

**Defining the Visual Album by way of Animal Collective's *ODDSAC*: Identifying the musicological exchange between music and images based in audio visual and music video analysis**

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## I. Introduction

An introspective case study on the first self-defined visual album: *ODDSAC*<sup>1</sup> by alternative indie-rock band Animal Collective. This thesis will interpret both the musical and visual components of visual albums under the guise of popular music studies on music video analysis. The conclusions drawn from this study are a continuation of multi-media musicological research on the evolving state of music and videos. The methodological approach to this study is drawn from Carol Vernallis' work documenting music video studies. This study will serve as a representation of dissecting the components of the visual album - defining it as an uniquely differentiated media form in the music and visual arts.

This thesis will first look at how musical concepts are represented in music videos, and then take on a wider perspective by examining how the visual, and editorial techniques directors contribute to music videos. The use of music within an audiovisual realm is quite limited. Musicological claims on popular music transformed into the music video are specific to the commercialization of the beginning media format. This study will uncover the process in understanding narrativity in the music of music videos.

The second half of the study deviates from a solely musicological standpoint as to incorporate the larger picture of the visual album's purpose in popular music analysis on audio visual media formats.

*ODDSAC* is a collaborative musical and visual album between the band and the director Danny Perez. The film is about 53 minutes long, encompassing the blend of audio visual into this experimental format branded as the visual album. The following aims are the focus of this research:

- (1) How is the visual album an enhanced and extended version of the music video (duration being the signifying characteristic of the visual album)?

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<sup>1</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

- (2) The musicological research aim will investigate three of the five composition characteristics of electronic music as modeled in the previously known institute of sonology as a department of University of Utrecht presents literature *Summary Observations on Compositional Theory*. The five characteristics of sound are: pitch, duration, volume, timbre, and location. Timbre and duration (time, and segmentation) and lyrics will be highlighted in this research on the visual album. Timbre is the way sound is represented, layered, created, and transmitted. This analysis on timbre will look at how the electronically produced elements of sound layer to the visual elements.

This analysis will not take into account melody and harmony due to the tedious nature of determining whether these properties are a priori or serve to hold a particular musical function in pop and rock music analysis. Carol Vernallis' ongoing contributions to the audiovisual analysis of music videos claims "musical features like timbre and time passing is more relevant than showcasing technological advances."<sup>2</sup> The music video is presented through music, lyrics, image, each feature within the media exhibits its own distinct sense of time - whether this is indicative of the future or past will be determined within this thesis. How do these musical to visual values add or subtract value to this media form? Do these elements sync within the visual components or act separately to the visual form and narrative? These categories will first be applied to the visual album in general, and then show how it is exhibited specifically within *ODDSAC*.

- (3) The visual analysis will apply meaning from Vernallis' music video theory on Editing, Space, and Color, to *ODDSAC*. The main reason for following music video theory rather than film music theory is described best by Vernallis: "Because music videos often lack essential ingredients - place names, meeting times, a link to both past and present, and fully realized protagonist and villains - they cannot be described as possessing a classical Hollywood film narrative."<sup>3</sup> The visual album - while the first in its genre - quickly becomes convoluted. The editing style and horror engulfed world of *ODDSAC* can be chaotic. For the editing portion of this analysis I will bring in Nicholas Cook's three types

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<sup>2</sup> Carol Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?" *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2013, 5. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199733866.013.0016.

<sup>3</sup> Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing music video: aesthetics and cultural context* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 15.

of interaction between music and images: complement, conformance, and contrast to focus in on the goal of editing and music together in this audiovisual format.

The overall aim of this study will be defining the musicological concept of visual albums within the musical and visual elements. Various scholars will be attributed to this analysis, but mainly that from Carol Vernallis. After defining various terms and techniques, these elements will be applied to the first ever visual album *ODDSAC*. How does this media form contribute to musicological studies - and what future research can be made in advancing the visual album as an academically fit audiovisual item?

## II. Background of *ODDSAC* (2010)

Experimental-pop and alternative-rock group Animal Collective is made up of four members, all of which perform under pseudonyms; adding to the fantasy and quirk of the artist to audience dynamic. Panda Bear (Noah Lennox), Avey Tare (David Portner), Deakin (Josh Dibb), and Geologist (Brian Weitz) (Monger 2016). Instrumentation of the group is almost entirely electronic instruments: electric guitar, keyboards, drum pads, synthesizers, and audio manipulators. Their recorded sound appearing on their albums is experimentally studio engineered, with a rambunctious weightlessness in energy. The soft lightness of Panda Bear's voice and kit-drum is contrasted by the ripping screams Avey Tare's vocals and guitar work. The blend of these two members mixed with synthetic beats and funk rhythm of Geologist on electronics and synthesizers and Deakin on the bass is unique to the group.

Animal Collective's 1 Recorded Studio LPs, 9 EPs 16 singles, 3 live albums, 1 visual album, 1 ios App launch, make for a colorful discography.<sup>4</sup> The expansiveness of the artist's musical releases are usually matched by an array of psychedelic to interactive to DIY made music videos. The 8th studio album, *Merriwether Post Pavilion*<sup>5</sup> is the top commercially ranked album in their repertoire. Only one year later, did Animal Collective launch the visual album *ODDSAC*, directed by independent visual artist Danny Perez. Before *ODDSAC*, Perez directed the Animal

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<sup>4</sup> James Christopher Monger, "Animal Collective," Billboard.com, 2016, , accessed July 22, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> Animal Collective, *Merriwether Post Pavilion*, recorded January 6, 2009, Domino recording, 2008, CD.

Collective music video for “Who Could Win A Rabbit” off of the album *Sung Tongs* in 2004.<sup>6</sup> Many visual elements used in this video such as the forest setting, costumes, and quick cuts later found their way into the visual album *ODDSAC* as further detailed in Figures 1 and 2.<sup>7</sup> Otherwise, most of his video art contributions fell mainly in the art-exhibition world. Perez’s work is dark and psychologically nightmarish.



**Figure 1 and 2:** These two still shots come from the Animal Collective music video, “Who Could Win A Rabbit” (2004) directed by Danny Perez. An early music video collaboration between Danny Perez and Animal Collective carries similar visual elements that later appear in the visual album *ODDSAC* (2010). The hexagonal light frames the shot seen here, and a similar feature appears on the opening song in *ODDSAC*. The effect of the dark costumes also carries over from the early work of the director / artist collaboration.

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The visual album took four years to complete. The album is approximately 53 minutes in length, featuring 13 songs. All songs were written by the four members of Animal Collective. Upon release of *ODDSAC* in 2010, Animal Collective and Perez hosted near 30 screenings in the U.S. which were then followed by a Q&A. This was announced prior to the the tour as fans could purchase tickets for the screening and Q&A. Fan documentation and transcription of some Q&A sessions are one of the sources for knowing what backstory, technical, and visual components went into make the album. This information has been shared via fan forums. In interviews with journalists and critics, the group is more conservative in disclosing technical, musical, and artistic details of the visual album. This is represented in editorial interviews published online.

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<sup>6</sup> Animal Collective, *Sung Tongs*, recorded June 1, 2004, Fat Cat Records, 2004, CD.

<sup>7</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

With a minimal feedback loop from artist to audience, much of the artistic and narrative elements of the visual album is up for interpretation.

The Q&A transcripts found online, are published by anonymous sources. Through this transcript, we can understand the production components of the visual album<sup>8</sup> which was shot with a DVX100 camera, and edited entirely on Final Cut and After effects. Budget was between \$65,000 - \$70,000. Inspiration for the title *ODDSAC* comes from the texture of a bag of gummy candies that are all melted together into one piece. The band also liked the visual look of the word in all capital letters. The likeness for horror movies and the clash of sound and outlandish demons made for a perfect pair between Perez and the Collective for writing this visual album. The following is a quote taken from the transcript of a Q&A session, retrieved from the fan - blog titled "Animal Collective Community Forum for Panda Bear, Avey Tare, Geo."<sup>9</sup> recalling the directional and artistic processes between Danny Perez and Animal Collective by Dave Portner. Dave Portner, is quoted below:

"[we] started making some music that went with the rough cut of the film. Then it got passed back and forth and we collaborated on the last scenes that we were acting in. We'd also added beats in the music where Danny had made a bunch of cool visual edits. That's why it flows so nicely."

The music and sound design of *ODDSAC* was intended as an album-only work<sup>10</sup> that stands on its own as a visual and musical piece.<sup>11</sup> The band never intended to release *ODDSAC* in order to promote their music and boost record sales.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the release was intended to stay

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<sup>8</sup> The group could not be reached at this time for confirmation of the production details, and have not commented against any of these details.

<sup>9</sup> This is not a primary source and cannot be relied upon for the best detail and most accurate facts. Yet, it is the only source to be found that explicitly states more specific production components to the visual album.

<sup>10</sup> "Album-only" comes from the film critique assumption that *ODDSAC* would have been representational of a film, rather than mixed-media form.

<sup>11</sup> Katey Rich, "Exclusive Interview: Animal Collective And *ODDSAC* Director Danny Perez," CINEMABLEND, February 02, 2010, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://www.cinemablend.com/new/Exclusive-Interview-Animal-Collective-ODDSAC-Director-Danny-Perez-16856.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Although the band do not pride themselves on commercial practices they have gone to great creative marketing efforts in music releases. The most recent album *Meeting of the Waters* was created by sampled sounds entirely from a trip of Avey Tare and Geologist in rainforests of Brazil (sponsored by

all-inclusive (as a visual-musical set: without one cannot come the other). But in the age of downloading, Portner recognizes that “people will rip the audio anyways and just be able to listen to it.”<sup>13</sup> This beckons the question: what is the lifespan of the visual album, as witnessed by way of *ODDSAC*? If audiences demand the accessibility and immediacy of music they consume, how will this media format survive?

Rather than seeing an industry need, Animal Collective and Danny Perez created the visual album out of creative precedent and collaboration. As for the media form in 2017 - we can look to audio-visual analysis through a musicological lens that has been done on expanding media forms by way of music videos as a standard.<sup>14</sup>

### III. From Music Video - to Visual Album

The core of the visual album still lies within the music video, as will be understood in the following section laying out the historical musicological evolution from one media form (music video) to the next (visual album). The visual album is a 21st century reconceptualization of the music video supported by the music industry’s increasing demand for new music and visual media forms online. The need for an extended, visually constructed album seems just as likely as the new generations of music and video forms founded in the album-app per example of *Biophilia* by Bjork<sup>15</sup>, or interactive videos like *We Used to Wait* by Arcade Fire.<sup>16</sup>

One of, if not the most essential scholars in music video aesthetics is Carol Vernallis. As a scholar in both music and communication, Vernallis has contributed a slew of publications on defining music video as its own separate genre. Her book *Experiencing the Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* serves as the starting point analyzing the topic from music video to visual album. As Vernallis will be referenced as the music video expert in this study,

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Earth Works by Viceland). In 2016 the group premiered an ios app accompanying their new album *Painting With* (Sodomsky 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Latest releases that occupy the same nominal space include *Lemonade* (2016) by Beyoncé, *Endless* (2010) by Frank Ocean, *Only in Dreams - Full Album Stream* (2011) by Dum Dum Girls *Boo Boo - visual album stream* (2017) by Toro y Moi.

<sup>15</sup> Bjork et al., writers, *Biophilia*, Björk, Naxos Digital Services US Inc., CD.

<sup>16</sup> Arcade Fire, *The Suburbs*, recorded August 2, 2010, Merge Records, 2008 - 2010, CD.

Mathias Bonde Korsgaard<sup>17</sup> contributes work on *Creation and Erasure: Music Video as a Signaletic Form of Practice* (2012) and *Music Video Transformed* (2013) specifically lays out the process of music video into subgenres and extended/altered forms.

Vernallis' general definition of the music video is: "any relation of sound and image that we recognize as such."<sup>18</sup> Scholar Alf Björnberg<sup>19</sup> claims a cultural significance between popular music and music videos. So much as they are embedded within popular music culture. And any changes that happen to music video practices, are socially determined.<sup>20</sup> Björnberg's cites dozens of musicologists in defining the multiple viewed functions of the music video:

"many scholars relate the characteristics, to the development of the specific media codes of commercial television (Berland 1986, Jones 1988; Kaplan 1987; Larsen 1987) and stress the function of music video to aesthetics of television advertising, (Allan 1990, Frith 1988; Goodwin 1987; Kinder 1984; Laing 1985; Movin and Oberg 1990; Storm 1989 and others)."<sup>21</sup>

In Korsgaard's contribution to musical video aesthetics in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* - the music video no longer fits into the strict commercially profiting limitations of its past. Music videos both "visualize music" (by recasting a song visually) and "musicalize vision" (by structuring images according to musical logic). And as music videos try to keep up with industry factors of accessibility and immediacy available through online channels - music videos "remediate content more actively than almost any other media form."<sup>22</sup> As the industry changes, so does the music video.

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<sup>17</sup> Korsgaard is a scholar in the Department of Aesthetics and Communication at Aarhus University, Denmark whose research focuses on music video aesthetics and how this is transformed into the 21st century audiovisual cultures.

<sup>18</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 156.

<sup>19</sup> Alf Björnberg received his Ph.D. in Musicology from Gothenburg University. He is currently a professor and department lead at Gothenburg. His article *Structural Relations of Music and Images in Music Video* analyzes the state of the music video specifically in the 1980s. The article analytically dissects the function of musical aesthetics in music videos.

<sup>20</sup> Alf Björnberg, "Structural Relationships of Music and Images in Music Video," in *Reading pop: approaches to textual analysis in popular music*, ed. Richard Middleton (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 348.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Mathias Bonde Korsgaard, "Music Video Transformed," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2013, 2, accessed July 11 2017, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199733866.013.015.

In the 1940s soundies were a mainstay in bars, nightclubs, diners, and social hubs. The coin operated, video-jukebox would play “black-and-white films up to three minutes long.”<sup>23</sup> Since the 1970s, the music video has played crucial role in the promotion and development of artists within popular music culture. Historically, the music video is an evolving media form: from Soundies to Scopitones, and video promo’s to the MTV era.<sup>24</sup> It can be assumed that as fluid as genre definitions move, as does the way all music is then translated into visual elements.

The pop music genre has undergone industry standard changes due to technological advances since the first music video in 1979. “Visual elements...come to the fore today and feel like a shift from the eighties.”<sup>25</sup> Technology standards and advances in audio and visual equipments and process opens the door for offshoots within the music video. These changes place “a new emphasis on shifting intensities and textures.”<sup>26</sup> Björnberg also pre-empted this shift because of the technological advancements and developments that were present in cable (television) and post production technology.<sup>27</sup>

Music matched to visual products today are wrapped in nostalgia. “Today, with so many media forms and venues, innovations may appear elsewhere first.”<sup>28</sup> The mixture of nostalgia and a wide frontier is how Mathias Korsgaard defines music videos remediation phase. “Music videos frequently remediate material. They adopt images from earlier sources (films, commercials, paintings, posters) and juxtapose them with others in video.”<sup>29</sup> Specifically to the creation of the visual album - *ODDSAC* director Danny Perez was heavily involved in the video art world. The long form visual album from its early renderings found in *ODDSAC*, suggest ambiguity and a step away from narrativity due to it’s visual arts, media roots.

Korsgaard identifies five new forms of the music video “participatory / interactive, user-generated content, remakes/remixes, alternative lengths, and hi-lo definition.”<sup>30</sup> The visual

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<sup>23</sup> Wennekes, ""All Aboard!" Soundies and Vitaphone Shorts," 59.

<sup>24</sup> Amy Herzog, "Illustrating Music," ed. Roger Beebe and Jason Middleton, *Medium Cool: Music Videos from Soundies to Cellphones*, 2007, 32, doi:10.1215/9780822390206-003.

<sup>25</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Björnberg, "Structural Relationships of Music and Images in Music Video," 348.

<sup>28</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Korsgaard, "Music Video Transformed," 4.

album is a further extension of the alternative lengths category. Within this subsection are different representations of full alternative lengths: entire albums with one or more videos for each song, the album music video: an entire album in one music video, long-form videos, two or more songs in the one video, and short renditions such as video teasers and blips.<sup>31</sup>

Visual albums are a generative side-effect of the industry demands on traditional form music videos. Through the alternative length format, the visual album takes on a new form that challenges the preconceptions and hierarchies of music videos audiovisual format. (I.e. exclusively for commercial and promotional purposes, the video following music, etc). Videos and music often take inspiration from other media forms: ie. computer games, silent movies, horror films, phone applications, concerts, performance art and more, therefore the visual album cannot be seen as a specific, singly bounded entity fulfilling strict guidelines of limitations.

Fundamentally: the visual album - as with the music video - represents a special landscape between image and sound.<sup>32</sup> The video “operates by visually remediating music (recasting a pre-existing song visually), but also by musically remediating the image (structuring the image according to musical logic).”<sup>33</sup> Musical details and the right visual touch define the world within the visual album

*ODDSAC*, musically, began as a soundtrack, layered with a visual storyline, directed by Perez. As the editing and post production followed some months of separate film shootings, Perez asked Animal Collective to create more percussive, punctuation points to match the some fast paced scenes and visual renderings. The complete soundtrack (or music portion of the album) encompasses aspects of sound design, in addition to originally composed and intended music. This is crucial for framing the visual album in a musicological lens. As music is not specific to a genre, or song, but instead, the overall timbre creates a progression in the storyline.

“Music videos have always been self-reflexive as well as intertextual with nearby forms and genres.”<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to mention “always” in terms of defining a new subgenre within the music video. The future of the visual albums is unpredictable. But understanding its musicological

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Korsgaard, “Music Video Transformed,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> Vernallis, “Music Video’s Second Aesthetic?,” 19.

stance will benefit an understanding of the current state of popular musicology with electronically studio mastered music and correlation with videos.

#### **IV. Musicological Remarks on Sound, Applied to Visual Components of Video**

Music's power of transformation holds a similar function as does the way videos depict alternate space. "Music rarely represents real things in the world ... The pleasure of music video, therefore, derives in part from the ways that the performer can negotiate two worlds-one like ours, and the other a parallel musical universe in which the performer becomes a musician who moves through a musical landscape."<sup>35</sup> The musical world of the artist transcends physical landscape when matched with an alternate universe created within audiovisual realms. Björnberg states this multi-universe space of narrative emphasizes the function of fantasy. The audience anticipates and escape from the everyday reality and enter a space of imaginary problem solution - due to the "incoherent and fragmentary structures of the music video."<sup>36</sup>

The horror, grotesque, and fantasy world that lives within *ODDSAC* is best represented through the Vernallis' claim on the performer negotiating two worlds in one. Unlike other music for videos, the music for *ODDSAC*, was not written prior to the video, but simultaneously produced. The parallel universe of that is inside this visual album is a true nightmarish vision of the collaboration between Danny Perez and Animal collective. "In the music video many sights and sounds fail to do what we expect of them to in everyday life; we no longer have a sense of exactly what sounds and images mean."<sup>37</sup> As videos and image effects can direct the listener's attention to musical components - as does the music alter the meaning of different visual effects. This next section will break down specific elements of the music in visual albums: timbre, time, and lyrics; to expose its narrative or artistic meaning / aim.

This section will also take Carol Vernallis interpretation on sound and image "which considers the ways sound and image reflect individual parameters such as narrative, teleological drive, harmony, timbre, rhythm, and so forth."<sup>38</sup> This will be applied to a general summary of

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<sup>35</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 169.

<sup>36</sup> Alf Bjornberg, "Structural Relationships of Music and Images in Music Video," 354.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>38</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 3.

observations on compositional theory in electronic music, and dissected by several categories of the hermeneutic-semiological method checklist of parameters of musical expression.<sup>39</sup>

The first section describes orchestra aspects and electro musical and mechanical aspects. Orchestra aspects are made up of vocals, instruments, and performance components of timbre. And the electro musical and mechanical aspects are comprised of special techniques of “filtering, compressing, phasing, distortion, delay, mixing, etc.”<sup>40</sup> The conclusions drawn from these components is summarized in the Timbre section of this text. Following that, this research will generate specific aspects of time by looking at how duration, pulse, rhythm textures, and motifs add to the timeline of music (within the music video and visual album). In the visual analysis, this research will take into account acoustical aspects from the checklist of parameters of musical expression.<sup>41</sup> These characteristics include: “(re-)performance, ‘venue’: distance between sound and source and listener; and simultaneous ‘extraneous’ sound.”<sup>42</sup>

## Timbre

Timbre describes the texture of music characterized by the overall sound: a collection of “individual voices/instruments to equate a change in timbral quality.”<sup>43</sup> Timbre is constructed through instrumentation, style, and effects when music is processed through electrical recordings.<sup>44</sup>

*ODDSAC* encapsulates a variety of miscellaneous and anonymous samples. Each song carries a distinctive timbre which is established by three main parts: (1) electronic samples (2) augmented/effected vocals (3) drums - either electronic or physical.<sup>45</sup> The electronic samples are typically looped and consist of recorded vocals, drum beats, or “found” sounds.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Philip Tagg, "Analysing popular music: theory, method and practice," in *Reading pop: approaches to textual analysis in popular music*, ed. Richard Middleton (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Bjornberg, "Structural Relationships of Music and Images in Music Video," 349.

<sup>44</sup> Summary Observations on Compositional Theory. Tech. no. 43A10., raw data, Utrecht State Institute of Sonology, Utrecht.

<sup>45</sup> It is hard to decipher whether the recorded drums are done so through synthesizers or physical kits. As the entire album is mastered to blend the sounds into a cohesive sound.

<sup>46</sup> This trick is common for Animal Collective, as in the past they've sampled NASA's sound clips of Saturn's rings in the song "My Girls" off of *Merriweather Post Pavilion*.

Physical instruments (i.e. guitar or other string instruments, percussion kick drums, snare drums, tam tams, brass instruments, woodwinds, etc.) carry specific timbre markings of sound which are altered by overtone and production. Instrumentation is the conglomerate use of different sounds with physical instruments. "In electronic music, timbre is simply the way in which sounds appears. Electronic music forms timbre through amplitude and time."<sup>47</sup> Control and modulation of the timbre in electronic music occurs by combining individual partial vibrations. As a sampler builds or filters multiple lines of noise and sound, the timbre spectrum, changes. By panning, filtering, distorting sampled sounds in real time, the studio mix of electronic and physical instrumentation makes for a thick mix of sounds.

Timbre represented in visual albums occurs through electronic processes. Playing the instruments live would add a different texture to an ongoing narrative. Thus it's important to understand the fundamental characteristics of developing sound in an electronic medium, before understanding where the sounds are coming from and how they match the visuals of the electronic album.

"Arrangements built up with digital sounds on the computer, rather than through live playing, create a sense of absence that must be compensated for."<sup>48</sup> Music recordings in audio visual form are reproduced. Therefore, any video and music mix is "based on the visual reworking of an already existing musical material."<sup>49</sup> How this translates into the visual album will be dissected in the following segment.

In understanding the relationship of music and visuals we turn to one of the experts in audiovisual analysis - Michel Chion.<sup>50</sup> As an introductory standard to uncovering moments of importance in music, sound, and video, Chion's process first "itemizes the different audio elements present."<sup>51</sup> This will uncover important points of synchronization and moments for

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<sup>47</sup> Summary Observations on Compositional Theory. Tech. no. 43A10., raw data, Utrecht State Institute of Sonology, Utrecht.

<sup>48</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 15.

<sup>49</sup> Korsgaard, "Music Video Transformed," 2.

<sup>50</sup> Michel Chion is a french critic and composer whose writings are focused on film music, audiovisual analysis, and sound studies. His text *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* dissects the aesthetics of music and sound in film. This book an important landmark in audiovisual analysis.

<sup>51</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: sound on screen*, ed. Claudia Gorbman and Walter Murch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 55.

comparison throughout a piece of audiovisual work.<sup>52</sup> As a preliminary study, this research will use Chion's process of identifying moments of dominant tendencies.

Essentially the dissection of sound in timbre we've completed above in understanding electronic music characteristics. The level of consistency - by Chion's qualifications - is the basis for the quality of sound and determining how this adds to the overall texture. Applying these components to the visual album will be further dissected in the next section - how timbre is represented visually.

### **Timbre Represented Visually**

Before finding a general take-away for representation of timbre within the visual album, I will analyze how timbre is represented (both visually and musically) in *ODDSAC*. *ODDSAC* is composed of primarily electronic sounds - the songs that play with physical instruments and clear vocals is significant in understanding the sectional divisions of the visual album.

Korsgaard's work on remediation of the music video as an audio visual art form, and a signifier for the industry claim on these digital technologies, show off music's plurality. Timbre is supported and represented literally in *ODDSAC* through busy details, quick camera movement, and incorporation of elemental features (fire, water, earth, and air).

The depiction of sound waves through textural detail is common for directors to build sound and visual connection in the music video. "Directors often respond to these production choices by picking highly differentiated visual detail."<sup>53</sup> This is animated in *ODDSAC* through, as I label them, "cerebral sequences." These segments have varying strobe and static connected to the bridge segment of particular songs. Much detail is organized in these segments of the song. Chion claims that "visual microrhythms function well within audio visually rich media, because they resemble musical processes."<sup>54</sup> This is well applied to the composition method for the media form between the director and the musicians. When there was a space in-between music videos that needed a musical fill, this was communicated and the band would compose work accordingly.

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<sup>52</sup> This research focuses on identifying these important moments of the music video and visual album - but due to limitations will not identify the sync points or follow Chion's model for audiovisual analysis.

<sup>53</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 10.

<sup>54</sup> Chion, *Audio-vision: sound on screen*, 55.

Carol Vernallis notes several functions that emphasize timbre within a music video in her book *Experiencing Music Video*. “Depicting instruments is one way to draw the viewer’s attention to that sound.”<sup>55</sup> This is done most presently in the song “Tantrum Barb.” We are introduced to the white haired monster while they physically sets up and play an augmented drum kit by the rocky riverside landscape.<sup>56</sup> This is the only track on the visual album that physically depicts the literal instrumentation the audience hears, into the video. The instrumentation set-up is pictured in Figures 3 and 4.<sup>57</sup> Significantly, this musical cue occurs nearly 2/3s way through the film, as the narrative starts to hit a lull point.

Taking a step back, from a key moment in the visual album’s representation of timbre, comes the close inspection on how music visually represents timbre on the first track on *ODDSAC* “Mr. Fingers.” This song sets the pace for the film, and introduces important visual cues that will be referenced later in the work.



**Figure 3 and 4:** Images of the drum kit represented in “Tantrum Barb” from *ODDSAC*

The opening track resembles an electronic-horror can-can, beginning with a white-noise, oceanic muffled sound, that has an abrupt start from a sustained free reed instrument sounds (perhaps jaw-harp tones or accordion-like). The key is in a melodic minor. This sound casts a wide plain for the other electronic sounds to enter and dissipate without a trace. There is a definite loop in four of the notes, each are clipped quiet definitively, as to change the pitch. The

<sup>55</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 169.

<sup>56</sup> More to be discussed on the horror-effect of the visuals and introduction to the song “Tantrum Barb” in the editing section of this thesis.

<sup>57</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

most interesting sample in this song comes from the crowd murmurs. Many busy, interesting electronic loops and booms build on, while behind these sounds we also hear the tension of a yelling mob ready to unleash fiery terror.

A cut comes halfway through the first track that presents a consistent eighth note drumming, and a new voice enters the space. This syncs with the introduction of the character Mr. Fingers, who dons a yarn woven eye mask along with bloody red - glitter paint all over his body. He plays an electric guitar - yet no electric guitar sound plays. Instead there's an insistent one-step up and down repetition. Perhaps the audience is being drawn into the horrifying characters soundscape that is busy and chaotic - instead of what we'd typically associate an electric guitar to sound like. Here the representation of the an instrument adds to question what space this world is in *ODDSAC* - surely not one to be familiar with.

In this electronically dense score, contains a mix of quick lines of syncopated drum rhythms that move back and forth from the down beat to the up beat. The slow moving lyrics add to the quickening shots that are edited in the first seven minutes. The shots are long, and easily transitioned in the first two minutes of the piece. The opening frame is thirty-seconds long, unveiling tall grass in the woods. The background then blends into the back of a woman's head, looking into darkness while hexagon light beams fade in and out around her head. As the score builds, so does new elements of the video. With the long shot of grass, there is only the long free reed tones. The entrance of the hexagon lights, enter eighth note electronically produced whole step jumps. And the back-shot of the female figure enters the vocals. As the song progresses, more elements enter the scene - an enclosed room, oil spewing from the wall, the woman's hands in the oil, a human figure submerged in the oil, the woman struggling to keep the oil inside the wall, more hexagon lights, and pits of fire. As each element appears, the score becomes more dense.<sup>58</sup> The final minute of the song has a close up, zooming shot of fire, while the final electronically sampled vocals loop in and out of the sound of fire spinning. This is more intense than a slow wide-shot of a grassy green patch of earth. The zoomed image of fire gets more indescribable, adding hues of pink and more electronic lines in the visual element. The sounds of fire fades along the clicking electronic line and is substituted with a new beat. This cues the end of the first track.

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<sup>58</sup> The editing techniques of this song will be analyzed in later

In the visual album, it is difficult to mark the definitive end sequence of a song or chapter. Timbre shifts cue the audience that a change in the storyline has been made. Chapters or songs are essential in determining the sequence of a narrative. This can be hard to establish when each song contributes to a different meaning. The structural function of songs and timbre within *ODDSAC* is to explore the different sound spaces within Perez and the Collective's alternate reality. Displacement and business contribute to the visual album's horror aesthetic. Each song brings a different character, story, and context, but they all live within this timbre-robust world.

Heightened activity in the frame draws the musical equivalent of a dense soundscape.<sup>59</sup>

"Tantrum Barb" is an overly visual and self-referential song. Quick edits are made between the white haired monster playing the drums, to a warrior by the riverside swinging a sling, and back to the sparkly red character from the beginning of the album we can call, Mr. Fingers.

The mentioned examples describe how timbre is built within electronic music. Studio recorded and engineered music will run through electronic processing. Mastering tracks cut away some of the immediacy and authentic sounds of physical instruments. Within the visual album, these sounds are translated into physical representations. This is done through showing the actual instrument that's being played, or by the rapid shot changes in a scene. These cues help divide the songs and allow the audience to follow the storyline, or refute the complexity of the images and enjoy the match of music and visual on their own. There are many hops and jumps along the musical line of *ODDSAC*. Constant moving around from place to place, and setting to setting, augments the audience's perception of time.

## Time

Aspects of time such as tempo, metre, rhythmic texture, pulse, etc. determine the pathway for an audiovisual subject matter.<sup>60</sup> For this research, the subject is the visual album as its own entity. This section will analyze not only time as it is formatted with the aspects labeled above - but also look at how duration and continuity, work towards dissolving reality.

There is a specificity of time represented within the structure of the visual album. For understanding this process, we turn to Carol Vernallis' understanding of time within the music

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Tagg, "Analysing popular music: theory, method and practice," 79.

video. In this media format, when images are added onto pre-existing music in non-sequential order, layers of time are created.<sup>61</sup> A range of temporalities are processed in the music video.

As defined in the section from *Music videos to Visual albums* in the above text: the visual album is an extended alternate length of the music video. Characteristically - the visual album will represent time in a different representation (of chapters, continuity, etc) than the abbreviated sense in music videos. Time demonstrated through music videos will serve as the basis for audiovisual analysis for the long form visual album.

Time in electronic music is cut by electronic switches. The invention of the tape recording machines in the 1940s introduced the possibility for radio splicing and mixing.<sup>62</sup> The editing techniques developed for cassettes changed the recording industry. A single performance was no longer the only way to manufacture a live sound.<sup>63</sup> Specific musical features of time, tempo, and beat are produced through electronic loop cuts. "In instrumental music too, practically any duration is feasible by the combination of metrical duration and metronome tempo."<sup>64</sup> There is a consistency in electronic music. The compositional processes control the limitations of time and tempo. Visual album compositions are filtered through electronic, studio processing.

Musical genre determines pacing and time of a music video. "Pop songs tend to convey more than one type of time."<sup>65</sup> Momentum is realized by the hook. Lyrics are a dominant defender for the mystified timescape within the visual album.<sup>66</sup> While song structure, phrases are the blood flow of pop music. When images match the pacing of songs in pop music, the audience can predict or allude to the time of the world within the visual album. The timely measurement of music in *ODDSAC* varies from song to song. Between day - night - and the cerebral inbetween, the electronic loops create a heartbeat rhythm for the life that is inside the world of *ODDSAC*.

In "Saint Orb Wash" a chromatic synthesizer sequence enters at the last twenty seconds of the song. This comes after a consistent sampled whining hum, or uneasy underlying pitch that

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<sup>61</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 10.

<sup>62</sup> David Byrne, *How music works* (New York: Three Rivers Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017), 107.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Summary Observations on Compositional Theory.

<sup>65</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 16.

<sup>66</sup> See section on Lyrics

moves the piece in between frantic strobe cuts between monsters. The cue of the chromatic sequence speeds up time in the song, rushing to some sense of resolution into the next song. This chromatic line appears later in the visual album - during an colorful representation of TV static in the song "Urban Creme." Within this song's context there is a great level of uncertainty of when the line will resolve - or where (if there is any) narrative - basically we're meant to ask: what is going on, where (or when) are we, and so on.

"Screens," the fifth track on the visual album *ODDSAC* represents the slow-go of things. Throughout the album there's an even mix between songs in allegro and largo. "Screens" is a primarily acoustic guitar lead tune (with hints of the sounds of trees swaying in the wind and a paddle through moving a canoe through a stream). This mix of electronic and acoustic instrumentation with a steady natural backdrop matches the way time moves in nature.<sup>67</sup> The time of electronic loops in *ODDSAC* sets the pace for continuity and narration.

It can be argued that pop music is made to transform one's sense of time. "Pop songs can draw our attention to a range of experiential time...we can shift our sense of time away from where we are to match our time with that of the music."<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, experiential time in pop music is limited to the constraints of human time; or the product attributed to an individual's lived experiences. Music videos remind us that we live in a personal and subjective timesphere. Different environments, sets and props can translate a different personal meaning different people. Allusions to space and time lapse are typical topics for Animal Collective.<sup>69</sup> For the visual album, time is specific to the world that is created between the music and videos.

### **Time Represented Visually**

When music is matched to the visual image - the audience's attention is drawn to the "transitory nature of time."<sup>70</sup> There is no mathematical formula for the ideal moment when image and music synchronize - and the tension that can come between the two is subjective to each an individual's experience of the combination of both. One of the closest methods to finding this

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<sup>67</sup> More to note with lyrics section

<sup>68</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 16.

<sup>69</sup> As lyrically put best in an Animal Collective lyric from "Cuckoo Cuckoo" - from the album *Strawberry Jam* "All I want is my favorite song, and two to three minutes don't seem so long." The title references the timepiece of a cuckoo clock, and the lyrics displace the memory of time when listening to a favorite song.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

perfect synchronized place between image and sound is determined by Michel Chion's approach to finding dominant tendencies and developing an overall description what audiovisual elements are consistent.<sup>71</sup>

Time in *ODDSAC* is multi-layered.<sup>72</sup> The active role of the viewer is to put all of these layers together into one - comprehensive story or art form.<sup>73</sup> Here lies the conflict for understanding narrative of the visual album through film music or music video theory. At its foundation, the visual album is an extension of the music video. The music video due to time restraints does not have enough time for film-like character development into a narrative plank. But with the visual album, we can become familiar with the overall storyline and investigation of the scene. I argue that this has still yet to be completed successfully. The selection of scenes in *ODDSAC* create a mystery world of monsters, vampires, and underscored by music. In the time it takes for this narrative to unfold, the visual album has reached its apex - immersing the audience into an audiovisual world. The time within the visual album is not meant to deliver a feature film of full understanding. Rather, to take make a personal and strong impact on the audience.

There's an indefinite area of time and space within video. Each camera use within the video suggests different types of time (Vernallis 2004). This is translated in different scenes and settings. As compared to the use of camera to develop timbre and attention to musical cues. Camera usage to evoke time are designed to be constantly engaging, and draw the audience forward in the timespace of the setting (Ibid. 2004).

Specifics for demonstrating time within the audio video dimension of the music video that crosses over into the visual album are represented below.

(1). When visual footage contrasts, against a consistent musical background, the audience becomes aware that whatever lives within the video, are experienced in pockets of time.<sup>74</sup> This is an example of music video analysis that does not translate over to the visual album. As in *ODDSAC* the visual album is very specific to having every sonic element match the visual

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<sup>71</sup> While Chion's literature is mainly applied to film music analysis - the overall aim of the book is to progress the commentary on audiovisual forms. The visual album fits into this mode.

<sup>72</sup> This is also a general claim on visual albums as a genre.

<sup>73</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 136.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 129.

representation. This is especially important in cueing the beginning and end of songs. The electronically engineered auditory elements - either that that matches the sound of visual elements present (fire sounds, monsters grumbling, or rushing water, for example) or those that are more interpretive to the noise - exemplify a sectioning of each song chapter. It is essential for visual and music to match up as a way of carrying a longer narrative throughout the entirety of the album - rather than just representing one song.

(2). A temporal shift is cued by the combination of music and video when showing a change in the weather. For example, if the sky darkens or dawn approaches, rain starts to fall, this can cue a shift in time.<sup>75</sup> In between the songs “Fried Camp” and “Fried Vamp” the sunrises, transitioning the family out of a horror inflicted marshmallow incident. Figures 5, 6, and 7 are utilized to show this visual progression.<sup>76</sup> The conflict resolution is in the natural cycle of time.



**Figure 5, 6, 7:** Here are three separate sunrising shots from the song “Fried Vamp.” The sun-rising sequence represents the natural progression of time.

Sometimes these features can be added into a montage or time-lapse sequence. *ODDSAC* is very keen to showing nature and elements that make up the physical world as we know it. Alf Björnberg warns of the use of montage sequences to progress time. He claims that directors under deadline pressure will edit short clips of material into a montage sequence. These typically have no coordination or sync with the downbeat (Björnberg 2003). The transition from “Urban Creme” to “Working” is a smooth fade from the TV static image into a wide angle of a

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>76</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

rocky terrain. Figure 8, 9, and 10 depicts the transition of these shots.<sup>77</sup> This elemental change signifies a shift from temporal time to physical time.



**Figure 8, 9, 10:** These three images show the progression of TV static from the left and center image in the song “Urban Creme” and fades into the rocky terrain of “Working.”

In terms of continuity, music-video images are usually discontinuous, as time is showed in a patch-work way with no clear time or point of reference for the audience (Vernallis 2004). One way to represent continuity in music videos is to repeat a varying set of materials: visual repetition, along with the camera movement, rapid editing, creates a sense of visual continuity that matches a songs flow.<sup>78</sup> As with *ODDSAC* the “cerebral sequence” as shown in the images from “Urban Creme.” Frequent references to the woods, different monsters, and elements features establish a sense of continuity between songs.

“A video will often draw attention to a song’s sectional divisions in order to help the viewer remember the song and its structure.”<sup>79</sup> This segmentation of time is essential to the visual album due to prolonged nature. The visual album is not one, long song that is overlaid with an image.<sup>80</sup> Individual songs illustrate chapters - and are divided as such, throwing the viewer's sense of continuity.

Interaction between image and music can guide the audience to personal, temporal, or visual moments. The visual album is a conglomerate stream of endless music to visual connections

<sup>77</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 163..

<sup>80</sup> This describer caters to the album-stream visual assets. As seen in *Boo Boo* by Toro y Moi (2017) - where the album was released in physical form and also including a 50-minute slow moving camera capture.

that interplay with time. In my opinion this is meant to evoke a memorial response in the audience. To trigger an emotional connection between the audience and the piece. Sometimes these moments sync, and sometimes they don't. For music video analysis - this does not de-rail the sense of space created by the director. The events and songs do not have to be sequential or progressive. Each song or chapter develop meaning individually and add to the overall take away of the album.

It is not unusual for one song to possess its own trajectory.<sup>81</sup> This is significant for the visual album as a collection of similar themed videos (or some not so similar themed - but all of which carry some thematic similarities in order to establish continuity). But the way a section or chapter unfolds can be entirely unknown. Obscurity in trajectory is an overall take away of the sense of time, both in music and visually, in the visual album.

## Lyrics

Lyrics are not a time or narrative guide to the visual album. Lyrics are artistic cues, guiding us through the artistic work. Vernallis writes: In pop music, lyrics are written as a response to the music.<sup>82</sup> But this is a long lasting discussion in the development of popular music - as the exchange between lyrics and music is constantly changing form and meaning.<sup>83</sup>

Robert Middleton describes three ways that lyrics shape music. Firstly, words function as expressive objects, to showcase emotion within a song. Second, words can take on a narrative function through rhythm, and harmony to mimic speech (ie rap). And thirdly, words can act as onomatopoeia's - expressing sound, while becoming an instrument in itself. As lyrics can take on more meaning than just the list above - these characteristics most pertain the visual albums. Most especially for the music of Animal Collective - where the lyrics are hard to decipher and act as onomatopoeia.

Lyrical and vocal structure are seeing a change with technological changes - as discussed in the perspectives of music video to visual album. The main change for vocals applies specifically to the method of pop songwriting. As with new audio and video recording and production

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> This not only an issue for the world of popular music studies.

technologies free the hinges on artists to being able to make nearly any piece of audiovisual art. Now the age old verse-chorus alternation is no longer the prime standard.<sup>84</sup>

Lyrical processes and meaning are difficult to evaluate - but it can be concluded that just like audiovisual format of music videos; the purpose and function of lyrics are changing.

### **Lyrics Represented Visually**

In uncoding the artistic process of incorporating music with lyrics into visuals, Carol Vernallis interviewed music video directors and found that they typically listen to the music of an artist first. They then attribute find dynamic emotive parts of the song to then translate this into a visual element.<sup>85</sup>

As per example of *ODDSAC* in the song "Mr. Fingers:" "Is perfection a place? Is there one sweet one I love?"

From the beginning of the visual album, Animal Collective is calling to the audience to define perfection, and attribute emotion and memory to perfection. It is unsure if we are about to uncover perfection within the time and space of the visual album. But the lyrical function serves as a call to action to the audience. In the video, there is a young woman in the frame when the lyrics ask "is there one sweet one I love?" - yet another question. But now the audience is being pulled into the space of the visual album - is this woman a heroine, protagonist or antagonist? Is she true love? Will more characters join to and a love emerge? Much uncertainty on where the storyline will go - let alone if the audience should trust the narration or story that's told through the lyrics.

Lyrics are to music videos as film music is to film: often unheard, and sporadically draw in the attention of the audience.<sup>86</sup> Vernallis outlines a hierarchy for audience attention within music videos: (1) timbre (2) camera movement (3) dramatic edits (4) lyrics. Within the context of the visual album, lyrics could mean more than just sporadic, unrelated words. Since the length of

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<sup>84</sup> Vernallis "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 20.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>86</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 155.

the album is much longer than the music video, the audience needs something to grip their attention. Therefore lyrics can cue meaning and significance to different characters, that can develop over time.

*ODDSAC* contains many insightful lyrics that frame the video in an all-knowing transcendent reality of understanding. Deliverance and style interchange between indecipherably chaotic to clearly omniscient. The self-referential lyrics of "Screens" asks: "why am I seeing screens?" and "if I could take my eyes away, I might not get so tired now." This relatively calming mid-point of the album puts the audience into question of their own purpose as a viewer; by way of the lyrics.

Only one section of *ODDSAC* has a direct line - questionably scripted. The question comes from an interview setting with a child. They speak of a monster that hates chocolate, and only eats green beans. This random statement is the only direct line in the entire album. The visual aesthetics of the video then take the backdrop of the child's frame and the song "Green Beam" is approximately three minutes of ambient electronic clips is shown in Figures 11, 12, and 13.<sup>87</sup>



**Figure 11, 12, 13:** This organization of three images shows the young child talking of the monster that only eats green beans. This child's form then transitions into a fluid wave of ambient moving colors.

The displacement of lyrics or words is seen in the song "Lady on the Lake" when a vampire creature creeps in on a family barbecue. The family is roasting marshmallows and upon the appearance of the vampire - their mouths are stuck shut with the goo of a melted marshmallow. The vocals sound crushed, filtered, and compressed. As if trying to listen to a conversation

<sup>87</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

through walls. The sounds slowly turn into are muffled anxious cries. The family within a monstrous landscape are subject to the torturings of the monsters that inhabit this *ODDSAC* space, and go crazy trying to remove the marshmallow from their faces. The displacement of lyrics and words are a measure of the inhabitability of humans in the monster zone.

As a measure, lyrics establish time: the lyrical rate, speed that they unfold, and the duration they explain signals a time-line progression. When they sync together, the narrative flows. Abrupt changes in lyricism are a clear cue of change, but can sometimes be overshadowed in the conglomeration of audio and visuals. End result of the audiovisual collaboration for music, lyrics, and video is to form texture and add to musical timbre. Lyrics can also be used as auditory cues foreshadowing development within the world of the visual album.

### **Implementation in the visual album**

“The continual audiovisual modulations of music and video rarely allow for any stability of meaning.”<sup>88</sup> A difficult conclusion, but one essential to the ongoing research for the visual album is anticipating the difficulty in truly outlining the connection between visual elements and how they are represented in the music.

By using various examples of Carol Vernallis text - I conclude that the mixture of visual effects and synchronization between the image and the music in the visual album of *ODDSAC* try to establish a cohesive story line. This is segmented into each song - and are consistent in style from one to the next.

As a mixed media form, investigated in a theoretical lens, there’s clear to be some components left out. “Music video began in the era of video editing.”<sup>89</sup> While musicological perspectives pay insite to the foundation of music videos, they are essentially a video form that anticipates the function of music to translate a message. Music videos are more effective, and less “decodable.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Mathias Bonde Korsgaard, "Creation and erasure: music video as a signaletic form of practice," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 4, no. 1 (2012): 8, doi:10.3402/jac.v4i0.18151.

<sup>89</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 22.

<sup>90</sup> Korsgaard, "Creation and erasure," 2.

The visual album takes on new challenges that come at the cross between film and music video. Therefore the following analysis will look at editorial elements and visual factors to better frame the context of music within the visual album.

## **V. Visual Elements within the Music Video, Translated to the Visual Album**

The following section will take notes from visual production elements of music video studies and apply these findings to the concept of the visual album. The section is divided into two parts - editing and spacing. These two elements highlight particular narrative shifts that occur between the transformation of the music video into the visual album.

### **Editing**

Editing directs the flow of the narrative and colors our understanding of the characters. Music video editing is characterized by quick editing techniques that usually cut on the beat (Vernallis 2004). Over the years the course of music videos have changed as solely promotional tools. Yet the quick editing technique still attracts viewer's attention and draws them into the story of the song and artist. Visual albums follow similar techniques in editing. It is unsure whether each song carries a separate meaning, and editing process - but together they construct a cohesive narrative.

"Edits happen between images; they are not part of the image."<sup>91</sup> In connection to the visual album's association with time - the continuity of the visual album is stitched together with what happens in-between the shots - rather than one, continuous storyline. Edits are cut as responsiveness to the music, rhythmic edits are closely related to the song.<sup>92</sup> When edits are jotty and incohesive the audience turns to music for a sense of spatial temporal grounding.

Each edit, or divide between songs is clearly visually formatted to cue a change in scenery. This is done in a variety of different ways. At the end of the first track, "Mr. Fingers" fades into "Kindle Song" with an intense close-up shot is zoomed into swirling flames. The image stays as an extreme close up, so close that the images are indecipherable, until there electronic string of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

purple that shatters the flaming image. The images change into a strobed electric visual renderings. These images flicker as we see a honeycomb mixed shot of Geologist's face.

In the filming and compositional technique between Perez and Animal Collective - some musical punctuation marks were made after the film was made to bridge the gap between sound and vision. The most terrifying surprise of the visual album comes during the song "Working." We follow the white haired monster's calming footsteps across the rocks, from eight different camera angles, as pictured in Figures 14 and 15.<sup>93</sup> From close-up of the feet, to the hair, to a wide shot of the figure moving across the frame, and so on.



**Figure 14 and 15:** These two shots from "Working" follow the progression of the white haired monster moving into the shot and then moving far off into center frame.

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The ease of movement is relaxing until a shrill scream cut of strobed images interrupts the sequence. It seems as if the demon living inside the next song is ripping through the calm of the river rocks scene. Harsh cuts of red and a warrior swinging a sling. As the song progresses - the shots are layered so we see the sling warrior, Mr. Fingers, and the white haired monster all overlap. This climax of physical instrumentation, brash editing, and numerous monster characters is a conglomeration of the monster world that lives in *ODDSAC*. Unsurprisingly, the next song is "Tantrum Barb."

"Tantrum Barb" fits a faster tempo than the rest of the songs in *ODDSAC* but really, this is the effect of the fast changing and graphically moving characters. As the tempo is evenly set at 120 BPM but the chorus and lyrics are cannoned. This pulls the meter back, and creates an uneven sense of time. This is contrasted by the fast paced, unstable setting. The audience is not sure

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<sup>93</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

whether to follow the slinging monster, the drums, or the try to figure out the images in between as pictured in Figures 16 and 17.<sup>94</sup>



**Figure 16 and 17:** These two images are just a selection of the massive amount of strobe, discolored and flickered images that were used in the song tantrum barb.

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Quick edits, rhythmic cuts, and wide, panoramic shots, are just some of the examples that help create a sense of narrative consistency within the long audiovisual format that is the visual album. This segment highlights these editing characteristics. “Music video emphasizes constant motion, and if we become too firmly rooted to a single site, we may not be able to follow the musical and visual flow.”<sup>95</sup> This is not a comprehensive understanding of how every editing decision is made to progress the meaning of the visual album. But rather, serves to showcase examples within *ODDSAC* and how these are representative of the visual album format.

## Space

The organization of space within the music video coordinates with how images are collected and move adjacently to the soundtrack of the music video.<sup>96</sup> In today’s visual advances, and access to advanced editing software - directors have a wide plain of working dimensions in showing space in between video and sound. “Music video space resembles but is not equivalent to

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Vernallis, “Music Video’s Second Aesthetic?,” 20.

narrative film space or lived space.<sup>97</sup> There's still a wall between the audience and the connection of visual album (extended music video) to presenting a full narrative as with a film.<sup>98</sup>

"Music...is transformed, acquiring more dimensionality, as if we wanted to reach inside a hologram and touch the surfaces."<sup>99</sup> Music itself gains more dimension and texture within a physical space of the music video. This space can be added in lieu of the missing link to the live performers on our plain of vision.<sup>100</sup> "Music videos raise questions about how the sounds in the song's mix are to be distributed throughout the spatial environment."<sup>101</sup>

The settings within *ODDSAC* include: a room that spills oil from the walls, inside a flaming torch, inside oil, a stream, rocky terrain, a waterfall (either natural or electrical - unable to decipher in editing features), the woods, inside the bloody mouth of a vampire, a swamp, around a campfire, or in the lake.

The depth comes through representation of walls, floors, and ceilings.<sup>102</sup> This transformed into the visual album allows a variety of settings, that all must construct a sense of dimensionality.

Space can be attributed to specific acoustical properties.<sup>103</sup> Nature and the outdoors are typically referenced in *ODDSAC*. For the visual album as a subgenre of the music video - this connection between nature and fantasy can improve consistency between image and sound. The elemental sounds of water, wind, fire, and rocks are often sampled in *ODDSAC*. This feature matches Carol Vernallis' perspective on the use of space to signify acoustical properties.

As observed in *ODDSAC*, acoustic cues overlay certain settings to cue a possible setting we might know and remember. In the transition from "Urban Creme" to "Working" the opening shot is a wide angle of a rocky terrain. The sound of water droplets falling into a stream background the image. Wet sounds have been a key elemental feature in this visual album. The sound

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<sup>97</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 121.

<sup>98</sup> This section on space will take research from Carol Vernallis' text *Experiencing the Music Video*, and *Music Video's Second Aesthetic?* exclusively.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> When characters and instrumentation is represented physically the image is bringing timbre to the forefront of the space.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>102</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 15.

<sup>103</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 83.

against the setting in this song cues the audience to imagine that these rocks must be near water.<sup>104</sup> As a white haired monster enters the frame, and walks across the rocks - the audience hears the sound of their steps across the rocks. But instead of hard rocky mis-steps, the sound is a wet, squishing-step. There is no musical backdrop - only the sound of these wet footsteps. The white haired monster is then shot in a wide angle - where the rocks foreground a wooded background. When the character hits the middle of the shot, a peaceful key-tone matched with acoustic guitar line plays.

“The viewer must decide how much the music reflects the performer’s own feelings and how much it simply describes the outward manifestations of other character’s actions or of the whole setting.”<sup>105</sup> The final space pictured in the visual album is the cumulation of space referenced earlier within the video. As a way to tie up loose ends and cue that the extended video is coming to an end: there is resolution in space by starting, and ending in the same place. Instead of this scene being filled with tension and turmoil of a wall spilling oil uncontrollably, the final scene is a celebration of mess and lunacy.

### **Implementation in the visual album**

Space as represented in nature - edits represent quick editing of the music video as the visual album is a collection of separate music videos that attempt to follow a similar storyline. But as its observed in the execution of *ODDSAC*, the aim of the visual album is to develop a world outside of our current understanding and become engulfed in this transformative place. In *ODDSAC* this space is a horror frenzy and lively place for monsters and music to overcome environmental limitations.

As a media format - the visual album draws from many of its predecessors: image, concept album, film, etc. “Even before we recognize figures in videos, we often see fields of color then perhaps a predominant texture - soft, fuzzy, metallic, rough, or jagged.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore it can be assumed that the music video is also a relative of the still photograph image. As an inclusive

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<sup>104</sup> Water representatively displays a source of life for living creatures - and the monsters that are characterized in this visual albums world. The EP *Water Curses* (2008) can be seen as a reference to the musical elements in these songs.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

media format - the main reference for the visual album is within the music video. As much of this research has shown.

The three types of interaction between music and images as defined by Nicholas Cook are: complement, conformance, and contrast.<sup>107</sup> The first exhibits the characteristics of the other, the second matches these qualities, and the third disagrees or conflicts against the other. In terms of consistency through the image, one medium can fill in the gap of another's.<sup>108</sup> Applying this musicological structure to the relationship of music and editing / spacing within the visual album will highlight the strengths of this audiovisual format.

What seems chaotic and frantic, within the cerebral sequences, are actually meant to complement the musical canon within the piece. Complements between image and sound are throughout the album. Whether it's a match between the calm, slow camera shots over a canoe paddling through a river accompanied by smooth, largo acoustic guitar phrases, or frantic quick edits to show off triple and double cannons climbing on top of the other. Overall the *ODDAC* finds resolution in the complements between image and sound. This creates consistency in the work. And while some shots appear random - it is true to the visual albums form of finding a balance between music and image. One example of the random images that come up unexpectedly is pictured in Figure 18.<sup>109</sup>



<sup>107</sup> Nicholas Cook is a musicologist and professor at the University of Southampton. His research expands the contemporary field of musicology by analyzing cultural artifacts to musicological meaning.

<sup>108</sup> Nicholas Cook, "Theorizing Musical Meaning," *Music Theory Spectrum* 23, no. 2 (2001): 172, doi:10.1525/mts.2001.23.2.170.

<sup>109</sup> *ODDSAC*, directed by Danny Perez (2010; Swiss Dots, 2010), DVD.

**Figure 18:** Pictured here is a random easter egg mixed within the quick montage flickering of images in between the songs “Tantrum Barb” and “Lady on the Lake.” This image seems to picture Avey Tare seated within a circle of children and a black labrador. At first glance this could be random - but the interview back shot of Avey Tare’s head matches that found in the beginning of the song Green Beans - where a child is being interviewed in the forest.

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A selection of Nicholas Cook’s musicological work is meant to “outline the way we can understand at least some of the meanings ascribed to music at the same time irreducibly cultural and intimately related to its structural properties.”<sup>110</sup> This research aims to create a similar outline. First by identifying outlining the historical development of music video to visual album, then identifying key musicological components exhibited within *ODDSAC* - and attributing aesthetics of the music video to these methods. And lastly, applying visual techniques to uncover the purpose of the visual album. This being - to create a sense of consistency between music, sound, lyrics, and visuals, in order to build a fantasy space of timeless musical indulgence.<sup>111</sup>

## VI. Future Research Prospects & Conclusion

The challenge with music videos transforming into the visual album is the uncertainty of perspective. Perspective as both a narrative and communicative term. Does this draw away audience's attention? Or pull them in to understand the bigger picture? *ODDSAC* held a proper marketing strategy behind its release: premieres in movie theaters, Q&A sessions, and proper press hype before the release.<sup>112</sup> But few artists have had the backing of record companies to produce such a format since.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>111</sup> In the example of *ODDSAC* this is found in a horror forest of monsters. Generalizing other examples of visual album space from prior examples we can briefly identify the music video stream for *Boo Boo* (2017) by Toro y Moi - encapsulates a timeless space is found within a Southwestern, United States road trip. And within *Lemonade* (2016) by Beyonce, the timeless space is the connected to her cultural background and is exhibited through the current disorganization of the social system in the United States. This story is lead by the possibly fictitious storyline of infidelity and betrayal by her partner (Pickard 2016).

<sup>112</sup> Write-ups appeared in major publications such as Pitchfork, Rolling Stone, The Guardian, Rotten Tomatoes, and many more.

Beyonce's *Lemonade* (2016) which was published unannounced, as a visual album supplement to the music-only version of the album, both released in April 2016.<sup>113</sup> The research contributed in this thesis, analyzing *ODDSAC* and the fantasy world that lives within this media format, discloses some keys to understanding the full purpose of a visual album.

Academic research on the music video today, typically documents the historical, technological, and cultural journey the media format has made. Music video's roots are, "a record-company product that puts images to a pop record in order to sell the song - has become too narrow."<sup>114</sup> But technology and experience in directing feature films, set some contemporary music videos apart from the early beginnings of the monetary structural confines of music video as a promotional tool. The function of the music video is to keep sound, image, and text an ambiguous amalgam; hinting to fans to want to buy a song.<sup>115</sup>

As seen in the analysis of *ODDSAC* it is a challenge to dissect every single element both visual and musical within this media format without having proper insight to the directors and artists work process. This would be keen insight into future investigation for visual albums. Adding to academic studies and research, there is a need to know if bands are actively trying to communicate a specific message - or are remediating the use of music video to visual album to sell more records in a different format.

In the remediation phase of the music video - came the offshoot that is the visual album. But the lack of academic expertise that has been attributed to this media format, I think, represents the lack of trust in the longevity of the format. Production and inclusivity of the visual album takes time and money - and at what benefit? The end product will most likely be ripped of its collaborative audio visual charm and pawned off for streaming plays. With the extension of YouTube as an accessible tool for fans to reach the products of their artist, the music video format has adapted as well as YouTube as an internet platform. Although surges of usage have alarmed an industry desperate to retain its grip on distribution, it is precisely this

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<sup>113</sup> Ryan Pickard, "The Formation to Lemonade," TIDAL The Stories Behind the Music The Formation to Lemonade Comments, April 29, 2016, , accessed July 28, 2017, <http://beyonce.tidal.com/>.

<sup>114</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 1.

<sup>115</sup> Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 143.

cross-fertilization of mutual interest that has driven the YouTube community—and the music video with it—back into our daily consciousness.<sup>116</sup>

An important reminder in analyzing the visual album is that there is always a crossover in references from earlier sources such as films, photography, commercials, and so on. Music videos frequently adopt images from earlier sources (films, commercials, paintings, posters) and often juxtapose them with others in the video.<sup>117</sup> The music video often juxtaposes other features within the video. To obtain a fully diverse research on the visual album - one must record the references to other medias, and outline the purpose of such.<sup>118</sup>

Altogether, the end product is a mixed audio-visual art form that's transformative powers can be measured through textual analysis of popular music studies by way of the music video. Carol Vernallis' work on *Experiencing Music Video*, exposes academic ground for experiencing the visual album. In coordination with cues from musicologists understanding of music and visuals together in one, bridges the contemporary understanding of the visual album. "Remediation reminds us that music still pierces us, but also that anything can work in an audiovisual context. One image might make associative chains with the music it is coupled with, but another might do as well."<sup>119</sup> Further research can be attributed specifically to this media format. And although this thesis does not emphasize the way of film music - it could mean for a greater understanding on collaborations between artists/musicians and film directors to create an extended audio visual experience.

## VII. Conclusion

Music serving as a communicative narrative between the composer and audience is highly reliant on perception studies. "Music as perceived by listeners and as conceived by the composer and/or musician before an actual performance are a foundation within the study of

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<sup>116</sup> Paula Hearsom and Ian Inglis, "The Emancipation of Music Video," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2013, 2, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199733866.013.031.

<sup>117</sup> Vernallis, "Music Video's Second Aesthetic?," 18.

<sup>118</sup> For example, a commercial serving as a marketing tool, photographs capturing one specific moment in time, and so on.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

pop music.”<sup>120</sup> In order to transgress this trap of perception studies in popular music - this thesis focused on the landscape and creative world that collectively forms between sound and vision.

The visual album is an extension of the music video, and not of an augmented form of the feature film. By selecting experts in the aesthetics and remediation of the music video (Korsgaard and Vernallis) with support of Nicholas Cook’s cultural analysis of musicological studies, and Alf Björnberg purely analytical perspectives - comes the certain musicological and audiovisual conclusions of the visual album.

The lack of cultural analysis and perception in this case study is supplemented by the use of film analysis. In identifying musicological elements that add to the narrative (timbre, time, and lyrics) as well as specifying the function of editing and space within the visual album - there’s a comparison to be made between the music video and the visual album. While they are bred from the same industry - they cater to different needs. Although both serve as marketing functions for the artist and their music, there’s yet to be a conclusion on if this new media format is truly profitable. This study focused on the audio visual techniques - and execution of such.

Looking to the future research on visual albums will require a close investigation on the editing, process, as well as all intended marketing strategy, could possibly uncover a secret to making this format lucrative.

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<sup>120</sup> Tagg, “Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method, and Practice,” 74.

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