



A music video is a short movie, on average of about 3 minutes in length. Music videos are commonly used to advertise a artist and show people their image, interests and style.

Music videos are also used to provide entertainment to the listener. they can tell the story of the lyrics, but Many do not create images only from the song‟s lyrics, Instead they Create their own areas of meaning. Some music videos aren‟t about the lyrics, just a video‟d version of the songs live performance or to represent the artist style and methods.

**Types of production**

Music videos can be seen on the internet, TV and DVD‟S. The most commonly used would be internet as it‟s quick and easy to use and most people have access to it.

There are many types of music video production making. They use animation, live concerts and editing clips together to make a short movie, sometimes representing the lyrics.

Some writers about music video have claimed that videos work primarily as narratives that they function like parts of movies or television shows. Others have wanted to say that music video is fundamentally antinarrative, a kind of postmodern pastiche that actually gains energy from defying narrative conventions.1 Both of these descriptions reflect technical and aesthetic features of music video that remain worthy of discussion, but they need to be placed in context with techniques drawn from other, particularly musical and visual, realms; we should consider music video‟s narrative dimension in relation to its other modes, such as underscoring the music, highlighting the lyrics, and showcasing the star.

Music video presents a range all the way from extremely abstract videos emphasizing color and movement to those that convey a story. But most videos tend to be non-narrative. An Aristotelian definition—characters with defined personality traits, goals, and a sense of agency encounter obstacles and are changed by them—describes only a small fraction of videos, perhaps one in fifty. Still fewer meet the criteria that David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson require in their *Film Art: An Introduction*: that all of the events we see and hear, plus those we infer or assume to have occurred, can be arranged according to their presumed causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations. Even if we have a sense of a music video‟s story, we may not feel that we can reconstruct the tale in the manner that Bordwell and Thompson‟s criteria demand. Music videos do not embody complete narratives or convey finely wrought stories for numerous reasons, some obvious and some less so. Most important, videos follow the song‟s form, which tends to be cyclical and episodic rather than sequentially directed. More generally, videos mimic the concerns of pop music, which tend to be a consideration of a topic rather than an enactment of it. If the intent of a music-video image lies in drawing attention to the music—whether to provide commentary upon it or simply to sell it—it makes sense that the image ought not to carry a story or plot in the way that a film might. Otherwise, video makers would run the risk of our becoming so engaged with the actions of the characters or concerned with impending events that we are pulled outside the realm of the video and become involved with other narrative possibilities. The song would recede into the background, like film music. Music-video image gains from holding back information, confronting the viewer with ambiguous or unclear depictions—if there is a story, it exists only in the dynamic relation between the song and the image as they unfold in time.

This chapter divides into four sections. It begins with a sketch of the continuum from narrative to non-narrative videos, tracing some of the familiar forms and providing descriptions of particular examples. Second, it considers why music videos most often do not embody narratives. The penultimate section offers models for understanding non-narrative modes such as the “process” video, the catalog, and the use of techniques such as contagion. Finally, advice is given for parsing meaning in examples where the message is particularly elusive.

**FROM NARRATIVE TO NONNARRATIVE**

As a short form with few words, a music video must fulfill competing demands of showcasing the star, reflecting the lyrics, and underscoring the music. If a director wishes to insert a narrative within such confines, she must employ certain techniques and devices.

As we move toward non-narrative videos, it is important to consider those that present some sort of problem or inconsistency and fail to yield a satisfying resolution. Even if we watch these videos repeatedly, we may never feel that we can put the characters and events in clear relation to one another. For me (and for many of my students), these problem narrative videos create a sense of pleasure but also anxiety and trauma. At the end of the video, I will feel as if I have grasped the video at some fundamental level but cannot articulate who, what, where, when, how or why. Such videos exploit two important aspects of the genre:

1. Each shot possesses its own **truth value**—a truth that cannot be undermined by another shot‟s; and
2. Each shot has only a **vague temporality**. Because of these ambiguities of truth value and temporality—and because a pop song‟s form and lyrics can undermine one another‟s authority— the viewer is hard pressed to decide a video‟s ultimate meaning.

LESS THAN NARRATIVE

Thus far we have remained on the side of the continuum where a video‟s story takes on such precedence that it threatens to overtake the song. Most videos, however, are not so ambitious, choosing rather to suggest the hint of a story and letting the song remain ascendant. A filmmaker may create continuity through moments of narrative closure or revelation that are satisfying but do not take over the action.

EXPLAINING THE ABSENCE OF NARRATIVES

Music videos avoid Aristotelian narratives and fully drawn stories for several reasons:

1. the genre‟s multimedia nature,
2. the lack of appropriateness and applicability of narrative film devices, and
3. the necessity of foregrounding the song‟s form (in order to sell the song)

THE GENRE‟S MULTIMEDIA NATURE

Videos that foreground changes in fortune, conflicts that matter, and ellipses in the narrative may always introduce an element of trauma: the viewer takes part in the video‟s unfolding and notes the shifts of activity, affect, and time, but cannot fill in the context. Here, music video‟s multimedia nature may be the major determinant. Each of music video‟s media—music, image, and lyrics—are to some extent blank. (Are the lyrics for me or a lover, or are they the singer‟s personal reflection? To whom do the empty sets and characters belong? What are the music‟s uses, and what spaces should it fill?) Music, image, and lyrics each possess their own language with regard to time, space, narrativity, activity, and affect.

The rest of the book will explore this topic, but I would like to give one example of how each medium possesses its own language with regard to time, space, narrativity, and affect. Music video‟s narratives are constructed by not only the tangled accumulation of music/image conjunctions, each of which may possess its own point of view and truth value; music, lyrics, and image even possess a distinct sense of time, whether suggestive of the future or the past, of time spent languidly or nervously. The sense of time created by music, lyrics, and image is always indefinite rather than exact, never definitive of the day or the moment. Each medium can suggest different types of time, and each can undercut or put into question the temporality of another medium. Not surprisingly, therefore, in “Take a Bow,” a video in which Madonna falls in love with a bullfighter, the music for the verse opens with a broad, open feel and closes with a touch of hesitation. The accompanying images show Madonna, the matador and the people of the town meticulously preparing for a bullfight over the course of what appears to be a single day. (The music and imagery match closely but not exactly. The music has a sense of grace, yet the image carries the scent of dull, repetitive labor.) A secondary staging presents Madonna standing or sitting alone in a room, hunched below a single light source, or passing her hands in front of a television set; here time seems painful, a suggestion that Madonna has engaged in this activity for a very long time. The music for the chorus, relaxed and lyrical in a ruminative way, could extend over a day or months. Even more oblique is the imagery featuring hands flow- ing over the matador‟s cape and Madonna‟s face and arms falling through the frame. This imagery is almost devoid of temporal markers: they might suggest a particular instant, a reoccurring moment, or a passing thought. Later, when Madonna and the bullfighter have what looks like demoralizing sex, there is no way to draw on what we have learned to tell if this is a one-time fling, a repeated event, or a figment of the star‟s imagination.

Even when the three media of lyrics, music and image seem to combine seamlessly into a new whole, some aspects of music, image, and lyrics may move to the background (as time, space, narrativity, activity, and affect), where they linger in an almost palpable way. Each medium may also change in relation to the others, making the multimedia object ambiguous. Finally, each ele- ment—music, image, and lyrics—is, moment by moment, riddled with its own ellipses. What happened between the cut from the image of the face to the shot.

of the fingertips? From the line “she knew me well” to “I‟ve always been there for you”? Or in the shift from the verse to the chorus?

The video often begins with the establishment of a ground, with a sense of stability and coherence. Although I cannot immediately understand the move- ment from one shot to another, the music begins to give me some feel for it, and the lyrics help me to piece it out. Once the music video starts developing a sense of history, however, and musical, visual, or lyrical elements begin to draw upon what the video has presented thus far, I note that I cannot find these sources from earlier in the video. One such source may be locked in the visual track in the fourth beat of the third measure of the first chorus. Another may be found in the lyrics of the second verse, third line. A third may reside in the music‟s texture, somewhere in the introduction. These moments are quite disparate, and between them stretches an archipelago of different events. These three moments from the video‟s past, and the moment in the video‟s present that has sent me back to them, are linked to other such complexes, each contributing to the present moment‟s sense of culmination. The best way for me to grasp the video is to learn the patterns inherent in the music, lyrics, and image, as well as the relations among these patterns, and to make conjec- tures about what happens in the gaps—time lapses, activity not shown, un- explained motivations. The template thus created (out of both depicted and inferred material) cannot be experienced in real time, because music videos are designed to be almost constantly engaging: the image draws us on as it rushes forward. Cognitive research on film has suggested that we cannot si- multaneously track every medium of a multimedia object. We may only hear and see moments of congruence among media, for example. Perhaps we may thereby edit out the most crucial aspects of a video.

TECHNIQUES FROM FILM

Because music videos often lack essential ingredients—place names, meeting times, a link to both past and present, and fully realized protagonists and villains—they cannot be described as possessing a classical Hollywood film narrative. As a rule, music videos do not help us to predict what will happen— in the next shot, or the following section, or at the close of the tape. To engage the audience in a feature film, many directors adopt a technique known as the narrative plank. An appointment is set, after which the character engages in some routine activity in preparation for the important meeting: she packs a suitcase and then walks or drives to the next scene. This gives the viewer ample time to predict how the upcoming encounter will unfold. If the director is able to intuit the viewer‟s guesses, and even incorporate an unusual twist on these expectations, he or she will seem competent and worthy of the viewer‟s respect. But because the objective of music video is to be continually engrossing, there is little time for a narrative plank. The music demands attention at every in- stant; a pressing future takes away from an interesting present. Music video typically elicits some protensive activity, most often on a local level— within spatial terms or within broadly sketched outlines of interpersonal relations (which also feel spatial). The viewer might chart how long it will take for the melodic line to reach its apex, or for the musical section to close, or for the figure to move across the room, or for one stock character to “get with” another.

Often the imagery that occurs at one of the high points of the video will have been disclosed somewhere in the opening third. As we move past the opening imagery, however, we can seldom identify an object, person, or setting as the “marked” material that will round out or clinch the piece. The satisfying rhythm of concealment and discovery so crucial to film narrative is less present in music video. Likewise, videos almost never give us enough information to predict one outcome over another (even if, in retrospect, the narrative appears to have unfolded in a coherent fashion). All outcomes seem possible—including an abandonment of the narrative in favor of a dance sequence.

As it is, the superficiality and brevity of a pop song mean that truly evil antagonists are almost always absent, and background figures can be only mildly threatening; their power and reasons for implementing it remains unclear. Some examples include the stone-faced judges in Nine Inch Nails‟ “Closer” and the factory owner in Madonna‟s “Express Yourself.” Given the absence of villains and, correspondingly, so few elements with which to define them, music-video figures become shadowy.

To understand the elusive qualities of a character in a music video is to accept a music video as a short, almost mute form whose purpose is to show- case the star, highlight the lyrics, and underscore the music. This requires that the viewer‟s attention be directed to various parameters; constant shift of focus precludes the construction of a unified subject. In addition, music video possesses multiple senses of time and space. A music video‟s star is a phantasmagoric multiple: the songwriter, the performer, and the figure on the screen embody different subjectivities. When the video is finally an edited whole, the image follows the music, and there is the eerie sense that the music, rather than the subject‟s intent, animates the figure. Generally, the image, in order to match the speed and energy of the music, reflects a more heightened experiential state than ordinary consciousness and the characters seem like mythical automatons.

FOREGROUNDING THE SONG‟S FORM

Pop videos are rarely teleological, and the same is true of pop music. Reflecting different aspects of a single topic, the verse might lay out the situation, while the bridge presents a solution to the problem, and the chorus, a crystallization of it. When a section repeats, we seem to know it more clearly. Similarly, as a musical and visual section repeats in a music video, we return to a related set of interests. More generally, videos mimic the concerns of pop music, which are usually a consideration of a topic rather than an enactment of it. If the intent of music-video imagery lies in drawing attention to the music—whether to provide commentary on it, or simply to sell it—it makes sense that the image ought not to carry a story or plot in the way that a feature film might. Otherwise, video makers would run the risk of our being so engaged with the actions of the characters or so concerned with impending events that we are pulled outside the realm of the video and become involved with other narrative possibilities. The song would recede into the background, like film music. Music-video imagery gains from holding back information, confronting the viewer with ambiguous or unclear depictions. If there is a story, it exists only in the dynamic relation between the song and the image as they unfold in time. The problems of superimposing a fully wrought narrative on the episodic, cyclical structure of a pop song can be seen in videos that derive from feature films—for example, Paula Abdul‟s “Hush Hush”

(borrowed from Rebel Without a Cause), Meatloaf‟s “I‟d Do Anything for Love, but I Won‟t Do

That” (Beauty and the Beast), and Blues Traveler‟s “Runaround” (The Wizard of Oz). In all of these, the opening two-thirds of the video follow the original source, and we can recognize the themes that will eventually collide to create a new status quo. But the videos fail to take up the encounters that truly count. They devolve instead into randomness and confusion. Perhaps such an encounter and its aftermath would suggest a sense of time and a type of structure different from that of the song.. This stylistic feature establishes the context for what most clearly distinguishes the character in a music video from a character in narrative film. Whereas an action of the latter spawns a series of effects that reflect back on him, thereby encouraging him to act again, the impetus in music video resides episodically in the song or in the way that the figures move in concert with the music. Moreover, a clear sense of time and movement must belong to the music in order for us to bestow our attention on it.

The unfolding of relations among figures in music video resembles the manipulation of materials in popular music. In a pop song, each musical element can both exist within its own sphere and become transformed over the course of the piece. For example, after a flute line is introduced, it will then be varied, extended, or simply repeated so that, by the end of the song, it stands in a new relation to other musical elements, like the bass line and the voice. Or, if the flute line disappears, it becomes submerged in the unfolding of the piece. Even when there is a dramatic break—when the music cuts out, the image shifts realms, sound effects and dialogue are added— the music will quickly resume, and the work remains intact. There is no annihilation of materials in music, as there is in narrative film.

TYPES OF NONNARRATIVE

If narrative models fail to capture a large portion of music video, what models can we put in their stead? Many videos are devoted to completing a single process: getting everyone to the party on time, ensuring that the plane gets off the ground or that the baby is born, and so on. (Here, we might define process as the act of carrying on or going on, a series of actions, changes, or functions bringing about a result, or a series of operations performed in the making or treatment of a product.) Such music-video projects do not feel like narratives, in part because they are arbitrary; one activity might have been picked as well as another. In addition, the focus on a single task often becomes apparent only in retrospect. The presentation of this process is fragmented, attenuated abruptly by images of the band performing or lip-syncing against an amorphous back- ground. The sustained treatment of the activity comes suddenly, at a time when we do not expect it, and its duration may be unusually prolonged or drastically abbreviated. The video‟s main project is dispersed across a number of the song‟s sections. When footage of this material appears over the course of the video, carrying the process forward, these appearances gain an uncanny sense of re- turn. In such videos, the emblematic characters, appearing intermittently with ferocious attention to a simple task, create qualities of volition and determi- nation befitting musical materials that function similarly.

A related type of music video involves categories, series, or lists. The per- formers might walk through a series of tableaux or separate rooms, or down the street as they encounter different people. The musician might be seen re- counting a number of previous relationships. Like the laundry list, the catalog is not a narrative; events or settings simply fall one after another. The catalog works well in a music video because the addition of a new yet familiar item (one that has a similar shape) can be compared with musical material that returns regularly but also incorporates variation.

The travelogue has elements of both the “process” video and the category or list—the performer driving, sailing, walking, and seeing or fantasizing things along the way. Sting‟s “Desert Rose,” Matchbox 20‟s “Ben,” and Bon Jovi‟s “It‟s My Life” are examples. Of special note is a species that blends process and list with a vaguely mysterious sense of cause and effect.

In music video as a whole, any visual reference to an unusual mechanical cause seems to suggest that the music possesses the greatest authority. R.E.M.‟s “Shiny Happy People” takes place in a high school auditorium, and a man pedaling a stationary bicycle rotates a pulley that draws back the curtains on the stage and shifts the rolling painted backdrop behind the actors and musi- cians. To ascertain whether this could really happen, we examine the music for possibilities. In fact, almost any technical, mechanical, or physical link between two spaces in relation to

music—two-way mirrors, rear-screen projections, pipes, satellites, computer terminals, television sets, and antennas—creates a question about effects.

Music-video directors add richness and complexity to the simple structures of processes and lists in several ways. One is to include a number of threads (for example, organized around lists, processes, or series) in a music video and make sure that at some point at least one becomes linked with another. Many music videos work on the principle of contagion: an element in one of the strands seeps into another—it might be a color, a particular prop, a way of feeling or moving.

For example, in Ben Folds Five‟s “Brick,” the splashes of red that appear in the performance space (which function purely as an arbitrary, decorative touch) gradually invade the story space

(we see a red Christmas bulb). Rage against the Machine‟s “Bulls on Parade” presents a much more complex example.

The video weaves eight threads into the texture in an un- predictable way:

1. generic, black-garbed freedom fighters wielding flags make their way up a mountain (a la

“king of the hill”);

1. the band performs, becoming more agitated as time progresses;
2. the crowds surge;
3. iconic political propaganda flashes on the screen;
4. text hand-scratched on film jitters on the screen;
5. a printing press churns;
6. an anonymous person writes graffiti on institutional walls proclaiming “long live the Los

Angeles revolution”;

1. Close-ups of earnest, highly photogenic young people of various ethnicities appear. Many of these threads contain material or processes that seep into the others. The torn red flags that become more worn as the video progresses connect to the last close-up of the lead performer, who stands firm, though looking completely exhausted.

There are a few more non-narrative modes still left for consideration—some more purely processual and some more based on tableaux. Many music videos simply extend performance settings: the performer might appear in a dolled- up high-school theater, and then some activity will play out backstage or in the wings. Performance videos are discussed in chapter 4; however, it is worth mentioning here that although the depiction may be static, the relation between the performer and the setting can seem unusually charged, as if the activity within the frame is somewhat taboo, and the police or a parent might rush in on the scene at any moment. In “Virtual Insanity,” Jamiroquia occupies a sil- very, boxlike setting. He does little except move back and forth along a floor resembling a conveyer belt, yet around him hover a number of ominous ele- ments: a crow, a pool of blood, a group of techno/science-fictional men ap- pearing and then disappearing. While the objects have little meaning, they present a bit of threat or danger for the performer.

Similar to the performance video is the “slice of life.” The slice of life func- tions in music video more as an extended tableau than as documentary, how- ever: a single image will be highlighted in time rather than revealed at once, with only one or two elements shifting slightly. In

Dishwalla‟s “Charlie Brown‟s Parents” a stock situation is set up—a candidate for public office appears with his unhappy spouse at a fundraiser while the band performs. In a vague way, the dynamic between the couple changes when the wife heads down the corridor, possibly to pick up a young campaign worker. Given numerous uncertainties—the viewer sees footage of the band only intermittently, does not know the time in which all of this is happening, and might guess that one thing might occur as well as something else—we may feel that we are simply seeing one tableau after another. We may connect the dots between instances, but what happens in the interim might be arbitrary.

Music videos often suggest a story, but in a somewhat static way: we obtain no more visual information than we might derive from a single narrative painting. Music videos encourage us early on to seek out a narrative, and by the video‟s close, they suggest that something crucial has transpired. But where, when, and how did this transformative event occur? Perhaps the evidence is buried in too many different places, and the clues are too elliptical. How much do we really know about what happens? A viewer may believe that some moment of density and richness is locked somewhere within this tape.

**DISCOVERING NARRATIVES THROUGH CLOSE READING**

When confronted with a Hollywood film, we can assume the existence of a narrative; anxieties about the kind of movie we will see are usually put to rest by the end of the opening credits.

Given the likelihood that a music video will lack certain narrative drive, it is not clear, at first, with what kind of attention we should watch. During the accretion of details that shape the production into a narrative, documentary, or performance video, the initiate will look intently for cues to determine the genre of the video—action adventure, sitcom, musical, fashion magazine, advertisement, soap opera, B movie, or whatever. Yet the sources of music video are quite disparate, and even if the genre appears to be narrative, a story may not materialize. Generic cues may provide no more guidance for the viewer than do other unfolding narrative elements. A look at how easel painters handle depiction will be helpful to our under- standing. Educated audiences know that if a portrait includes a particular cluster of icons like a lily, a cross, and a swan, there will be no story conveyed about the person depicted in the painting; rather, by drawing on biblical and mythological references, the painting will point to a generalized truth— an ideal such as faith, beauty, or chastity. If detailed attention is paid to the depiction of the figure, however—one focused more on specifics than on an idealized image—we might instead ask questions involved with narrativity: who is the person, how does he live, and so on. To comprehend the ways that characters function in music video, we can learn from the film theorist Jean-Louis Comolli‟s discussion of the difference between cubist painting and traditional film.He claims that no one looking at a still life by Georges Braque seeks further information about the objects that make up the composition—what the fish may be telling each other, why they are there and not in the sea, to whom the lemon belongs, and whether the plate is exploiting them. In cinema, he says, the opposite is true: an actor cannot put one foot in front of the other without a spectator wanting to know where he is going, why, whether the woman he loves has broken with him, and whether that is his last pair of shoes.

Music-video characters resemble the lemon, fish, and sea in Comolli‟s description of Braque‟s painting. Each figure is integral and whole, yet also opaque and mysterious. Nothing can be added to a music-video character, and nothing can be taken away. Perhaps the sketchy, obscure nature of music videos helps to create the sense that most often they are kept at a threshold below which a narrative commences. Without enough material to get us started, we spend time simply deciding what to make of the characters and whether to take them as allegorical figures, as musicians who find themselves in a strange situation, or as actors within a complete fiction. To see the characters as self-possessed and well-formed agents, we must feel that we can become acquainted with them. The ability to know what the characters will do next, or how they will meet the next obstacle before them, depends on this choice.

Music videos often challenge us at the first moment we must try to read them. It takes a certain skill to determine where to place a work because depictive modes collide within the same video.

# Editing

HEN CRITICS of film and television say that something is “cut like music video” or refer to

“MTV style editing,” what do they mean?

They might mention quick cutting or editing on the beat. And indeed, one can see that the edits in music video come much more frequently than in film, that many stand out as disjunctive, and that the editing seems to have a rhythmic basis closely connected to the song. These last two features of music-video editing—that it is sometimes meant to be noticed and that it brings out aspects of the song—suggest at once that it does something different, and perhaps something more, than does the editing in film. Music-video editing bears a far greater responsibility for many elements than does classic Hollywood film editing. Not only does the editing in a music video direct the flow of the narrative, but it can also underscore non-narrative visual structures and form such structures on its own. Like film editing, it can color our understanding of characters, but it has also assimilated and extended the iconography of the pop star.

Much of the particularity of music-video editing lies in its responsiveness to the music. It can elucidate aspects of the song, such as rhythmic and timbral features, particular phrases in the lyrics, and especially the song‟s sectional divisions. Because it can establish its own rhythmic profile, the editing can provide a counterpoint to the song‟s rhythmic structures. More subtly, and most importantly, the editing in a music video works hard to ensure that no single element (the narrative, the setting, the performance, the star, the lyrics, the song) gains the upper hand. Musicvideo directors rely on the editing to maintain a sense of openness, a sense that any element can come to the fore at any time. The editing does so in part simply through being noticed. By demanding attention, it prevents powerful images from acquiring too much weight and stopping the flow of information. The editing thus preserves the video‟s momentum and keeps us in the present. A striking edit can allow one to move past a number of strange or disturbing images while neither worrying about them nor forgetting them completely.

Music video‟s complexity stems not only from the sheer number of func tions it serves, but also from the way that it moves unpredictably among these functions. It may be helpful to picture the succession of images in a video, and the edits that join them, more as a necklace of variously colored and sized beads than as a chain. This picture not only emphasizes the heterogeneity of shots in music video, but it also suggests the materiality of the edit itself. Indeed, sometimes the edit seems to function as a part of the image and sometimes as a gap.

This chapter is divided into five sections:

1. an introduction to the grammar of **shots and edits**, and a discussion of how their functions differ between film and music video;
2. an analysis of the role of editing in making meaning, creating narrative, and establishing other forms of continuity;
3. an explanation of how music-video image adapts to the processual nature of sound;
4. an examination of the ways that music videos treat close-ups of the star; and
5. a presentation of the means by which editing can reflect musical features. Because it deciphers types of shots and edits, this chapter functions as a grammar for music-video editing; however, it also contains a theoretical component. I argue that the edits in music video mean something different—and create meaning differently—from their filmic counterparts. Even when a shot and edit in a music video remind one of classic narrative film, their function may have undergone a change of valence. Music-video editing, like camera movement and camera placement, enables relations between the song and the image.

SHOTS AND EDITS

When constructing a taxonomy of shots and edits in music video, one can begin with traditional narrative film practices. The continuity system forms the basis of film editing but is much less common in music video. Common continuity edits in film include the 180-degree rule, which preserves screen direction, as well as the thirty-degree rule, which prevents a jump cut between two shots, and shot/reverse-shots, over-the-shoulder shots, and matches on ac- tions.Such edits attempt to naturalize the movement from shot to shot and render the break as seamless as possible. Continuity editing seeks to preserve the flow of time and the coherence of spaces. The ultimate goal of continuity editing is to create a single, clear path through a film‟s world. Because music videos seem to benefit from providing a multiplicity of incomplete, sometimes obscure paths, continuity editing will serve different functions and govern only isolated sections of a video.3 Perhaps music videos avoid continuity editing because such techniques would give the visual track too strong a forward trajectory: the image might seem to overtake the song. A music video‟s aim is to spark a listener‟s interest in the song, to teach her enough about it that she is moved first to remember the song and second to purchase it. Music video‟s disjunctive editing keeps us within the ever-changing surface of the song. Though such edits may create a momentary sense of disequilibrium, they force the viewer to focus on musical and visual cues, allowing the viewer to regain a sense of orientation. In addition, the dense, oblique quality of a string of images can serve to showcase the star. The viewer may experience a jolt of accomplishment and pleasure as she passes through a thicket of imagery to come upon a clearing where she finds herself alone with a close-up of the performer. One of the most narrative music videos, Aerosmith‟s “Janie‟s Got a Gun,” comes the closest to following the rules of traditional Hollywood continuity, yet it also extends and breaks these rules. The video concerns incest. At one point, the father stands at the threshold of his daughter‟s room while the mother watches. In this sequence, sightlines do not match. Consequently, it will take a while for the viewer to notice that, based upon the position of the characters, the mother is watching the father, yet he does not see her. In addition, the thirty-degree rule is violated between the medium and close-up shots of the father. (The camera angle between shots is narrower than thirty degrees, and the object in the frame appears to jump.) Music videos avoid matches on action, often extending or abbreviating a shot to give the sense of a cut in the “wrong place.” This effect blunts narrative progress and creates a rhythmic emphasis on the moment when the edit occurs.

It will be helpful to widen our consideration of editing techniques to include not only those of classic Hollywood films, but also those in the Russian formalist film tradition. Karel Reisz‟s description of Eisenstein‟s October works as a characterization of music-video editing.

MEANING, NARRATIVITY, AND CONTINUITY

How does music-video image create meaning, and in what ways does editing contribute to that creation? The meanings of music videos have been thought to present a puzzle. Most often, music-video image is relatively discontinuous. Time unfolds unpredictably and without clear reference points. Space is re- vealed slowly and incompletely. A video will hint at a character‟s personality, mood, goals, or desires but will never fully disclose them. We seldom see an action completed—a figure‟s movement is often cut off by the edit. Stories are suggested but not given in full. Nor can the lyrics tell us what we need to know—they may be banal or purely conventional. A famous performer can also pull at the video‟s meaning—we cannot tell beforehand how or to what extent our knowledge of a star is intended to come into play in a given video.

Music-video editing plays an interesting role in producing this effect of discontinuity.The editing in Hollywood film seeks to fill the gaps in our knowl- edge, to stabilize the meaning of an image. In music video, the editing seems rather to help create the discontinuity and sense of lack.If, as I have suggested, e diting constitutes a distinct visual parameter of music video, we should expect that it can contribute to the creation of discontinuity. Because it, too, reveals things incompletely, makes promises it does not keep, it should be understood as but one of the elements fighting for attention in a video. And the case becomes more complicated. Edits happen between images; they are not part of the image. Edits can literalize the discontinuity by making us aware of the space between images.

EDITING AND THE EXPERIENCE OF IMAGE AND SOUND

In order to show that the connections between the editing and the music of music videos can be more subtle and more various than this, it will be helpful to take a step back and consider those elements of music-video image—crucial, in my view— that reflect the experiential properties of sound.This deep connection between image and song in music video allows for the responsiveness of editing and other visual parameters to musical features.

Theorists such as Edward Branigan, Michel Chion, and Walter Ong have reminded us that sound and image possess different properties. Sounds ebb, flow, and surround us. The cinematographic features and mise-en-sce`ne of music video—extreme high, low, and canted angles, longtracking shots, un- usual camera pans and tilts, and the lively features within the frame, glittering surfaces, rippling light—can mimic sonic processes. The types of shots used in videos do not just reflect sonic processes, but they also suggest a listening subject as much as a viewing one. We actually see figures turning, as if to listen, toward people and objects in the space.The camera‟s perspective often suffices to imply a listening subject. In order best to see something, we might want to be placed squarely before it.If we want to listen attentively to a sound, however, a frontal position is unnecessary. Many positions may be satisfactory—above, below, off to the side. In fact, turning an ear toward the object will take our eyes away from it.One of the most common camera positions in music video— below the subject and to one side—may privilege listening over viewing and grant greater authority to the soundtrack than to the image.The camera in music video also seems to mimic the ways that we direct our attention in a sonic space. We can throw our attention to focus on a sound that interests us.When we shift our focus among various sound sources in our environment, we experience a greater sense of mobility than viewing offers.The kinds of shots and editing that we see in music video—jumping from one location to another even before an image catches our eye—resembles what we do when we listen.

The camera normally takes time to explore the extent of video‟s setting, so that a setting is only partly revealed in any single shot. How does this practice influence our hearing of a song? A pop song creates a sense of a space through arrangement, production, mixing, and mastering. The acoustical properties of this constructed musical space seldom seem to match that of the video‟s setting. This lack of fit creates some confusion and some interest.How could the song‟s sound world inhabit the space of the video? The camera, as it explores the space, suggests possible ways that parts of the arrangement might be distributed within this environment. Many music videos exploit our curiosity about how a song might sound in the actual space of the music video: walls, floors, and ceilings are placed at odd angles and covered with materials that imply specific acoustical properties; objects that resemble speakers and baffles may be distributed throughout the space. Despite the fact that the camera never quite reaches the sides or the back of the setting, these videos encourage us to imagine the sound waves rolling into the walls and bouncing off them, much like dye moving through water

SHOWCASING THE STAR

A focus on editing can help us to understand the relation between music video‟s star-making dimension and its modes of continuity and signification. Close- ups of the star, and the ways they are edited into the flow of a video, provide useful cases to study. The music-video close-up possesses its own rhetoric. It has developed a unique look, revealing each wrinkle of the brow and blink of and future that press in on them as we view them in close-up, the music-video performer stands in a kind of temporal isolation.As the face fills the frame, it is subjected to so much visual analysis that it seems to move very slowly, almost to suggest the song‟s slowest rhythmic stratum. This rhythmic effect can serve a grounding function. The close-up of the singer‟s face is often shot and edited in such a way as to leave us with a single gesture. In its abbreviated simplicity, this gesture suggests a way of grasping hold of some musical element, which might be the main hook or a small detail. Music videos often present a flow of images that are too rich and materials that seem to dissolve too quickly. The close-up gives us something to commit to memory. The music seems to set certain faces in amber, preserved and just out of reach. The face becomes a mask, drawn into contortions we associate with the most hyperbolic silent screen acting—more an archetype than an expression of the performer himself. This intense isolation keeps the viewer in the present, blocking access to the past or the future as the music rushes by. The compositional features of the close-up, particularly the relation of the figure to the edges of the screen, contribute to this sense of the figure‟s being held in isolation. Rudolf Arnheim has taught us to recognize the force of the frame on the composition of a painting. He defines the balancing center as the point “around which the composition organizes itself. It is created by the con- figuration of vectors issuing from an enclosure such as the frame of a picture.”16 One can liken this force or pressure from the frame upon the picture proper to that of the song upon the close-up of the star. Here the song drives toward the downbeat, the beginnings of phrases and sections, or the tonic chord.When a performer is shown in close-up moving a bit with the music, the music seems to buffet the figure, like rip tides pushing and pulling in different directions. One wonders whether the figure will hold position or be sucked into the center. This effect of a push and pull within an unyielding frame makes the close- up precarious. The moments of stability that close-ups provide become high points of the video. The video brings us towards these peaks, holds us against them, and then releases us. Only a few moments of the video will provide this much pleasure, and as I, the viewer, reach for them they will be gone. As I watch a video and follow the song, I casually study the performer‟s body, just as I do when I look at models in magazines. I admire the lines of the jaw, the look in the eye, the light. Suddenly the performer‟s head turns toward me, the eyes gaze into mine, the singing voice demands my attention, and I am struck. Music can transgress both physical space and the borders of the body, changing our sense of time and of these boundaries themselves.

EDITING AND THE MUSIC OF MUSIC VIDEO

Through its varied roles, editing loosens the representational functions filmed images traditionally perform, opening them up to a sense of polyvalent play. The editing thereby places the video‟s images and the song‟s formal features in close relation.19 I doubt the numerous ways that music and image can be put into one-to-one relations would surprise musicians or pop music scholars. Obviously, editing can reflect the basic beat pattern of the song, but it can also be responsive to all of the song‟s other parameters.For example, long dissolves can compliment arrangements that include smooth timbres and long-held tones. A video can use different visual material to offset an important hook or a different cutting rhythm at the beginnings and ends of phrases. And, of course, these effects can switch from one-to-one relationships to something that is more contrapuntal. plodding tempo, the image will often unfold especially quickly or slowly— the image will seem ac- tually to exceed the song‟s extreme speed. Green Day‟s “Jaded/Brain

Stew” is really two short, connected songs.During the slower first part, the video shows Tempo is one feature readily taken up by music-video editing.Music videos tend to underscore the most arresting features of a song, and if the song is striking for its sprightly rhythmic feel or its languorous, a tractor dragging a couch across a landfill in slow motion, along with shots of a dead horse and a sullen old man. The performers‟ lack of engagement enhances the sense of lassitude. When the music changes to a faster tempo for the second part of the song, the camera starts whipping around and the pace of the editing increases. The concentration of energy also derives from squeez- ing the performers into a small room and from using lurid, overheated colors.

# Actors

RECORD COMPANIES and video makers will try anything once, if only because novelty can break through the onslaught of commercial messages and grab the viewer‟s attention. Why, then, has there not been a video that makes it difficult to find the lead singer? Such a video might place the singer in a crowd in order to obscure her, or in a large group of performers, with each character acting slightly out of phase until the real performance is almost unrecognizable. There are videos that do without the performers, most of these being either clay or line-drawn animation, and a few that seem nearly to abandon the need for a band, such as Chemical

Brothers‟ “Setting Sun.” Several contain only cameo appearances of the star or leave out the band en- tirely, drawing on experimental films instead (like the found footage with gi- gantic superimposed printed lyrics in R.E.M.‟s “Fall on Me”), but no video offers the goods and then fails to deliver.1

Whereas both the sets and the supporting characters in music video typically have an indeterminate nature, the star is most often foregrounded in bold relief. The camera showcases every curl of the fingertips and bend of the elbow, every wrinkle of the brow and blink of the eyelid. When the shot is a close-up, it seems that the lens captures every emotion for our own private scrutiny. At first glance, the glitzy depiction of the star serves only as an advertising tech- nique, and the critics‟ complaint that a performer‟s mugging before the camera is overwhelmingly tiresome carries real weight.

Yet close-ups have an important role to play in the overall experience of the video. Because music videos break visual, lyrical, and musical elements down to their smallest constituent parts—an object, a color, a few words, a turn of the wrist, a funny or intriguing riff or sound— the close-up can be as important a structural element as anything. Close-ups give us just a portion of a sound- track and a face; unlike the protagonists of narrative film, who have a history and a future, desires and intentions, the music-video performer stands in tem- poral isolation.

Often, as the head fills the frame, it is subjected to so much visual analysis that it seems to move very slowly, so slowly that the face alone can suggest the slowest rhythm of the music. In this musical fashion, the close- up has a grounding effect. The close-up of the singer‟s face is shot and edited to emphasize one simple gesture—a gesture that in its abbreviated simplicity will indicate a way of paying attention to or grasping some element of the music. It may be the main hook, a lyric, or a small rhythmic or melodic feature. And as it unfolds, we have something to commit readily to memory. Some faces have the torching poignancy of photographs, and the music seems to set them in a pool of liquid amber, preserved and luminous but slightly out of reach. By contrast to viewers of narrative films, a fan will wish to watch and wait unendingly for this moment in the music video.2 We can teach ourselves where the sublime instance is—onethird into the verse on the fourth beat— but we can experience it only in passing and can never own it.

HOLLYWOOD FILM‟S CONVENTIONS VERSUS MUSIC VIDEO‟S CONVENTIONS

The conventions of rock and roll imply that the singers in music videos are trying not to act but to speak truthfully. We assume that they draw on their own emotions and experiences. Whether they excel or not, we should keep faith in their honesty even though we know that record companies and video- makers put artists in roles they feel confused or embarrassed by and have little control over. The very fact that artists in music-video settings are vulnerable to embarrassment may even elicit our sympathy. Knowing that the performer has put herself at the mercy of directors, cinematographers, set builders, and so on, and seeing that the work has, in some ways, spun out of her hands, we can identify with her predicament. Thus, music video‟s persuasive force func- tions like this: if a person I admire for her music is willing to endure such a strange context, I might as well leave aside my critical disbelief and go along for the ride. There are a few clear exceptions, as when cinematic codes tell the viewer that the video is a spoof or parody; here, the performers appear within TVs, dress like politicians or shysters, or leer and wink at the camera. Another is with performers who have enjoyed long, well-established careers and have become cultural icons: Madonna, Aerosmith, Prince, Rolling Stones, and ZZ Top all carry a trace of the self-referential with them. In whatever they do, we assume that they wear some sort of mask.

Music-video performance differs markedly from acting styles in film and television. For a number of reasons, the genre brings to the foreground candor, self-disclosure, and direct address. Perhaps the situations in music video are streamlined because the performer lacks a clear goal that would encourage us to place her in a competitive context with others and distance her from our- selves. In addition, the setting often seems organic, as if it were a projection of the performer‟s own psyche. (Directors talk about showing off the performer‟s best side while also including some aspect of the character of which he is unaware.)

Yet another aspect that heightens the intimacy of music video is the variety of ways that the performer can break the viewing plane or, as is said in the theater, the fourth wall. In Hollywood film, to reveal the scaffolding of the production or to acknowledge the viewer is not allowed. Yet in music video, we often see the cameras, and band members address us routinely. Some of music video‟s most provocative examples of breaking the frame include the wet kisses the star and the little girl give the camera lens in the Stone Temple Pilots‟ “Vaseline” and Nirvana‟s “Come as You Are,” respectively. Dr. Dre likes to cover the lens with his palm in “Gin ‟n‟

Juice” and “No Diggity.” Similarly, Busta Rhymes smashes his face into us in “Woo Hah,” and

Cypress Hill‟s B-Real gleefully threatens to poke out our eyes with his finger in “Insane in the

Membrane.”

A number of other codes breed familiarity and comfort; these resemble film in that the lead character remains autonomous, integral, and predictable. The principal roles music video performers play can be sketched roughly as over- seers, dreamers (or somnambulists), neutral observers, and participants em- bedded within the action of the piece. Whatever role a performer adopts, it becomes set in place as the video gets underway and remains stable until nearly the end, when boundaries occasionally threaten to dissolve. (In the latter case, the shift functions primarily as a framing device.) The musicians do not pull a Hitchcock on us; they do not pop in on their actors‟ tableaux, and the actors do not intrude on the performers‟ private space unless they are arriving as part of a band rehearsal. The band‟s performance space and that of the story rarely interpenetrate. Recent videos flirt more with these boundaries than have videos of the past; however, the sense of a boundary is teased but remains firm.5 Almost all videos maintain a sense of coherence. For example, it would be surprising if TLC‟s “Waterfalls,” Pearl Jam‟s “Jeremy,” or Green Day‟s “When I Come Around” integrated the star into the narrative. In a Madonna video, it would be strange for the background figures to move into the star‟s contemplative space. As in many videos, Chaka Khan plays the role of both narrator and participant in the action of “When the Water Runs Dry,” but this is established from the outset. If she withdrew from either role, it would be just as surprising. It is instructive to watch videos and imagine what it might be like for the performer to move into and then quickly out of the collective, actionoriented space, or for supporting characters to flow in the other direction. This inflexibility of role and address may have to do with the homogeneity of tone in a pop song (of a uniform emotional pitch), as well as the need to preserve structural boundaries, to showcase the song‟s sectional divisions. It might also be a way of preserving suspense. Once performer and characters have bridged set tings, there is nowhere else to go. Or the formulaic functions might constitute a form of advertising: the message must be decipherable. The most important rules for music video—the clear and limited role a performer plays—differ little from those of classical Hollywood film in this particular way. Not only can we predict that the performers will stay in their own realm, but we can also expect them back at the same section, often at the same point, on or near a hook line.

Another rigid convention is the way that the performer acknowledges the musical environment in which she or he exists. This convention can be illus- trated by contrast with opera. Whereas characters in an opera would not be surprised to discover that they were part of a given scenario, they would be shocked to find out that they were singing, not simply speaking within their present context.6 In music videos that extend past the documentation of per- formance, that are more narrative, the singers would not be surprised to find out that they were singing. They are forbidden, however, to acknowledge the sonic environment in which they exist. Within the communicative resources of a video, this might be signaled quite subtly; the singer might play

“air guitar,” pretend to listen to the music, and then smile appreciatively or frown, or initiate one of those typical interruptions when the music stops and voice and sound effects kick in.7 Two examples: in John Cougar Mellencamp‟s “It‟s Just Another Day” and Sheryl Crow‟s “Every Day is a Winding Road,” the performers engage in musical gestures reminiscent of performance, but they do not seem to hear the music around them. Strangely, they seem to be listening to some private song inside their heads, rather than what we are listening to. In almost all videos that neither foreground live performance nor depict the speakers carrying the song, the song is something like room temperature and humidity, something that is so much a part of the setting that no one attends to it. But the song functions as more than ambience; by the video‟s close, the singer will most likely have been put through paces—asked to look happy or sad, wistful, thoughtful, or reckless. Some of music video‟s charm derives from the myriad moods the performer displays. Because the star cannot acknowledge the role of the music in affecting her emotions, we are left to conclude that the image and music have acted on her. This is remarkable especially when the performer is the songwriter or producer. Toward the end of Janet Jackson‟s “If,” the singer suddenly looks more joyous. The transformation in mood is completely un- motivated by the setting; Jackson‟s dance has not taken a new turn, nor has her relation with those around her shifted or the background changed. The shift, which remains mysterious, can be attributed only to the song‟s culmi- nating in a larger chorus at the end. (The shift was in fact made by compositing many different outtakes; however, within the logic of cinema, and to some extent, that of music video, editing cannot be the cause of changes, and the viewer must look elsewhere to find her sense of orientation.8)

A number of threads that are easy to follow run across the whole of the music video‟s fabric. One is the character who maintains a single activity that carries out a process, such as going to or getting everybody ready for a concert. Another is a shift in time or weather, such as from day to night or from clear skies to cloudy ones. A third is the star‟s face as it shows a number of moods from happy to sad. In all of these cases, we must make guesses about what has happened and about how much time has elapsed. By the close of “If,” Janet Jackson becomes ebullient; in Nine Inch Nails‟ “Closer,” Trent Reznor becomes relaxed and somber; Kurt Cobain becomes exhausted in Nirvana‟s “Heart- Shaped Box”; in “You Were Meant for Me,” Jewel becomes less aggrieved. The image does not reveal why such shifts have occurred, so we must turn to the music for additional narrative, temporal, and affective cues.

# Interlude: Space, Color, Texture, and Time

ONE OF MUSIC VIDEO‟S pleasures lies in tracing a trajectory through space while following along with the music. As the camera cranes, the performer‟s body twists, and the eyes follow, the viewer can pursue one thread (the music, say) or another (for example, the camera as it tracks through space or the line of the body as it leans backward). This experience raises an impor- tant question: can we apprehend more than one medium simultaneously, or are we always more grounded in one? The unfolding spaces of music video— conveying possibility, autonomy, and prowess—stand in marked contrast to contemporary lives, which can be locked into patterns of repetition and stasis, caught within binds of hierarchy, decorum, and surveillance that structure both the social and the familial realms. By enlarging our sense of space, at least in the unfolding moment, music video can leave us dissatisfied with our predic- ament and lead us back into the video to search for something better; at other times a video‟s space serves as a mirror of our distress. This chapter suggests how by artful editing—juxtaposition of body to body or setting to setting— music video can free us through its unceasing trajectory; the chapter also ex- plores the medium‟s spatial limitations. In order to accomplish this, I will first consider the ways musicvideo space departs from that of classic Hollywood narrative film. The chapter closes with a discussion of the ways space can be used toward musical ends, and put in the service of the star, the director, and the genre.

SPACE UNFOLDING IN TIME

Does time organize space, or does space organize time? Is space four, five, or even more dimensions, curved or Cartesian, quantum or mechanical, out there, in the body, or somewhere in between? In cultural geographer Yi Fu Tuan‟s characterization, “Space is experienced directly as having room in which to move. Moreover, by shifting from one place to another, a person acquires a sense of direction. Space assumes a rough coordinate frame centered on the mobile and purposive self Place is a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell.”1 Tuan‟s description suggests why music video might be more about space than place. Always in flux as it attempts to match musical processes, the music video image rarely offers us a place to inhabit. The elaborate recording and postproduction techniques of popular music create sonic environments that almost never resemble lived spaces. Cor- respondingly, music video‟s settings, camera movement, and editing depart from ordinary lived experience. We must throw ourselves into a music video‟s environment if we want to make a guess about how these spaces feel.

Music video can return us to simple pleasures, like the exploration of space, as narrative is pushed aside. U2‟s “With or Without You” suggests a character groping through a misty fog; Prince‟s “Gett Off” moves through an ornate maze; Peter Gabriel‟s “Mercy St.” traces a slow, winding path out to sea; Ma- donna‟s “Cherish” suggests an arrow shooting across the sea. At moments, these videos suggest some character‟s subjectivity (wounded, virginal, devout), but a viewer may still feel adrift. The camera keeps moving. These experiences do not derive just from setting or the images‟ unfolding. Music colors the nature of the path.

Viewers follow a music video‟s progress in a way that differs from their experience of Hollywood cinema. We can begin to understand this difference through a comparison of camera and editing in the two genres. In the tradi- tional Hollywood film scene, the camera begins at a distance and gradually moves in—from wide to over the shoulder to the face. This structure allows the viewer to create an ever-widening base of knowledge about plot and char- acters.2 Often, the camera in music video moves much more freely and unpre- dictably. The close-up most often highlights an intensification in the music and fits within an unfolding sequence of shots. Because shot decisions are made to suit the music and the pattern of close-up, medium, and long shots already chosen, the search for knowledge about space and plot takes second place.

Unpredictably, one sees a new setting with a different color scheme, followed by a sudden return to the original setting. These shot sequences produce the effect that the viewer does not own or know the space but rather is taken through it.

COERCIVE AND NONCOERCIVE SPACE

Although these music/image associations have a certain power, they cannot always liberate the viewer from the image‟s control. The jump from one shot to the next can be dictatorial; the image‟s vector directs the eye where it does not wish to go, and the use of the human figure can suggest claustrophobia. In the most utopian video, the camera may seem very free, as if it were linked not to a body that walks, but rather to one that can dance, jump, or fly from place to place, as if attention might be thrown in the fluid ways that sound does—over the cranium and under the chin—a 360-degree movement, fol- lowed by an extreme low angle, then a point of view taken from behind a hand, cuff, or ankle. But in the typical music video, space may not be as egalitarian. The most potent spot is front and center in the frame, and it is the lead per former who owns it. The performer‟s movement around the center, synchro- nized with the frame‟s corresponding moments of stability and instability, cre- ates the video‟s sense of drama: can the performer stay ahead of the driving forces in the music and in the frame—the rush to the downbeat of the measure, the pull and push of objects in relation? When a supporting character fills the space, the moment often seems transitory and unstable; often the centered interloper becomes an object for study, as if a title—“silent boy” or “old man”—could be placed at the bottom of the frame.

Similarly, the larger organization of space in a video often turns toward the workmanlike and banal. One of the commonest and simplest means of cho- reographing figures within the frame could be called a “proscenium arch.” The singer moves along a z-axis, while supporting figures fill in the front left and right edges of the frame, creating a portal. An arc or semicircle fans outward from these foreground edges toward the back. This fanning configuration (ornamenting the lead performer) can occur within a single frame or it can also be constructed through a series of edits with different figures and/or types of spaces that gradually fill in to compose a virtual space.12 By lending the star an audience as well as a sense of plentitude, the arc shape flatters the performer; it also mimics sound sources like speakers, the throat, and the bell of a brass instrument. Although this arrangement provides fluidity and momentum, it reduces the other choices for organizing space. The star‟s face and body are the primary hooks, and the constant return to the star‟s face as the video‟s ground may restrict the video‟s peripheral vision.

SPACE: CONCLUSION

Music-video space resembles but is not equivalent to narrative film space or lived space. Its air has a different weight—either thick like corn syrup, or ex- tremely thin, as if from a high altitude. The music video‟s empty spaces resem- ble ether, and directors often work to enhance this quality, shooting with col- ored gels, diffusion, and smoke or fog. Drawing on what we have learned about musical multimedia and metaphor from the chapters discussing modes of con- nection and props (chapters 5 and 9), we know that music transforms the image and vice versa: the music parses the space, helping to mark out the distances among people and objects. Music, of course, is transformed as well, acquiring a bit more dimensionality, as if we wanted to reach inside a hologram and touch the surfaces. If the spatial coordinates in music video matter so much, it is essential that the cinematographer have a sensitivity to the music. If the figure within the frame is to work, it must fall within its own well-judged proportions in relation to the frame, as well as in right proportions in rela- tion to the song. With poor framing, the video falls flat; bad music-video framing is more deadly to the medium than a poorly composed image in a

Hollywood film. Does this make music video closer to painting and still pho- tography than film? In a good photograph (I am thinking of the work of Irving Penn), every bit of negative space is palpable. So should it be in music video. This chapter, as with the chapters on other parameters, claims that music video reduces to its raw essentials—props, spaces, gestures, color, rhythm, melodic motives, and so on. Moving through music video space is perhaps the genre‟s greatest pleasure, even if we only move down hallways, through exits, and toward dead ends. When we watch music video, we may be seeking a body that can exist with a right disposition. Really, it is a wish to live gracefully in time.

COLOR

Even before we recognize the figures in videos, we often see fields of color, then perhaps a predominant texture—soft, fuzzy, metallic, rough, or jagged. The image is a moving painting, and its materials become wet paint, oozing and shimmering. Music video directors trumpet their allegiance to lime green, ma- genta, and cobalt blue—or, less often, more earthbound tones like burnt sienna. Directors frequently spread color, rather than emphasize line.

Concepts of dissonance and consonance apply to both color and pitch. Whereas fully saturated complements (imagine these colors in their most in- tense and pure), such as red and green, yellow and violet, or blue and orange, are jarring to the eye, so-called analogous colors—those close to one another on the color spectrum, such as yellow, yellow-orange, and orange (with yellow dominant)—are found to be soothing.

TEXTURE

Music videos use texture to elicit a visceral response—to the softness of fur, the smoothness of glass, the roughness of stucco, the sharpness of metal spikes. This physical response helps to draw our attention to elements in the song‟s mix, while the music can direct us to things within the frame, suggesting in part a sense of drawing near to or keeping away from surfaces. Musical timbres are often described as having tactile qualities. The waveforms of sounds pro- duced by the vibraphone and the flute are said to be smooth, while the wave- forms of instruments like the electric guitar and saxophone are called rough. Like color, texture seems to work well in music video because by producing a visceral response it can substitute for a story. Scenes that imply a time of day or story can be placed in sequence. Different scenes with textures do not imply a sequence. The temporal indeterminacy of texture serves to allow additional space for the music.

TIME

A rich description of time or musical time is more the province of philosophers than the scope of this book—as St. Augustine remarked, “What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; but, if I want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know.” The Oxford English Dictionary offers a tenpage entry for time and twenty-seven different definitions for the noun, including “a limited stretch or space of continued existence, as the interval between two successive events or acts, or the period through which an action, condition, or state continues,” and the “indefinite continuous duration regarded as that in which the sequence of events takes place.” Musical time is also difficult to define. Jonathon Kramer has stated that “time and music can be many different things,” and Gerard Grisey has remarked that “real musical time is only a place of exchange and coincidence between an infinite number of different times.”31 Musical time is often associated with specific temporal features of music: accent, beat, meter, period, rhythm, and tempo. This view of musical time can be broadened to include everything that pertains to the temporal structure of music (such as musical form, for instance), clock time (an objectively measurably duration), and the listener‟s subjective experience of the music‟s temporal unfolding.

TIME: CONCLUSION

I would like to close with a consideration of music video‟s sense of time in relation to that of other art forms. Music resembles a carpet unfurling before us, and rolling up afterward: in any instance, sounds have already passed us by, and the rest of the music is yet to appear, and this aspect of music, more than for any other medium, draws our attention to the transitory nature of time. The music-video images attempt to keep pace with the music—its speed, volubility, transitoriness. They are instantly gone, like cotton candy or dry ice, they immediately dissolve away; we had held them briefly and cannot know them in a similar way until we watch again. Painting can seem to open up to us for our endless contemplation, and narrative film most often occurs at a pace close to our ability to comprehend. The viewer‟s relation to music video can be more vexed. Henri Bergson describes the present not as a sliver but as a saddle within which the disappearing past and the now approaching future coexist.40 Music video can offer long stretches that are in the flow, where we feel fully present within both the music and the image. All of a sudden there is an edit or a musical shift, and we have the frightening sensation that we cannot access the past, and that the future is uncertain. So a music video oscillates between presence and dissociation.

Successful music-video directors develop trademark styles that work well with music video‟s effects, its transitoriness, incomprehensibility, and speed. Marcus Nispel‟s figures tend to be monumental and simple, smoothly surfaced, perfectly sculpted, and slow moving. They seem enormous and heavy, and the viewer has the illusion that he can reach forward and grasp these sturdy forms against the onward unceasing rush of the music. On the other hand, some of Matt Mahurin‟s imagery is so blurred, fuzzy, and weightless that we feel we do not have to possess the image. We let it stand away from us, a bit inscrutable and intractable.

Paradoxically, while music video is constantly disappearing, it also has its firm materiality; it seems clearly bounded with a highly marked beginning, middle, and end. With such a small scale, yet such grand themes, a video often seems like a miniature, a memento forever encased and out of reach in amber, a lively overpopulated flea circus forever locked under glass.

The musical track is both a priori and a stern master unto which the image must bend. Soon into the song, the listener can gauge the scale of the song— how long it will be until the phrase ends and the verse closes, how soon the next chorus will arrive and the song as a whole will drive to a close. The image can tarry, match, or run ahead of the music, but at some level, it must subject itself to the steadfastness of the track. We feel the need for the image to assist in the process of closing sections, of finding an end that will be approaching soon, almost certainly on the first or third beat four or five measures from now. If the image and music in the first verse had ended with a striking build- up or fade away, we hope for the same or even more in the next. The video director‟s ultimate goal is to keep the tape spinning well (almost like a group of twirling plates) until the song‟s end. I wonder if it is because of the unyield- ing, onrushing undercurrent of music, which forces the image into frenzy. There is a need to make jokes, to run away, to try to obliterate and transcend what one is irrevocably yoked to.

# Lyrics

AS WE STEP BACK from the surfaces of music videos, the twitches and turns of bodies, the melting colors, dazzling camera work, and fleeting edits, we might wonder what the lyrics are doing.

This chapter attempts to address this question, discussing such aspects of the topic as (1) How important are the lyrics of music video in relation to their image and music? (2) How do viewers receive a music video‟s lyrics, and how does this reception differ from that of lyrics when the song is heard alone? (3) Do music-video lyrics function similarly to pop-song lyrics, poetry, or di- alogue in movies, or do they function differently, as a new entity? (4)Do music- video lyrics transform music and image, and vice versa? (5) What structural role do lyrics play? (6) How do lyrics contribute to a video‟s sense of time? (7) Do lyrics differ based on musical genre, gender, ethnicity, or era?

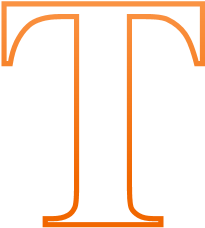
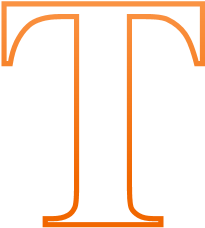
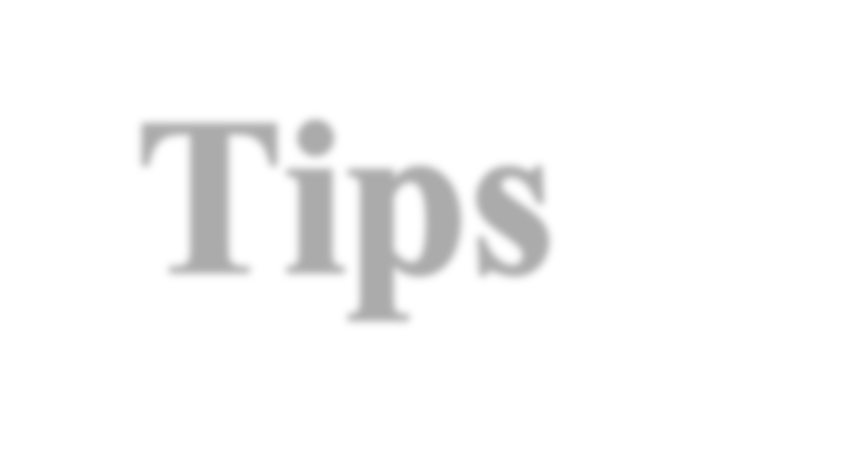
THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC-VIDEO LYRICS

Throughout this chapter, I argue that lyrics rarely take on a superordinate function, instead jostling with music and image for a moment in the limelight. Among the three media, lyrics most commonly play a subservient role. They may almost become like film music, essential but often unheard and only sporadically capable of occupying the viewer‟s attention.1 Claudia Gorbman‟s description of unheard and unremembered film music sounds similar to the role lyrics play. She provides an early example that shows how music had to give way to the dialogue: “In the United States, the practice of lowering the volume of music behind the dialogue, rather than eliminating it, was already de rigueur. A machine nicknamed the „up-and-downer,‟ developed as early as 1934, had as its purpose to regulate music automatically. When dialogue signals entered the soundtrack, the up-and-downer reduced the music signal.”2

Like film music, music-video lyrics frequently make way for materials with sharper contours— an interesting timbre, a dancer‟s gesture, a dramatic edit. The lyrics‟ broken continuity and uncertain effects may stem from their genesis.

When we watch music videos, lyrics rarely maintain the upper hand. Even when at first glance a music video seems to orient itself toward the lyrics, on closer inspection, other relations take precedence. In Soul Asylum‟s “Runaway Train,” the image is less about a runaway train, real or figurative, than about the inexorable drive of the melody and the reckless way that it heads into an abyss. And in House of Pain‟s “On Point,” the line “When it‟s time to rock a funky joint—I‟m on point” seems designed to reflect an enthusiasm for a very short, prominent, and funky melodic hook accompanying the voice. This hook, not the words, wins out at conveying the workingclass environment and the image‟s dirty quality.

Andrew Goodwin has noted that music videos rarely point to the lyrics; typically they serve to set a mood.4 The hook line of a song is represented most often in an indirect way. In Madonna‟s “Cherish,” the imagery is focused on expressing an imperative—cherish—but it is not clear how or to whom. Prince‟s “Gett Off ” expresses an image of community and an experience of flux and movement, rather than the satisfaction of sexual desire. In both these cases, the hook line is taken up, only to be left behind. Its sole function is to get the video started.



A music video can help you [promote your band](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-promote-your-music-online-2460817) through social media channels such as [YouTube,](https://www.thebalancesmb.com/protect-and-monetize-youtube-videos-2531668) Facebook, and more. Contrary to what you may think, a music video doesn't need to cost a fortune. What's most important is that you have a good idea, a good team, and a well-defined budget.

Some production companies charge a fortune for even the simplest [promotional](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-plan-a-music-pr-campaign-2460833) videos; but you can do it yourself. Or, if you are willing to give an up-and-coming [filmmaker or producer](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/television-film-producer-skills-2062347) a chance, they will often do it at a low cost (maybe even free of charge).

Before you begin producing your music video, it is important to plan and take a few key things into consideration. Here‟s a step-by-step guide for how to make a music video.

# Choosing the Right Song

While it might seem like the best idea to simply make a video for your next upcoming single, that may or may not make the most sense. Here are a few other factors to consider when choosing a song:

* **Think ahead or recycle an old song.** It will take a lot longer than you think to shoot, edit, and produce a music video. If the song is three minutes or longer, your “new” single might already have come out by the time you‟ve published your video. Instead, consider selecting a song that has done well in the past or use a single that is planned for release in the future, after you plan to publish your next single.
* **Don’t merely think in terms of a “single.”** Honestly, in these days of Internet streaming, any track can be a single. Therefore, you might pick a track from an album that you had a great music video idea for in the past, even if that track wasn't originally planned as a single.
* **You might want to start small.** For every minute of a song in a music video, it can take you and your crew anywhere from 2-10 hours of shooting, editing, and finishing. The longer you take, the greater your risk abandoning the project.
* **Make sure that your song truly inspires the band.** You will not like every song that you and your band create or play. Music videos should be authentic expressions of the song‟s creators. Even the best filmmakers struggle to put a good video together if the band does not feel inspired by the lyrics and sound of the song they‟ve selected.
* **If the song is not yours, consider copyright costs.** Do not assume that a song that is not yours is okay to use for your music video. However, if your budget permits your band to produce a video for a song from someone else, that does not already have a video or single out on it, get the paperwork in place to move forward legally.

# Casting the Film Crew and Getting Equipment

However complicated (or simple) your shoot is, you'll need a team. If you have a team, everyone should be clear on what they are responsible to accomplish. Here are some of the roles that you will need to fill:

* [Camera person:](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/camera-operator-525460) 1 or more individuals
* Lighting person for any and all indoor shots: 1 individual
* [Actor(s):](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-an-actor-525659) the number of individuals varies based on what kind of video you seek to create
* Director: 1 individual that everyone clearly acknowledges as “in charge”
* Band members: this should be obvious, but make sure that all your members are on board and able to commit to their scheduled shooting days

As you build your team, consider their individual needs. If you‟re shooting through meal times, either provide food or at least remind crew members to bring food and set aside aside time for people to eat. If you are shooting all day, or for several hours, encourage the crew to take breaks.

Ideally, you'll be able to recruit a team that can provide their own equipment. If you have to get equipment yourself, then you'll want to get the best that your budget allows. Even though prices have come down in recent years, buying a camera, lights, and gear will still set you back a small fortune.

As such, renting gear is usually the best bet. Many places have community arts programs that allow you to rent equipment for lower rates. You can also check out local colleges in your area to see if they are willing to help. Who knows? You might find a few film students willing to let you use their gear in exchange for allowing them to be on your crew and get experience.

# Planning the Shoot

Wasted time can cost you more money (if you‟re renting by the hour/day) or sour relationships (where you called in favors). Most film crews who do more “hanging out” rather than working, are simply responding to the lack of planning. So take a few minutes (or hours) to think through how this music video will be filmed.

It is customary to build **storyboards** for each shot. This will ensure that you don‟t miss anything and that you can describe to your crew what you need. Feel free to Google “music video storyboard template” in order to find and download a template to work from. Sketch out each scene in the box and describe the scene underneath.

After completing your storyboard, make a list of the equipment and casting you need for each shot. Share your finished storyboard with the whole crew and discuss each shot with the appropriate teams. Ideally, you should also create a schedule identifying who is needed when and where.

Most importantly, make sure that your camera and lighting crew know what your expectations are for each scene. If you are a band member, you are probably in the scenes yourself. Those actually shooting the video will be able to see what you can‟t and make suggestions accordingly.

If you‟ve cast a video director (someone other than yourself), you will need to only brief him/her on the storyboard first. The director can then handle the meetings with crews, scheduling, etc.

# Filming

On the day of shooting, be focused and stick to the plan. Keep a careful record of the shots you've made for the sake of editing. Always allow plenty of time for shooting. Even though the finished scene may only last 10 seconds, it could easily take several hours to set up and shoot. That being said, don‟t get so preoccupied with getting the “perfect” shoot that you take six hours on one shoot and have only six hours left to finish the remaining 15.

Ideally, you'll have several good takes for each scene. You can never have too much footage, and the re-take may capture something that you hadn't noticed the first time around. While it is never a good idea to deviate from the storyboard, there are extra things that the crew can do to provide a nice touch to the available footage.

For example, if you have more than one camera, ask the “idle” cameraman/woman to keep shooting from other angles (not in sight of the main camera) or in between scenes. This technique often affords golden footage that you didn‟t realize you could get. Additionally, some of the best shots might be candid moments with the set and crew.

# Capturing Live Footage

Filming the band [playing live](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-get-a-gig-a-musician-s-guide-to-booking-concerts-2460375) is a way to get some great footage for your music video. Filming the band at a gig will mean you'll be able to capture the live energy and interaction with the audience.

However, if you‟re planning on shooting the entire video with live footage, you will need professionals experienced with live filming as this can be extremely difficult to do well.

A much better solution for someone creating their first music video would be to capture some live footage and mix it in with the other footage. Here are a few unique challenges to consider when filming live:

* The band will only play the song once, so you'll only have one chance of capturing the right footage.
* The live version may differ considerably from the recorded version, so syncing the footage with the audio track could be problematic.
* The band's, and particularly the audience's, movements won't be choreographed. As such, you and the director can‟t expect the audience to meet your expectations. On the other hand, these reactions are genuine, and if you capture a genuine reaction that is positive, you‟ve got great footage.
* The lighting and effects may look great to the audience but may not look great on camera.
* Your filming may interrupt the band's performance. Make sure that the band members are on board and that the venue is large enough for there to be as little interference from filming as possible.

One technique to guarantee that your live footage syncs to a video is to "stage" a live performance. Get the band to play along (or mime) to the track in front of an audience of selected friends or fans. By doing “live” footage in this way, you can control the lighting and people's movements, and get the track played as many times as you need.

# Using Stock Footage

You can spice up your video by adding stock footage; but you'll need to be aware that almost all video footage is subject to strict copyright law. Making use of footage without the copyright holders' express permission is illegal.

However, there are also sources of footage that you can use legally. Royalty-free footage is footage you can reuse in any setting, without asking permission or paying the copyright holder a fee each time you use it; but you may have to pay a fee to obtain it in the first place. Lastly, there are several [free stock, royalty-free sites](https://www.techradar.com/news/the-best-free-stock-video-sites) to check out before paying for stock footage.

Additionally, there is more and more footage being made available under creative commons licenses - original material that the copyright owner has entered into the public domain with certain conditions attached. Often, the only condition is that you properly credit the source or creator.

# Using the Right Video Editing/Finishing Software

These days, relatively inexpensive or free software can do a decent job of video editing:

* The basic video software for Apple users is iMovie.
* For PC users, Adobe's Premiere Elements as a good place to start.

The judicious use of effects can set your video apart. Much of this will depend upon the capabilities of the video editing software you use. For the best quality look, consider using professional software such as Apple Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premiere Pro.

Most computers and digital devices should be capable of editing film footage. However, video editing takes up a lot of hard drive space, so keep your hard drive clean and get rid of footage you're not using (but be careful not to delete footage you ARE using!). Investing in a fast, external hard drive to store your video footage on is probably a good idea.

The output format will depend on its [destination](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/put-music-videos-on-youtube-2460819) (where you want your video to end up). Highly compressed formats are best for streaming over the Internet (Quicktime and MP4 are among the most common). For sending to the media/press, DVDs are still frequently the best format, and a DigiBeta tape may still be needed for some TV broadcasts (something you'll need to accomplish with the help of a professional production company).

# Being Creative

How many videos have you seen on [MTV](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-get-an-mtv-internship-2460876) or [YouTube](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/put-music-videos-on-youtube-2460819) that consists of the band playing in a club, with the lights flashing, whilst the audience jumps up and down? This style of music video is overused, and it wasn‟t a particularly creative idea to begin with.

Rather, try to think differently. Attempting a Hollywood blockbuster on a shoestring budget will generally look terrible. However, a strong dose of originality will allow your video to connect with thousands of people, regardless of your budget.

On the flip side, don‟t overdo it. A simple idea, well executed, is always more effective than a complex idea, done poorly.

# Key Takeaways

**Beware of Using Excessive Zoom**: It may look cool while you're shooting, but in the final edit, zooming often looks cliché or unusable. Typically, only the top professionals with very steady hands can pull this off.

**Avoid Using Excessive Special Effects**: A good video isn't a showcase for how many effects you or your editor can master. It's usually better to use a couple of effects throughout the video to create a certain feel; rather than use as many effects as you can to make a video exciting.

**Think About Adding Sound Effects**: A dramatic music video may be enhanced with some additional sound effects. If your video begins with someone walking down the street, you could add the sound of footsteps, or ambient street noise, over the intro

