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The Last Day on Earth:

Encoding and Decoding of Resistant Ideology in Music Video

By

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Department of Communication at Trinity University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with departmental honors.

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ABSTRACT

According to Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding, an audience member, based on their individual ideological perspectives, can read media texts in one of three ways: dominant, negotiated, or resistant. Hall's theory, however, also implies that the producer will always encode a dominant or hegemonic message. Given semantically messy texts like music videos, however, producers now have the freedom to either encode a dominant ideology or to resist it.

In order for the audience to make sense of a resistant ideology, it must first be relevant to them. Their subject position, which includes personal experiences, as well as familiarity with other media texts and a combination of political, religious, and philosophical beliefs, adds to ideological relevancy. And the closer the audience member's unique subject position falls in relation to the producer's the greater the chance that they might read the resistant message as intended.

Acknowledgments

Immense gratitude goes out to all twenty-two respondents, without whom this thesis could not have been completed. To my advisors, Dr. Rob Huesca and Dr. Aaron Delwiche, for their constant guidance during these past three semesters. To James Bynum, Trinity University RCC Operations Manager, for helping me through the tedious post-production process, and for not ghosting computer #21 for an entire semester. To my parents, George and Mary Catherine Damon, for putting up with the claymation set that took up 2/3 of their living room and all the other unmentionables. To my friends, especially Victoria and Kat, who actually lived with me during most of this project, and therefore their ability to survive just about anything. And, of course, to Marilyn Manson, a constant source of inspiration throughout this entire project.

"Only those who see the invisible can do the impossible."

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Growing up in the MTV generation, I have always enjoyed watching music videos, especially those with controversial themes. I love videos that make me think, that I can watch dozens of times and still see something new. As I took over production of Trinity University's music television show, a job that inspired me to make music videos of my own, I became especially interested in the relationship between a video producer's intention and the audience's interpretation. Had I truly understood the videos I watched? Will the audience truly understand mine? And more importantly, how does the audience actually arrive at that understanding?

I am not alone in such thoughts. Media producers are often concerned that the audience has failed to understand the meaning that they – the producers – intended. With production costs starting at $30,000 and six-figure budgets common, professional music video producers are just as concerned (Doherty 355).

Audiences do not always interpret a video the way the producer intends. In fact, many interpretations can exist for the same video. In an attempt to understand complex and ambiguous imagery, the audience must have relied on something besides the video itself. Ideologies, for example, might have played a role. But to what extent is it possible for music video producers and audiences to escape the unconscious ideologies embedded in the material that they utilize? To what extent might the producer's role make a difference in the audience's interpretation?

In response to both questions, the current Cultural Studies paradigm suggests that the meaning making process is too complex to simply be controlled by producers. One theory that helps explain this process is Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding. Media audiences research proposes that it is the audience, not the producer, that decides

how meaning is ultimately made. And that audience is seemingly bound by its ideological

positions. However, that same research also assumes that the producer's role in the

meaning making process is quite scant. If the producer chooses to consciously alter this

formula by encoding a resistant meaning, however, how will the audience respond? Will

there be differences? How might Hall's model be forced to adapt?

I hope to answer such questions by reexamining Stuart Hall's encoding and

decoding model in a holistic fashion. Previous research, on the other hand, focused

mainly on encoding and decoding as separate actions. By watching both halves of the

encoding and decoding model work together, I can better understand the model's

intricacies and also discover limitations that may otherwise go unnoticed.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will describe Hall's theory and the use of

ideologies in greater detail in the first chapter. Chapter two focuses on the history of the

music video as a salient text, in light of Hall's theory, and its applicability to the

intricacies I hope to study. The chapter also includes information on encoding practices

specific to music videos.

Using the first two chapters of this thesis as a guide, I then produced a music

video for Marilyn Manson's "The Last Day on Earth" with a resistant ideology in mind. I

will elaborate on the production of this video in chapter three to better demonstrate how

meaning is specifically encoded in the music video medium and present the meaning that

I attempted to encode. The completed video, on DVD, can be found in appendix A.

Documents relating to the production process are included on CD-ROM, in appendix B.

To complete the communication process, however, a video must be received by

an audience. Chapter four provides an overview of qualitative audience research and the

methodology of an audience study designed for the interpretation of "The Last Day on Earth." It also contains my expectations of the audience's responses. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. Chapter five focuses on the results of that audience study, and the surprising responses I received. Appendix D includes an organized matrix of those results, also on CD-ROM. Chapter six will then apply those results to illuminate Hall's model of encoding and decoding as a complete process and support my own additions to the theory. All appendices are located in the back of this text, in DVD and CD-ROM format.

Chapter I: Encoding-Decoding Theory

While this thesis is based on Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding, I ultimately hope to illuminate a couple of variations in the model that have been ignored by media scholars. The model itself, along with these variations, will be described in detail shortly. In this chapter, I set the foundation for my study. Special consideration is given to ideology, and how it applies to the communication process, including both encoding and decoding.

To better understand Hall's theories, it is necessary to first examine the environment in which the model was developed. Early semiotics (circa 1950) focused mainly on the meaning within a media text (Branston 6). Signs are constructed based on the intentions of their author. Communication was believed to be a one-way function between sender and receiver. The producer of a text controls its meaning, and audiences read them in the way they were intended. If an audience member read a text in a different manner, the process of communication had somehow failed. Perhaps something the sender said was not clear, or perhaps the receiver did not properly understand the message. This, however, was unlikely. Communication was viewed as a straightforward transmission, a hypodermic needle, in which meaning was simply injected from one party to another. The passive audience receives the message, and believes that it is true. Although this, as a theory, was abandoned early on, the idea of communication as a one-way process has continued.

Context of a message was not considered academically until the 1960's. Jakobson theorized that for a text to be received by an audience as intended by a producer, it needed a particular context. His model proposed a series of codes, or signs, that both the

sender and receiver needed to comprehend before the message could be properly understood. What these codes were, however, he did not define. But he did realize that a media text could not be studied independently of its context.

Moving farther away from the hypodermic needle theory, Hall's 1977 communicative model emphasizes the discursive aspects of a media text. For the first time, meaning is not automatically assumed. The producer's role in the interpretive process is diminished, and the audience's is strengthened. Instead of viewing communication as a one-way process, a variety of factors, i.e. ideologies, affect the transmission of meaning.

It is impossible to have meaning without ideology, as ideology serves as a framework for reading that meaning. Producers encode a particular ideology within the meaning of text. The audience also decodes meaning based on ideology, although it may be a different ideology than the producer intended.

On a basic level, ideologies, using Althusser's definition, can best be described as social know-how. They are "rules of good behavior… i.e. the attitude that should be observed… rules of morality, civic and professional conscience" (Althusser 132). They are not usually conscious rules, but rather part of the collective unconscious. Ideologies originally referred to "the relationship between information and social power in large-scale political-economic contexts" and could be most recognized in political speech (Lull 7). To Althusser, the economic base and their relationship to production is the infrastructure, which then supports the superstructure of ideology. The only ideology taught is that of the ruling class, and society "must in one way or another be steeped in this ideology in order to perform [its] tasks conscientiously" (Althusser 133). These

ideologies develop through years of interaction with systems of churches, schools, politics, and importantly for our purposes, media.

Out of this background, Hall developed the encoding and decoding theory mainly for political speech. He originally took a Marxist perspective, linking dominant ideas and ideologies with political power, as Althusser did. The media, like other apparatuses of ideology, perpetuate opinions, "despite its diversity and its contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology" (Althusser 146). However, he differed from the theories of Althusser and Gramsci in that he did not believe that ideology was imaginary or solely economically determined (Althusser 160, Pillai 223).

One would be shortsighted to simply ascribe the ideology of a class based on its socioeconomic position. While socioeconomic class difference still produces differences in how people view media, it is not the most important factor. Social and historical conditions play a larger role in encoding and decoding than Marxism allows (Pillai 224). As we move away from the structure of political texts, ideologies are more often used to describe the values of a particular group. They concern power in social categories, such as race, gender, and sexuality. To some extent, individual experience can also be included. Furthermore, due to globalization, social conditions are rapidly changing. The hybridization and blending of cultures creates multiple unique perspectives from which ideologies can arise.

Like Althusser, Hall assumes that the ideology encoded by the media reflects that of the ruling class. The ideology it encodes is a dominant one. The mass media frequently create a "vocabulary that favors certain interests and groups over others… by giving presence to their codes" (Lull 10). This is done not only through routine television

broadcasts, advertisements, magazines, and movies, but also lesser forms of media. A bumper sticker with the phrase, "He who Dies with the Most Toys Wins," reflects a capitalist ideology just as well as a politically-minded news program (Lull 9). Power in social trends can also be seen in fashion advertisements, for example. The extremely low occurrence of homosexual images featured in fashion catalogues elaborates on the dominant social ideology of proper sexuality. The same is true in mainstream cinema, with the classic "boy gets girl" plotline. If broadcasted long enough, these kind of ideologies become second nature, "self-evident cultural assumptions," the key to hegemonic readings (Lull 33).

Hall reminds us, though, that polysemy must not simply be confused with pluralism. "Connotative codes are not equal among themselves" (Hall 134). Every society hierarchically organizes codes into dominant meanings due to institutional order. Some codes take precedence over others. "If there were no limits, audiences could simply read whatever they liked into any message. No doubt some total misunderstandings of this kind do exist. But the vast range must contain some degree of reciprocity between encoding and decoding moments, otherwise we could not speak of an effective communicative exchange at all" (Hall 135-136). In his model, encoding constructs at least some limits and parameters within which the decoding operates (Hall 135-136). Encoding practices "attempt to prefer but cannot prescribe a correspondence between the encoded and decoded meanings" (Pillai 222).

Hall also recognized that hegemony, the process by which ideologies gain power, is incomplete. Political or social structures are still fallible, and ideologies are not textually determined. "Hegemony is not a given and permanent state of affairs, but it has

to be actively won and secured; it can also be lost" (Lull 38, Hall 1977, 33) Ideologies can change over time, and the texts that reflect them are not necessarily closed. According to Hall's model, media texts can never be fixed for any particular audience. Rather, they are polysemic; the potential exists for multiple interpretations.

Messages that challenge the dominant ideology can be found in numerous texts, especially those related to countercultures and minority groups. For example, the slogan, "Black is Beautiful" was used by the Civil Rights movement to challenge the negative connotations of the word "black." Rock or Rap music is also a ripe environment for underground values and contradictory themes. The focus on independence, determination, and anti-misogynistic ideas by feminist hip-hop artists provides one example (Emerson 92). Bowden's treatment for Rage Against the Machine's "No Shelter" video is another. It included Diego Rivera's murals from 1931-1933 to critique the enslavement of America by consumerism (Reiss 53). However, as far as media production is concerned, underground themes are always the exception rather than the rule. Hall's theory and contemporary communication research agree strongly with this assumption. There are no studies based upon the deliberate encoding of anything but dominant ideologies.

Instead, research focuses almost entirely on how the message is received, the latter half of Hall's model. According to Hall, encoding and decoding are not only autonomous, but almost completely separate events. The resulting decoded message may or may not be the same as the encoded one. Because of that purpose, he insisted on studying encoding and decoding separately. However, encoding and decoding can never be completely autonomous. They are still dependent on each other. Communication

"must contain some degree of reciprocity between encoding and decoding moments, otherwise we could not speak of an effective communicative exchange at all" (Hall 135-136).

As far as meaning, and to some extent, ideology, is concerned, the encoding and decoding model suggests that the audience can decode a text in one of three ways: dominant (or hegemonic), negotiated, or resistant (Branston 412). In a dominant reading, the audience accepts the dominant code produced by the media text or by society at large without question. A negotiated reading recognizes the dominant code and largely accepts it, but the audience modifies the meaning according to its own perspective and interests. Although they read new meaning into the text, they do not give up the dominant position entirely. Resistant readings, on the other hand, are in direct opposition to the dominant code. The audience recognizes the dominant code, but its social status, perspectives, or interests places it in direct opposition to it.

These three readings can be more clearly illuminated through the use of an example, such as Marilyn Manson's music video, "The Man that you Fear." The video, which was based on Shirley Jackson's short story, The Lottery, follows Manson's character as he prepares for his execution by stoning. The dominant code was decoded as punishment, and the dominant ideology suggests that the severity of punishment reflects the severity of the crime committed.

A dominant reading would follow that ideology, and the viewer would notice images that supported it. The ease at which Manson's character accepts his fate, for example, may be read as evidence of guilt. A negotiated reader would likely accept that Manson's character probably committed a crime, but may also feel that his character may

be treated harsher due to how the town is viewing him. Perhaps the viewer would go a step farther, and assert that he may or may not be guilty of a crime at all. However, the viewer would not be able to break free of the dominant view. Instead of seeing such a strong link between crime and punishment, on the other hand, the resistant reader might decode the imagery as an example of how the "justice" system victimizes the wrongly accused. He or she may pick up on images (such as the blindfolded girl) that suggest Manson's character is, in fact, innocent of any wrongdoing. He was chosen for execution in a random process, which was, in fact, the intended reading.

But "counter-hegemonic tendencies do not inhere solely in texts. They are formulated in processes of communication" (Lull 38). Hall emphasized "the interpretive work required to prefer one reading of the text over another" (Pillai 229). He was one of the first cultural studies theorists to suggest that the audience had an equally significant role as the producer, perhaps more so, and served as an active participant in the communication process. Even though the producer can suggest a preferred meaning through encoding, "in the end, the individual controls his or her final interpretation based on personal, cultural, and social experiences (Berry 132).

Within the three possible readings, there is "a necessary correlation between the audience's social situation and the meanings that they will create" (Fiske 260). As with ideologies, an individual's experiences with race, gender, and other social categories can create different meanings for the same text.

Personal experience also creates a layer of interpretation. Just as a text is polysemic, the audience is polyvalent. They have many different views. Media texts "do not influence the viewer's values, but rather these values affect the viewer's perceptions"

(Sherman 386). Certain codes may be more relevant to a particular individual, while others are likely discarded. "There will always be private, individual, variant readings. But selective perception is almost never as selective, random, or privatized as the concept suggests. The patterns exhibit, across individual variants, significant clusterings" (Hall 135). Groups of similar audiences are likely to read a text in a similar way.

For example, in a 1990 study of Madonna's "Papa Don't Preach," interpretations fell mainly on a racial division. The song presents a girl who must confront her father about her pregnancy. The chorus contains the lines "Papa don't preach… I made up my mind, I'm keeping my baby." According to Madonna, the preferred reading of the song is "I love you Father, and I love this man and this child that is growing inside me" (Brown 5). Brown and Schulze, in their audience study, found that almost all white students interpreted the word 'baby' as an unborn infant, while black students interpreted it as a boyfriend (Berry 136). While the code of pregnancy was recognized, black viewers focused on it less than white viewers did. Instead, they emphasized the presence of relationships, be it father/daughter or boyfriend/girlfriend (Brown 8). The authors suggested a reason for the resistant reading. "Black males may not see pregnancy among unmarried teens as the trouble most whites think it is. The black viewers focus on the boy/girl and father/daughter relationship may reflect the currently more problematic nature of establishing lasting cross-sex relationships in black society" (Brown 8).

Madonna's video for "Open your Heart," which carried a far more sexual theme than "Papa Don't Preach," also produced different interpretations. "Open your Heart" mainly features Madonna performing in an erotic peep show. For this video, construction of meaning was indicative of geographic location. "Only 15% of southern students

identified the setting as a peep show, while 49% of northeastern students recognized the setting" (Brown 10). The video also produced a variety of meanings based on gender. Male viewers generally found the video pleasurable; female viewers found it difficult to accept the way Madonna complied with the patriarchal and voyeuristic ideology of femininity (Brown 10). Some, however, decoded the imagery in a resistant manner. "Building on the narrative they constructed, they assigned character traits, psychological motivations, and social identities to the dancer that resisted patronizing her as the bad girl/whore" (Brown 10).

Given its roots in political texts, most studies that utilize Hall's model still assume that the producer encodes with a dominant ideology in mind. The use of resistant meanings is left to the audience and the decoding process. This study, however, proposes the opposite. Successful music videos, for example, as I will suggest in the next chapter, are purposely created to be semantically messy and produce a definite semiotic struggle over meaning. Producers have the freedom to work within the dominant ideology or subvert it. It is conceivable then, that they can do a little of both. Should a producer purposefully encode a resistant ideology within a text, how will this affect the decoded message?

Chapter II: The Music Video

As discussed in the previous chapter, because they are salient texts, music videos can be aptly analyzed using Hall's model of encoding and decoding. "Few genres are as open to audience interpretation as are experiential, highly impressionistic music videos" (Walker 1051). They can be encoded with both dominant and resistant ideologies, and have the potential for multiple dominant, negotiated and resistant readings. However, in order to adequately tailor my study to how music videos are encoded and decoded today, it is crucial to understand how the music video industry has evolved artistically within its commercial context.

History and Influences

Current music videos are merely the most recent innovation of a genre. The first 'music videos' were short musical films showcasing singers like Billie Holliday and Bing Crosby (Reiss 13). Theaters played them between coming attractions, cartoons, and newsreels. Under less scrutiny than full-length features of the era, these music videos were free to express various socio-economic and political viewpoints, and by extension, counter-hegemonic themes (Reiss 13).

Many academics base much of music video analysis on film. However, the main influence of early cinema on music videos was demonstrating the ability of images to sell music. The 1956 film, Blackboard Jungle, inadvertently started the trend with its theme song, "Rock around the Clock" (Reiss 16). The song was a modest hit the previous year, but after the movie's release, it entered the charts again. Other films, like Jailhouse Rock,

and The Girl Can't Help It, produced the same trend (Reiss 16). This would later serve as evidence for the commercial viability of the modern music video.

Advertising was (and still is) a greater influence on music videos. Promotional music videos were first produced for commercial reasons in the 1960's, and became popular segments on television shows like Top of the Pops, Shindig, and Hullabaloo (Reiss 16). They were produced by record companies, interested in promoting their top artists while at the same time dramatically cutting travel time and booking costs. As bands grew more famous, these videos became more extravagant (Reiss 16-17).

However, music videos were not used as advertising campaigns until the 1970's. The first attempted televised ad campaign for a musical album was for Captain Beefheart's "Lick My Decals Off, Baby." Although the video was deemed "too strong for commercial broadcast," it attracted critical attention, was eventually included in the Museum of Modern Art (Reiss 18). By the mid 1970s, the possible success of this format was evident. Heavy rotation of the video for Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" on Top of the Pops and similar shows, for example, helped keep the song on the charts for eleven weeks (Reiss 18). Images were specifically designed to sell the album, as evidenced by the positioning of the band members' heads to resemble the album art.

MTV first broadcast in 1981 with its 24-hour music video format. It was originally predicted to be no more than a temporary fad of the fickle youth market. Its ability to successfully sell to the 12-34 demographic bracket, however, suggested to advertisers as well as musicians that music video could be a powerful tool. Although the station operated at a loss for the first couple of years, the impact of using music videos to sponsor artists was clear by 1983. It "saved local concert promoters an estimated

$250,000 in advertising costs" for the Police concerts alone (Doherty 355). By June of 1984, MTV had signed multi-year agreements with CBS, MCA, RCA, and Geffin Records. MTV paid $4.6 million for exclusive periods of airing music video clips by top artists (Doherty 357). Because of this relationship, the music video has often been dubbed by academics as "the bastard offspring of art, falling somewhere between the mini-movie and the maxi-commercial" (Reiss 10).

Its purpose is exactly the same as other advertisements. For that reason, some critical scholars would go so far as to suggest that the only true consumption the music video audience can attain is consumer-oriented. MTV was originally - and still is - marketed to the "TV generation," best defined by their desire for instant gratification. Programs like Total Request Live allow viewers to vote for their favorite videos. Contests allow them to win visits with rock stars. "Viewers are encouraged to play an active role – as consumers any way" (Aufderheide 9). Music video audiences are often characterized as the stereotypical passive cultural dupes, despite their role in the decoding process. "Every image is directed specifically, and utterly, at the viewer" for the purpose of selling them an album (Gehr 37).

Much of the early criticism directed at MTV followed this view. If music videos are defined as part of a commercial environment, it might be considered difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe any meaning to the random images, even if the producer intends for meaning to be present. Through disjunction and discontinuity, there can be "no narrative as such within which the viewer can find himself" (Gehr 40).

This argument, however, is too simplistic and too extreme. Scholars who grouped music videos under the same lens as traditional television advertisements were ignoring

their key differences: complexity and ambiguity. I must also admit, however, that during

the last decade these differences are slowly disappearing. Both music videos and

advertisements now work at the same speed, for example – music videos average 20.38

shots per minute, commercials 28.33 shots per minute (Sherman 381). At the same time,

music videos adopted many of the techniques advertisers used, such as macro close-ups,

double/triple images, hallucinatory special effects, and slow motion (Sherman 381).

Advertising too, has now adopted the ambiguity and complexity present in music videos,

qualities that will be discussed at length shortly.

The rise of MTV also pushed music video producers to do more than simply

promote the artist. The simple concert video that could entertain the audience of

Hullabaloo is no longer extravagant enough to warrant today's audience's attention. High

rotation demanded something even more complex and ambiguous. "If a star has a video

being cycled at the high density rate, his/her image could be on the channel, and in

viewers' minds every three to four hours… Viewers quickly tire of the same image, given

its high rate of circulation, and there is constant demand for something new" (Kaplan

156).

As director Mark Romanek, (Michael and Janet Jackson's "Scream" and Nine

Inch Nails' "Closer") suggests, "the job of the music video director is not only to

interpret songs but to create imagery that adds another layer to what the artist originally

intended" (Reiss 213). The commercial success of the music video has become

intertwined with its malleability. The demands of the contemporary MTV structure

creates conditions where producers may make videos encoding a dominant ideology,

while at the same time, adding symbols that allow the audience to read it in a completely

different way. In fact, in order to create a memorable music video and to survive in the industry, they must do so.

Nor is the audience as passive as academics often believe. Sun and Lull's research on motives for viewing MTV found that audiences typically watched for a reason. Some searched for specific artists, videos, or songs. "This finding suggests that MTV viewers know what to expect from MTV and specifically want to see and hear their preferred music" (Sun 6). This selective attention suggests an active audience. Those surveyed cited music appreciation and visual appreciation as their motivation for watching nearly forty percent of the time; the third largest subcategory focused on music video interpretation (Sun 7). Overwhelmingly, the audience assumed that the videos added to the meaning of the song, which implies that the audience tends to analyze a music video while watching it. This also implies an active audience. "Because many of the videos harness these embedded and often deceptively sophisticated layers of texture and meaning into their veneer, watching videos is hardly a passive experience" (Reiss 27).

Once an active audience is assumed, Hall's theory of encoding and decoding can be applied. After all, "if no meaning is taken, there can be no consumption" (Hall 129).

Ambiguity and Complexity

The industry structure described above produced two important characteristics of modern era music videos, especially those that are placed in high rotation. The images that the videos present are both ambiguous and complex.

Ambiguity arises directly out of encoding and decoding practices. While advertisements can also be read in dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and resistant ways,

music videos are far more likely to be deliberately encoded with multiple meanings in mind. Because of this, music videos break one of the cardinal rules of advertising; they confuse the consumer.

Audience research into traditional advertisements suggests that high levels of ambiguity result in poorer advertising recall and comprehension (Hitchon 292). Confusing ads are essentially unsuccessful marketing tools. If the same tactics used in music videos were applied in advertisements, they would likely leave the audience "confused, perhaps fixated on one particular image or image series, but most likely unsatisfied" (Kaplan 63).

More often than not, music videos are also overwhelmingly complex, including the number of cuts, the amount of characters in any given scene, use of superimposed text or graphics, and the sheer amount of movement. And it is all done purposefully. "The first rule of making videos is to keep interest, an obsession that measures videos in IPM's, or ideas per minute, and compels the producer to create movement where there isn't any, and eliminate any visual slack" (Sherman 378). Complexity makes it impossible for the audience to ever see everything during the first viewing. The producer and the network has a vested interest in keeping viewers intrigued for as long as possible, because, as director Russel Mulcahy suggests, "if people can figure it out, they get bored with it" (Reiss 27).

Advertisements are rarely given the same active processing required for understanding that a music video receives (Hitchon 298). Instead, as far as complexity is concerned, music videos have more in common with art, where "interest value and pleasingness… increase with complexity" (Hitchon 291).

While complexity is the standard, it is certainly not an unbreakable rule. The pace of the music and the underlying style of the video may allow for less visually complex productions. From what I have observed, these videos seem to make up for what they lack in complexity by using deliberately ambiguous imagery. What were once critiqued as "three-minute clumps of visual noise" have evolved to a point where they can actively engage the mind of the audience just as much as the pocketbook (Ehrenstein 42).

At the same time, the evolution of ambiguity and complexity in music videos has also affected the encoding and decoding process. Ambiguity and complexity would be useful methods for encoding themes counter to the dominant ideology. This is especially important in a time where censorship of counter-hegemonic themes is an industry standard. Videos with resistant ideas, if even aired on MTV, are usually limited to late night rotation only. Incubus' recent video for "Megalomaniac" is one example. Its anti-George Bush imagery caused it to receive very little airplay. However, the same techniques that producers use to generate interest in a music video over time should also allow for a resistant reading to appear over time, avoiding censorship by MTV and the other major networks.

<div align="center">Technical Aspects of Encoding</div>

A successful music video, however, is not created out of ambiguity and complexity alone. In attempting to produce a memorable video, layers upon layers of codes are utilized, all dependent on ideology. Before I can go into detail on my own music video, "The Last Day on Earth," I must first elaborate on the categories of codes

used in music videos in general. These codes can be divided into three basic categories: narrative, performance, and cinematographic.

The first category, narrative codes, contains the greatest number of signs. This category includes all the factors of a narrative, such as plot structure, characters, and setting. The narrative category is usually very complex, and contains multiple layers of symbols, along with multiple meanings. As with music videos in general, what the narrative structure lacks in complexity, it typically makes up for with ambiguity.

The plot structure itself is freer than in film. It contains few discrete scenes and the images are discontinuous. While early critics felt this "free-form potpourris of manipulated imagery" signified "a death of context," as noted earlier in this chapter, that assumption is no longer accurate (Gehr 37, Corliss 34). A video hints at a character's personality, mood, or desires, but will never fully present them. There is "a clear indication that [the] narrative will proceed elliptically and be rendered only in fragments" (Vernallis 33). Because narrative codes are dependent on each video's story, specific examples from "The Last Day on Earth," to be explained in the next chapter, will help to best illustrate this category.

The second category, performance codes, refers to any scenes of the band playing the song on their instruments. Codes within this category include the physical position of performers, concert theatrics, and body language.

The performance category is perhaps the most recognizable, as it's been a music video staple since the earliest videos. Performance footage still appears in the vast majority of videos. The main role of this category is to introduce the band, its relationship

with the audience, and band members' relationship with each other. However, its purpose

has been widely debated.

Much like the music videos from the 1960's and 1970's, performance clips

existed mainly to sell the band as a musical act. Because of that, early critics also felt that

performance footage erased the reciprocity between the musician and the audience (Gehr

37). Early analyzers of music videos assumed that these performance clips do not aid the

construction of meaning in any significant way.

Such codes, however, can, and often do, create meaning. Performance clips often

emulate far more than the concert-going experience. Kaplan's "post-nuclear" video

provides a useful example. The smoky haze and sudden explosions present in that type of

setting match the visual spectacle that has been established through thirty years of rock

concerts (Goodwin 18). At the same time, they connote images of an unstable alien world

racked by unmotivated explosions (Kaplan 60-61). This type of setting typically

emphasizes the band as a larger-than-life entity, as well as represent a reference to film

noir.

Sometimes, instead of a concert setting, the performance takes place in an empty

room. This symbolizes the rehearsal space, and has been dubbed the "rockumentary"

motif, as it emphasizes "a sense of community within a group of musicians or between

the musicians and their fans" (Goodwin 107).

Because performance footage is mainly used to present the band as a musical act,

it is found more generously in music videos for relatively unknown artists. Their videos

must first and foremost establish the band's image, introducing them to their target

audience. That need must be met before attempting to address ideological issues.

Established artists can afford to use performance footage more sparingly, and to blend it more subtly with the narrative codes.

The final category, cinematographic codes, refers to the technical aspects of making a video, including camera position, lighting, editing, and special effects. They evoke their own specific connotations in combination with both performance and narrative footage. They also serve to highlight certain narrative or performance codes, by drawing attention to or away from specific images.

In the music video, almost all camera shots follow the music for a spatial and temporal cue. Camera movement is freer in music videos than in any other genre, and seldom follows the camera operation rules set by cinema. "Not only is the relation between figure and space frequently off kilter, but the camera bisects the figure in places that would be unacceptable for classic Hollywood film" (Vernallis 27).

In classic film theory, for example, long shots are typically only used as establishing shots, to set up a scene. They can appear at any point in a music video, sometimes only for visual contrast (Vernallis 27). The space is revealed only in fragments. Along the same lines, film theory delineates close-ups for disclosing intimate aspects about a character. In music video, they can be applied in the same way, but just as frequently they are used to underscore particular lyrics or musical rhythms. As a star's face fills the frame, "it is subjected to so much visual analysis that it seems to move very slowly, almost to suggest the song's slowest rhythmic stratum" (Vernallis 42).

When filming performance scenes, low angle shots are used extensively, "partly because they reproduce the relations among audience, performer and stage" (Vernallis 28). It is probably no accident that those shots give authority to the performers, while also

asserting their sexual charisma. Another common camera position – below the singer and to one side – reflects this.

The flow of the narrative is derived mainly from editing techniques, many of which break the unwritten rules of cinema as well. The 'ideas per minute' formula prescribes that continuity editing, or editing that gives the narrative a continuous flow, be generally avoided. Following the narrative too closely would slow the story and overtake the song (Vernallis 23). For songs with slower tempos, however, this is not as large an issue.

The most widely used editing technique in music videos is the simple fast cut. Besides eliminating visual slack through the 'ideas per minute' commercial formula, quick cuts also allow a wide variety of other codes, especially narrative codes, to appear in the form of snippets and nuances.

Disjunctive editing is the ultimate taboo of cinematic form because it disorients the audience through an abrupt change in a scene. However, it is often utilized in the music video to create a drastic shift forward or backward in the story. Making cuts in the "wrong place" also places emphasis on the moment around the edit point. "Though such edits may momentarily create a sense of disequilibria, they force the viewer to focus on musical and visual clues, allowing her to regain a sense of orientation" (Vernallis 23).

While the use of disjunctive editing can often give the impression that any random shot can just follow any other shot, editing choices are certainly not that arbitrary. Graphic matching is used draw attention to shared colors and shapes, and cuts often foreshadow the next scene. For example, camera motion can prepare the viewer for

dramatic gestures. Slow zooms in the direction of the lead singer can foreshadow lyrics that are significant to the song's overall meaning.

Each layer of codes, regardless of category, is based primarily on ideology. Codes can carry dominant meanings, or resistant ones. And as described above, through exploring the artistic and commercial context of music videos, I have found them a perfect medium for encoding resistant ideas and ideologies. So, in order to more accurately understand the particular nuance of Stuart Hall's model that I am interested in, these industry standards and production techniques must first be applied a video exhibiting a resistant ideology. Such a video will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Chapter III: The Last Day on Earth

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding provides one theory on how music videos are produced and consumed. In order to better explore the role of ideologies in the encoding and decoding of music videos, however, I must put that theory into practice. Therefore, I need a video that is both reflective of the industrial context described in the last chapter and amenable to ideological ambiguity and complexity. Throughout this chapter, I will elaborate on the actual encoding process, calling special attention to ideology and how that ideology relates to the meaning of the codes I have emphasized. Within each category of codes, I also establish predictions as to the audience study that will comprise chapters 4 and 5.

In producing a video, I strove to be as accurate as possible within Hall's model. I selected Marilyn Manson because his music first and foremost suggests an active readership. As stated to NME Magazine, Manson's primary goal in making music and music videos is to make people think and question the values that they hold (Manson 1).

His music also suggests a clear interest in making a video that supports a resistant ideology. Many of his songs, such as "Rock is Dead" and "I Don't Like the Drugs (but the Drugs Like Me)" employ vivid critiques of the media. References in the album *Mechanical Animals* suggest that he is also familiar with media theorists like Marshall McLuhan. References in Manson's most recent disc, *The Golden Age of Grotesque*, suggest that he understands at least the basics of Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding theory. The song, "This is the New Shit*,*" addresses "human behavior in relation to pop culture… its control over it and its inability to not be controlled by it." (Moose 64) "This

is the New Shit" and its corresponding video show a meta-analysis of the use of resistant

ideologies in modern pop culture.

Marilyn Manson first released "The Last Day on Earth," on his 1998 album,

Mechanical Animals. The song itself has received little media attention, as it never

circulated as a single. Manson has never directly stated the exact meaning behind that

particular song to the press. However, most of the lyrics relate to the central themes of the

album as a whole, including the metaphor of drug use, apocalyptic imagery, and

posthumanismm among others, and can be analyzed in the same manner.

The apocalyptic imagery hinted in this song's title can be traced to the film,

Miracle Mile. The movie title is mentioned in "Coma White," the song directly following

"The Last Day on Earth." In the film, the 'Miracle Mile' or the La Brea Tar Pits in Los

Angeles, is where the main character meets the woman of his dreams. It is also where he

learns from a ringing payphone that nuclear war has been declared, making that the last

day on earth. One of Manson's watercolor paintings, entitled "The Last Day on Earth,"

gives a similar impression - of two lovers watching their city being destroyed by nuclear

war. Apocalyptic metaphors have surfaced in other albums as well, but as seen with

Manson's past work, when he sets out to create an apocalypse, it usually ends up being a

personal one (Manson 242). The personal apocalypse Manson described usually includes

the breakdown of a relationship, increased use of drugs (sometimes with dangerous

consequences), along with stark self-hatred and self-mutilation.

Apocalyptic imagery is closely tied with the album's posthumanist motif, which is

illustrated briefly in this song's second verse. Posthumanity, which is the evolutionary

result of the combination of man and machine, is used by Manson to better express a world grown numb.

Those ideas also relate to a third central album theme, the nature of drugs and addiction. "*Mechanical Animals* is the way I describe mankind and the path it's following. That people look and act like human beings, but inside, we're losing our souls, that we numb ourselves with drugs… with whatever we can find" (Official).

"The Last Day on Earth" has been considered by many Manson fans to be a love ballad as well. References on the album would support this claim. However, the 'love' can be directed toward several different things. "On the whole album, I speak about this unobtainable entity called 'Coma White,' which at times could be looked at as a drug or a person or even the fans or even myself" (Manson). Again, the theme of drugs and addiction arises. The woman of his dreams, Coma White, becomes a physical representation of Manson's many addictions as well as the addictions of the people around him. This same sentiment was recently reinvented in Manson's video for "(s)AINT," which featured the darkest side of this Coma White metaphor through an extremely dominant ideology regarding addiction.

As is evident in relation to the other themes, drug metaphors appear throughout the entire album, and operate on several different levels. *Mechanical Animals* was almost titled *Great Big White World* as a reference to cocaine. The character of Coma White makes the same reference. Use of cocaine has been a theme throughout Manson's work for years, paralleling the artist's own experimentation with the drug. To what extent Manson is addicted today is unclear, although given images from the recently released "(s)AINT" video, addiction is a distinct possibility. Without a doubt, however, literal

addiction was a real issue during the time this album was recorded. Only two years earlier, Manson suffered a near-fatal overdose from cocaine while living in New Orleans (Manson 230).

If "The Last Day on Earth" can be viewed as a love ballad, then it is no stretch to suggest that the admiration is directed toward his addiction to cocaine. After all, both types of love can be classified under what Manson has dubbed "the icon of the forbidden…' a metaphor for indulgence and anything you're not supposed to have, be it sex, drugs, alcohol, or pornography" (Manson 23). Such a romanticization also presents an idea running counter to the current view of addiction. Using the album's main themes as a guide, I then based my ideological inscriptions on this idea.

The present ideology of addiction as a negative social stigma is roughly new. Prior to the twentieth century, "addiction meant simply a strong inclination toward certain kinds of conduct, with little or no stigma associated with it" (Grilly 119). It was used roughly the same way as the word 'habit,' which could be either good or bad. Although legislation to curb drug use and government campaigns to alter public opinion first arose in 1914, it was not until the World Health Organization defined the term, 'drug addiction' approximately thirty years ago that the term itself took on most of its modern negative stereotype (Hooked, Grilly 119). Anti-drug campaigns of the Reagan era only fueled the negative connotation, quickly solidifying it as a part of the American unconscious, an obvious cultural assumption. Although experts now use the terms "physical dependence" and "psychological dependence" to refer to drug use or abuse instead, the term addiction is too ingrained in our language to eliminate the negative connotations associated with it (Grilly 119).

Because of that, the dominant ideology of addiction today is one of scorn. And the term is no longer limited to drugs and alcohol. Today, everything is considered potentially addicting, and therefore dangerous. It is seemingly possible to be addicted to anything, i.e. sex, gambling, video games, etc, as long as it can stimulate your senses.

According to the dominant ideology, the addict is viewed as weak willed. There is an ideological assumption that addictions are not "the product of reasons but as the product of causes that lie beyond the volition" of the addict (Luik 1). The current view of addiction centers on the belief that it is a disease, and therefore requires immediate treatment. Classifying addictions as a disease also suggests that there should be medical intervention. For instance, because depression commonly precedes and follows cocaine usage, numerous studies have investigated using antidepressants to treat the possible causes of the addiction (Grilly 217). Multiple treatment options exist, focusing on the differences in each addict's environment, genetic predispositions, or behavior.

As the hegemonic view of addiction, especially involving cocaine use, has been circulating through the American consciousness for the better part of a century, encoding a resistant reading of addiction is a difficult task.

In order to do so, the ideology in this video must run counter to the idea that the addict is weak willed, and must negate the need for any intervention or treatment. The scenes must unfold in a way that the characters remain in conscious control of their actions, and in doing so, present addiction in a positive light. In order to connote this resistant ideological definition of addiction, I will romanticize addiction, or inclination, as a conscious choice and celebrate the effects of that choice as positive.

The narrative that I designed for this video presents this resistant ideology. I created multiple narrative codes for addiction, both with drugs and with other desires, and coupled them with images that I felt would guide the audience to read it as romanticized.

At the same time, I was careful not to exclude images that could reflect a dominant reading. As described in the previous chapter, a video that is too directly resistant to the dominant ideology receives limited, if any, airplay. For that reason, I chose to exhibit codes that were generally ambiguous in nature. With those ideas in mind, I applied them to my narrative codes.

Narrative Codes

The narrative is inherently simple. It focuses solely on the interaction between two figures - a Marilyn Manson character (in order to differentiate the actual musician from the Marilyn Manson in the video, I will identify the animated Manson as a character) and an unnamed female character. Both characters will be described in greater detail shortly.

The video begins and ends with a short live-action segment, setting up the animated scenes as a dream sequence. By setting up the video in this manner, I hope to capture the essence of a true fan's ultimate dream, a romance between herself and the lead singer. Such a theme has been used in many memorable videos, such as the Moody Blues' "Your Wildest Dreams" for example, to create an inherently positive atmosphere. The tranquil nature of the dream foreshadows the resistant ideology, mainly by showing how the female character remains untroubled by any deleterious effects.

The animated video begins by revealing the Marilyn Manson character trapped within a decrepit snow globe prison. The majority of early codes surrounding Manson's character could exhibit the dominant ideology of addiction. The snow globe represents Manson's physical and psychological addictions, and the snow is a direct reference to cocaine, Manson's literal addiction at the time the song was recorded. The rotting wooden beams that barely suffice as shelter, tattered clothing, and desperate expression suggest that he has been trapped there at length and convey a state of weakness. Although it is not clear whether or not he chose to enter the snow globe on his free will, it is obvious that he beyond the point of being able to escape it under his own power. He knows that his time is short, and he will likely die there.

While this may appear to be strongly hegemonic, given much of Manson's past work, weakness is often portrayed as strength. The images I selected are reminiscent of videos like "The Beautiful People" and "Tourniquet," both of which put Manson in a vast array of painful situations to show his strength. Nor is impending death a negative ideal for Manson. The video for "I Don't Like the Drugs but the Drugs Like Me," shows Manson having his arm sliced off before jumping to his death on a smokestack. The "Coma White" video recreates the Kennedy assassination in order to suggest the inherent power of celebrity martyrdom.

In designing the first few sequences, I focused mainly on the setting and the Manson character's presence there. I attempted to apply several of the psychological symptoms of cocaine addiction: mental isolation of the addict, shorter durations of pleasure as time moves forward, and numbness to the world around him. It is also reminiscent of post-cocaine dysphoria. Constant blurs are utilized in order to disorient the

audience, and draw their attention to what could be seen as the character's suffering. Interestingly, director Asia Argento used some of the same techniques in the "(s)AINT" video, in order to draw out Manson's mental anguish.

Again, such symptoms are not always negative. Cocaine users often describe the cocaine high as "a full body orgasm," a distinctly positive experience (Hooked). Given the Manson character's environment in the snow globe, numbness to pain can also be read as merciful, and not as destructive.

As the first verse begins, a nameless female character appears outside of the glass. I designed her as a semi-autobiographical character, an animated version of the dreamer. She began as an answer to a vitriolic assertion that Marilyn Manson fandom, as an obsession, fell under the dominant ideology of addiction.

Her place in the video is the narratee. I wanted the audience to see the Manson character as the female character would, and by extension, as a devoted fan would. This implies a sense of love and adoration. Again, by appealing to this sort of fantastic dream sequence, the audience may be more likely to positively receive a resistant ideology of addiction. For an audience who are not yet Marilyn Manson fans, I tried to create a sense of the female character's fascination with the Manson character. He becomes an icon of the forbidden, something alluring simply because he cannot be achieved.

In this respect, the female character portrays the resistant ideology of addiction from the moment she is introduced, gazing lovingly at the Manson character from afar. She has a strong inclination to be with him, and a desire to be loved by him. She rubs against the glass in a vaguely sexual manner, and kisses it, as though she were kissing him. As she touches the glass, her heart's determination appears as waves of blue energy.

She witnesses the Manson character being crippled by his own addictions, but his weakness is his strength. She wants to be with him, no matter what the cost.

At the same time, the Manson character sees her, and wonders if she is real. Perhaps she is merely a dream image, or as the *Mechanical Animals* lyric booklet would suggest, a side effect. He crawls to the glass, and tries to touch her. Several interpretations of this scene are possible. According to the resistant ideology, just like the metaphorical Coma White on *Mechanical Animals*, she is no different from the snow around him. He feels drawn to her. On the other hand, a dominant reading would suggest that he wants to escape the globe and own addiction. Corroborating the images, the lyrics in the chorus also promote a positive and romantic atmosphere- "I know it's the last day on earth, we'll never say goodbye."

In the interlude before the second verse, she succeeds in breaking the glass. After broken shards reveal an opening in the side of the globe, she climbs inside. This entrance represents the female character following her inclination. An alternative reading, however, might be that she is addicted to the drugs as well, or a denial of her own problems.

In those scenes, I draw the focus toward her intentions, and away from the dominant ideology. Were she to accept the dominant ideology, logic dictates that she should certainly remain on the outside, lest she be an "addict" as well. And should she dare to enter the snow globe, it would be to quickly rescue the Manson character from his own foolish choices. After all, "the more severe a patient's addiction, the more likely he or she is to accept the twelve-step philosophy and the need to attend self-help meetings"

(Washton 115). But instead, her decisions to break the globe and then go inside are based on the resistant ideology.

For example, her first physical interaction with the Manson character expresses their addictions. He collapses dramatically into her arms, unable to muster the strength to do anything else. As he sings the second verse, the camera maintains a close-up. As is in live action videos, the close-up of the singer's face is edited in such a way as to give the viewer a definite gesture, and is formulated as one of the high points the audience will surely remember.

In that close-up, the audience is directed toward the lyrics, "Love burns its casualties," as well as subtle facial features, such as the trembling of Manson's lips. Hopefully, it will allow the audience to associate addiction with more than just drugs. Meanwhile, the female character cradles Manson's head in her lap and sheds a tear for him.

Compelled, they share a tender embrace, almost oblivious to the conditions surrounding them. Again, this kiss supports the resistant ideology. He has little strength left, and yet, it is clear that Manson is more inclined to embrace her than his other addictions. He initiates the actual kiss, reaching his arm around her. An attraction to her is just as compelling as the drugs. Love is, in essence, another form of addiction or inclination. During this passionate kiss, he looses consciousness.

The next sequence focuses on the female character's most important decisions. Again, were she to adhere to the dominant ideology, she would certainly leave, perhaps taking his body with her. She would heed his warning, and treat her addictions while she still can. But instead, she leans over his body and kisses him gently. Then she picks up

the biggest piece glass, and seals herself inside the snow globe. She is addicted to him, in love with him. She makes a conscious choice about her behavior, and seems altogether pleased with it.

She pulls the barely conscious Manson to his feet, and carries him back to the feeble shelter. At final chorus and the lyrics, "we'll never say goodbye," he finally dies, collapsing again into the snow. She then lies down next to him, fully embracing the one she is attracted to. Together, they are both buried under the snow, the ultimate symbol of her devotion.

I chose a tragic, although romantic, ending for two reasons. First, it fits well with the apocalyptic images invoked by the song itself. Second, it is reminiscent of resistant imagery already widely accepted in the American consciousness - namely the theme of Romeo and Juliet – an idealized tragic love story.

The ending, of course, could also be decoded along the dominant ideology, suggesting that by falling victim to the Manson character's addiction, she has killed them both. It could also emphasize the danger of drug use or of obsession in general. However, with the romantic connotations associated with Romeo and Juliet, the audience may be less likely to accept the dominant meaning of addiction.

However, unable to completely escape the dominant ideology in production, I give subtle credit to it again during the video's live action ending. During the song's instrumental outro, the phrase "I'm still not there" is backwards masked. It is possible, then, to interpret that the fantasy is only a fantasy, and that the dreamer will distance herself from such thoughts as soon as she awakens.

To clarify, the intended resistant reading of the narrative would include a romanticization of addiction through imagery and lyrics surrounding the loving relationship between the two characters. It would conclude that the inclination of each character toward the other is positive in nature. A dominant reading, on the other hand, would focus on addiction as a weakness, and the characters as weak willed. It would likely describe the character's relationship as codependent or hurtful, and possibly view the addiction as literal. A negotiated reading would include responses from both of those examples, hinting that the addiction is more than just a literal weakness, but still unable to view it in a completely positive light.

Approaching the audience study that will be described in detail in the next couple of chapters, I initially set forth the following expectations. First, I believe I will have some degree in success at transmitting this resistant message despite the difficulty in using an ideology so deeply hegemonic. Even given my own unique standpoint, I do not think that the desire to romanticize the forbidden or idealize a relationship is limited to a single audience niche.

I predict that romanticization of addiction will likely be arrived at through one of two ways - either through an identification of the Coma White metaphor as described earlier in this chapter, or through the Romeo and Juliet theme. Therefore, I expect the participants to base their reading on intratextual analysis, using the lyrics of "The Last Day on Earth" and the images in the video, and intertextual analysis, using other works, especially Romeo and Juliet.

But as mentioned in chapter one, both of the intratextual and intertextual references will likely be based on personal experience. Using Hall's model of encoding

and decoding, I interpolate that some of the narrative codes described in this chapter may be more relevant to a particular individual, while others are more likely to be discarded. It can be assumed that personal experience will play an extremely large role in the decoding process.

Research into Hall's model also suggests that similar audience members are likely to read a media text in a similar way. I expect that the most likely groups of audience members to read the text as I have intended would either be Marilyn Manson fans (who would probably be able to relate the text to Manson's earlier work and the album's thematic references) or those with a history of drug use (who would use romanticization of addiction as a psychological justification for defending their own behavior.)

Performance and Cinematographic codes

In producing "The Last Day on Earth," I chose not to include a performance component. Primarily, I felt that allusions to the concert or rehearsal atmosphere would detract from this narrative. I also did not want to weaken the possibility of romance, or for a dominant reading, feelings of drug-induced isolation by adding extra characters.

Again, this is keeping within the boundaries of Manson's past work. One third of Marilyn Manson's videos had only light, if any, performance footage, so my video would be consistent with his past videography. Because of this, I do not predict that the audience will notice the absence of performance footage. Nor will it likely alter their reading of the narrative codes.

Because of the cinematographic codes I utilized, the narrative structure of the animated video is undoubtedly less complex than many professional music videos. The

scenes change very slowly, much like the pace of the song, "The Last Day on Earth." The number of characters is also limited, allowing the audience to focus more closely on the figures and their interactions. It also allowed me to encode multiple layers of symbolism in the codes that I did choose, making the narrative more ambiguous.

The most important cinematographic codes in "The Last Day on Earth" involved the use of stop-motion animation. I chose to use stop-motion animation for a couple of reasons. First, it is a rarity in music videos, and seeing such a style would undoubtedly help attract the audience's attention to video. Second, portraying Marilyn Manson as a claymation character is not far-fetched. Between 1997 and 1999 a claymation Manson appeared in the MTV program Celebrity Deathmatch several times (including both the show's pilot and an MTV half-time extravaganza during the 1998 Super Bowl). The video for "Astonishing Panorama of the Endtimes," which appeared on the Celebrity Deathmatch soundtrack, was also done entirely in claymation.

I modeled my clay puppets after the style of director Tim Burton, in an attempt to capture the same deathly appearance as created in The Nightmare Before Christmas. The eventual degradation of the clay puppets was also the best form to illustrate the resistant ideology as seen in the intentions of the female character as she watches the Manson character. A dominant reaction to that decay would be repulsion, but deeply rooted in her adoration, she either doesn't see the change, or she doesn't care about it.

My animation techniques, however, drew more from American and European Vaudeville in the early twentieth century. In keeping with the time period, my video was shot frame by frame without the use of high-tech capture devices. Also keeping with that era, I cast myself as the peaceful dreamer in the bed, continuing a tradition of self-

figuration that began with the early animators I modeled my techniques after. Although considered audacious in film, part of the charm of early animation was to develop a mythology that bestowed upon the animator a sort of special status, such as a demigod or benevolent creator (Crafton 11).

I chose this specific filming style because it would greatly appeal to Marilyn Manson, who has shown great interest in Vaudeville and other forms of entertainment from the early 1900's. The video for "mOBSCENE," for example, was shot on a hand-cranked camera to replicate the style of early filmmakers. This style of video is also consistent with his past work.

In terms of the audience study, I expect that the cinematographic codes will draw some of the participants' focus. Stop-motion animation, especially claymation, is rare in music videos because of the time and painstaking effort involved. I suspect it will be mentioned throughout the study, but I doubt that it will weigh heavily on or distract from the reading of the narrative codes.

The only exception I can foresee would be the eventual degradation of the clay puppets. Although this was meant to emphasize the resistant ideology by an identification with the female character's reaction to the decay, it can just ass easily illustrate the destructive effect of addiction, according to the dominant ideology.

By the end of the encoding process, as Althusser would probably agree, no matter how hard I consciously tried, I found it difficult to adhere to a completely resistant ideology in producing this music video. This is perhaps due to how much the dominant ideology regarding addiction appears in American culture. It is stressed to the point that it is accepted unconsciously. From my own perspective, although I have exhaustively

researched the ideology of addiction, I am not a drug user. Raised in an era of massive anti-drug public service campaigns, I have chosen to abstain from the use of all drugs.

However, the ideologically messy narrative should provide a wide variety of places for the audience to make resistant readings. The results of the audience study will be described in greater detail in chapter five. The next chapter will outline my methodology.

Chapter IV: Methodology

Up to this point, I have focused primarily on ideology in the encoding process. Upon completion of the finished video, "The Last Day on Earth," and with a better understanding of encoding practices, we can then explore Stuart Hall's model from a decoding angle. This portion of the study consisted of several stages. First, a subject population was selected. Subjects were all shown the video of "The Last Day on Earth" individually, and an interview was conducted following this viewing. This chapter focuses on the qualitative approach utilized in making my questionnaire, as well as explains each step in the interview process, beginning with sample choice.

Sampling

In this study, I relied on a nonrandom, targeted sample. The sample for this audience study was collected via advertisements at local clubs, including Sanctuary and The White Rabbit, record stores, such as Hogwild Records, and local colleges, including San Antonio College and Trinity University. I also advertised using various Internet newsgroups, such as those connected with the San Antonio Music Business Expo, The Edge Magazine, and fan listings for local artists. Several participants responded due to word of mouth from previous participants.

I focused on these outlets in particular because they attracted people that fit within the target audience for music videos, and my music video in particular. Their appeal is directed towards young adult rock music fans, generally ages 18-35, as well as those within the music and music video industries.

However, using a targeted sample can limit the generalizability of a study's results (Webster 3). But in this case, a targeted sample is necessary, and better fits within the research question. Such people will provide appropriate answers to the research question with interpretive depth.

The final group of participants included twenty-two people from around the San Antonio area. It was comprised of thirteen females, nine males. The participants' backgrounds varied. Professions included musicians, deejays, video and recording producers, military veterans, teachers, and students (from a variety of different subject majors). I obtained a roughly even spread of college age participants and working professionals.

As far as prior drug use is concerned, thirteen of the participants had at least some history with illegal drugs, ranging from experimentation to years of addiction and treatment programs. Five had specifically used cocaine, which I believed extremely relevant to "The Last Day on Earth," as described in detail throughout chapter three. One person chose not to disclose that information.

Screening Procedure

Because decoding depends on individual factors, I conducted all my interviews in a one-on-one fashion. Alone, participants might feel more comfortable talking about personal experiences, which are central to both this study and the Sense-Making method, which will be explained in more detail below. The nature of addiction, which is the main ideological theme in "The Last Day on Earth," is a sensitive topic. Participants might feel reluctant to expound on experiences involving drugs and other addictions in front of other

people. In addition, participants were all guaranteed anonymity throughout this study.

Greek letters are used in place of names for the duration of this thesis.

All interviews were also conducted in a location of the participants' choice, with

the intention of making them feel more comfortable. Although I traveled to some

participants' places of residence to conduct the interviews, approximately half came to

my dorm room instead.

I did not anticipate that conducting an interview in a room similar to one featured

in the live action intro and outro of the video would become an interesting challenge.

Early in the study, one participant noticed the similarity of my bedspread to that in the

video. Another participant noticed that a poster in my dorm room was featured in the

video. I tried to minimize this issue as best as possible, even changing my sheets when an

interview session was scheduled in my room. However, such perceptiveness in my

participants also confirms their tendency to read situations, and by extension, media texts,

actively.

The video was shown to each participant twice. As they watched the video, I

encouraged them to make notes on anything they found interesting, entertaining,

confusing, disturbing, etc. After the screening was over, I instructed participants to

choose two of those notes to discuss in greater detail. Those ideas, in combination with

the questionnaire, were used as points of departure for the interview.

Questionnaire Design

As described in chapter one, individual factors play a large role in the decoding

process. At the same time, people "are meaning finders. They can make sense of the most

chaotic events very quickly" (Huberman 215). In order to capture accurately the rich detail of how individuals derive meaning, my methodology is based on a qualitative research method. Such techniques are designed to study social and cultural phenomena in depth, identifying patterns based on each audience member's unique set of responses to a particular text.

Although my interest mainly lies in how participants will read the ideology of addiction, the audience may consider other concepts of greater importance. As is in all qualitative studies, those ideas and their relationship to the construction of meaning must "remain open, subject to refinement and definition based on what the researcher is able to uncover and observe" (Jorgensen 18).

However, being present in the interview process can also influence the results. Pre-conceived intentions and questions leading to those intentions can affect how an audience reads a media text. Because I produced the video, a very strong potential exists for researcher bias. In order to guard against this, I took careful consideration into planning the questionnaire. Only through completely unguided open-ended questions would I get thoughtful answers that were not skewed to my intentions in the encoding process.

Given those concerns, I structured my interviews on the Sense-Making methodology, developed by Brenda Dervin. Instead of focusing on specific scenes or the purpose of an image or symbol, Sense-Making instead focuses on how people make sense of a certain scene based on their own context (Dervin 236).

This method is especially useful for encoding/decoding research, because "in decoding, the discourse must then be transmitted into social practices if the circuit is to be

both completed and effective" (Hall 129). The decoding of media is based, as mentioned

in chapter one, primarily on individual factors. This method is designed for collecting

data that depends largely on individual experience. At the same time, Sense-Making

allows for a wide variety of responses to any single event or media text, as Hall's model

does.

Sense-Making is also an ideal method for analyzing music videos. It begins with

the assumption that "reality is neither complete nor constant but rather filled with

fundamental and pervasive discontinuities or gaps" (Dervin 4). The music video, which is

purposely structured with gaps in mind, is consistent with the presuppositions of the

Sense-Making methodology.

In addition, the Sense-Making method minimizes the researcher bias that I stated

earlier. The structure of the interviews presents a firm distinction between researcher and

participant, which will be absolutely essential (Dervin 8). The questions are structured to

privilege the perspective of the participant. Questions do not lead towards any pre-

conceived ideologies. The method assumes no categories, and allows the participant to

control the direction that the interview takes. A complete copy of the questionnaire can

be found in Appendix C. The questionnaire was divided into three sections.

The first section was based solely on the notes made by the participants. While

watching the video, respondents were encouraged to write down anything that they found

interesting. They then selected two of those ideas as a springboard for more detailed

discussion. For each of those ideas, the Sense-Making structure dictated a series of

questions based on corresponding thoughts, feelings, and emotions. For example, if a

respondent mentioned a particular scene, questions included, "Was there anything

particularly interesting about scene X? Tell me a little more about how that was interesting," "Do you have any questions or confusions about scene X?" and "Did scene X remind you of anything you had seen or heard before?"

Each of those questions could then be followed up with further questions about specific thoughts, feelings, and emotions. In this respect, the questionnaire served more as a guide than a scripted dialogue. Questions were added or deleted based on the direction that the participant took the interview.

The second section of the questionnaire focused on the video as a whole. I asked participants whether or not they liked the video, and to elaborate on why they either liked or disliked it. This question provided insight, although limited, into the marketability of the video as a whole. In striving to produce the music video that conformed to the restrictions of the industry, marketability of the song and the corresponding album is one of the most important factors.

In this section, questions included: "If you were to describe the video to somebody, what would you say it was about?" "What emotions or feelings are associated with the video as a whole?" and "Does the video as a whole remind you of any experiences you've had, either positive or negative?"

The third section of the questionnaire focused solely on the ideology I encoded, but it did so indirectly. I instructed participants to list their experience with drugs, legal or illegal, both recently and in the past. This question was included as a way to determine (as I predicted) whether a past history with drugs, specifically cocaine, had any bearing on whether a participant could recognize drug imagery in the video or read that imagery with a resistant ideology of addiction in mind.

However, I analyzed the responses to this question with a grain of salt, especially if it was the first time drugs or addiction were mentioned in the interview session. It could be interpreted as a leading question, and therefore skew the results.

Coding of Transcripts

After each interview, the session was transcribed. Each transcript was then coded based on themes and their subheadings and by meaning-making process. The themes column consisted of narrative codes, such as the relationship, each character's basic personality, and their eventual deaths. It also included cinematographic codes, such as the use of claymation and simplicity in plot and characterization. Meaning-making processes include categories such as personal experience (and by extension, relationships, experience from school, and experience with religion or philosophy), intertextual references (other books, movies, music, and art), intratextual references (visual images or music relating only to this video), emotional responses, and cultural assumptions. It also includes a category for readings based on the business side of media production.

The codes provided a three dimensional matrix, with participants on the X axis, themes on the Y axis, and meaning making methods on the Z, coded by color. A copy of this matrix can be found in Appendix D, in CD-ROM format.

Chapter V: Results

As described in chapter 1, Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding anticipates a wide range of readings, namely dominant, negotiated, and resistant. For "The Last Day on Earth," this was certainly the case.

Many of the audience's responses, although not necessarily the ones I originally expected, revealed strong ideological positions. In this chapter, I explain those interpretive patterns in greater detail, focusing first on the ideology of addiction. Special attention is given to the meaning making process described in the Sense-Making methodology, and how specific contexts relate to ideology.

Ideology of Addiction

Recalling the expectations set forth in chapter three, because of the deliberate encoding, I anticipated that there would be a successful negotiation of the resistant ideology of addiction. I also approached the audience study with the initial hypotheses that participants with a history of drug use would be more apt to make a resistant reading of the ideology surrounding addiction. However, this was not the case. Not a single drug user read the imagery in a resistant way.

Out of the twenty-two participants, almost half mentioned imagery associated with addiction. Five elaborated on those ideas to the extent that an ideological position could be extrapolated from them. Those ideological positions included three dominant readings, one negotiated reading, and one resistant reading. I will elaborate on them in that order.

All of the dominant readings were vehemently dominant in their ideological stance, and can be boiled down to a dislike for people who escape from their problems through temporary pleasures. All three dominant readings were also based in part on past codependent relationships. However, they approached their decoding with different meaning-making processes.

The female character's desire to settle for the Manson character's lifestyle led participant Beta to recall the behavior of drug addicts, as well as his own behavior during the years he was addicted to cocaine. Beta also focused on the imagery in the video, decoding the snow as a symbol for cocaine. "We're talking about being lazy, not taking care of business, just settling for the way things are, and laying down in your own misery…Being buried in snow is actually a perfect example." (Beta)

Contrary to my expectations, former drug users, like Beta and Nu, were actually more likely to decode this video in a dominant way. They were more likely to see addiction as a term relating specifically to drugs, with no apparent need to rationalize their past behavior. The current drive to stay clean was a more important factor in how they decoded the imagery than their past experience with drugs. Participant Eta commented on the subject during debriefing. "I think that in the past, while I was associated with drugs, I probably would have caught onto it a lot more. I guess it's a different frame of mind. I've got a more positive frame of mind" (Eta). Participant Theta made a similar observation.

Participant Chi, the only dominant reader to have no history with illicit drugs, used mainly cultural observations and intertextual references when comparing the relationship between the characters as that of a drug user and a drug. His ideological

stance on addiction is only part of a larger pattern, and all of the themes he addressed were interpreted with dominant ideologies in mind. Chi compared the way the characters' relationship should work to the film, <u>As Good as it Gets</u>. "One of the lines in the movie, he stutters out- you make me want to be a better person." (Chi). Like drug use, he felt the characters' relationship was inherently destructive, and did not fit within an ideal relationship. He characterized the female character as a hegemonic and romantic ideal. For Chi, the Manson character created "an idealized image of what the perfect woman would be, and put a lot more meaning in that than [he] should" (Chi). Participant Chi also attempted to characterize the Manson character from the female's point of view. However, he was at a loss when he could not easily fit the Manson character within the hegemonic male stereotype of a Prince Charming or a Knight in Shining Armor.

The only negotiated reading came from participant Alpha, who shared a great deal with the three dominant decoders, including a history of drug use and codependent relationships. In fact, he went into great length defining the characters' relationship in terms of his own. On one hand, he responded to much of the video with a dominant ideology in mind. "It reminds me of relationships I've had with girls who thought they could fix me, but couldn't. When she put her hand on his stomach and chest, its almost as if, like a bandage for a wound rather than a lovable touch… The girl is like a drug. [It] only temporarily makes you feel better. You're using it, and once you use it, it's gone. This love isn't sticking inside him. Its just passing right though him, but it feels better than nothing." (Alpha).

He differed from them, however, in that he was still a current drug user. And perhaps because of that fact, he identified better with the Marilyn Manson character than

the dominant readers. "Part of me wanted her to see that she couldn't help, that she should get out of the driving snow. She needed to save herself because she couldn't save him. But another part of me didn't want him to be alone in the end." (Alpha). It was that latter part that sought after the Manson character's lasting comfort that defined this as a negotiated reading, as opposed to a dominant one. His response was given with such emotion, that there is no question in my mind that he spoke of a genuine fear of being left alone in the end. However his response displayed pity, rather than romanticization of the subject, and unlike the resistant reader, he could not ignore the codependency in the relationship.

Out of my sample, only one participant, Pi, decoded the video with a resistant reading. This surprised me. Participant Pi was the only female to provide an ideological perspective on the subject of addiction; the other four were all male. And while, like the dominant and negotiated readers, she based much of her reading on past relationships, she did so in a radically different way.

Upon closer inspection of the data, however, it becomes clear what sets this participant apart from the other readings. As I had intended, the idea of addiction was romanticized in order to take it out of its hegemonic context. Her unique social position allowed her to romanticize drug use because she was first able to romanticize death.

She interpreted the deaths of both characters as a drug induced suicide and compared them to Romeo and Juliet. "Some people see suicide as a selfish act, because you're taking yourself away from your family and people that love you. But I didn't really see it that way because they were together. I felt there was a strong connection

between them, that they were in love, because they died together. It wasn't that selfish act

that took them away from anything, because they had each other in that" (Pi).

The peaceful death, to Pi, suggested a drug overdose, and she also decoded the

imagery of snow as cocaine. She has never used drugs, but did have some unique

experiences involving the subject matter.

First, her decoding of snow as cocaine was primarily based on a recent poetry

writing class, where she heard a poem making the same comparison (albeit in a

completely hegemonic way). Her interpretation of this code can also be based on another

recent experience. She overheard a past roommate doing cocaine in her bathroom, and

expressed both terror and excitement concerning that event. During the interview,

participant Pi's tone displayed more wonder than it did fear, comparable to Manson's idea

of the icon of the forbidden.

However, this study on encoding and decoding was not limited to simply the

predictions regarding the ideology of addiction. There were just as many interesting

responses that did not follow the initial expectations. Although I did not purposefully

encode ideologies relating the use of Marilyn Manson, the nature of the characters'

relationship, gender roles, and the linearity of time, the audience's responses indicated

that such themes were incredibly important in how the audience made meaning.

Marilyn Manson

A second expectation of this audience study was that past experience with

Marilyn Manson's music would play a role in decoding a resistant ideology of addiction.

This also proved to be incorrect.

Marilyn Manson fandom did not help the participants provide a resistant reading. If anything, it may have even hindered that chance a little. Participant Alpha, who provided a negotiated reading, felt a powerful need to separate the idea of Marilyn Manson from the Manson character in the video: "The first time yes, you read the character as Marilyn Manson, but there's so much more to talk about when you're not looking at it as a direct caricature of Manson" (Alpha).

However, that is not to say that the star persona of Manson did not have an effect on the decoding process. As suggested by past research of music video decoding, the use of an extremely recognizable persona can alter how a video is read. Celebrities come to represent specific social types to particular audiences and images can be directly associated with specific musicians – such as Thomas Dolby's mad scientist character in "She Blinded Me with Science" or Bob Dylan's outlaw hero (Lynch 116). Manson's shocking image is certainly no exception. In this study, it made more of an impact on whether the participant liked or disliked "The Last Day on Earth."

Those who already enjoyed Manson's music usually saw him at his best, and viewed the video in a more positive light. Theta summed it up best - "I like Marilyn Manson, so it just happened to go along with all the stuff I liked already" (Theta). Both Lambda and Zeta described Manson's intelligence and philosophical positions at length to justify how much they enjoyed the video.

These Marilyn Manson fans, one of which who painstakingly compared this video to every other video that arose out of the *Mechanical Animals* era, were not any more likely to read a particular ideology than those who disliked the artist with a passion. They were not as familiar with the thematic references as might have been expected.

For participants who were not fans of Marilyn Manson, their personal opinion of the video was similar for the most part. As participant Gamma elaborated on why she felt that the video portrayed only emptiness, "I think part of it might be the stereotype of Marilyn Manson in my head. I kind of have this conception of Manson as a pitiable figure" (Gamma).

Xi was extremely vitriolic about the use of Manson's image, so much so, he was forced to pushed it aside in order to even watch the video. "I guess because he's such a media whore, I just want to tune out anything related to him and hope that it's not him, if you know what I mean...." (Xi). Ironically enough, Xi had previously commented about how much he liked this song. And when the interview was over, he seemed very distraught with the contradiction he just expounded upon.

<div align="center">Relationships and Gender Roles</div>

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the deciding factors in how the ideology of addiction was interpreted was the characterization of the relationship between the characters as a codependent one. However, there were several other patterns in responses concerning the characters' relationship that proved insightful about the relationship between ideologies and the current state of hegemony. The theme of the relationship was also closely connected with another ideology - that of gender roles. Participants were astutely aware of gender roles in the video even though I did not intend to encode anything specific regarding gender.

The characters' relationship was a significant point of discussion for the vast majority of the participants. For participants taking an ideological stance on relationships

rather than on addiction, referencing the video's visual imagery was a very significant factor in the meaning making process. Nine participants (roughly an even amount of male and female participants) defined the relationship as true love, mainly through dominant means. Over half of those participants also cited Romeo and Juliet as an intertextual reference.

Sigma took an extremely hegemonic stance in this respect, believing he saw a wedding ring present on the Manson character's finger. He suggested they were already married. Although he eventually concluded that the ring was really just a seam on the clay figure, he still called them husband and wife for the duration of the study (Sigma).

A few participants also decoded the relationship as hegemonic by reading the female character as fulfilling a nurturing or motherly role. Tau saw the female character being portrayed in such a fashion, basing her idea on "the archetype of a mother and her son" (Tau). The image reminded participant Zeta of the Pieta sculpture of the Mary holding the dying Jesus' head in her lap, a hegemonic image in the Christian religion, and another intertextual reference. However, she gave a negotiated response by altering the biblical image to include two lovers. "He sacrificed himself. And there's this woman… presumably from the video its his lover, mourning his brokenness" (Zeta).

Participants who decoded the relationship in a dominant way were roughly evenly divided between the two sexes, suggesting that both men and women have hegemonic notions about what a proper relationship should include. Counter-hegemonic descriptions of relationships, on the other hand, were very divided along gender lines.

One category of responses was based on countering the dominant view that relationships should consist of people from the same social class, or that people should

'stay with their own kind.' Participant Iota was very forward about this viewpoint, basing her reaction off previous relationship experience. "She seemed to be well-kept and he was scraggily. And I've seen myself in that position in the past, with scraggily guys, and feeling that it's not socially acceptable in some ways. It's just expected that you form relationships with your same class" (Iota). Participant Omicron made a similar observation, inventing a complicated story about how the characters came to arrive at the snow prison. Given the upscale style of the female character's dress contrasted with the Manson character's poorer clothing, participant Omicron felt that the female character's sacrifice was substantial, more so than if they were of a similar social status (Omicron). It is interesting to note that both of these participants were female. No male participants commented on the character's apparent social class.

A second category of resistant responses involved necromancy and necrophilia. Participant Xi decoded the Manson character as a vampire, and the female character as a succubus. His response was based mainly on visual imagery, "the fact that he was dead and she was still with the body, and still in love with him," as well as the association between her kiss and the Manson character's death (Xi). Sigma also presented this resistant view in a similar way. "Both times I watched it, it didn't look like they kissed. It looked like she was devouring him. It looked sort of feral, like something you would see on the Discovery Channel, like a carnivore over a carcass." (Sigma). The idea of a black widow or a praying mantis is consistent with psychoanalytic literature, but was certainly unexpected given the encoded imagery. This viewpoint was also solely a male phenomenon. No female participants adopted this view.

A third category of resistant responses was largely philosophically based. Lambda described the characters' relationship on these terms, perceiving the female character as a literal "reflection of the man in the globe" (Lambda). He read the video with an existentialist ideology in mind, comparing it intertextually to Dostoyevsky's House of the Dead. He elaborated, "I consider Dostoevsky an existentialist. The main character's in a prison in Siberia, a winter wasteland, and the themes that come out in the book are similar to this, a man coming to realization, and dealing with anxiety" (Lambda). Participant Alpha, applied his active reading of the Orson Wells' film, Citizen Kane and its "use of the snow globe as a signifier of lost innocence and lost identity." (Alpha). The female character served to help recapture that identity.

As a whole, participants generally saw the characters act in accordance with dominant gender roles, even if the relationship was read in a resistant manner. All of the responses that emphasized those roles were based on either past relationship experience or cultural stereotypes, suggesting that for these participants, their notion of gender is based primarily on personal exposure. They differed, however, in what meaning they made.

There were several dominant ideological readings. Most participants agreed implicitly with the female character's role as a caregiver. Others viewed the characters as ideals, generating the same ideological response. As I mentioned earlier, participant Chi was particularly detailed about both the Prince Charming and Knight in Shining armor stereotypes when discussing the Manson character, just as he idealized moderation when it came to alcohol and drugs (Chi). A couple participants even read the narrative as though the Marilyn Manson character saved the female character by freeing her from

being behind the glass (Delta, Kappa). This also fits in with the dominant theme of a knight in shining armor.

A few negotiated readings of gender did exist, although they were usually the exception. One participant, Tau, reacted to the Manson character's androgyny with intrigue. Throughout her interview, she was incredibly aware of how men and women are supposed to look. Participant Tau first read the Manson character as a woman, because the character displayed feminine traits, especially long hair. It was not until a more feminine character appeared that she changed her idea. She also noted the androgynous Marilyn Manson poster in the live action intro and outro, but was unable to determine the figure's identity or gender.

Another participant, Omicron, also read the female character as a powerful woman because she was willing to sacrifice her life to be with the person she loved. "I just think that passion always has to come from somewhere, and I thought it was really beautiful in the video that she really wants to be with him that badly" (Omicron). However, she could not break from the dominant ideology completely. The female character's behavior was still stereotypically tragic, and her behavior was gender specific. "She needs the male more than the male needs her" (Omicron).

Resistant readings also appeared, characterized mainly by vitriolic attacks against the dominant ideology of gender. Largely, these readings were made by female participants and applied to the female character. The participants found a wide variety of stereotypes present, from the mother to the vixen. Needless to say, such dominant stereotypes bothered them. Some felt that the nurturing side of the female character was too stereotypically female. "It seems her existence is just there to be with that guy when

he dies. I don't like the idea of a girl being there for the sole purpose of catering to a guy, or comforting a guy" (Delta). One participant, Gamma, felt the female character behaved in too much of a sexual way, thrusting her chest forward against the glass (Gamma). That too, presented a negative stereotype of femininity.

The vast array of responses about relationships and gender roles is suggestive of another quality of ideologies discussed in chapter one. They are not infallible. Over time, ideologies can change. However, also suggested by the responses to this video, the dominant ideologies surrounding these concepts still hold a great deal of weight. Both of these ideas will be described in greater detail in the next chapter, when I elaborate on the conclusions of this study.

<div align="center">Death</div>

Death of a main character, in any medium, is a powerful statement. As stated in chapter three, the tragic, yet romantic, ending of "The Last Day on Earth" is meant to be reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet. The ideologies behind that association, especially regarding the benefits of suicide, are resistant, but the imagery is already widely acknowledged in the American consciousness. It was surprising how many of the participants took notice of this, but still read the ideology of death with a dominant ideology in mind.

While some participants read the Manson character's death as succumbing to the apocalyptic elements inside the snow globe, for the vast majority of participants, it was read with a sense of hopelessness. Such a reading, in effect, countered most of the Romeo and Juliet imagery. Instead of a tragic hero, his death was often painted as just "laying

down in your own misery" (Beta). For ten of the twenty-two participants, the snow

became a symbol for emptiness and sadness. Some participants found this more bearable

than others. "It depressed me that somebody would feel so empty inside. He died, and

ended up taking her with him. My reaction was sadness for the character, and pity

almost" (Gamma).

For the most part, the female character's attitude towards death could be summed

up as, "If I can't have him, I don't want anything" (Phi). However, instead of painting her

as a tragic heroine, such as Juliet, the concept was read as disapproving by a significant

number of the participants.

They generally saw the female character's death as unnecessary. "I don't think

life should be wrapped up in somebody else, into one other person, because there are so

many other people that we can have an effect on in this world" (Heta). Omicron made a

similar assertion, although eventually read the death in a negotiated fashion. "You can't

just live for one person, because if that one person is gone you're not going to have any

reason to live and that's just sad to me. I just kept thinking that she's in this little snow

globe, but you see everything out side and there's so much still out there!" (Omicron).

For some, as mentioned earlier, the female character's death was extremely sexist, and

conformed to depressing standards of traditional gender roles (Delta).

However, the death of both characters at the end of the video also elicited some

interesting interpretations. There were a variety of negotiated and resistant readings.

Several participants were able to romanticize death, at least in part. "In western culture,

kind of we see death as a really sad thing, but maybe it was not sad for them" (Omicron).

Participant Heta, for example, read the female character's death in a resistant and positive

way by comparing it to an article she recently read. The article, focusing on Buddhist monks, suggested a different ideology on death. "They just set themselves on fire… but they never said anything. And that's what came to mind when I was watching that part of the video, because it seems like the girl was okay with that, just okay with being covered in the snow, and dying that way" (Heta). Other participants praised her devotion to him above her own life.

Participant Rho also gave a negotiated reading of death. He did not believe the characters actually died, but rather that their death was a metaphor for greater change. When asked what the video was about, he simply answered, "second chances" (Rho). He compared the snow globe to "a revolving door. In our eyes, we would see it as death, but in their eyes, they would see it as a new beginning, a rebirth of sorts."(Rho). Every time the snow globe is shaken, the events in the video repeat themselves. But each time it is shaken, there is a possibility for change. "Each time you're reborn, you have that opportunity to change one little thing. You have the opportunity to change something for the better… Maybe the next time they have a hole, they might decide to escape, take a different path in life…" (Rho). This reading was based primarily off personal experience, the participant having gone through cancer therapy several times already. His sickness, like the tragic events of the video, kept repeating themselves, and continued hoping for a change. While this reading displayed some of the qualities associated with the dominant readings, the sense of immortality present for the characters made it appear more negotiated.

The Use of Time

Another unanticipated theme to emerge was the use of time. During the live action intro and outro of "The Last Day on Earth," a clock is seen in the background. When filming the live action scenes, I only concentrated on time elapsing so that 4:20 (a cultural reference to marijuana smoking) happened somewhere in the video. Other than that, I left the exact amount of time elapsing completely to chance in order to better create a dream-like atmosphere. In other words, the video begins with the clock reading 4:09. After the five-minute video has elapsed, the clock read 4:23 in the final scene. I did not realize that the concept of time was such a hegemonic one. The participants vehemently took sides on the issue.

Some, like participant Beta, expressed a dominant ideology of time. He was adamant that the time that passed on the clock should have equaled the amount of time that passed during the song (Beta). Participant Xi was also extremely adamant – "Time is a linear issue. I understand that time is passing differently inside the dome, but we're watching from the outside, so I would assume that time would remain constant on our side" (Xi).

Others, like participant Heta, expressed more negotiated ideologies, trying to make sense of the inaccuracies on the clock. "Even though the video was over quickly, it's still a minute part of time, as far as eternity goes, and never having to say good-bye. Its over, but compare that to eternity, then it seems like its just going slowly" (Heta).

A couple of participants read the clock with a resistant ideology in mind. Participant Nu, for example, was so lax with the linearity of time that he felt the clock should have run backwards. "Time is an interesting area, because it's very constant. It's

always moving forward. And who says it can't go backwards?" (Nu). A few also noticed

the clock's reference to marijuana and used it to justify a resistant reading of time.

"Normally with marijuana usage, keeping track of time is more difficult, so you don't

know whether or not something's passed" (Kappa). However, that interpretation was in

the minority.

These ideological readings appear to stem from cultural rules governing time. The

only difference I can find between those that wanted the time to be strictly linear and

those who felt the video should have been more playful with it was that the strict

timekeepers tended to be the professionals in the video or music industries. Their jobs

depend on a strict adherence to a timeline. Those who were more lax about it were the

fans or the audience members.

Regardless of the ideology being interpreted, these results suggested several

conclusions about encoding and decoding, upon which I will elaborate about in the next

chapter. First, the range in interpretation provides strong evidence for the adaptability of

Hall's theory. It also reaffirms the resiliency of his model as a communicative process

and solidifies the role of ideologies in both parts of the model. Second, they confirm that

while ideology guides perception, it is dependent on individual relevancy. A great portion

of these results came from ideologies that were not deliberately encoded. Lastly, the

results suggest a connection between the producer's unique subject position and the

audience's subject position in determining intended readings.

Chapter VI: Discussions and Conclusions

Indeed, as Hall described in his theory, encoding and decoding are separate events. However, in studying them separately, it is difficult to paint an accurate picture of how ideologies are transmitted. When I began researching Hall's encoding and decoding model, I found no instances in which the model was studied as a whole, with both encoding and decoding taken into consideration. Throughout the previous chapters, I have explored this question in depth, and gained a greater understanding of encoding and decoding as a communicative process. Making a music video with a resistant ideology, and then subjecting that video to interpretation by an actual audience fleshes out the abstract claims made of Hall's model, alluding to its adaptability and its shortcomings.

The results described in the previous chapter stress three things. First, they emphasize the importance of the role of ideologies in the encoding and decoding process. Such ideology is largely dependent on individual relevancy and saliency of experience. Second, they suggest that ideology, in a sense, guides perception, often independent of encoded imagery. Lastly, the producer's unique subject position is just as relevant in the communication process as the audience's.

Ideological Relevancy

Encoding a resistant ideology as opposed to a dominant ideology does not necessarily have a significant effect on the communicative process or how meaning is actually made. By focusing so intensely on encoding a resistant ideology, however, I was better able to separate the blind influence of ideological institutions from the intended reading. I was also able to see more clearly how meaning was made.

Readings of "The Last Day on Earth" began with intratextual references, pulling images and music from the video to guide their interpretations. But in order to make meaning out of the music video and read it with an ideological position, the audience needs more than that. The text alone does not contain sufficient information. This was evident in the myriad of different ways that participants made sense of the ambiguous imagery present in the video. Relevant personal, social, and cultural experiences hold more weight in the meaning making process than the text itself. And those experiences are very rich in ideological conditioning.

In order to explain this in greater detail, let us first consider the resistant ideology that was purposefully encoded in the video. Addiction, through romanticization, can be viewed in a positive light, as a strong inclination to another person or thing. It produces powerful feelings, and exists as a conscious choice.

I began the audience study with the expectation that drug users would be more apt to make a resistant reading in order to rationalize their own behavior. But what I found was almost the exact opposite. Participants having experience with drugs were no more likely to decode the intended resistant reading than those who did not, as the data revealed. In fact, they were even less likely!

However, while past experience with drugs is not a significant determinant of whether someone would read the video's intended message, past experience with drugs, especially cocaine, had an effect on whether the audience would notice the drug-related imagery the video. It was also significant in whether they would read it with an ideological position in mind. Three out of the five cocaine users' responses included an

ideological reading, as opposed to two out of the eleven participants who did not have any experience with drugs.

Interestingly, out of those ideological readings, as described in the last chapter, those with drug experience decoded the imagery in dominant or negotiated manner. The negotiated reading was given by a current drug user. The dominant readings were given by former drug users. Because such readings were not directly encoded, the current drug user and certainly the former drug users must have come to this conclusion using something from beyond the video.

Most of this can be attributed to individual experience. However, those experiences vary. As participant Alpha stated, "you'll get a different reading from someone who's used drugs, not because they've used drugs, but because they've had the impetus to use drugs… trying to fill a hole" (Alpha). While half of the people in this study reported at least some illicit drug use, only five had ever used cocaine, which was a major source of imagery for the video. And each of those participants explained different scenarios involving why they turned to drugs.

The common thread in their experiences with drugs was that they were, for the most part, profoundly negative. These drug users' history of filling that hole or battling with such an impetus led them to see addiction as a definitively negative condition. The rehabilitation programs that drug users go through in order to become clean, of course, also promote such ideologies.

Both participants Beta and Chi, related stories about other people who had suffered because of their addictions, be it to actual drugs or to dependant relationships. For Beta, his own addiction to cocaine, which caused many problems, followed by years

of improving sobriety, prevented him from being able to read the imagery in a resistant way.

Such experience also prevented other participants from reading an ideological position, even if they noticed the associated imagery. Participant Eta commented on the subject during debriefing. "I think that in the past, while I was associated with drugs… I probably would have caught onto it a lot more than now, because I guess it's a different frame of mind. I've got a more positive frame of mind" (Eta). Participant Theta made a similar observation. These participants' desire to remain clean had a greater influence over their interpretation of drug imagery than their past history of drug use. They put a great deal of conscious effort into sobriety, and that effort is reflected unconsciously in their ideology.

For participant Pi, who read the video as intended, this line is not as clear-cut. Even though she had no personal experience with drug use, and most of her knowledge on the subject came from second-hand sources or educational settings, she still made meaning through relevant experience. The video, for example, reminded her of a poem on the subject of cocaine addiction that was presented recently in her poetry writing class as well as her roommate's use of drugs.

I believe that it was her lack in personal experience with drugs that allowed her to romanticize the subject. She has always kept a safe distance from cocaine and other hard drugs, and thus has not experienced the negative effects that many of the other participants have experienced. Nor did she reveal any negative experiences with her roommate, unlike Beta and Chi, whose friends developed many problems due to an

addiction. Thus, she was freer to identify with the positive aspects of the addiction, as encoded in "The Last Day on Earth."

This pattern, however, is not limited only to addiction. Where meaning making arises from experience, relevant events consistently made a larger impact on decoding on an ideological level than those that are less relevant.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, relationships were cited many times in the meaning making process. This is likely the result of a common experience. Far more participants had multiple experiences with relationships (either through personal experience or through other media) than with drug use. Therefore, the audience could readily relate to the relationship between the two characters. Plus, relationships are also a more common theme in music videos. By 1996, almost half (47.8%) of videos played on MTV, as well as other cable music stations like TNN and Z Music Television, contained references to sex (McKee 164-165).

The relationship is also one of the essential narratives of our culture, and as participant Heta observed, "I thought the video, at it simplest terms was like a love story" (Heta). It was a key factor in many of the intertextual references given by the participants, regardless of ideological position. Films like <u>As Good as it Gets</u> and <u>True Romance</u>, both mentioned by participants, perpetuate different ideologies of what a relationship should be, although the mutual attraction between two people is still present in each. The idea of <u>Romeo and Juliet</u> also permeates society's view of true love, being willing to die for the person you care so strongly about. It was a sentiment that many participants could not ignore, even though they logically tried to.

Even resistant ideologies of relationships are rooted in relevant personal experience. When asked to go into further detail on the association of necrophilia and vampirism with the Manson character, participant Xi would only admit to having "traveled in some crazy circles" (Xi). Although perhaps not relevant for many other participants, for Xi, such themes were an important part of his social life. The characters reminded him of people he knew who tortured souls, so to speak.

For participants like Iota and Omicron, for example, who read the video with class distinctions in mind, social class plays an important role in relationships. Iota's emphasis on the issue is evidence of how often it is expected of her to form relationships within her own class. And phrases such as "stay with your own kind," or conversely, "moving up in the world" keep these issues relevant in the American consciousness.

The same is true for participants taking ideological stances on gender roles in "The Last Day on Earth." For example, another participant, Delta, read the video as being extremely sexist. She described the female character's existence as being solely for the purpose of comforting the Manson character, and could not push that idea out of her mind. Delta is also an avid feminist; the idea of female representations in media is one of her favorite topics of debate. The relevance of this issue to her life allows it to alter her interpretation of the video, and to read elements that were not purposefully encoded.

Of course, such an interpretation does not deviate from the norm. The encoding of dominant gender roles in music videos is also supported by current research. Early MTV was predominantly a male world (Sherman 378). And the feminist critique of modern music videos is one of the most popular areas of content analysis.

However, relevancy and saliency do not account for only stable ideological preferences. Recent events may suddenly become alter what one deems as relevant, and thus play a significant role in the decoding process.

My interview with Theta, who was firm in the video's supposed anti-Bush message, was conducted only a few days prior to Election Day, a time where controversial issues are often debated. Each of those issues carries with it at least one ideology, and in supporting their chosen candidate, people are very vocal about the issues they care deeply about. Had this interview been conducted at another time, participant Theta may not have interpreted the snow globe as evidence of environmental issues and Bush's tampering with the Clear Skies initiative (Theta). It may have led him to think of something completely different.

Exhibiting a Marilyn Manson video around the time of Halloween also affected a few results. Manson's ghastly image fits well within acceptable pop culture surrounding Halloween, and participants may have been more open to accepting frightening images at this time of the year than at others.

Again, participant Theta was heavily influenced by the season. He celebrates Halloween every year by watching dozens of his favorite old-fashioned monster movies in October. He was quick to compare this video to those movies, and to the holiday itself. Had this interview been conducted at another time, those connections may have been different.

Participant Omicron's reading of the female character's sacrifice was also highly influenced by recent events. "It made me think of one of my friends. His brother was fighting in Iraq, and he just died last week. I guess he was kind of [similar to] the girl; he

was willing to go to Iraq, even though he knew he might die, because that's how much he loves the people back here. I just think that passion always has to come from somewhere, and I thought it was really beautiful in the video that she wants to be with him that badly" (Omicron). Her response to the girl's behavior seems to stem more from her attempt to cope with a very recent death more than a deep-rooted ideology or history of personal experience. She is attempting to rationalize her friend's brother's death, and so she also rationalizes a sacrifice made by the female character in the video. Had she watched the video only a few weeks earlier, her reaction to those scenes probably would have been vastly different.

Therefore, the relevancy and saliency of a particular ideology is key to how meaning is made. But this does not account for all readings of "The Last Day on Earth." Other factors besides relevancy, such as the popularity of a given ideology and the strength of an ideological institution, can play a role in the decoding process.

Pervasiveness of ideological institutions

This study is unique in the area of encoding and decoding theory because it proposes that the producer can willfully encode a resistant ideology. As determined by the data in the previous chapter, it is possible for a resistant ideology to be read as intended, even for a staunchly hegemonic ideology such as addiction. However, it is the exception rather than the norm. The findings support Hall's assertion that production within a commercial system will generally reflect dominant codes, despite efforts to do otherwise.

Attention, then, must be given to the willingness of participants to still read this video with the dominant ideology in mind. As stated above, part of the reason why this is the case is based on the relevancy of experience and the ideologies associated with them. However, a great deal of these readings should be attributed to prevailing cultural ideologies that are not based on personal experience, but rather on daily interaction with ideological institutions.

For example, we can consider the purposefully encoded ideology. The dominant ideology of addiction is highly ubiquitous. All of the participants in this study grew up an era in which the government publicized addiction in a negative light. That campaign has been going on as early as 1914, and peaked during the 1980's with the widely publicized public service announcements during the Regan years and beyond. So much is this the case, most of the participants found it difficult to view the idea with a connotation other than what has been defined by the World Health Organization and the media. Even for those raised in the 1960s and 1970s, where a slightly more romanticizing attitude existed for drugs like cocaine, participants still held onto the dominant view (Hooked).

To question this ideology is taboo. Even though popular music frequently addresses drugs and drug related imagery, Marilyn Manson's "I don't like the Drugs, but the Drugs like Me," for example, and such a lifestyle is generally glamorized, drug use is still considered a modern scourge. To disagree personally with such cultural norms is difficult. It is certainly not socially acceptable, in most circumstances.

How the participants reacted to controversial ideas present in "The Last Day on Earth" demonstrated the power those ideological institutions hold over them. With hardly any exceptions, controversial statements were first made through jokes and passing

comments, to test the waters. And participants would not elaborate unless they received a signal from myself as the researcher that the topic was not too taboo for discussion. Even when prompted at the beginning of the study that nothing was off limits, participants were still careful in what they chose to say. Participants Beta, Eta, and Zeta, among others, all referred to drug imagery with nervous humor.

Nor could this be limited to the ideology of addiction. Participant Theta, who believed the video contained an anti-Bush political undertone, also approached the idea as joke, so as not to be seen as offensive. It took several pushes on my part before he would elaborate further.

At the same time, the participants may be more likely to read the video with a dominant ideology in mind because that is how they are conditioned as receivers of media. The media, as ideological institutions, generally support the dominant ideology. The encoding of a dominant ideology is the basis of Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model. Media producers are not usually able to deviate from that. Indeed, in trying to make sense of this video, most of the participants compared it to other media texts that were encoded with a dominant ideology in mind.

However, this power is not unconditional, as noted by Althusser. Personal experience has an influence on these ideological institutions over time, and can eventually change the prevailing opinion. Several ideologies elaborated on by the participants are currently in flux, including the nature of relationships and gender roles. Contrary to addiction, which is strongly hegemonic, the categories of relationships and gender are both currently surrounded by negotiated ideologies. And this is supported by differing opinions from ideological institutions.

1950s style relationships and gender roles are being restructured to include deviations, including stay-at-home fathers, single parent households, and high-powered female executives. Several ideological institutions support these changes. The government prohibits the discrimination of women in the workplace. Schools teach us to respond negatively to gender discrimination. At the same time, many religious institutions still stress segregation. The media and the family both present differing views. Some media texts exhibit different behaviors than the dominant ideology would ascribe, while some adhere to a rigidly hegemonic viewpoint. Families are equally encompassing, presenting a wide variety of roles as to how relationships can operate.

The dominant role of gender in society, and in music video, is also in flux. The Gay Rights movement, as well as other modern trends, reshapes the way gender is described. The media in particular have propelled this ideology into negotiation. Many musicians have offered attitudes to sexuality and gender that combine traits from both sexes. One reason I did not anticipate a dominant reading of gender roles was the use of the Marilyn Manson character. Manson's name draws from both male and female archetypes, and his relationship with gender can easily be described as being part man, part woman, and part unknown. The cover of *Mechanical Animals* vividly displays that combination, complete with breasts and ambiguous genitalia. Although I did not use that particular *Mechanical Animals* era image for the animated Manson character, I did use the album cover art in the live action intro and outro.

However, much of this imagery went unnoticed in the face of cultural paradigms for gender. At the same time, many of the other ideological institutions, such as religion,

still hold strongly to a hegemonic stance, and undoubtedly affect the way such imagery is read.

Therefore, despite purposefully selecting imagery to resist the dominant ideology, the audience, for the most part, still read a dominant meaning into the video. And while Hall's model suggests several reasons why this variety of readings is possible, it fails to explain adequately how an intended reading, especially a resistant one, can persist in the face of hegemony. To better understand participant Pi's resistant reading, a subtle nuance must be added to Hall's model.

The Relevance of the Producer

Given the importance of ideological relevancy and the pervasiveness of the dominant ideology, participant Pi's resistant reading's requires extra attention. Hall's theory goes into great length in explaining why the audience's readings differ from the producer's intentions, but it says very little about how and why they might match up.

In analyzing what made participant Pi's reading different from the other participants, it struck me as notable how close she came to my (the producer's) position on addiction: a non-drug user with a fascination of the subject and a romanticizing of death. And her reading was only part of a larger pattern. The closer an audience member came to replicating the producer's subject position, the more elements of a resistant reading appeared in their responses.

Such a suggestion is not present in traditional encoding and decoding theory. As described extensively in chapter one, Hall's model emphasizes the social situation of audiences as a central factor in the meaning they make, but he does not extend the same

importance to the producer. And from a viewpoint based solely on decoding, this may seem obvious. However, when encoding and decoding are studied together, this emphasis is actually a striking limitation in Hall's theory. By studying both parts of the model together, this study suggests that the role of the producer is not as limited as the current cultural studies paradigm suggests.

For example, we can return to Brown and Schulze's study of the Madonna videos. With "Papa Don't Preach" they saw interpretation divided on racial lines. Almost all white students interpreted the word "baby" as an unborn infant (the intended reading), while black students interpreted it as a boyfriend (Berry 136). What the study does not mention is that both Madonna and the director of this video are also white.

The same is true for Madonna's "Open your Heart" video, with which meaning was indicative of geographic location. A greater percentage of northeast viewers recognized the setting as a peep show than did southern viewers (Brown 10). Again, the study fails to mention that Madonna is also from the northeast. Brown and Schulze interpreted responses from female participants both characterizing the dancer as a whore and resisting that characterization (Brown 10). However, no comparison was made as to the participants' view of gender roles compared to Madonna and/or the producer's.

There is a real possibility that these audiences read the text in the way the producer intended because they had similar perspectives to the producer, not just because they fit into a particular social category. The results of my audience study corroborate this possibility.

The closer I examined Participant Pi's resistant reading, the more I realized that she stood out from the other participants because she was like myself, in both

demographic profile and subject position. She was a Trinity University student that had taken some of the same classes I had. She also cited these classes in her interpretation of the video. She is from a similar age group and from the same ethnicity and gender. Like me, she had not used drugs, but had known people who did, and she had a tendency to romanticize death. All of those factors played a role in how she read "The Last Day on Earth." These factors enabled her to read against the dominant ideology.

Participant Pi was also the only female to give an ideological position on addiction. That may have also allowed her to identify with the characters, especially the female character, in a different way.

Participant Alpha, the negotiated reader, also had some similarities with the producer, although not as many. He was also a Trinity University student who had taken some of the same classes I had, and he also used information from those classes to corroborate his interpretation. However, unlike me, he was a current drug user. Because he was male, he also identified more with the video's male character than the female one. His experiences with drugs and dependent relationships prevented him from romanticizing either drug use or death.

Those who read with a dominant reading were farther removed from my own subject position. All three of the dominant readers were male. Two were working professionals with a past history of drug use and rehabilitation. They were also from an age group different from my own. Their experiences, quite different from mine, prevented them from reading the video as I had intended.

On average, the more a participant's reading differed from the intended reading, the more differences existed between their subject position and mine. For example, we

can turn to participant Rho's unique reading. It was not until he elaborated on his life that I understood why he worked so hard to rationalize the character's deaths. He was a black disabled war veteran, who had recently undergone three different surgeries in an attempt to stop his brain cancer. His subject position was so far distanced from my own, there was no way he could read the video as I had intended. "Let me put it this way. I've thought of stuff that I've been through. I can decide one of two things, that I'm not going to do nothing but have the tumor consume me, or I'm gonna' get out here, and keep living and keep changing, to make my life that much better" (Rho). His close brushes with death made certain that he could not romanticize the topic, and his medical experience put the use of drugs into a completely different category than the encoding of imagery could allow.

The importance of the producer's unique perspective is made even more noticeable once the assumption of automatically encoding dominant ideologies is removed. By encoding a resistant ideology as opposed to a dominant one, I was made more aware of my own unique social perspective in relation to the ideology itself. Thus, I was better prepared to compare the audience's perspectives.

From a producer's standpoint, however, it is still important to consider the difficulty in communicating resistant meaning over hegemonic meaning. For the music video producer who desires to ultimately circumvent the dominant ideological structure, the impact of their work is likely to be small. The more hegemonic the idea they hope to counter, the less likely they will find an intended reading in the general population at large. In small groups of audience members with similar subject positions, however, their

reading may be more widely received. And for artists who wish to reach certain audiences, it may be more beneficial to find producers with similar subject positions.

Future Directions

The findings from this thesis suggest that scholars should continue to investigate the subtle nuances of Hall's encoding and decoding model. The role of the producer in the encoding and decoding process, the use of resistant meaning, and the role of ideologies in the meaning making process need to be examined more closely.

With so much of the cultural studies paradigm focused on the active role of the audience, we as media scholars must not dismiss the role of the producer in the meaning making process. So little research has been done on producers' intentions that I believe there is little ground for making accurate assumptions on intended readings. Careful attention should be directed at documenting producers' chosen ideologies as well as their interaction in the production process. The producer's ideology must not simply be assumed, especially in texts as salient as music videos. The music video industry has moved to a standard of ambiguity and complexity that allows for much more than a reiteration of hegemonic concepts. Scholarly analysis should reflect that change if it wishes to remain viable.

More studies also need to be conducted on the encoding of resistant ideologies. This study focuses on resisting a very hegemonic ideology, addiction, and leaves room for many variations. Different resistant ideologies may produce different results. And audience groups will certainly respond differently to each ideology. Currently negotiated ideologies, such as homosexuality or gender roles, may produce more marked results.

More people may read those types of images as intended, because they are more familiar with, and have more experience relating to, negotiated concepts. Perhaps studies along this line can be used to trace the rise and fall of hegemonic concepts, and lead to a better understanding of how meaning changes through time.

But most important, as this thesis suggests, encoding and decoding must no longer be studied as autonomous events. They must be reconceived of as parts of a whole, equally important in the meaning making process, despite the suggestion by Hall to the contrary. Without properly understanding encoding, as I have previously stated, one has no basis for accurately assuming intended readings. Along the same lines, without properly understanding decoding, one has no way of learning how, or perhaps if, the message was interpreted.

Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model is one of the building blocks of communication research, and I suggest that we build upon it. In the face of constantly changing ideologies, we must no longer sidestep around the time and effort needed to do studies of this nature. Instead, we should focus on the big picture. We should take that next step in communication research – an examination of the whole communicative process and how it affects meaning making.

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Appendix C

Instructions: (read to participant as stated above)

This interview is designed to allow you to express your ideas about a student-produced music video. Because of the way this interview is structured, it may feel repetitive. If you feel you've already answered a question, merely say so.

We'll watch the video again in order to refresh your memory. As you watch the video, write down anything that you find interesting, intriguing, disturbing, confusing, or anything else in the video that you would like to talk about. As you watch it a second time, go through your notes again, and add to them. Remember, there are no right or wrong ideas.

Please read through these ideas, and circle two of them that you wish to discuss in greater detail.

For each idea: You selected _____.

1. Was there anything particularly interesting about _____? Tell me a little more about how that was interesting.
   a. What were you thinking about when you watched _____?
   b. Is there something in particular that led to this thought? What leads you to say that?
   c. Do you have any feelings or emotions associated with _____?
   d. Is there something in particular that led to this feeling? Tell me a little more about that.
2. Do you have any questions or confusions about _____? What about it was confusing?
   a. What emotions or feelings are associated with _____?
   b. Is there something in particular that led you to think about these emotions or feelings?
   c. Did you see anything in the video that helped you to answer that question or confusion? Tell me a little more about this.
   d. What thoughts or feelings are associated with this answer?
   e. Is there something in particular that led up to these thoughts or ideas?
3. Did _____ remind you of anything you had seen or heard before? Tell me a little more about this. What does it remind you of? For each memory: You mentioned…
   a. What thoughts or emotions are associated with this?
   b. Is there something in particular that led to these thoughts or emotions?
4. Did _____ remind you of any experiences that you've had, either positive or negative? For each experience: You mentioned…
   a. What thoughts are associated with this experience?
   b. Is there something in particular that led to this thought?
   c. What emotions are associated with this experience?
   d. Is there something in particular that led to this emotion?

Repeat above formula for the second idea.

Next, I would like to discuss the video overall.
1. Do you like or dislike this video as a whole? Tell me a little more about why you like or dislike it.
2. If you were to describe it to somebody, what would you say it was about?
   a. What emotions or feelings are associated with the video as a whole? What leads you to say this?
   b. Does the video as a whole remind you of any experiences you've had, either positive or negative?
   c. For each experience: What thoughts or emotions do you associate with this experience? Is there something in particular that led to these thoughts or emotions?

3. Is there anything that we have not addressed that you would like to discuss in greater detail? (if so, then repeat the above formula for that particular idea.)

Final Question:

I am also interested in the perception of music videos and drug use. Could you please share with me the extent to which you have used drugs, (legal or illegal) recently and in the past? Remember, all information will be kept completely confidential.