SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM:

Animation At The Service Of The Popular Music Industry

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M.A. THESIS

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1995

CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The use of animation has been associated with some very successful music videos. Prior to its use by the popular music industry animation had been used in combination with music since the days of the 'follow-the-bouncing-ball' cartoons produced by the Fleischer Studio in the mid 1920's. The Disney Studio devoted an entire series of cartoons to the visualisation of music called the *Silly Symphonies* which culminated in the feature length animated film *Fantasia*. In so doing Disney and his animators set the technical standards by which subsequent work in the field has been measured. They also established the aesthetic base. This was challenged by the Fleischer Studio in the 1930's and also often parodied by the Warner Bros. Studio.

Half a century later the popular music industry turned to animation, amongst other film and video forms, in the production of the first wave of music video. The global cable television station MTV consolidated the connection between pop music and animation with the production and screening of a series of animated logos for its corporate identity.

Between the activity in the 1920's and the advent of music television there have been various attempts by other studios and by individuals to visualise music. In most of these instances images have been created in response to the music. The soundtrack has preceded the visuals. This is contrary to normal practice in film and television production where the music is not composed until after completion of the editing. But here the music was privileged and the animation was, so to speak, slave to the rhythm, as this thesis will show. Not only did the music take precedence over the visuals in production but the identifiable image of the pop stars involved in the videos took precedence over any animated effects. This suited the needs of the popular music industry which saw the videos as a marketing tool for the promotion of musical product. Once again the Disney aesthetic was challenged and reworked.

Establishing the emergence of a new aesthetic of animation set to music is the basis of this research. It will be seen that music and animation have certain commonalities. Accordingly, the method of structural analysis employed in this thesis is similar to both a musical score and an animation bar sheet and is employed to uncover the multi-layered nature of music videos. After a brief introduction to this new aesthetic I will review current theory on animation and music video. There follows a short history of American animation set to music with some references to European experimentation. The research model is designed and then applied to three music videos. The analysis of these videos shows the nature of the new animation aesthetic and how in music video the animation is indeed a slave to the rhythm