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Abstract

The global impact of demanding environmental concerns is visible in almost all contexts of contemporary communication and across geographical borders. An increasing range of multimodal texts surface continuously in various media in order to facilitate public understanding of irreversible environmental changes, to educate future generations in ecoliteracy, to promote green or disclose greenwashed corporate images and practices, or to entertain and facilitate appropriate actions as well as responses. Simultaneously, research in environmental communication tries to keep up with this rapid pace by examining environment-focused multimodal texts from the context of journalism (Doyle, 2011; Lester & Cottle, 2009), education (Maier, 2010; Reid, 2007), advertising (Corbett, 2006; Cox, 2010; Hansen & Machin, 2008; Maier 2011; Moschini, 2007), and popular culture (Brereton, 2004; Meister & Japp, 2002; Starosielski, 2011), to mention only a few relevant areas.

Although environment-focused music videos have also proliferated in the last decade, and despite their recognized impact upon younger generations, giving expression as they do to the rhythms and visual associations relevant to youth cultures, music videos that deal with the environmental theme have relatively rarely been the subject of research endeavours. The present chapter intends to draw attention to how the analysis of relevant multimodal texts, such as the music video *Earth Song*, can contribute to a better understanding of the ways by which communication about environmental issues takes place in the context of popular culture. Our analysis will primarily be focused on how the video takes a critical view of human interaction with the environment by questioning the wisdom of traditional national boundaries and notions of time as linear and irreversible.

Michael Jackson's *Earth Song* is a call to save the planet from the destructive impact that has been wrought upon the earth by humanity and technology. It was recorded in 1995, but never released as a single in the United States, due to events related to perceptions of Michael Jackson's private life. However, *Earth Song* won a Grammy nomination in 1997 (Jurin, Roush, & Danter, 2010, p. 132), as well as recognition in the form of the Genesis Award in 1996. According to Grant (1998), it was Jackson's intention to create a lyrical and also melodically simple song, so the whole world, including non-English-speaking audiences, could sing along.

Earth Song has a specific synchronization of semiotic modes, orchestrated along four narrative strands and filmed in four different geographic locations across the globe, but presumably occurring at the same time. Each of these strands presents images of deforestation, animal cruelty, pollution, and war, with their disastrous consequences for humanity and Earth. These visual stories, based on shots taken from documentary archives and documentary-like footage filmed in Warwick, New York, the Amazon Rain Forest, Croatia, and Tanzania, are brought together and synchronized with an equally alarming musical accompaniment, insistent lyrics, an iconic presenter, and carefully edited shots of similar actions and gestures performed by the participants. The regular solo appearances of Michael Jackson as the voice of the world are staged against a backdrop of burning forests around New York. The overall spectacular effect is largely achieved through the interplay between its regular musical structure and the chorus-like chant "What about us?" which is coordinated with footage from the four disparate locations of devastation. *Earth Song* has earned its recognition as a "green anthem" because the broader environmental discourse that underlies it can be found not in the four individual "activity schemas" (Machin, 2010, p. 94), but at the level of the whole video, which reveals Michael Jackson's critical approach to environmental issues.

This chapter illustrates a few of the ways in which this video's discourse constructs space and time through the interplay of several semiotic modes. Our focus on space and time is motivated by the fact

that we consider these to be fundamental coordinates of many environmental discourses. As will be shown below, in this particular video, the multimodal representation of space and time carries the critical green message in multiple ways.

Keywords

environment, multimodal, beat, analysis, music, video

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A Multimodal Analysis of the Environment Beat in a Music Video

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The global impact of demanding environmental concerns is visible in almost all contexts of contemporary communication and across geographical borders. An increasing range of multimodal texts surface continuously in various media in order to facilitate public understanding of irreversible environmental changes, to educate future generations in ecoliteracy, to promote green or disclose greenwashed corporate images and practices, to entertain and facilitate appropriate actions as well as responses. Simultaneously, research in environmental communication tries to keep up with this rapid pace by examining environment focused multimodal texts from the context of journalism (Doyle, 2011; Lester & Cottle, 2009), education (Reid, 2007; Maier, 2010), advertising (Corbett, 2006; Cox, 2010; Hansen & Machin, 2008; Maier 2011 and Moschini, 2007), and popular culture (Brereton, 2004; Meister & Japp, 2002 and Starosielski, 2011), to mention only a few relevant areas.

Although environment focused music videos have also proliferated in the last decade, and despite their recognized impact upon younger generations, giving expression as they do to the rhythms and visual associations relevant to youth cultures, music videos that deal with the environmental theme have relatively rarely been the subject of research endeavours. The present chapter intends to draw attention to how the analysis of relevant multimodal texts, such as the music video *Earth Song*, can contribute to a better understanding of the ways by which communication about environmental issues takes place in the context of popular culture. Our analysis will primarily be focused on how the video takes a critical view upon human interaction

with the environment by questioning the wisdom of traditional national boundaries and notions of time as linear and irreversible.

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schemas” (Machin, 2010: 94), but at the level of the whole video, which reveals Michael Jackson’s critical approach to environmental issues.

This chapter illustrates a few of the ways in which this video’s discourse constructs space and time through the interplay of several semiotic modes. Our focus on space and time is motivated by the fact that we consider these to be fundamental coordinates of many environmental discourses. As will be shown below, in this particular video, the multimodal representation of space and time carries the critical green message in multiple ways.

Approaches to music video analysis

Music videos have been the focus of research work belonging to various traditions in media and cultural studies. McQuail (2000, p. 114) describes music videos as the first postmodern television service and therefore, part of a real cultural revolution that has taken place within the mass media, resulting in a new aesthetic where popular music has become a dominant art. Since it is not only relevant to consider how music videos are perceived by their audiences, Schwartz and Ratner’s extensive reference guide to the making of music videos (2007) portrays the music video production medium and its practitioners in revealing ways so that readers can see how the industry perceives itself. This insider’s view of the industry shows that it is neither as hedonistic nor as chaotic as many may think.

Content analysis of music videos has focused on specific themes, such as the verbal and non-verbal portrayal of performers (Wallis, 2005), as well as on what is culturally sensitive; that is, gender and race. Reid-Brinkley (2008), for example, has interrogated black women’s internet-based discussion and negotiation of the negative gender and racist stereotypes portrayed in inflammatory rap music videos. The posted responses provoked by a music video provided a

means of analyzing discursive communicative patterns according to the social allegiances these defined. McKee and Pardun's qualitative study (1999) of how first year college students "read" music videos seems to support the view that deeper understandings can indeed be gained from what appears to be superficial and sensationalist popular culture music texts.

Relational approaches to the analysis of popular music (Moore 2003) work from yet another viewpoint, attempting to merge the lines distinguishing genre (Mittell, 2000), content, textual and other analyses. Studying music videos as communication, Gow (1992) categorizes them according to six popular formulas according to recurring combinations of form and content. The multi-layered discourses and meanings in music videos, however, have rarely been addressed in research or educational texts although a combinatory approach (of the art and its commerce), as adopted by Vernallis (2004), does begin to analyze critically, steering away from a focus on appearances, sales and stereotypes. Among multimodality researchers, Martinec has approached a couple of Michael Jackson's music videos focusing on rhythmic hierarchies at the level of language, music and action (2000b), phases and foregrounding (2000a).

Methodological framework, data and transcription strategies

In this chapter, we also adopt a multimodal approach both to data collection and analysis. For the purposes of this analysis, both the consideration that "each mode is partial in relation to the whole of meaning" (Kress & Jewitt, 2003, p. 3) has been important and also the emphasis on "the temporal and spatial unfolding" (O'Halloran, 2004, p. 109) of these semiotic resources. Based on Van Leeuwen's (2008) approach to discursive time and space, this chapter explains how semiotic modes interrelate and impact on the discursive construction and critical communication of time and space. By employing Van Leeuwen's concepts of *synchronization*

and *recurrence* (2008, p. 81), the present multimodal analysis addresses the issue of time in terms of both what is represented and how it is represented in the environmental discourse of *Earth Song*. The representation of space is similarly considered in terms of both what is represented and how it is represented through various semiotic resources. As will be demonstrated below, the representation of time and space is crucial for achieving continuity and unity in the music video and thus for its overall effect as a ‘green anthem’.

The transcription strategies that have been adopted in this chapter for the multimodal analysis are closely related not only to the research interests of the authors, but also to the structural specificity of this music video. Using the editing software *Adobe Premiere*, which allows exploration of the juxtapositions of sound, images, movement/dance and words at frame and shot level, has enabled us to highlight their functions in securing this music video’s continuity. Highlighting continuity has an important role in the analysis of this video due to employment of two different editing strategies that might have had a disrupting effect without being combined with other continuity strategies at the level of the aural mode. We have adopted Bordwell and Thompson’s (2001) definition of frame as “a single image on the strip of film” (p. 431), and their definition of a shot as “one uninterrupted image with a single static or mobile framing” (p. 433). The data has been transcribed in a table that includes both aspects of description and interpretation of data. A selection from the transcription table used can be seen below (Table 1) displaying information regarding aspects of the visual and aural modes, as well as multimodal connections related to space and time. The rows in the table are coded in varying shades to distinguish each of the four narrative strands, as well as the role of Michael Jackson’s appearances in the video’s structure. For example, all rows describing shots from the Amazonian forest are light grey, while those describing shots from Africa are dark grey.

In the first two columns, descriptive elements have been inserted for each shot (measured in one second intervals) in terms of specific visual (photographic and animated images as well as special effects and camera movements) and aural (lyrics, music and other sounds) modes. The third column focuses on multimodal connections as it presents elements of interpretation oriented specifically to the representation of space and time at the level of each narrative strand. Each row has been shaded differently according to the continuity relations established across the four narrative strands.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Table 1. Sample of the multimodal transcription of the music video

Representation of temporality and spatiality across semiotic modes

As already suggested, in order to identify what kind of discursive meanings are assigned to time and space, both what is represented and how it is represented are taken into account at the level of each narrative strand and at the level of the whole video. We have adopted this approach as we consider that temporality and spatiality are embodied both in the participants and locations of the discourse, while their representation is manipulated at the level of all semiotic modes in order to create a sense of timeless continuity and global unity.

When examining one of music videos' formulas, namely "the enhanced performance" formula, Gow (1992) explains that this type of video "blend[s] performance and non performance images together in a manner where the musical work of the artist(s) is kept at the forefront of the video" (p. 62). In the case of *Earth Song*, it is evident that Michael Jackson's performance is kept at the forefront, but it remains in tune with the non-performance images

during the whole video. Therefore, although Michael Jackson himself appears to embody the critical narrative “voice” and “consciousness” of *Earth Song*, three of the four narrative strands contain human participants (men, women, children, old people) who also “narrate” their stories via documentary-like footage, the regular tempo of music and a specific editing strategy.

Temporality is embodied in these participants because the choice of human participants suggests time passing in terms of age: babies, children and adults appear in the four narrative strands suggesting historical and biological evolution.

In the first part of the video, the human participants enact and question stories that simultaneously show how humanity has negatively interacted with and impacted on the environment, while in the second part, all destruction is reversed.

Murphet (2005) notes how film always appears to “unfold in real time” (p. 78) and hence, she concludes: “the simultaneous tense [that is, the present tense] is the most typical temporal location of filmic narrative voice”. This is also the case in *Earth Song* where, despite the above mentioned suggestion of time passing, the past is revisited and recurs as if eternally present, emphasizing the key notion of how time is conceptualized in music as “the extended present” (Tagg, 2012, p. 262). The temporal continuity of the parallel narrative strands implies an ongoing cry to align around a common concern for the future of the Earth.

Similarly, if the choice of human participants suggests temporality, the choice of non-human participants, for example, elephants and whales, is more suggestive of spatiality in terms of the natural environment, such as the forest and sea. In general, space is more than setting as symbolic values are added in each narrative strand. We have found several categories of discursive space according to its relation – or lack of relation – to human participants. Visually, *human space* is represented through social space (the Croatian ruins, street and factory), while

non-human space is represented by nature (forest, sea and African landscape). Space is also *humanized* aurally through personifications: “crying Earth”, “bleeding Earth”, Earth’s “wounds”, “planet’s womb” and “weeping shores” in the song’s lyrics. At the same time, the blatant lack of care for the environment makes space *unrecognizable*: “Now I don’t know where we are”. The ways in which these multimodal manifestations of space are related to each other have specific discursive consequences, as will be argued later in this chapter.

a. Continuity and unity across texts and images

As already mentioned, time initially follows a visual chronological path in each of the narrative strands. However, continuity at the level of the whole music video is visually maintained through the existence of similar actions and gestures in each strand. For example, actions and gestures of human participants such as walking, kneeling and clinging to trees appear in each narrative strand and are synchronized across strands. This repetition contributes to maintaining the idea of spatial unity throughout the music video even though the actions take place on four different continents. Furthermore, the same actions are visually reversed in each strand in the second part of the video. Future becomes past, but this transformation has no negative connotations in this discourse because the progression of time causes destruction, while the regression in time suggests healing.

Verbally, the same rhetorical question with variations according to the content of each narrative strand strengthens the cyclical patterns as well as the continuity and sense of unity at the level of the whole video: “What about elephants/ forest trails/ children dying...?”. The first two words of this pattern, uttered repeatedly by Michael Jackson, enter in dialogic “sequential interactions” (Van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 212) with the recurrent question of the chorus “What about

us?” as they alternate with it in the second half of the video. None of these questions receives an answer, increasing in this way the challenge each one makes, especially when synchronized with the above-mentioned repeated actions and gestures.

Time is visually represented through several strategies: (i) fast motion represents time as passing at high speed and thus becoming uncontrollable; (ii) alternation of lighter and darker frames, also construing time as becoming unmanageable, combined with cutting on the move, suggesting that time unifies spaces; (iii) backwards action representing time as passing in reverse, and it seems only then that time becomes controllable and a sense of balance can be restored. The main discursive implication of these temporal manipulations suggests that “progress” is out of control and that humanity should be aware of irreversible consequences.

Additionally, the use of slow motion filming foregrounds actions through dilated moments conveying a sense of being located out-of-time; this effect is also achieved through the use of close ups, which confer temporal stability, while simultaneously plunging the participants into spatial isolation. In addition, the repetition of similar types of shots in all four narrative strands creates visual rhymes that reinforce the cyclical character of time at the level of the whole video and further assist in creating smooth transitions from one story, space and time to the next. It is this cyclical representation of time that confers hope on the relations of mankind with the environment. Yet, its visual realization is reminiscent of clichéd blockbuster films. As a result, the documentary-like footage can appear as contrived or staged, especially due to its being so expertly synchronized with and reinforced by the music - an interaction discussed later in this chapter.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

The figures above represent drawings after two screen shots.

The images in Figure 1 and Figure 2 come from different narrative strands and illustrate how the four strands parallel and emphasize each other visually at the level of the video as a whole. The low-angle images portray a form of global prayer through the similar actions and gestures of the participants. They also help reduce the spatio-temporal distance between the video's participants and events and the audience; according to Vernallis, "low-angle shots are used more extensively in music videos, partly because they reproduce the relations among audience, performance and stage" (2001, p.28). This effect is reinforced verbally through the rhetorical question "What about...?", recurrently asked with pleading intonation and appropriate variations.

Continuity is also maintained through several other visual strategies: recurrent shots of Michael Jackson in the same location; similar shades of color throughout the video's duration; similar types of long shots and similar panoramic camera movements in all four locations, foregrounding the spatial specificity of each setting while linking each of them in the same moment of recurring time. The dominant technique for joining all these types of shots in the video is parallel cutting/montage, "cutting between two or more related actions occurring simultaneously at different locations or occurring at different times" (Konigsberg, 1988, p. 254), which highlights the similarities of actions happening in various places and times. The synchronization of actions across narrative strands achieved through parallel montage suggests unity across space and time and reflects a certain view of the destruction of our world. At the level of each narrative strand, "continuity editing" is used in order "to maintain continuous and clear narrative action" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 429). Vernallis found that "music videos avoid continuity editing because such techniques would give the visual track too strong a

forward trajectory: the image might seem to overtake the song” (2001, p.23). However, in the case of this video, the combination of parallel montage and continuity editing ensures a balance between the visual and the musical tracks.

Thus, a sense of continuity and unity is maintained multimodally at the level of the whole video in order to connote critically the idea of global responsibility for the environment. First of all, this is achieved through the ways in which temporality and spatiality are embodied visually in participants. Then, the four narrative strands are characterized by multimodal similarities involving recurrent actions and rhetorical questions. Finally, repetitions of multimodally constructed space types, including human, non-human, humanized/personified and unrecognizable, contribute to a sense of global unity. The main types of repetitions are given by the visual parallel montage, visual temporal manipulations, echoing of musical phrasings, similarities in space visualization and recurring words, as well as by repetition of phrases in the lyrics. The next part of the article is dedicated to some of the repetitions related to music.

b. Continuity and unity through music

Continuity is also aurally realized and maintained at the level of the whole music video through several strategies. The main strategy is musical time, which follows a consistent “beat”, a term often used loosely to refer to combinations of tempo, metre and rhythm. In this music video, the four distinct narrative strands unfold with a continuity based in the sameness of their tempos, metres and rhythms. This sameness in beat is reinforced by sameness in musical phrasings as these too are repeated a set number of times, both within and between narrative strands.

For the first few tranquil seconds of the music video, viewers see a forest and hear a faint accompanying sound of a bird twitter: rhythms of nature briefly suggesting the “extended

present” (Tagg 2012, p. 262); these sounds of nature can be a rich source for connotative meanings and here they momentarily evoke a sense of the timeless present. A lone electric piano then introduces the music video’s signature melody for the first minute or so, before strings join in, effectively downplaying any discernible beat, which only becomes apparent when the tambourine enters about one and half minutes into the clip, together with the chorus, heralding the four-four time signature proper. The percussive tambourine has traditionally been described as having a hypnotic effect partly due to the range of simultaneous effects it can produce: it can be played by hand, stick, mounted or held, shaken or stroked (Hamerman 2011, pp. 104-108). The sound properties and associations of the tambourine thus contribute to dream-like associations for the space and time in which the rest of this music video plays out.

It is at the point when the song’s time signature proper begins that the string instruments contribute to a classic, even predictable, sense of “musical story-building”: the instruments continue to repeat each of their phrasings at least three times, before progressing to one octave higher when their pitch range begins to widen. Following Van Leeuwen (1999, p. 140), who describes sound qualities such as pitch register, loudness and tension as having an “experiential meaning potential”, where meanings are based on past bodily experiences, an expansive pitch range connotes force. The repetition of the A flat minor /D flat major chord pattern in the verse, with its subsequent E flat major resolve, serves to accentuate the melody, while the music’s rising pitch has metaphoric extensions suggestive of both power and prayer.

As the musical phrasings reappear in a higher register, the images cut rapidly from fleeting glimpses of a dying elephant and fleeing zebras and giraffes to more lingering close-ups of a deeply concerned child and horrified woman. Although such disquieting images may well be documentary evidence of authentic reactions and real events, they are synchronized with an

original musical composition, unable to be categorized as representative of a particular genre, but variously described as a rock ballad with gospel, blues and operatic elements (Hunter, 1995), and a surreally staged narrator in the form of Michael Jackson. This, alongside the editing techniques described earlier and the multi-layered soundtrack, increases the potentially dramatic effect of the complete music clip. The combined effect of a repetitive musical structure with parallel repetitions in the aural and visual modes is discursively multiplied by their synchronization, producing a potent representation and criticism of global tragedies.

By three minutes into the music video, a full band is performing, with drums that include a crashing snare pulsation as well as a bass, emphasizing the theatricality of the music video as a whole. The increased volume of the sound, together with the increase in vocal resonance and pitch range, combine to produce an overall “experience” of augmented effort. Loudness, pitch range and tempo are musical parameters whose effects function as “cues” (Tagg, 2012, p. 255) most likely indicative of, in this section of the music, “healing energy”. The cumulative result of the unrelenting beat and recurring musical phrasings effectively results in a dreamlike atmosphere wherein even tragedies can be reversed. The throb of the music finds its visual echo, about halfway into the piece, in the participants’ parallel actions and related movements. Just as “elaboration” restates by providing equivalent information, so do repetitive musical phrasings elaborate on parallel gestures, providing a different perspective on the same information (Halliday in Machin, 2010, p. 192), and thereby multimodally underlining the crisis that the Earth is facing.

Alternating minor and major chord patterns, which initially lead from A flat minor, suggest a tendency towards disaster, while the momentary duration of each is also significant. Tempo is, according to Tagg (in Van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 39), “an important parameter in

determining the human/biological aspect of an affective relationship to time”, so the brevity of these phrases can be variously interpreted to mean something fleeting, or unstable and even volatile. Moreover, as these brief wave-like phrasings are recycled throughout the music video, their collective effect as short bursts of energy seems to signify disquiet and anxiety. Still, the conventional four-four time together with the two basic building blocks of tonal music, the minor and major chords (Kamien, 2008, p. 46), anchors actions, unifying and grounding them as well as suggesting consistency. Meanwhile, the haunting melody assists in the discursive realization of a sense of continuity and also unity. Ultimately, a steady increase in volume and pitch range conveys a sense of urgency and fear that time is running out. Combined with its considerable range in pitch and volume, the final shift to a higher tone in a major key allows the music to evoke a sense of enduring continuity and spatial unity that the visual and verbal modes of *Earth Song* also communicate.

Vernallis (2004, p. 189) notes how the last beat (number four) of each verse in *Earth Song* results visually in a tree being felled, a seal being bludgeoned or a man being killed. Despite the representations of these atrocities being separated visually and temporally, the accent of the music constantly connects man and animal with the fate of, but also the hope for, the planet. The strong, sturdy beat of the music does not totally overpower its evocative melody or lyrics, but serves to underscore their energy and hence, the importance of what is being communicated. In other words, although repetition is characteristic of most popular music, it needs to be appreciated within the context of this music video as a whole. In short, the snowballing effect of the timed strike with the disturbing image results in a metaphorical enhancement of the message, namely our global responsibility of responding to environmental disasters appropriately now.

The music's substantial pitch range, suggestive of a force directed at rousing emotions on a global scale (Machin, 2010, p. 219), is a style reminiscent of national anthems (often referred to as "hymns" in languages other than English), as these tend to be characterized by an "expansive range" (Tagg, 2012, p. 309) and usually include a preponderance of major chords specifically drawn on to stir patriotic emotions. These very same characteristics of anthems are deployed in this music video for, however, a critically different purpose: to rally all peoples of the Earth, rather than individual nations, for the purpose of saving the planet.

Applying Van Leeuwen's system network of timing (1999, pp. 60-65), we can identify each sound element in the gospel-style answer-call vocals as measured and regularized: the usual unvaried response of such vocals is now in the form of a rhetorical question, "What about us?" that is sung invariably and in unison, articulating a critical issue about the collective fate of the many communities listening across our planet. The regular, unvaried bass signifies a grounded, persistent, "down-to-earth", but nonetheless, poignant, harmonizing and consistent theme. The answer-call vocals and echoing of musical phrasings across the globe indicate a sense of community and solidarity, a collective perspective on destruction, a sense of reflection and recognition of the cyclical nature of time: at the end of the video, past becomes present while sounds once again soften in the eternal present of a natural space shared by a vast range of animals, plants and people.

The gradual crescendo and amplified pitch range leave the listener in no doubt the long wail is the climax for the four narrative strands, as it peaks more than half-way through the music video and marks a turning point. Winds change direction, felled trees rise, an elephant and a person come back to life; finally, the soft note of nature concludes the music video. As the music video ends, the events filmed and the music's denouement come full circle; simultaneously, the

volume and pitch decrease while the unrelenting beat of the music concludes one tone higher, on a hopeful F major, indicating that an atmosphere of equilibrium has been almost instantly restored and, consequently, nature as we have always known it reappears and seemingly exists as it had before. The almost symmetrical arrangement of both the music and the images frames the four narrative strands.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Table 2 summarizes visual and aural strategies employed for the representation of temporal continuity and spatial unity.

Conclusions

The critical multimodal analysis of *Earth Song* presented in this chapter has demonstrated how this music video addresses significantly vital questions about our global responsibility towards the planet's future by constructing a specific interpretation of time and space through a complex interplay of several semiotic modes. By focusing on how the multimodal construction of discursive time and space at the level of the four narrative strands contributes to a broader critical discourse at the level of the whole video, this analysis complements other explorations of the video, which consistently recognise its explicit condemnation of the destruction humanity has wrought upon the Earth (Hunter, 1995; Stillwater 2011; Vernallis, 2004). The analysis has revealed that in *Earth Song* time is no longer represented as divisible, linear and irreversible, and space is no longer divisible and unrecognizable, but a shared view of nature is possible. The novelty of this music video lies in the ways in which a meaning of "oneness" is attached to both time and space. This overarching meaning is multimodally achieved by highlighting temporal

continuity and spatial unity. Visually unifying four continents through the same recurrent actions and gestures, the video focuses on the central message of its environmental discourse: the need for global involvement. The melody links the various visual narratives of the musical video as it reverberates in alternating minor/major patterns. The tone and tempo of the music drive both the lyrics and the images, allowing *Earth Song* to become a compassionate voice capable of revealing the magnitude and the urgency of environmental problems at the level of the whole planet. However, the discrepancy between the documentary archival shots and documentary-like footage that reveal the problems, together with the impossible solution of time reversion, weakens the intended message by implicitly suggesting a lack of viable solutions.

In the light of the present findings, future research could focus on comparing various versions of popular music videos and the social context in which they have been produced, so as to explore their various representations of urgent contemporary issues. With reference to *Earth Song*, these versions could include the original, as well as a later version that uses still images, but displays the lyrics of the song clearly across the screen, omitting the authentic footage shot across four different geographical locations or any images of Michael Jackson. A third version worthy of consideration is the relatively recent DVD, which begins with a child's perspective in *This is it*. Significantly, the title of Michael Jackson's planned final comeback refers specifically to a new version of *Earth Song*. Comparing the impact of various realizations may highlight the contribution of each semiotic choice in constructing meaning, as well as the combined overall effect of each in the context of popular culture.

The popularity of Michael Jackson may well be debatable, but it is hoped that, by having chosen to analyze this particular music video, it has been shown how a representative text of

contemporary popular culture communicates its critical environmental message by defying traditional time and space constraints.

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