Chapter 19

Music Video’s Second Aesthetic?

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How different is a Lady Gaga video from one by A Flock of Seagulls? MTV’s first broadcast was thirty years ago. Music video has since undergone shifts in technologies, platforms, periods of intense cross-pollination with other media, financial booms and busts, and changing levels of audience engagement. While music videos hit a low point in the 00s as budgets dried up, they have reemerged as a key driver of popular culture.¹ Music video’s moment of resurgence resembles MTV’s first moment: there seems to be a question of what music video can do and where it fits.

What does it mean to look back on this thirty-year history? A comparison of the beginnings and the present might show vast differences in performance style, formal conceits, editing, depictions of space, the showcasing of new technologies—or it might not. Might we track the changes from 1979 to 2012? Should we follow the arrivals of new technologies or the migrations to new venues and platforms—from low-res video production in the eighties, to high-gloss 35 millimeter in the nineties, to flexible digital technologies in the 2000’s; from BET, MTV and late-night TV to YouTube, Vimeo and Vevo? We might instead follow the cycles of maturation (in genres like rap and metal), or auteurs’ interests and influence and the ways

¹ Music video is financially viable again as directors and musicians embed product placement in clips, and YouTube clips link directly to the industry-driven site VEVO. A longer version of this chapter appears in my book *Unruly Media: YouTube Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*, forthcoming with Oxford.
audiences participate with music video. Or we might track the image’s response to pop music’s changing production practices and vice versa, or the larger cultural turn toward the audiovisual.

Such a project would be too ambitious for a single article. Instead, I treat a narrower topic, providing a frame and focusing on some videos from today and from the eighties. Looking back to the eighties and comparing them with the present moment makes sense: new technologies and changing platforms have shaped videomaking in both moments. A variety of styles, genres, tropes, and treatments of space marks both the eighties and today. This chapter aims to provide a sense of whether the genre has gotten savvier and more open to experimentation or more ossified, and what this thirty-year history might add up to.

What is a music video? At one time we knew, but no longer; part of the change has to do with media contexts. In the eighties and nineties, music videos were primarily seen on a few satellite services—like MTV, BET or VHI—or within a countdown on broadcast television late at night, and it was difficult for record companies to get their clips on the air. To make the MTV rotation, clips would first be vetted by a board of ten, and then have to clear the Standards and Practices division. Consciously or unconsciously, directors and artists tailored their work for these committees. Standards and Practices was an especially difficult hurdle, seemingly wielding as much power as the Hays Office in the 50s. Directors and musicians could never predict which constraints would be enforced. For example, no alcohol or product placement was supposed to appear on MTV (unless you were Guns N’ Roses). Some forms of smooching and T&A were okay, others not.² Most submissions to the station never aired, and what did possessed a high degree of uniformity, probably resulting from the cat-and-mouse games between censors and

² At least the Hays Office distributed a highly codified list of what was disallowed. All links in this chapter searched on October 11, 2011.
directors. Today music video clips are dispersed across a number of commercial websites (Vevo, Hulu, Launch, MTV, Pitchfork), as well as YouTube. There is little vetting of clips. Except for concerns about copyright violations (a constant struggle), prosumers feel free to upload a range of material that confounds genres. For example, many clips with full-frontal nudity remain up even though YouTube viewers can flag them.3

We used to define music video as a product of the record company in which images are put to a recorded pop song in order to sell the song. None of this definition holds any more. On YouTube, individuals as much as record companies post music video clips, and many prosumers have no hope of selling anything. The image can be taken from a variety of sources and a song recorded afterwards: a clip might look like a music video, but the music might be neither prior nor preeminent. In addition, the song might not be a pop song but something similar (ambient, electronic) or very different (jazz or opera). Clips can range from ten seconds to several hours; no longer is there a predictable four-to five-minute format.4 All sorts of interruption can occur (an insertion of a trailer clip or someone talking), and material from other genres may infiltrate (commercials, sportscasts). Music videos appear in new and unexpected media, interactive games and iPhone apps. A dizzying array of user-based content ranges from vidding and remixes to mashups. It still makes sense to call all these music videos.

We might thus define music video, simply and perhaps too broadly, as a relation of sound and image that we recognize as such. YouTube especially makes it hard to draw a line between

3 A prosumer is a consumer who does production. The work can be semi-professional.

what is a music video and not. We might keep all of the attributes that once made up music video hovering like a shadowy constellation, calling on them to help us read the new clips. We might also strengthen the definition to include the requirement that the images seem engaged with showing off the soundtrack to some extent. But even adding this corollary provides little assistance. Music, sound and image can be so tightly interwoven in some segments of contemporary film that we might see them as music-video sequences: once these appear on YouTube they can seem indistinguishable from other clips. In large segments of today’s films, too, the soundtrack may be more striking than the image. Conversely, on YouTube some sleepy music videos have such a passive soundtrack that there’s almost nothing to show off, but these clips are nothing if not music videos.⁵

At the same time that we define music video inclusively and expansively, we may wish to restrict the focus. In the thirty years of music video, various sorts of “canon” have emerged. We can see why it’s useful to flag some musicians’ and directors’ bodies of work, and particular historical moments. It is hard to be rigorous about what exactly is within this genre, and what is an outlier. Wittgenstein’s idea that genres are made up of family resemblances might prove

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⁵ The definition of music video I advanced in Experiencing Music Video also seems obsolete. There I argued that music video image seeks to sell a song by showing off musical features in a serial fashion (because you cannot reveal all of them simultaneously). This careful tracking of musical features largely holds true for the industry-funded music videos of big-name artists, but not for today’s music videos more broadly. Carol Vernallis, Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context (Columbia University Press, 2004), 68.
helpful here. For example, games can share a number of features, but not all; they can be related but very different (for example, chess and hopscotch are both games). This may also hold true for music video and music video-like aesthetics.

Recent studies have embraced analytic methods that better encompass this larger body of materials and more deeply consider what music videos were then and are now. Nicholas Cook has defined three types of interaction between music and images: complement, conformance, and contrast. The first shows off or brings to light; the second matches or replicates; the last differs or works against. He also notes that one medium can fill in the gap of another’s. Michel Chion’s concept of added value, where the image seems to absorb or take on the attributes of the music, as well as the notion of empathetic and anempathetic relations, can also apply to music video. Claudia Gorbman’s model, holding that music seeks out attributes in the image, is another helpful approach. There is also my own, which considers the ways sound and image reflect individual parameters such as narrative, teleological drive, harmony, timbre, rhythm, and so on.6

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Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* is considered the first major scholarly work on film scoring. She discusses many topics including what music does in the movies and how it does it. She notes that music relaxes the “psychic sensor” and provides interpretive assistance to combat the ambiguity of visual cues. Nevertheless, what I value most is the ways she considers what music and image do together and apart. Drawing on film scenes, for example,
But a broader picture of music video may require a new model. Since music videos place song and image in a relation of co-presence, I suggest that we consider them as partners: we might sit them on the couch and imagine them in couples therapy. As analysts, we might consider each spouse in turn. What kinds of behavior does this persona exhibit, what attitudes, dispositions, traits, and ways of functioning? In what ways is each able to listen to or shoulder the requests of the other? Are there examples of pushing and shoving, stifling, or mutual admiration? Asking each to articulate needs in classic therapeutic language is not too farfetched: “when you do this, I feel this,” or “if you do this, I will be better able to do this.“ We can assume there are issues of dominance and subservience, passivity and aggression. In music-image relations, one medium often seems to be pushing the other to do something, acting as the driver. Each suffers from not being able to show all it has. If only it had a different partner! Some new entity or quality emerges from the couple’s relationship, and we respond more to that quality than to either individual in the pair. This aspect is surely contingent and constructed, but it feels so densely colored. Similarly, we may think of the music-image relationship as a new hyper-being.  

Two short examples will show how audio-visual relations in music video might be structured this way. Sigur Rós’s and Floria Sigismondi’s clip “Untitled“ presents itself bicyclists on a holiday in Truffaut’s *Jules and Jim*, she queries the ways music shapes our attention to the image. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London BFI, 1987), 2, 57.

7 Kay Dickinson’s approach which considers music-image relations that have gone bad seems particularly relevant here. See her book *Off Key: When Film and Music Won’t Work Together* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
immediately as stoic, abject, and vulnerable. The song and imagery show some overlapping traits: the visual track suggests the schoolchildren are charming, tender, oppressed, and innocent. The music is also sympathetic to these children’s circumstances, but it’s witnessing, it’s not going to step in and help them. (This stance is literalized when at one moment a teacher’s hand runs down a child’s head of hair, but both adult and child remain unresponsive to the other. Music takes no note here, simply coursing on.) Establishing the unresponsiveness between sound and image early in the clip is important. Later the children go out in gas masks to play in a dark, burnt-out post-apocalyptic wasteland where blackened dust falls like snow.

Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way“ and Kanye West’s “Power,” on the other hand, project a super-fluidity of emotion: energy flows from the music and image together. These last two videos, both alone in relationship with their music and image, and together as dynamic multimedia clips, feel like good corporate entities. Each stares side by side like two contenders in a beauty pageant. Both feature the star placed center from an outwardly expanding vortex.8

Asking what the music and image are saying to one another, how they act as players and performers, can reveal a music video’s persuasiveness or allure. The videos for “Born This Way“ and “Power,” for example, suggest that the first imperative is cultural work rather than fine musical or formal relations. Music video’s main goal here may be simply to pull us out of the recession and sync us up with one another. And why shouldn’t music video step into the breach? I argue elsewhere that if we can get coordinated around a hook (a syllable like “Ga-ga,“ a visual


Kanye West’s “Power,” http://www.vevo.com/watch/kanye-west/power/USUV71001422?source=ap
stutter, a “beep beep beep” buzzy tone, or a simple image like that of a kiss), perhaps we’ll be attuned enough to address corporate domination and environmental disaster. According to Siegfried Kracauer, Busby Berkeley’s musicals with lines of chorines helped keep capitalism going.⁹ Why not music video today?

Let’s begin a comparison of eighties videos with present-day ones, focusing in both periods on videos produced by the large record labels. I adopt a parametric approach, considering elements like form, color, editing, technology, and performance. (In a few cases—editing, performance—I’ll add a brief historical overview.) The chapter ends with a return to the wider definition of music video and my suggestion of an interpersonal method for understanding music-image relations to help compare the two historical moments.

It’s my hope that an interpersonal method will help us assess this history of heterogeneous audiovisual materials. Music video is hard to evaluate. The genre possesses an odd particularity—comprised of intangibles that have analogs to pop music like syncopation, rubato, articulation, and grain, it’s fragile.¹⁰ I will float the claim that many eighties videos possess more charm, allure or power than their contemporaries today, not only because a community cared about them, and the work was so novel, but because the audiovisual relations were special. In eighties videos, directors were trying discover how to get the new technology of videotape to catch up with the song. This effort is literalized in a video like A-Ha’s “Take on Me,” where the rotoscoped (animated) hand reaches up to the (live-action) woman as the lead singer sings “up.” Similarly there’s something fragile and earned about the intimacy of U2’s


“With or Without You” and George Michael’s “Father Figure.” Both videos are haunted, as the performers and supporting characters press forward through hazy diffusion, stoically aiming to make a connection that may not happen. This lost-versus-found relation is endearing: it may remind us of our own fraught relations and our desires for what might be. Today’s attempts—let’s say Beyoncé’s “1 + 1,” a supercharged hypersexualized video (“make love to me as the war rages”—even the lyrics are jacked up), can seem jaded compared to U2’s “With or Without You.”

Perhaps the eighties were a fortuitous moment when our knowledge of technology, culture, music and image produced some special tension or frisson. But then again, today’s moment has its own special newness. Directors are struggling with surprising limitations and possibilities. While budgets have been drastically curtailed, new technologies enable all kinds of new configurations. Changes in methods of pop songwriting along with new audio and video recording and producing technologies may free music videos from the classic, strongly demarcated verse-chorus alternation, making possible instead a new emphasis on shifting intensities and textures. Learning how to enact these new modes is exciting for practitioners. Many have been in the industry a long time, sometimes working in film when music-video

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11 A-Ha’s “Take on Me,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djV11Xbc914](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djV11Xbc914)

U2’s “With or Without You” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmSdTa9kaiQ&ob=av3e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmSdTa9kaiQ&ob=av3e)


budgets were low, but coming back for love of the genre. Their knowledge informs this
generation of clips.

II

*Audiovisual Relations in the Eighties and Today*

*Technology*

Do technologies call attention to themselves now more than in the past? Mathias Korsgaard celebrates the recent foregrounding of visual effects like the video trail, kaleidoscope, stamped multiples, and sinusoidal designs. He claims these digital technologies show off music’s plurality.\(^\text{13}\) But one could argue that similar effects occur just as frequently in eighties videos, like David Byrne’s “Once in a Lifetime,” Prince’s “When Doves Cry,” and Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody.” It’s true that the technological devices in these videos aren’t quite as riveting or hallucinogenic as today’s. There’s something a bit more insistent in recent clips—friskier. But perhaps this is occurring now because MTV cast a conservative shadow, and the wider number of venues, from YouTube to Vevo, has loosened things up a bit. Another question concerns the history and the incorporation of technologies in music video. Why do some become popular at certain points and not others? It has been noted that new visual technologies often appear first in


music video. (Examples include the snorkel cam in Steve Winwood’s “Roll with It“ and the Quantel in Cutting Crew’s “I Just Died in your Arms Tonight.”)  

Right now kaleidoscopes are popular, for example in Selena Gomez’s “Naturally,” Beyoncé’s “One Plus One,” and Gnarls Barkley’s “Crazy.” Perhaps they match today’s musical materials, or they’re nostalgic, or they pick up some musical feature that has recently become popular. The trails and kaleidoscopes might also project well on cell phones. Back in the eighties, the frame was frequently fractured into quadrants or blocks (as in Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean”). Today that’s a familiar effect, but in the eighties it was tremendously exciting.  

This makes sense: music videos were higher-profile then, but coupled with lower costs and fewer aesthetic constraints. Today, with so many media forms and venues, innovations may be —

14 David Byrne’s “Once in a Lifetime,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1wg1DNHbNU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1wg1DNHbNU)  
Prince’s “When Doves Cry,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tL1gM0QrI0E&feature=fvwrel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tL1gM0QrI0E&feature=fvwrel)  
Steve Winwood’s “Roll with It,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWptXUblA4E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWptXUblA4E)  
Cutting Crew’s “I Just Died in your Arms Tonight,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ua26qTEK25U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ua26qTEK25U)  

Gnarls Barkley’s “Crazy,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7W2KR_z9P0M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7W2KR_z9P0M)  
appear elsewhere first. Historically, not all visual effects have been useful for music video. Michael Jackson’s “Black or White“ was the first to employ morphing, for example, but it did so only during the song’s break. Then the device nearly vanished from use. Possibly morphing is so visually engaging that it draws the viewer’s attention away from the music. Music’s transformations may also not be continuous and seamless, so morphing provides a poor complement. Bullet time, on the other hand, has remained popular. (It appears in Lady Gaga’s “Bad Romance,“ for example.) Perhaps bullet time is engaging because it makes music’s time strange.¹⁶

In the eighties, technological gizmos were often used to foreground the song’s form. For example, multiples might quickly carry us from a sparser verse into a thickened chorus. (One device favored in the eighties was using multiple instruments wedged into the frame’s edges--for example, The Police’s “Every Breath You Take.”) Perhaps directors have discovered how to produce strong audiovisual relations through many parameters, most strikingly through the use of color, so today’s technologies do not need to do as much work. (Note the kaleidoscopes in Beyoncé’s “One Plus One;“ though they are musical, they seem to appear more for their local charm than as a means to assert large-scale structure.)

Can technologies help change our understanding of space and time? The trails in today’s Ok-Go’s “WTF“ and the pixellation in Kanye West’s “Welcome to Heartbreak“ help to suggest a Bergsonian present: we’re aware that the present is like a saddle, with the past streaming behind

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¹⁶ Michael Jackson’s “Black or White,“ [http://www.vevo.com/watch/michael-jackson/black-or-white/USSM20300985](http://www.vevo.com/watch/michael-jackson/black-or-white/USSM20300985)

us and the future yet to arrive. But I would argue that David Bowie’s 1980 “Ashes to Ashes,“ with its image solarization, seems to do an even better job of this. Surely these devices respond in part to the pop song’s arrangement, lyrics, and its relation to the image-scape.\textsuperscript{17}

We may also track subtle flows of artistry and influence. In the spring of 2011, there were numerous 1000-hit alt videos that foregrounded technological gimmicks. Suddenly by the summer’s end, it seemed mainstream directors had capitalized on them. (Such a fast turn! How can we guess where music video will be in a year?) Handmade, low-cost devices and techniques have always appeared alongside their more expensive siblings, often with equally striking results. In the eighties when directors were using the Quantel box to produce prism effects, others were holding beveled mirrors before the camera to produce kaleidoscopic patterns. Today, Michel Gondry has made low-tech his stylistic signature. And other music video directors on small budgets find alternatives: without fancy software like After Effects (which can produce prisms in the background), international and third-world directors simply paste Xeroxed sheets of paper on the wall (See Azis’s “Bulgaria +18 [Tits and Penis],” for example).\textsuperscript{18} The role of the technological gimmick differs between large-budget mainstream clips and alt-independent siblings. For mainstream clips, digitally distorted effects tend to be narrativized and the performer’s body and face remain legible. For example, kaleidoscopes and mirroring in Linkin

\textsuperscript{17} The Police’s “Every Breath You Take,“ \url{http://www.vevo.com/watch/the-police/every-breath-you-take/GBF060300032}

OK Go’s “WTF?,“ \url{http://www.vevo.com/watch/ok-go/wtf/USR3B1000004}

Kanye West’s “Welcome to Heartbreak,“ \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMH0e8kIZtE}

David Bowie’s “Ashes to Ashes,“ \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMThz7eQ6K0&ob=av2n}

\textsuperscript{18} Azis’s “Bulgaria +18 [Tits and Penis]” \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78g5AAWtRQw}
Park’s “Iridescent“ are naturalized by a Gothic landscape that seems out of Lang’s *Metropolis*. Similarly, Selena Gomez’s “Naturally“ has multiples but it also harks back to Busby Berkeley’s art deco look. Gomez looks dressed up for the prom, and the mirroring might suggest the fancy hotel where she and her boyfriend first paint the town.  

In what ways are today’s visual schemes with their sinusoidal waves meant to complement the digitally enabled, buzzy soundtrack? Perhaps we can't discern how much the digital image is driven by its technological context, and how much it’s responding to musical features, like qualities of tempo, rhythm and timbre. We might note that the weightlessness of the sinusoidal and the buzzy has a long history: music videos have long used light shows and visual micro-articulations and these may help to disarticulate objects and performers from their settings. Today we might consider Radiohead’s “House of Cards“ or Ok-Go’s “WTF,“ but earlier films and videos like Erasure’s “A Little Respect“ and Michael Jackson’s “Rock With You“ became weightless too. The similarities among these examples—changing colored

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19 Linkin Park’s “Irridescent,“ [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLYiIBCN9ec&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLYiIBCN9ec&ob=av2e)  
21 Radiohead’s “House of Cards,“ [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaSYpWpWYek](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaSYpWpWYek)  
Erasure’s “A Little Respect,“ [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65lyoDUDWQg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65lyoDUDWQg)  
light—suggest highlighting shifting musical features like timbre and time passing is more relevant than showcasing technological advances.

From another perspective, however, these showy technological effects just work aggressively. Not musicality but rather visual or aural novelty may be what catches a viewer’s attention. (Or do these technologies work like musical hooks drawing her into the music?) Technological gimmicks, or showboating, can highlight the question of what kinds of images go with what kinds of music. Perhaps sync only needs to be good enough, and then music and image can each independently go about its business.

*Color and Digital Intermediate*

In the eighties and nineties, music video was still a hotbed of color experimentation, even though directors could not change each pixel’s color through digital intermediate. Even before the Gatorade commercial, elements in the frame were cordoned off and given lurid color; rotoscoping also gave the image fine detail through hand-tinted frame-by-frame animation (The Outfield’s “Since You’ve Been Gone,” and INXS’s “What You Want,“ for example). Telecine


23 The Outfield’s “Since You’ve Been Gone,” [http://www.vevo.com/watch/the-outfield/since-youve-been-gone/USSM20400831](http://www.vevo.com/watch/the-outfield/since-youve-been-gone/USSM20400831)

INXS’s “What You Need,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSME53nL8tg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSME53nL8tg)

Belinda Carlisle’s “I Get Weak,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmMCXLdNrz8&ob=av2n](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmMCXLdNrz8&ob=av2n), is another video that uses the isolation of color for expressive effects.
could amp up a color across the image, and directors would shoot to exploit this. For example, it was common to see very bluish diaphanous cloth from drapery and orange tints from fire or candlelight in eighties and nineties videos (David Fincher’s and George Michael’s “Freedom,” or Bonnie Tyler’s “Total Eclipse of the Heart,” for example). With DI, color management gives a much wider range and more detailed possibilities for shading, however. Music video today is loudly proclaiming its capacity for hyper-control in many ways. Think of all the videos that proclaim, “We have color!” In the Coldplay video “Every Teardrop is a Waterfall,” bucketfuls of paint are spray-painted onto the characters, the background walls, and tenement buildings’ facades; and then the lead singer comes forward wearing a deeply purple t-shirt. Painting onto walls has always been a music-video trope, but in the Coldplay video it occurs on so many different planes—even on a virtually-configured epoxy sheet placed in front of the camera. There are also new videos that foreground party drinks. Every plastic cup is separated out and given a different shade as if the drinks had become elixirs, and then everything suddenly turns black-lit and fluorescent. Colors in videos also seem to be conversing about the latest fashions, as if trends were quickly streaming by and some videos might miss the boat. Recently some wan-looking yellows, pinks, and greens have appeared, one suspects because others flaunt the same hue.

Colorist David Hussey claims that few practitioners today want to work with magenta, simply perhaps because it reminds viewers of the eighties. I’ve seen it creep slightly back in, by way of a hot pink (See Dave Meyers and Rihanna’s “Where Have You Been” and recent T-Mobile ads).

The control of color opens up many new possibilities. Music video now can go very dark, as dark as the darkest night, and then suddenly become sharply lit (like David Guetta’s video featuring Ludacris’s and Taio Cruz’s “Little Bad Girl”). Varied types of footage can be more readily combined, as in Katy Perry’s “ET,” which blends super-8-like footage with digital
projections onto blue screen. Streaks of light and color can also be added to the frame, complicating and enriching it, suggesting that the music and the people have been touched by sonic waves, God’s touch or aliens—we never know.  

DI can serve as a focal point or pivot. Directors put a lot of time into what Jonas Akerlund calls “beauty work,” retouching the star in post. (Akerlund likes to digitally enhance a performer’s mouth so that it opens wider, for example.) Directors often change the color of the eye’s iris from shot to shot. In Gaga’s “Judas,” her eye color turns from green to blue.

Akerlund’s videos take much care with expressive fingernail polish (notice the black with white stripes, the circled silver, the American flags—as in “Telephone“). Imagine you have modified the star’s iris and fingernails. From there you can start turning her into pure color: consider Mika’s “We Are Golden,” Lady Gaga and Beyoncé’s “Telephone,” Madonna’s “Ray of Light“ and Britney Spears’s “Hold It Against Me.”

In mainstream music videos, color is usually thematized (painting on buildings, drinking from cups); even when color serves as a backdrop (as in Hype Williams’s clips) it cannot just be free. In more independent videos we might find that it can. Color’s historical trajectory in music video overlaps with and diverges from its treatment in cinema. Eighties video seemed to be

24 Katy Perry’s “ET,“ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Sd5c4o9UM&ob=av2e.


25 Lady Gaga’s “Judas,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wagn8Wrmzuc&ob=av2e

Mika’s “We Are Golden,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hehut1EUq8k&ob=av2e

Britney Spears’s “Hold It Against Me,“ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Edv8Onsrgg&ob=av2e
predominantly scaped in blue, while the nineties were golden and red. These colors ran independently of cultural fashions. The popularity of these colors may have been tied to timbre and production practices. Colors were certainly tied to race, genre and gender. Color provides new possibilities in terms of experience, culture and ideology. Floria Sigismondi, tired of all the silver and gray cars, decides to imagine her technofuture world tinted with feminine gold, pink and lavender in Katy Perry’s “ET.” But first Perry flies down in a uterine, hibiscus, purple-blue-fuchsia world. Such painterly effects can make us feel that like Perry, we too are in utero.

*Materiality and Microrhythms*

Fine, changeable and tangible things of the world —like dust, water, smoke, clouds—may be more insistently depicted today because digital cameras have become so adept at capturing detail. As Chion notes, visual microrhythms function well within audiovisually rich media, because they resemble musical processes. As sound waves decay, they exhibit granular detail (through an oscilloscope, one can see these sound waves breaking into fractal patterns). Today these help show off features in pop songs. Producers arranging for low bit-rates choose musical objects sharply differentiated through timbre—for example, buzzy versus smooth. Grain and its absence then come to the fore: music video directors often respond to these production choices by picking highly differentiated visual detail. Of course, earlier music video directors had also

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27 Katy Perry’s “ET,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Sd5c4o9UM&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Sd5c4o9UM&ob=av2e)

28 Janet Jackson’s “Make Me,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwQyUTkGOew](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwQyUTkGOew)

foregrounds the way director Michael Hales isolates and brings to the fore different musical elements—something easier to do now digital technologies.
foregrounded such effects. One of the best music videos of the eighties, U2’s “With or Without You,” worked with delicate projections of shadows of tree branches and water. But consider Adele’s 2011 “Rolling in the Deep,” with the dust motes that surround her and the water glasses on the floor that shimmy their contents as the music marks the beat. Each element is marked off so clearly it’s almost as if we were examining the video’s detail through a magnifying glass.29

With digital intermediate, smoke and clouds can become performers. Beyoncé’s “Best Thing I Never Had“ contains little performance, except that she sings in her bra and underwear (okay, maybe that’s a lot) and then slowly gets into a wedding dress. But behind her there’s a lot of business. The sky sometimes shifts color slowly, and sometimes very quickly, so that the clouds themselves maintain our interest. We might note that clouds have long been foregrounded in music video: think for example of Herb Ritts’s videos for Chris Isaac like “Wicked Games.“ But today, a finer grain of control allows clouds to come to the fore for much greater lengths of time. David Fincher claimed, for film, that the first thing viewers track is light, the play of light and shadow. With music video we track the play of light and shadow against sound.30

29 U2’s “With or Without You,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmSdTa9kaiQ&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmSdTa9kaiQ&ob=av2e)
Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYEDA3JeQqw&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYEDA3JeQqw&ob=av2e)
Human League’s “Human,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb8zJ28amoI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb8zJ28amoI), is another eighties example. Janet Jackson’s and Busta Rhymes’s “What’s It Gonna Be,“ [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4PFClnMkOU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4PFClnMkOU), is a nineties one.

30 Beyoncé’s “Best Thing I Never Had,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHp2KgyQUFk&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHp2KgyQUFk&ob=av2e) Chris Isaac’s “Wicked Games,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAOxCqSxRD0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAOxCqSxRD0)

Conversation with director, Spring 1998.
**Rhythmic Subtlety**

Rhythmic subtlety in the eighties was often hard to achieve: clips were mostly edited on video, some of it without timecode (for example, found footage). Frame counts were inaccurate—even with timecode; an editor would suffer a one- or two-frame slip. A sequence of tight, brief edits might take forever. Forms of rhythmic articulation seen today were nearly impossible to achieve then. While I’ve only seen a few recent examples that really strike me as both virtuosic and unachievable by earlier technologies, they point to what the future might yield. Ke$ha’s and Taio’s “Take a Dirty Picture of Me,” for example, foregrounds a sense of speed-ramping, of acceleration and deceleration, as a sports car revs against passing telephone poles and mountains, and the music also whip-pans between accelerando and diminuendo. The clip suggests a new experience of frenetic tautness. Consider Akerlund’s and Pink’s “Sober” as well. The shot lengths and the editing are so surprising and exact; nothing this precise existed before. It took not only the advent of the digital, but also a few years of practice to change the way shot lengths worked in music video.  

**Shots and Editing**

Have shots and editing in music video become more sophisticated or better able to reflect musical features? I begin here with a few historically situated styles that point to larger stylistic shifts. As mentioned, in the eighties, figures moved and suddenly froze as still frames, or were suddenly startled by hard edits as if through electric shocks. The big boomy synth sucked up the

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31 Taio Cruz’s “Take a Dirty Picture of Me,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgnXl7fz0Bc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgnXl7fz0Bc)

Pink’s “Sober,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ3ZM8DBl6g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ3ZM8DBl6g)
frequency range; sounds weren’t quite assimilated into pop song writing (or much else).\textsuperscript{32} Director Matt Mahurin’s strange gaps from shot to shot often seemed like non-sequiturs—what are the images saying to one another, and the viewer? In the late eighties, Mark Pellington discovered how to project a series of staccato-shots composed of two to three frames, alongside incorporated bits of text with strong graphic values. Marcus Nispel created “dolly within dolly“ moves where the camera’s motion constantly circled. Tarsem Singh made videos with a lot of leader and flash-frames, raising the question of what counts as an edit. Later in the nineties, Hype Williams would use his wide-angle lens and strange sets to distort his characters into loveable, superhero, cartoon-types. Videos for hip-hop artists like Biggie Smalls showcased a relaxed style, where the long shots’ edits would fall off the beats, and one couldn’t predict where they would land. In the 2000s Floria Sigismondi would use edgy, hard edits, attenuating narrative drive. Later Alan Ferguson would establish an all-over technique wherein every single musical element might be picked up within the frame.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} This aesthetic was both technologically and musically driven. A video with different concerns, REM’s “Driver 8,” showcased folk guitar and nostalgia and featured grainy Super-8 footage of trains.

\textsuperscript{33} The clips include Mark Pellington’s and Pearl Jam’s “Jeremy;“

\url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MS91knuzoOA&ob=av2e}

Marcus Nispel’s and C&C Factory’s “Everybody Dance Now;“

\url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2VQQEoWlTg}

Amy Grant’s “House of Love;“ \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXxXj7rzZY4&ob=av2n}

Tarsem Singh’s and REM’s “Losing My Religion;“ \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=if-UzXIQ5vw&ob=av2e}
Some types of framing and editing we see today could not have been done in the eighties. Jonas Akerlund likes to use an extreme wide-angle shot of the setting and then cut quickly to an extreme close-up. Without digital cameras and new postproduction techniques, I doubt this shift would make much sense. He may also cut three or four fast shots around the face at well-judged off angles. These are hard to see; viewers likely don’t register them as a cubist realization, but just experience deeper immersion with a character.

Framing has changed too. A musically saturated culture (iPods everywhere), a long period of the public shooting with cell phones (so visual literacy has risen), lighter cameras, and a history of music-video practices have all contributed to an image no longer framed four-square, flush along a horizon on a tripod. In music video today one can see much freer framing, as in Melina Matsoukas’s and Rihanna’s “Rude Boy.” Here off-kilter shapes come into the frame from all sides. Layers build up and we’re not sure where they will stop. And then while all this is going on, the most beautiful moment for me arrives. Instead of following Rihanna’s gorgeous moves, the instruments, or the engaging Warholian graphics of grenades and pineapples, my eye drifts to a slow black stain seeping slowly from the top of the frame. Contrast “Rude Boy” with INXS’s “What You Need.” Too four-square! Though “What You Need“ looks contemporary—

Hype Williams’s and Missy Elliot’s “The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly);“
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHcyJPTTn9w
Biggie Smalls “Big Papa;“ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ27AM3RTv8
Floria Sigismondi’s and Marilyn Manson’s “The Beautiful People;“
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ypkv0HeUvTc&ob=av2e
Alan Ferguson’s and Cee-Lo’s “Open Happiness,“
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cxfkg3RaRjs
animation has long contributed to the most vanguard music videos—the camera's framing and the way images build toward the chorus reflect an earlier period. Some of today’s videos flaunt off-angled and elongated forms on the bias streaking past the lens, like Skrillex’s “First of the Year.” Cars skidding and horses galloping (sometimes together in the same clip) often suggest both multi-temporality and freedom.

*Narrative and Large-Scale Forms*

I have described visual elements like color, microrhythms, and editing first before narrative, because these are the things that come to the fore today and feel like a shift from the eighties. But narratives have changed too: they’ve become more subtly worked and therefore more transparent, allowing surface detail to come forward.

Though most videos today, both indie and mainstream, seem to hew to familiar forms, a handful of examples suggest other possibilities. Lady Gaga’s and Beyoncé’s “Telephone” is a remarkable one. While Hitchcock once quipped that film was life with all the boring bits cut out, “Telephone” feels like a feature with all of its boring bits cut out. One senses a complete film residing behind the clip. We can find ways of explaining why we’ve only now come across this new formal conceit. Like Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” and Akerlund’s “Paparazzi,” “Telephone” has a substantial introduction. (Satellite services like MTV did not tolerate long beginnings well, and screening “Thriller” took much arm-twisting.) “Telephone” presents one long segment of narrative exposition and a medley-like number from a musical, with tiny bits of

34 Rihanna’s “Rude Boy,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e82VE8UtW8A&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e82VE8UtW8A&ob=av2e).


35 Lady Gaga’s and Beyoncé’s “Telephone,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVBSypHzF3U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVBSypHzF3U)
interlocking business between. There is also something about the video’s suggestion of time, the characters, and their offscreen behavior that's new and striking: we sense they’re constantly up to important business, shenanigans we’ve most likely missed and even right now are continuing to not quite grasp. “Telephone”’s heightened storytelling is enabled by the near end of censorship. Stakes are high—poisonings, murder, sexual betrayal. The songs themselves might make narrative more possible. “Telephone” is more cellular and fragmented than the average pop song, facilitating more interrupted moments in the images' unfolding. With these short segments and interruptions, the work stretches like an archipelago, and only in retrospect seems peculiar. Why is Lady Gaga wearing that leopard print and shimmying in front of the Jeep at night? Is she the limousine driver? And why is Beyoncé wearing that Sergeant Pepper’s military dress in her hotel room, hopping up and down all by herself as if she were a windup doll, while behind her we catch glimpses of kitschy Louis XIV furniture and painted cinderblock walls? And let’s not ignore the over-the-top stuff of Gaga’s hair in rollers fashioned from coke cans, and sunglasses made of lit cigarettes. The prison block is really a gay dance hall; “telephone for Lady Gaga” rings out. The harp in the soundtrack is very sweet, and its return may enable Gaga’s and Beyoncé’s final getaway (the women and the credits outstrip the story). Earlier music videos like Madonna and David Fincher’s “Bad Girl” or his and Aerosmith’s “Janie’s Got a Gun” also are constructed through musical but segment-oriented narratives. ¹⁶ Romanek’s videos were often set

¹⁶ Madonna and David Fincher’s “Bad Girl,”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmX29GpZMvc

Aerosmith and David Fincher’s “Janie’s Got a Gun,”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvFeqUQcBOE
as tableaux that implied worlds behind the videos. Akerlund’s videos suggest a synthesis of these approaches.

Floria Sigismondi’s “ET” also has a density of causes that seems to exceed what we normally experience in a music video. Is it Kanye West, the Wall-E doll, Katy Perry, the deer, or the CD, that enables the sci-fi creatures to have sex and repopulate? The chain of Proppian helper agents is never made clear but the narrative still feels sensible.37 In a different way, Laurieann Gibson’s and Lady Gaga’s “You and I” may present a wider range of characters than traditional music videos. In her 1987 book Rocking Around the Clock, Ann Kaplan identified a “Madonna 1” and “Madonna 2” in Madonna’s “Papa Don’t Preach”: the protagonist vacillates between two forms of identity that never integrate—a Jean Seberg good girl working-class type and a vamp.38 But the range of Gaga types in “You and I” is much broader. The clip is about transgendered identity (again, freedom from censorship may have made more representations possible), richer than what we have seen before. Gaga is a fashionista-type Addams-family

37 Katy Perry and Floria Sigismondi’s “ET,”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Sd5c4o9UM&ob=av2e
Vladimir Iakovlevich Propp, TR Laurence Scott, Morphology of the folktale, University of Texas Press, [1928] 1968. THIS TEXT NEEDS FIXING. PLACE OF PUBLICATION?
38 Akerlund’s and Gaga’s “You and I,”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9YMU0WeBwU&ob=av2e
Madonna’s “Papa Don’t Preach,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkxqWgEEz4&ob=av2n
Morticia, a mermaid, a girl next door, a male James Dean type, a horror monster (flash-frame), a
dancing troll-like doll, a wood sprite, and a fairy queen.

Some directors have gotten savvier about how to construct character in music video.

Directors I’ve interviewed have stated that returning to music videos after directing feature films
has helped them develop character. Technology helps, as does a whole history of music video. In
Francis Lawrence’s “Bad Romance,” both the large-scale changes—Lady Gaga as sheik,
prostitute, and revenge artist—and the many fine shifts as well (including a kewpie doll and a
French chanteuse) are richer than in any eighties video I can recall.39 Digital intermediate plays a
role too: you really need to know you can easily shift from those whites to hot red, with the
reptilian green in between.

Performance

In Experiencing Music Video I note what might be considered bad acting for the camera.

Sometimes eighties musicians seem as if they’ve been shot with an elephant tranquilizer; they
move woodenly through space until forced to a halt by a freeze-frame.40 Such mannequin-like
deportment may have occurred because performers hadn’t yet figured out music video’s
language, or there may be something in the music itself—those big enormous synth sounds have

39 Lady Gaga and Francis Lawrence’s “Bad Romance, “
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrO4YZeyl0I

40 See Vernallis, Experiencing Music Video, 286.

Gary Numan’s “Cars,” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ldyx3KHOFXw) is one example.
sucked up most of the frequency range once filled by rich instrumental arrangements.\textsuperscript{41} The new sounds may overwhelm performers’ bodies. Stasis also represented a turn away from seventies disco: dancing was no longer cool.\textsuperscript{42} Maybe the stance was just a haughty, chic pose that now looks a bit too obvious. But at the same time, eighties videos possess some of the best performance moments in music-video history. Since there was often not much going on but the camera and the barren set, the body had to carry weight, unlike now when a performer knows that a flurry of post-production business may appear suddenly behind her, and that someone might alter her expressions in post.\textsuperscript{43} Eighties videos convey an intimacy and vulnerability that’s forever lost; its sweetness may resemble the beginnings of film, as when Robert Flaherty’s actor Nanook smiles for the camera. Look at some Tears for Fears videos or the Pet Shop Boys: such charged but ambivalent sincerity! High points in the history of music video performance might include Sinead O’Connor’s “Nothing Compares 2U,” with her solo face, shaved monkish head, floating against a black background. Hype Williams’s extreme wide-angle shots, with foregrounded performers mugging against cartoonish scapes, often gave a sense of the performers as blowup dolls. Francis Lawrence’s and Justin Timberlake’s “Cry Me a River”

\textsuperscript{41} Think of seventies’ Earth, Wind, and Fire’s “After The Love Is Gone” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0lpityVOiE) compared to the eighties’ Human League’s “Don’t You Want Me” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPudE8nDog0&ob=av2e).

\textsuperscript{42} Though there are some exceptions, like Young MC’s “Bust a Move,”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZQQGX24Teg

marked the first time I felt that music-video performance might project the same amount of intimacy and realism as cinema’s. In retrospect, however, that was an unusual video. Today so much is built around the character that it can seem as if less acting and dancing is unfolding.

Today, music-video image fractures into the smallest bits. In the digital era the face often bifurcates: eyes versus mouth, each heading off in different directions. Performers have found the eyes particularly must hail and capture the camera, but the mouth still needs to carry the text (like in Nicole Scherzinger's “Poison”). The hyper-focus on the face is complemented by today’s musical arrangement, lyrics, and production. One thing that has changed is an intense focus on the processing of the voice and the ways it’s brought forward— the voice might be chorused, faded in and out, autotuned, or shadowed by other timbres created through plugins. (Listen to the kind of fine work done in Katy Perry and Kanye West’s “ET.”)

Dancing is worth tracking as well. Early hip-hop videos, like those with Chaka Khan, display a kind of freedom. When it first appeared in music videos, break-dancing seemed fresh and alive. In the eighties and nineties, performers often moved in synch in what felt like robotic simulacrum, and that practice has continued until today. Looser, Jonathan Dayton’s, Valerie Feris’s and Steve Winwood’s “Higher Love,” in the eighties, with its stylized dance moves in gypsy costumes, was the music video that captured my attention and has kept me watching music

44 Sinead O’Connor’s “Nothing Compares 2U,”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUiTQvT0W_0

Justin Timberlake’s “Cry Me a River,”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DksSPZTZES0&ob=av2e. And sure enough Timberlake became an actor—but I’d argue his best performance was in this music video.

45 Nicole Scherzinger’s “Poison,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9joqPp3peLg
video all along. Today, Beyoncé's “Countdown” has lovely dancing in it too (borrowed from experimental choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker).

**Settings**

I have claimed that images wafted along or buoyed against a soundtrack are musical. In music video, the origins for such levitation are uncertain, lending more authority to the song. But music videos also, at some point, tend to “touch ground,” to reveal the floor or the earth. The ways music videos depict figures within space can reflect technical acumen, musical style or fashion. For example, one typical eighties scenario showcased a night scene at a smoky bar, shot from overhead, often with a ceiling fan cresting the frame. But often this image wouldn’t give the viewer an integrated kinesthetic sense of the floor, feet dancing, the walls, and ceiling, in a way that bound these elements to the music (Examples include Simple Mind’s “Don’t You (Forget About Me),” and Wang Chung’s “Dance Hall Days,” though I can provide several exceptions).

In eighties videos, high heels, long legs, thick shoulder pads, and blow dried, waxed or sculpted hair styling often pulled everything away from the floor perhaps because the big glossy synth sounds provided the “true” ground. In nineties hip-hop videos, the floor was essential, but it

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46 Steve Winwood’s “Higher Love,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqlauwX_ums](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqlauwX_ums)

47 See Experiencing Music Video

48 “En Vogue’s “Free Your Mind,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tIYpvlQP_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tIYpvlQP_s)

49 “En Vogue’s “Free Your Mind,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tIYpvlQP_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tIYpvlQP_s)

Rihanna’s “Who’s That Chick?,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbghbznr26U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbghbznr26U)

Rihanna’s “Who’s That Chick?,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbghbznr26U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbghbznr26U)
was implied, not displayed. The low-slung camera framed as a tracking wide-angle shot seemed always to be three feet above.\textsuperscript{50}

There may be something “musical” about repressing footage of the floor, yet today, for the first time, we find directors concertedly working to create a three-dimensional space that combines ceiling, wall, and the floor. Does the music seem to call for this approach, or have directors finally figured out how to do it? Perhaps arrangements built up with digital sounds on the computer rather than through live playing create a sense of absence that must be compensated for; hence a more completely articulated space. Simultaneously the concrete and object-like qualities of the digital sounds may also demand clearer containers. In Justin Bieber’s “I Need Somebody to Love,” and Justin Timberlake’s “Rock Your Body,” there’s a series of low-angle shots up through a glass floor—the video moves from shots of feet, toward the performer’s torso, up toward the wall, the bent background, and finally the ceiling. Francis Lawrence’s “Bad Romance” articulates ceiling, walls, and floor very carefully.\textsuperscript{51} I find Jonas Akerlund’s hybrid spaces particularly charming.

\textit{Sculptural Spaces}

Most music videos today need to project both on large screens and on cellphones. One way to accommodate to this range is to foreground a dramatic shift in scale between figure and set. In

\textsuperscript{51} En Vogue’s “Free Your Mind,” \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7iQbBbMAFE&ob=av2e}

Rihanna’s “Who’s That Chick?,” \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4_U2ZqFLeM}

Nicole Scherzinger’s “Whatever U Like,” \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX-1q_Lpzp8&ob=av2e}
the nineties, director Mark Romanek was the master of building sets that looked simultaneously enormous and miniature, as in En Vogue’s “Free Your Mind,” but today there has been a renaissance. The sloping and accordion-ribbed spaces in Rihanna’s “Who’s That Chick?,” or the Serra-like iron constructions in Nicole Scherzinger’s “Whatever U Like,” can be seen as canny extensions of Romanek’s practice.\textsuperscript{52} This rich play of figure and environment may well reflect an accrued understanding of the genre, to be deployed and developed into the future.

\textit{Packing the Frame}

In many eighties videos, you could often see the seams of the barren film stage-set or television studio; a cookie-cutout scrim produced a silhouette of a window against the wall and a figure might be draped in silky cloth, obscured by some smoke. There weren’t many items in the frame. When performers and supporting characters moved in a spookily stilted way, and the blocky editing unpredictably turned harsh, there was something magical about the image with the music (for example, Kim Carnes’s “Bette Davis Eyes“).\textsuperscript{53} Now, we have the reverse: with digital cameras and digital intermediate, directors can put an unprecedented number of objects in the frame, and delineate them through color, texture and lighting. Even small objects toward the back of the frame possess distinct textures—whether they’re made of softer, more malleable

\textsuperscript{52} En Vogue’s “Free Your Mind,” \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7iQbBbMAFE&ob=av2e}

Rihanna’s “Who’s That Chick?,” \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4_U2ZqFLeM}

Nicole Scherzinger’s “Whatever U Like,” \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX-1q_Lpzp8&ob=av2e}

\textsuperscript{53} Kim Carnes’s “Bette Davis Eyes,“

\url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPOIS5taqA8&ob=av2e}
plastic or harder acrylic. Digital intermediate helps these elements come forward; objects pop. We can also track the shifts in spots of color from mauve to burgundy and the modulation from dark to light. Rihanna’s videos seem to do this more than others. Is it her voice? Her beauty? Her Amazonian presence? In many of her videos everything projects forward. This visual strategy complements the musical scapes designed for headphones: hooks are finely manicured, stacked up, and distributed around the space. (Consider her “Who’s That Chick?“ “Rude Boy,“ and “Umbrella.”)\(^{54}\)

**Multiples and Crowds**

Music video’s prismatic proliferation of objects reflects both the digital signal and music’s inherent polyphony. The image becomes buzzy as technical devices jack it up to speak to both music video’s new digital technology and its nature as a polyphonic form. Also, as never before, we feel the pressure of the crowd around us as billions on the planet (many who are online at the same time) compete for the same jobs and natural resources. As Les Brill might argue, the images of multiples in the frame reflect human crowds.\(^{55}\) Then again, music video has always

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\(^{54}\) Rihanna’s “Who’s That Chick?”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDgT0kR6770&feature=fvwrel. Rihanna’s “Rude Boy,“

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e82VE8UtW8A. Rihanna’s “Umbrella,”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXvauXKo2hU. Stan Hawkins has written about what he calls the “hyper-embodiment“ of the figure. Each thing including bodies seems more extremely realized.

\(^{55}\) Les Brill, *Crowds, Power, and Transformation in Cinema (Contemporary Approaches to Film and Television)* (Wayne State University Press, 2006), 3.
drawn on images of multiples. Think of the crane shots that pass like wind over a field of wheat in the eighties stadium videos for rock and heavy metal, or a video like Peter Gabriel’s “Sledgehammer,” when a white speckled on black animated figure opens the door and walks out into a field of stars.  

In Depth and on the Horizontal

The tracking shot has been an essential technique because it supports the music’s pace in relation to the video’s environment, and provides a respite from rapid editing. But, surprisingly, music videos have backed away from the tracking shot—and when they do deploy it, it’s frequently less showy than in the past. Directors rather have started exploiting other spatial techniques, like placing performers and objects twisting from within an expanding whorl. (Examples include Justin Timberlake’s “Let Me Talk To You/My Love“ and Katy Perry’s “E.T.”) Today music videos are also staged more in depth and on the horizontal. Perhaps the new cameras create a greater three-dimensionality, and digital intermediate can more easily separate objects from the background, bringing some objects close while leaving others in the far distance (but all remain clearly visible through strong color demarcation). Directors shooting for the scale of cell phones, too, may coax objects to pop. Or with YouTube in mind, they may sharply define edges to

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56 Peter Gabriel’s “Sledgehammer,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqyc37aOqT0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqyc37aOqT0)

George Michael’s “Monkey,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHb2XYeXcJl&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHb2XYeXcJl&ob=av2e), is a good example of a crane shot documenting a stadium performance with masses of concert goers.

57 For example, Lady Gaga’s “Bad Romance,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrO4YZeyl0I&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrO4YZeyl0I&ob=av2e), and “Telephone,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVBsypHzF3U&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVBsypHzF3U&ob=av2e) use very discreet tracking shots.
compete with everything around the frame. These videos may tap into primitive “fight or flight” responses: objects coming from a distance or entering from the side can seize a viewer’s attention, holding her within the clip, rather than letting her dally with other engaging web attractions outside the frame. Directors and viewers may also be starting to imagine their projects in 3D, because so many media are set for release in that format. Some visual objects are also designed for music that has been spatialized and often redistributed (panned from ear to ear) for headphones. Or just as likely, the whorl could appear because it works as an inverted mirror of our lived experience: we sit at the computer and feel our presence radiating out from the mouse, through the screen, to other screens beyond it. Or it could simply be that this technique is the latest trick directors and musicians have stumbled on, a novelty to exploit, but I doubt it. Such a strong hook—something barreling down an unfurling path, calling to us, cloth whirling from an abyss at a distance—is a very powerful image. It suggests control, authority, magic and magnetism. It claims this video is the center of our attention and the internet.58

Haptics

Do music videos today elicit a heightened sensation of touch, or a greater sense of kinesthetic engagement? While objects in recent videos may seem concrete, three-dimensional and isolated in space, objects from earlier clips seemed more capable of existing in a generous, cohabitable

58 It appears in Floria Sigismondi’s and Katy Perry’s “ET,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Sd5c409UM&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Sd5c409UM&ob=av2e), Kanye West’s “Power,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L53giP-TtGE&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L53giP-TtGE&ob=av2e), and Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV1FrqwZyKw&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV1FrqwZyKw&ob=av2e), for example.
space—where we might reach out and be a part of them. They seemed to belong more to the world of film critic André Bazin.

We can contrast these approaches by comparing some recent videos, like Nelly’s “Just a Dream” and Justin Timberlake’s “My Love,” with earlier ones like Matt Mahurin and REM’s “Orange Crush,” or Mark Romanek and Macy Gray’s “I Try.”

Perhaps the older “generosity” derives from the fact that it wasn’t as easy in the eighties and nineties to create a tactile sense in the image as it streamed alongside the music, and so directors worked hard to find ways of using hands and objects that were expressive. In Mahurin’s “Orange Crush” the hand in closeup digs into rich dirt and clasps a piece of wood. Romanek’s “I Try” shows Gray holding a bouquet of flowers that perches in the frame’s center for much of the video. The extra friction or work required to project a person in relation to an object may now be unnecessary. Now objects may simply be hurled at us: there is less charm in setting them off against everything else. It may also be that digital sound and image is a bit harsh, while video is softer and more capacious.

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59 Nelly’s “Just a Dream,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6O2ncUKvlg&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6O2ncUKvlg&ob=av2e)

Justin Timberlake’s “My Love,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVvIWiKgJ12g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVvIWiKgJ12g)

Matt Mahurin and REM’s “Orange Crush,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mSmOcmk7uQ&ob=av2n](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mSmOcmk7uQ&ob=av2n)

Mark Romanek and Macy Gray’s “I Try,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzvbiFR95gM&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzvbiFR95gM&feature=related)

My book *Experiencing Music Video* describes how objects in music videos become odd. They project their own aura or voice that we recognize from the real world, but they nevertheless seem strange. It’s almost as if you had inadvertently encountered your pet, suddenly feral, as it was trolling through the park, or as if you peered at a stick, as seen underwater, now twisted and bent. Objects in these videos remain strange—ring, car, violin, flower, stick and dirt. But in recent videos, objects often seem to retain more of their real-world ordinariness, and it is difficult to pinpoint why. Perhaps each sound dutifully seeks out an object in the frame: each newly formed sound-image object is more fully rendered and separate than in the past. The sound-image connections don’t seem surprising. Do we recognize these amalgams now more simply as commodities? Consider the car and ring in Nelly’s “Just a Dream”; they look grand and they float, but there’s less sense of wonder. Directors may only now be discovering how to work with low bandwidth and a small frame in a way that compensates for what could be seen as a brittleness of the digital soundtrack and image. In “Wish You Were Here,” Avril Lavigne holds a burning flower, to little effect, but such instances where a hand holds an object may carry great weight soon.

Some objects do still seem strange, their uncanniness created through savvy use of color. In Jonas Akerlund’s “Paparazzi“ the video’s color arc finally leads us to Lady Gaga as a musketeer dressed in black and yellow, pouring a poisonous substance into a pale pink fizzy liquid. Suddenly everything turns uncanny. Perhaps it’s because we’re surprised that the video’s opening Spring promise—a beautiful pale pink rose and a rich magenta orchid, both linked to

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62 Avril Lavigne’s “Wish You Were Here,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VT1-sitWRtY&ob=av2e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VT1-sitWRtY&ob=av2e)
Lady Gaga, have turned sullen. The bits of purple at the video’s opening and close suddenly become tainted with sickly yellow, green and black; this shift, as well as a new motor-rhythmic pulse, pushes the video into some sort of hyper-dreamland where murder becomes contagious and licit.\(^{63}\)

Elements in music production too, have tended toward the distinct, so that they will project well on mp3s and YouTube. The attacks have become shorter, and careful equalization has sharpened the separation between sounds. Perhaps songs and images are triggering each other: the sharply defined objects in the image encourage music producers to seek sharply defined qualities in the music, and vice versa; both seem to seek a greater dimensionality. Here low-register attacks boom, each sonic event suggesting a three-dimensional object the listener can trace in space. Visually, too, we can sense the other sides of objects in the frame. Like Caravaggio’s chiaroscuro in which shadows suggest fuller forms, performers now have “backs.”

Sometimes a sound effect and an object can become so tightly synced that they become a three-dimensional amalgam. Look at the Donald Flavian fluorescent lights blinking and listen to the thunks and variously pitched cowbells in Timberlake’s “Let Me Talk to You,” or the exhortation of “heartbeat” and the lurid 3D modeling of a pumping heart in Enrique Iglesias’s “Heartbeat.”

**Intertextuality**

Music video has always been self-reflexive, as well as intertextual with nearby forms and genres; think, of course, of the Buggles’ “Music Video Killed the Radio Star,” the video that inaugurated music video’s first broadcast in 1979, and, as the song title suggests, staked its claim against

\(^{63}\) Lady Gaga, “Paparazzi,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2smz_1L2_0&ob=av3e](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2smz_1L2_0&ob=av3e)
other media. My favorite historically-based intertextual videos include Paula Abdul’s “Rush Rush“ which pays homage to Rebel Without a Cause, and the Blues Travelers’ “Runaround“ which reenacts The Wizard of Oz. But videos today want to say “music video is back!“ and there are many ways it does so. Musicians can place clips of their earlier videos in their clips in a recent one, as if to say “I’m still around.“ “Know your music video history!“ suggests Britney Spears’s “Hold It Against Me“ and Eminem’s and Dr. Dre’s “I Need a Doctor.“ Another way is to intersperse references to other videos, as in Hanson’s 2011 “Thinking Bout Somethin’.”64 The clip plays with speed—characters move a bit too fast or slow, which makes the clip seem very up-to-date, but it’s also filled with a thousand references for those in the know—to Blues Brothers films, West Side Story, Spike Jonze’s and Weezer’s music video “Buddy Holly“ (an homage to the television show Happy Days), a Gap commercial, and every other “dancin’ in the street“ video like the already nostalgic LMFAO’s “Party Rock Anthem“ and Lionel Ritchie’s “All Night Long.“ It seems jokingly to say, “Hanson was always retro, remember when they did “Mmmbop?“ but we’ll really test your knowledge of retro.“ Many other examples include Katy Perry’s “Friday Night,“ which contains cameos by eighties music video stars Kenny G and Debbie Gibson, and recent YouTube viral web star Karen Black. And Weezer’s “Pork and Beans“ video is a mashup of YouTube one-hit wonders.

Remediation

64 Paula Abdul’s “Rush Rush,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqyIaNWP0T0

Britney Spears’s “Hold It Against Me,“ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Edv8Onsrgg&ob=av2e

Hanson’s ”Thinking ‘Bout Somethin’,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmG0DqhFDbY
Music videos frequently remediate material. They adopt images from earlier sources (films, commercials, paintings, posters) and often juxtapose them with others in the video.\textsuperscript{65} In MTV’s first half-hour in 1981, two clips exhibited extensive remediation, perhaps more than we tend to see today. Todd Rundgren’s “Time Heals” featured images from paintings by Magritte, while PhD’s “Little Suzi’s on the Up” borrowed from Fred Astaire movies. The practice of remediation continues today. In The Strokes’ “Taken for a Fool,” the singer wears a t-shirt with an American flag, while behind him flicker shadowy electric trees, lit as if they might serve as Christmas ornaments, and then the band rotates to the left as if it’s on a lazy Susan.\textsuperscript{66} We might say that the video points to multiple media: lithography (the flag stamped on the t-shirt); the coming of electricity and capitalism (electric trees); records, record culture and moving media (the electrified lazy Susan). The materials sort of combine into something new. A patriotic Christmastime snow globe? Whatever the intent, it’s evocative and it looks good.

Music videos may remediate materials in order to work like poetry. In poems, words or phrases not normally placed together form new relations. The brain can experience a flooding, or

\textsuperscript{65}Korsgaard suggests that more of this takes place in the digital era than in the past. This is an interesting claim, but it might be hard to prove. Mathias Korsgaard, “Creation and Erasure: Music Video as a Signaletic Form of Practice,” \textit{Journal of Aesthetics & Culture} 4, (2012).\hspace{1cm}\texttt{http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/18151/22823}

\textsuperscript{66}PhD’s “Little Suzi’s on the Up,” \texttt{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKgzYLBV_cc}

The Strokes’ “Taken for a Fool,” \texttt{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0U_jGVEKr9s&ob=av2e}

Queen’s and David Bowie’s “Under Pressure,” \texttt{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtrEN-YKLBM}, is another example of an eighties video that uses much remediation.

Lady Gaga’s “Paparazzi,” \texttt{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2smz_1L2_0&ob=av2e}
an affective overload. In music, images serve the same function as words in poems, and the sense of overload becomes amplified by music’s affective qualities, forming a potent amalgam. In the era of multitasking and the remix, our brains may more strongly crave these interactions. Remediation also makes accessible certain features of music-audiovisual relations. As Nicholas Cook and Philip Tagg argue, music presents conflicting attributes simultaneously. Music is often said to create the sense that it’s immediately affective: even before culture, it goes “directly to the heart” without explanation. But in a contradictory fashion, music in an audiovisual context seems “cultural.” Cook argues that music is willing to pick up associations with almost anything it encounters: music is “sticky.” One remembers a song because its halo of memories always trails it. All the modes of dress, performance, and paraphernalia surrounding music—its concerts, album covers—can shape our relation to a piece of music. Remediation reminds us that music still pierces us, but also that almost anything can work in an audiovisual context. One image might make associative chains with the music it’s coupled with, but another might do as well.

The Fragment

Nicki Minaj sings “boom da da da, boom da da da, super bass,” and that’s what the video is about. Her hands flutter, her hips pound, and speakers quiver on ice. Stuttering hooks have long been important in popular music, but earlier examples have never been so pointed, piercing, insistent. Lady Gaga sings, “Ga-ga.” Enrique Iglesias sings, “listen to my heart beat,” and we hear a “boom,” “boom,” “boom,” as we peer through his illuminated body’s insides to a
synchronized red heart beating. Today’s instances may reflect new possibilities for pinpoint control, a competitive urge with YouTube, a claim for listening now, or a desire to sync up everyone.

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This chapter has embarked on a comparison of music videos from the eighties and today. I want to conclude first with a claim for the artistry of the past: with small and then adequate budgets, and with forgiving, inexpensive video incorporated into the production process, an eighties director might create a delirious environment that moved beautifully against the human figure. Video’s visual softness and loose synch actually supported the big stripped-down sound of the eighties—here, pop-music production and video technology may have tightly fitted one another. The record industry also actively sought out experimental visual artists across many fields including the graphic arts and filmmaking. Directors reported being excited by audience responses. The field was open: new programming was needed, costs could be low, and fast production schedules obliged many directors to improvise and rapidly review their ideas.

The present era presents many exciting opportunities for music video too. With digital technologies, fine synch between sound and image becomes realizable, frame by frame and pixel to pixel; more malleable, flexible relations have become newly possible. Though budgets have dropped, directors still find means to produce glossy work, as cameras and recording media have become cheaper. Shooting on green-screen or against a studio’s cyc background, and paying technicians to animate backgrounds and edit on Final Cut rather than shoot on location, keep


Enrique Iglesias’ “Heartbeat,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVk4vENObiI&ob=av2e
costs low. Placing products in videos can also raise a budget by twenty per cent. On the other hand, today’s audiences and their favorite venues are fragmented. Directors often feel they don’t know whom they are shooting for. The relaxation of censorship rules creates new and sometimes freeing possibilities.

Which period, the eighties or today, seems richer? At the chapter's beginning, I argued that in the eighties, music and image had to work to find one another and there was something plaintive about this (like a relationship). Some of the resistance could be found in the sync of sound and image on videotape. I suspect finer control of sync may not always be freeing today. While today’s technologies might seem capable of producing a music video sublime, where the image in its voluble fluidity can be as responsive as the song, we may not want our music video images to be so flexible that they cross over into the realm of pure animation. Rather, we may enjoy the weight of the human figure and real objects in space, in relation to more painterly elements. Technologically, today, there may be less friction in creating the image or music, and it’s not as exciting.

One might counterargue that bodies still have plenty of inertia and the digital offers all kinds of new possibilities, particularly with color. Some directors like Romain Gavras and Melina Matsoukas have stayed with film, others like Mark Pellington have embraced the digital. Even today, different approaches and aesthetics are most suited to particular technologies.

Sync may be important only for some genres of music video. On one hand, the most popular clips on Vevo today still work “classically,” hewing to the familiar mode of carefully tracking the song. On the other hand, many YouTube and Vimeo clips with 1,000-500,000 hits may foreground first a technical gimmick or disjunctive sound-image connections (to seem different from corporate sponsored clips). Audiovisual aesthetics may not be as essential as we
had once assumed: sync can be good enough. Directors with great visual flair can make wonderful videos even when their musicality isn’t immediately apparent. Other directors, with highly developed chops at shaping music-image relations, tend to be appreciated more by connoisseurs (like director Alan Ferguson). This may boil down to taste; I like videos that encourage repeat viewings (and these tend to track the song), while other viewers may be drawn to punchiness or beauty in but one domain—image, music, or text.

We might also be able to evaluate the eighties and the present day by considering the roles of experimentation and innovation. There are some strong early examples. In the eighties, MTV vee-jay Mark Goodman announced, “This is a wild one from REM.“ And then screened, both upside-down and scrolling to the left, footage of a stone quarry and bolded lyrics for the song “I’m Falling“—that’s all. MTV also played clips that surprised its audience, like Peter Gabriel’s “Mercy Street“ which dealt with incest and suicide but lacked strong performers or identifiable figures. Today’s equivalents might include clips that disrupt narrative expectations (Jonas Akerlund’s clips for Lady Gaga’s “Paparazzi“ and “Telephone,“ for example). Some videos experiment with hybrid forms—videos built for cellphone apps, or teasers or long-playing quasi-musicals (work of Bjork, Britney Spears and Kanye West), or with interactive elements that help them approach video games.68

But what about videos that leave us completely lost—that might reflect postclassical values like those that have reconfigured cinema (Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Moulin Rouge) or technical approaches that really stun us? I could claim that music video remains

conservative. As noted earlier, music video has long showcased a heightened image souped up by technical effects. Today, mainstream, corporate-funded music videos may cannibalize YouTube’s and indie clips’ technologically showy devices (trails, kaleidoscopes, sinusoidal waves) and then incorporate them as passing moments—as a means to lead into the chorus, fill in gaps among verses, or kick off the intro. But the performer’s face and body must remain legible and accessible. When these effects appear, the clips find ways to explain or narrativize the devices (the trippy effects might be part of a karaoke show, for example, or a performer’s hallucination as he drives his car at night, or the whole video might adopt an art-deco sheen as if it were a segment from a Busby Berkeley musical).69 There are some exceptions (Kanye West’s “Welcome to Heartbreak,” Chairlift’s “Evident Utensil,” and MGMT’s “Time to Pretend”), but these are few and even they could be said to remain what I’d call classical.70

We could argue that mainstream music video has always already been progressive and experimental, even before digital technologies saturated production practices. Music video began


Selena Gomez & the Scene’s “Naturally,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_YR4dKArgo

70 Kanye West’s “Welcome to Heartbreak,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMH0e8kIzTE&ob=av2e MGMT’s “Time to Pretend,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9dSYgd5Elk&ob=av2n
in the era of video editing. The technology was cumbersome and the sync was poor, but with a four- or five-minute piece, and so few constraints, a director might move material around and experiment. Techniques applied to the frame, like animation, frame-by-frame rotoscoping, and visual software and hardware, provided frisson. Pre-digital videotape was already pretty weightless and buzzy. Music video is a short-form genre, and its underlying materials—the pop song—haven’t gone through any radical transformations since the late eighties.

But then I check myself. Suddenly, anew, mainstream music video is true for me again. Beyoncé’s and Adria Petty’s “Countdown,” Rihanna’s and Jonas Akerlund’s “Who’s That Chick,” Katy Perry’s and Floria Sigismondi’s “ET,” Lady Gaga’s and Francis Lawrence’s “Bad Romance,” or Kanye West’s and Hype William’s “All of the Lights” are strong or stronger than anything I have seen.

Why are these clips seductive? A sizeable cohort of music video directors have been directing for ten to twenty years and have developed a well-honed method and mature handling of materials. Their knowledge informs these clips. Music video has also experienced competitive pressures that have forced quick adaptation, in response both to economic shifts and developments in other newly emergent media—rendering some videos tough and fleet. Mainstream music video needs to compete with or respond to indie clips that appear on sites like Pitchfork and Vimeo and have their own innovations. Their music is often brutalist, compressed for the mp3 aesthetic, and the image seems overtaken by jittery, colorful sinusoidal waves and mirroring effects that are rendered by algorithms. Surprise might play a role too: how do Rihanna, Lady Gaga, or Katy Perry and their directors treat performance and editing when any feature can be distorted in post, including an expression? Doesn’t this create some uncertain

Like the quantel and the toaster in the eighties, and the flame in the nineties.
tension, a new relation among artists, practitioners and directors? Suddenly music video has the right scale for today, and perhaps the right mode for a competitive global market (tied but loosely to language, it easily crosses national borders).

I’ve intimated that some of the strongest music videos arise from a nexus of evolving audiovisual relations. The image responds to pop songwriting and vice versa. Perhaps we are now witness to a new type of songwriting and directors are laboring to keep up. Some musicologists have noticed the appearance of “the soar.” Many hit songs, like Katy Perry’s “Teenage Dream,” rely on a tiered chorus, which draws on principles of layering and “buildups” that have long been a staple of electronic dance music. Unlike a traditional pop song chorus, its chorus builds in stages. The song begins with a relatively basic, perhaps even sparse, texture, then it repeats a second time with added layers that usually thicken the rhythm, along with an included propulsive dance beat. This is effectively a two-part chorus, and as the listener moves through it, she experiences a rapidly building textural crescendo. To add to this layering effect, many of these recent pop songs feature a fairly active verse that then intentionally scales back at the beginning of the prechorus or chorus, so it can make the textural layering and buildup of the chorus even more dramatic. Examples include Katy Perry’s “Firework,” Ke$ha’s “We R Who We R,” and Britney Spears’s “I Wanna Go” and “Till the World Ends.”

Many musicologists don’t like “the soar.” They feel listeners are forced into an automatic response— hectored into the ecstatic high of the chorus. The listener feels obliged to

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72 I’d like to thank Theo Catforis for describing "the soar" for me.

73 See Simon Reynolds, who also connects "the soar" to dance music: http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2011/apr/14/balearics-ibiza-pop and Daniel Barrow’s critique of the soar.
raise her hands (or hail the DJ). But in a music video context the new songwriting technique may offer new possibilities. Against the song’s regimented structure, color can adopt a contrapuntal voice, or project its own phrasing, possibly even to break free from other visual elements and the music. Watch the patches of reds, pinks, yellows, and blues in some recent videos featuring the soar like The Black Eyed Peas’ “I Gotta Feeling” and Jennifer Lopez’s “On the Floor.” 74 We don’t know enough about how YouTube, music video, and digital cinema are influencing one another. Nor are we sufficiently tracking the ways directors draw on these media, incorporate, and refashion them while they respond to music video’s history. We need to think more about this, but for now I’ll say that music video is back with a vengeance.


74 The Black Eyed Peas’ “I Gotta Feeling,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSD4vsh1zDA
Jennifer Lopez and Pitbull’s “On The Floor (featuring Pitbull),”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4H_Zoh7G5A
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