of music is a complex subject which can be approached through various fields including physics, neurobiology, musicology, psychology, or philosophy. In this dissertation I shall consider music as a series of sounds and silences that employs recognizable musical principles such as tone, rhythm, timbre, dynamics. As an art form, it evokes emotion and affect.[14] Moreover, music is highly social and engages in cultural, generic conventions shared by composers and audiences.

My aim is to explore how recorded music functions as a site in which personal, affective responses intersect with social practice and collective memory. In my analysis, I emphasize affect more than emotion. Affect broadly refers to bodily sensations and reactions that occur before individual states are consciously and linguistically identified as emotions. It is affects that are prominently evoked in Curtis' fast-paced audiovisual juxtapositions. Music listening, like affect, can be a pre-linguistic experience. Where I

[14] In the field of cognitive science, the emotional influence of movie music is studied through empirical investigations on cognition. Summaries of the cognitive approach can be found in Annabel J. Cohen (2010 and 2014). In this project, I draw from literature on affect from within the humanities field, in which theorists are seeking to capture how "affect" is represented and codified through literary and cinematic forms (Ahmed, 2010; Brinkema, 2014; Berlant, 2011). Still other scholarship on emotions and film music combines both cognitive and literary approaches (Plantiga, 2009).

want to foreground the distinctive nature of emotion, as well as affect, I will use both terms.[15]

I also draw from critical, literary approaches to affect to consider how affective states are culturally perpetuated via genres, rhythms, and conventions. Raymond Williams first coined the term "structure of feeling" in a 1958 essay on the connection between artistic conventions and written text. Later, he expanded on the term to address how feeling and emotion can be culturally and socially situated (Williams, 1961). Today, an attention to affect addresses the limitations of the linguistic turn: "the world [is] shaped not simply by narratives and arguments but also by nonlinguistic effects—by mood, by atmosphere, by feelings" (Hsu, 2019).

To Lauren Berlant, "identity is less a set of conscious decisions that we make, but rather compulsions—attachments and identifications—that we feel" (Hsu, 2019). Originally a literary analyst, Berlant has come to develop "genres for life," generic and encultured ways that our bodies respond to the precariousness of existence. Berlant identifies our current age as marked by "cruel optimism," in which people maintain affective attachments to optimistic promises such as romance or upward mobility, even when those attachments are ultimately destructive. Berlant writes that new, hybrid genres of art emerge to address the unfolding state of contemporary experience. To Berlant, the materialization of new aesthetic genres, such as "the situation, the episode,

[15] As affect theory is a relatively new academic field I cite literature on film music and collective memory that exclusively use the term "emotion". I interpret these ideas to apply to affect as well.

the interruption, the aside, the conversation, the travelogue, and the happening" describe and mediate our activity and can offer reflections about contemporary historicity (Berlant, 2011, p. 5). Significantly, Berlant emphasizes that, beyond artistic categories, "genres for life" can be located anywhere, such as: "nonverbal cues, gestures, and fleeting expressions" (Hsu, 2019).

In *Ubiquitous Listening*, Anahid Kassabian argues that identity is the discursive "trace of affect" (2013). Genres of music first emerge out of sensations of similarity, before shared qualities of music are identified and theorized through social discourse **(**Kassabian, 2013**).** In this dissertation I focus on both domains of affect and music discourse: music writing that refers to genres, history, techniques, and individual and collective experiences. I consider how the disruption of generic conventions or associations can provoke new affective experiences.

Synthesizing concepts from both the psychological and literary approaches to affect, I also examine how the strategic reappropriation of music can elicit (or challenge) what researchers in psychology and neuroscience refer to two fundamental continuums of affect: valiance (pleasant to unpleasant) and arousal (low activation to high activation) (Linnenbrink, 2007; Russell, 2003; Russell and Barrett, 1999; Schutze et al, 2010).

3.2 Film Music

In documentaries and narrative films, sound can be divided into two kinds: diegetic and non-diegetic. Diegetic sound is located within the world of the story, such as footsteps, background noise, or music that is emanating from a radio. Non-diegetic

sound comes from outside the narrative world. Music is often used, like the voice-over, as a form of “non-diegetic” sound.

Scholarship on film music reveals that non-diegetic music has long played a role in guiding the audience’s attention and ensuring their psychological engagement. Jean Mitry has argued that, since the earliest functions of music in silent film, the “rhythm of music [has] mediated between real time as experienced by the audience and the diegetic or psychological time adhered to by the film” (1964/1963, qtd. in Gorbman, 1980, p. 186). Additionally, it has been said that in the early years of silent film, music was used to cover up the unwanted sound of the film projector (Gorbman, 1980).

In her pioneering work on film music (1980, 1987) Claudia Gorbman recounts that once sound film developed, the synchronization of diegetic sound and image came to replace the visible presence of the music. In talking films, the use of non-diegetic music was no longer necessary in the same way that it had been in silent film. As audiences increasingly attended to the diegetic sound within the cinematic narratives (composed heavily of dialogue) in talking films, they began to perceive the music more indirectly. As Gorbman eloquently puts it, as sound film developed, the non-diegetic musical score became, in the reception of the viewers, an “unheard melody” (Gorbman, 1987).

Gorbman argues that in classical models of film, music did not serve as a conscious element of the story but was used to reinforce emotional, referential, or narrative cues (1987, p. 73). Classical musical scholarship tended to either prioritize a formal musicological analysis, or to limit an approach to music only as it related to the image, through the prevailing concepts of parallelism and counterpoint.

The contemporary scholarship that Gorbman pioneered recognizes that music and the image are interdependent. Both modalities share a power in meaning-making, which Gorbman refers to as “mutual implication.” Music cannot be understood strictly in terms of image. The image is polysemic, and irreducible to a single meaning. Additionally, music responds to that which is not immediately available in the image (subtext).

Gorbman’s approach to film music is reminiscent of Barthes’ examination of the rhetoric of the photograph. Alan Durant summarizes her argument regarding the addition of music to moving images: “[It] always adds an effect of some kind, by interpreting the image in terms of emotion and cultural reference, like a caption to a photograph, narrowing and filtering interpretation and anchoring the image against polysemy” (Durant, 1988, p. 341).

Gorbman delineates three ways that music can make meaning in a film: through cultural musical codes, that “elicit encultured reactions” (Gorbman, 1980); pure musical codes (the form of the music itself) and cinematic musical codes, in which the music refers to film itself (1980, p. 184).

Cinematic meaning can be created through repeated musical cues to “articulate positions and points of view” (Gorbman, 2017, p. 18). A musical pattern can be repeated throughout the film in association with plot developments or characters, in the form of a Wagnerian leitmotif (Gillick and Bamman, 2018; Prendergast, 1992; Rodman, 2017). Gorbman defines the leitmotif as “any music— melody, melody-fragment, or distinctive harmonic progression— heard more than once during the course of a film.” She argues that the leitmotif has two significant functions: to evoke an association with

a cinematic object, and to re-occur “in order to evoke the memory of the viewer” (Gorbman, 1987, p. 26).

In addition to musical and cinematic codification, the cultural component of meaning plays a more substantial role in the compilation soundtrack: the reappropriation of previously recorded (archival) music.[16] Most scholarship on film sound recognizes that the compilation soundtrack is significantly understudied (Danks, 2006; Inglis, 2003, p. 3; Heldt, 2016, pp. 97-113). Guido Heldt argues that “the scarcity of systematic discussion of pre-existing music in film . . . is the most obvious example [that] . . . some kinds of music in film have been more thoroughly theorized than others” (2016, p. 97). This scarcity is multiplied when considering the role of the compilation soundtrack in the non-fiction documentary mode.

3.2.1 The Musical Soundtrack: A Short History

The reappropriation of popular music in movies dates back to the beginning of film history. During the film sound era, popular music was featured diegetically (such as songs played on the piano in *Casablanca*) (1942) yet was generally considered inferior to classical music scores.[17] In the late 1960s and 1970s, the use of popular music in film

[16] In some writing on film sound, the term “soundtrack” signifies the totality of audio tracks used in conjunction with the moving image. I use the term in the more colloquial sense, to refer to the collection of previously recorded music that is featured in the film.

[17] By the late 1950s, music composed for films started to cross over into the billboard charts. Producers would start to release the music in advance in order to promote the film. One example is Henry Mancini’s “Moon River,” featured in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961). Mancini described that many composers of the time would only

became more prominent as studios started to produce movies both for and about baby boomers. The success of the nuanced film *The Graduate* (1969), featuring a soundtrack by Simon and Garfunkel, and *Easy Rider* (1969), the first major movie hit to feature a compilation soundtrack of various artists, would prove that a popular music soundtrack could contribute to "serious" films (Holden, 2011/1989, pp. 438-439).

The rise of MTV and the popularity of the music video genre in the 1980s further encouraged the development of the compilation soundtrack.

> Studios began to invest directly in the production of music videos, especially in videos of songs featured on film soundtracks. Directors also began to adjust the structure and visual style of their films to accommodate the new, fast-paced rhythm and disjunctive editing of the music video. (Hubbert, 2011, p. 382)

By the early 1990s, directors were faced with two musical routes: they could feature orchestral scores in the wake of blockbusters like *Jaws* (1975) and the original *Star Wars* (1975), or they could work with a music supervisor to create a pop compilation soundtrack (Holden, Qtd. in Hubbert, 2011, p. 394). Though often constrained by budget or proprietary agreements, compilation soundtracks could function as a domain of film auteurism, in which the director has more creative control. Musical auteurism is reflected in the films of Quentin Tarrantino, Baz Luhrman and other directors that began, in the 1990s, to use the compilation soundtrack as a form of postmodern pastiche. "The use of songs as ironic commentary may be viewed as a particular configuration of postmodern culture, where a very self-conscious mode of

compose pieces that fit the length requirements within the film; he would always re-record the music for the record (Kalish, 2011/1961).

textual address is situated within a larger network of intertextual references (Smith, 2001, p. 408).

Today, the soundtrack has become an integral element of narrative film, television, and documentaries, and figures majorly in the streaming content industry. The Performing Rights Society for Music released figures showing that the use of music in the top on-demand streaming platforms has more than tripled from 2014 to 2018, "from 145 billion minutes in 2014 to 490 billion minutes in 2018," the majority of which is re-purposed music (Siddique, 2019). The role of music supervision is increasingly appreciated as an art form. The 2017 Annual Grammy Award Ceremony was the first time that music supervisors were eligible for the "compilation soundtrack" category (Bakare, 2019).

Today, in conjunction with the rise of streaming music culture, movie and television soundtracks are made instantly available through official and unofficial playlists on Spotify or YouTube. Music can be made popular after being featured; movies and series can gain authenticity or status through the soundtrack choices. Echoing ideas of Crary (2001) and Kassabian (2013), Holly Rogers writes that

> Ubiquitous music in our everyday lives, in shops, on TV and on mobile media has highly attuned our sonic awareness. In addition, the saturation of music in cinema has formed audiences highly accomplished in processing images with the help of musical signification. (2014, p. 3)

Compilation soundtracks embody the contemporary soundscape and today's culture of music listening with instant access to an ever-expanding archive.

3.2.2 The Musical Soundtrack: Identification, Memory, Affect

As Ronald Rodman argues in "Popular Song as Leitmotiv in *Pulp Fiction* [1994] and *Trainspotting* [1996]," popular music soundtracks refer outward to social practice. "In the pop music score, leitmotiv denotation shifts from the musical artifact itself to musical styles, and the social discourse about music and beyond" (2006, p. 119). In this study, Rodman examines how the two 1990s films designate leitmotifs for different characters— not from the same piece of music but from songs of the same genre. In this way Rodman's analysis touches on how the reappropriation of music in films invokes people's extra-textual understandings of musical styles.

Audiences' emotional and affective reactions to musical soundtracks involves their own personal backgrounds; the musical soundtrack can compel identification and memory. Recognizable music can elicit nostalgia, evoking memories of different contexts in which it has been listened to or enjoyed (Abebe, 2011). "Where the old-time Hollywood film score uses the vocabulary of classical music to evoke a timeless romanticism, pop songs, which are inextricably tied to our sense of nostalgia, automatically convey a specific sense of time and place" (Holden, 2011/1989, p. 439). The soundtrack can reward the audience for their recognition. It can also instantiate new memories or associations with the music.

Music serves to connect individual experiences to a continually evolving collective memory. José Van Dijck argues that recorded music can function as a site in which memory is "embodied, enabled, and embedded" (2006). One reason for this, he argues, is that music reflects a shared socio-technological context:

> People become aware of their emotional and affective memories by means of technologies, and surprisingly often, the enabling apparatus becomes part of the

> recollecting experience. Songs or albums often get interpreted as a 'sign of their time' in part also because they emerge from a socio-technological context. (Van Dijck, 2006)

Reappropriated music in films can also inspire a new relationship with the past. "Increasingly, it seems, we think in soundtracks… Songs used in films recall us to our past, or they conjure up a past we never experienced and, through the familiar language of popular music, make it ours" (Wojcik and Knight, 2001, p. 1). Music can also impact the continually changing ways in which people remember the past:

> Remembrance is always embedded, meaning that the larger social contexts in which individuals live stimulate memories of the past through frames generated in the present. (Van Dijck, 2006)[18]

The various ways that appropriated music refers outward to social practice can be emphasized in the documentary, as it too refers outward to society and reality.

3.2.3 Documentary Music

The "supporting role" of music in the classical model of film may be one reason that research on filmic music, and filmic sound in general, has traditionally been limited. This is especially true of the documentary, in which Realist aesthetic preferences have contributed to a belief that music added to the documentary can interfere with its sense of authenticity (Corner, 2002). Corner cites that this incorrect view of documentary music can be gleaned from a bullet point in the most widely-used documentary

[18] This also highlights that memory is mutable; memories are "framed according to the present" just as experience of the present is shaped by memory.

filmmaking manual at the time of his writing: “music should not inject false emotion” (Rabiger, 1998, qtd. in Corner, 2002, p. 358).

Recent scholarship on documentary music has emerged alongside a renewed interrogation of the genre itself (Rogers, 2013, 2014). In the introduction to the first in-depth examination of music and sound in the documentary, Holly Rogers writes that “choices such as musical style, instrumentation, structure, texture, mode, history and genre, familiarity, text/lyrics and audiovisual synchronicity or dissonance can fundamentally change the reception of the unfolding images” (Rogers, 2014, p. 9). Rogers argues that music, once considered an intrusion upon the authenticity of documentary footage, can function as an integral component to documentary authorship, “in which the director’s presence or signature style is clearly evident” (Rogers, 2014, p. 11).

A renewed attention to documentary music reveals dynamic ways in which it has been used. In Errol Morris’ *Thin Blue Line* (1988) a creative selection of imagery and dramatic re-enactments are used to illustrate various accounts of past events surrounding the conviction of Randall Adams for the shooting of a police officer. Some of the images are illustrative, such as the swirling shots of evidence from the crime scene. Yet the re-enactments are not illustrative or metaphorical, but hypothetical. The veracity of the re-enactments are questionable, as the speakers are not necessarily reliable.

Morris uses the music of Philip Glass during the re-enactments of the different characters’ versions of the events. The music corresponds to a change to the “subjunctive mode,” defined as ‘that mood of a verb used to express supposition, desire,

hypothesis, possibility, etc., rather than to state an actual fact, as a mood of *were*" (*Merriam Webster Online*, n.d.).

Morris argues in favor of such creative forms of documentary-making. For Morris, questioning people's subjective perspectives is a necessary step in the quest for truth; ultimately, his film aided in the exoneration of Randall Adams.[19]

Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance* (1982), also using music by Philip Glass, combines fast-paced synthesizer arpeggios with time-lapsed imagery of cityscapes. Juxtaposed with footage of natural landscapes and slower-paced chanting music, the techniques capture the artificial speed of modern life.

In *Man on Wire*, directed by James Marsh (2008), music is used to reflect the emotional conditions of the timeline of the story as well as to foreshadow known historical events to follow. In this case, the music points outward toward the events of September 11, 2001, which are known to the viewer. John Corner describes how the juxtaposition of Michael Nyman's song "Fish Beach," featuring a "stately but mournful two-note development on trombone" with archival shots of the foundations of the World Trade Center prior to the famous 1974 walk on the wire, embeds onto the viewers' consciousness the sad future of the towers' tragic history (Corner, 2014, pp. 127-128).

[19] The use of Philip Glass music has become an element of Errol Morris' signature style. The style of music has also become the prevailing convention of documentary music: minimalist piano or synthesizer arpeggios. While the style of arpeggiated music may lend a sense of authority to the documentary, its over-use limits the dynamic ways in which music can be used in the genre.

These few examples illustrate the myriad ways that music can shape the interpretation of the story and create distinctions between different perspectives, temporalities, or states of being. Yet it is hardly an exhaustive list, and through my analysis I aim to expand on a wider range of these capacities.

3.3 Audiovisual Analysis

My analytical approach draws on Michel Chion's framework for audiovisual analysis (1994).[20] Chion describes how "audiovisual analysis aims to understand the ways in which a sequence or whole film works in its use of sound combined with its use of images" (1994, p. 185). Chion recommends repeated listening/viewing, a focus on each modality in isolation (the masking method) as well as in various combinations, and an attention to balance, intelligibility, reverberation, and audiovisual phrasing (pp. 189-190).

3.3.1 Michel Chion's System of Synchresis

Michel Chion has developed a number of concepts applicable to analyzing the ways that sound and image can function in the documentary or essay film.[21] Chion dubs the perceptual experience of an audiovisual unity in film "synchresis," a term which

[20] While Chion focuses his analyses of sound and music to analyze narrative films, I apply his concepts to the role of music in the documentary.

[21] Chion writes: "Audiovisual analysis must rely on words, and so we must take words seriously—whether they are words that already exist, or ones being invented or reinvented to designate objects that begin to take shape as we observe and understand. The lion's share of this work of naming remains to be done, particularly naming auditory qualities and perceptions" (1990, p. 186).

combines “synchronism” and “synthesis.” He coins the term “added value” to describe the meaning that is produced when

> Sound enriches a given image, so as to create the definite impression (either immediate or remembered) that this meaning emanates. . . . The phenomenon of added value is especially at work in the case of sound/image synchronism, via the principle of synchresis. . . . The forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears. (Chion, 1990, p. 5)

Chion illustrates that music can function empathetically, when its mood matches the meaning of the images, “by taking on the scene's rhythm, tone, and phrasing” (1994, p. 8). Or, it can function anempathetically, by “exhibit[ing] conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner” (1994, p. 8). Usually, this occurs as a form of diegetic sound, such as the continued sound of running water after the pseudo-protagonist of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, Marion Crane, is stabbed to death in the famous shower scene (Hitchcock, 1960).[22] [23]

Chion has developed another concept applicable to the extreme incongruity between music and image featured in Curtis’ works. He uses the concept of “forced

[22] However, it is important to point out that there are no strict boundaries between different categories of sound and music (Chion, 1994, pp. 39-40; Gorbman, 1987; Heldt, 2016, p. 97). Increasingly, scholars recognize the opaque distinction between music and sound design. Claudia Gorbman describes how music can function in between a diegetic and non-diegetic state, such as when the music is mirroring a character’s state of mind, a scenario which she refers to as “metadiegetic.”

marriage" between sound and image to describe cases when music "resists" the image, which can lead to moving or comical juxtapositions.

> Changing music over the same image dramatically illustrates the phenomena of added value, synchresis, sound-image association, and so forth. By observing the kinds of music the image "resists" and the kinds of music cues it yields to, we begin to see the image in all its potential signification and expression. (Chion, 1994, pp. 198-199)

Chion discusses how "forced marriage" can be achieved via experimentation with different choices of music in juxtaposition with the same image. He argues that this practice can provide an important sense of the capacity to which the image's meaning can be shaped.

The concept of "forced marriage" has been taken up in several film music analyses (Audissino, 2018; Schültzke, 2015) with a particular focus on mashups and remixes. It is also employed by Sarah Keith in her 2013 analysis of Curtis' use of music which I discuss in the following chapter.

Chion also recommends an attention to the image and sound separately in isolation, to uncover audiovisual "masking":

> In order to observe and analyze the sound-image structure of a film we may draw upon a procedure I call the masking method. Screen a given sequence several times, sometimes watching sound and image together, sometimes masking the image, sometimes cutting out the sound. This gives you the opportunity to hear the sound as it is, and not as the image transforms and disguises it; it also lets you see the image as it is, and not as sound recreates it. (1994, p. 187)

Another analytical technique Chion describes is "reduced listening." Originally coined by Pierre Schaeffer, reduced listening is "an appreciation of the inherent qualities

of sound" (Balderston, 2013). It is a mode of listening that has been facilitated by music recording technology, which allows for repeated listening of the same sound.[24]

A pupil of Schaeffer's, Chion argues that reduced listening is one of the three listening modes in film, in addition to semantic listening or causal listening. Repeated listening can "disrupt lazy habits" and "[open] up our ears and [sharpen] our power of listening" (p. 31). Reduced listening can illuminate that "the emotional, physical, and aesthetic value of a sound is linked not only to the causal explanation we attribute to it but also to its own qualities of timbre and texture, to its own personal vibration" (p. 31).

In films and documentaries, the experience of reduced listening may be encouraged through repetition and leitmotifs. Devices of repetition draw the viewer's attention not just to the possibilities of signification or expression of the image but to the texture of the sound recording itself.

3.3.2 Rhythm

In the audiovisual analysis, Chion suggests that one look for "key points of synchronization, the primary synch points that are crucial for meaning and dynamics" (p. 190). The collaboration, or behavior of sound and image, can be analyzed "with respect to a given formal aspect of representation." Examples include rhythm, speed, hardness, or preciseness (p. 190).

> A character might be shown in long shot but her or his voice might be heard in sound close-up, or vice versa. The image may be crammed with narrative details while natural sounds are scanty; alternately, we might observe a spare visual composition with a busy soundtrack. (p. 191)

[24] In electronic music, this effect is commonly achieved through looped sampling.

The concept of rhythm originates from the Greek term *rythmos*, meaning “order of movement.” Throughout history the term has been defined in different ways. A general definition is the indication of “a regular, recurring movement or measured motion of time” (Ikoniadou, 2014, p. 10). Different durations, pacing, and the placement of the image and sound produce rhythms.

Rhythm has long been acknowledged as an integral element to the film experience (Mitry, 1964/1963; Munsterberg, 1916). Rhythm plays an important role in ensuring viewers’ attention. It can underscore messages or meaning. To Jean Mitry, a core function of rhythm in film is “[a]lternating tension and rest” (Mitry, 1997/1963, p. 104, qtd. in Pearlman, 2019).

Fast-paced cuts have been shown to hold contemporary viewers’ attention (Lang, et. al., 2000). Slower cuts, reflected in contemporary international New Wave styles, can function as a strategy of resistance against the capitalist, Hollywood movie industry (Jaffe, 2014).

There are a number of ways to approach the rhythms generated from the interaction between cinematography, editing, voice-over, footage, lyrics, and captions, and music of different valiances. The synchronization of image and sound, along with the beats— as in the music video— can draw attention to particular details.

It is important to state that the role of rhythm goes beyond its potential to signify meaning. Rhythm is felt by the body in an affective and visceral way. By eliciting such responses, the use of rhythm in films and documentaries can implicate the body of the viewer into the production, sometimes in spite of the signified meaning.

3.3.3 Captions

Captions, when they are present, can function in similar ways to the voice-over or music. In his recent work, *Words on Screen* (2017), Michel Chion has turned his focus to the role of written language in film. Chion argues that, like sound, the role of visual text on the screen has been overlooked. Filmic meaning is always audio-logo-visual.

Chion investigates different forms of words on screen such as diegetic words (people writing letters, street signs) as well as non-diegetic words such as credits, intertitles and subtitles. In the diegetic examples he explores different media technologies such as writing and typing on a computer (2017).[25] Both diegetic and non-diegetic words are featured in Curtis' films, and often the diegetic text such as that featured on computer screens or news tickers contains a strong temporal component to it.

In addition to the signification of meaning, captions can be examined for their typeface, placing, and color regarding similar issues of attention, accessibility, and psychology. Questions can also be posed about their function in the work: whether they introduce new material, function as footnotes, or introduce dates or times. Considerations about the relationship between captions and the other modalities include whether the captions are synchronized; if they are fast or slow; or if they are opaque or clear. Similar to rhetorical concerns regarding the "authority" of the voice-over, the

[25] Another body of contemporary research investigates the relationship of closed captions to issues of accessibility and translation (Linder, 2016; Parks, 1994).

reliability of the captions can also be questionable. Like music, the captions can correspond to different perspectives, whether they support the authorial voice of the documentarian or the perspective of the characters on the screen.

3.4 Conclusion

My method seeks to expand on Chion's audiovisual analytical strategies by considering how repurposed music can structure meaning and affective experiences in Adam Curtis' essay films. Acknowledging the problematics of music from a semiotic standpoint, I situate music in a multimodal analytical framework involving text, image, footage and captions. Chion's demonstration of "forced marriages," masking, and key points of synchronization are helpful additions to this analytical process.

Moreover, I scrutinize how temporal and intentional disparities are evoked through the repurposing of incongruent music with news or commercial footage. I consider the impact of affective valiances and intensities of the music; genres and generic conventions; and the circulation of the footage in regards to how it might have been appropriated in other contexts.[26]

[26] I have grounded my data-gathering methods according to Chion's devices of audiovisual analysis. Using the masking method, I have repeatedly listened to the songs featured in the works (alone, through Spotify or YouTube lists) as well as having engaged with the visual footage silently. I watched all the works created throughout his career repeatedly. In the three works I analyzed closely, I documented the entirety of the juxtapositions of visual footage, voice-over narrative, and music, shot by shot. I color-coded the different modalities of voice-over, visual footage, and music. I then analyzed the data according to how I could locate repeated and discernible audiovisual strategies.

The audiovisual analysis is presented through rich description, the utilization of words and concepts necessary to name the phenomena observed, and the inclusion of shot-by-shot analyses.

In order to identify the sources of the key footage, I often had to consult outside resources. A list of examples include: the social media platforms, Spotify and YouTube; playlists of Curtis' music; the music recognition software, Shazam; Google searches; and the consultation of colleagues and friends. After identifying a song or visual footage source, I would research it, read other discourse about it and sometimes identify other contexts in which it has been appropriated; this process enriched and informed my understanding of the meaning of particular juxtapositions in Curtis' work, and ultimately re-affirmed the cultural and discursive significance of the music. This extra-textual research informs some of my description of the events, artists, pop-cultural footage, or music.

4. FILMOGRAPHY: AUDIOVISUAL STRATEGIES

4.1 Introduction

As Adam Curtis puts it, "I sit on top of the biggest archive in the world, the BBC film library, and I just write with images from it" (Curtis, qtd. in Budzinski, 2011). A former history professor, Curtis' arguments have been compared Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and the theories of Michel Foucault (1972, 1982). Explicitly, Curtis sites Herbert Marcuse's concept of "technocratic rationality" (1941) as a central theme of his work. Another major focus is the relationship between cultural hegemony and the individual subject, exemplifying Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemonic power.

Yet Curtis maintains that he is a journalist, speaking to a mass audience, "trying to reconfigure the way one sees the world." Academic writing can be "intimidating and obscurantist" and "frighte[n] people off." His aim is to make complicated subject material "simple and approachable, and emotional as well as intellectual" (Curtis, qtd. in Budzinski, 2011).

Curtis states that his inspirations mainly come from literature, and he has often cited John Dos Passos' *USA Trilogy* as a significant influence. A three-volume panorama of 20th century America, *USA Trilogy* features a collage of different sections: portraits of characters, selections of dialogue, quotations, news clippings, and a "camera eye" section. Dos Passos himself was known to have been influenced by the films of Dziga Vertov (Kadlec, 2004; Beal, 2015). "The Camera Eye" is a clear homage to Vertov's philosophy of Kino-Eye, famously depicted in *Man with a Movie Camera*

(1929). “By the mid-thirties, Dos Passos’s debt to Vertov was an open secret and that Vertov was proud to be known for influencing Dos Passos” (Kadlec, 2004, p. 307).

The last three decades during which Curtis has been making his essay films can be perceived as a period of dramatic transformation for the television news industry. The television and video archive has greatly developed in scope and circulation along with the growth of personal computers, the internet, streaming, and interactive social networking platforms. Eduardo Navas refers to this period— beginning in the early 1990s— as the era of remix culture. The changing media environment has caused Curtis to explore new modes of distributing his televisual assemblages for digital platforms; Curtis was the first journalist to release his works directly to the BBC iPlayer.

Richard Porton argues that Curtis has emerged as an “unwitting avatar of ‘digital convergence” (Porton, 2014, p. 24). Curtis’ works feature contemporary issues of epistemology: attention and recognition, algorithmic generation of information, networked associations of meaning, and unpredictable and conflicting information. In his analyses of Curtis’ later films, Rob Coley argues that Curtis’ works “actively inhabit the rhythms and vectors of contemporary media and, in doing so, express a state of ‘destabilized perception,’ to adopt a term used by Curtis himself (*Oh Dearism II*, 2014, qtd. in Coley, 2018, p. 308).

Digital convergence also refers to the new ways that viewers consume his works. Today, the majority of viewers watch his work on digital platforms. Curtis provides a significant reason for this in his 2007 interview with Paul Arthur: television networks in the US will not broadcast them. He describes having worked hard with the BBC early on to broadcast some of his series in the U.S., but to no avail. At least one reason for this

is the influence of copyright restrictions. The lack of commercial distribution of his works in the United States is one reason why his popularity in Britain does not extend across the Atlantic Ocean.

While his mode of distribution has evolved, Curtis has maintained a focus on many of the same themes and subjects throughout his career. Richard Porton argues that the dominant theme in all his works is an examination of "technocratic rationality," a term originally coined by Frankfurt School scholar Herbert Marcuse. In a 1941 article Marcuse critiques the fetishization of technical efficiency and its effect on the individual. He contends that the principle of individualism, based on the proposition that individual self-interest is rational, has been transformed by technological rationality:

> Giant advertisements tell him when to stop and find the pause that refreshes. And all this is indeed for his benefit. Safety and comfort; he receives what he wants. . . . Everything cooperates to turn human instincts, desires and thoughts into channels that feed the apparatus. Dominant economic and social organizations do not maintain their power by force. . . . They do it by identifying themselves with the faiths and loyalties of the people. (Marcuse, 1941)

Porton writes that technocratic rationality is a "recurrent motif that permeates almost all of [Curtis'] films—a massive preoccupation with the ravages of a technocratic rationalism endemic to the modern era" (2014, p. 24).

Technocratic rationality is explicitly the main theme in Curtis' very first television series, *Pandora's Box* (Porton, 2014). The episodes explore different rationalities to managing and controlling society. Recurring topics include (but are not limited to) Communism in the Soviet Union, systems analysis and game theory during the Cold War, the rise of consumerism and liberalism in the West, Thatcherism and buccaneer capitalism, neo-conservativism, New Labour and the new Democrats, and the Western

media's representation of radical Islam. Additionally, Curtis explores the rise of ecology, the history of personal computers, different developing nations' attempts at economic autonomy, and the use of medical and psychiatric intervention as a tool for social engineering. Curtis' focus on post-World War II history, advertising and popular culture, as well as his inclusion of rare, never-before-seen footage reflects the breadth and scope of the BBC television archive since it was first launched as iTV in 1955.

One overarching strategy in Curtis' work is to problematize how power is represented in hegemonic narratives. This project has roots in early Soviet film and other avant-garde movements that approached art as a form of resistance. Owen Hatherley of *N+1* describes Curtis' narratives as different retellings of the history of neoliberalism (Hatherley, 2017). To Jonathan Lethem, the central subject of Curtis' works

> is the possibility that we're listening to the wrong voices in public life, and in our own heads; that the ideas we find authoritative and persuasive about our politics and culture are in fact a tenuous construction, one at the mercy of bias, invisible ideological sway and unprocessed, untethered emotions (principally, fear). (Lethem, 2016, p. 62)

I focus my analysis on Curtis' ongoing exploration of how individual experiences are formations of social and political ideologies, a theme that becomes more central to his works after *A Century of the Self*. Curtis' juxtapositions of popular music and news footage reveal how entertainment, pop culture, and advertising all shape individuals' gratifications, fears, pleasures, and desires, while exposing the fact that conventional news narratives often elide this connection. His techniques also reveal popular culture to play an important role in constituting people's experience of individuality and freedom.

A particularly salient subject that exemplifies this theme is the baby boomers' retreat from political life and resultant turn inwards: a generational shift of focus from the collective to the self (*It Felt like a Kiss*, 2009; *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, 2011; *HyperNormalisation*, 2016). Curtis argues that radical individuality, a popularized mode of resistance in the 1960s, in fact reflects and maintains structures of power. The influence of radical individuality extends to today's media culture, in which social media is the purveyor of detachment and alienation.

Curtis locates the impulse to retreat inward as a reaction to growing chaos and uncertainty. In many of his works he draws parallels between individual, cultural, and political obsessions with control as a response to the unknown, unpredictable, or the chaotic. He argues that, due to the growing complexity of the world, both individuals and social and political institutions have embraced oversimplified moral versions of the world (*The Trap,* 2007; *Century of the Self,* 2002; *Bitter Lake*, 2015; *HyperNormalisation*, 2016).

4.2 Audiovisual Techniques

4.2.1 Overview

Curtis has maintained a notable audiovisual style throughout his career, to the extent that it has been parodied (Woodhams, 2011). Curtis mixes archival news media footage, commercial and video content, disjointed or incongruous musical soundtracks, and an authoritative voice-over reminiscent of conventional expository documentaries.

In his appropriation of music Curtis demonstrates a unique style and wide knowledge of music and film history. He foregrounds the music by using it in deliberately ironic or jarring ways to reframe the news footage and pop-cultural content.

This contributes to an emotionally compelling narrative while simultaneously drawing the audience's attention to the role of music in constructing the overall work (Corner, 2009; Keith, 2013).

Usually, he begins his narration by stating, "This is a film about. . ." followed by the main question of the work: "How did we get here?" As Paul Arthur has argued, the "aggressive voice-over," use of factual captions, and the fact that he does not attempt to hide his partisanship are "old school" documentary techniques (Arthur, 2007). Doyle argues that this mode of address points to the BBC's "strategic ritual" of employing an objective and impartial tone as a source of authority (2005, p. 382).

While Curtis' works may ostensibly appear to adopt a conventional form, his narratives often take surprising turns. These shifts are activated by his word choices, such as "but then," "but in fact," "but at this very moment," "but even as this was happening," "but in reality," "but this was a fantasy," "but it was an illusion." The technique recalls the Surrealist emphasis on aleatory methods of chance encounters. In the works of Adam Curtis, the device provokes a sensation of history structured almost entirely by coincidental synchronicities and unintended consequences.

Curtis is also well known for interweaving his stories with a mix of popular culture footage and news footage. He cunningly pairs music from different contexts and eras to arrest the audience's attention and challenge their recognition. He illustrates his narratives with a fast-paced sequences of recurring images, including city skylines, flashlights in the dark, people watching media, and crowds of people. One of the most recurrent imagistic tropes is footage of people dancing, which he inserts between historical events and descriptions of influential ideologies and theories (see Figure 1).

Sometimes he retains the diegetic music to which people were dancing. In many other cases, he re-tracks the footage to different music.

Curtis sometimes warps and distorts the visual footage (as he does with music and sound effects) by changing the speed or adding a filter. Occasionally, he plays a clip backwards or repeats a short cut several times. Curtis' unpredictable, divergent narratives are expressed through a kaleidoscopic form, described as "serenely bizarre juxtapositions" (Lethem, p. 61); "a heady brew of connotations" (Corner, 2009, p. 117-118); "a playful mix of journalistic reportage and a wide range of avant-garde filmmaking techniques" (Obrist, 2012) and a "rapid-fire editing style that synthesizes elements form avant-garde cinema, music videos, and advertising" (Porton, p. 24).

This style reflects the logic of hypermediacy, defined by Bolter and Grusin as the privileging of "fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity" with an emphasis on "the process on performance rather than finished art object" (2000, p. 31).

The fast pace of his editing is a central feature of Curtis' work. Paul Arthur cites sixty shots in the two-minute pre-title sequence to the first episode of *Power of Nightmares* (Arthur, 2007, p. 15). Arthur argues that the rapid-fire editing is Curtis' "most powerful formal instrument." A visual bombardment is paired with an "insistently-paced [didactic] voice-over," which, Arthur argues, could alienate viewers if it was "plied in a more conventional idiom" (p. 16).

Adrien Danks designates the sped-up pace as a key aesthetic characteristic of the contemporary found footage film. "[The] rapid-fire editing simulates the distracted viewing encouraged by the television remote control or the point-and-click hyperlinking of the Internet" (Danks, 2006). Arguably, the rapid pace and networked associations

reflected in Curtis' juxtapositions parallel the experience of digital media culture today, or as Rob Coley puts it, today's "infrastructural aesthetics" (2018).

In these ways Curtis destabilizes the "official" narratives of the past. He displays unpredictable and unplanned outcomes, he discloses the relationship between pop culture and politics, and draws on the audience's sense of recognition as a subject within the same culture.

Figure 1. Images of figures dancing from various essay films of Adam Curtis

Yet Curtis' unique voice has garnered criticism for evoking a sensational, conspiratorial or propagandistic style, in which music plays a significant role. Some scholars have posed concerns about whether Curtis is not so much as revealing something new about the media industry as he is perpetuating the same manipulations that he attempts to criticize (Rosenbaum, 2008; Coley, 2018). In a review of *Power of Nightmares*, J. Hoberman of The *Village Voice* argues that the miniseries "demonstrates what it proposes to demystify, engaging in a rhetoric of conspiracy mirroring that of the neocons" (Qtd. in Arthur, 2007, p.16). Jonathan Rosenbaum writes that

> The clips and music serve not so much to illustrate the arguments as to weave fanciful and seductive arabesques around them. . . . The anti-intellectual elements at times seem to resemble the advertising techniques that are being critically addressed throughout the series, which appeal to unconscious desires more than to conscious and rational formulations. (Rosenbaum 2008, p. 72)

The divided responses to Curtis' work reflect a significant concern regarding any project that seeks to critically interrogate hegemonic culture through reappropriation: whether it unwittingly re-perpetuates or reinforces dominant meaning.

In my view, Rosenbaum mischaracterizes Curtis' techniques as an "appeal to unconscious desires." Curtis explicitly foregrounds an interrogation of the process by which unconscious desires are cultivated through popular culture and commercialism. Curtis draws attention to the issue most directly in *A Century of the Self*, in which he introduces the historical figure Edward Bernays— Sigmund Freud's American nephew, and the creator of the modern field of public relations. Bernays integrated Freudian approaches to the unconscious into advertising strategies, which Curtis illustrates using early commercial footage.

Rosenbaum's critique expresses a wider distrust of rhetorical arguments that veer from "conscious and rational formulations" (Rosenbaum 2008, p. 72). Curtis' techniques of repurposing do position the audience to face emotionally charged clips from films, news, and commercials, mixed with incongruous music. There is a vast array of connotations that can be drawn from the kaleidoscopic arrangement of footage.

Techniques that seek to aestheticize politically charged issues or mix together incongruent popular culture and news footage, are risky; the meanings of the resultant works can be interpreted in very different ways. While Curtis may not intend to appeal to unconscious desires, his strategies of decontextualization and fast-paced editing can

evoke visceral, affective reactions before the audience is able to form a sense of conscious recognition. The question becomes whether the technique provokes a new understanding of the audiovisual experience of history. Otherwise, it risks reinforcing the pleasures of spectatorship, recognition, and circuitous thinking.

4.2.2 Adam Curtis' Use of Reappropriated Music

To date, Sarah Keith's analysis is the sole scholarly focus on Curtis' use of music. As Keith rightly points out, music is central to Curtis' authorship (Keith 2013, p. 208). Music does not just support his arguments but can constitute them as well. "Curtis' use of archival footage is a much-discussed hallmark of his documentary style. . . . His use of music and sound alongside this material is likewise a core feature of his work but is far less acknowledged in critical and academic discussion" (Qtd. in Keith, 2013, p. 7).

Curtis works with a music supervisor, Gavin Miller, who also produces original electronic music featured in the essay films. Some of Curtis' most prominent musical choices include pieces by Dmitri Shostakovich, Brian Eno, the Velvet Underground, Benjamin Britten, John Barry, and the soundtracks of John Carpenter, Bernard Herrmann, Ennio Morricone and Pino Donaggio. His more recent works, which chronicle events throughout the last several decades, spotlight more contemporary music such as Burial, LCD Soundsystem, Pye Corner Audio, Nine Inch Nails, and the soundtracks of Clint Mansell and Cliff Martinez.

Curtis refers to some of his song choices as "trash pop," suggesting an intention to challenge mass culture debates or class distinctions between high and low culture. Yet a survey of Curtis' musical choices hardly reveals a "trash" aesthetic, if there is one.

The phrase may also be a means to avoid explaining the rationale behind his musical choices, a tendency evident in his interviews that Sarah Keith has acknowledged.

Curtis demonstrates an expansive knowledge of music and an eclectic taste. He shows an affinity for discursive music such as work by Kraftwerk, Brian Eno, Burial, and Shostakovich. These musical choices have been historically accompanied by a great deal of writing and surrounding discourse. Whether the artists articulate a new philosophy about music or demonstrate the use of new electronic musical instruments, much has been written about these various artists because their music reflects new relationships with technology, media, culture, and memory.

Shostakovich created a new style of “ambivalent” tonality in classical music. Kraftwerk was one of the first bands in the world to popularize electronic music using early synthesizers. Kraftwerk’s music not only came to define a new generation of German youths born after World War II, but had a wide global influence, impacting the future of electronic music made on synthesizers and drum machines (instruments common to the vast majority of music produced today). Brian Eno is famous for his creation of an ambient music culture. Yet Eno’s entire career reflects significant contributions to contemporary music, including his experimentation with sound effects and instrumentation, and the incorporation of chance and unpredictability into the recording process.

Curtis’ selection of cinematic scores also reflects a broad knowledge of film history. When he is arguing about the influence of Cold War ideology in *The Trap*, he employs music from dozens of suspense and horror films produced between the 1960s and the 1980s; the films themselves are products of the Cold War.

Curtis features short clips of music from these films to invoke certain emotional reactions and recognition. In doing so, he draws upon cinematic and popular cultural history's influence on people's memories and imagination. Cinema is both a reactive domain and one that offers kernels of truth about collective anxieties and desires.

In his most recent work, Curtis uses Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) and *Solaris* (1972) as examples of hypernormalisation. He has also constructed a montage of disaster films from the 1990s, having organized them in a manner that foregrounds the homogeneity of their cinematic tropes.

One of the most notable and important aspects of Curtis' musical style is his use of sampling and repetition to transform appropriated music into leitmotifs. Curtis cuts film scores into short clips and then re-uses them within and across multiple works. Historically, films rarely include more songs than can be compiled onto one or two albums. By cutting songs into shorter selections, Curtis creates a musical palette featuring pop, rock, industrial, classical, art rock, ambient, electronic classical soundtracks, and cinematic sound effects.

Using the musical clips as leitmotifs he often repeats music from the beginning of his episodes at the end of the episode. This helps tie his associations together, as the clips become recognizable narrative cues. Curtis also recycles musical leitmotifs among his own different essay films, amounting to a type of authorly musical language.

4.2.3 Incongruous Music Choices

One of Curtis' longstanding strategies is to repeatedly juxtapose incongruent music with news footage. This technique is evident in all the works spanning his career.

Many of the juxtapositions can be approached as devices of irony. Jaimie Baron argues that irony is fundamental to the archive effect (p. 74). Efthymia Braounou argues that irony is a discursive practice in historiography (2016, p. 35). She describes it as a "self-reflexive use of metaphor designed to inspire ironic second thoughts about the nature of the thing characterized or the inadequacy of the characterization itself (p. 43). What is unique about irony as a figurative trope, she argues, is that "irony involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude and this is where its emotive or affective dimension enters. Irony seems to invite inference, not only of meaning, but also of attitudes and feelings" (Braounou, p. 36).

Various forms of irony are produced through Curtis' audiovisual strategies. Dramatic irony is the employment of devices that play on the audience's awareness of knowledge or events unknown to the characters in the story. Verbal irony is generally defined as a technique "to make something understood by expressing its opposite" (Oesterreich, P.L. and Quintus, *A.* 2001, p. 404). Drawing on the work of Linda Hucheons, Barron refers to the expression of opposites as "antiphrastic irony." This is to be differentiated from "inclusive irony," in which two or more meanings are signified by one signifier; the tension between meanings is never resolved. "For Hutcheon, it is this continuous oscillation between these two (or more) signifieds that constitutes the truly radical potential of irony" (Baron, 2013, p. 76).

The rapid-fire pace of Curtis' repurposing of footage also plays a very important role in the reception of the music. His treatment of music can be described in the same terms that Corner uses to characterize Curtis' quick succession of images—as piling on "a set of heady connotations" (Corner, 2009, p. 117-118). The short clips can provoke

feelings of recognition that cannot be fully recalled or processed by the audience before there is a cut to a new song. The speed of the editing evades intelligible cultural connotations; instead, it provokes visceral reactions through the feeling of recognition. This becomes even more apparent in Curtis' later works, which feature a broader range of contemporary music. This repeated strategy foregrounds the affective element of reception.

Self-reflexivity and the emotive, affective dimension of irony are integral to Curtis' strategies of audiovisual juxtaposition. Repurposing music with official narratives of the past can reveal a sense of uncertainty, theatricality, or historical contingency to the political rhetoric in the news footage. It can inspire a consideration of the role of music and music culture in shaping people's social participation and their reception of historical events.

However, Curtis concedes that his song choices are subjective. In one interview he states, "I used that [Brian Eno] track because with [*Nightmares*] I was more angry than I normally am. That track, it builds in mood and kicks off, and it felt that it was a very good way to actually tackle something like that" (Qtd. in Keith, 2013, p. 167; Budzinski, 2011). Additionally, not every placement of his music serves the same function. Sometimes a song simply allows him to transition between two unrelated ideas. Curtis has also acknowledged the importance of playfulness in his works. This reminds the audience that the films are constructed from a subjective perspective. It also differentiates his style from the gravitas of conventional television journalism.

4.3 Reappropriated Music: A Lineage

4.3.1 1992-1999: Music and the Official Versus the Personal

Pandora's Box: A Fable from the Age of Science (1992, six episodes) was the first major documentary by Adam Curtis to be broadcast on the BBC. The byline of *Pandora's Box* describes it as an exploration of "the consequences of political and technocratic rationalism." Each episode demonstrates how attempts at social and environmental engineering have failed.

The series includes topics that re-appear in his later films: The Soviet Union, systems analysis and game theory during the Cold War, the rise of consumerism and liberalism in the West, the post-1970s Thatcher-Reagan-era and neo-conservative movement, media representations of radical Islam, and the use of nuclear power. In *Pandora's Box,* Curtis also covers such topics as the ideology behind the development of insecticides; specifically, he draws parallels between promotional material invoking Charles Darwin and the devastating effects of the chemicals described in Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*.

Pandora's Box, like Curtis' other work in the 1990s, more closely resembles the traditional television documentary format than does his recent work over the last decade. The series doesn't feature as lengthy a soundtrack or employ as much contemporary music as his later works.

However, like all his work, it does integrate incongruous musical juxtapositions. The title sequence at the beginning of each episode is composed of a playful series of rapid-fire shots of commercial television footage, sound effects and short clips of rock music which he mixes with the song "Time, Forward!" by Soviet composer, Georgy

Sviridov. The style of the song can be interpreted as an auditory form of Soviet Futurism. It is recognizable to many people who lived in the USSR as the theme song from *Vremya,* the Soviet nightly news program from 1968 to 1991.[27]

Examples of dramatic, incongruous juxtapositions often occur at the beginning of each episode. The very first episode, titled "The Engineer's Plot", examines the USSR as a failed attempt at a totally planned society and economy. Curtis details that modern technology, and especially the new power of electricity, was central to the plan.[28] For Lenin, the dream of socialism equaled "the Soviets plus electrification." In 1920, Lenin illustrated his "planned electrification of the country" with a map of Russia studded with lightbulbs. In order for the map to work, Curtis explains, "the rest of the Moscow power grid had to shut off" (00:03:36-00:03:41).

Music plays an important role in Curtis' depiction of the Bolsheviks' aim to create a society of people as scientific beings, and the failures of this attempt. Throughout the episode Curtis features music performed on the theremin, an early electronic instrument invented by soviet engineer Léon Theremin. Curtis uses the theremin as an example of Lenin's optimism about the electrical age as a means to make "rational" art. Curtis describes: "Even music was used to transform the way people understood the world. . . Electrical machines made what was called 'rational music'' (00:05:04). He first features

[27] The song was also featured in Guy Maddin's avant-garde film *The Heart of the World* (2000).

[28] The case of the USSR and the role of modern technology in the social planning and control of individuals is a theme that reoccurs throughout his works. Notably, it is a main theme in Curtis' most recent work, *HyperNormalisation* (2016), which premiered twenty-five years after *Pandora's Box* (1992).

the eerie, high-pitched theremin music with footage of Léon Theremin demonstrating his instrument in concert, and then continues the music, juxtaposing it with other visual examples of the “rational” Russian art and architecture of the time.

In a sharp contrast to theremin music, Curtis begins that same episode with a scene from the late-1970s to early-1980s, the long period of stagnation before the USSR collapsed. Shortly after the title sequence, Curtis cuts to color video footage, dating from the 1980s, of a boy standing in a Soviet town square. The boy is facing the camera and holding a boom box. The boy presses a button on the boom box, and Curtis plays the Sex Pistols’ cover of the song “C’mon Everybody.” The affective intensity of the punk music contradicts the theremin’s delicate resonance.

The song is from the 1979 soundtrack album, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*. The film features a fictional plot in which the Sex Pistols’ manager attempts to manipulate them for financial gain. This subtext foreshadows Curtis’ later discussion of the Soviet Union’s use of the engineers in their efforts to modernize, and the subsequent execution of a large majority of them during Stalin’s great purge.

Figure 2. The Sex’ Pistols “C’mon Everybody” versus theremin music as “rational art” (*Pandora’s Box*, Ep. 1)

Another example of contrasting styles of music occurs in the beginning of *Pandora's Box*, Episode 3: "The League of Gentlemen." The episode discusses how, since the 1960s, British political parties have attempted to engineer economic growth, a theme Curtis returns to in *The Mayfair Set*. Curtis begins the episode with the statement: "For the last thirty years, politicians in Britain have tried to build a new prosperity. They wanted to make an old nation that had fallen behind in the world recapture the glories of its past" (*Pandora's Box*, Episode 3: 00:01:29).

Curtis pairs the voice-over with glimpses of the exterior of a building resembling the Crystal Palace on a dark evening, its glimmering lights swathed in scaffolding and cranes. The Crystal Palace was the location of London's Great Exhibition of 1851. It was destroyed by a fire in 1936 and never rebuilt. Juxtaposed with the images of the building is Brahms' "A German Requiem, to Words of the Holy Scriptures, Op. 45" (1868), a somber and sacred large-scale work which he wrote after the deaths of his mother and the composer Robert Schumann.

After the pensive, grandiose metaphor for post-war England's dreams of glory, Curtis cuts to a shot of young British people drinking beer in a karaoke bar; one bloke belts out Tears for Fears' "Everybody wants to rule the world" (1985) (*Pandora's Box*, Episode 3, 00:01:58-00:02:25). *Tears for Fears* has later described the song as being about the political and spiritual corruption of the Cold War.[29] What is striking about the

[29] Curt Smith of Tears for Fears has said in a 2017 interview, "I think that consciously or subconsciously, [politics] always affects you. A lot of songs we've written have been political, but they're also personally political. . .

juxtaposition is its shift from the grandiosity of the palatial building and the music of Brahms' mass to the local, personal footage of people in the pub. This incongruity in scale highlights how, through popular culture, the individual experience can reflect a larger national sentiment. The image of the drunk "Tories" unwinding at the pub after another day of work reinforces the argument that the great British empire has become small.

The sequence illustrates that the dynamic between the personal and the political is mediated by popular music. There is also an irony to the way the song is being celebrated in the karaoke bar. Although the song's lyrics criticize the Cold War, the singer's enthusiasm gives his performance the appearance of an endorsement. (Examples of social critiques that get subsumed by popular culture continue throughout Curtis' work. In other series, such as *It Felt Like a Kiss*, Curtis focuses on the stories of individual musicians to reveal how the artist's intended meaning for the music can become neutralized or even inverted in popular culture).

Still featuring the image of the drunk Tories, Curtis cuts the diegetic, karaoke version of the Tears for Fears song to low-key horror music (00:02:22). Curtis continues: "But instead of restoring the country's fortunes, the economic experiments failed to hold Britain's relative decline." Curtis cuts to a visual shot of the burnt-out interior of a

We were really discussing the Cold War. . . It was the U.S. and Russia then, and now the concern is more the U.S. and Korea. I find that fascinating" (Baltin, 2017).

building, presumably a metaphor for the inside of the Crystal Palace. Mixed with the horror music are faint, reverberant sounds of the people continuing to drink (00:02:22-00:02:35).

Figure 3. A resemblance of the Crystal Palace paired with Brahms' "A German Requiem, to Words of the Holy Scriptures, Op. 45" (1868) juxtaposed with a karaoke rendering of Tears for Fears' "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" (*Pandora's Box*, Ep. 3)

Curtis' next two works, *The Living Dead: Three Films About the Power of the Past,* (1995) and *The Mayfair Set: Four Stories about the Rise of Business and the Decline of Political Power* (1999) both explore concepts of cultural memory and nostalgia. Both series start at the same point in history: a postwar Europe struggling to make sense of itself.

Additionally, both *The Mayfair Set* and *The Living Dead* feature incongruous musical juxtapositions characterized by oscillations between the affective valences of pleasure and displeasure. *The Mayfair Set* teeters between symphonic classical music and patriotic British and American songs (pleasurable), and subdued, cinematic horror music (unpleasurable).

The Mayfair Set (1999) explores how post-World War II nostalgia for Britain's imperial past inspired "buccaneer capitalism," an aggressive approach to privatization. British buccaneer capitalists inaugurated Britain's global arms trade, engaged in asset stripping, and embraced a new mode of economics that shaped the climate of the

Thatcher years. The series also focuses on the rise of corporations during this period and the replacement of politics by big business.

The Living Dead: Three Films About the Power of the Past (1995) focuses on various ways individual and collective memory have been influenced or manipulated by systems of power. Examples include the Nuremberg trials and the concept of "Zero Hour," a German term for a sense of cultural amnesia following the Holocaust and World War II. Specifically, the term refers to the destruction of all belief in the past. Curtis also describes other means of socially controlling the misaligned individual memory: the use of psychiatric drugs, electroshock therapy, and at the most extreme, CIA mind control tactics.

In one episode, Curtis reveals a wide disparity between returning World War II veterans' memories of the war and the country's collective memory of it. He oscillates between upbeat 1950s rock-and-roll music and dark, foreboding cinematic horror music. Curtis pairs the horror music to commercial footage of the American dream: houses with white picket fences, and appliances that offer comfort and convenience. Curtis unites the rock music with footage of broken soldiers being treated by doctors after returning from war. This produces a stark contrast between the rosy, commercial representation of American history and the memories of the many people who fought in World War II. Curtis completely inverts the conventional, sympathetic pairing of music and image in journalistic news. In *The Living Dead*, the device of featuring contrasting styles of music, mainly of positive or negative valence, expresses how individual and social memory could be so at odds with each other.

These early films emulate traditional television documentaries more than his recent work. The episodes employ a smaller number of songs and feature longer stretches of time without music. One reason for this is because the episodes are edited around original interviews conducted by Curtis. (His most recent work is entirely composed of archival footage).

In these early episodes, Curtis tends to punctuate the interviews with music and archival footage. He cuts the music when the interviewee is speaking. When Curtis inserts his own narration between the interviewee's accounts, the music accentuates his argument. In other moments, the narration pauses, and the music vivifies the emotional significance of a previously stated idea. These interludes can function as moments for the viewer to process what was just said.

4.3.2 *Century of the Self* and Music of Ambivalence

A noticeable shift is evident in *A Century of the Self* (2002) in which Curtis tells the story of Edward Bernays' contribution to the birth of modern advertising and public relations. Edward Bernays was Sigmund Freud's American nephew. Like his uncle, Bernays felt that people had the propensity to act irrationally; the unconscious had a strong influence on people's behavior. After World War II, Bernays argued that, in order to prevent the American people from descending into a chaotic mob like what had been witnessed in the fascist state of Germany, people's attention and desires had to be directed in a certain way. Bernays' solution was to govern people's irrational urges through commercialism.

Following World War II, Bernays drew on Freudian ideas of the subconscious to link consumer advertising to people's deeper emotional attachments and yearnings. For

example, Bernays re-oriented the social stigma of women smoking by associating it with freedom and women's liberation. Psychologist Steven Reidbord reflects on the series:

> What motivated people to spend their hard-earned money on features they'd never use and quality they'd never fully appreciate? Again, it was hard to escape the conclusion that corporations sold self-image and emotional aspirations, not rational goods and services. (Reidbord, 2013)

The television series goes on to examine how, to a large extent, the concept of the "self" was shaped by psychological techniques used in business and political communication. It also follows the trajectory of how radical individuality became both a product of commercialization and a force that transformed society. The 1960s countercultural aspirations to change the world were sidelined by the subsuming of radical individuality into a hyper-focus on the self (and the individual choices about what to buy).

Curtis suggests that politics, too, has become overly oriented around the self. He argues that today, politics does not lead the people; through the use of focus groups and polls, the people lead the politicians. Curtis argues against the notion that this is inherently good. By appealing directly and immediately to individuals' particular desires, politicians make contradicting policies with no clear long-term direction.

Like his previous two series, *A Century of the Self* features original interviews and long sequences without music. It also includes rare, archival film footage. Examples of old footage include aged, black-and-white shots of people moving in crowds or dancing at a ball. Whenever Curtis discusses the Freudian concept of the unconscious, he slows the shots and pairs them with subtle orchestral music or silence. The effect mirrors Freud's discovery of the unconscious. The black and white, grainy

quality of the moving images evokes a temporal disparity, recalling the first decades of the development of cinema. Just as photography and film could capture moments of time and elements of reality invisible to the naked eye, the discovery of the unconscious opened the doors to desires and feelings that were repressed and unacknowledged in society.

This strategy of slowing down and repeating footage is an example of what Adrien Danks describes as the second aesthetic characteristic of found footage films, in addition to the device of speeding it up. Danks writes that slowing down footage often serves to explore the “visual subtexts of found scenes and snippets of footage” (2006).

A significant development in Curtis’ audiovisual strategies occurs in *A Century of the Self.* Curtis goes beyond simply shifting between two styles of music that feature contrasting valence or intensity, such as frightening horror music and upbeat rock and roll, as he did in *The Mayfair Set* and *The Living Dead*.

In *A Century of the Self* (2002), Curtis features a new addition to his techniques of audiovisual juxtaposition: the inclusion of ambivalent music. I adopt the term “ambivalent” from previous analyses of Shostakovich’s “ambivalent tonality” (O’Donnell, 2011). Shostakovich’s music has been described as ambivalent because it is not completely atonal, but does feature a departure from the tonic scale. This is exemplified in Curtis’ selection of Shostakovich’s solo piano piece, “Prelude in C op. 87.” The piece is deceptive; it begins with simple, major C and G chords, but the melody soon meanders into chromatic and sometimes discordant scales.

Curtis places “Prelude in C op. 87” in significant moments in which the music does not directly correspond with his argument, or with the conscious emotional

perspectives of the characters. For example, the piece appears in Curtis' discussion of Freud's retreat to the countryside. Curtis states: "Freud was becoming increasingly pessimistic about human beings. . . . In the mid 20s, he retreated in the summers in the Alps where he began to write about the dangerous potentiality within group behavior" (25:00).[30] As Curtis describes Freud's physical retreat from society, the music represents a sense of mental retreat or withdrawal into psychological comfort. On the surface, the piano piece appears to be stylistically normal or pleasurable, but it slyly meanders into atonal scales before returning to the C major chord pattern. The song, like Freud's concept of the ego, reflects a socially adapted pattern that contains darker undertones and a propensity towards the irrational.

Curtis continues to feature this technique in works after *Century of the Self*, most notably in his selection of Brian Eno music. Choices of ambivalent music do not always represent repression. Often, the music can offer spaces for the audience to experience the imagery in a new way. While his early juxtapositions foreground a disruption of valiance (pleasurable versus unpleasurable) and are often high-intensity, the ambivalent music functions more neutrally regarding both intensity and valiance.

4.3.3 2004-2011: Use of Music to Undercut Threats and Promises

All of Curtis' films after *Century of the Self* (2002) place a great emphasis on how the personal experience and people's sense of individual identities can be shaped and

[30] Freud's focus on the collective unconscious during this time would later be developed into the text *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929).

influenced by political and ideological forces. While the *Century of the Self* focuses on the cultivation of optimistic attachments to consumer goods, *The Power of Nightmares* (2004) focuses on the use of fear in public rhetoric for political gain.

The Power of Nightmares focuses on techniques of perception control during the Iraq war. Curtis argues that the "moral crusade" against radical Islam has often involved grave miscalculations and exaggerations in its focus on certain threats, when "what one is actually facing is a nationalist movement in all its complexities. . . ." (Curtis, qtd. in Arthur, 2007, p. 18). The boldest and most controversial of his arguments in the series is that the growth of radical Islamic ideology shares a "parallel history" with the development of neo-conservatism (Rosenbaum 2008, p. 70). Both movements feature highly magnified and largely imagined threats and oversimplified, utopian solutions.

The Power of Nightmares is one of the two films that Sarah Keith analyzes in her focus on Adam Curtis' use of music. Keith invokes Chion's concept of "the forced marriage" between sound and visuals to scrutinize Curtis' audiovisual juxtapositions featuring humorous or ironic music (Keith, 2013, p. 167). One example she describes as the most controversial and commented-upon scene in the film features footage of Islamic people dancing, juxtaposed with the Western pop music standard, "Baby it's Cold Outside."

Curtis states that the song was what inspired him to make the film; the song itself was "responding to postwar anxieties." Curtis first pairs the song with people dancing to illustrate Islamist Sayyid Qutb's "thoughts about the moral emptiness of capitalism" (qtd. in Keith, p. 167) during his early experiences in the United States. Curtis describes Qutb's perspective about American people: "They believed that they were free, but in

reality, they were trapped by their own selfish and greedy desires" (00:05:05-00:05:20). Keith argues that the use of the song is multidimensional:

> First, as an allegory for postwar anxiety; second, replicating Qutb's experience in 1950s America; and third, as a suitable or ironic accompaniment for on-screen events, namely, dancing couples, and later, Islamists (p. 167).

Keith interprets that "Curtis' employment of musical jokes and covert musical associations, as well as more orthodox uses of music, functions as commentary on the creation of 'nightmares' – exaggerated or unfounded threats – by politics and the media" (Keith, 2013, p. 168). Another critic described Curtis' audiovisual juxtapositions in *Power of Nightmares* as "drawing the poison out of fear" (Biddiscombe, 2011, qtd. in Keith, 2013) so that the viewer isn't afraid of the images anymore. These techniques were attempts to serve as a sort of antidote to the televisual fear-mongering characteristic of war journalism at the time; the ubiquity of images of the Middle East that accompanied reporting on the war or terror contributed to popular associations of images of Islamic people with fear or antipathy.

Keith also evaluates the use of music in *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (2011), which takes its title from a Richard Brautigan poem of the same name (1967). In this work, Curtis argues that the ideological goals of techno-utopian computer engineers have failed. Instead of liberating humanity, the rise of computers has led to a social media culture that distorts and oversimplifies people's experiences of reality, and has escalated the corporate consolidation of power. He contends that the optimistic pioneers of personal computing were inspired by problematic theories, including Arthur Tansley's concept of the ecosystem and Norbert Wiener's theory of cybernetics. Ecologists falsely believed that there is balance in nature, as did Wiener in

his conceptualization of a self-sustaining, closed system. Rather than herald a decentralized democratic infrastructure, the world of computers has led to further isolation and retreat into cyberspace or social media.

The soundtrack features the cinematic works of Ennio Morricone and John Carpenter, along with more popular and contemporary music. Curtis often represents his criticism of techno-utopianism by juxtaposing early footage of the optimistic engineers with contemporary industrial music or "hauntological" electronic music, evoking alienation and melancholy. Curtis also pairs subtle, quasi-subliminal electronic music with his discussion of computers in order to signify cyberspace or invisible systems of power.

Curtis' selection of industrial music infuses the work with a critique of Western ideology. Keith describes how it is a trope in industrial music to feature cinematic film clips, inspiring a common practice for fans to "spot the music." Keith argues that this process occurs in Curtis' work, but in reverse. Viewers are rewarded for their recognition of the industrial music, and "likely to be making an active connection between Curtis' films, and the semiotics of the music used" (Keith, p. 173).

Curtis also uses music in very humorous and playful ways. Keith cites different examples:

> Kraftwerk's "Radioactivity" (1975) is used to prefigure a section concerning Silicon Valley, and later, to accompany a discussion of disillusioned counterculture and the birth of the commune movement. "Suzanne" (1967) by Leonard Cohen, a song alluding to infidelity, underscores scenes involving Hillary Clinton, and Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky; later on, footage of Monica Lewinsky is accompanied by Tony Bennett's "Blue Velvet" (1958) alluding to the infamous "blue dress." (Keith 2013, p. 171)

She admits, however, that Curtis' ironic choices have been criticized by some viewers as trivializing the seriousness of some of the violent events depicted. Ultimately, Keith concludes that

> Like *Nightmares*, music goes beyond the standard documentary function of intensifying the viewer's emotional response; it is used to confront and perplex the audience, as well as to create cryptic humor. Most distinctively, music is not only used as a background element to reinforce commentary or on-screen footage; it is often foregrounded as part of Curtis' argument. (pp. 173-174)

The films that I will analyze in the subsequent chapters include *The Trap: What Happened to the Dream of our Freedom (*2007*)*; *It Felt Like a Kiss* (2009); and Curtis' most recent work, *HyperNormalisation* (2016). In *The Trap*, Curtis demonstrates how today's concept of freedom has evolved out of an oversimplified view of human beings, which was manifest in game theory during the Cold War. Like prior works, it features an extended, eclectic playlist of cinematic scores and rock music that Curtis repeats throughout the three hour-long television episodes.

It Felt Like a Kiss (2009) is a 54-minute film that made its debut as the centerpiece of an experimental multi-channel installation at the Manchester International Festival. It covers America's rise to power during the commercial 1950s and 1960s, "featuring American pop music to highlight the consequences to the rest of the world and in the peoples' minds" (Punchdrunk, n.d.). In my analysis, I will focus on how he re-contextualizes music using editing and captions to undercut the commercial promises of the 1950s and 1960s' utopian vision of radical individuality, as it was perpetuated through music and popular culture.

4.3.4 BBC iPlayer Productions: Hyper-Reappropriation

Curtis' two most recent works, *Bitter Lake* (2015) and *HyperNormalisation* (2016), were produced exclusively for the BBC iPlayer. Both composed entirely of archival material, *HyperNormalisation* runs at 166 minutes and Bitter Lake at 140 minutes. They feature a wider range of archival material and are edited at a faster pace than Curtis' prior works. Having circumvented the television format altogether, they are not subdivided into television episodes. Through the use of intertitles, the footage is divided into chapters organized around different sub-themes. Like the rest of Curtis' works, the chapters or episodes are not organized chronologically and can be watched independently.

Bitter Lake features recent video footage of Afghanistan and the Middle East, as well as a distinctly contemporary soundtrack that includes the hauntological electronic music of Burial, which Curtis continues to feature in *HyperNormalisation*. Like some of his previous arguments, Curtis argues in *Bitter Lake* that the Western story of militant Islam is one that has been manufactured and oversimplified as a reaction to the increasing chaos and complexity of the world. Curtis introduces the film with a tracking shot from a car driving toward an orange sunset:

> Increasingly, we live in a world where nothing makes any sense. Events come and go, like waves of a sea, leaving us confused and uncertain. Those in power tell stories to help us make sense of the complexity of reality. Those stories are increasingly unconvincing and hollow. (00:00:00-00:00:30)

The opening then segues into a long musical sequence featuring Burial's song "Come Down to Us." The song mixes moody, atmospheric synthscapes with a mysterious, repeated riff on a sitar, a recognizable Middle Eastern string instrument.

“Come Down to Us” has been described as Burial’s most overtly political song to date. In its entirety, the song is thirteen minutes long. It mixes seventeen different samples and concludes with a speech given by transgender filmmaker Lana Wachowski at the 2012 Human Right Campaign gala (00:00:30-00:03:11).

Curtis juxtaposes the song with shots of a young girl performing a dance [*captions read: Helmand Provence: Afghanistan*]; black-and-white footage of people dancing in London; men dancing to a guitar player outside [*captions read: Ukraine 1989*]; a film shoot featuring people dressed up as animals [*captions read: Saudi Arabia*]; and a view of a Citibank building [*captions read: Wall Street*]. The sequence ends with disturbing video footage with a visible drop of blood on the camera’s lens. It appears to be a body camera, which swirls and jerks around as its operator ducks, moves away, and eventually falls. The accompanying song then cuts to diegetic silence in a shot from Tarkovsky’s movie, *Solaris* (00:00:30-00:03:11).

The disparate footage juxtaposed with the melancholic electronic song supports Curtis’ opening argument that the world has become too complex and too fragmented to understand. The gaze that Curtis produces through the montage directly collaborates with the meaning of the music. The song’s layers of samples evoke an awareness of the co-existence of a plurality of cultural and subjective perspectives. But its mournful melody and inclusion of short samples of dialogue anchor its meaning. It is a confrontation with suffering and injustice around the world. Coupled with the undulating rhythms of the synthscapes, there is a sense that there is no easy way to change it; all the perspectives form parts of a larger system.

Throughout the film, Curtis centralizes the strangeness of the experiences of soldiers during their missions in Afghanistan. One shot features an interview of a soldier attempting and failing to describe what the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan was. In different scenes, Curtis pairs atmospheric contemporary electronic music with video footage of soldiers. The addition of the electronic music illuminates the bizarreness of the soldiers' experiences in the distant land (44:38). Emma Graham-Harrison argues that

> [The film] does a powerful job of conveying the sheer physical incongruity of Nato's heavy military presence in impoverished Afghanistan [and captures] the strangeness of these heavily armoured soldiers wandering through superficially tranquil villages and pomegranate orchards, hunting an invisible enemy, and with it a deeper truth about how mismatched the soldiers were to their mission. (Graham-Harrison, 2015)

Like *Bitter Lake*, Curtis' most recent film, *HyperNormalisation,* also includes a wide range of recent video footage and strategically chosen contemporary music. Curtis' extensive selection of music and digital videos draws attention to the growing influence of the internet and social media in shaping reality; the various sources of the footage extend far beyond the BBC archive, calling to mind Baron's description of the erosion between the "official" and "footage."

HyperNormalisation coalesces many ongoing themes, such as the liberal retreat into the self, and the rise of computing and the finance industry. Curtis continues to develop his focus on techniques of perception management; this culminates in the concept of hypernormalisation, a state of post-truth in which people come to accept the theatrics and denialism within political representation because they cannot imagine another world.

Figure 4. Opening sequence to *Bitter Lake* (2015) featuring Burial's "Come down to Us" (2013)

5. REPURPOSED MUSIC IN *THE TRAP* AND *IT FELT LIKE A KISS*

> I feel that music on the screen can seek out and intensify the inner thoughts of the characters. It can invest a scene with terror, grandeur, gaiety, or misery. It can propel a narrative swiftly forward or slow it down. It often lifts mere dialogue into the realm of poetry. Finally, it is the communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one single experience.
>
> —Bernard Herrmann, 1979 [31]

5.1 Music of Threats and Promises

Robynn Stilwell argues that there is no one overarching theory about the role of pre-recorded music in determining the meaning of the work (Stilwell, 2006, xviii-xix). Pre-recorded music in documentaries can function to create meaning in a wide variety of ways. This is especially true regarding the dynamic ways that Adam Curtis uses music throughout all his films, in which the choice and the placing of the music is fundamental to his argument.

One overarching objective of Curtis' reappropriation of pre-recorded music is to draw attention to how the personal, subjective experience is deeply connected to social and political ideology. He has explicitly stated that the relationship between the political and the personal is a feature that contemporary news narratives lack today.

[31] Qtd. in Thomas, T. (1979). *Film Score: The View from the Podium.* A.S. Barnes and Co., p. 143.

In *The Trap: What Happened to our Dream of Freedom?* (2007) and *It Felt like a Kiss* (2009) Curtis' use of music draws the viewer's attention to the range of emotional contours through which history can be represented and felt. By challenging the audience's affective reactions, identification, and memories of the footage, the films illuminate how subjective experiences of freedom, desire, pleasure, and individuality can all be shaped by ideological forces of power and be perpetuated through popular culture. While *It Felt Like a Kiss* features optimistic attachments to the promises of commercialism and popular culture, *The Trap* places a great emphasis on sinister underlying ideological influences.

The Trap traces how, since the 1970s, contemporary social, personal and political policies have been shaped by paranoid theories born in the Cold War. These theories produced cynical perspectives of humanity, as composed of entirely self-interested and economically predictable individuals. Throughout the three episodes Curtis traces how this underlying ideology has extended into every domain of life in the West.

Musically, Curtis draws almost entirely from an archive of canonical cinematic scores, which he samples into leitmotifs that he then recycles cyclically throughout the three episodes. The repetition of the musical motifs evokes the sensation that both society and the individual advance through history through repeated patterns of behavior and thinking. The occasional insertion of a rock songs or romantic ballad conveys a sense of optimism, self-empowerment and newness felt by the people depicted when they are confronted with a novel promise of greater freedom. Yet inevitably, Curtis returns to the suspense music. In this way, Curtis reveals each attempt

at liberation as based on the same assumptions of the thinking born out of the Cold War: that human behavior can be predicted and controlled.

It Felt Like a Kiss originated as a 55-minute film installation at the Manchester Art Festival.[32] It is Curtis' only work without voice-over; he uses captions to interrogate the popular culture footage of the 1950s and 1960s during America's rise to power. The captions are used to recontextualize the audience's collective and personal memories of the music, which, the film argues, have mirrored and legitimized the new hegemonic culture. As stated in the program and the film's byline, the intention is to "show to you that the way you feel about yourself and the way you feel about the world today is a political product of the ideas of that time" (Curtis, qtd. In Bourke, 2009). Placing music at a central intersection between the personal, the collective, and America's political history allows Curtis to explore how attachments to the American dream, or "the good life", could be continually re-perpetuated, even when people's actual lived experiences were imbued with material and emotional conflict.

[32] *It Felt Like a Kiss* was Curtis' first major art installation. His second installation, in collaboration with Damon Albarn and the Kronos Quartet, premiered in 2013 at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City. It is not featured in this analysis because it was not subsequently released as a stand-alone video. However, several of its sequences are featured in *HyperNormalisation* (2016).

5.2 Classical Film Scores in *The Trap*

5.2.1 You Are Not Free

From the vantage point of 2019, the critical arguments made in the trilogy of films concluding with *The Trap* stand in contrast to the optimistic climate of the time they were made (2002-2007). In hindsight, this period of the early 2000s can be seen as a time in which the emergent network of broadband internet promised *more* freedom of expression. “The Facebook” as it was originally called, was released in 2004, two years after the premiere of *Century of the Self*. During this time, many scholars, politicians, and businesspeople published optimistic visions of the internet’s potential to facilitate a participatory culture of convergence. The concept of “Web 2.0” was popularized by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty at the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in late 2004 (O’Reilly, 2005). In 2006, the same year that *The Trap* was originally scheduled for release, Henry Jenkins published *Convergence Culture*, declaring that the internet had the potential to offer a unique space for self-expression in which individuals could exercise their own agency (Jenkins, 2006). “You" were chosen in 2006 as *Time* magazine's “Person of the Year” (*Time Magazine*, 2006).

The arguments made in *The Trap* directly counter this optimism about the internet’s potential to offer new individual freedoms. In *The Trap,* people continually seek freedom in ways that are based on a limited and over-simplified view of humanity. Promises are erected around the predicting and controlling of human behavior, which, Curtis argues, can lead to destructive or unintended consequences.

The Trap is the third of a trilogy of television series that focus on the relationship between individual subjectivity and political ideology (the first was *Century of the Self*

(2002) followed by *The Power of Nightmares* in 2004). The strong relationship dynamic between the personal and political is a thread that runs throughout all three films. *The Century of the Self* introduces the argument that individual emotional attachments are often cultivated through advertisements, politics, and ideology. *The Power of Nightmares* (2004) then focuses on the use of fear and oversimplified moral messages in politics and its disastrous consequences. *The Trap,* composed of three separate one-hour long television episodes, summates many of the ideas in the previous works in its focus on how people's concept of human freedom and potential is also a product of hegemonic power. Curtis argues this position in a 2007 interview as:

> [The trilogy of films] trace the rise of the self. . . First, we have moved into a world that is dominated and driven by the ideas, the dreams and the emotional needs and cravings of the individual self. But then they tell of what happens to those groups who see this as dangerous and corrupting to the structure and moral purpose of society. And finally, how that vision of individual freedom for the self leads to a narrow vision of what human beings are and what they are capable of that traps all of us in a static world. (Qtd. in Arthur, 2007, p. 18)

Curtis argues that the dominant [neo-liberal] concept of freedom today, which has been influenced and reflected through the Reaganomics of the 1980s and the new labor movement and neo-conservativism in the 2000s, is based on over-simplified views of how the world functions. He traces the underlying ideology to strategies used during the Cold War. One influential theoretical framework was game theory, which Curtis argues is a reductive and behaviorist perspective that all people are governed by self-interest, and thus can be predicted and managed. The irony, Curtis points out, is that attempts at freedom that utilize principles of game theory are based on a perspective that humans are indeed robotic and controllable.

In *The Trap*, Curtis traces how game theory would come to shape economic policies, the psychiatric industry, counter-culturalism, the finance industry, and evolutionary anthropological perspectives of humanity including theories espoused by Richard Dawkins and anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon. In the final episode, Curtis addresses how game theory would also inspire the neoconservative ideological goals of spreading democracy through foreign intervention and violent revolution. Drawing on the political philosophy of Isaiah Berlin, Curtis concludes that today's [neoliberal] understanding of freedom lacks a component of "positive liberty." Positive liberty is the freedom or agency that people can achieve through overcoming themselves (self-mastery) and by playing a role in choosing the government of the society that they are a member of (Berlin, 1958).

In *The Trap*, Curtis draws extensively from an archive of celebrated classical film scores to shape the emotional urgency of the story and to reveal how people's hopes and fears can be ideologically constructed. Drawing heavily on the work of Bernard Herrmann, longtime composer for Alfred Hitchcock, Nino Rota, John Carpenter, Pino Donaggio, and other composers, Curtis exploits the music's propensity to elicit feelings of suspense, ominousness, strangeness, and foreboding. Many of the films were direct responses to the Cold War, such as *North by Northwest* (1959), *Mosca Addio* [*Farewell Moscow*] (1987), and to an extent, *The Godfather II* (1974). Curtis samples the music into short leitmotifs which he cycles throughout the series. Emblematic of the suspense genre, the cinematic leitmotifs function as generic codes which are understandable to the viewer even if they haven't seen the original films.

Within each narrative, Curtis cycles through the same musical leitmotifs to reinforce a sense of cyclicality. By pairing the same music with content from the political and individual domains (such as people's experiences of pharmaceutical medication for depression and attention deficit disorder) Curtis reinforces the argument that the influence of Cold War theory extends into every facet of life, including how people think about themselves.

5.2.2 Description of Episodes

Curtis introduces the first episode of the series, "Fuck you Buddy," by describing that after World War II, politicians and scientists came to believe that "the self-interested model of human behavior" could be the basis of a new type of free society. Yet within this dark and distrustful vision lay the seeds for a new and revolutionary system of social control" (Episode 1: 00:02:30).

In the same episode, Curtis introduces University of Chicago Economist Frederik von Hayek, who argued that the only way to avoid the "tyranny and the end of freedom" that had occurred in the USSR was to embrace a radical free market capitalism which would self-regulate out of principles of self-interest (Episode 1: 00:05:22).

Curtis also introduces John Nash, the mathematician whose mathematical model, "the prisoner's dilemma," (which Nash privately referred to as "fuck you, buddy") would become central to the field of game theory. Curtis then details how the perspective of "the self-interested model of human behavior" would come to be adopted as "a truth about all social interaction" (Episode 1: 00:30:44). For example, Curtis describes that beginning in the late 1970s, doctors in the medical profession gave up on trying to understand the human mind. Instead, "they created measurable categories that

were only based on the surface behavior of human beings" (Episode 1: 00:41:15) and treated patients through psychiatric drugs and new diagnostic criteria such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and attention deficit disorder.

In the second episode, "Lonely Robot," Curtis describes how the same Cold War theories of human behavior would inform the economic policies of Tony Blair's New Labour party and Bill Clinton's neoliberal economics. Both politicians proposed a "model of freedom based on "freedom of the market" (Episode 2: 00:2:28). Curtis argues that these perspectives assumed that people could be predicted based on their consumer behavior; what people buy is a better gage of public sentiment than any other (Episode 2: 00:14:20). Curtis depicts the resultant ethos as a corporate environment in which workers found themselves constrained by performance targets and numbers. Moreover, evidence from within the industries of policing, finance, and the medical profession revealed a tendency for people to "game the system." "What was supposed to be a rational system created a strange world where no one believed the numbers" (Episode 2: 00:42:40).

In the final episode, "We will Force you to be Free," Curtis invokes Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of liberty to analyze how the forced liberalization of regions around the world has led to chaos and disaster. Berlin identifies both perspectives of liberty as having originated from the French Revolution. "Negative liberty" is the perspective of "freedom from interference," while positive liberty is a view of freedom that emphasizes the transformation of humanity. Berlin argued against "positive liberty" because it tended to universalize one single perspective of freedom. Furthermore, history had

demonstrated the “terrible implications in revolutions: the masses who did not realize what freedom was, had to be coerced” (Episode 3: 00:5:45).

Curtis contends that today’s dominant view of freedom is limited in its sole emphasis on negative liberty. He ends the series with the suggestion that “we have to embrace a positive view of freedom. Berlin was wrong. Not all attempts to change the world for the better lead to tyranny” (Episode 3: 00:59:02).

5.2.3 Classical Film Scores as Leitmotifs

The Trap features a longer selection and wider range of songs than any of Curtis’ previous work. Additionally, it features more contemporary rock music including songs by New Order, Yo La Tengo, Brian Eno and LCD Soundsystem. Curtis also re-uses the music of Dmitri Shostakovich and Peggy Lee which he has spotlighted in past works.

Notably, *The Trap* features selections from cinematic scores written by some of the greatest composers in film history: Ennio Morricone’s scores from *Il Mostro* [*The Monster*] (1994), *The Thing* (1982), *La Tragedia di un uomo Ridicolo* [*The Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*] (1981), *Ogro* (1979) and *Mosca Addio* (1987); Bernard Herrmann’s scores for *Vertigo* (1958) and *North by Northwest* (1959); Nino Rota’s music for *The Godfather II* (1974); Pino Donaggio’s score for *Carrie* (1976) and several scores from John Carpenter’s films including *Halloween* (1978), *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), and *Starman* (1984). The most repeated musical pieces in the series are songs from *Carrie, Halloween, North by Northwest, Mosca Addio,* and *La Tragedia di un uomo Ridicolo*, which are repeated from five to thirty times throughout the three episodes. As leitmotifs, these selections of film music evoke suspense, paranoia, and anxiety, along with moments of bittersweet joy or relief.

Curtis' invocation of this wide array of film scores demonstrates his broad understanding of film and music history. His selection of film scores illustrates and reinforces his arguments about the constructed nature of threats and promises of liberation, as the films themselves were symptoms of the Cold War. *North by Northwest* is a quintessential movie inspired by the Cold War, featuring government agents, mistaken identity, and subterfuge. In the forty years since it first premiered, *The Godfather* trilogy has been analyzed as "a compelling vision for America's place in the world in the 21st century" (Porter, 2009). The Corleone brothers are not just gangsters but can represent different perspectives on American foreign policy (Porter, 2009; Phillips, 2013). Literally, *Mosca Addio* is a story about a scientist who attempts to leave the USSR.

John Carpenter's musical themes about alien invasion in *The Thing* and *Starman* represent common fears during the Cold War. *Carrie* and *Halloween* can be analyzed as representing emergent social anxieties about feminism and female power. Curtis deploys a selection of musical themes from these films to reinforce his argument that game theory approaches arose out of, and perpetuated, states of paranoia and mistrust. His use of the music demonstrates the power of cinema (and cinematic scores) to reflect and signify those social anxieties.

Curtis also uses music to mock or ridicule different misguided attempts at political or social change with Ennio Morricone's vaudevillian-styled theme song to *La Tragedia di un Uomo Ridicolo* (1981). Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, the film "[offers] a brilliant dissection of contemporary Italian political and social life in the drama of a manufacturer attempting to deal with the enigmatic kidnapping of his son by terrorists" (Cook, 2016, p.

619). In Bertolucci's film, the music evinces the character of the protagonist, Primo. Once a hero of the resistance, he uses the ransom money to save his faltering cheese factory instead of paying the kidnappers to save his son; he is a metaphor for contemporary Italian social and political life. Curtis pairs the same music with his discussion of policies advanced by Tony Blair and Bill Clinton.

Curtis often makes use of the fact that several of the musical scores from the horror and suspense movies contain two contrasting sections: a melodic, serene section and the dark and sinister main theme. For example, Pino Donaggio's theme from Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976), "For the last time we'll pray", features two parts: a melodic, joyful string section, and the notoriously macabre piano and string arpeggio. *Carrie* depicts a high school girl who is severely mistreated by her peers and her religiously zealous mother. The melodic music is used throughout the film as a form of dramatic irony; it draws the audience's attention to the inevitable shift from Carrie's brief encounters with happiness back to a state of telekinetic rage. In a review of the film in *The New Yorker*, Pauline Kael writes that:

> De Palma, a master sadist, prolongs her moments of happiness; he slows the action down to a trance while we wait for the trap to be sprung, knowing that it will unloose her bottled-up telekinetic anger. It's a beautiful plot—a teen-age Cinderella's revenge. "Carrie" becomes a new trash archetype, and De Palma, who has the wickedest baroque sensibility at large in American movies, points up its archetypal aspects by parodying the movies that have formed it—and outclassing them (1976).

Curtis employs the same technique when using two sections of Ennio Morricone's theme from *Mosca Addio* and Nino Rota's music from *The Godfather II.* Curtis utilizes the fact that these cinematic scores feature contrasting affective dichotomies between pleasurable and unpleasurable valence and between heightened

suspense or relaxed arousal. In the cinematic scores, these affective states are singularly expressed through the same instrumentation and production quality.

The filmic “leitmotif,” originally conceptualized by Richard Wagner as a strategy of operatic composition, is music that is repeated in a film to draw connections and associations between characters, scenarios, settings, perspectives, and other cinematic elements (Rodman, 2006). While in classical film scores the leitmotif is often a musical element of the original composition, Adam Curtis creates short leitmotifs by sampling from the cinematic scores. Some musical segments are as short as a few seconds long. He repeatedly cycles through the many leitmotifs, which re-appear upwards of 30 times throughout the series.[33]

Often, Curtis uses the music to support his own argument that various promises of freedom- such as the liberalization of markets, the rise of pharmaceuticals and self-help movements have, in actuality, kept people trapped in the same way of thinking about humanity. The music often undercuts the representation of optimistic promises

[33] This strategy of repurposing music is uncommon in television series, major Hollywood movies and documentaries. One reason is that it is expensive and time-consuming for a music supervisor to acquire the licenses to a long list of commercially-produced music. Circumventing this process creates legal issues which have kept Curtis’ work from being broadcast on television in the United States.

There is also an aesthetic reason; often, repurposed music is featured for a longer duration of time during a sequence, in which it is juxtaposed with a montage of images of characters or establishing shots to emphasize certain moods. This device can punctuate or fill time between scenes of dialogue and action. Reappropriated music used in this way occurs less often and can feel obsequious or repetitive if it is replayed.

and reinforces his argument that the West's conception of freedom today is based on a narrow view of humanity that emerged out of the Cold War.

Occasionally, Curtis inserts a rock song to convey the felt sense of empowerment or optimism on the part of the people depicted. Or, he uses a ballad or love song to convey a different type of emotional attachment such as nostalgia. Like his deployment of the rock songs, the love song functions as a form of dramatic irony in which the audience is aware of the impending failure of the actions depicted alongside the music. Inevitably Curtis cycles back into the cinematic suspense music, creating the sensation that the promises were hollow, and the experience of freedom was short-lived.

The musical leitmotifs are tightly edited to the narrative argument. One reason for this is because music and voice-over are both elements of the soundtrack. Sharing the soundtrack, music and dialogue must often make aural space for each other. Curtis strategically edits music around the voice-over to draw the audience's attention to his argument, while preserving the clarity of his words. The music also propels a sense of emotional investment and urgency. While the editing of the music corresponds to the sentences in Curtis' monologues, visually, the film features shorter and more rapid cuts of generic images, which are not as tightly edited in alignment with Curtis' voice-over arguments.

One example of the longer duration of the music can be located in Curtis' pairing of Bernard Herrmann music with his discussion of Afro-Caribbean revolutionary Frantz Fanon's philosophical influence from Paul Sartre. The visual shots are short and varied. The visual sequence includes generic imagery of France, black and white footage of Sartre, and found footage of people on the streets of Paris. The Bernard Herrmann

music is edited tightly to the voice-over argument. The music is played throughout Curtis' entire description of Fanon and cuts to the theme from *Halloween* at the moment Curtis stops speaking (Episode 3: 00:15:13-00:15:53). The subsequent cut to the John Carpenter horror music signifies Fanon's radical alteration of Sartre's ideas that would later manifest in tactics of violence.

The music is often used to conjoin various images together as examples of a shared idea. In Curtis' discussion of R.D. Laing's bleak ideas about human nature Curtis explains:

> Laing wrote a series of books with titles like politics of experience that became huge bestsellers, and he became one of the leaders of the new counterculture movement. The aim of the movement was to make people realize that none of the state institutions of the post war world could be trusted. Those that claim to be motivated by public duty and a desire to help were really part of the system. (Episode 1: 00:27:45-00:28:11)

Curtis pairs the entire voice-over description to the theme from *Carrie*, while the visual sequence includes various images of gestalt therapy, protests, television programming, and what appears to be the British parliament. The music sutures the images together as examples of countercultural expression, while furthering Curtis argument that all the forms of activity were fueled by the same paranoia and mistrust born from the Cold War.

The tight relationship between the voice-over and the music is exemplified in Curtis' discussion of John Nash's thought experiment, "the prisoner's dilemma" (Episode 1: 00:13:53-00:16:01). Curtis uses several different, very short leitmotifs to punctuate his longer explanation of the mathematical model. (Iconic synthesizer riffs, such as John Carpenter's Theme for *Halloween* or Pino Donaggio's piano riff from *Carrie* work well as these shorter leitmotifs). Curtis inserts the different micro-clips at the beginning or ending of his voice-over arguments and at pivotal moments within the

monologue, signified by non-sequiturs such as: “but at the same time,” or “but what they didn’t know.”

Curtis begins his monologue: “Imagine you have stolen the world’s most valuable diamond, and you have agreed to sell it to a dangerous gangster” [Paired to Roy Budd’s shootout theme from *The Stone Killer* (1973)] (00:14:04). “He offers to meet you to change the diamond for the money, but you think he may kill you.” [Cut to music from Bernard Herrmann’s *North by Northwest*] (00:14:17). “So instead you tell him you will take it to a remote field and hide it. . . .” [Cut to Pino Donaggio’s theme from *The Godfather*] (00:14:50). Curtis concludes: But in the very same moment you realize that he is probably thinking the same thing, that he could betray you. You have no way of predicting how the other person will behave. That is the dilemma.” Each piece of music animates a different stage of rationalization within the thought experiment.

5.2.3.1 Music from Carrie*: “For the Last Time We’ll Pray”*

Pino Donaggio’s “For the Last Time We’ll Pray” is one of the most widely repeated songs in the *The Trap*. The famous horror theme is characterized by a repeated keyboard arpeggio that shifts modally between two minor chords.

The music is first played in the title sequence of the first two episodes, during which Curtis argues that “the attempt to liberate people from the dead hand of bureaucracy has led to a new and increasingly controlling system of management, driven by targets and numbers” (Episode 1: 00:1:26). The horror music portrays threatening and antagonistic forces otherwise invisible in the footage: a doctor’s office, a school classroom, generic footage of wealthy people walking through the streets of

London and in their mansions. The theme music speeds up, and then Curtis cuts to various shots of violence around the world.

Curtis re-uses the *Carrie* theme to underscore different examples of political, social and economic attempts at liberation. The musical pairing occurs in his description of Tony Blair's political vision that "the West now had a duty to intervene in countries where individuals were threatened by tyranny and bring liberty to the people" (Episode 3: 00:46:35). On a denotative level, it is emotionally incongruous with Blair's intention to inspire optimism and support. Yet the juxtaposition of the music and video footage invokes the audience's knowledge of the impending Iraq War that would follow speech; years of devastating violence and destruction throughout the war would challenge the argument that Iraqis were "freed" by the operation. It is a case of dramatic irony in which the music draws on the audience's knowledge of how the wars in the Middle East would unfold. In the aftermath of the war, popular discourse emerged distinguishing "liberation" and "liberalization," the latter of which co-opts an oversimplified understanding of liberty to create new consumer markets.

Curtis again uses the *Carrie* theme when introducing psychologist R.D. Liang, a specialist in mental disorders who became notable in the 1960s for providing an alternative to the shock therapy methods that were standard in psychiatric treatment (Episode 1: 00:23:45). Alternatively, Liang located the causes of mental illness in the family unit. Curtis argues that Liang approached the family like a system which was governed by power dynamics and "an arena for strategizing" (Sigal, qtd. in Curtis, 2009). To Liang, affection, love, and support obscured the more fundamental reason to cohere to a family which was to attain "ontological security." According to Liang, "one

had to be constantly on guard, never trusting anyone, even those who said they loved you" (Episode 1: 00:28:30). To Curtis, this philosophical view of humanity undercuts notions of kindness, love, altruism, and trust.

In the second episode, Curtis again uses the *Carrie* theme when describing the marketing of SSRIs in the early 1990s. In contrast with the commercials from the 1990s advertising Prozac as a liberation from anxiety and depression, Curtis pairs the *Carrie* theme with his argument that the epidemic of anxiety disorders "that were sweeping the US and Britain" were in fact reducing human experiences into manageable symptoms to be predicted and controlled. The disorders were diagnosed by checklists that deliberately did not inquire into why individuals felt anxiety" (Episode 2: 00:30:25).

The repeated use of the *Carrie* theme reinforces his central argument that the same ideology that underlies economic and political policy can govern the individual experience. Curtis uses the music to accompany many different examples of attempts at liberation that were all grounded in the same ideology that every facet of human life could be quantified, predicted, and controlled.

5.2.4 The Rock Song and a New Sense of Empowerment

The soundtrack of *The Trap* is not entirely composed of cinematic orchestral scores. Occasionally, Curtis injects a rock song from artists including Yo La Tengo, New Order, and LCD Soundsystem. In comparison to the Bernard Herrmann scores, the rock music sounds contemporary and new. Often, Curtis pairs the rock music with examples of social movements in the 1990s that offered promises of change. The music is always incongruous with the critical tone of Curtis' narrative argument. Rather, the music corresponds to the peoples' subjective senses of optimism, often producing a

sense of dramatic irony that indicates the eventual failure of those attempts at freedom or radical change.

Citing the political philosopher, Francis Fukayama, the 1990s, Curtis states in episode three, was a time in which Western society felt that it had reached the end of history. After the fall of the USSR in 1991, Fukayama argued that “all competing ideologies were now dead, and liberal democracy would spread unchallenged around the world” (00:34:53). People would be free to do what they wanted. The 1990s was the dawn of a new era.

Yo La Tengo’s style of alternative rock music specifically evokes a sense of newness and empowerment that was subjectively felt during the decade of the 1990s, the period during which many of the events depicted took place – the rise of psychiatric drugs, the rise of Tony Blair’s New Labour and Bill Clinton’s New Democrats, systems analysis, and evolutionary biological models based on DNA research. The rock music is especially poignant in Curtis’ discussions of the rise of diagnostic criteria and the use of the psychiatric drugs during that decade, as the music mirrors the aesthetic of the stock music in the pharmaceutical commercials of the time, which Curtis also features. There is a notable dramatic irony to every scene that depicts a sense of newness evoked during the decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The viewers of Curtis’ film are aware of the events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing wars, which were exactly the result of competing ideologies and a direct affront to the theories of Fukayama.

5.2.4.1 Yo La Tengo's "Return to Hot Chicken" and the 1990s

Curtis often pairs his discussions of "new" promises of freedom in the 1990s with the rock song "Return to Hot Chicken" by Yo La Tengo. The song appears on the band's 1997 album, *I can Hear the Heart Beating as One*. Marc Hogan of *Pitchfork Music* describes the album as a masterpiece, "exploding the boundaries of garage rock" (Hogan, 2017).

Curtis uses the song to evoke the subjective experience of an extraordinary transformation of society. Simultaneously, the song is used ironically by calling on the audience's understanding of the impending failure of the actions depicted. The viewer is presented with two different emotional and temporal perspectives on the issue: the optimistic personal experience at the time, versus Curtis' own negative, critical perspective of the past events as he understands them retrospectively. The effect leads to a posterior framing of the events.

In one example, Curtis features the music in his discussion of the appeal and spread of John Nash's radical ideas. "Nash's ideas were about to spread in the most amazing way. . . . He was a radical psychiatrist with a vision" (Episode 1: 00:19:06). Curtis again uses the Yo La Tengo song when introducing Tony Blair's vision of the New Labour party: "Throughout the campaign, [New Labour] had modelled themselves on the Clinton democrats. They did exactly what Clinton had done. They gave power away to the banks and the markets" (Episode 2: 00:37:40).

The temporal disparity elicited by the music interrogates the sensation of "newness" that was celebrated during the decade of the 1990s, a decade that began fifteen years before the release of *The Trap* and three decades before the time of

writing this dissertation. The posterior framing of events positions the viewer to scrutinize how the music could function to produce the sensation of "newness" in a way that collaborated with the political visions of the "New Democrats" or "New Labour."

Curtis also uses the song in his discussion of the rise of psychiatric diagnostic criteria: "for many people, the checklists were a liberation. Their private suffering was finally being recognized" (Episode 1: 00:44:35). He uses it again in the second episode when detailing that the same people who found comfort in the diagnostic criteria were now asking their doctors to prescribe them newly available SSRIs.

The style of the Yo La Tango music matches the style of the stock 90s music featured diegetically in the infomercials about psychiatric disorders and commercial advertisements for Prozac (Episode 2: 00:32:00). The alt-rock song is itself a promise of a new alternative to mainstream or commercial music. It embodies a style of music that expresses the desire to seek refuge from individual pain and loneliness— through love. Hogan recalls *Rolling Stone* critic Rob Sheffield's comparison between Yo La Tengo and The Velvet Underground: what heroin was for Lou Reed, love was to Ira Kaplan and Georgia Hubley. Like the Velvet Underground, Yo La Tengo sought escape through their music, and love was the answer. Hogan writes, "The record also sensitively traces the outlines of intimacy, both musical and romantic, hinting at a new way to imagine a life in music" (Hogan, 2017).

Curtis uses the same rock song to accompany a very divergent sense of self-empowerment from the preceding examples. In the third episode, Curtis juxtaposes "Return to Hot Chicken" with a description of the rise of radical revolutionary theory that espoused the goal of overthrowing bourgeois society. Curtis pairs the music with a

discussion of how revolutionary theory was implicated in the violent and brutal terrorist attacks of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the late 1970s (Episode 3: 00:17:12). The use of the same music to constitute the subjective optimism of the young terrorists illustrates that radically different ideologies still function similarly in their promises of liberation or self-empowerment.

Figure 5. Scenes juxtaposed with Yo La Tengo's "Return to Hot Chicken" (1997) in *The Trap* (2007)

5.2.5 The Love Song and Dramatic Irony

Akin to his strategic use of rock music, Curtis also positions serene and melodic love songs to correspond to the lived experiences of the people depicted. In some cases, the love song reflects delusion, emotional manipulation, or longstanding affective attachments in the form of nostalgia. The music is also used to generate dramatic irony incongruent to Curtis' argumentative tone.

Curtis uses Bernard Hermann's song, "Reunion" in this way. For instance, Curtis juxtaposes the song with his description of how Clinton "dismantled the welfare structure, abandoned healthcare, and cut government regulation of business" (Episode

2: 00:15:19). "Reunion" is the sole love song in the score of *North by Northwest.* In the film, the music occurs when protagonist, Roger Thornhill, experiences his growing affection for the secret agent, Eve Kendall. As Thornhill becomes aware that Kendall is a double agent, the music pushes the film to a strange generic intersection between a Cold War-inspired suspense film and a romance.

"Reunion" features the same instrumentation and production quality as the suspenseful pulsating riffs and musical cues that characterize the entire *North by Northwest* score. While it is sweet and romantic, it still contains a dark undercurrent in the possibility that a pulsing cello section may strike out at any moment.

As *North by Northwest* was itself a product of the ideological climate, Curtis uses the same music to interrogate the solutions determined through Cold War strategizing. One example is his explanation of the Nash Corp's thought experiment, "the prisoner's dilemma." First, Curtis juxtaposes his monologue with Nino Rota's mysterious and suspicious "Godfathers at Home" (Episode 1: 00:14:56). In juxtaposition with the Rota song, Curtis argues that "what the prisoner's dilemma expressed was the strange logic of the Cold War. The optimum solution, offering to get rid of all your weapons, provided the Russians did the same, would never happen. Because you couldn't trust them not to cheat." Then, the music cuts to "Reunion" (00:15:35) as Curtis continues: "Instead, you went for stability, created by a balance of dangerous weapons on both sides."

The song reoccurs in the same episode after a description of Ed Terman's use of mathematics to determine how many weapons would be necessary to build to deter the Russians from dropping a bomb (00:52:05). While dark, eerie sound effects accompany the first part of the description, the music cuts to "Reunion" as Curtis continues:

> Out of this, Ed Terman had developed a technique he called systems analysis. It was a technique of management that he believed could be applied to any type of human organization. Its aim was to get rid of all the emotional and subjective values that confused and corrupted the system and replace them [with] rational and objective methods" (Episode 1: 00:52:05-00:52:23).

In these examples, the music calls attention to the strangeness of how these "new" systems of organizing society could feel optimistic or positive. There is a marked disparity between the tone of the music and Curtis' own argumentative position; these were the only solutions afforded by the limited approach to human behavior inherent in game theory, a system of thinking that contained very little positivity about humanity to begin with. "Going for stability" presumed a paranoid and untrusting view of humanity. Market democracy presumed that consumer behavior was the most fundamental quality to human behavior. The use of the love song in these cases is markedly ironic because it underscores the very limited capacity for actual love or empathy afforded by these ways of thinking.

Another way that Curtis uses the love song is to illustrate how nostalgia for a golden age of the past functions to shape people's view of reality. During the second episode, Curtis features "Reunion" in his description of the inherent nostalgia in the new vision of market democracy during the 1990s:

> The promoters of this idea of market democracy portrayed it as a glorious return to a golden age. A time in the 18th and 19th centuries, when Laissez faire capitalism, not politics, had ordered society. But this was a myth. The political philosophers of that time had made a distinction between the self-interest of the marketplace and other areas of social and political life that involved what Adam Smith called moral sentiments. These were sympathy and understanding for others, which were just as important in the ordering of society (Episode 2: 00:17:48-00:18:15).

Curtis juxtaposes the monologue with a visual sequence featuring a sunset behind a city skyline, the images of skyscrapers from the perspective of the street, a shot of people staring at computers, and a ticker with numbers.

Throughout the monologue, the song takes on different meanings. The song first signifies the market democrats' nostalgia for the laissez faire capitalism of the 18th and 19th centuries. But as Curtis continues to describe Smith's moral sentiments, the song comes to support Curtis' own argument about the importance of empathy, in a rare moment in which the love song functions sympathetically with Curtis' narrative.

The placement of serene and melodic love songs is also used to underscore how people's feelings and emotions can be manipulated. Curtis juxtaposes Ennio Morricone's "Profondamente Nel Mostro," a melodic ballad featuring piano and strings, with his discussion of how the burgeoning culture of identity disorders left people confused about how they should feel. Curtis claims that the diagnostic checklists encouraged people to monitor their own behavior and police their own feelings.

> This new system of psychological disorders had been created by an attack on the arrogance of power of the psychiatric elite, in the name of freedom. But what was beginning to emerge from this was a new form of control. The disorders and checklists were becoming a powerful and objective guide to what were the correct and appropriate feelings in an age of individualism and emotion. (Episode 1: 00:46:55-00:47:20)

Together with the monologue, Curtis juxtaposes the love song to images of people's pronounced expressions of happiness: hugging, dancing, celebrating a wedding. The images are over-exposed and awash with solar glare. Curtis then slightly warps the music to a slower tempo and pitch, juxtaposing it with a shot of numbers generated from an analogue calculator (00:47:43). The stark contrast between the tone of Curtis' narration, the love song, and images illustrates that the happiness cultivated

by the new psychiatric culture was one that was constructed and manipulated. The love song, incongruous to Curtis' narrative, reflects a falsely injected emotion that does not in fact correspond to exterior reality.

5.2.6 Music and "The Trap"

The cycling of the same selection of songs throughout *The Trap* constitutes Curtis' main argument that the West has become trapped in a system of thinking in which freedom continues to be sought through the quantification, prediction, and control of human behavior. Curtis uses the music to correspond to peoples' subjectively experienced promises of freedom, while ironically underscoring the failure of the approaches. He also uses music to constitute the broader perspective that underlying different approaches to freedom was the same set of ideological assumptions.

Invariably, the rock songs and love songs are followed by horror or suspense music. The cycling of music engages a consideration of the viewer's own approach to freedom as a subject in the same society: we are still trapped in that same system of thinking.

During the end credits, Curtis directs his gaze outwards to the viewer. He juxtaposes the music of the British national anthem to slow motion footage of people jogging, imagery he had featured earlier in a discussion of the influence of genetics research and deterministic evolutionary theory. The footage of the joggers depicts a society centered around individual pursuit, but the slowed pace reveals everyone to be moving in lock step with each other. Curtis concludes:

> If we ever want to escape from this limited world view, we will have to rediscover the progressive, positive ideas of freedom. And realize that Isaiah Berlin was

wrong. Not all attempts to change the world for the better lead to tyranny" (Episode 3: 00:58:58-00:59:08).

Yet Curtis doesn't provide an answer. This ending is thematically similar to that of *Bitter Lake* in which Curtis states: "There is something else out there, but we just don't have the apparatus to see it. What is needed is a new story, and one that we can believe in."

In *The Trap*, the conspicuous music draws the audience's attention to the cultural construction of freedom in the West. By recycling music from films about the Cold War to interrogate its ideological underpinnings, Curtis acknowledges that he is constructing his critical argument from within the same ideological system. His repeated use of music draws attention to the illusive subjective experience of change, culminating in a final consideration about how an experience of true transformation would feel like. A new way of thinking about freedom in a positive way, as he proposes, would undoubtedly be accompanied by new music.

5.3 *It Felt Like a Kiss*: Music and Cruel Optimism

5.3.1 From Installation to Video

Unlike the majority of Curtis' works which were released as television miniseries, *It Felt Like a Kiss* first premiered as a 55-minute video installation at the Manchester Film Festival in 2009. It is billed as telling the story of "America's rise to power in the 1960s" (Curtis, qtd. in the Manchester Film Festival, 2009).[34]

[34] In collaboration with Punch Drunk International

It is Curtis' only work that features no-voice over; it relies on captions, music, and the rapid editing of very disparate news and Hollywood footage to convey disparities between the subjective, lived experience and the promise of the "American dream."

It Felt Like a Kiss is one of Curtis' most experimental works and does not feature a straightforward narrative argument. In its original context as an immersive installation piece, viewers would be surrounded by the music and the video would be illuminated on a large screen in a darkened gallery. This unique multimodal combination of captions, video, and music allows Curtis to invoke a different form of attention to the music. While there is some dialogue in the diegetic footage, the music is no longer disrupted by the sound of his voice-over. Instead, the music cuts from one song to the next; the soundtrack is measured and experienced by the duration of each song. In this way *It Felt Like a Kiss* takes on the form of a music video. The image does not take a dominant priority in the production of meaning. The music is the dominant modality and the video footage is edited to the music, featuring various techniques including synchronization, different rhythms of duration and pace, and lyrical matching.

Curtis uses music to interrogate the dominant media representations of the 1950s and 1960s in contrast to the lived experience of it. Positive footage from commercials or Hollywood movies is often paired with painful or melancholic love songs. Rock-and-roll songs are often paired with violent images of war, painful medical treatments or melancholic images of depressed people. Sometimes, Curtis pairs music from the 1970s with footage of the 1950s and 1960s. The temporal disparity provides a different lens through which to analyze the optimistic promises of the earlier decades.

Music is a central focus of the piece, both in terms of form and argument. Curtis distinguishes between the genres of the golden age of pop music and the burgeoning rock music in the late 1960s to represent intergenerational ideological differences and similarities. Through captions and editing, Curtis re-contextualizes the music and interrogates collective memories of it.

Curtis depicts peoples' inner struggles in dramatic contrast to the optimistic media representation of the good life. Depression and homosexuality were repressed and treated with violent medical techniques; many female artists who sang about empowerment and liberation in fact suffered from domestic abuse. This also demonstrates how the critical meaning in art can be neutralized or subsumed by mass culture.

Throughout *It Felt Like a Kiss* Curtis continually depicts the role of popular culture as both a reactive domain and a culturally legitimizing force in postwar America. Obvious examples of the representation of the American dream include footage of Hollywood stars Rock Hudson and Doris Day (the quintessential all-American girl) in romantic roles, child beauty pageants, pop music about love, images of leisure and social gatherings, and commercials featuring cars and kitchen appliances as the apotheosis of happiness. These images are mixed together with an array of footage reflecting tragic or complicated events: Lee Harvey Oswald, the Vietnam War, the CIA's foreign intervention in various countries, President Nixon's awkward televised interviews with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, the use of electro-shock therapy, and anti-homosexual educational material.

It Felt Like a Kiss is Curtis' most rapidly edited work. The images are swiftly cut to form sequences that are often too fast for the viewer to comprehend or identify independently. The durations of the songs, however, are longer and more comprehensible. The rhythms produced by the relationship between the long cuts of music, fast cuts of visual footage, and captions draw the viewer's attention to different details. For example, the visual footage is often synchronized with the music, which produces a strong sensation of the power of popular culture to influence the emotions and rhythms of people's actions. It also indicates how easily news footage can be constructed to support different arguments.

When the music does cut to a different song, a feeling of change and momentum occurs, signifying a new historical event or the development of a new perspective. Often, however, Curtis in fact pairs different music to clips of the same visual footage which he re-uses. This can especially be discerned when the visual footage is watched silently.

It Felt like a Kiss embodies Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" (2011). Berlant argues that today, people continue to hold on to fantasies of the good life even when the optimistic attachments themselves become painful and inhibitive. Cruel optimism occurs "when the object that compels an attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially, when the desired object, which promises some sort of fulfillment, actually poses an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011, p. 1). Berlant writes that we have grown addicted to having our heart strings pulled, "rather than focusing on what the pulling could accomplish by way of political change" (Qtd. in Hsu, 2019).

Berlant's concept of cruel optimism underscores Curtis' project to expose how cultural hegemony (manifest through advertising, pop music, and Hollywood films) perpetuates irrational attachments in the face of the cruelties of history and neoliberalism. The title of *It felt like a Kiss* comes from a song written by Carole King: "He hit me (and it Felt like a Kiss)". The song was an attempt to make sense of the psychology of domestic abuse, questioning how people can remain attached to their partners in the face of their cruel treatment.

It Felt like a Kiss exposes how commercial television legitimized consumerism and perpetuated attachments to consumer goods. It also reflects how television culture sharply expanded people's media consumption. Its rapid-fire cuts of fragmented news clips, images, and popular culture conveys the growing chaos of the 1960s and the inundation of television content to become a major feature of people's realities. This style of editing reflects another of Berlant's ideas— that today's temporality is a stretched-out present marked by crisis after crisis, an experience which has been largely shaped by the culture of television.

Curtis resists presenting the material in a chronological order, preventing the interpretation that that the 1960s or 1970s provided a solution to problems of the 1950s. Additionally, the film consistently references the present. Throughout the film, Curtis alludes to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, through the repeated motifs of planes flying overhead and the inclusion of footage about the building of the Twin Towers. These details draw a connection between the events depicted and the present moment: "that era" is now.

5.3.2 Incongruities

From the very beginning of the film, Curtis uses music and captions to undercut the representation of America as it was constituted through television, film, and popular culture in the commercial 1950s and 1960s. The work begins with an eerie soundscape. White captions over a black screen read: “When a nation is powerful it tells the world confident stories about the future / The stories can be enchanting or frightening / But they make sense of the world. / But when that power begins to ebb / the stories fall apart / and all that is left are fragments / which haunt you like half-forgotten dreams” (0:0:00 - 0:00:25).

Then, captions introduce Doris Day and Rock Hudson, stars of *Pillow Talk* (1959) and *Lover Come Back* (1960). But the accompanying footage is not of Day or Hudson. It is black and white and grainy, akin to the direct cinema documentary style. The footage features a man waking up in the morning, frowning and sighing; he is waking up from a dream. A caption reads: “Autumn 1958.” This footage of the man, his wife, and their nuclear family repeats throughout the work. In every shot, the man or his wife appear forlorn, bored, and seemly trapped. The footage of the man is paired with Ruth Brown’s 1954 blues song “Oh What a Dream.” She sings: “Woke up this morning and I looked around / So disappointed and I laid back down / Oh what a dream I had last night / Dreamed I held you in my arms.” The shot of the man, brooding over a cigarette, then cuts to brightly colored film footage of a dancer in a cocktail lounge.

Throughout the film, Curtis illustrates disparities between the lived, personal experience and dominant representations of the good life. He often uses captions to undercut the meaning of the images. For example, Curtis introduces Rock Hudson and

Doris Day as the quintessential Hollywood image of romance. Yet captions describe that Hudson was homosexual, a fact he kept secret throughout his career. Curtis juxtaposes a scene from *Pillow Talk* in which Doris Day is thinking out loud: “Marvelous looking man, I wonder if he is single” (00:21:58) with captions that describe that Rock Hudson would die in 1985 from AIDS-related illness (00:22:21). The dominant heteronormativity reflected in *Pillow Talk* is undercut by the acknowledgement of the repression of homosexuality and ensuing stigmatization of H.I.V. The lives of the actors depicted differed greatly from their representation on the screen.

Another way that Curtis reflects the disparity between the personal experience and the representation of the good life is by juxtaposing early rock or pop songs from the 1950s with increasingly chaotic, violent, or erratic footage of world events, evoking a sense that the popular music of the time became increasingly unable to reflect or make sense of people’s experiences.

It Felt Like a Kiss features a soundtrack laden with optimistic songs of the 1950s and 1960s. These tracks include "Just One Look" by Doris Troy, “Summer Wind" by Frank Sinatra, and “End of the World" originally written by Skeeter Davis. Curtis juxtaposes upbeat 1950s songs with violent footage of the Vietnam War, the administration of Electro-Shock Therapy, a monk starting himself on fire. The tension and ambivalence produced between the incongruous music and news footage reflects a conflicted, uncertain subjective experience.

5.3.3 Cruel Optimism and the Sad Love Song

Often, Curtis features mournful and sad love songs with gleeful and amusing footage of people smiling and enjoying themselves. For example, Curtis follows the

song “Oh what a Dream” with Georges Delerue’s mournful, symphonic “Camille’s Theme” from Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Mépris* [*Contempt*] (1964). *Le Mépris* depicts the dissolution of a marriage within the context of a film shoot. Critics have approached the film as a story about modern alienation, which is reflected in its musical score. Peter Strickland describes the impact of the song, “Camille’s Theme” in the film: “Love’s last embers are stoked by Georges Delerue’s yearning score, which wraps itself around the film like a noose” (Strickland, 2019). Similarly, Curtis uses the song as an overture to the work; it is the “last embers” of the American dream. Curtis juxtaposes the slow, orchestral music with a fast-paced sequence of 1960s footage featuring a woman dancing, boys talking on the phone together, a rocket launching into space, cheerleaders, people marching in a parade, people riding in a speedboat on a lake, and a blonde woman lying on a sandy beach.

Many of the juxtapositions used throughout *It Felt Like a Kiss* illustrate the condition of cruel optimism and the experience of sustained attachments to promises of the good life (Berlant, 2011). The conventions of the film, television and film footage represent how people’s emotional attachments can be culturally shaped and manifest.

Berlant writes:

> Often the optimism manifests as a change that is not going to come: one of optimism's ordinary pleasures is to induce conventionality, that place where appetites find a shape in the predictable comforts of the good-life genres that a person or a world has seen fit to formulate (Berlant, 2011, p. 2).

The sad love songs, juxtaposed with commercial and Hollywood footage, are the very embodiment of cruel optimism: a painful, sustained desire for and acceptance of the conventions of the good life. Cruel optimism is reflected through the commitment to the object of desire even amidst pain, conflict, and instability. The sad love songs refer

to sustained emotional attachments to other people, but the fact that unrequited love is a common subject of popular music reveals how the condition of cruel optimism can be perpetuated and normalized through genres and conventions.

This is especially evidenced through the lyrics of several of the sad love songs featured. Early in the film, Curtis presents Doris Day singing “What does a Woman Do?” The song is first paired with visual footage of a missile in the sky, followed by black and white footage of the unhappy wife (it is continued footage of the same family featured in the beginning of the film). The shot then cuts to footage of the “the kitchen debate,” a filmed conversation between U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the opening of the U.S. National Exhibition in Moscow on July 24, 1959 (00:05:45-00:06:58).

Day sings the lyrics: “What does a woman do / When the man she loves is wrong / Judging by me and you / She goes along / Goes along / One of us has to choose what’s to be the game we play / So whether we win or lose / I’ll go your way / Your way.” Curtis makes clear that the lyrics do not just apply to the power dynamics and emotional attachments of a romantic relationship but to larger-scale ideological struggles.

The title of *It Felt Like a Kiss*, as the captions explain, comes from a 1963 song written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin: “He Hit me (And it felt like a Kiss).” In the captions, Curtis describes that King wrote the song based on a memory of when she discovered her babysitter was being regularly beaten by her boyfriend. Her babysitter told Carole that she tolerated it because he did it out of love (00:16:30-00:16:43). Borrowing the title of the song for the title of his film, Curtis draws a parallel between the

toxic relationship described in the song with people's attachment to the promises of the good life in postwar America, even when they remained unfulfilled by it.

Additionally, there is another layer to the meaning of King's song. After depicting King's personal inspiration behind it, Curtis demonstrates how her intention to interrogate the psychology of domestic abuse was deformed and lost through the production process. In interviews, King described that the song was intended to give a voice to a problem that she recognized but didn't have the language to describe. However, "It Felt like a Kiss" was produced by Phil Spector, who guided a young girl group, the Crystals, to perform it without any irony (00:16:43). The Crystals, who were teenagers at the time, would later describe that they felt uncomfortable singing it and didn't understand the emotions behind it. The reception to the song was immediately negative, as many listeners interpreted that the song was endorsing physical abuse. It was banned from many radio stations and would gain an infamous reputation.

Through the way that Spector recorded it, Kings' original meaning was lost. Her attempt to criticize toxic emotional attachments and reveal a complexity to the psychology of domestic abuse was transformed into an endorsement of it. This exemplifies an ongoing theme in Curtis' work that through the mass production process, the intended meaning was subsumed into a self-perpetuating cultural system, not

terribly unlike how King's babysitter came to interpret her boyfriend's treatment of her as a sign of love.[35]

Curtis features the song after the captions first describe the inspiration behind it (00:16:43-00:19:11). First, he pairs the song to a long clip of a woman expressing intense anguish. The footage is followed with shorter clips of the Vietnam war; a monk setting himself on fire in protest of the corrupt regime; and a man playing with a toy shotgun with his kids. Following that is footage of a child's beauty pageant and a commercial of a young girl in a white dress. Images from beauty pageants re-occur throughout the film and appear in Curtis' other works, evoking a sense of theatricality and performativity. The smiling girls exist to please and to be judged. Captions within the commercial footage read: "See Sally. / See her Dress. / It is very white. / But will it stay white?" (00:19:11). There is a dichotomy presented between violence and purity, a clear signal of the socialization of gender roles. But the dichotomy also applies to power dynamics in general. The footage of the soldiers in the Vietnam War and the protesting monks depicts the lack of recourse that weaker parties have over dominant ones.

[35] A further, darker irony exists in the fact that Spector would be later convicted of murdering his girlfriend in 2003.

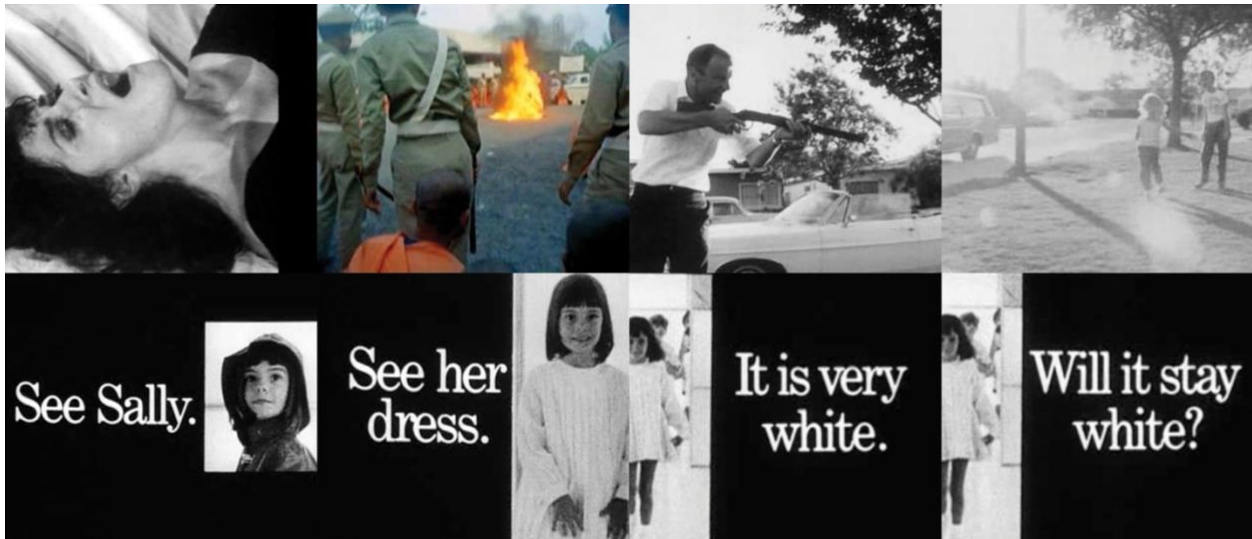

Figure 6. Exposition to the song "He Hit Me (And it Felt Like a Kiss)" (1962) in *It Felt Like a Kiss* (2007)

5.3.4 The Culture Industry and the Lives of Others

Out of all his works, *It Felt Like a Kiss* most directly refers to the hegemonic power of the pop culture and music industry. This is evidenced by Curtis' attention to the artists, their experiences, and the intention behind their music. In various examples, Curtis illustrates how artists' original, intended meaning can be disfigured or neutralized in mass culture. A critique of systemic problems can be twisted into an endorsement of them. As Curtis repeatedly states in *HyperNormalisation*, "the system absorbs all opposition."

Phil Spector makes another twisted appearance in *It Felt Like a Kiss* as the pop producer for Tina Turner. Curtis narrates: "[Spector] decided to write the most perfect pop song ever / It was about love, ragdolls, puppies and passion / Tina Turner wanted it to be a hit so she could have a solo career / and escape being beaten by her husband Ike" (00:45:10-00:45:25). Turner saw a path to freedom by singing about a fantasy that was far from her own reality.

Spector's pop production style is also used to represent a particular ideological view of the world. Spector was famous for creating "the wall of sound," a production method in which he mixed an array of orchestral instruments and duplicated them with large amounts of reverb. This produced a dense, rich sound that came through well on the radio but could enshroud the individual vocals. In contrast, rock music stripped down the instrumentals and amplified the vocals. The charismatic "rock star" was cultivated through a celebration of the individual voice.

Captions describe that "Phil Spector hated rock music and self-expression. It was destroying the beautiful world of pop," juxtaposed with footage of people screaming in a gestalt therapy session. "The golden era of pop began to splinter / In America people wanted to be free to be themselves / They had found a new world to conquer inside their own heads. . . ." (00:33:21-00:33:34).

Curtis' distinction between pop and rock music is also reflected through his dual portrayals of two musicians: Brian Wilson and Lou Reed. Both born in 1942, California-born Wilson's music would come to form the zeitgeist of the early 1960s music. Long-Island born Lou Reed would develop a style emblematic of the early 1970s; although he produced the music in the 1960s, it didn't become popular on a mass scale until the beginning of the next decade.

Similar to Curtis' depiction of Carole King's inspiration for "He hit me (And it felt like a Kiss)" Curtis juxtaposes their music with captions that provide details about their personal backgrounds and the experiences that informed their art. In this way, their music is recontextualized through the additional knowledge, which challenges the viewer's affective reaction, identification and collective memory of it.

Brian Wilson was heavily inspired by Phil Spector's wall of sound production. He employed the techniques in his production of the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (1966) to create its dreamy, orchestral soundscape. Curtis pairs his description of Brian Wilson to the song, "Wouldn't it be nice" (39:53-40:27). Yet "in reality," the captions explain, "Brian Wilson hated the ocean / Its darkness and power terrified him / Every day he heard loud terrifying screams inside his head / The only way to drown out the screams was to write happy songs" (00:39:57-00:40:23).

This is visually paired with a shot of violent waves crashing over the lens of a camera. This cuts to a black-and-white image of what appears to be a California underpass (interpretable as a more authentic representation of California), followed by footage of a children's beauty pageant.

Through the juxtaposition of captions and video footage with the song "Wouldn't it be Nice," Curtis confronts the viewer with a striking disparity between Wilson's tortured mental state and the joyful expression of his music. It points to the private suffering behind Brian Wilson's elocution of airy harmonies. The sequence reminds the viewer that "Wouldn't it be nice" was hypothetical; Wilson was attempting to capture a "spiritual love" that he couldn't find in the real world. It also provokes a consideration about the process of making art as it relates to pain and suffering.

Figure 7. Exposition to Brian Wilson's "Wouldn't it be Nice" (1966) in *It Felt Like a Kiss* (2009)

In a different example, Curtis dedicates a long sequence to the early life of Lou Reed. Curtis pairs music from the Velvet Underground with a depiction of the pain and suffering in Reed's youth, suggesting how the experience would inform his art and manifest in his gritty, iconoclastic rock voice.

Juxtaposed with harrowing footage of the use of electro-shock therapy, captions explain that "In 1959 a 17-year-old Lou Reed was given Electro-Convulsive Therapy / To cure him of his homosexual feelings / Reed said that the ECT made him blank and devoid of all feeling / And compassion for others / Three years later Reed wrote a song that expressed this blankness" (00:11:08-00:11:47).

The sequence is followed by the Velvet Underground and Nico's song, "All Tomorrow's Parties" (00:28:18-29:53). The song was written by Reed and released on the Velvet Underground's first album in 1967. It was originally written about a desperate woman who frequented Studio 54. The song is juxtaposed with footage of the unhappy family that re-appears throughout *It Felt like a Kiss* and in other works. The husband and wife sit on chairs in their living room while the kids sit on the floor playing. The wife is smoking a cigarette and the little girl is playing with paper dolls (00:28:15-29:03). (Earlier, Curtis uses another song by the Velvet Underground, "I'll be your Mirror" (00:12:29) with clips from that same sequence of footage.)

The title, "All Tomorrow's Parties" contrasts with the boredom on the face of the housewife in the footage of the nuclear family. The music expresses an optimistic attachment to a future that will not come. Curtis subtly warps the speed of the song to a slower tempo to further emphasize that the idea of "all tomorrow's parties" is a distorted attachment.

Curtis repeats the song, “All Tomorrow’s Parties” later in the film, pairing it with commercial footage from a 1956 Populuxe film produced by General Motors, titled “Design for Dreaming.”[36] The promotional material features a woman waking up into a dream, where she is enthralled by the promises of new cars and new kitchen appliances. The sequence then cuts to shots of crime scene footage of celebrities who died; the imagery is then followed by a woman testifying that she learned how to leave the state [mental] hospital by “act[ing] the way society tells me to act, and abid[ing] by the rules” (00:12:51-00:13:10).

The sequence provides a new perspective of the suffering that informed Reed’s music: the “blankness” described in the captions that resulted from the ECT is manifest in Nico’s monotone voice and the slow, marching tempo of the song.

Undeniably, the song draws attention to the ethos of Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground. It is significant to note that Reed’s music would come to define not the 1960s but the 1970s. During its time as a band, the Velvet Underground achieved virtually no commercial success. It would take a decade for the band to sell 100,000 records. Yet through a slow process of word of mouth, the band would come to influence generations of musicians and define a new music genre. As the music achieved popularity in the later decade, Reed held a solid allegiance with the counterculture and his spirit of rebellion, an identity that he was “almost shamed into” by mainstream society (Levine, 2019).

[36] *Design for Dreaming* was also featured in the title sequence of Curtis’ *Pandora’s Box* (1992).

While Wilson's ethereal soundscape and projection of joy is emblematic of pop music, Lou Reed's raw and uncompromising voice is representative of the coming rock music. In all the examples of his use of Lou Reed's music, Curtis creates a disparity by juxtaposing footage of the early 1960s with music that would not become celebrated or understood until the 1970s. The emotional and temporal disparity provides a vantage point from which to analyze the optimistic promises of the 1960s, as represented in the media. "The good life" would come to be interrogated through the rock voice that more directly criticized society's rigid social standards. "All tomorrow's Parties" points to the future of rock music, in addition to the future of America; the sequence is followed with footage of the architectural model for the twin towers and a man describing the New York City skyline as visually representative of the greatest achievements of capitalism.

5.3.5 The Rhythms of Televisual Subjectivity

Without a voice-over argument, Curtis inscribes textual meaning in the work through the use of captions. The captions appear predominantly at the bottom-center of the screen, as white captions in Arial font, a departure from his typical Helvetica typeface. Occasionally, Curtis displays the title of the music in the bottom-left of the screen, akin to the format of a music video.

Throughout the work, the interaction between the captions, music and visual footage produces different rhythms. One clear textual difference between the three modalities is that the visual footage is often cut speedily, featuring swirling camera angles, shaky footage, and distorted television clips. The duration of the songs is much longer than the quickly edited visual footage. The captions are the rarest of the three and are used to re-contextualize the music as well as the visual footage.

Curtis often synchronizes the visual footage to the pacing of the music. Often, he does this with shots of people dancing. Additionally, Curtis repeatedly pairs the music to intersect lyrically with the footage on the screen. For instance, he features different lyrics with images of President John F. Kennedy throughout the work. First, he pairs images of the late president with the song "Who's that Guy," recorded by The Kolettes (00:25:40). Later, he pairs footage of President Kennedy with a phrase from Peggy Lee singing the great ode to disillusionment, "Is That All There Is?": "And then I met the most amazing guy. . . ." (00:49:17).

The rhythms produced between the modalities reflect the perceptual influence of the television industry. Early in the film, Curtis anchors a thematic attention to televisual subjectivity in the captions: "Every day, thousands of things happened / to thousands of people / Some seemed to be significant and others did not" (00:07:54). Curtis also starts the film in a typical television format: through the introduction of its main characters. Additionally, he features footage of various people watching television throughout the work (24:52).

Curtis uses various rhythmic techniques to represent the new televisual subjectivity of the 1950s and 1960s in which the circulation of media and news content was rapidly increasing in pace and scope. In one sequence, Curtis uses captions to describe that the iconic Zapruder "home footage" of the Kennedy assassination became the most televised moment in history, yet simultaneously the least understood (00:25:33). Reminiscent of Bruce Conner's *A Report,* Curtis uses the now famous footage of the historical event as an example of the destabilizing effects of televisual

media overload. The footage was repeatedly replayed on television, yet it offered no conclusive evidence and only stoked further speculation and conspiracy theories.

Subsequently, Curtis features Skeeter Davis' recording of "It's the End of the World" with increasingly sped-up sequences of televisual footage. This combination signifies a sense of growing chaos associated with the rise of television; rather than clarify an understanding of reality, the growth of television broadcasting made it more difficult to understand the world and make sense of what was important. Included in the sequence is footage of foreign military intervention mixed with entertainment footage. The fast pace of the footage contrasts with the much slower tempo of the song, producing the sensation that the televisual subject is either oblivious of or inured to the scenes of violence.

At certain points Curtis layers multiple audio tracks together, allowing several songs to play simultaneously. He also dissolves different shots of visual footage together to create the same effect. This creates a sensation of destabilized cacophony. It reflects the barrage of different perspectives and commercial enticements, circulated at an increasing rate, via the growing television industry. Often, the visual footage includes fast cuts of violent imagery or shots in which women are sexualized. These images are cut between more innocuous shots of people dancing. This produces a similar effect regarding the violence; the televisual subject becomes inured to the violent and sexual images. The range of footage presented reflects an increasingly chaotic world, in which serious televised historical events are juxtaposed with insipid television entertainment.

Additionally, Curtis inserts footage of seemingly random or unrelated figures into sequences, such as chimpanzees. In fact, he features the stories of two different chimpanzees. The chimpanzees represent society's scientific practices but also serve as a metaphor for the social experiment that has been thrust upon the American people. One scene features footage of a chimpanzee buckling himself up into a spacecraft set to orbit. The shot represents the drastic ways that science was used during the Cold War and suggests that the social and technological experiment extends to the human subjects of the same culture.

The second story featuring a chimpanzee regards the coming spread of the HIV virus. "Somewhere in the jungles of the Congo the HIV virus had been passed / From a chimpanzee to a human / And in 1959 what would become known HIV virus / Passed unnoticed into a blood sample / Taken during fighting in Kinshasa. / At the same time, chimps from central Africa / were being trained for rocket flight / to beat the Russians into space" (00:08:58-00:09:38). The juxtaposition of the captions with generic footage of wild chimpanzees and upbeat 1950s music creates a sensation of social unawareness, ignorance, repression, or unpreparedness.

Throughout the work, the footage is structured according to the dominant televisual gaze. Women are continually sexually objectified and made to perform for the camera. Men of color are "otherized" within the footage of American military intervention. Throughout the work Curtis teases music from the movie *Fight Club*, with the theme song "Who is Tyler Durden?" In *Fight Club*, Tyler Durden represented freedom from consumerism and social programming. In *It Felt Like a Kiss*, Curtis teases the music, although it is often overshadowed by other, popular songs.

In one sequence Curtis strategically juxtaposes the song with footage of African Americans, only to later replace the music with a more socially comprehensible style. Following a shot of an interview with H. Rap Brown, Chairman of the radical Civil Rights group, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (paired with music from the opera *Peter Grimes*) Curtis synchronizes a scene of African Americans clapping and dancing to the music from *Fight Club* (00:35:25). The pairing signifies the threat that African Americans pose according to the dominant social perspective. However, Curtis then re-winds the visual footage and replays it, re-synchronizing the African Americans clapping to Solomon Burke singing "Cry to Me." An African American preacher from Philadelphia, Burke was a foundational voice in the soul movement of the 1960s. The song "Cry to me," however, was written by Bert Russell and produced by Bert Berns. Berns was a New Yorker and Juilliard graduate described to have come from a very different background from the soul tradition in which he specialized. By resynchronizing the footage to this song, Curtis illustrates how, through music, the black identity could be shaped and contained by hegemonic influences.

The rhythms of the music and multimodal interaction in *It Felt Like a Kiss* implicate the viewer's own bodily reactions into the same cultural and televisual industry depicted on the screen. This approach to the rhythms of *It Felt Like a Kiss* follows Jaimie Baron's reading of Leslie Thornton's *Other Worldy* (1999). In *Other Worldy*, Thornton synchronized German industrial music with found footage of white women dancing for the camera in imitation of various Orientalist cultural styles, presumably for American soldiers during World War II. While the juxtaposition offers a clear critique of the footage, the viewer is simultaneously drawn into the spectacle through the rhythms

of the music. Baron writes that “Even if our minds are unwilling to enjoy the spectacle of the dancing female bodies before us, our bodies are implicated in the production of the media spectacle” (Baron, 2013, p. 86-87).

Throughout *It Felt Like a Kiss*, various rhythms and synchronization do exactly this: the music draws the viewer’s visceral reactions into the same televisual spectacle that the work critiques. The process of reading the captions, when they do occur, momentarily draws the viewer out of the musical rhythms, thereby drawing their attention to it.

The musical rhythms and synchronization structure the experience in such a way that the viewer is implicated in the pleasures of the spectacle. Harrowing footage of ECT treatment, violence, racism, and sexual objectification is all made more tolerable through the musical rhythms in *It Felt like a Kiss*. The film demonstrates how hegemonic culture can be inscribed onto the individual body through the pleasures of rhythm. In *It Felt Like a Kiss*, the rhythms of music are shown to be a powerful and significant purveyor of ideological influence.

5.3.6 Conclusion

In *It Felt Like a Kiss* Curtis depicts another significant element to the culture of television: it is continually focused on the present. As each new piece of music and visual footage unfolds, the viewer is continually drawn into the present context. Curtis structures the film through a non-linear montage that does not move chronologically, from the late 1950s to the 1960s. Rather, the work presents different contrasting juxtapositions between the representation of the good life and the individual experience. Music, news events, commercials, and cultural artifacts from various points within this

history are featured throughout the work, including scenes depicting the expression of radical individuality in the late 1960s. This non-chronological form resists the interpretation that history was progressing towards a more individually liberated era.

The film is also ostensibly about the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In the opening, Curtis uses computer graphics to label the apartment number of Doris Day's apartment, "2001." Planes fly overhead throughout the film. There is continual acknowledgement of the events of September 11, such as a shot of the development of the Twin Towers in New York City and, at a different moment, a shot of people jumping out of a burning building paired with Peggy Lee singing "Is That all There Is?" Additionally, the film not only features music contemporaneous with the 1950s or 1960s but includes short segments of contemporary music such as the industrial style of the band, Nine Inch Nails.

At the end of the film, Curtis juxtaposes a shot of a woman smoking and dancing to Benjamin Britton's "Four Sea Interludes" from the opera, *Peter Grimes*. The opera is based on a tale of a doomed fisherman fated to be rejected by his community. The footage of the woman is rendered mysterious and almost frightening by the dark and foreboding music. Captions describe: "The same computers that controlled the Cold War and sent a man to the moon were put to new use; they started to analyze the credit data of all Americans. So that in the future everyone could be lent money. And buy whatever they wanted. And be happy" (00:52:50-00:53:20).

In the final scene, Doris Day goes to sleep dreaming of romance. Then comes a sound of an oncoming plane, a re-occurring aural motif throughout the piece (53:42-53:49). A signal of the 2001 World Trade terrorist attacks, Curtis' final message is that

we live in that very same aspirational culture, characterized by cruel attachments to the promises of the good life. The same technical infrastructure that helped the US achieve the glorious feats of the 1960s would also come to be used to perpetuate and control the consumer spending power of American citizens.

It Felt Like a Kiss challenges the audience's sense of present and past, provoking a consideration about how the events depicted are contemporary and continuous. The music may feel very different today, but the system of control is the same. Through this final juxtaposition of captions, music, and Hollywood film footage, Curtis once again draws the audience's attention outward to their own subjectivity within the same culture; it is a final suture between the personal and the political.

6. *HYPERNORMORALISATION*

6.1 Living in an Unreal World

> *You go into an office and sit at a desk. But maybe it is a fake desk. Your real job is shopping. The true factories of our time are the shopping malls. That is where the real hard work is done. You are managed with performance targets and measured outcomes. But as you sit in the glass-walled offices, you know that the targets are manipulated and fake. And the managers know that you know. But you all sit there and pretend it is objective and rational.*

This is a trailer for *HyperNormalisation*, titled “Living in an Unreal world,” which Adam Curtis released on “Vice” in October of 2016.

As Curtis speaks in the second person, directly to the audience, his voice-over is juxtaposed with rather unremarkable footage: high rises, malls, an office, Donald Trump riding down an elevator at Trump tower before announcing his presidential bid. But it is not the visual footage that illustrates the state of hypernormalisation of which he is speaking about, but the presence of a near-subliminal, hauntological style of minimal electronic music that renders the familiar footage uncanny and strange.

HyperNormalisation was released one month before the 2016 United States presidential elections. The 166-minute long piece relies entirely on archival footage. It was produced directly for the BBC iPlayer, to be consumed and distributed entirely through the internet. It is an amalgamation of audiovisual motifs from Curtis’ previous works, including long sequences that first premiered at Curtis’ installation at the Park Avenue Armory in collaboration with the bands Massive Attack and Pye Corner Audio.

HyperNormalisation encapsulates many of the themes and subjects of the last twenty years of his work: how Cold War-inspired ideology has affected people’s

understanding of humanity, how the political left has retreated, and how the utopian vision of personal computers has led to today's dystopian reality structured by filter bubbles, growing polarization, and the consolidation of corporate control. These sub-themes all relate to the concept of "hypernormalisation." Techniques of perception management have led to a destabilization of meaning in public discourse which characterizes today's era of "post-truth" (Coley, 2018).

The term "hypernormalisation" was coined by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak to describe life in the USSR during the stagnating decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Although everyone knew the system was failing, because they could not imagine an alternative world, people were "resigned to maintaining the pretense of a functioning society. Over time, this delusion became a self-fulfilling prophecy and the fakeness was accepted by everyone as real" (Klumbyte & Sharafutdinova, 2012). As Curtis put it:

> You were so much a part of the system, that it was impossible to see beyond it. . . .The Soviet Union became a society where everyone knew that what their leaders said was not real, because they could see with their own eyes that the economy was falling apart. But everybody had to play along, and pretend like it was real, because no one could imagine any alternative (00:24:21-00:24:26).

Curtis' overarching argument in *HyperNormalisation* is that similarly, Western politicians have pivoted from trying to shape the future of the world to trying to maintain stability, in which they rely on systems of perception and risk management. In effect, the Western political arena has become a theater; people go along with it because they cannot imagine an alternative.

6.2 BBC iPlayer Format

HyperNormalisation is the second of Curtis' works produced directly for the BBC iPlayer. His earlier television series were divided between three to six hour-long episodes. Each episode featured a title sequence, introduction and conclusion, which restated the series' main theme. In contrast, *HyperNormalisation* is 166 minutes of a continuously told, digressing and non-chronological narrative.

Like his other BBC iPlayer production, *Bitter Lake, HyperNormalisation* features a greater amount of media footage in which a younger audience may have lived through: news footage of Brexit, the 2016 American presidential race, recent footage from conflict in the Middle East, images of refugee boats on the Mediterranean, and scenes from Hollywood movies produced in the last decades.

In order to structure the footage, Curtis divides the work into nine thematic chapters, which are introduced via intertitles in Curtis' signature Helvetica typeface. The chapters are titled: "1975" (00:02:52); "The Human Bomb" (00:27:13); "Altered States" (00:39:32); "Acid Flashback" (00:42:54); "The Colonel" (00:50:43); "The Truth is Out There" (1:06:10); "Managed Outcomes" (1:14:52); "A Cautionary Tale" (1:28:00); and "A World Without War" (2:00:00).

As Curtis has stated in interviews, he wanted audiences to be able to start watching from any point in the series. Additionally, the themes are not mutually exclusive. Often, Curtis repeats his arguments in slightly different ways in different chapters. He uses the examples of different historical events to exemplify the same underlying ideological forces. One prominent topic is how we have arrived at today's

culture of social media and the powerful role of algorithms in pacifying people's political activity. He discusses the topic and restates it differently in three separate chapters.

6.3 Thematic Overview

In *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis builds on many of the arguments in his earlier works. Curtis continues his exploration of the dynamics between hegemonic culture and the individual. This theme is present in Curtis' ongoing attention to two subjects: how radical individuality has led to a retreat into self-absorption and political apathy, and how the utopian dream of personal computers has led to today's state of passive, self-involved activity, guided and structured by algorithms via social media.

The concept of "hypernormalisation" concerns how the personal experience is a reaction to larger forces of power and ideology. Curtis states that in addition to managing the credit data of Americans, corporations are gaining more control over individuals by using their personal information to carefully structure algorithms that guide their behavior. Strategies of perception management, along with the growing technology of computers, have contributed to the widespread acknowledgement that mediated, theatrical performances now dominate our culture, politics, and economy, even when people know that what is being communicated is false.

Three techniques which Curtis employs in *HyperNormalisation* that express the condition of hypernormalisation and reflect the new digital environment are: music video montages, the incorporation of "hauntological" music, and the strategic juxtaposition of YouTube and mobile "home videos." The inclusion of digital videos and YouTube content evokes the sensation of internet browsing or scrolling through "streaming feeds." In comparison to the format of televisual news, the Internet experience is

structured less according to a temporal schedule, but instead is guided by a more associative or algorithmically generated way. The music video montages, like the structure of *It Felt like a Kiss*, incorporate a different multimodal interaction between the music and the images. The music plays a significant role in suturing the various shots together and in re-structuring the audience's identification and affective reactions to it.

Like his technique of inserting footage of figures dancing or other expressions individual pleasure within footage of political or historical events, Curtis often inserts "amateur" YouTube videos into his discussion of the finance and technology industries. This reveals a strong reactive dimension to the individual behavior reflected in the social media posts; social media has become a powerful purveyor of reactive behavior and individual retreat.   Curtis uses music (and silence) to structure the YouTube videos in different ways. Sometimes he pairs the videos with music as part of longer sequences. At other moments he cuts the music completely to the diegetic sound of the YouTube videos. This plays a significant role in bringing the audience's attention to the personal, and sometimes unpredictable, qualities of the digital "home video."

The soundtrack of *HyperNormalisation* is characterized by an overwhelming presence of "hauntology" music, a musical style that first emerged in the early 2000s in Britain. Hauntological songs feature digital samples of archival music, which are warped and distorted to foreground material defects such as crackles and glitches. The quality of decay foregrounded through the music evokes a sense of pastness; simultaneously, the music also sounds futuristic through devices of sampling and the use of digital processing.

The hauntological music is very minimal and features a lot of space. Entire songs or long sections of songs are characterized by near-subliminal sound effects. Curtis uses this style of music to express a contemporary state of detachment, alienation, and repression. Additionally, he pairs it with his discussions of the growing invisible power of the technology and finance industries. The presence of this music at its most minimal creates a destabilizing effect to the footage and signifies inconspicuous structures of power.

6.4 The Music Video Montage

HyperNormalisation begins in New York City, 1975, a period marked by sharp economic decline and brutal austerity measures. Curtis argues at the opening that since the 1960s, the baby boomer generation's celebration of "radical individuality" has led to a political retreat into the self. Radical individuality, once a promise of freedom, has kept people from organizing together to affect large-scale political and structural change. Similar to strategies used in previous films such as *It Felt like a Kiss*, Curtis locates this cultural shift and the left's "retreat into the self" in the example of a musician: artist Patti Smith. Curtis argues:

> The radical and left wingers who, ten years before, had dreamt of changing America through revolution, did nothing. They had retreated and were living in the abandoned buildings in Manhattan. . . [There rose] a new kind of individual radical, who watched the decaying city with a cool detachment. They didn't try to change it; they just experienced it. (00:08:32)

Curtis pairs the monologue with a scene of Smiths' apartment, decorated with material artifacts she had collected from around the city. Smith describes that she likes to watch and observe the city, people's behavior, or graffiti on an aesthetic level, but

that she doesn't identify with the political organizations of the time. Smith stands for a generation of leftists who became passive, detached, and apolitical.

As in his past works, music plays a powerful role in representing various forms of detachment. In *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis expresses detachment and the power of hegemonic culture over the individual experience, through music-video style montages. The montages harken back to Curtis' techniques in *It Felt Like a Kiss* in which the absence of voice-over allows for an intimate interaction between music and the moving image footage. But the montages in *HyperNormalisation* are less erratic than the quickly cut footage in *It Felt like a Kiss*. The musical montages in *HyperNormalisation* feature longer segments of ambivalent music. The music sutures associations between the visual shots but also decontextualizes the images from conventional forms, allowing the viewer to regard the footage in a new way.

6.4.1 ScubaZ' "The Vanishing American Family"

HyperNormalisation begins with a montage to the music of ScubaZ' "The Vanishing American Family," the title of which is a clear textual association with the major themes in the film (see Figure 8). The montage contains visual motifs that later re-appear in the film: a flashlight in the dark; a woman dancing; and what is referred to as "a fly guy," the inflatable, flailing figure often featured in front of car dealerships.[37]

Curtis markedly reprises ScubaZ' song, "The Vanishing American Family" later in *HyperNormalization* (see Figure 12). The second montage occurs toward the end of the

[37] The same montage is used, with different music, in the "Living in the Real World" trailer.

film, after Curtis' most focused inquiry into the evolution of the internet and social media. In the second montage, Curtis features different footage: clips of digital videos of Kim Kardashian and viral animal videos. In this montage, the shots stand for the algorithmically generated content that can overwhelm users' attentions and distract them from other discourse or communication.

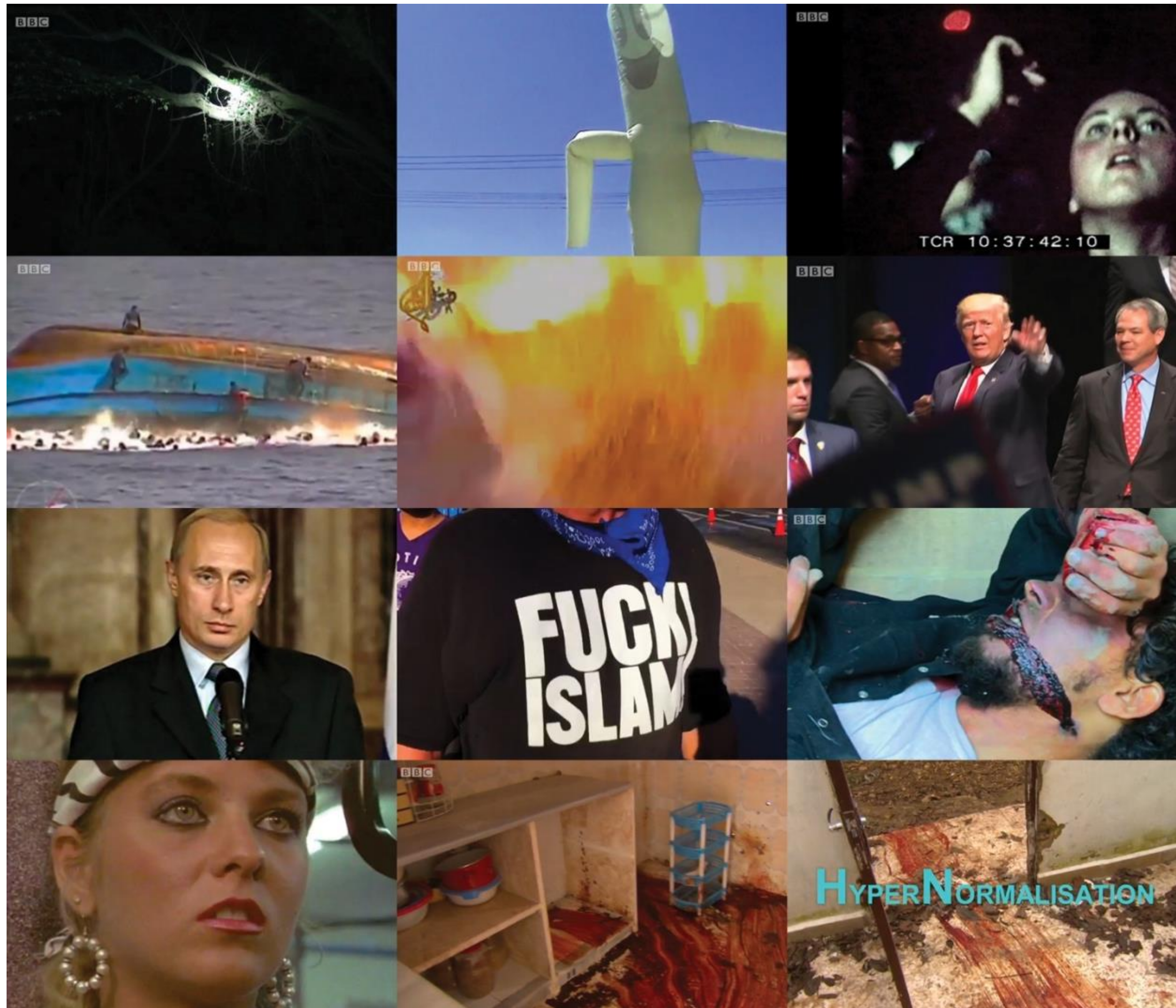

Figure 8. Introductory montage in *HyperNormalization* (2016) paired with ScubaZ' "The Vanishing American Family" (2001)

Another prominent montage oscillates between footage from Jane Fonda workout videos from the 1980s and footage of the overthrow and execution of Romanian communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, juxtaposed with Brian Eno's "On some Faraway Beach" (1973). The music serves as a conduit between the two very different worlds depicted, and the disparity between all three sources of footage evokes a sense of the disconnection between the East and the West. A third sequence features disaster films produced prior to 2011, juxtaposed with Burial's "Dream Baby Dream". All the disaster films display the destruction of American cities, predominantly iconic New York City buildings such as the World Trade Center, the Statue of Liberty, and the Chrysler building. The music undercuts any suspense inherent in the film clips. It reflects a detached collective consciousness of America during the 1990s as strangely obsessed with disaster but simultaneously totally unprepared for its real possibility.

The three songs: Brian Eno's "On Some Faraway Beach" (1973), Suicide's "Dream baby Dream" (1979) and ScubaZ' "The Vanishing American Family" (2001) were produced decades apart. But all sound timeless and enduring. In all three montages, the music is discordant but ambivalent; it doesn't enforce a clear emotional orientation to the footage. Rather, the music offers a space for the viewer to contemplate the images. In a change of style, however, Curtis concludes the film with a final montage to a country-pop song performed by Barbara Mandrell. The country music injects a nostalgia into the framing of the shots, suggesting that nostalgia can function to normalize social processes and behavior.

6.4.2 Brian Eno's "On Some Faraway Beach"

In one of the most prominent sequences in *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis juxtaposes footage from Jane Fonda's popular work-out videos from the 1980s with footage of communist leader of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu, being forced out of power and executed in 1989. Cuts of each scene go back and forth to the music of Brian Eno's song "On a Faraway Beach," a track from his first solo album *Here Come the Warm Jets* (1973) (1:12:05-1:14:32).[38]

Curtis begins the sequence by describing how no one in the West predicted the fall of the Soviet Union. He pairs this description with visual footage of a 1989 meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Nicolae Ceaușescu. Curtis states, "Something was about to happen that would demonstrate dramatically just how far the American government had attached from reality. The Soviet empire was about to implode." [*He begins the music Brian Eno's "On some Faraway Beach"*] "And no one— none of the politicians, or the journalists, or the think tank experts, or the economists, or the academics, saw it coming" (1:11:56 -1:12:16).

Then, Curtis cuts to the Jane Fonda workout video, featuring brightly clad, smiling women from the 1980s performing step aerobics in unison. This footage is then contrasted with shaky, hand-held camera footage of soldiers tying Ceaușescu and his wife's hands up as they protest.

[38] The Jane Fonda-Nicolae Ceaușescu-Brian Eno montage has also appeared in the "Living in an Unreal World" trailer on *Vice* as well as in the Massive Attack v. Adam Curtis Park Avenue Armory show in 2013.

Fonda serves as a metaphor for the materialism of the 1980s in America. Once socially and politically active, Fonda turned her focus to aerobics. It was a time, Curtis states, during which people started to focus on things they could control, unlike politics: their own bodies.[39]

In the two-minute long montage, Curtis oscillates between the two scenes several times in juxtaposition with the Brian Eno music. Towards the end of the sequence, Curtis cuts back to the Ceaușescu footage. The shot now features an empty lot outside of the building. The camera zooms in to focus on two dead bodies on the ground: Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife. Then, once again, it cuts back to a long shot of the Jane Fonda workout footage.

The sequence illustrates a stark incongruity between the lived experiences in the East and West. It reflects the growing detachment of people in the West, manifest in the redirection of their focus to themselves. Brian Eno's dreamy, mellifluous song "On Some Faraway Beach" serves as a conduit between the two scenes. The song resists clear emotional resonances such as happiness or sadness. The song is built around a I-IV piano chord progression that undulates steadily through the entire piece. It is a progression that feels like it could be played for a very long time (even though the album cut is four minutes long).

[39] There is an equivalency to be drawn to the concept of self-care in the neo-liberal economy: an attention to the self that elides criticism of the systemic causes of anxiety, such as overwork or debt. Instead, self-care offers solutions in the form of more goods or services to be purchased and consumed (ie. meditation apps) which maintains and perpetuates the same neo-liberal ethos.

The dreamy feeling makes the footage of Ceaușescu and his wife easier to ingest. Simultaneously, it renders the footage of both Fonda and Ceaușescu uncanny, suggesting both a surface level of meaning as well as a hidden level of complexity.

"On some Faraway Beach" is a deceptively simple rock song. David Shephard, biographer of Brian Eno, argues that the song contains all the elements of the future ambient direction Eno would take. "What I hear is the sound of rock music being slowly exorcised and an interest in what's left being brought to the foreground" (Sheppard, 2009). Within the rock form, the song features very futuristic and avant-garde elements. While the chord progression is a familiar I-IV progression, its constant repetition throughout, featuring no bridge or chorus section, is comparable to the future of minimalist music.

The sound of the processed instruments makes it both familiar and strange, nostalgic and futuristic. Prior to his solo career, Eno's role in the previous band, Roxy Music, had been working with early synthesizers and samplers. The band was known for using the mellotron, "a tape-loop-based keyboard instrument often used for orchestral sounds" (Encyclopædia Britannica, 1998). The overdubbing and engineering of the instruments in "On some Faraway Beach" subtly defamiliarize them, drawing attention to the textual, material quality of their sound.

Shephard writes:

> One report claimed Eno had overdubbed twenty-seven pianos on this song alone with a steady accumulation of wide-screen keyboard and guitar sonorities and gospel backing vocal group Sweetfeed's ever-swelling, choir-like polyphony. [The] song builds in waves for nearly three minutes before Eno's lead vocal makes its yearning entry. (Shephard, 2009, p. 49)

Additionally, the track was produced using Dada techniques of chance and unpredictability, which would also become key tenants of experimental music. Eno was famous for never saving the settings on his synthesizers, and for giving cryptic instructions to other musicians. The lyrics were often created through improvisation over the instrumentals. Douglas Wolk of *Pitchfork Music* writes: “Brian Eno’s run of rock albums in the ’70s was an unprecedented achievement in music built on aleatory synth settings, fiery guitar work, subconscious lyrics, and of course, oblique strategies” (2017).

Curtis is consciously juxtaposing Eno’s music, produced using Dadaist techniques of unpredictability and giving up one’s conscious control, with the argument that the political retreat into the self was connected to the West’s growing fetishization of control and predictability. The sequence juxtaposes two very different experiences of control: Ceaușescu loses his communist control over Romania at the same time that the Jane Fonda generation chooses to focus “on what they can control: their bodies”. “On Some Faraway Beach” reflects a different, nuanced experience of control: seemingly structured, it also features a surrealistic element, constituted in part by the chance and unpredictability that informed its production.

Additionally, the title of the song points to the impasse between the West and the East, and the lyrics acknowledge the fall of the ideological vision of the USSR. Eno’s vocals are not featured in the sequence, but the lyrics include: “Given the chance / I'll die like a baby / On some faraway beach / When the season's over / Unlikely I'll be remembered”. The death of Ceaușescu and his wife signals the death of the ideological vision of the USSR.

Ultimately, the song allows for the possibility of a new reception of the archival footage. The music decontextualizes the shots to allow space for the viewer to reflect on them in a new way. The song's dreamy feeling and the swelling chord progressions make the footage of the dead bodies tolerable and depict the West's materialism as a kind of detached dream. The song's timeless quality, simultaneously nostalgic and futuristic, destabilizes a clear sense of historical disparity of the footage, challenging the audience's sense of "pastness" of the events depicted.

Figure 9. Exposition to Brian Eno's "On Some Faraway Beach" (1973) in *HyperNormalisation* (2016)

6.4.3 Suicide's "Dream Baby Dream"

Another significant music video-style sequence occurs in the chapter "America at the end of the 20th century." Curtis explains that in the late 1990s, increased ethnic conflict and failed peace projects led many people to give up on trying to find a political solution for complex issues, such as the Palestinian question. A pessimistic mood began to spread out "from the rational, technocratic world and infect the whole of the culture" (01:34:47).

Curtis then cuts to a montage of disaster films from the 1990s, all of which depict the destruction of monuments and skyscrapers (and quite often, the World Trade Center). Curtis juxtaposes the sequence to Suicide's song "Dream Baby Dream" (1979) (1:40:29-1:42:38).

The films depicted in the montage include *Armageddon* (1998); *Independence Day* (1996); *Deep Impact* (1998); *Ghostbusters II* (1989); and *Godzilla* (1998) among others. Curtis edits the films together to feature the homogeneity of their generic tropes. In the first part of the sequence, Curtis features different shots of people staring up at the sky, presumably at the moment right before impact. The next segment of the sequence depicts people running away. Often, it is a diverse crowd of people on the streets of New York City. Then come the shots, bombs, tidal waves, and annihilation of the buildings, including the Chrysler building, World Trade Center, Penn Station and the White House. The twin towers are subsumed by a tidal wave. The top of the Chrysler building comes crashing down to the streets on more than one occasion. The White House is obliterated by a beam of light from an alien spacecraft hovering above it.

The homogeneity of the generic tropes in the sequence illustrates the decade's collective fascination with the disaster and apocalypse genres. A temporal disparity is evoked by the films' datedness; the colorful, obsequious explosions reveal an America in which nobody was prepared for the actual destruction of the twin towers on September 1, 2001.

The song, "Dream baby Dream" sutures the film footage together into a familiar music-video like format. Its upbeat post-punk or new wave style playfully neutralizes the intended suspense inherent in the film clips. There is only one line in the lyrics. Throughout the entire song, Alan Vega repeatedly sings, "Dream baby dream / Dream baby dream / Forever."

The tone and mood of the song are ambiguous. The repeated lyric can be interpreted to be optimistic about the future, supportive of the human necessity of hopefulness, or a cynical take on the sustained attachment to an impossible dream. In her article "Suicide's Dream Baby Dream: An unlikely anthem of 2016," Alexandra Pollard of *The Guardian* describes it as a song that "hangs between hope and nihilism . . . Anchored by an urgent electric drum beat that lurks like a ticking bomb beneath Vega's murky vocals, its lyrics are stark, yet impenetrable" (2016). The ambiguous song has been covered by many musicians over the years. It also appeared in another 2016 film, *American Honey*. Pollard writes that some musicians, such as Bruce Springsteen, have embraced its hopefulness while others have interpreted it to be much sadder.

In *HyperNormalisation*, the repeated, nearly monotone phrase "Dream baby dream" functions to illuminate the eerie similarity of the repeated cinematic tropes. The

lyrics point to the collective imagination reflected in the popular cinema of the 1990s as preoccupied with, or even obsessed with, the concept of annihilation. In Curtis' reappropriation of the song, the meaning of the lyrical "dreams" is twofold: the large-scale explosions and digitally rendered images of the skyscrapers exploding, crashing to the streets, or succumbing to a giant tidal wave reveal a culture obsessed with destruction. Yet the dated 1990s blockbusters also reveal the culture as hubristically safe and stable enough to fetishize it. Pollard argues that within the sequence in *HyperNormalisation*, the song seems to "mock the state of blissful ignorance Curtis believes society has wrapped itself in."

At one point in the montage (1:41:58) Curtis rewinds and repeats a shot of a man falling from the Chrysler building, upwards of four times. The sequence is fast and the image onscreen is chaotic; the device is largely unnoticeable but for the repeated sound of his scream. The sound byte is a sample of "the Wilhelm Scream," a stock sound effect that has appeared in over 400 films and television series. It first originated with the character Private Wilhelm in the 1953 western, *The Charge at Feather River.* For sound designers, the Wilhelm Scream has become an insider joke which they continue to playfully insert within a wide range of Hollywood movies.

Curtis uses it as a harbinger of what was to come. Seconds later, Curtis cuts to silence, with a wide shot of the Statue of Liberty and the New York City skyline (1:42:39). It is ambiguous as to whether the footage comes from another Hollywood movie. The wide-angle shot is followed by a short, glitchy image of VHS footage, a child beauty pageant contestant, and a television featuring a black-and white-image of

someone holding their head in their hands, all juxtaposed with melancholic ambient music.

Then, Curtis cuts to actual footage of the twin towers, in a video that appears to be taken from a mobile phone. Against a bright blue sky, the first tower is already burning. Curtis mixes the diegetic sound of wind in the video with a very subtle, melancholic tone. The lens is zoomed in; the buildings are too far away for much sound to be heard. This detail reflects many people's actual experiences of having seen the towers fall from far away: silently. In contrast to the busy and loud music video sequence that preceded it, the quietness of the shot is palpable.

A plane crashes through the second tower, causing a real explosion of fire and smoke. Yet unlike the quick cuts featured in the 1990s disaster films, the camera remains fixed. For seconds longer, billows of smoke rise into the sky.

In "Movies, patriotism, and cultural amnesia: tracing pop culture's relationship to 9/11" Lindsay Ellis writes that "the images of gleeful destruction the '90s had reveled in disappeared almost overnight" (2017). Colors became muted, and so did the emotional nuances featured in the American independent cinema of the 2000s, "with its first-hand, first-person inspiration from lives led and work conceived in relation to the internet" (Brody, 2009). In a reflection of the subsequent decade of cinema of the 2000s, Richard Brody of *The New Yorker* argues that the uniting concept of the decade of independent film during the 2000s became "mumblecore": "the assimilation of acting to mere being, a readiness to capture the transcendent in the awkward and the expressive of the everyday, a readiness that has been primed by the habit of watching YouTube Videos" (Brody, 2009).

Figure 10. A montage of disaster films from the 1990s, juxtaposed with Suicide's "Dream Baby Dream" (1979) in *Hypernormalisation* (2016)

Following the montage of disaster films, Curtis argues that after 2001, Western politicians became so possessed by their over-simplified visions of good versus evil that the line between fact and fiction became blurred. In September 2002, the leader of British Intelligence Agency, MI6 presented the British government with direct evidence of Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons program. Later, Curtis describes, someone noticed that the description was identical to the depiction of chemical weapons in scenes from the fictional action movie *The Rock* (1996) (01:41:19). Images of gleeful

destruction may have disappeared from the cinema of the 21st century, but they are still circulating elsewhere.

6.5 Techno-Dystopia and the "Hauntology" Music Style

6.5.1 Techno-Dystopia

In *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (2011) Curtis depicts the techno-utopian vision of computers during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Young computer programmers, inspired by LSD and 1960s counterculture, embraced an optimistic vision of the future of personal computers as a means to "liberate" people from old "hierarchies of power." This optimism was in opposition to William Gibson's original vision of cyberspace in the science fiction novel, *Neuromancer* (1984) as a dangerous and frightening place. Throughout the series, Curtis argues that the new techno-utopian ideology failed to decentralize hierarchies. Instead, it extended the reach of corporate power and expanded the risk of global economic instability.

In *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis builds on that argument by applying a greater scrutiny to the power of algorithms and social media. Curtis argues that today, social media satiates people by feeding them only what they have already liked in the past. The algorithms polarize people into filter bubbles, preventing them from seeing displeasing information or contrary opinions. Protest or criticism through social media is contained within those filter bubbles, while people's angry clicks generate more money for the corporations. In this way, the system absorbs all opposition.

Throughout *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis refers to invisible systems of financial, technological and corporate power. He pairs the discussions with visual footage of empty offices, a recurring aerial shot of the Citicorp building, corporate server facilities,

or close-ups of computer motherboards which he repeatedly inserts as short visual leitmotifs throughout the film. Juxtaposed with the images are faint, ambient electronic tones. They are selections from a style of British electronic music from the early 2000s that has been referred to as "hauntological."

Hauntological music features the sampling and processing of archival music from the 1940s to the 1970s. It is mixed with melancholic synthscapes and slowed down, reverberated industrial drum patterns. The hauntological style makes up a large portion of the soundtrack of *HyperNormalisation*. The most recurrent musical artist on the soundtrack is Pye Corner Audio of UK record label, Ghost box. Additionally, Curtis prominently features the music of Burial, another British artist signed to Kode9's UK label, Hyperdub. Other music of this style featured in *HyperNormalisation* includes work by Thomas Ragsdale, Gavin Miller, and worriedaboutsatan. The music of Trent Reznor and the cinematic scores of Cliff Martinez (*Drive*, 2014) and Clint Mansell (*Moon,* 2009) are aesthetically similar.

As Sarah Keith noticed in her analysis of *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, Curtis "makes use of music, particularly noise, often as an aural accompaniment to visuals relating to computer systems" (Keith, 2013, pp. 172-173). In *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis expands on the technique by incorporating samples from the wide range of strategically selected hauntology music to achieve different, specific meanings. One way the music is used is to refer to collective or generational emotions such as nostalgia, melancholy, or alienation, which undercuts the techno-utopian optimism. In another device, the music heralds the danger of the growing power of the

technology and finance industries. It signifies the invisible, material infrastructure that controls and structures cyberspace.

6.5.2 Hauntology Music

The term “hauntology” was originally coined by Jacques Derrida to describe how the “timeless” specter of Marxist ideals haunts Western societies (1994). In the 2000s, “hauntology” became used to describe the emergence of a British style of minimal electronic, post-dub dance music. Like the music of Brian Eno, hauntological music foregrounds the grain and texture of the archival recordings and synthesizers. Vintage records, cassettes and early synthesizers are often used in ways that spotlight their vinyl crackles, tape hiss, warped tempo, off-key pitch or other signs of degradation. The warping and distortion of the musical samples make the songs sound ghost-like and spectral, both retro and futuristic. Critic Simon Reynolds describes the style as a "largely British genre of eerie electronics fixated on ideas of decaying memory and lost futures" (2017). Jamie Sexton writes that in hauntology music, the sampling “evokes dead presences” (2012).

6.5.3 Invisible Power and Near-Subliminal Sound Effects

Throughout the film, Curtis regularly inserts selections of minimal, spacey hauntological music which critic Simon Reynolds describes as “reverb and near-subliminal sound effects” (2017). These selections are often paired with images of corporations, offices, and computer servers, along with descriptions of the growing power of the finance and technology industries. The faint atmospheric sounds, minimal synthesizer tones, and sound effects, like blowing air, destabilize familiar footage and

are suggestive of the ominous and invisible systems of power: social media algorithms, corporations and the finance industry.

In various formulations, Curtis argues that the current state of artificial intelligence is manifest in the management of individuals through complex algorithms that determine what they desire before they even realize it. Just as cyberspace is invisible to both citizens and politicians, so are the algorithms that structure it. Curtis states that it is mysterious as to how algorithms determine what you like, see, and notice.

Every time Curtis returns to the topic of cyberspace, he juxtaposes images of computer servers, interior shots of offices, and exterior shots of office buildings. The image of the servers draws attention to the digital materiality that structures all the communication that transpires via cyberspace. Additionally, he often oscillates the footage of the computer servers, characterized by thousands of tiny blinking lights, with night-time footage of office buildings in New York, featuring the twinkling lights in the windows. This device draws a visual connection between the finance world and the internet as two sources of “invisible” power. Additionally, the lights from the individual office windows are akin to the blinking lights on the server, which has become the new domain for individual activity and behavior.

In each instance Curtis employs subtle hauntological music. When the music is discernible, he often distorts it by slowing it down, turning it out of key or adding reverb. Often, he features selections that are “near subliminal”- atmospheric soundscapes containing wind, reverb, a monophonic synth tone, or the room tone of a giant warehouse. The subtle sound effects are one way that Curtis expresses the state of

hypernormalisation. The slight addition to the soundscape is not obsequious as is characteristic of Curtis' early style. Yet the barely perceptible sound effects destabilize the audience's perception of the footage, suggesting that there are forces of power at play beyond the spectacle, but that are inaccessible to us as individuals.

The near-subliminal music is featured throughout the chapter "Managed Outcomes" (1:14:56), which follows the music video montage sequence to "On Some Faraway Beach." In this chapter, Curtis embellishes on the concept of perception management, the emergence of a new political system with a focus "not try to change things, but to manage a post-political world." Curtis' voice-over is juxtaposed with an image of an empty office and desk and a faint hauntological soundscape. The empty office, paired with the near-subliminal music, is also featured at the beginning of the trailer, "Living in the Unreal World," when Curtis describes: "You go into an office and sit at a desk. But maybe it is a fake desk. Your real job is shopping." The juxtaposition inverts the conventional idea that individuals have power and agency in their places of work. Rather, it suggests that the system is structured in such a way that the individual is expendable; employment is only necessary to provide the system more consumers.

Another powerful use of the technique occurs in Curtis' discussion of Larry Fink and the founding of the company, BlackRock (1:16:58). Curtis details that after losing over $100 million dollars due to an incorrect prediction about interest rates, Fink founded BlackRock. The company hired computer engineers to build a gigantic operating system that could perform complex systems analysis procedures to manage financial risks, which they called "Aladdin."

Curtis repurposes a promotional ad for BlackRock Aladdin from the 1990s. The ad features sprightly, generic stock music to a montage of a diverse group of employees describing how, using sophisticated algorithms, Aladdin can predict and measure financial risks around the world (01:19:07- 01:19:56). A temporal disparity is evoked through the images of pixelated computer screens featuring the Windows 95 operating system, in addition to the obsequiously cheerful and confident tone of the commercial. In shots before and after the promotional ad, Curtis features an atmospheric hauntological soundscape with footage of the rural town of East Wenatchee, Washington, which is where the BlackRock Aladdin computer servers are located. After the ad, Curtis features a long tracking shot of the region from a car on the highway. Curtis describes that "the assets [BlackRock Aladdin] guides and controls now amount to $15 trillion dollars, which is seven percent of the world's total wealth" (01:20:05- 01:20:12). The images of the East Wenatchee main street and its adjacent strip malls along with the vast, open landscape of the Northwestern region stand in sharp contrast to the accumulated wealth and power alluded to by Curtis. The virtual information, Curtis describes, is facilitated and stored on servers in a campus of large sheds in the middle of an apple orchard outside the city. Images of the servers are prohibited, but the music draws the viewer's attention to their existence.

Curtis features the near-subliminal style of hauntological music in many other discussions throughout the film regarding cyberspace and the finance industry. Notably, he uses it in juxtaposition with footage of Donald Trump (1:30:20) when stating that by the 1990s, Trump's empire was largely a facade; in actuality, he was facing bankruptcy.

6.5.4 “The Secret Sadness of the 21st Century”

Additionally, Curtis uses hauntological music to refer to the specific, temporal and contextual mood of the 2000s, the time period when the music was originally produced. In this way Curtis utilizes the fact that hauntological music, like Curtis’ own video essays, is historiographical. In his article "From Hypnagogia to Distroid: Postironic Musical Renderings of Personal Memory” (2016) Adam Trainer argues that hauntological music reflects a culture which recognizes the growing primacy of mediated experiences.

> Our relationship with memory and the representation of our individual and collective pasts have changed. The personal and affective are undeniably tethered to our negotiation of culture through increasingly mediated experiences, which now occur predominantly in the digital realm… Informed by this new era of cultural and informational oversaturation, a number of musical trends emerged that drew on concepts of nostalgia, formed by both collective popular memory and the personal histories of their creators. Driven by technology but steeped in a desire to revisit the past, these styles celebrated personal attachments to past forms while pushing the sources of that nostalgia into less-recognizable musical performances. (Trainer, 2016, p. 409)

In “Stone Tapes: Ghost Box, Nostalgia, and Postwar Britain,” David Pattie writes that it is "a nostalgia for a future that never came to pass, with a vision of a strange, alternate Britain, constituted from the reordered refuse of the postwar period. . . . Its nostalgia isn’t for a lost country, but for a country that was never quite there” (Pattie, 2016).

This description is especially true of the work of the musical artist, Burial. Burial samples from UK’s dance music past with “an obsession with using reverb and near-subliminal sound effects, often taken from the real world, to conjure an atmosphere of eerie space” (Reynolds, 2017). The reverb summons a sense of an empty, abandoned

warehouse and the evocation of a feeling of yearning for something that is irretrievably in the past.

In his article, “Why Burial is the greatest music of the 21st century so far” Simon Reynold describes that emotionally, Burial’s music expresses a reaction to larger historical conditions: the erosion of the economy and the failed promises of the New Labour movement. Reynolds writes: “You could say that Burial certainly was early to tap into—if not invent—an emotional tenor that characterizes our era and which Mark Fisher dubbed ‘the secret sadness of the 21st century’” (2017).

Curtis uses the music to refer to the melancholy and disaffection that characterized many young people’s experiences during the 2000s, the years of the Iraq war and the financial crisis. Sometimes he pairs the music with images of individuals, but the music also achieves the same effect without visual footage of human subjects. Often, Curtis pairs the hauntological music with landscape shots: tracking shots through rural highways or rainy towns, or a fixed shot of fireflies in the twilight of a forest.

For example, Curtis strategically places Burial’s dark, reverberant song “In McDonalds” in the beginning of the chapter, “A World Without Power” (2:00:08). Curtis introduces the chapter by describing the emergence of a new sense of melancholic retreat in the mid-2000s (and the same time that Burial’s music was released). Juxtaposed with a shot of fireflies in a forest, Curtis states that

> People in Britain and America now began to turn away from politics. The effect of the Iraq war had been very powerful. Not only did millions of people feel that they had been lied to over the weapons of mass destruction, but there was a deeper feeling that whatever they did or said had no effect. That despite the mass protests, and the fears and the warnings, the war had happened anyways. (2:00:12-2:00:41)

The mournful song evokes the feeling of alienation and melancholy regarding an irreversible past. It is mostly instrumental but for an occasional sample of a woman singing the phrase "'Cause at once upon a time it was you who I adored . . . 'Cause at once upon a time it was you who I adored." In a barely perceptible moment at the end of the track, she sings, "You look different." The song has been described in an interview in *The Wire* as "[connecting] to an era, one that's gone" (2012). Yet the loss the song describes is the kind of irretrievability that occurs when somebody's understanding of someone or something has been irrevocably altered; it is not just the loss of something that has gone, but the fact that it had never existed to begin with. Burial has also attributed it to the vulnerability that arises from the loss of a protective force such as family or friends. He has described the music as an expression of "wanting an angel [to watch] over you, when there's nowhere to go and all you can do is sit in McDonalds late at night, not answering your phone" (qtd. in *The Wire*, 2012). It is a realization that no place—no space— can protect him from what has been lost to time.

The music specifically expresses the experience of a post 9/11 world, characterized by the failure of the Iraq war, the pervasion of social media, the decline of economic stability, and feelings of powerlessness to change the direction of the future. The pairing of the music with the shot of the fireflies in the introduction of "A World without Power" is two-fold. Literally, the shot of the fireflies in the waning darkness refers to the absence of electrical power. The fireflies parallel the blinking lights of the computer servers featured throughout the film. The tiny, blinking lights signify the flurry of individual activity that is absorbed and subsumed by the system and does nothing to change the state of the world.

Curtis repeatedly uses the Burial music to undercut the ideology of techno-utopianism in its various manifestations throughout contemporary history, from the Menlo Park computer programmers of the 1970s and 1980s to the hopeful leaders of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the late 2000s. Curtis doesn't always use Burial music to explicitly refer to the 2000s. However, his use of the music draws a connection to the contemporary experience even when Curtis is describing events of previous decades.

A full sequence of juxtapositions that undercut techno-utopianism occurs in the chapter, "Altered States" (00:39:32). Curtis begins the chapter by introducing William Gibson's original concept of cyberspace. In Gibson's vision, cyberspace was composed of giant networks of information linking banks and corporations that "were invisible to ordinary people and to politicians. But those networks gave the corporations extraordinary new powers of control" (0:40:12-0:40:40). In Gibson's novel, *Neuromancer* (1984), people's consciousnesses were physically linked to the network and were vulnerable to attack. "In cyberspace, there were no laws, and no politicians to protect you. Just raw, brutal corporate power" (0:41:10-0:41:21).

Curtis describes this conception of cyberspace in juxtaposition with Burial's "In McDonalds" (40:54-41:53), the lush, sorrowful synthesizer track which Curtis repeats again when discussing the contemporary condition of social media and political efficacy.

Then, in contrast, Curtis presents the technological utopian vision rising up in California, which reinvented cyberspace as a "new, safe world where radical dreams could come true" (0:42:18-0:42:20). To illustrate it, Curtis features video footage of John Perry Barlow reading his declaration of independence of cyberspace juxtaposed

with early computer graphics and footage from Disney's original movie, *Tron* (1982) (0:44:14-0:44:25).

Minutes later, Curtis returns to the music of Burial's "In McDonalds" when he describes attempts by hackers in the 1990s to reveal how computers facilitated the growing power of the finance industry. "The companies that ran the new systems of credit knew more and more about you, and increasingly used that information to control your destiny" (00:49:49).

He then cuts to footage of the Citibank headquarters featuring a different song by Burial, "Dog Shelter" (2007) (00:50:01-00:50:34). The song features deeper synth pitches, sounds of crackling, bit-crushed footsteps, and voices that seem to emanate from far, far away. The remote voices elicit a sense of emptiness or abandonment, while the bit-crushed crackles draw an attention to the anempathetic coldness of the digital infrastructure.

In this sequence, Curtis uses the music to constitute the dichotomy between the two positions on the potential of cyberspace. The Burial music structures a contemporary identification with the past events. Simultaneously, the music signifies how the events connect to the contemporary situation. It encapsulates the ensuing bleakness experienced by the next generation of Americans to inherit the precarious economy, which was the direct result of the finance and technology industries.

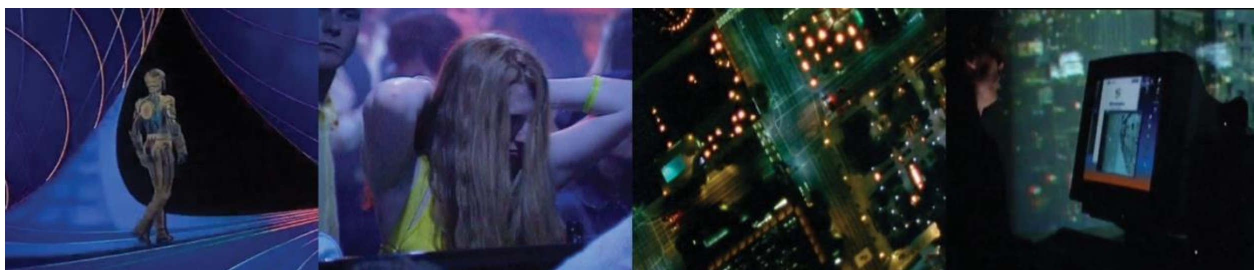

Figure 11. Exposition to hauntological Music in *HyperNormalisation* (2016)

6.5.5 The Past and the Present

A final example of Curtis' use of hauntological music occurs in his discussion of artificial intelligence. The music also creates a poignant connection between past historical events and the contemporary experience. Curtis introduces the segment (01:22:12) by describing the development of "a more effective way of re-assuring people that did not involve medication. . . It too came from computer systems": artificial intelligence.

Curtis states that the story begins in the early 1960s, when optimistic scientists believed in the possibility of a computer that could think like human beings (1:23:10-1:26:05). In 1964, one computer scientist at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, Joseph Weizenbaum, created software that emulated the strategies of psychologist Carl Rogers, who would notably repeat what patients said back to them. Weizenbaum called the software ELIZA.

The disillusioned scientist conceived of the idea to "parody" people's "hopeless attempts" at developing A.I. However, Weizenbaum was surprised by the enthusiastic and emotional responses to the software from people who tried it, even when they were fully aware that they were communicating with a computer.

Curtis juxtaposes his narration with black-and white-footage of a recording studio in a vignette, paired with playful instrumental music resembling that used in early cartoons. In this way, he frames it as a story about the naivety of scientists in the past. However, after revealing Weizenbaum's surprise at people's emotional investment in their interactions with ELIZA, Curtis cuts the light-hearted instrumental music to the hauntological song, "Sail to Europe" by composer Cliff Martinez. Curtis argues: What

Eliza showed was that “in an age of individualism, what made people feel secure was seeing themselves reflected back to them, just like in a mirror” (1:26:02). He continues the music as he cuts to a slow-motion shot of a girl dancing to a pulsating strobe light at a music concert. It is a visual leitmotif which he uses several times in the work. While participating in a social musical experience, the girl appears conspicuously alone. The extended darkness between each strobe augments a sensation that her reality is structured by the rhythms of technology.

The music and the image of the girl signifies the implicit sadness to Curtis' conclusion. The story of AI and ELIZA is in fact revealed to be about present moment. The isolation created by the algorithms of social media, which Curtis explicitly refers to throughout the film, is not just that people's communication is restricted by filter bubbles. Echoing the arguments of Rosalind Krauss (1976), Curtis is arguing that people are essentially communicating with themselves when they engage with social media. People find comfort in their own image. Through social media, they become emotionally invested in their own ego. As the mirror fascination takes further hold of them, they become inured to the presence of other people or their community. The state of artificial intelligence today is the digital manifestation of Narcissus' sad fate.

6.6 YouTube: The Personal and the Programmed

6.6.1 Digital Videos

In addition to the style of hauntological music that Curtis heavily features throughout *HyperNormalisation* another prominent technique is the strategic placement of social media footage itself— in the form of YouTube videos and uploaded mobile camera videos.

The digital videos are constituted by a specific audiovisual form, characterized by natural lighting conditions and lo-fi audio quality, including background noises such as the sound of the phone being adjusted or muffled voices. The videos feature just a single shot or camera angle. The camera can be fixed or handheld, in which the frame is often unsteady or shaky. Videos originally broadcast through web cameras or as live streams retain the trace of the frame rate delay. These material qualities are instantly recognizable to audiences when the digital videos are reappropriated in movies and cut between other footage of higher production quality.

To an extent, the YouTube and mobile phone videos resemble amateur recordings which Baron refers to as the “home video mode.” Baron writes that the viewer reception of the “home video mode” involves an intentional disparity derived from the sense that the recordings were originally intended for a different viewership. However, the YouTube videos differ from the “home video mode” in that they are often produced specifically for the public video hosting platform which makes them available to anyone who might encounter them. Many of the videos, especially featuring people performing directly to the camera, evoke questions about the intended audience and who the people are performing for.

Moreover, the mobile phone video is personally recorded but often documents public behavior, reflecting candid, “on the ground” experience. Both styles of digital video reflect qualities of our increasingly surveillant culture and signify the rapidly growing digital archive of social media, governed through algorithmically driven searches and recommendations.

The inclusion of these digital videos is significant from an audiovisual standpoint because Curtis often cuts the music to feature the diegetic sound of the videos. In his early work, he cut the music for his interviews, in which he would come back in with music to augment the emotional dimension and clarify the argument. But *HyperNormalisation* does not feature original interviews. Instead, Curtis cuts the music to feature the diegetic sound of the YouTube and digital videos to create a dichotomy between official news narratives and the individual experience.

Throughout *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis illustrates his arguments with digital videos as examples of individual experiences and behavior reflecting the power and influence of larger ideological forces. Curtis often follows the sequences in which he describes the growing power of the technology and finance world, paired with images of servers and hauntological music, with a YouTube video. The digital videos illustrate the hyper-reactive element of the personal experience as it is communicated through the internet.

Cutting the music to the diegetic sound in the videos not only draws attention to them but creates an audiovisual dichotomy between the dominant system of representation and the personal experience. The dominant system can be represented in the sequences in which he is discussing systemic power, which almost always features music. The personal experience can be represented through the diegetic videos.

There is also a certain sense of unpredictability to the YouTube video, when it is represented diegetically and without added music. Many scenes throughout the film feature personal videos or news "outtakes" that lead to unexpected moments of

violence or surprise. The sense of unpredictability evoked by YouTube videos contrasts Curtis' focus on the West's preoccupation with predictability and control in the face of a world that is inherently chaotic. Simultaneously, Curtis' pairing of music with the YouTube videos and his juxtaposition of the videos within larger sequences reveals how individual experiences, as presented via social media, often mirror and reflect dominant ideologies.

6.6.2 Social Media as Hyper-Reactive

In various juxtapositions, Curtis highlights how individual experiences can reflect larger, collective feelings such as anger, paranoia or mistrust. These emotions are often a reaction to the larger political and social climate and fueled by the corporate-controlled media system. The digital videos are simultaneously unpredictable and reactive.

This is exemplified in one of the most prominent digital videos in the film: three young girls dancing "the Wop" dance, in what appears to be a front lawn in middle America. (2:03:18-2:03:45; 2:08:51; 2:45:26). "The Wop" was a viral dance craze in which thousands of people performed their version of the dance on social media.
The video occurs several times throughout the film, with and without added music, and is the concluding shot of *HyperNormalisation*.

Curtis narrates: "New technology began to allow people to upload millions of images and videos into cyberspace. And the web, which up to that point seemed like an abstract other world began to look and feel like the real world." The genre of the "viral dance video" illustrates the hyper-reactive quality of the social media environment. This is made obvious by the girls' young age and the domestic setting. The "genre" of the

amateur dancing on social media is well-described by Jaimie Baron in her analysis of Natalie Bookchin's multi-channel art piece, Mass Ornament.

> Mass Ornament sifts through the brief fragments of lives archived on YouTube… We watch these individual amateurs trying out their moves, with no immediate audience other than the camera, the number of screens in Bookchin's image begins to increase, each showing someone and somewhere different. As more and more dancers appear, each alone in his or her own little square on the screen, Bookchin weaves their movements together so that at times they come into synch, making nearly the exact same movements— presumably imitating the dance moves they have seen in music videos and popular culture (p. 147).

In her multi-channel work, Bookchin reveals the hyper-reactive quality of the dance videos by synchronizing their movements together in a variety of different ways.

Curtis features the hyper-reactive quality of the actions in the video by repeating it several times throughout the film and recontextualizing it within longer sequences of digital videos. At the end of the film, Curtis repeats the footage of the YouTube video in a faster montage of images juxtaposed with ScubaZ' "Vanishing American Family" (2001). Both the song and several of the images in the montage also appear at the beginning of the film. In this way, the video is shuffled into a larger socio-political context. Through repeating the video in this new context, Curtis is asserting that the seemingly individualistic experience of personal YouTube videos can be influenced by wider system of power; in this way, social media functions as a form of individual retreat.

Other deployments of digital videos emphasize more directly that, through the internet, people's emotions are shaped and manipulated by structures of power. One example is the insertion of the iconic smart phone footage of a shirtless, irate Trump supporter yelling that he loves Trump (2:28:15-2:28:40). The same footage appears in the final montage of the film. Shortly after the footage (2:29:53) Curtis

describes how anger inspires people to click more, which serves the interests of large corporations. This statement is juxtaposed with the same stock imagery of computer servers. The fact that he describes the significance of the role of anger and outrage in generating clicks and ads *after* he displays the video footage resembles how the emotional spread of emotional content often occurs before the rational or scientific understanding of how and why.

Another way that Curtis deploys digital videos reflects how individual behavior qua social media videos can be a reaction to the larger political or social climate, but in projected ways. Following the chapter “Perception Management,” Curtis begins the chapter “The Truth is Out there” by featuring a series of mobile phone videos of seemingly paranormal activity (1:06:09). The home videos of people supposedly witnessing paranormal activities are constituted almost entirely by the diegetic sound of people in the background, gasping and reacting in real-time with exclamations such as “What is happening? What is happening? Oh my God. What is that?” (1:06:16-1:06:42; 1:06:42-1:07:10).[40] The viewer’s own emotional response is directed by their reactions to the occurrences in the dark sky, amid long periods of diegetic silence.

The videos reveal people trying to make sense of an experience that doesn’t correspond to reality; perhaps the unidentified objects could signify paranormal activity, or a government conspiracy. The videos illustrate a very common element to

[40] Today, this style of video has become a veritable genre within social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

conspiracy theories: anxiety and paranoia, which may be a suitable reaction to other events, can be misplaced or transferred onto something else. In the preceding chapter, "Perception Management," Curtis presents many issues which do warrant concern and suspicion. In the phone videos, the unidentified object functions as an object of transference, onto which the people are directing a reaction to the larger political climate, where information is routinely suppressed from the public. The true invisible power, which Curtis argues, emanates from the corporations and their political constituents.

6.6.3 Unpredictability

Another quality to the digital "home videos" is their sense of unpredictability. The videos have not been edited to the conventions or production standards of television, and the massive circulation of digital video content online often leads to many unexpected encounters.

Throughout his work, Curtis argues that ideas and ideology can spread and mutate in unpredictable ways. One example is the former Syrian President Hafez al-Assad's deployment of suicide bombers to force the United States to leave the Middle East, only for the concept of suicide bombing to morph and mutate into other ideologies across the Middle East, coming to threaten Assad's own stability in the region. Throughout his work, Curtis emphasizes that unintended consequences are fundamental to reality. This argument counters that fact that chaos and unpredictability are often elided through dominant journalistic conventions and narratives of history.

Using digital videos, Curtis features this sense of unpredictability in various ways. One device that he has used previously is the inclusion of outtakes" or extra footage

that was not included in official BBC news segments. Curtis also features many journalistic segments that lead to unexpected explosions or people's cell phone videos of bombing in Syria (1:06:16-1:06:42; 1:06:42-1:07:10, 2:35:47, 2:38:23). In one scene, a woman is describing in a news interview what had just happened when another explosion is experienced. Both people speak in the past tense, characteristic of conventional journalistic forms, when the conversation is interrupted by the unpredictable present.

Unpredictability characterizes Curtis' second montage of social media content juxtaposed with the ScubaZ' "The Vanishing American Family" (02:07:10-02:08:53). The song both introduces and concludes the film. The second sequence to the song features shots of Kim Kardashian, a duck being chased by a cat on a robotic vacuum, Mark Zuckerberg skateboarding around the Facebook headquarters, and a panda bear sneezing (see Figure 12). The sequence omits any news footage depicted in the beginning of the film such as the shot of the capsizing boat in the Mediterranean Sea. The sense of precariousness in the long sequence of seemingly random juxtapositions of digital content represents the experience of a hypertextual environment structured by algorithms and search engines— and their predilection to direct the content to the entertaining and absurd.

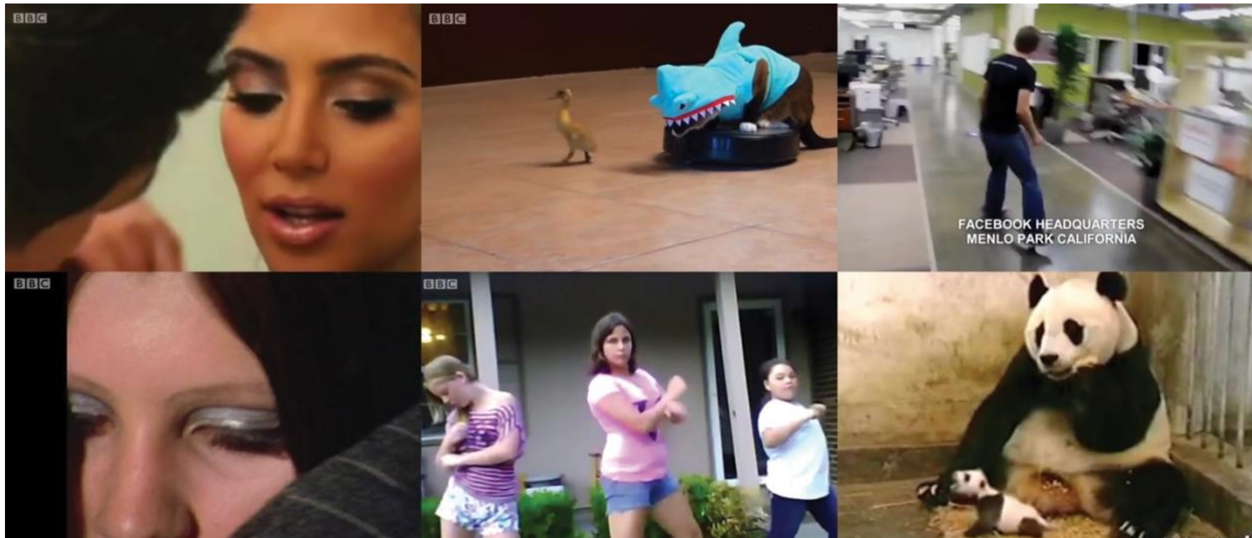

Figure 12. Second exposition to ScubaZ' "The Vanishing American Family" (2001) in *HyperNormalisation* (2016)

Table 1. Description of shots in second exposition to ScubaZ' "The Vanishing American Family" in *HyperNormalisation* (2016)

Time	Description of Shot	Narration
2:07:10	Kim Kardashian	
2:07:22	Duck being chased by a cat on a robotic vacuum cleaner	
2:07:32	Facebook headquarters	*Individuals began to move without noticing into bubbles that isolated them from enormous amounts of other information. They only heard and saw what they already liked.*
2:08:11	Older, archival footage of people dancing (A short segment is repeated over and over and over)	
2:08:28	The young girls dancing again	
2:08:34	A panda sneezing	
2:08:44	Older, archival footage of people dancing again (the short segment is repeated over and over and over)	
2:08:53	The young girls dancing again	

Curtis concludes the work with a focus on a sense of unpredictability. Near the end of the film, Curtis describes the strategy of "non-linear warfare" espoused by Vladislav Surkov, the main ideologist of the Kremlin and personal advisor to President

Putin over the last two decades (2:37:21).[41] "The underlying aim, Surkov said, was not to win the war but to use the conflict to create a constant state of destabilized perception, in order to manage and control" (2:37:40). Curtis also describes the ideology of Islamist terrorist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri who gave lectures promoting the idea that individuals "should stage random, small-scale attacks on civilians in Europe and America. . . . The aim was to spread fear, uncertainty, and doubt and undermine the already failing authority of western politicians" (02:39:22).

Curtis connects these strategies to the "new politics of fear and anxiety" (00:02:39) employed by the Brexit campaign and Donald Trump. "What started as doomed campaigns on the fringes of society became frighteningly real" (02:41:02).

Curtis then cuts to the Steven Colbert Show. Colbert speaks to the camera:

> I am genuinely freaked out right now, about this whole Brexit thing. Because we had all been told [Brexit] wasn't going to happen . . . Because I had this bedrock belief, I have friends who live and work in London who said 'don't worry, we're very sensible people. This isn't going to happen. It's a lot of talk but we don't do that sort of stuff'. They were wrong. And that really kind of crushes my view of what can happen that is bad . . . It's just not supposed to happen. (02:41:05-02:41:45)

Curtis cuts to the scene in Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) when she is doused with pig's blood on the stage of the prom. The entire crowd goes silent (02:41:46-02:42:04). The scene is followed by video footage of a person on the streets of London describing, through tears, how she had no idea that something like Brexit could happen in her own country (02:42:04-02:42:31).

[41] On Feb. 18, 2020, it was announced that Surkov would step down from the role.

In the final sequence of *HyperNormalisation* Curtis juxtaposes a series of shots from earlier ones in the film to Barbara Mandrell's slow-paced pop country song, "Standing Room Only." The song is about a woman getting fed up with her lousy boyfriend. The style of the country song is somewhat surprising; is a dramatic contrast from the rest of the soundtrack which is heavily composed of electronic music. The lyrics express the woman's pain and indignation at allowing herself to be treated poorly by her lover for so long, a similar theme to other songs in *It Felt Like a Kiss.*

The sequence features many shots from the beginning of the film: President Putin of Russia, a capsizing boat full of refugees. The traditional, Americana quality of the song adds an element of nostalgia to the sequence, as if the images have already become classic entertainment footage, even though the images reflect serious and sometimes tragic historical events beyond the audience's control. The song structures the images in such a way to evoke the sense that this is a normal and accepted part of the contemporary Western experience.

The final shot of the film is the home video footage of the young girls dancing (02:45:00-02:45:07). The Barbara Mandrell music cuts to the diegetic sound of the video (02:45:07). One girl turns the camera to include another friend off screen, who had been watching them rather than participating in the YouTube recording. Perhaps Curtis is alluding to the unknown beyond the screen, or perhaps he is pointing the audience's attention to her choice not to participate in the spectacle. Within the unpredictable, the film seems to be suggesting, is the possibility of human agency.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Music, Individual Pleasure and Political Ideology

By pairing previously disparate forms of news and historical footage with popular music, Curtis interrogates the relationship between hegemonic culture and the individual experience.

First, he does this by using music as a form of historical signification. He depicts popular culture alongside historical events to reveal how the music industry has been an integral force within the postwar history of Britain and the United States. He shows how the music industry is interrelated with the development of media technology, economics and social history.

Second, Curtis foregrounds music to constitute different subjective perspectives, which includes his authorial voice as well as the narrative perspective of the characters depicted. His foregrounding of the music also draws attention to the audience's own subjectivity in the same media environment through their recognition of the music and their affective reactions to it.

Through these devices of audiovisual juxtaposition, Curtis offers a radical critique of dominant historical and news narratives. His disjointed pairing of music selections with journalistic news footage challenges conventions of intentional and temporal disparity and demonstrates a wide range of affective engagement with the material.

7.2 Music as Historical Signifier

Curtis' work makes evident the significance of the culture and music industry in postwar Britain and the United States over the last 75 years. The music industry is

inseparable from Adam Curtis' discussions of political and social history of the 20th and 21st centuries. Curtis' focus on musicians, leisure time, consumerism, and the reactionary and influential qualities of the music industry reveals a myriad of ways that popular culture has developed in relationship to politics and social change.

Each of Curtis' works that I closely analyzed demonstrates a requisite component to how music functions as a point of historical signification: its relationship to the media technology and social forces of the time. *The Trap* draws connections between Cold War ideology and the cinematic imagination. *It Felt Like a Kiss* implicates the viewer into the rhythms of the commercial television industry. *HyperNormalisation* assumes the infrastructural conditions of the Internet, regarding algorithmically driven searches and precarious video streams. It uses music to signify invisible forces of power that structure the digital experience. In all of the films, Curtis' foregrounding of the music draws attention to the audience's own subjectivity in this media environment.

In *The Trap,* Curtis draws from a range of classical film scores, using their familiar musical codes within cinematic genres of suspense and intrigue to bring the audience's attention to the cultural construction of the individual experience of freedom in the West. His strategic selection and deployment of musical clips from classical film soundtracks demonstrates the great extent to which the ideology of the Cold War has permeated into every aspect of popular culture. The films themselves are heavily influenced by the Cold War. Curtis never makes this explicit, but utilizes their affective qualities to elicit suspense and challenge the viewer's emotional responses to conventional promises of liberation versus threats of entrapment. Curtis uses the same film scores that dramatized the emotions of the Cold War ideology to critique it. This

strategy of re-appropriating the same music from Cold War-inspired Hollywood films to form his critique exemplifies remix theorist Eduardo Navas' notion of the metaloop of cultural production between the critical remix and its cultural legitimization. Curtis' recycling of the film scores is positioned within this metaloop of production, which Navas argues is where resistance must thrive (2014a, pp. 116-132). Curtis' reappropriation of cinematic music in *The Trap* reveals a powerful dynamic between the film industry and political and cultural ideology. His audiovisual strategies demonstrate how music can constitute both forms of influence and forms of resistance.

The beginning of the close relationship between cultural hegemony and political ideology as it exists today is most explicitly felt in *It Felt Like a Kiss*. Music is used to highlight how the burgeoning music and television industries foster affective attachments that service hegemonic structures of power. Originally released as an experimental installation piece, *It Felt Like a Kiss* foregrounds the music to interrogate how the individual subject is socially constructed. Since the 1950s, this has largely transpired through the influence of commercial television, which has come to structure the rhythms of everyday life in America.

One resonant theme in the work is that music and media culture often function to promise liberation while simultaneously perpetuating hegemonic power structures. Curtis continually depicts examples in which rock music often espoused personal freedom, but its hyper-emphasis on individuality led people to become politically apathetic. Additionally, he reveals subversive or critical perspectives to have become sublated through mass production in popular culture, such as Carole King's attempt to critique the psychology of domestic abuse.

Curtis most critically interrogates the audiences' complicity with the re-production of hegemonic power by implicating the body of the viewer into the rhythms of the music as it is synchronized with the footage. This is most salient when he synchronizes music to footage in which the institutional televisual gaze perpetuates dominant modes of representation; non-Western or brown people are "otherized" or deemed as threats and females are sexually objectified and perform for the camera.

In *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis assumes the infrastructural aesthetics of the internet (Coley 2018). He uses historiographical music that itself reflects a grappling with history and the archive; the hauntological electronic music featured in *HyperNormalisation* expresses a yearning melancholy for a future that did not come to be.

Curtis demonstrates how musical styles that utilize sampling can be historiographical. The style of the hauntological electronic music foregrounds the material qualities of the sound recordings which can provoke a new understanding of the past.

Additionally, Curtis' use of near-subliminal sound effects plays an important role in destabilizing the evidentiary authority of the image. His repurposing of YouTube videos in various montages expresses how people's interaction with digital videos in an online environment can be shaped and guided by underlying forces such as algorithms.

In each work, Curtis acknowledges a media subjectivity which structures peoples' encounters with cultural and historical footage.

7.3 Music and Subjective Perspectives

A second way that Curtis uses music to interrogate the dynamic between hegemonic culture and the individual experience is by selecting it to constitute various subjective perspectives. As a significant non-fiction narrative device, the music can support his authorial voice as well as the subjective perspectives of the characters depicted. Most often, he uses the music to constitute his own arguments; the music undercuts the dominant media representations that he seeks to subvert, yet still functions in collaboration with his own critical voice. In other cases, he uses the music to collaborate with and reflect the perspective of the historical actors. Often, Curtis uses music to reflect the subjects' repression or misguided notions of liberation. It can be used to express repression, delusion, obsession, yearning, and nostalgia. In these cases, the music signifies the limitations of the character's perspectives.

Additionally, there are cases in which the music does not collaborate with either perspective, often through the use of ambient or ambivalent music. This can be a way to break through journalistic conventions. The music serves as a space for the viewer to contemplate the image from outside the dominant way that it is circulated.

Finally, as he uses music to defy generic conventions in dominant media or to constitute different perspectives, Curtis forces the viewer to acknowledge their own identification with the music themselves, therefore drawing on the viewer's perspective as a media subject. The identification the music solicits is not an intellectual or discursive one, but one that is felt.

7.4 Disrupting the Archive Effect

Throughout his work, a longstanding technique has been to invert the conventional pairing of pleasurable or unpleasurable music with news footage. For example, pleasurable rock or classical music can be paired with images of violence; dark and foreboding suspense music is paired with news footage of politicians or blissful commercials. This has functioned to strengthen or constitute his authorial arguments and draw attention to the constructed nature by which news and history are depicted.

When Curtis uses music as a narrative device as well as a point of historical signification, he discloses the dynamics between popular culture, historical events, and political ideology. Pairing the music or popular culture with the news footage challenges conventions of contextual or intentional boundaries and can evoke a new sense of a historical “multiplicity” and “synchronicity” between the domains of political ideology and popular culture (Koivunen, 2016).

Later works draw attention to the affective dimension of intentional disparity by deploying shots of footage at a rapid pace, so that viewers are often unable to make conscious identifications of what they recognize. While the references are highly discursive, and connect to wider networks of discourse and history, this strategy illuminates how affect and discourse are intricately related.

Often, the rapid-fire pace of the editing engages the audience’s recognition of music or visual footage before or without their identification of it. The viewer is invited to figure out where they recognize the music from. Simultaneously, Curtis’ works are highly discursive. Not only does he draw from a wide range of archival sources and discuss a wide range of political ideologies and histories, his audiovisual juxtapositions can

contain layers of meaning based on the content and connotations of the footage. The process of making discursive meaning out of his work goes beyond one viewing. The viewer is at close hand to research further ideas on a search engine. Repeated viewings elicit attention to new details and new connections. His works also shape the viewer's way of approaching the footage should they come upon it in the future.

In this way, Curtis challenges the viewer to interrogate their own affective reactions to the archival footage as a separate but connected domain from the music's discursive signification. Curtis demonstrates that affective reactions can be elicited even if viewers don't consciously recognize the source of the footage. This supports Kassabian and Baron's ideas about the primacy of affect, which occurs prior to discursive meaning. By drawing attention to both the affective dimension of the footage as well as to how the subjects of his work are discursively situated, Curtis compels a new consideration of the connection between the individual experience and the social domain.

Curtis' works also challenge and disrupt journalistic conventions of temporal disparity. Jaimie Baron argues that "pastness" is an experience of reception demarcated by a temporal disparity. While Curtis' narratives are ostensibly about the past, Curtis challenges and destabilizes a clear sense of "pastness" through a non-linear narration, by subtly mixing archival footage from different eras, and by referencing the present in his discussions of the past.

For instance, he achieves a sensation of timelessness by incorporating near-subliminal hauntological music or through other selections of music that do not exude a particular time period. Often, the recorded music he chooses was very much the avant-

garde of its time; examples include Kraftwerk, Brian Eno, and Burial. Even decades later, the music does not exude a sense of a particular time period.

His non-linear narration can also disrupt conventional distinctions between the present and the past. His narratives incessantly veer away from a sense of sequential history. Rather than organize the chapters or episodes of his movies chronologically, he presents his stories in a kind of fractal manner. He tells of various events that are propelled by the same ideological influence; knowledge of one story can contribute to a deeper understanding of any of the others.

He often repeats his arguments about various historical events that are all manifestations of the same ideological underpinnings, demonstrating Berlant's argument that "the affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way" (Berlant, 2011, p. 2).

His unreliable, non-linear narration highlights how mainstream journalism features sequential modes of storytelling with a clear indication of cause and effect. What Curtis implies through his style is that that is not how events are experienced; a chronological mode of narration is constructed only through a posterior framing of historical events.

All of his histories are simultaneously concerned about issues in the present. Ostensibly, Curtis employs a traditional expository form in all his works, featuring a conventional voice-over in which he continually chooses to use the "past-tense" mode even when discussing very recent and ongoing events. This elides the fact that his

narration of past events is also referring to contemporary issues of the communication of power and its influence on the individual.

For example, when Curtis tells the story of historic hacks that occurred in the 1990s, he is speaking about an arrangement between the finance and technology industries that has only increased in scope. When he discusses the ELIZA software developed in the late 1960s, he is referring directly to people's emotional investments in the use of algorithmically generated social media today.

In addressing his fundamental question, "how did we get here" the answer he gives, even when he chooses to speak almost entirely in the past tense, always refers to an ongoing, contemporary situation. Curtis' narratives of the past are simultaneously very much about the present, and in this way could be considered to be a form of the present perfect tense.

By confusing a clear sense of "pastness," Curtis forces the viewer to acknowledge a continuity between the past and the present. The technique challenges what Lauren Berlant refers to as the new temporality that characterizes the age of "cruel optimism." Manifest through vicious television news cycles with a continual emphasis on live breaking news, today's temporality is a stretched out present, marked by continued moments of crises. By focusing his stories ostensibly on the past, Curtis' works undercut dominant conventions of a stretched out present, allowing for a more fluid interaction with the past that is continuous and integrated into the current moment.

7.5 Radical Critique

Curtis' project can be considered as a demonstration of different forms of affective engagement with archival material. He draws our attention to the way that the

media can shape our experience of the past, present, and how we interpret future events. For example, many of Michel Chion's audiovisual strategies of analysis are displayed in Curtis' audiovisual techniques. Curtis employs forced marriages, masking, and repetition, compelling forms of reduced listening. By demonstrating these techniques, Curtis encourages the viewer to consider the capacities to which the media can elicit signification and affective engagement.

His foregrounding of music, which is often achieved through a "forced marriage" of incongruous music and footage or narrative, can draw the audience's attention to the ongoing process by which news and history is experienced through conventional affective forms. Like the hauntology music he deploys in *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis' work can be seen to cultivate an understanding of people's affective relationship with archival material. These affective possibilities involve visceral reaction, recognition, and identification.

This strategy is almost in direct opposition to the intentions of propaganda, which is to "secretly emphasiz[e] only one way of looking at the facts" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Rather than reinforce a single interpretation, Curtis foregrounds a range of possible interactions and affective engagements with the footage.

His techniques provide a space for viewers to encounter the footage in new ways. Some of the most poignant sequences that do this involve ambivalent juxtapositions (such as the sequence to Eno's "On some Faraway Beach"), in which the music does not enforce a clear valence or temporality. The music is disparate but does not suggest one particular interpretation or feeling. Akin to the Surrealist efforts to

circumvent rational thinking through aleatory practices, the music functions to jar the viewer into perceiving it from outside of the dominant conventions of representation.

Curtis not only demonstrates a thoughtful interaction with archival footage of the past but also draws attention to how viewers interact with future media representation of events. Bolter and Grusin have referred to this process as “premediation.” Premediation is defined as the process by which “media-derived schemata [can] pre-form new experiences, memories and their mediation.” Affective conventions determine how people will interpret future events. Three ways of approaching premediation include “the remediation of future media forms and technologies; the remediation of future events and affective states; and the extension of sociotechnical media networks into the future” (p. 6).

This reading is supported by Curtis’ continued emphasis on the fact that the ideology that has underpinned Post-War history no longer serves to make sense of the present reality; the uncertainty and chaos of the world today must be addressed according to a new ideological framework. Additionally, his twisting and unreliable narratives reveal how a linear, chronological narrative is only inscribed onto events *after* they occur.

Additionally, Curtis’ work interrogates the representational capacity and evidentiary quality of the image. He reveals that images alone are insufficient to signify underlying ideological and infrastructural power and influence. In many different cases, Curtis uses sound and music to signify that reality. In effect, Curtis is not only calling for a new ideological approach to making sense of the world, but also a new mode of representation to depict it.

Curtis emphasizes the component of unpredictability throughout his work. The quality of unpredictability is most pronounced in *HyperNormalisation*, which he concludes with descriptions of various rhetorical strategies of destabilizing meaning. He ends the film with footage of people's outright astonishment at the results of the Brexit referendum.

Curtis also draws attention to randomness. As Curtis puts it, sometimes the music is there to simply provoke a different affective encounter with the past. Jaimie Baron draws attention to people's ambivalent desire to feel closer to history, to feel its presence, and the simultaneous threat of the destabilization of meaning (p. 36). Just as the image reminds us that the past is irretrievable, the music is a reminder that the past could have been experienced very differently.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary

In this dissertation, I have attempted to expand on an understanding of how pre-recorded music can function to shape new meaning about historical narratives and audiovisual footage. I have demonstrated a multimodal analysis of the devices of audiovisual juxtaposition in the works of Adam Curtis. Specifically, I have focused my attention on Curtis' use of music to reveal intersections between the personal and the political. I have presented my analysis according to how Adam Curtis uses music in two ways: he demonstrates how music signifies historical meaning and its potential to elicit a range of affective reactions.

Throughout the history of the music industry, economics, technology, and ideology have played an important role in shaping the kind of music produced and the ways of listening to it. As an archivist, Curtis draws from different domains of music, provoking an attention to its temporality; the technology used to produce and distribute it; how it has been culturally consumed; and how it has shaped people's experiences through genres, rhythms and habits of pleasure.

His audiovisual juxtapositions compel viewers to interrogate their own affective responses and identification with it. As a radical critique of dominant journalistic practices, Curtis discloses the close connection between the popular culture industry and political history that is often elided in conventional journalism. His work resists reductive interpretations and commercial reappropriation. It invites a critical viewership, not just of the audiovisual representation of the past, but how that process informs our

reception of future events. Drawing from the performative documentary and essay film tradition, Curtis' works demonstrate a dynamic human intervention into the media archive.

8.2 Limitations

Throughout this project I have attempted to focus on Curtis' devices of audiovisual juxtaposition from a rhetorical perspective rather than to evaluate his truth claims. Still, this study is very interpretive one, supporting Baron's argument that the archive effect is constituted through recognition and situated in the viewer's reception. "The experience of the affect effect is dependent on an experience of multiple possible contexts of reception and, therefore, possible meanings" (Baron, 2013, x).

As a single viewer, my analysis unquestionably accounts for a fraction of the historical references and cultural content in Adam Curtis' films. Based on my own personal knowledge, I am only able to discern a limited range of connotative meanings in his audiovisual juxtapositions. As I have discovered throughout this project, other viewers could identify many additional references. Moreover, the secondary discourse about the topics and footage is considerable and wide-ranging. Many of the archival news and music clips have been reappropriated or sampled many different times and in many other contexts, especially regarding iconic or viral footage. Many of the events depicted have been interpreted in divergent or opposing ways.

There are also limitations to the study of only one filmmaker. In the course of his ongoing career Adam Curtis has developed a singular style and authorial voice. Yet most documentarians do not directly implicate the role of music in shaping the

relationship between individual pleasure and political ideology. Nor is music used at such a fast rate, or with such irony.

Interestingly, Curtis' works elicit an emotional, affective experience even while viewers may not be aware of the references. In other cases, viewers recognize the footage but cannot consciously identify its source. I contend that this raises important considerations regarding the dynamics between affective reactions, identification of the footage, and the discourse surrounding it.

8.3 Future Research

Questions of how music can impart meaning, elicit emotion or affect, and compel identification or memory are ongoing ones. Our culture of music, as Curtis has explicitly shown in many of his narratives, is constantly adapting to new technological environments and accompanied by new ways of listening and socializing. Musical recordings are imbued with material, aesthetic, and cultural qualities that can function as a form of historical signification.

This study aims to contribute to a wider discourse about repurposing music as a strategic practice in documentaries, remixes, essay films and modes of representation that refer to the media reality outside of the film. It encourages a greater focus on the aural archive effect, or the archival properties of music and sound. Further research can expand on how music situates new meaning about footage and elicits different affective reactions through temporal and intentional disparities. Another consideration regards how viewers' subsequent exposure to the material in the future may be affected by the initial viewing. Not only does this have epistemological implications, but ethical ones as well. Devices of musical juxtaposition can not only encourage viewers to be

critical about how they read archival footage, but it can situate the viewers as subjects in the same world that is depicted, in which they share an ethical responsibility.

Further research can engage in more comparative studies and apply a focus to both documentaries and narrative films. Works within the “true crime” genre on streaming platforms like Netflix make heavy use of music to re-contextualize older television and video footage into compelling and socially relevant stories. For example, *Wild Wild Country* (2018) employs a soundtrack of American folk songs to situate the story of the construction of the [Bhagwan] Rajneeshpuram commune in Oregon in the 1980s as a quintessentially American one (Berman, 2018).

Documentarian Laura Poitras featured suspense music produced by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross to represent her subjective experience in *Citizen Four* (2014). Notably, Reznor and Ross have also produced music for Hollywood films *The Social Network* (2010) and *Gone Girl* (2014), both directed by David Fincher. *Citizen Four* documents Poitras’ tense and uncertain meeting with Edward Snowden and Glenn Greenwald in Hong Kong, during which Snowden first divulged information about the National Security Agency’s domestic wiretapping program.

Documentarian Alex Gibney, who has directed and produced a vast amount of investigative work on financial fraud and cyberwarfare in films including *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005), *Zero Days* (2016), *The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicon Valley* (2019) and *Dirty Money* (2018-2020), states that the soundtrack plays an important role in his critical works. He describes its function as akin to the chorus in classical Greek drama, which serves to comment on the actions within the story from a

collective, social standpoint. The music is also a means to insert his own subjectivity into the film (Decurtis, 2005).

The role of the soundtrack in narrative, fictional films is also of growing importance in this continued era of peak content production. Similar studies could be applied to the work of directors such as Xavier Dolan, Wes Anderson, Paul Thomas Anderson, Sophia Coppola and Baz Luhrmann. These filmmakers strategically reappropriate music in ironic ways, playing with the audience's sense of temporality and drawing on their encultured, affective reactions.

Music is most often used to craft vast amounts of footage into formulaic entertainment content. Film and television series producers continue to increase their investments in high quality sound design, composing, and music supervision. A recent *South Park* episode jokes that any audiovisual footage, however banal, can be transformed into engaging Netflix content via the addition of a compelling soundtrack. Scott Malkinson, a nerdy classmate of the main characters in South Park gets his own Netflix show in which his dull routine is made exciting and fabulous through the addition of music (*South Park*, "Franchise Prequel", 2017).

A crucial concern is that due to copyright issues, there is a comparative lack of similar strategies in the critical documentary. Research and advocacy must also address the copyright laws that delimit how filmmakers may commercially release works featuring reappropriated footage. There is a continued conglomeration of corporate control of the media, which constricts what journalists can broadcast and what footage documentarians can use to form a critique. Copyright laws can prevent the recycling of popular media content that attempts to subvert or challenge hegemonic culture.

However, the reappropriation of music and popular cultural footage is overwhelmingly featured in entertainment content and commercials that play a strong role in shaping the reality of our media environment.

Research may also focus on how the reappropriation of music functions as a strategic practice in social and mobile media. New social media platforms like Tik Tok have skyrocketed to popularity, currently counting over 500 million users (Alexander, 2019). Tik Tok makes it easy to carefully sync video footage to music, encouraging the production of memes that are centered around the music. Users commonly sing duets, dance, or engage in other physical behavior to the same songs as a form of social remix.

The streaming takeover of the television industry also poses new questions about the future of multimodality and interactivity as it relates to the musical soundtrack. Streaming platforms can offer users more options to control how they view or experience the content. If the rapid popularity of Tik Tok is any indicator of what the next generation may want, more consumer choices could offer greater flexibility to change or adjust the dialogue track, the soundscape track or the musical track. At the extreme, music and sound could be made interchangeable.

In this speculative scenario it is wise to consider Curtis' attention to the rise of the self and the resultant state of consumer society. Curtis points to the grave danger of the fact that today, people's desires are satisfied by algorithms before they are even aware of them. An enhanced technical ability to incorporate and edit different music and sound to video footage does not necessarily lead to a valuable interaction with it.

Moreover, the transformation of anything into a consumer choice risks neutralizing its very force and meaning.

8.4 Music and Sound in a Post-Truth World

Since the release of *HyperNormalisation* in September of 2016, a much wider understanding has developed concerning how algorithms and social media platforms filter and organize the information that people see. News of the illegal harvesting of personal data by the political consulting firm, Cambridge Analytica, during the 2016 American presidential election and Brexit campaign, along with Facebook's executive-level cover-up, became public knowledge in 2018. This activity occurred during the same time that *HyperNormalisation* was being produced and released.

In November of 2016, Oxford Dictionaries named "post-truth" the word of the year, defining it as a condition "in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." There is a growing concern about the role of the mass media and the process of democratic discourse in the post-truth era. In addition to an expanding number of academic publications on the subject, other documentarians have attempted to explore the nature of post-truth rhetoric. The dangerous, physical repercussions of disinformation have been recently examined in HBO's *After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News* (Rossi, 2020). Curtis' discussion of the devices of "destabilization of perception" used during the USSR is comparable to Jack Bryan's exposé of Russia's tactics of political and communications warfare in *Active Measures* (2018).

In *American Dharma* (2019), Errol Morris' most recent film to date, Morris uses film history as a point of identification with former campaign strategist for President

Donald Trump, Steve Bannon. Bannon argues that today is an age of emotion. Interpretation doesn't have to be rational; it just has to be compelling. Public reaction to Morris' film was mixed. Many critics argued that it is dangerous to aestheticize Bannon's ideas by pairing them with dramatic imagery and music. Morris has described the film as a sort of Rorschach test which reveals the audience's different expectations of the role and purpose of a documentary.

In *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump* (2018), Michiko Kakutani has argued that today's epistemic crisis may have been galvanized by the deconstruction movement of the 1990s. This suggests that new epistemological or historiographical paradigms may be needed to effectively interpret and produce meaningful audiovisual representations of reality and history.

Today, the evidentiary power of the image is being challenged within the climate of post-truth. The capacity with which people can capture details about our reality using images is limited. The vast amount of information transmitted through fiberoptic cables and satellites; the structures of power that delimits the architecture of the internet; and clandestine political, military, and commercial activity are just a few examples of significant forces in our world that elide the evidentiary prowess of the image. One of the most important conclusions to be drawn from Curtis' work is that sound and music can signify realities that cannot be depicted through images. Music can bring us closer to the lived experiences of the past. Sound can alert us to approaching forces and changes within our society. Curtis' work calls for a greater awareness of how we interpret future events— and the key may be through listening.

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APPENDIX A. FILMOGRAPHY

A Movie (Bruce Conner, 1958)

Active Measures (Jack Bryan, 2018)

After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News (Andrew Rossi, 2020)

All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace (Adam Curtis, 2011)

American Dharma (Errol Morris, 2019)

American Honey (Andrea Arnold, 2016)

Armageddon (Michael Bay, 1998)

Assault on Precinct 13 (John Carpenter, 1976)

Bitter Lake (Adam Curtis, 2015)

Breakfast at Tiffany's (Blake Edwards, 1961)

Carrie (Brian De Palma,1976)

Casablanca (Michael Curtiz,1942)

Citizen Four (Laura Poitras, 2014)

Deep Impact (Mimi Leder, 1998)

Deux ou Trois Choses que je sais d'elle [*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967)

Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y (Johan Grimonprez, 1997)

Dirty Money (Alex Gibney, 2018-2020)

Drive (Mario Quinones Revolori, Ana Revolori, 2016)

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (Alex Gibney, 2005)

Exiles (Kent MacKenzie, 1961)

Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999)

Ghostbusters II (Ivan Reitman, 1989)

*Godzilla (*Roland Emmerich, 1998)

Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978)

Homecoming (Sam Esmail, 2018)

HyperNormalisation (Adam Curtis, 2016)

Il Mostro (Roberto Benigni, 1994)

Independence Day (Roland Emmerich, 1996)

It Felt Like a Kiss (Adam Curtis, 2009)

Jaws (Steven Spielberg, 1975)

Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance (Godfrey Reggio, 1982)

La Jetée (Chris Marker, 1962)

La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon [*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon*] (Louis Lumière, 1895)

La Tragedia di un uomo Ridicolo [*The Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*] (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1981)

Le Mépris [*Contempt*] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1964)

Little Fugitive (Raymond Abrashkin, 1953)

Living in an Unreal World (Adam Curtis, 2016)

Lover Come Back (Delbert Mann, Robert Arthur, Martin Melcher, 1960)

Man on Wire (James Marsh, Simon Chinn, 2008)

Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Masculin Féminin: 15 Faits Précis [*Masculine Feminine: 15 Specific Events*] (Jean-Luc Godard, 1966)

Millhouse: A White Comedy (Emile de Antonio, 1971)

Moana (Robert J. Flaherty, 1926)

Moon (Duncan Jones, 2009)

Mosca Addio [*Farewell Moscow*] (Mauro Bolognini, Riki Roseo, Ippolita Tescari, 1987)

Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, 1956)

North by Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)

Ogro (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1979)

Oh Dearism II (Adam Curtis, 2014)

On The Bowery (Lionel Rogosin, 1957)

Otherworldly (Leslie Thornton, 1999)

Our Century (Artavazd Peleshian, 1983)

Pandora's Box: A Fable from the Age of Science (Adam Curtis, 1992)

Pillow Talk (Michael Gordon, Martin Melcher, Ross Hunter, 1959)

Power of Nightmares (Adam Curtis, 2004)

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, 1994)

Report (Bruce Conner, 1967)

Solaris (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972)

South Park, "Franchise Prequel", Season 21, Episode 4 (Trey Parker and Matt Stone, 2017)

Stalker (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979)

Star Wars (George Lucas, 1975)

Starman (John Carpenter, 1984)

The Century of the Self (Adam Curtis, 2002)

The Charge at Feather River (Gordon Douglas, David Weisbart, 1953)

The Conversation (Francis Ford Coppola, 1973)

The Godfather Part Two (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)

The Graduate (Mike Nichols, 1969)

The Heart of the World (Guy Maddin, 2000)

The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicon Valley (Alex Gibney, 2019)

The Living Dead (Adam Curtis, 1995)

The Man in the Mirror (Don Wilson, 1988)

The Mayfair Set: Four Stories about the Rise of Business and the Decline of Political Power (Adam Curtis, 1999)

The Rock (Michael Bay, 1996)

The Thing (John Carpenter, 1982)

The Trap (Adam Curtis, 2007)

Thin Blue Line (Errol Morris, 1988)

Trainspotting (Danny Boyle, 1996)

Tron (Steven Lisberger, 1982)

Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

Wild Wild Country (Maclain Way, Chapman Way, 2018)

Zero Days (Alex Gibney, 2016)

APPENDIX B. PERMISSION STATEMENT FROM ADAM CURTIS

From: **Adam Curtis - Current Affairs**
Subject: RE: Request for minor changes to your submission
Date: May 7, 2020 at 9:52 AM
To: Jacqueline Bowler jacquelineannbowler@gmail.com

Dear Jacqueline,

Thank you for that. It sounds good - I will have a read of it. Not right away - because I am a bit busy editing

And of course you can use images from the films. You have my permission - especially as it's not for profit. You are right - you are perfectly entitled to use them under Fair Use. I had a look at the instructions to you from the administrator. That is a very complex bureaucracy lost in its obsession with detail.

Very good luck with it. And thank you for writing

Yours

Adam

From: Jacqueline Bowler [jacquelineannbowler@gmail.com]
Sent: 06 May 2020 22:17
To: Adam Curtis - Current Affairs; BBC Press Office; Your Questions
Subject: Fwd: Request for minor changes to your submission

Hi there!

My name is Jacqueline Bowler and I am a New York-based musician and disaffected PhD student in media studies, hopefully graduating soon and moving on from perpetual part-time work as an adjunct professor.

For my dissertation I chose the topic of analyzing the use of music in your/Adam Curtis' documentaries (not so much a quantitative or even semiotic analysis, but looking to it as a demonstration of the possibilities of music in the documentary). I'm a big fan of the work, and it gave me a good opportunity to talk about the films along with the music of Brian Eno, Yo La Tengo, Burial, Shostakovich, etc.

Anyways I never thought I would be writing you directly with a copy of the dissertation but the graduate office at the school where I'm completing the dissertation, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY asks that I try to obtain some sort of verbal or informal permission to use images of the film stills in my dissertation.

In my opinion, it falls under the Fair Use clause as I am certainly not planning on making any money off of it and I can't see that it would have any negative influence on the commercial value of your work because I doubt that it will have much influence at all. Also, it's a bit ironic considering that the whole topic is about creative and critical re-appropriation, but I'm not sure that the graduate office sees it that way. Also, the liberal arts program is small at RPI and they don't often come across dissertations on film studies.

I've attached the dissertation and included some of the correspondence with my school below. Basically, I employ the typical format for film stills in a scholarly paper and similar to that of Sarah Keith's article about the use of music in Adam Curtis' works. As I'm not sure how to reach Adam Curtis and whether this is his correct email, I kindly ask that perhaps someone in the BBC press office might forward this to him or anyone at the BBC that would be willing to offer an informal consent via email. I don't plan on making the dissertation publicly available and I believe that this is just protocol for my school.

I'm really sorry to bother you with this during an unprecedented world pandemic. I wish everybody well at the BBC and thank you for the invaluable work that you do.

Best,

Jacqueline Bowler