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“I don’t wanna make it, I just wanna... ”: Cinematic Intertextuality in 2000s Emo Music Videos

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Introduction: Approaching Cinematic Intertextuality in Emo Music Video

One of the most proximate forms of intertextuality in music video is with cinema, whether through references to specific films or entire genres. The highly contentious musical genre of emo¹ has been especially prone to these references and as a musical genre makes use of several overlapping thematic tropes around alienation, self-harm, dark comedy, suicide, and death that have also given rise to cinematic narratives from teen movies to horror, crime, and art-house cinema. Emo is a particularly slippery term operating as something other than a genre and more as a tendency or mode of various punk-related forms of popular music inclining toward confessional personal expression and emotional catharsis. Taking place largely in North America from the 1980s to the 2000s, emo evolved in terms of both musical styles and visual aesthetics over time, only really attaining its stereotyped look of ironed black hair, guyliner, and tight skinny jeans in the 2000s, corresponding to the rise of social media platforms like MySpace and the increasing visibility of this formerly underground music on music video channels like MTV.

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¹ On emo music and subculture see Andy Greenwald, *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers and Emo* (New York: St. Martins Griffin, 2003), Taylor Markarian, *From the Basement: A History of Emo Music and How It Changed Society* (Coral Gables Florida: Mango Publishing Group, 2019), and Leslie Simon and Trevor Kelley, *Everybody Hurts: An Essential Guide to Emo Culture* (New York and London: Harper, 2007).

This chapter will look at this intertextuality between emo music videos and cinema, focusing especially on those videos where there is some form of relatively autonomous narrative that makes references either to a specific film or to an identifiable cinematic genre. This will not necessarily be focused around those moments the music was actually used in products of the film industry although this was sometimes indeed the case, if to a lesser extent than the adjacent genre of pop punk. For example, there is the use of Dashboard Confessional's "Vindicated" (2004), which was the theme song for *Spider-Man 2* (2004) and which is doubly remediated in the music video through both images from the film and references to the comic book format.

This raises terminological issue around the terms "intertextuality," "intermediality," and "remediation." These processes whereby a given media text refers to both other media texts and other media forms are especially acute for music videos, which are by their very nature of combining moving images with a pre-existing audio recording of a song, multi-modal texts, whose double nature also involves other modes of expression such as choreography, acting, and musical performance, as well as set design, graphics, special effects, and animation.² As indicated in the introduction to this volume, intertextuality arose from structuralist and post-structuralist literary studies referring to the ways whereby literary texts were not created *sui generis*, but were produced in relation to a web of other texts, formats, and pre-existing genres. Hence statements such as Derrida's from *Of Grammatology* that "there is nothing outside of the text,"³ meaning more that there are no texts without contexts, were fundamental for the project of deconstruction, and intertextuality was no less significant for Barthes's proposition of the "Death of the Author," suggesting a shift in the role of authorship from a God-like creator to a rearranger of pre-existing signs and meanings. Whatever the differences in approach of these theories, they all share the displacement of the author as creator from nothing, source, or origin of a text, in favor of the multivalent and playful activity of the reader. These theories had massive impacts in literary and cultural studies but also, significantly, in adaptation studies. Without discussing this at length, essentially intertextuality was a new paradigm that largely supplanted earlier emphases on fidelity, which still continue in popular understanding of adaptation, especially of film

² For a contemporary exploration of these and other facets of the music video form, see Gina Arnold, Daniel Cookney, Kirsty Fairclough, and Michael Goddard eds., "Introduction," *Music/Video: Histories, Aesthetics, Media* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1–14.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

adaptations of literature or theater. What the paradigm of intertextuality was able to offer adaptation studies was specifically an escape from the comparison of an adapted text with an origin or source text considered as a measuring device based on fidelity, which made little sense given that different media operate with drastically different types of signs from written language to the images and sounds of audiovisual media. This is equally the case when it comes to music video's relations with cinema, which cannot really be viewed as anything other than intertextual relations or traces rather than adaptations at all; for example, Madonna's music video for "Express Yourself" (dir. David Fincher, 1989) makes abundant references to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) through set design and visual style but at most this can be considered a stylistic inspiration rather than any kind of attempt to represent the full narrative or meanings of the original film. And this is more or less the norm for the ways music videos engage with both pre-existing films and cinematic genres.

For these reasons, terms other than intertextuality might be appropriate to discuss the relations between music videos and cinematic precursors. Intermediality, for example, despite disparate understandings of the term and related ones such as transmediality or transmediation, emphasizes more relations and commonalities between different media or "the interconnectedness of modern media of communication."⁴ Given that music videos and cinema are both audiovisual media that combine moving images and sound, it could seem like an ideal term to use. However, from the perspective of this chapter, intermediality will be reserved for the ways in which music videos allude to cinematic forms and systems of meaning such as genres, styles, or paracinematic material like trailers, whereas intertextuality will be used to consider textual traces and relations of specific films. Nevertheless, as the introduction to this volume indicates, such distinctions are never clear cut or precise. Finally, remediation is another proposition for thinking the relations between signs in different media forms. Based on McLuhan's idea that the content of any medium is another medium, Bolter and Grusin proposed that remediation takes place whenever there is a second-order incorporation of a medium that already contains another medium.⁵ While they were specifically interested in how this accounts for "new" meaning digital media, music video has always been a prime example of remediation that remediates both popular music recordings which already exist

⁴ Klaus Bruhn Jensen, "Intermediality," in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Klaus Bruhn Jensen, Robert T. Craig, Jefferson D. Pooley, and Eric W. Rothenbuhler (John Wiley & Sons, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect170>.

⁵ Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Boston: MIT Press, 1999).

as mediations, with moving images that might remediate any number of previous mediations whether cinematic, performative, choreographic, animated, and so on. In some senses, the art of the music video is always an art of remediation, of re-interpretation of a previous media text that often also calls up multiple other media texts in its combination of images with popular music. This chapter will explore several instances of these intertextual remediations in a selection of especially cinematic emo and pop punk music videos.

For example, in Yellowcard's "Ocean Avenue" (dir. Marc Webb, 2003) there is a clear recreation of the looped repeated narrative of *Run Lola Run* (dir. Tom Tykwer, 1998) as well as references to video games and there is an even more complex heist narrative in Hoobastank's "The Reason" (dir. Brett Simon 2003) that evokes films like *Ocean's Eleven* (Steven Soderbergh, 2001). In neither case is the narrative in any direct relation with the song lyrics; in fact, the two are at some points contradictory as a criminal visual narrative is juxtaposed with romantic relationship-based lyrics. The idea of a music video as a movie trailer is made literal in My Chemical Romance's "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" (dir. Marc Webb, 2004), which is presented as being the trailer for a teen movie about alienation and a revenge of the nerds with a high school setting. More specific intermedial connections can also be seen in Thirty Seconds to Mars' video for "The Kill" (dir. Jared Leto, 2005), which recreates the atmosphere and uses some direct elements from *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) in its portrayal of a rock band trapped in a strange hotel and undergoing psychic disintegration. This is only added to by the fact that the band features Jared Leto, the Hollywood actor, and one of the few examples of parallel success in both film and music industries.

This chapter will analyze these case studies of this intertextuality and intermediality between Emo music video and cinematic aesthetics and genres, arguing that music videos have played a key role in remediating youth popular culture between film and music industries and especially in presenting an outsider perspective that was paradoxically situated at the center of youth popular culture at the time.⁶ It will do this through an attention to and analysis of both visual and sonic elements of these music videos and how they reference cinematic aesthetics and genres. But first it is necessary to also define the term "emo," which will be done in the following section.

⁶ See Judith May Fathallah, *Emo: How Fans Defined a Subculture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2020).

What Is or Was Emo?

Emo is an especially unstable generic label, appearing in different popular music contexts at different times and referring to a range of musical styles that might at first listen appear to have little in common. This is complicated further by the fact that virtually no group to whom the label has been applied has accepted it, from Ian McKaye when it was applied to his 1980s post-Minor Threat group Embrace to My Chemical Romance's Gerard Way in the 2000s. To a certain extent, emo, like postpunk, is a retrospective construction, generalizing what at first was a fairly inconsistent labeling into a four-decade historical canon, propagated nowadays in list form by publications as elevated as *Rolling Stone* and *Vulture*, which a decade ago would have had no interest in the genre. Furthermore, despite widespread discussion of the genre or style in popular media, there is very little sustained academic work that has been conducted on it, although this situation is beginning to change at present. Fathallah's 2020 book is one of the few exceptions, but is tightly focused on the fandom around three of the more successful emo groups. While it does contain valuable insights such as the importance of fan activities on social media sites in defining and constructing emo as a genre, this focus limits how comprehensive it can be for a full understanding of emo not only as a subculture but a set of transmedia practices. Andy Greenwald's 2003 book *Nothing Feels Good*, despite being a more journalistic work written in the middle of the 2000s emo explosion, remains the most systematic account of emo, taking into account the perspectives of bands, record labels, social media sites and fans, considered as a loose but interconnected network of practices. The theoretical approach adopted here is that emo was initially a set of stylistic qualities of emotional expression and catharsis, associated with bands of different punk-related genres, that eventually attained sufficient visibility in the early 2000s to function like a genre. A historical film analogy to this might be Film Noir which similarly started as a set of stylistic features across different film genres, but eventually was recognized by producers, critics, and audiences as a genre.

Appearing first as "emocore" and applied to Washington, DC, post hardcore groups Rites of Spring and the already mentioned Embrace, the term was often used as an insult in the local hardcore scenes in which these groups appeared. Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, several other groups appeared that, like these precursors, combined a departure from hardcore musical styles with cathartic musical and lyrical expression; they included Annapolis, Maryland's Moss Icon, San Diego's Drive Like Jehu, or Oakland's Indian Summer. One line of

development from these kinds of groups that already combined guttural howls, cries, and screams with more regular vocals was the so-called “screamo” bands, which developed in parallel with the nineties tendency for hardcore and metal styles to be combined as metalcore, whereas they had previously been mostly separate, other than in a few exceptions like Suicidal Tendencies. Notable metalcore bands like Converge and especially Botch took emocore catharsis to new levels, whether in forms of melodic hardcore, like Grade or Reach the Sky, or alternatively, something closer to metalcore, as in the case of Neurosis. Screamo was something different to this, however, and as perfected by bands like Saetia or Orchid in the late 1990s involved complex time signatures and extreme contrasts between quiet melodic passages and cathartic screaming of impossible to distinguish lyrics, often with existential themes.

However, there was another tendency spearheaded by two highly influential early 90s west coast groups, Sunny Day Real Estate and Jawbreaker, both of which attracted the interest of major record labels in the wake of the popular explosion of grunge or punk adjacent groups like Nirvana, Green Day, and The Offspring. Sunny Day Real Estate was a Seattle band whose songs were characterized by complex structures with dramatic shifts in intensity and moments of sheer beauty that were miles away from the distorted rock and roll, punk and metal hybrids of their city’s now famous grunge music scene. Despite falling apart before completing their second album, which remained untitled, and having their rhythm section appropriated by Dave Grohl for the first Foo Fighters line-up, Sunny Day Real Estate was perhaps the most influential 90s emo group, even leading to it appearing on the goth vs. emo episode of *South Park* as the quintessential original emo group. Their first album *Diary* (1994) in particular, with its dramatic shifts in intensity, and heartfelt and bordering on mystical lyrics about angels and painful spiritual ascension would set up a kind of diagram for future emo groups like Mineral or the Applesseed Cast and countless others. Equally important, however, was the Bay Area group Jawbreaker, which, despite sounding at first listen more like a conventional punk band, was no less emotional or cathartic, albeit in a very different way. Fronted by Blake Schwarzenbach, whose highly intelligent and poetic lyrics were inspired by beat writers like Jack Kerouac, Jawbreaker was both incredibly tight and powerful and cultivated a cult following. Seen by some commentators as the “thinking person’s Green Day,” it was widely anticipated that should they successfully transition to a major label, they would be capable of just as much success. However, due to an entire complex of factors this is the exact opposite of

what happened, despite the now acclaimed brilliance of their major label debut, *Dear You*.⁷ Nevertheless, they provided the other more visceral punk rock pole to Sunny Day's spiritual ecstasies. As Andy Greenwald put it:

Sunny Day Real Estate was emo's head and Jawbreaker its busted gut—the two overlapped in the heart, then broke up before they made it big... The bands shared little else but fans, and yet the combination of the two lays down a fairly effective blueprint for everything that was labelled emo in the next decade. While Jawbreaker found poetry in the stumbling drunks down on the corner, Sunny Day had ecstatic visions of winged deities in the night sky.⁸

This dichotomy would inform many of the bands that became known in the late 1990s as Midwest emo, wherever they in fact came from: Braid, The Promise Ring, Cap'n Jazz, Rainer Maria, American Football, Christie Front Drive, as emo shifted from a local to a regional phenomenon to a national one. Regardless of whether people used the term emo, or the more generic “post hardcore,” or the more specific term “screamo,” over the course of the 1990s emo was proliferating like a virus, while slowly mutating to having more in common with the now massively popular pop punk than with local hardcore scenes, although in the early 2000s the most successful emo groups like Dashboard Confessional, Thursday, Taking Back Sunday, and even Fall Out Boy could trace their roots back to specific hardcore scenes in places like Florida, Chicago, New Jersey, and Long Island. But meanwhile something significant had changed in the ways in which the genre circulated, especially via newly emergent forms of social media.

Since the early 1980s, music television, especially MTV, had come to function as a primary media form for popular music to reach audiences, especially on a national or international scale. MTV was, however, closely tied to major record labels and similar to radio airplay; it was rare for risks to be taken with groups that were not already on a major label, which would tend to also come up with the sometimes lavish budgets for music videos. So while there was an initial more risk-taking stage in the 1980s during which a lot of British new wave bands were seen on MTV, by the 1990s this was more rare and music television more closely tied to pop music or classic rock. This changed considerably, however, with the explosion of grunge and especially Nirvana, followed closely by the wave of pop

⁷ On the failure of Jawbreaker's attempted transition to a major label see Dan Ozzi, *Sellout: The Major Label Feeding Frenzy That Swept Punk, Emo and Hardcore 1994–2007* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2022), 35–68.

⁸ Greenwald, *Nothing Feels Good*, 19.

punk bands that emerged in the wake of Green Day's success, which led to entire channels of MTV, and shows like TRL being devoted to the genre. Nevertheless, when it came to 1990s emo, it was still rare for bands to rise to high enough level of attention for there to even be a music video—key groups like Jawbreaker, Sunny Day Real Estate, The Get Up Kids, and The Promise Ring, for example, only making one video a piece and several groups never making any. However, there was another media phenomenon happening around the turn of the millennium, namely the incorporation of pop punk soundtracks and in some instances the bands themselves in Hollywood teen movies. The most successful example of this phenomenon being *American Pie* (dir. Paul Weitz, 1999) in which members of Blink-182 not only appeared but also spearheaded a pop punk soundtrack for the film. In turn, the teen movie genre would also inform the aesthetics of pop punk music videos, and this, as well as other connections via fashion and sports like snowboarding, skateboarding, and surfing, would create a kind of pop punk media convergence at the heart of US popular culture. More pop punk leaning emo groups would also benefit from this conjunction, most notably Jimmy Eat World whose originally self-produced album *Bleed American* gave rise to massively popular singles like “The Middle” that would in turn be incorporated in teen movies and television shows, with the band almost becoming the house band for *One Tree Hill* (2003–12), while other emo or emo adjacent bands appeared frequently on *The O.C.* (2003–7).

Nevertheless, this Hollywood proliferation would very rapidly seem outdated as a new generation of bands started using early social media sites like *LiveJournal* (1999–) and *MySpace* (2003–), which shifted rapidly from being a space for teenage diary entries and personalized online decorations to an essential “word of mouth” marketing tool that by the mid-2000s was considered absolutely essential for bands. While emo was hardly alone in using these social networks, it had a particular affinity for them, given the fact that its bands were essentially making public musical versions of diary entries, combining confessional lyrics with cathartic music, as can be seen in album titles such as *Diary* (Sunny Day Real Estate, 1994), *Dear You* (Jawbreaker, 1995), *Nothing Feels Good* (The Promise Ring, 1997), *Something to Write Home About* (The Get Up Kids, 1999), or *Do You Know Who You Are* (Texas is the Reason, 1996). However, it was the next generation of bands, like Taking Back Sunday, Thursday and Dashboard Confessional, who would really make use of these platforms, drastically reducing the time previously required to build up a reputation based on local, then regional then national touring over several

years, by which time most of the 1990s emo bands would probably already have broken up. Instead, in this brave new social media world, a band composed of members still often at high school could play a few basement shows and suddenly have a national reputation and fame often leading swiftly to major label record deals all within the course of a new month. While there were other factors involved (like the feeding frenzy of major labels looking for the next big thing from the underground after grunge and the pop punk explosions of the early 1990s),⁹ and other media (like the shifting music press, MTV specialist shows, and new national live pop punk and emo platforms such as the Vans Warped tour), social media played a key role not just in popularizing new bands but as an essential part of the ascendant music culture surrounding emo in the 2000s. In fact, Judith May Fathallah goes so far as to argue that it was social media facilitated fandom on platforms from MySpace and Tumblr to YouTube that essentially constructed emo as a consistent genre.¹⁰ By the time emo reached its highest point of popularity and visibility in the 2000s, it was already a transmedial phenomenon, and this informed the cinematic intertextuality and intermediality of the music videos that this chapter will now engage with.

Music Videos as Intermediality: The “I’m Not Okay” Music Video as Imagined Trailer

One way that music videos engage intertextually with cinema is via another media form—the cinematic trailer. In fact, music videos and trailers have a lot in common since both are intended as promotional material for their respective industries, are of relatively similar duration, and are often characterized by accelerated and nonlinear editing. The video for My Chemical Romance’s “I’m Not Okay (I Promise)” (dir. Marc Webb, 2005) is presented explicitly as a movie trailer, complete with extraneous dialogue at the beginning of the video (directly after an official looking censorship ratings card) which directly presents a kind of emo ethos, and is followed by a series of titles, taking the place of the ubiquitous movie trailer voice. The opening dialogue clearly sets the same as Ray Toro says to a school uniformed Gerard Way (see Figure 11.1):

⁹ See Ozzi, *Sellout*.

¹⁰ Fathallah, *Emo*.

You like D&D, Audrey Hepburn, Fangoria, Harry Houdini and croquet. You can't swim, you can't dance and you don't know karate. Face it, you're never gonna make it.¹¹

To which Way replies:

I don't wanna make it, I just wanna ...¹²

The implication is that the song that follows will be the explication of this unstated desire. However, both are misleading; while the song sounds at the beginning like a cheerful pop punk track about high school and the video looks like a typical teen movie of the kind prevalent at the time, like *American Pie* (Weitz, 1999), it soon becomes clear that it is about a group of dysfunctional non-conformist nerds who are plotting some kind of revenge against the jocks and authority figures that have been making their high school lives a living hell. Tom Bryant describes the video as “a satirical swipe at rights-of-passage high school movies.”¹³ The video then edits together a series of high school scenes with the band performing in their rehearsal space intercut with titles like “If you ever felt Alone ... If you ever felt rejected ... if you ever felt confused” and so forth. At first this is largely played for laughs as various nerd protagonists, including



Figure 11.1 My Chemical Romance, “I’m Not Okay (I Promise)” opening scene. [from music video: My Chemical Romance, “I’m Not Okay (I Promise)”]

¹¹ My Chemical Romance, “I’m Not Okay (I Promise),” directed by Marc Webb, 2005, music video, 0:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhZTNgAs4Fc>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 0:11.

¹³ Tom Bryant, *The True Lives of My Chemical Romance: The Definitive Biography* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 2014), 119.

the members of the band, are subjected to mild playground harassment or stand out as a sore thumb dressed entirely in black while all the other appropriately dressed teenagers dive into the swimming pool. However, darker scenarios are already suggested by the lyrics, for example, about breaking a foot by jumping from a second story window, while the video presents what seems to be a sexual assault in a bathroom. At this point a series of acts of rebellion on the part of the nerds are enacted from leaping out of a locker to scare a cheerleader, to filling a jock's locker with prescription pill boxes. These pranks escalate over the course of the video into an all-out attack on sporting events and mascots, as well as public urination by the croquet playing nerds, while the school announcement system is taken over to disrupt proceedings by playing the very track we are hearing. Almost all of these are tropes from high school movies, even if they are more aligned with and referencing Wes Anderson's *Rushmore* (1998) than the more conventional high school movies that were popular at the time. A telling example is the moment in the video when the music stops and Frank Iero is talking to a girl, a blonde cheerleader, and says "wait you've got something in your eye," but instead of leaning in for a kiss, he actually removes something from the girl's eye, thereby sarcastically parodying a highly familiar teen movie trope. These themes of outsiders, bullying, and revenge are reinforced by both the titles and the lyrics from the song which keep repeating "I'm not okay" both celebrating if not dysfunctionality itself then at least honesty about mental health in line with an early line in the song "If you wanted honesty that's all you had to say" (My Chemical Romance "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)").

What is most interesting in this parodic engagement with the teen high school movie and its tropes is the way the video remediates both the song itself and these films, via the intermediate form of the trailer, as a trailer for an attack on the norms of audiovisual content on channels like MTV and a statement of intent about the group which is also given multiple variations of its name in the end titles. In fact, a single off their following album *The Black Parade* (2006), "Teenagers," would raise the stakes of this revenge of the nerds by suggesting a far more lethal and less playful form of revenge, making deliberate references to high school shootings like Columbine. This is even more apparent in the accompanying music video directed by Marc Webb which makes direct intertextual references to *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (dir. Alan Parker, 1982). Unlike some of the other examples that will be discussed here, this music video is primarily based on intermediality and remediation rather than intertextuality with a specific cinematic text and does this via the intermediate format of

a paracinematic movie trailer for a non-existent film. This exemplifies the playfulness of the music video as a form as well as its capacities to engage with cinematic aesthetics in an intermedial way.

Yellowcard's "Ocean Avenue," and Hoobastank's "The Reason" as Heist Film Homages

As mentioned, several emo videos reference the crime film visually, even if the lyrics have little to do with this genre. In the examples discussed here this will be specifically the subgenre of the heist or caper film that differs from other crime films in some key respects. Firstly, heist films almost exclusively follow the activities of criminals rather than law enforcement attempts to stop the crime, and most importantly focus on the planning, execution, and aftermath of a single major crime, usually a robbery. This genre, while arguably existing since early cinema, reached its classic peak in the 1960s with films like *Ocean's 11* (dir. Lewis Milestone, 1960) or *The Italian Job* (dir. Peter Collinson, 1969), which not only detail complicated robberies involving multiple roles but also were star vehicles for the "rat pack" and British actors like Michael Caine respectively. While these films had gone out of style in the late twentieth century, they had a strong revival in the 1990s films of Quentin Tarantino and Guy Ritchie, as well as remakes of the abovementioned classics in 2001 (*Ocean's Eleven*, dir. Steven Soderbergh) and 2003 (*The Italian Job*, dir. F. Gary Grey). In both periods these films used a combination of high-profile stars, high-tech gadgetry, and a mixture of drama and comedy to romanticize and glamorize crime, in a harsh distinction to the moral punishment of criminals in other crime subgenres like the gangster or detective film. These qualities are precisely what made the genre so amenable for re-invention in emo music videos, since its qualities of aestheticizing and romanticizing crime fit well with emo music's own cultivation of a romantic outsider mode of subjectivity.

In Yellowcard's "Ocean Avenue" music video (dir. Marc Webb, 2003), the protagonist, played by the vocalist Ryan Key, goes through a looped sequence of actions, beginning with waking up on a sidewalk covered in broken glass (see Figure 11.2), then running through a variety of obstacles, including a homeless man, a group of nuns and culminating in an encounter with a Ford Mustang that consecutively speeds off into the distance, runs him over, and in the last interaction offers him a ride. This is intercut with the band playing the song in



Figure 11.2 Yellowcard, “Ocean Avenue,” the beginning of the loop.
[from music video: Yellowcard, “Ocean Avenue”]

a parking garage. After two iterations and corresponding with the bridge in the song, a back story is provided, in which a mysterious woman makes off with a briefcase with a lamb image on the outside, and then the protagonist starts being chased by the gang that have already been seen chasing him in the first two iterations of the loop. This leads to the final iteration, in which the protagonist joins the woman in the car and they speed off together. There is little connection between this sequence of actions and the song lyrics that are a nostalgic evocation of teenage romance in Florida (“we were both 18 and it felt so right”) and the desire to return to it. While there is a rough suture in the ending of the video with the man and woman speeding off together with whatever was in the briefcase, this is a completely different narrative to the one presented by the song lyrics.

While this video could be seen as a mere incorporation of a video game logic, the repetition of a sequence of moves with increasing skill, in order to progress to the next level, the director Marc Webb was explicitly inspired by *Run Lola Run* (dir. Tom Tykwer, 1998), which not only operates by repetitions of a looped narrative but also combines a romantic and a quasi-heist film narrative. *Run Lola Run* is not fully a heist film, as it does not involve the collective planning and execution of a major crime but rather the efforts of single character, Lola, to recover 100,000 Deutschmarks lost by her boyfriend Manni as part of undisclosed criminal activity. Nevertheless, given that she has to complete a

series of actions to obtain the money within a period of twenty minutes, in order to save her boyfriend's life, it operates as a kind of mini-heist repeated three times. The "Ocean Avenue" music video takes both this looped structure and its heist setting as the basic components of the music video narrative. So, it is a clear example of cinematic intertextuality not only with a genre and mode of storytelling but a specific film. Regardless of whether the viewer gets the intertextual reference, or just experiences the music video as video game-like, its circular nonlinearity creates an engaging experience, mirroring the structure of the song if not its lyrics, and furthermore constructs a narrative temporality that mirrors the nostalgia of the song's iconic lyrics desire to return to a simpler and more innocent time: "We could leave this town and run forever."¹⁴

In a similar but much more generic vein, the music video for Hoobastank's "The Reason" (dir. Brett Simon, 2003) begins with a classic misdirect. A young woman, seeing someone she knows on the other side of a street, steps out in traffic and is run down by a black van, her lifeless body soon surrounded by a crowd of onlookers, including the owner of a pawn shop across the street (see Figure 11.3). All this takes place with the amplified sound of the traffic incident before any music starts. Once again there is repetition once the music starts and we see that this incident was staged precisely in order to distract



Figure 11.3 Hoobastank, "The Reason," circling above the "crime" scene. [from music video: Hoobastank, "The Reason"]

¹⁴ Yellowcard, "Ocean Avenue," directed by Marc Webb, 2003, music video, 0:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9fLbfzCqWw>.

the owner of the pawn shop while an elaborate heist is enacted, seemingly involving all members of the group and a few accomplices. Some of these enter the shop from the front and from the back and uncover a safe hidden behind a poster and start working on it with safe cracking tools, supported by a flashback showing a planning session involving an overhead projector. Meanwhile, the woman who had collapsed on the street gets up and goes to join her accomplices, as the ones inside the pawn shop are shown, with heist film style flashbacks to their planning session, finding and stealing a huge and presumably valuable ruby before they all reunite in the building where we had previously seen the band performing the song, accompanied by the sound of sirens. Essentially the video is a whole heist movie that is detailed and precise and is a kind of homage to films like *Ocean's Eleven*, albeit in a much grungier and less glamorous environment. This video scenario even had a sequel in the video for another song by the same group, "Same Direction" (dir. Brett Simon, 2004), which provides both a prequel to the heist in which the singer from the group is revealed to be an undercover police officer and also shows its law enforcement consequences.

In this case there is an even bigger disconnect between the song lyrics and the visual narrative, since the song is about being inspired by a lover to become a better person, continuing learning, not wanting to hurt "you" again, starting over anew.¹⁵ While initially it seems like the singer could be addressing the song to the seemingly dead victim of the traffic incident, this is all revealed to be misdirection and part of the heist. So, there does not seem to be any will to change bad behavior but rather to get away with the crime and everyone including the singer and the girl are clearly in on it (although in the second video it is revealed that the singer is an undercover cop and was intending to entrap his band members from the beginning). What is striking in this video is how, through a precise use of video editing, an extremely complex narrative is elaborated, without any support from the lyrical content of the song. The music video effectively mixes and combines different time periods, shows repeated actions from different character perspectives, and reveals sudden realizations on

¹⁵ There were emo associated groups who did adopt aspects of the cinematic crime genre in their music such as Alkaline Trio, whose song "Private Eye," for example, relates the disintegration of a romantic relationship with the investigation of a crime scene. The music video, however, only shows a live performance of the band. Senses Fail do something similar in "Buried a Lie," the lyrics of which involve the protagonist's girlfriend dying and the singer being falsely accused of her murder, which he then investigates by digging up her corpse to prove his innocence. Both the song and the music video are very cliché and less worthy of analysis than the other examples discussed here.

the part of different characters. For example, we first see a rapidly edited version of the accident in which a young woman steps out on the road and is presumably hit by a car as the music starts, shifting from rapid cuts, to birds flying overhead to a circling overhead shot of the woman's body on the road and a crowd of onlookers, including the man we later realize is the owner of the pawn shop. However, around the time of the first chorus we see exactly the same event very differently, starting with close shots of the feet of the woman, who sees the same figure across the street as the first time but is clearly deliberately stepping out into the street, precisely in order to get the pawn shop owner to leave the shop so the heist can take place. This logic of misdirection is very much typical of the heist film but to achieve this through images alone in four minutes is very impressive.

“Take a Little Time Off, Relax, Get Lost”: Thirty
Seconds to Mars “The Kill (Bury Me)” and *The Shining*
(dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1980)

Finally, we come to the incorporation of horror film aesthetics in emo music video and specifically in Thirty Seconds to Mars video for “The Kill (Bury Me)” (2006).¹⁶ This has an especially dense intertextuality, since the band features the Hollywood and independent actor Jared Leto and his brother Shannon, who are both in the band, and Jared Leto also directed the video. A prologue shows the band arriving at a deserted hotel, which is apparently all theirs for a few days, although later titles indicate they have been there much longer. Several scenes are direct homages to *The Shining*, including phantom twin girls, a doppelganger spectral bartender, and a typewriter on which is written the same phrase over and over “this is who I really am”¹⁷ rather than “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” from Kubrick's film. In this case there is much more confluence between the video and the song, since the song lyrics are very much about confrontation with the self and more specifically the dark side of the self, which is what all the band members go through in different ways during their stay in

¹⁶ This music video will also be discussed in the subsequent chapter by Adam Cybulski and Konrad Klejsa, with more attention to the Kubrick references rather than the context of emo music video used here.

¹⁷ Thirty Seconds to Mars, “The Kill (Bury Me),” directed by Jared Leto, 2006, music video, 2:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yvGCAvOAFM>.

the hotel. In a sense, all of these experiences can be summed up in the song's lyrics:

Come, break me down
 Bury me, bury me
 I am finished with you ...
 I know now, this is who I really am¹⁸

The Shining serves as a perfect framework for this self-confrontation, whether through recreating specific scenes from the film or via new ones but this is not the only cinematic aspect of the video; it also has highly aestheticized widescreen cinematography, the use of split screen, apparently inspired by Jared Leto's work on *Requiem for a Dream* (dir. Darren Aronofsky, 2000), and the extensive use of non-musical elements, such as dialogue, sound effects and titles, as well as the elaborate prologue lasting over a minute in which Leto invites his fellow band members to "take a little time off, relax, get lost."¹⁹ There are also other breaks in which the music stops, and in one case we think we are hearing an ominous extradiegetic drum beat that turns out to be a ball being thrown repeatedly at a wall in the hotel. Leto also encounters his own double (see Figure 11.4), who, again following *The Shining* style, is dressed in a 1920s-style white tuxedo,



Figure 11.4 Thirty Seconds to Mars, "The Kill (Bury Me)," Jared Leto confronts his double.

[from music video: Thirty Seconds to Mars, "The Kill (Bury Me)"]

¹⁸ Ibid., 1:50.

¹⁹ Ibid., 0:25.

the same clothing that Leto and the rest of the band are seen performing in the deserted hotel ballroom. In this case a cinematic model allows for an intense exploration between the song's lyrics and sonic intensity and the visual imagery of a confrontation with the self that both directly references *The Shining* and fits very well with the emo aesthetic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear from looking at these four cinematic emo music videos that the latter engage with cinematic genres, aesthetics, and specific films in complex ways, in order to extend the power of music videos to generate fictional worlds in relation to the music they are supporting. This involves both intertextuality with specific films or genres, and intermedial references to cinematic formats and conventions. These references may or may not have a direct relation to the lyrical content of the songs, but in all cases relate to something of the ambience within the songs and common themes like mental health and the confrontation with the darker side of the self. Of course, such cinematic intertextuality is by no means limited to emo music videos but in the case of emo takes on a particular intensity. In terms of the concepts of intertextuality, intermediality, and remediation, these relations operate differently but in overlapping ways across the different examples this chapter discusses. In "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" there was less direct intertextuality with any specific film, than with the entire genre of high school romantic or coming of age comedies, which the video, and the song, set out to subvert from an outsider perspective. In doing so the music video raises issues such as bullying and teenage mental health, as it switches gears from broad comedy to revenge. But above all, the music video operates in relation to the paracinematic form of the trailer, and hence follows a logic of intermediality and remediation, more than intertextuality, as the trailer form is used for the form of the music video, and a way of tying together its otherwise fragmented elements. In contrast, "The Kill (Bury Me)" and "Ocean Avenue" refer intertextually to specific films, recreating the thematic elements and atmosphere of *The Shining* in the first instance, and focusing more on the narrative form of the loop of *Run Lola Run* in the second example. This is far from any attempt at fidelity to these cinematic texts, however, but rather their remediation into the very different form of the music video, through visual economy and a playful use of the films as audiovisual inspirations

and resources. Finally, “The Reason” does not refer to any specific heist film, although its use of archaic technologies like an overhead projector seems to point more toward the classic heist film, than its more recent updating, even if it is far from the glamor of either version of *Ocean’s Eleven*. But this is not only a case of intertextuality but again remediation, as the various narrative moves of the heist film are reconstructed in four minutes solely through the use of images and especially non-chronological editing, showing the same events from different points of view. All of these videos demonstrate aesthetic sophistication in the ways they engage with both the music they are accompanying and their cinematic references, and in some cases exhibit authorial tendencies that have also extended in the case of Marc Webb into a feature film career as a director, notably of *(500) Days of Summer* (2009), a nonlinear anti-romcom that is filled with the kinds of independent music Webb directed music videos for. By examining the dynamics of these 2000s emo music videos, it is evident just how powerful and productive the intertextual intersections between cinema and music video can be, which is by no means limited to this musical genre.

Associated YouTube Playlist:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJT_IMCv7Tkif21nvWyY3b5CxHeTStPVO.

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