Context in Music Videos: Extreme Contextualization in Contemporary Rhetoric

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Abstract

Drawing on analyses of music video discourse, this paper argues that communicators can so completely legitimate their respective discursive contexts that they become almost exclusively linked to the limited cultural and social assumptions behind those contexts, and therefore become unable to evolve and adapt when discursive contexts change. This project coins the term *extreme contextualization* to explain this process. Legitimating the taken for granted assumptions of a particular discursive context and failing at self-critique and reinvention emerge as the primary ways discourse becomes extremely contextualized. This paper also seeks to prescribe ways that rhetors can avoid extreme contextualization. Self-critique and an effective use of rhetorical history are keys to avoiding extreme contextualization.

Extreme contextualization is developed by applying principles based in Bitzer's conception of rhetorical exigencies. The methodology for a close textual reading that examines extreme contextualization involves examining the relationship between discourse and its culture, sources, and influence as outlined by McGee. By developing the theoretical contours to extreme contextualization, this paper argues that extreme contextualization is more broadly applicable to rhetorical theory and the critique of popular culture in general.

What happens when karma turns right around and bites you?
And everything you stood for turns on you despite you?
                                        "When I'm Gone" by Eminem

Express yourself in the face of change...repress yourself you surely seal your fate.
                                        "Stand" by Poison

TWENTY YEARS GONE

1992 was a watershed year in the union of popular music, music videos, and politics. 1992 was the year that MTV (Music Television) got involved in political coverage by covering the presidential election as extensively as any news organization (albeit with a decidedly 'hip' twist). Vice-President elect Al Gore went so far as to publicly thank MTV for the Clinton/Gore victory in 1992 (Georges, 1993, May, pp. 30-35). The 1992 presidential campaign was also marked by the controversy surrounding then Vice-President Dan Quayle's comments over the portrayal of a single mother on the television show *Murphy Brown* (Benoit & Anderson, 1996, pp. 73-85). It should come as no surprise that MTV would be a significant player in shaping political discourse in an election where a controversy over gender made headlines. MTV has always relied on stories about love, sex, and various couplings that fall somewhere between the two to sell its videos and its advertisers' products (Whiteley, 1997, pp. 259-276). In short, MTV relies on symbolizing gender for its lifeblood. The controversy over gender during the 1992 presidential election only allowed MTV to deal explicitly and politically with themes and topics that have always been at the center of its videos and other programming.

The popularity of the network, along with its apparent influence on its audience, made music videos an interesting form for popular and academic critics almost from the beginning. Scholarship on music videos have taken a variety of forms, been pursued by diverse disciplines, and focused on a variety of topics. Scholars in communication, musicology, anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines have probed everything from music video's effects to political

economy to audience interpretation and everything in between (Beebe, Saunders, & Fulbrook, 2002).

These scholars, regardless of whether or not they are pursuing the same interests or agree on the ultimate political functions of music video images tend to believe the point of analysis has primarily to do with what music videos "say" as texts and/or how audiences might "interpret" them (Banks, 1996). As such, much scholarship on music videos has ultimately built its arguments on the persuasiveness of its own interpretation of whether the images, lyrics, and other codes seem "liberating" or "oppressive." Still other scholars have added what seems, on the surface, to be a more scientific attempt to locate and interpret how audiences use music videos and what meanings they "take" from videos (Brown & Shulze, 1990, pp. 88-102). Most significant styles of music videos have had at least some critical attention paid to them.

But what scholars have not necessarily paid attention to are the ways in which particular styles and performers often respond to and react against the style that came before. For example, Walser offers a comprehensive critique of the sociological implications of glam rock (a primarily male, rock-oriented genre of music and videos popularized in the 80s). Much of Walser's critique focuses on portrayals of gender and aggression that perform potentially hegemonic functions (1993, pp. 153-181). What Walser doesn't take into account to the extent that he could is how glam rock was itself a specific reaction against politically conscious music of the 70s and thus reacted to a particular discursive environment while itself coming to symbolize another discursive environment. Walser also doesn't examine how subsequent discourse responded to glam rock.

These are important considerations to take into account because they can situate glam rock more concretely. As most music video critics tend to do, Walser details possible consequences of

the portrayals of gender in music videos. And he offers a nice link between glam rock and certain political and social norms of the 80s. What is missing, though, is an understanding of how glam rock's cultural and social context was itself informed by discourse that came before glam rock and how the cultural and social context that emerged after glam rock was itself informed by glam rock. This same broad strategy of analysis has been applied to women's rock in the 90s (Shugart, Waggoner, & Hallstein, 2001, pp.194-210), rap music (Forman, 2000, pp. 65-90), and overly sexualized female pop artists (Rushkoff, 2001).

When music video scholarship does pay attention to the factors that gave rise to a particular style of music, it tends to do so by examining culture or politics as if those things were discrete, material entities, rather than examining culture or politics in terms of how they were themselves informed by discursive practices and historical antecedents. For example, critics might note that glam rock reinforced a conservative political climate in the 80s by promoting or symbolizing traditional patriarchal structures or capitalist excess. What critics don't pay as much attention to, though, is how prior discourse shaped and transmitted the "glam rock" context. Musical forms such as feminist music of the 70s and punk rock of the 70s often (and probably unintentionally) gave a public, tangible face to a hopelessness or fatalism that made the status quo, rather than progress, seem much easier or plausible (Bennett, 2001). The music that came before glam rock left a hole to be exploited. For glam rock to be successful there had to be something imperfect with the discourse that came before it. It had to rise to prominence for some particular rhetorical reason.

Bitzer, in outlining his conception of the rhetorical situation, would term this "imperfection" a rhetorical exigence (1968, pp. 1-16). A rhetorical exigence exists when some problem or situation comes along that can be modified in some way by discourse. Glam rock responded to

various exigencies, just as other forms that came after glam rock met whatever exigencies ultimately came about in and through glam rock. According to traditional conceptions of rhetoric, if glam rock solved the exigencies created in the 70s and early 80s, then it performed a rhetorical task. But in performing this rhetorical function, glam rock itself contributed to the rise of another set of contextual and extra-textual factors that call for something else. Glam rock contributed to exigencies.

These new exigencies were met by women's rock in the mid 90s. Analysis of women's rock, whether employing the vocabulary of rhetorical criticism or not, has praised this genre for correcting the gender portrayals found in glam rock (Kearney, 1998, pp. 148-188). But in doing so women's rock then contributed to yet another set of contextual and extra-textual factors that it was then unable to respond to with credibility. Specifically, these exigencies were met by the over-sexualized "midriff" female performers and the abrasive, violent male "mook" rap and rage rock artists. Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein argue that women's rock icon Alanis Morissette made the political movement of third wave feminism look corrupt or too narrowly sexual to the mainstream public (2001, pp. 194-210). But their analysis stops just short of satisfactorily examining the ways in which Morissette played a role in constituting a broader rhetorical context beyond third wave feminism.

TOWARD A THEORY OF EXTREME CONTEXTUALIZATION

The overriding argument of this paper is that certain popular music video styles have so perfectly legitimated their respective discursive contexts that they become almost totally and exclusively linked to the limited cultural and social assumptions behind those contexts. This paper uses the term "*extreme contextualization*" to explain this process. Extreme contextualization suggests that some music video discourse is indeed nearly perfect in

symbolizing the assumptions of particular contextual, textual, or extra-textual situations (political, social, or artistic) but in responding so perfectly to this context, the discourse becomes inextricably linked to the limited values or ideals of that context. When contextual and extra-textual factors change (often, in part, because of the limited scope of the extremely contextualized discourse) and new exigencies are created, the extremely contextualized discourse is unable to adapt.

A historical analysis of music videos suggests that extreme contextualization occurs when four criteria are met. Music video artists become extremely contextualized when they:

- Offer a contextually appropriate or legitimating response to their discursive context

- Fail to adequately critique themselves, their genre, or their discursive context

- Fail to successfully reinvent themselves

- When their discourse is challenged, modified, or corrected by a subsequent discourse

This project also argues that music video artists can also avoid extreme contextualization through some combination and variation of the following broad categories of strategies:

- Successful self-critique and/or successful critique of one's genre

- Challenging the conventions and assumptions of a discursive context while that context is ongoing

- Articulating opposing ideas during a discursive context

- Successful critique of rhetorical history or developing a useful relationship with rhetorical history

The model of extreme contextualization is useful in several ways. Extreme contextualization aids in understanding the link between the portrayals of gender and other social themes in various styles in a particular form of discourse, a key recurrent interest in rhetorical and communication scholarship. Extreme contextualization also aids in understanding the reasons a

style of discourse ultimately gives way to new styles that contain new portrayals of various

social themes. Such an understanding provides a tool for scholars to examine the relationships

between styles of discourse. Since the outcome of extreme contextualization is that a style of

music usually loses relevance, extreme contextualization also helps account for the inability of

musical styles to sustain popularity for prolonged periods of time. This understanding is useful

because it helps explains the ever-changing, unstable nature of music videos (and possibly

popular culture in general) in theoretical terms rather than as merely commercial or accidental in

nature.

Developing an argument for music videos as extremely contextualized requires an analysis

that goes beyond textual analysis. It is also necessary to go beyond a simple statement of the

exigencies a particular style responds to. It is necessary to account for the discursive

characteristics of those exigencies. McGee provides an approach that is helpful in dealing with

the kinds of issues necessary to develop a theory of extreme contextualization in music video

discourse. McGee points to the importance of examining three structural relationships when

considering a text: The relationship between discourse and its sources, between discourse and

culture, and between discourse and its influence (1990, pp. 274-289). Analyzing the relationship

between discourse and its sources provides insight into the inventional strategies employed by

music video artists. This begins to move us toward an understanding of how generic conventions

of any particular musical style structure an artist's rhetorical options. Analyzing the relationship

between discourse and culture is helpful in considering how music videos are constrained by

certain contextual factors, while also being afforded certain opportunities that are bound up in

other contextual factors. This moves us toward an understanding of how music videos react to

the assumptions of their discursive environments in ways that suggest extreme contextualization.

Finally, analyzing the relationship between discourse and its influence is helpful, on the most practical level, because it reminds us that all discourse invites its own critique. Inviting its own critique is one of the key ways extremely contextualized discourse begins to back itself into what can best be described as a rhetorical corner. Music video discourse, because of the constraints imposed by generic sources and discursive contexts, is often limited and rigid in how it treats various social, political, and artistic themes. For example, if glam rock conventions hadn't mandated that Poison objectify and exclude women then Morissette would have had no significant rhetorical work to do. The relationship between discourse and its influence as applied in this project is primarily concerned with the effect of discourse on subsequent discourse. This is helpful in considering how extremely contextualized discourse aids in developing the very contextual and extra-textual exigencies that lead to its displacement and contributes to the rise of contradictory discourse and new discursive contexts.

The theory of extreme contextualization is potentially applicable to rhetorical theory in general and to other styles and genres of discourse. The model of extreme contextualization has the potential to shed light on why and how some messages and styles of communication survive and others do not. An understanding of extreme contextualization can also help rhetors avoid various pitfalls and remain relevant in changing discursive contexts.

A METHOD FOR INVESTIGATING EXTREME CONTEXTUALIZATION

The theoretical approaches that influence this study suggests the need to develop a methodological approach that examines rhetoric as contextual and exigencies as discursive phenomena. McGee's three structural relationships, the relationship between discourse and its sources, discourse and its culture, and discourse and its influence (1990, pp. 274-289), combined with close textual reading provide a useful methodological structure for this project.

The first step in examining whether discourse is extremely contextualized is to present and adequately describe the textual and extra-textual characteristics that give rise to a particular style of music video discourse. This is necessary not only to begin to qualify and look ahead to the exigencies likely to spring out of each kind of discourse, but also to understand the relationship between textual and contextual factors. The next step involves funneling down to a more specific description of the artist being studied as an adequate and often culminating example of the genre or persona being studied. This is accomplished through an analysis of what McGee calls the relationship between discourse and its sources. This provides an understanding of how each artist's work is influenced and structured by its genre's broader stylistic conventions and the responses to the exigencies behind the development of those conventions.

Next, the case being studied can be linked to its cultural, political, and discursive climate in order to examine whether the band or artist legitimated its discursive context by giving a nearly perfect voice to certain contextual factors. This analysis utilizes McGee's conception of the relationship between discourse and its culture. In the case of most of the bands and artists studied in this project, this portion of the analysis will begin to show how such perfect and legitimating responses cause the discourse to invite its own critique and to begin to create certain rhetorical exigencies. It is at this point that we generally begin to see extreme contextualization take form.

By then moving to McGee's third structural relationship, the relationship between discourse and its influence, we can see how particular rhetors tends to "cause" or "suggest" certain kinds of reactions against themselves in a way that influences subsequent discourse. Based on the themes that drive this study's concept of extreme contextualization, the most important "influence" these artists tend to have is to contribute significantly to the construction of textual and extra-textual factors that critique, and ultimately displace them.

This paper also seeks to demonstrate how extreme contextualization can be avoided. The same kinds of questions are asked in investigating the potential for avoiding extreme contextualiation, and the same basic order of narrative and critical method is utilized, but with an eye toward understanding how rhetors tied to particular textual and extra-textual characteristics can evolve and continue to have cultural relevance and influence.

Studies of the relationship between social themes and discourse have traditionally understood the need to think about depictions of various social themes as formal and rhetorical "arguments," as representations of particular cultural or social movements, and as lenses through which to understand the evolution (cultural, social, and political) of the social themes being studied. The methodological approach proposed here privileges the textuality of discourse, while also focusing on the textual nature of culture, society, politics, and common cultural bodies of knowledge.

The theory of extreme contextualization as summarized here emerges from a larger study of several influential music video artists spanning nearly twenty years of the form's history. The author of this paper is also the author of the larger study from which this paper is culled. This paper does not provide the proper forum to address the findings of each particular case study in depth. However, a brief summary of extreme contextualization as it applies to several relevant music artists may provide a bit of detail. The music video artists discussed briefly include: the glam rock band Poison, women's rock icon Alanis Morissette, pop icon Britney Spears, rap artist Eminem, glam rock band Bon Jovi, and the new wave band No Doubt (and their lead singer Gwen Stefani.)

Poison: Dirty Talkers and Fallen Angels

This paper argues that Poison's early success was caused by their ability to utilize the

conventions and tropes of glam rock antecedent sources that had come before them as a way of responding to the discursive context of the middle and late 80s. Poison's discursive context is termed the *masculine discursive context*; a term for a discursive and political context that privileged solutions to economic and political problems grounded in traditionally masculine ways of reasoning. The band's early success was clearly linked to their ability to utilize the conventions of glam rock to nearly perfectly symbolize and legitimate the masculine discursive context. By so perfectly symbolizing and legitimating their discursive context, Poison developed a relationship of unity and complicity with their cultural environment rather than one of contestability. Poison's relationship to their sources, genre, and culture created and contributed to rhetorical and social exigencies that political critics and subsequent discourse sought to modify or correct. Poison's influence was ultimately to inspire contradictory social and artistic discourse that in turn contributed to the dissolution of glam rock and the masculine discursive context. Through this process Poison met all four requirements of extreme contextualization and that extreme contextualization explains the band's inability to evolve or remain credible in a new discursive context.

Alanis Morissette: Jagged Little Supposed Former Feminist

The case of Morissette demonstrates that the process of extreme contextualization is more widely applicable and generalizable and not just an accident or coincidence by demonstrating how Morissette also fell victim to the process of extreme contextualization. Like Poison, Morissette gained popularity by employing her rhetorical sources and the conventions of her genre in a way that symbolized and legitimated the discursive context that emerged in the early and middle 90s as a reaction to the exigencies in the masculine discursive context. Morissette's context is termed the *inter-intrapersonal discursive context*; a term for a discursive context more

focused on community and introspection than the masculine discursive context.

Like Poison, Morissette's relationship to her sources and cultural context is one of legitimatizing and not contestability. Like Poison, Morissette's use of her genre's conventions and her relationship to her discursive and social environment created and contributed to exigencies that subsequent social and popular discourse sought to modify or correct. Morissette's influence was ultimately to inspire contradictory discourse that in turn contributed to the dissolution of the women's rock movement of the 90s and the inter-intrapersonal discursive context. Like Poison, Morissette fell victim to extreme contextualization and her significantly decreased popularity in the new millennium can be explained by the concept of extreme contextualization.

The cases of Morissette and Poison are not identical, though. The case of Morissette demonstrates that extreme contextualization is not a linear process, that extreme contextualization is effected by the stability of a discursive context, and that the severity of extreme contextualization can vary. Morissette also fulfilled the four criteria of extreme contextualization in a different order than Poison. She inspired contradictory discourse earlier and attempted to engage in self-critique and reinvention after already beginning to inspire contradictory discourse. The differences between Poison and Morissette indicate that the process of extreme contextualization is not necessarily linear. Rhetors do not necessarily fulfill all four requirements in any specific sequence.

The inter-intrapersonal discursive context was also less stable and more concerned with overturning, rather than upholding hegemonic structures. These differences between Poison's discursive context and Morissette's discursive context indicate that the process of extreme contextualization is also affected by the stability of a particular discursive context and the

contextual nature of hegemony in any particular discursive environment.

The contradictory discourse that Morissette inspired, particularly with respect to representations of women, at least maintained some of Morissette's rhetorical strategies, albeit with significantly different inflections. Her discourse and the values of the inter-intrapersonal discursive context were not challenged or modified as severely as Poison and the masculine discursive context had been. This difference between Poison and Morissette indicates that the severity of extreme contextualization can vary and is linked to how strenuously a rhetor's discursive context is challenged or modified. Because Morissette's extreme contextualization was not as severe, she enjoyed a very brief resurgence in the discursive context that followed the inter-intrapersonal discursive context.

Eminem & Britney Spears: The Motor City Motor Mouth Meets the Midriff Mousketeer

Rap artist Eminem and pop icon Britney Spears both gained popularity in the discursive context that emerged from the exigencies in the inter-intrapersonal discursive context. Spears' and Eminem's context is termed the *millennial discursive context* here. Eminem seems more likely to avoid extreme contextualization because he consistently engages in variations on strategies for possibly avoiding extreme contextualization provisionally suggested by Morissette's lone foray outside extreme contextualization. For Eminem these strategies include challenging some assumptions of his discursive context, engaging in successful self-critique, critique his rhetorical sources as a means to articulate oppositional ideas, and critiques of his own rhetorical history. Through his rhetorical modifications Eminem seems to be avoiding extreme contextualization.

Spears, meanwhile, simply legitimates her discursive context in nearly every way instead of challenging its values in any significant ways. She also demonstrates no ability to critique her

persona, rhetorical sources or rhetorical history. Finally, she demonstrates no ability to reinvent herself in spite of pressing contextual and discursive needs to do so. Her failure to engage in the same types of rhetorical strategies as Eminem has caused her to meet most of the requirements of extreme contextualization.

Bon Jovi & No Doubt: Unplugging the Tragic Kingdom

This paper extends the hypothesis that Eminem seems to avoiding extreme contextualization by discussing two groups that have clearly done so: The glam rock band Bon Jovi and the band No Doubt's, which was fronted by women's rock artist Gwen Stefani. Both groups managed to avoided extreme contextualization and successfully reinvent themselves in discursive contexts other than the ones they originally worked within.

Bon Jovi's work in the masculine discursive context avoided extreme contextualization by effectively utilizing (rather than accepting) the constraints of their genre, by contributing to the downfall of their genre and formative discursive context, and by anticipating and contributing to a subsequent discursive context. The band's relationship to their sources, culture, and influences was completely different than Poison's and this accounts for Bon Jovi's ability to avoid extreme contextualization. In using these strategies Bon Jovi was able to challenge assumptions of their discursive context, articulate oppositional ideas, engage in a critique of their genre, and establish a relationship with their rhetorical history that would serve them well after the masculine discursive context had passed.

Bon Jovi's work in the inter-intrapersonal and discursive contexts demonstrates that the band successfully reinvented themselves by refocusing their work to reflect the problems of a new context, by displaying sensitivity to the type of rhetoric required during periods of discursive shift and flux, and by employing their rhetorical history in a positive rather than burdensome

manner. Bon Jovi's successful use of their own rhetorical history was possible because the band had avoided extreme contextualization during the masculine discursive context. Successful reinvention is, in many ways the final test for whether a rhetor has avoided extreme contextualization and Bon Jovi's successful reinvention accounts for their sustained relevance and popularity during different discursive contexts.

No Doubt and Stefani managed to avoid extreme contextualization in ways that are similar to Bon Jovi but also unique. No Doubt avoided extreme contextualization by emphasizing historical, rather than overly contextual, treatments of the themes in their work and by strategically avoiding many of the rhetorical exigencies inherent in women's rock and third wave feminism. No Doubt's historical rather than overly contextual strategy allowed the band to distance themselves from the inter-intrapersonal discursive context in which they began, to articulate oppositional ideas, and to not be seen as a clear representative of that discursive context and its assumptions and when it was displaced by the millennial discursive context. No Doubt's ability to avoid the rhetorical exigencies in their genre and formative discursive context was also important in allowing the band to avoid extreme contextualization because they were not as clearly tied to the various elements of their genre, sources, and context that were challenged during the rise of the millennial discursive context. This enabled them to ultimately develop a relationship to their rhetorical history that worked to their advantage.

No Doubt and Stefani's work in the millennial discursive context demonstrates how Stefani successfully reinvented herself after avoiding extreme contextualization. Stefani then reinvented herself successfully in the millennial discursive environment by refashioning herself as more serious-minded artist, by becoming a more strident contextual and discursive critic, and by recovering an allegiance to many of her women's rock sources. Stefani's reinvention in the

millennial discursive context is unique because she was, at times, intensely different from other female performers working in that era. But her reinvention was ultimately successful. The case of Stefani demonstrates that successful reinvention clearly defines a reinvented persona, utilizes rhetorical sources effectively, and justifies reinvention. Because Stefani clearly defined the parameters of her reinvented ethos and because she was able to utilize her history with her rhetorical sources to demonstrate the need for a critique of gender roles in the millennial discursive context she was able to reinvent herself in a way that separated her from the pack of women artists working in the millennial discursive context.

FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Again, the preceding summaries of case studies are not meant as comprehensive descriptions. Rather, they are meant to serve as an overview to further demonstrate broad theoretical concepts related to extreme contextualization. Extreme contextualization accounts for the tendency of popular music artists to lose relevance and popularity rather quickly. The instability of popular music (and most likely popular culture in general) is a result of the principles outlined in the theory of extreme contextualization.

This project emphasizes that extreme contextualization is avoidable if rhetors make appropriate choices. Extreme contextualization occurs when artists legitimate their discursive context, fail to engage in sufficient critiques of themselves or their rhetorical sources and histories, fail to engage in successful reinvention, and give way to subsequent discourse that critiques their work and their discursive contexts. Extreme contextualization is avoidable when rhetors engage in successful self-critique and/or critique of their genre, challenge the conventions of their discursive context while it is ongoing, develop a less burdensome relationship with their rhetorical history, and articulate opposing ideas during a discursive context.

Because the concept of extreme contextualization relies in part on an examination of what is wrong or socially inappropriate with a particular style of discourse in any particular context, Bitzer's concept of rhetorical exigency is central to this study. Bitzer anticipates this study's focus when he outlines the concept of rhetorical exigency as a way of examining how discourse comes into being as a response to what he terms *imperfections* in prior discourse (1968, pp. 1-16). According to Bitzer, imperfections and defects are constitutive elements of an exigence. However, Bitzer seems to assume that these exigencies that are made up of imperfections and defects are more objective or pre-existing in nature.

Vatz (1973, pp. 154-157) and Biesecker (1989, pp. 110-130) help frame the concepts of exigence and imperfection in this more constructivist manner. Specifically, Bieskecker develops the argument that the meaning of a rhetorical text is brought about by its relation to an exigence that is operative *at some particular historical moment*. In other words, the exigencies and imperfections that may exist in discourse are only necessarily exigencies and imperfections in specific contexts. This is a helpful clarification of exigency and imperfection for this study because that which is inappropriate, defective, or imperfect in one particular context is not necessarily so in another context. Indeed the process of extreme contextualization relies on Bieskecker's conception of exigence because extreme contextualization is founded upon the process by which that which is an appropriate (indeed, often "perfected") response in one context becomes imperfect in another context. Further, these imperfections create an exigence because they can be, and are, modified by subsequent discourse. This particular conception of the process of modification is at the heart of this paper.

The concept of rhetorical exigency has also been necessary to this study because it provides a framework to perform a critical task that is not often found in the study of music videos and

popular culture but that has motivated this study: The analysis of when, why, and how discourse becomes <u>unpopular</u>. This study has proceeded from the assumption that a study of the process of popular disintegration is necessary to explain the ways in which forms of popular music video discourse owe their cultural relevance in particular moments to the ability to respond to what became "unpopular" before them. If discourse comes into being because it addresses some imperfection, then it is necessary to examine those imperfections as well. These imperfections are located by examining the discourse that produced them

Because the concept of extreme contextualization relies on an examination of the link between discourse and particular historical, social, or political environments, the project is concerned with what might broadly be termed *context*. Sloop and Olson have outlined how "culture" is best thought of as a context or a location that the critic uses to describe the logic of a society (1999, pp. 248-265). This concept of culture has allowed this project to see the strategies of specific artists as enactments of the "logics" of any given moment. Further, as these pieces of discourse began to create and suggest imperfections and exigencies, the concept of culture as context allows us to see how those exigencies will create and suggest a new logic..

What the concepts of exigency and context remind us of is the importance of evolution, modification, and correction for rhetors. The concept of exigency assumes that some problem must be modified in an affirmative fashion (Birzer, 1968, pp. 1-16). The problem must be fixed. It must be *corrected* because there was something wrong in the first place. The work of Poison, for example, was arguably perfect (or at least intensely appropriate) in its legitimating response to the discursive environment of the 80s. But the band's work was imperfect and inappropriate in its response to the discursive environment of the 90s. Morissette *corrected* these imperfections in a new context through modifications that specifically targeted the elements of Poison's music

that had become imperfect and incorrect in the 90s. She corrected the problems of Poison as they exist in relation to a particular discursive environment.

Musicologists have discussed the link between what this project terms correction and context as a social construct. Attali argues that music influences and suggests social change by probing the unarticulated values of a culture and placing them within familiar forms (1985.) This not only helps account for the practical reality that all of the artists studied here, however different, are essentially "pop" artists, but it also demonstrates how cultural contexts evolve in a corrective fashion: By the slow infusion of new ideas into cultural consciousness through familiar and established forms (in the case of this paper: Pop songs and music videos). Morissette did not simply spring forth from dust. In essence, her work was simply the assembly of seeds that were challenging the glam rock worldview for at least five years before she came along. Attali's description of this process fits with this project's focus on correction and evolution because it details how norms and values of particular contexts come to be challenged and altered.

As Beebe notes, musicologists would likely use the term *discord* to account for how Morissette's work is musically, textually, and politically antithetical to Poison's while still working in the same general and basic format (1991, pp. 18-34). However, that conception focuses on difference without an adequate emphasis on how those differences work to modify and correct the contextual problems of prior discourse. *Discord* describes objectively what is happening. *Correction* describes the result of the process.

Popular music in the music video era, however, is about numerous factors other than music. Indeed, many have argued persuasively that popular music in the music video era is *least* about music and more about visual or lyrical content. As such, musicology is inadequate to fully explain the genre. We must turn to discussions that link context and visual and thematic

storytelling. While not dealing specifically with music videos, Rushing explains a process similar to this project's conceptualization of evolution and correction very well in her discussion of the representation of the American cowboy archetype in U.S. film (1983, pp. 14-32). She demonstrates how the "cowboy" has been portrayed differently at different times as some sort of response to varying and shifting contextual elements. The "cowboy" character is what it needs to be in any particular discursive environment, and it often needs to change because it is no longer appropriate and correct *in a new discursive environment*.

Rushing's work provides a model for performing a task that is central to this project: Accounting for the ways in which culture, context, and discourse all work together to suggest meaning. This is distinct from the critical theory tendency to assume that meaning is more or less imposed <u>upon</u> culture and context in either oppressive or emancipatory forms (Craig, 2001, pp. 125-137). While a critical approach is influential on this project it also leave less room for examining how meaning or interpretive possibilities might evolve as a result of a more complex, hybrid relationship between different forms of discourse.

BEYOND MUSIC VIDEOS

This paper has sought to offer a broad theoretical approach to important music video artists and texts of the past twenty years. By taking an approach that eschews the tendency to treat various artists and musical styles in general isolation, by applying the rhetorical method of close textual reading, and by applying the basic theoretical principles behind the concepts of rhetorical exigency and context, this project has found that music videos as a form are highly susceptible to the phenomenon coined here as *extreme contextualization*. This phenomenon is a rhetorical phenomenon because it comes about through a complex interrelationship of rhetorical principles such as audience, context, and representations.

Extreme contextualization happens when discourse pays too much attention to its context and becomes linked to, and representative of, its discursive context by overly legitimating that context. When popular critics casually note that some piece of popular culture is a perfect representation of its particular era, they are, in essence, articulating the thesis of this project. When a cultural artifact is discussed in terms of its discursive context rather than as an artistic or commercial form of it own merit, it is extremely contextualized.

This paper uses popular music and music videos to develop the concept of extreme contextualization. But extreme contextualization may indeed have broader applications and future research could examine how the theory applies to other popular culture discourse and to other discourse in general. To make this move beyond music videos and begin thinking about the ways in which extreme contextualization can be thought of as a more general rhetorical phenomenon, we must acknowledge that popular discourse is the dominant form of contemporary discourse. Music videos have been heavily influential on other forms of popular culture and popular culture has been influential on other forms of discourse. Political discourse is mediated through television channels, magazines, internet sites, and even music video networks. Interpersonal and relational communication are being absorbed into a more general popular culture model through the use of blogs, dating websites, reality television shows, and online communities. This project privileges popular communication as the dominant form of communication in contemporary culture and it privileges methods of popular culture criticism as the keys to formulating a more detailed articulation of extreme contextualization.

The simplest way to avoid becoming extremely contextualized is to not be too perfect or too legitimating in a response to a particular situation. Rhetors must be aware of both what is taken for granted in a cultural moment and what is excluded. Rhetors must also work to engage in

successful self-critique, which is a complex endeavor that requires, among other things, an ability to critique one's own rhetorical history and one's own sources. Rhetors must also pay close attention to the practical problems of a particular rhetorical situation but must not become tied to the context. They should attend to the problems of a discursive context and not the context itself. In short, this project argues that good rhetoric challenges its discursive context. Bitzer argues that a situation calls for a response. As this project demonstrates, the response should address the problems that constitute the context without necessarily absorbing the limited assumptions of the context. By following this model the discourse will by nature be adequately situational and contextual but it will not necessarily proceed from a mandate to legitimate the limited, subject to change assumptions of a discursive environment.

Rhetors who work to avoid extreme contextualization will not be linked to a context, but instead will be linked to messages or ideals, and will then be able to respond to their own critiques and will stand a better chance of evolving and adapting when contextual factors change. This project offers the first attempt at codifying and explaining the process known as extreme contextualization for the purpose of understanding, forecasting, and avoiding it. The theory of extreme contextualization offers an opportunity to enrich the critical agenda of those who are interested in the union between discourse and culture and to enrich the more critical aims of rhetorical theory and communication theory.

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