

More than Music Videos: Rammstein and the Art of Reference

Introduction

A famous 1979 song carries the title “Video Killed the Radio Star.” Before music videos, fans were lucky to watch a pre-recorded concert on television if they were unable to attend a concert themselves. Then music videos came along, placing musicians onscreen outside of a concert setting, dancing, acting, playing their instruments. There was a certain cinematic value to early music videos, novel to audiences in the late 1970s as moving pictures were to audiences in the early 1900s. At the beginning of the 21st century, many contemporary music videos feature nothing more than the band playing, much like a concert, or a sequence of scenes telling a story that usually does not relate to the lyrics’ actual meaning. These videos can be catchy or interesting, but they are rarely anything more than sources of face-value entertainment. Rammstein, an avant-garde German industrial rock band, creates music videos that are not only appealing to the rock-lover’s ear or art-lover’s eye, but are also intellectually stimulating performance art.

This study explores the literary, historical and socio-political references that can be observed in four of Rammstein’s music videos, “Sonne,” “Mutter,” “Amerika” and “Seemann.” These videos are much richer than their contemporary counterparts, with allusions to globalization, Freudian psychology and fairytales. This study delves into those allusions and lends insight into the methods Rammstein uses to further its agenda. This close-reading is important because, while the advent of the music video has certainly changed the way music is digested by audiences, music videos are rarely studied outside of psychological implications, such as with the Columbine school shooting and similar events.¹ These Rammstein music videos are more than a vehicle to showcase the band’s music with artistic flair. They are the gathering

point of various influences, both from the members creating the band's music and the directors developing videos around that music.

Rammstein

Rammstein, based in both Berlin and Schwerin, was formed in 1994.² The musicians who make up the band are singer Till Lindemann, guitarists Richard Kruspe and Paul Landers, drummer Christoph Schneider, bassist Oliver Riedel and keyboardist Flake Lorenz.³ The band's name translates literally to "battering ram" and also suggests a reference to the American military base Rammstein in Germany. The band was not named specifically after the base, but rather after an accident that happened there in 1988. According to journalist Wolfgang Spahr, Rammstein is "named for a 1988 tragedy in which 80 people were killed when an aircraft crashed during an air show. According to Lindemann, 'Rammstein is the place where hope crashed to the ground.'"⁴ Perhaps this name is especially fitting, as the band's members hail from the former East Germany, which fell because of its people's unrest after 40 years of near-imprisonment by an unfair system—only to expose those people to post-reunification conditions of economic inferiority that Germany is unable to shake, even well into the 2000s.

Unlike many European bands, the majority of Rammstein's songs are in German, rather than English. This did not prove a language barrier in countries like Spain, France and the United States, where Rammstein is particularly popular. According to German popular music scholar Ulrich Adelt, "Rammstein's all-German repertoire became their bonus in America. People did not have to understand what Rammstein actually sang in their songs to perceive their provocative content."⁵ Rammstein's first album, *Herzeleid*, was followed by the album *Sehnsucht*, which went platinum in the United States.⁶ The band also gained international renown after two of its songs were featured in the 1997 movie, *Lost Highway*, directed by David Lynch⁷. Another

reason Rammstein may have gained popularity overseas—and mention in studies discussing the relationship between music and youth violence such as that at Columbine—is the negative qualities many foreign audiences associate with Germans. According to Adelt, “Rammstein were successful overseas because they perpetuate stereotypes of Germans as being technically versatile, cold-blooded, and aggressive. However, the ironic implications of these bands, largely discernible in their lyrics, could only be appreciated only by their German-speaking fans.”⁸ Indeed, some of Rammstein’s songs deal with topics like cannibalism, arson, psychological abuse and war. A deeper reading into the lyrics, however, shows them not as aggressive and cold-blooded, but highly analytical and critical of modern society and ideas of conformity.

Rammstein’s work has been controversial because of questions about the band’s political agenda. An article in the International Herald Tribune stated:

In the early 1990s, when Rammstein burst onto the scene, resurgent nationalism had given rise to an efflorescence of politically strident "Fascho-rock." Rammstein's innovation was to look and sound very much like Fascho-rock while denying any political opinions at all.⁹

Although Rammstein’s publicist kept saying the band’s lyrics “contain no political content whatsoever,” critics continue to denounce the band as perpetuating and promoting National Socialist ideas to their fans.¹⁰ It seems only German-speakers and scholars have the pleasure of sharing knowledge of Rammstein’s real agenda. According to Adelt:

Their employment of Leni Riefenstahl material and their posing as Aryans were quite ironic but many cultural critics did not see it that way. For their 2001 release Mutter (“Mother”), Rammstein felt obliged to include a song entitled [stet] “Links 2 3 4” (“Left

2 3 4”) to hint at their ‘real’ agenda while at the same time maintaining their ambiguity (the song title is a march chant).¹¹

Rammstein’s left-wing agenda seems to be especially active in critiquing racism, religious adherence, cultural imperialism and capitalism. They use their work to spur change, as evinced in an interview by the International Herald Tribune with guitarist Landers:

“At first, yes, we thought it was our duty to provoke Germany,” he said, “to get Germany going in a certain direction. That was at first. But then we realized, it doesn't work that way. It takes time. What we can do is set a certain example. We can show the way. Blaze a trail.” That trail, he explained, was toward healthy self-esteem. “Before, it was Deutschland über alles - Germany above everything,” he said. “And now Germany is below everything. Rock bottom. Our problem is that we actually think Germany is pretty good. But almost nobody thinks that. Everybody's very embarrassed to be German.”¹²

This suggests that Rammstein’s accessibility and subsequent popularity is another tool the band uses to further their agenda. Rammstein’s accessibility seems to come from its simple lyrics and artistic aplomb. Aside from beautifully rendered music videos and thought-provoking album covers, the band uses intense pyrotechnic displays during concerts to enhance the music’s provocative content.

But provocative content is something many readers expect from this industrial rock band because of the genre. According to a definition by Ed Klein, author of the Stanford University database of industrial and gothic music, industrial rock is music having “some kind of industrial connection or influence, but are too ‘rock’ to fit into the Industrial category, and not beat-

oriented enough to fit into the Industrial Dance category. Also includes what a lot of people call 'industrial metal.'"¹³ *Guitar Player* magazine writer Matt Blackett wrote that Rammstein's musical influences are techno, pop, industrial and classical.¹⁴ This broad variety of musical influences converge on the television screen with artistic renderings of space, color, texture and time, sometimes outrageous costuming, and fantastic settings.¹⁵ Rammstein's videos should be considered performance art, because they are consciously choreographed to merge critical renditions of culturally-loaded texts with visual symbolism. To truly appreciate Rammstein's finely tuned music videos as performance art, viewers must explore the connections not only in the lyrics one hears, but also in the imagery projected onscreen.

Sonne

The music video for "Sonne," created in 2001 by director Jörn Heitmann, puts a spin on the traditional German fairytale, *Schneewitchen*, or Snow White.¹⁶ It is clear this fairy tale is being referenced, as the Snow White character in the video is dressed like Snow White in the 1937 Disney animation (Figure 1 and 2).

Figure 1 and 2—Clip of Snow White in "Sonne"; Snow White as depicted in the 1937 Disney animation of "Snow White."



This character is also shown as being much larger than the men in the video, suggesting they are the seven dwarves. The choice to utilize a fairy tale for the music video could come from the utilitarian function fairy tales are made for: to educate an audience while entertaining it. Fairy tales are also signifiers of a shared cultural identity, which paves the way for multiple meanings when used as Heitmann has chosen. The fairy tale Heitmann chose for “Sonne” is about a girl of the same name who grows in beauty and is cast from her royal home by a jealous stepmother. Left for dead in the woods, she finds the seven dwarves’ home and they allow her to live with them. She gladly agrees to keep house for the dwarves in exchange for her stay there. Because she is so good-natured and obedient, Snow White evades death multiple times and ends up with her prince charming.¹⁷ As this reading shows, the Rammstein video diverges from the original content quite a bit.

The video begins with footage of blackened men mining for gold (Figure 3).

Figure 3—Dwarves mining



In the next scene, they are seated at a long table, eating. Only then does the viewer realize these men are dwarves, as a colossal Snow White enters the room, captivating the men. In *Schneewittchen*, Snow White is dutiful and gladly helps the dwarves with housework:

Die Zwerge sprachen: 'Willst du unsern Haushalt versehen, kochen, betten, waschen, nähen und stricken, und willst du alles ordentlich und reinlich halten, so kannst du bei uns bleiben, und es soll dir an nichts fehlen.' 'Ja,' sagte Schneewittchen, 'von Herzen gern!' und blieb bei ihnen.¹⁸

Rather than cooking for the dwarves or cleaning up after them, the Rammstein Snow White grants the dwarves the pleasure of looking at her, being spanked by her and living with her, all in return for her drug of choice, the gold they mine. Even though these acts bring pleasure to the dwarves, it is a shared pleasure because Snow White is a narcissist. According to one definition, narcissism is "Excessive self-love, together with a lack of empathy for others."¹⁹ Not only does she fit that definition perfectly, but the idea of narcissism links back to *Schneewittchen*, as Snow White is the "die Schönste im ganzen Land."²⁰ Through Rammstein, that idea takes on a whole new meaning.

This hyper-sexualized, drugged-up Snow White defies every aspect of the woman's role as laid out in the original fairy tale: good-natured, innocent and hard-working. The Rammstein Snow White is neither demure and hard-working nor innocent. In the second scene, a dwarf offers Snow White a chunk of gold, which she gladly accepts before punching the dwarf and launching him onto the table, disrupting the half-eaten dinner (Figure 4).

Figure 4—Snow White hitting a dwarf



The abuse does not seem to disturb the dwarves, who are addicted to Snow White and gladly offer her gold in return for her abuses, even if they know her drug addiction is harmful. The gold could signify a plethora of things, from drugs like cocaine and heroin to capitalism. Whatever the gold is meant to be, the dwarves and Snow White's relationship is one of joint addiction, feeding each other's vices. For example, a later scene shows Snow White spanking a dwarf while the others wait in line. The next in line waits, looking longingly at Snow White as the other dwarves behind him cower in fear or cover their eyes (Figure 5). When Snow White turns a lascivious gaze on him, he looks away, embarrassed, but drops his pants and waits for his turn to come (Figure 6).

Figure 5 and 6—Dwarf waiting in line; Snow White smiling as she gives a dwarf his spanking



Snow White knows her abuses bring pleasure to the dwarves, as evidenced here with a sexual tension reminiscent of sado-masochism at work in a dominatrix parlor, and the dwarves, though eager in their pursuit of the pleasure, are awed by Snow White's terrifying authority. This is quite different from the relationship in the original version of *Schneewittchen*, in which Snow White works and cares for the dwarves in return for them allowing her to stay with them; they share a familial relationship, free of sexual tension and abuses. The Rammstein Snow White holds a godlike authority over the dwarves, evinced in the video with a scene of the dwarves embracing her (Figure 7). Not only does she give the dwarves "rewards" for offering sacrifices of gold to her, but she is a drug that keeps them from leaving her or throwing her out.

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Figure 7—The dwarves embracing a haloed Snow White.



The window light shining behind Snow White's head in Figure 7 looks like a halo. This sacred aura makes her a direct representation of the sun through the filter of the lyrics: "Die Sonne scheint mir aus den Händen / kann verbrennen, kann euch blenden."²¹ Not only does the sun give light and nourishment, but it can also hurt. Much like the sun or a vengeful deity, the Rammstein Snow White holds the worshipping dwarves in her gravitational pull. The dwarves have made her into an icon they worship.

The dwarves in *Schneewittchen* are very concerned about Snow White after the Queen comes and tries to kill her: “Als die Zwerge hörten, was geschehen war, sprachen sie: ‘Die alte Krämerfrau war niemand als die gottlose Königin. Hüte dich und laß keinen Menschen herein, wenn wir nicht bei dir sind!’”²² The dwarves in Rammstein’s “Sonne,” have no authority over their Snow White. Instead of protecting her from the gold drug she snorts and injects herself with, they supply her with it (Figure 8 and 9).

Figure 8 and 9—A dwarf presenting freshly mined gold to Snow White; Snow White snorting gold like cocaine



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The dwarves’ facial expressions in the video show they know that what Snow White is doing is wrong. They look nervously on as she accepts the gold each time, and they fail to look more than a little surprised after she overdoses in the bathtub, even though they are complicit—she would not have overdosed had they ceased to provide her with gold (Figure 10 and 11).

Figure 10 and 11—Dwarves discovering Snow White overdosed in the bathtub; Snow White, overdosed



The combination of the dwarves' worry and Snow White's abusiveness is like a theatrical representation of an abusive relationship in which one member beats the other, and the abused member stays in the relationship because he or she is too afraid to leave. There is evidence supporting this idea at the end of the video, when the dwarves take Snow White up a mountain in her glass casket.

As the dwarves sit around the casket, they look peaceful and contemplative (Figure 12).

Figure 12—Dwarves sitting around Snow White's casket



They are sad at her death, but they also look relieved, as if a weight has been lifted from their shoulders. Perhaps they sit around the casket not because they are mourning her loss, but because they don't know what to do without her in their lives. What else will they do if they don't have Snow White to mine gold for anymore? They are free to do what they will and, much like people who have been enslaved their entire lives, they are not sure they want to move away because they have not known any other way of life. In fact, this sentiment of slavery can be drawn to parallel American race relations, as the dwarves are painted with soot to look like early 20th century actors in blackface (Figure 13 and 14).

Figure 13 and 14—A dwarf climbing out of the mine; An example of blackface: Bert Williams, member of the Ziegfeld Follies group from 1910



This racializes the dwarves because they are “black” when they work. The Caucasian Snow White sits at home and does drugs while they work, much as plantation mistresses spent their days at meaningless tasks while their black slaves toiled away. The dwarves spend their lives mining gold they don’t receive any payment for, except for the occasional beating and sexual teasing. Everything the dwarves do directly benefits Snow White in some way, just as slave labor primarily benefits the owner, and the dwarves are left to find illicit, perhaps dangerous, pleasure in their circumstances. As well as mining drugs for Snow White, the dwarves polish her apples—a tie back to the poisoned apple in *Schneewittchen*—comb her hair and hold the mirror for her (Figure 15).

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Figure 15—Dwarves waiting on Snow White



The most caring action Snow White uses to repay the dwarves' hard work is by letting them touch or look at her, which reinforces connotations of forbidden sexual pleasure, perhaps much like the forbidden pleasures white slave masters took with helpless female slaves in the antebellum American South. The idea of slavery in "Sonne" not only relates to the past, but also back to the Rammstein Snow White's apparel—a reference to the Walt Disney Corporation's past and modern day scandals. For example, Disney has been using sweatshop workers in Asia and India to create its merchandise.²³ Many older Disney films also incorporate racist content, such as the 1946 "Song of the South," 1935 "Peter Pan" and 1941 "Dumbo."²⁴

"Sonne" is chock-full of literary references¹—not just to the original *Schneewittchen* and Disney's *Snow White*, but also to news stories about Disney's sweatshop practices, sexual power theory and literature about the antebellum South and early 20th century racism. Heitmann was able to combine all of these ideas within the video and assign them directly to Rammstein's lyrics by giving simple associative details in the video—an outfit here, an action there.

¹ Literary references can come from a variety of sources: fiction, non-fiction, letters, folklore, diaries, drama and even medical writings.

Seemann

Another music video teeming with literary references is “Seemann.” Directed by László Kadar² in 1995, this video dabbles in Greek mythology via a representation of Charon, ferryman of the dead.²⁵ Beginning with a montage of shots of a woman in black, the video rolls into scenes of the band members, dressed in ragged outfits appearing to be from a primitive era and wearing their hair in tufts atop their partially shaven heads, surrounding and standing on a beached boat. The boat is, however, not as beached as it looks. Rather than filming the scenes on the water, Kadar had the sand surrounding the boat raked so it gives the impression of waves (Figure 16). This highlights the artificiality of the video and reminds the reader that she is not viewing reality.

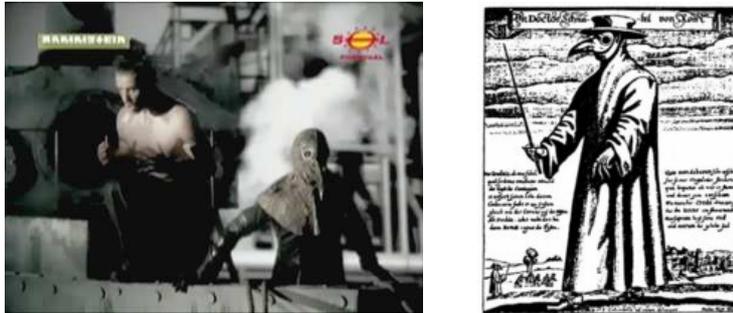
Figure 16—Boat surrounded by sand waves.



Singer Lindemann stands at the head of the boat, imploring someone to “Komm in mein Boot.”²⁶ The figure he stands next to in some shots, wearing a mask and birdlike beak, is modeled on one medieval and Renaissance example of death personified (Figure 17). In theatrical performances especially, death’s character would be portrayed in a costume similar to that of the figure next to Lindemann in the video (Figure 18).

² Kadar has also been the cinematographer for “The Doe Boy” (2001), “Rivalen des Glücks” (1993) and “Land der Vater, Land der Söhne” (1988).

Figure 17 and 18—Lindemann on the boat with death personified; The engraving, “Doctor Schnabel von Rom” by Peter Fürst, 1656



This Renaissance character reinforces the reference to a Greek mythological character with ties to death, as classical literature and mythology reentered the spotlight during the Renaissance.

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The boat and death personified create a reference to Charon, the ferryman of the dead in Greek mythology.²⁷ Another reference that reinforces the notion of Lindemann’s character being Charon is when Lindemann pounds his fist on the ground and boat (Figure 19).

Figure 19—Lindemann pounding his fist



In Greek mythology, Hades is the god of the underworld. According to mythologist Micha F. Lindemans, “...when they prayed to him, they would bang their hands on the ground.” It seems fitting that Charon would pray to Hades since Charon works for him.

According to mythologist Lindemans, Charon ferries the dead across the river Acheron to Hades but, “he only accepts the dead which are buried or burned with the proper rites, and if they pay him an obolus (coin) for their passage. For that reason a corpse had always an obolus¹ placed under the tongue.”²⁸ Looking at the woman in black who wanders around for the duration of the video in relation to this definition, it becomes apparent that the woman may be a dead soul that either has no obolus or no desire to cross the river (Figure 20). Shots of this woman are often juxtaposed with shots of a woman in white who is shown either wearing a veil or surrounded by candles (Figure 21).

Figure 20 and 21—the woman in black; the woman in white.



If Lindemann is to be taken for Charon, then the woman in black can be interpreted as the lost soul of the woman in white, who is surrounded by candles because she has died. For whatever reason, she can not or will not get into Charon’s boat to cross the river with him.

The absence of an actual river in this video may suggest a loss of religion. For example, the lyrics at one point say, “der beste Seemann / war doch ich.”²⁹ Combining “war,” or “was” in English, with this idea, it is possible to conclude that a loss of the ancient religions means Charon has fewer clients—fewer people to remember to give the dead an obolus and fewer people to remember him after they have died. Since there is no river, he can not take the dead

anywhere, anyway. In several shots, the other band members attempt to pull the boat with ropes since they can not tread water. It is clear they strain and the boat goes nowhere—the boat is beached in a river of sand by non-belief. Perhaps there is no water in the river because there is no belief in Charon and Hades for it to flow with. The idea of lost religion could connote changing times, either pertaining to religion or other aspects of life, or reflect the current decline of religious belief in German society.³⁰ Toward the beginning of the video, Lindemann sings, “Wo willst du hin?”³¹ The woman wanders farther and farther from the boat until, finally, Lindemann drops from the boat with his arms held as if he were being crucified (Figure 22).

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Figure 22—Lindemann as if being crucified



This posture suggests the crucifixion of Christ, which is the most important event in the Christian calendar. Shortly after this, Lindemann and the boat are shown on fire, suggesting a descent into hell (Figure 23 and 24).

Figure 23 and 24—Lindemann on fire; the boat on fire



The Greek underworld was not associated with fire as the Christian hell is. Since there is no fire in the video until the end, after Lindemann has failed to coax the woman onto his boat and the crucifixion appears, this strengthens the claim that a switch in religiosity is being referenced—both of the ancient and modern strain.

Mutter

Another Jörn Heitmann video, “Mutter” (2002) carries strong references to Sigmund Freud’s ideas of psychology—specifically “The Interpretation of Dreams.”³² In the beginning of the video, a bald, bare-chested Lindemann sings from a cage-like enclosure. The high angles from which Lindemann is shown make it seem like this is a subterranean enclosure. He is confined, as he never leaves, and is always shown in what the viewer presumes to be the same spot. He is covered in blood and the external-diagetic sound of baby voices fades into the song as Lindemann begins to sing (Figure 25).

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Figure 25—In the cage



The baby voices, blood and bald head allude to Lindemann's character as representing a newborn baby. At the end of the second shot, the character stops singing and begins to open his mouth wide and make faces like babies make when they are first born (Figure 26).

Figure 26—Making baby faces



This infantilization of the character suggests he represents a newborn baby or the id of the second—and only other—character in the video. Shots of the baby singing are juxtaposed with those of a man with long hair singing. This suggests the baby and man are the same person, but at different stages.

The video has strong connotations of birth, as the man gets into a boat and travels via water. Because of the way the shots are composed, it appears the man travels to the baby's cage

to give him some water. There are many shots leading up to his arrival at the cage that suggest a regression through birth or the bringing forth of repressed feelings relating to birth. For example, the man travels at night in a boat that has a single light in it. The initial establishing shot of the boat on the water shows a tiny light in the distance, which can be interpreted as the light at the end of the birth canal (Figure 27). As the boat progresses, a pathway appears on the water, guiding the man toward the light source (Figure 28).

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Figure 27 and 28—Light at the end of the birth canal; approaching the light path



A final water travel scene shows the boat entering the light, as if birth is taking place (Figure 29).

Yet in order for the man to be “born,” he must pass through water (Figure 30).

Figure 29 and 30—Entering the light; in the water



According to Freud,

In dreams, as in mythology, the delivery of a child from the uterine waters is commonly represented, by way of distortion, as the entry of the child into water; among many other instances, the births of Adonis, Osiris, Moses, and Bacchus are well-known illustrations of this.³³

While this validates the theory that shots with the man traveling by water towards a light are representative of birth, the water seems to entrap the man instead of freeing him like birth should. This entrapment references the underground cage from which the baby is unable to escape.

The water shots are juxtaposed with shots of the baby sitting and standing in the cage, looking bored and hopeful. This juxtaposition suggests the baby is waiting for the man to return, perhaps to rescue him from the cage. On the subject of rescue, Freud wrote, “Dreams of ‘rescue’ are connected with parturition dreams. To rescue, especially to rescue from the water is, when dreamed by a woman, equivalent to giving birth.”³⁴ Although it is impossible to say this video is supposed to be a dream, especially one by a woman, the idea of rescue being linked to birth is uncanny in this instance. The idea of the baby being the same person as the man is further supported by the fact that the light outside the baby’s cage grows lighter as the boat’s journey progresses, and finally is brightest once the man is in the water (Figure 31).

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Figure 31—Brightest light outside the cage.



This brightening not only enhances the idea of a deeper connection between the two characters, but it also suggests a brighter future for the baby. Once the man docks his boat, there is a shot of him standing above the cage that cuts to a shot of the baby reaching up to take a bowl of water that is balanced on the cage bars. This shot cuts to one of him drinking the water (Figure 32).

Figure 32—Drinking the water



In some way, the man's arrival nourishes the baby and quenches his thirst. According to psychiatrist W. Weygandt, "The manner in which a dream represents the act of quenching the thirst is manifold...A universal phenomenon noticeable here is the fact that the representation of quenching the thirst is immediately followed by the disappointment in the inefficacy of the imagined refreshment."³⁵ Moving forward from this theory, it is possible the man has some

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desire that needs to be fulfilled, and judging from the birth imagery and baby, that desire relates to the youngest stages of childhood. This is further enforced by the lyrics, in which Lindemann sings, “und wünsch mir, dass ich eine Mutter hätte / Keine Sonne die mir scheint / keine Brust hat Milch geweint.”³⁶ These lyrics suggest a sense of abandonment and unfulfilled needs. The baby has not received the nourishment it needed from a maternal figure, and the man has internal baggage as a result, perhaps that he revisits in his dreams or psychically.

It is apparent the baby receives nourishment from the water and man’s visit, as he falls asleep soon after it is presumed the man leaves (Figure 33).

Figure 33—Baby asleep



He falls asleep in fetal position, which further represents a link to birth and childhood. The man, however, does not appear to have had any desires fulfilled, as he leaves the same way he came and looks no happier as he steps from the boat, mirroring the footsteps he took to make his journey. Another line from the lyrics reinforces the idea that the man’s mother has hurt and neglected him, leaving him stunted and unhappy: “Der Mutter die mich nie geboren / hab ich heute Nacht geschworen / ich werd ihr eine Krankheit schenken / und sie danach im Fluss versenken.”³⁷ This video shows the effects of a less-than-desirable mother-son relationship through the lens of a dream or movie sequence, as evinced by the video’s letterbox format.

Amerika

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“Amerika,” directed by Jörn Heitmann in 2004, differs most from “Mutter,” “Seemann” and “Sonne.”³⁸ Rather than hearkening directly to a specific literary or historical source, “Amerika” critiques capitalism and cultural imperialism through the lens of contemporary media. The video begins with shots of the band members posing as astronauts on a surface like the moon (Figure 34).

Figure 34—Men on the moon



This is also one of the rare Rammstein music videos in which the band members are shown playing their instruments. This frames the video like an American-style music video, which generally has much footage of the band playing interspersed with other action. The first line of song, set in these shots, is, “We’re all living in Amerika / Amerika ist wunderbar.”³⁹ That enforces the notion that the astronauts are supposed to be Americans, especially since Americans were the first to land on the moon. Since the American astronauts are playing their instruments on the moon, this is to be taken as an “American” music video. Shots of the astronauts are juxtaposed with a montage of shots of groups of people watching the band on television sets. These groups of people are indigenous to various parts of the world, specifically Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Arctic (Figures 35-37).

Figure 35-37—Africans; Inuit; Asians



This makes it seem like people everywhere are watching America and paying attention to what the country does, produces and thinks. In the earlier montages, these people appear fascinated with what they see on television, as well as with other parts of American culture (Figures 38-43).

Figure 38-43: Pizza; hamburgers; Nike shoes; cigarettes; pop culture (e.g. James Dean), Santa Claus in the American-style costume.



This message is furthered by the fact that the people are all watching an “American” music video on television, which is an essentially American mode of entertainment.

One interesting thing about this video is that all of the non-American peoples are depicted outdoors. Not only does this allow the viewer to better understand the setting each group of people is from, but it also enforces a notion of all things American being on the outside only, or superficial. The viewers are also on the outside, however, because people like them are never

shown with the astronauts. This is a critique of the “other,” which in American ideology could be seen as anyone who does not live in a prefabricated house in the suburbs, drive a mini-van and make more than \$48,000 a year.³ The people watching the music video are not shown in American settings and are not all wearing American clothing. People who do not fit into the American “majority” are historically not depicted in American television or movies. Such peoples’ role in this video brings attention to that disparity and enhances the idea of American superficiality—the American media is superficial and inaccurate because it often does not depict minorities, and non-Western peoples have long been deemed inferior when viewed through the lens of American ideals. A prime example of this is the 1948 book, “Mickey Mouse and the boy Thursday.” In the book, Mickey Mouse orders a case of bananas and instead receives a West African, whom he names Thursday. After a series of antics in which Thursday attacks technology and worships Mickey’s friend Goofy, Mickey realizes he must show Thursday how to be civilized: “‘Poor little guy! He just makes mistakes. He doesn't know any better. I'll just have to be patient and teach him the right way to do things,’ said Mickey.”⁴⁰ While this view may seem outdated, it is part of the groundwork of American ideology. And Mickey Mouse himself is not without a reference in the song’s lyrics: “Musik kommt aus dem Weißen Haus / und vor Paris steht Micky Maus.”⁴¹ Mickey Mouse and racism go hand-in-hand in American history, so this reference cannot be escaped.

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The idea of superficiality is taken to a different level with footage of the astronauts. Not only are they unable to do things for themselves, like put up their own flag, but they spend most of their time with frivolous pursuits (Figure 44 and 45).

³ The average American income was \$48,200 in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 44 and 45: Following instructions to assemble the flag; playing pinball on the moon



Through watching television and consuming American goods, the people in this video become American on the outside. On the outside, all things American seem good. But as the video progresses, it goes deeper into a discussion of being American, and brings up racist stereotypes in American culture. Right where the climax of the song appears, shots of the band members in stereotypical Native American costumes are juxtaposed with shots of indigenous peoples looking angry. For example, after footage of the “Native Americans” smearing on war paint, a shot cuts in of an Inuit man crossing his arms and looking displeased. This is followed by a shot of Africans frowning (Figure 46-49).

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Figure 46-49: Applying war paint; offended Inuit; smoking a peace pipe around the fire; unhappy Africans.



These shots are sepia in tone, which makes them seem darker and slightly ominous. This is grounded by the humorous tone of other shots juxtaposed with those in Figures 46-49, of the astronauts having antics on the moon (Figure 50 and 51).

Figure 50 and 51—astronauts play ring-around-a-rosy with the flag; astronauts in formation



Since Americans walked on the moon first in 1969, right after the American Civil Rights movement, this suggests that Americans do not take things seriously. These astronauts do not seem bothered by the serious issue of race relations. The lyrics of the song at this point take an aggressive tone, as if in retaliation to the astronauts' antics. Against a strong bass melody, Lindemann sings, "This is not a love song / This is not a love song / I don't sing my mother tongue / No, this is not a love song."⁴² This line, paired with shots of "Native Americans" applying war paint, suggests this song is, in a sense, going to war against American ideals and American cultural imperialism.

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American cultural imperialism is illustrated in this video through the Native-American and non-Western people watching American television and consuming American goods. Although they have their own native goods, their facial expressions suggest they derive the most pleasure from the American ones (Figure 38-43). American cultural ideals are, in this video, the smiling white actor or musician in the limelight, the white Santa Claus, and the idea that

indigenous people, especially Native Americans, are primitive. The line “I don’t sing my mother tongue” also suggests many non-American people are abandoning their native languages in favor of English. In light of U.S. legislation attempts in the past few years, it is clear America is a country in which English is the preferred language.⁴³ The video goes on to show a montage of non-American peoples singing along with the band, “We’re all living in Amerika / Coca-Cola, sometimes war / We’re all living in Amerika / Amerika, Amerika”⁴⁴ Two shots associated with this are most striking. In one shot, a crowd raises their fists in time with the music, presumably representing the masses swayed by American media and culture (Figure 52).

Figure 52—Masses raising their fists.



It is unclear whether this shot was appropriated from footage of an allegiant or protesting crowd. In the second shot, a Middle Eastern man who took off his Nike shoes to pray sings “Amerika, Amerika” as he raises his arms in prayer (Figure 53).

Figure 53—Middle Eastern man in prayer, singing “Amerika”



This image is especially disturbing, as it suggests the fascination people in other countries have with America nears that of worship. Since colonization began in the 1700s, many poor people in other countries have believed that America is the “land of opportunity” and “the streets are paved with gold.” This prayer scene reminds the viewer of such mythology, and enforces it when the man sings “Amerika” during prayer—which can be thought of as a time to escape from worldly troubles and hope God will reward the worshipper with a better life.

The video goes on to reiterate the idea of American superficiality and ideology. A shot of one band member pointing to the camera and winking pans out so the viewer can discover he’s having makeup applied in a film studio (Figure 54 and 55).

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Figure 54 and 55—Having makeup applied; makeup on set



Not only is he a fake astronaut, but his looks are not even real because he is wearing makeup.

After an outward zoom from this shot to an establishing shot, the music becomes external-diegetic and the viewer can see crews, a set, band members posing with an African actor, and a stagehand easily carrying a giant boulder across the set (Figure 56).

Figure 56—Band members pose on set with African actor



This is a display of “camp” aesthetic. According to theorist Susan Sontag, “the essence of camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration...Its hallmark is ‘the spirit of exaggeration’ ‘an outrageous aestheticism’ ‘art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is ‘too much.’”⁴⁵ This use of camp encapsulates the entire video and suggests nothing the indigenous people were viewing on television was real, and that everything American is theatrically superficial. This makes the video a protest against globalization in the sense of spreading American culture and ideals throughout the world. It also questions the origin and truth behind things people see on television, including the video itself. For example, the last footage in the video is a black-and-white shot of a photograph of the astronauts against a background like that of the moon’s surface (Figure 57).

Figure 57—Photo on the moon



The external-diegetic sound in this scene is an American voice speaking over a PA system, saying, “Hey, we have a problem here.” This ending shot leaves the viewer questioning what in the video was real and what was not. This can be interpreted as a call to make the viewer think that way about everything he or she sees on television, especially when it comes to America.

Conclusion

Whether it comes to race relations, fairy tales or criticizing cultural imperialism, Rammstein’s music videos are an avant-garde deconstruction of traditional narratives. The music videos analyzed for this study are rich with references to literary, historical and socio-political works and ideas. Rammstein uses culturally-loaded texts relating to Western consciousness as a means for grabbing the viewer’s attention and spurring him to be critical of both the original text and Western ideologies. The videos use visual representations of these texts in a way that brings attention to the videos’ artificiality. There is no illusion that the band is trying to create a non-familiar reality out of works that are familiar to most Western viewers. This non-familiar reality draws attention to the things Rammstein is out to critique.

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Although this close-reading study uncovered a plethora of references in “Sonne,” “Seemann,” “Mutter” and “Amerika,” there are surely many more references waiting to be

uncovered. This study has made it clear that the two directors who created these videos are aware of the lyrics' meaning and keen on linking those meanings to references they imbed in the videos.⁴ László Kadar, the director of "Seemann," and Jörn Heitmann, who directed the other three videos, clearly have an education that allows them to play with historical, literary and socio-political references accurately. One Renaissance theater expert who was asked to consult on this project, after listening to the music, said, "I highly doubt anyone associated with these videos would know anything about Renaissance theater." Rather than viewing these videos as performance art and opening his mind to the possibilities they contain, this expert shut out the possibilities because of the industrial rock music playing over the footage. One must get past the music to get to the root of the video. Here, that root is in the references.

⁴ Visitors to several online Rammstein forums claim the band's songs usually have nothing to do with the music videos. It is clear from the results of this study that those claims are unfounded.

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