

AN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF MUSIC VIDEO

Brad Osborn, Ph.D.



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Lawrence, KS

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Brad Osborn,
MusicVideo@ku.edu
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Lawrence, Kansas

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CHAPTER 1: FORM

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1.1 TWO STANDARD SONG FORMS

- verse/chorus form
- strophic (AABA) form

1.2 OTHER SECTIONS

- refrain
- drum break
- rap verse
- coda

1.3 OTHER SONG FORMS

- terminally climactic form
- super-simple verse/chorus form (SSVC)

1.4 SONG FORM VS. VIDEO FORM

- cinematic additions
- diegetic vs. non-diegetic sounds

In this chapter we'll learn how to recognize two standard song forms that shape nearly every music video: verse/chorus form and strophic form. We'll also learn how to name the smaller sections that frame these songs, as well as some non-standard sections that make some pop songs unique. We'll look at videos in which the form of a song's video is different than that heard on the song's corresponding album. Finally, we'll develop a holistic tool—the parametric form chart—for analyzing the visual and musical form of video together.

CLIP LIST

- Whitney Houston "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" (1987)
- Nicki Minaj "Anaconda" (2014)
- Radiohead, "Karma Police" (1997)
- Cyndi Lauper "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" (1983)
- En Vogue "Free Your Mind" (1992)
- Rihanna (ft. Jay-Z) "Umbrella" (2007)
- Childish Gambino "This is America" (2018)
- Red Hot Chili Peppers "Under The Bridge" (1991)
- Outkast "Hey Ya!" (2003)
- Michael Jackson "Thriller" (1982)
- NSYNC "Bye, Bye, Bye" (2000)

1.1 TWO STANDARD SONG FORMS

1.1a verse/chorus form

Let's begin by watching Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" all the way through to get a sense of its overall form. The video begins with a section called the introduction, often shortened to **intro**. Listen how the backing instruments are added one at a time. We start with just the percussion, then the bass is added at around 0:30, and finally the keyboards and horns strike up a riff. This technique, called the **buildup**, is a common way that intros keep our interest before the verse begins.

Houston begins the **verse** (0:57) in a somber mood, wondering how she'll chase her blues away. In the **prechorus** (1:14), her vocal range gets higher as she reflects on how her mood has been fine during the daylight hours. But she ultimately longs for dancing when the night falls. The **chorus** (1:28), undoubtedly the most memorable section of the song, contains the song's title-lyric and has Houston singing at her loudest and highest. Some songs, this one included, amplify this climactic section even further with a final **pump-up chorus**, in which the last chorus is raised in pitch so the vocalist can sing higher. Play the beginnings of chorus 2 (2:04) and chorus 3 (3:37) back-to-back to notice the difference for yourself.

This overall song form is known as **verse/chorus form**, the first of our two standard song forms. Lyrically, verses typically set up and advance a narrative, while the chorus either reflects on that narrative or drives home its main message. Notice that while the chorus's lyrics are the same every time, the verses' lyrics are different. By changing one or more visual elements in the second verse, the form of the video often parallels that of the song, pairing changed imagery with changed lyrics. Example 1.2 shows several changes between the beginning of verse 1 and verse 2, including point-of-view (straight-on vs. angle), lighting (backlit vs. side), hairstyle (down vs. up), and costume. We'll talk more about these visual techniques in Chapter 5.



Verse 1



Verse 2

Example 1.1: Visual form in "I Wanna Dance With Somebody"

Once we've learned to identify these sections, we can keep track of the video's overall form with a tool called a **form chart**, shown in Example 1.2. These can be as simple or complex as you'd like, but typically include a column to note where sections begin and a column to name the section in question. In Example 1.2, I've also provided a column that describes the music in each section, usually focusing on lyrics. When you make a form chart, you should feel free to include descriptions of whatever elements stand out to you.

Time	Section	Description
0:01	Intro	buildup: percussion, bass, horns and keyboard
0:56	Verse 1	Lyrics about getting through the day
1:14	Prechorus	Lyrics about loneliness at night
1:27	Chorus	Begins with title lyric
2:04	Verse 2	Different lyrics than verse 1
2:20	Prechorus	Begins differently than prechorus 1, ends the same
2:34	Chorus	Same as 1st chorus
3:06	Bridge	Dependent, based on chorus
3:23	Prechorus	Same lyrics as prechorus 2
3:37	Chorus	Pump-Up chorus (higher)
4:09–5:12	Outro	Dependent, based on chorus

Example 1.2 Form Chart for Whitney Houston
“I Wanna Dance With Somebody”

Verses and choruses are the only essential sections in a verse/chorus form, but other sections often act as connectors between them. As their name implies, prechoruses connect verses to choruses, and must be musically different enough from either to count as a different section. Listen at 1:14 how Houston’s melody becomes higher and different, and the keyboards become more active. You may or may not also notice that the beginning chord of the prechorus is a different chord than the beginning chord of the verse.

If a song contains a **bridge**, it usually occurs after the second verse or chorus. Bridges can be completely different than anything else heard in the song, but are often based on some other section. Here, the backing music is different, but Houston’s lyrics are dependent on words she’s sung in the chorus. Similarly, the **outro** is also dependent on other material, usually the chorus. This one is so similar that it seems to merely *continue* the chorus, but note that the title-lyric is now absent.

1.1b Strophic form

We don’t hear verse/chorus forms in pop music until the 1960s. A simpler form called **strophic form** had been heard in popular songs since at least as early as the 1800s. Strophic forms have verses, but no contrasting chorus. Just like verse/chorus forms, they often contain a bridge after the second verse, and are therefore sometimes called **AABA form**, where each verse (also known as a strophe) is represented by the letter A, and the bridge by the letter B.

To better understand how strophic forms work, let’s watch the video for “Anaconda” by the Trinidadian-American rapper Nicki Minaj. The song proper begins only after an 18-second **video intro** that contains jungle noises not heard on the **album version** of the song (the version of the song you’d hear if you bought the CD or downloaded the song from iTunes). This video intro, including the anaconda shown slithering nearby, helps to establish the video’s jungle setting, shown in Example 1.3. We’ll discuss some of the video’s themes of female sexual empowerment, expressed both visually and in the lyrics, later on in Chapter Seven.



Example 1.3 Video Intro in Nicki Minaj “Anaconda”

“Anaconda’s” actual musical intro is a sample of the 1992 Sir Mix-a-Lot song “Baby Got Back,” which itself contains samples of the 1986 Channel One song “Technicolor.” This practice of **sampling** another artist’s work as part of a new creation has been part of hip-hop music since its inception in the 1970s, when DJs (especially in the Bronx burrough of New York City) would play drum breaks from one or more funk records while another musician rapped.

Minaj raps in each of the song’s three verses, each of which is preceded by one or more Sir Mix-a-Lot samples. The bridge of this strophic form is composed entirely of Sir-Mix-a-Lot samples. Minaj’s rap returns in verse 3 is, after which follows an instrumental outro that removes all but the drum and bass, allowing the audience to dance long after the main song is finished.

Time	Section	Description
0:18	Intro	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample on title lyric (“my anaconda”)
0:27	Verse 1	Minaj rap
1:11	Intro	Two Mix-a-Lot samples (“my anaconda,” “look at her butt”)
1:33	Verse 2	Minaj rap
2:17	Intro 1	Two Sir Mix-A-Lot samples return
2:40	Bridge	Third Sir-mix-a-Lot sample (“little in the middle”)
3:24	Verse 3	Minaj rap
4:05–4:36	Outro	Drums and bass only

Example 1.4a Simplified Form Chart for Nicki Minaj “Anaconda”

Example 1.4a shows the resulting form as concisely as possible. But there’s a lot of nuance missing, which we could choose to include in a more detailed form chart such as that shown in Example 1.4b. In particular, this more detailed form chart helps us to appreciate the three-part micro form in each of Minaj’s raps, as well as the remixed order of the Sir Mix-a-Lot samples in the bridge. It also highlights the use two related devices heard in a lot of hip-hop and electronic dance music: the **riser** and the **build**. The riser is one note that constantly rises in pitch to build intensity into the next section. The build achieves this same intensity by speeding up the rhythms, usually exponentially. Listen how these two

work in tandem at 0:56. We begin with a siren-like riser, with hand claps building the intensity on every beat. Minaj’s speeds up her rap to the fastest yet, and actually devolves into untexted percussion at the last second before the sample re-enters. When you make your own form charts, you can choose to be as concise or as detailed as you wish, and focus on whichever parts of the song you find most interesting.

Macro Form	Time	Micro-Form	Description
	0:18	Intro 1	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample on title lyric (my anaconda)
A	0:27	pt. 1	Minaj rap sans beat
	0:41	pt. 2	Rap continues with beat stuttering
	0:56	pt. 3	Rap continues with riser and build
	1:11	Intro 1	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample #1 (my anaconda)
	1:19	Intro 2	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample #2 (look at her butt)
A	1:33	pt. 1	Minaj rap sans beat
	1:48	pt. 2	Rap continues with beat stuttering
	2:03	pt. 3	Rap continues with Riser
	2:17	Intro 1	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample #1
	2:25	Intro 2	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample #2
B	2:40	Intro 3	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample #3 (little in the middle)
	2:54	Intro 1	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample #1 (x2)
	3:09	Intro 2	Sir Mix-a-Lot sample #2 (w/riser)
A	3:24	pt. 1	Minaj shout-out sans beat
	3:38	pt. 2	Rap continues with beat stuttering
	3:53	pt. 3	Minaj laughing, rapping
	4:05	Outro, pt. 1	Dance off with uninterrupted beat
	4:23–4:36	Outro, pt. 2	Horn tags from Sir Mix-a-Lot sample

Example 1.4b Detailed Form Chart for Nicki Minaj “Anaconda”

1.2 OTHER SECTIONS

Though most pop music can be described using the main forms and sections named already in this chapter, there are certain songs that require us to know a few other terms. This section will give you the tools to analyze these exceptional videos.

1.2a Beginning-Refrain and End-Refrain

As we heard in “I Wanna Dance with Somebody,” verse/chorus songs usually highlight the song title by placing it in the chorus. But some songs, especially strophic songs that lack a chorus, highlight the song’s title (otherwise known as a **refrain**) by placing it prominently at either the beginning or ending of a verse. An example of a **beginning-refrain** can be heard at the onset of each verse in Radiohead’s “Karma Police.” Notice how this alternative rock song’s three beginning-refrains line up with our increased focus on the plight of the video’s antagonist, a man running down the road. As seen in Example 1.5, he isn’t visible in the first verse, becomes vaguely visible in the second, and only comes

into focus in the third verse. The intervening chorus cuts away to show our protagonist for the first time (played by Radiohead’s vocalist Thom Yorke). Such perfect correspondence between song form, plot, setting, and character are relatively common in music videos.

“Girls Just Wanna Have Fun,” the 80s synth-pop hit by Cyndi Lauper, concludes each verse with an **end-refrain** that reflects on the verse’s narrative by reiterating the song’s title. In verse one the narrator’s mother scolds her for coming home late (“girls just wanna have fun”); the narrator’s father scolds her in verse two for having no career goals (“girls just wanna have fun”); and finally the narrator bemoans possessive men in verse three (“girls just wanna have fun”). The song’s shiny, fun exterior masks some rather complex issues of protagonist-persona and gender politics that we’ll explore further in Chapters Three and Seven.



Verse 1: Antagonist invisible (0:26)



Verse 2: Antagonist visible (0:53)



Chorus: Protagonist visible (1:18)



Verse 3: Antagonist in focus (1:43)

Example 1.5: Beginning-Refrain and setting in Radiohead “Karma Police”

1.2b Drum Break

En Vogue’s crossover R&B/hard rock hit “Free Your Mind” is cast in a more-or-less standard verse/chorus form. At 2:50, following two sets of verse/prechorus/chorus, we hear a special kind of bridge known as a **drum break**. Instead of featuring vocals, as in Whitney Houston’s bridge, this one is entirely instrumental. It was these very sections in funk records that hip-hop artists used to sample to form the basis of new rap tracks. En Vogue’s drum break acts exactly like a buildup, stripping down the layers then replacing them one at a time (drum set, then cowbell, then guitar, then bass), allowing a DJ maximum flexibility in choosing which layers to sample.

1.2c Rap Verse

Verse/chorus or strophic forms in which most of the verses are sung sometimes one that is rapped instead. This **rap verse** is especially common if the track features a guest artist. Rihanna’s “Umbrella” features her own singing in verses 2 (0:34) and 3 (1:40), but the first verse (0:12) is rapped by guest artist Jay-Z. Rap verses can occur anywhere in the song, but often occur after the singer gets at least one verse, making “Umbrella” somewhat exceptional.

1.2d Coda

As we saw in “I Wanna Dance With Somebody,” the final chorus of a song can often blend seamlessly into an outro, which continues the same backing music while the vocalist sings non-chorus material over the top of it. A **coda**, on the other hand, occurs in the same place as an outro, but is made of new material. Childish Gambino’s “This is America” is a strophic song in which each of the two rapped verses is preceded by a short intro of choral singing. After the third choral intro, the music and dancing are suddenly interrupted by what sounds like a knock at the door. The playful white lighting featured in all previous verses (shown on the left in Example 1.6), changes to an extremely dark setting in which all characters are running for their lives. This coda consists of a brand new solo melody sung through an auto-tuner. We’ll learn more about the auto-tuner in Chapter Two, and discuss the video’s pressing political critique of gun ownership and police brutality in Chapters Three and Eight.



Intro/Verse lighting scheme



Coda lighting scheme

Example 1.6 Lighting schemes in Childish Gambino “This is America”

1.3 OTHER SONG FORMS

While the sections described above constitute minimal alterations to underlying verse/chorus or strophic song forms, some songs have such a distinct form that they demand a new label entirely. We’ll discuss two of the most common here.

1.3a Terminally Climactic Forms

The coda that ends “This is America” is definitely made of new material, so it’s not an outro. But Gambino’s coda is by no means the most memorable section of the song—that would surely be the beginning-refrain of each verse on the title lyric. So, what if a song ends in new material that usurps all previous sections, even the chorus, as the song’s most memorable section. What is this ending even contained the only instance of the song’s title?

Such a section, known as a **terminal climax**, happens at the end of The Red Hot Chili Peppers “Under the Bridge.” The resulting song form, shown in Example 1.7, is called **terminally climactic form**. Such forms begin as if they were verse/chorus forms, but we can sense that the chorus is leaving

something unfulfilled. In “Under the Bridge,” the chorus fails to present the song’s title, and only hints at the crux of the story. The chorus vaguely describes a terrible experience (“I don’t ever wanna feel/ like I did that day”), but only in the terminal climax do we learn the nature of the experience—a heroin overdose—and that it occurred “under the bridge downtown.” The fact that the song title is sung by a literal chorus (from which the section “chorus” derives its name) proves that the terminal climax is fulfilling a duty left unfulfilled by the chorus.

Terminally climactic forms are found infrequently in early pop music (think the endings of The Beatles “Hey Jude” and Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believin’”), but only occur regularly after 1990. “Karma Police” is in terminally climactic form, as is Dashboard Confessional’s video “Hands Down.”

Time	Section	Description
0:01	Intro	Solo electric guitar
0:28	Verse 1	Lyrics about Los Angeles
0:58	Verse 2	Narrator continues to praise Los Angeles
1:27	Chorus	Lyrics hints at a bad experience
1:50	Verse 3	Narrator feels lonely, but comforted by the city
2:29	Chorus	Lyrics hints at a bad experience
3:13	Terminal Climax	Song title appears, describes heroin usage

Example 1.7 Terminally Climactic Form in Red Hot Chili Peppers “Under the Bridge”

1.3b Super Simple Verse/Chorus Form

Terminally climactic forms essentially add a third section to what is normally a two-section form (verse/chorus). **Super-Simple Verse/Chorus Form**, or **SSVC**, does the opposite: it subtracts one section, essentially turning the song into a single, repeated section. Outkast’s crossover pop–hip-hop hit “Hey Ya!” has only one section that serves as both its verse and chorus. Listen to the verse, starting at 1:09, then listen to the chorus at 1:42. Though the verse features rapping and the chorus features singing (including the title lyric), the backing music underneath is the same. Normal verse/chorus forms are defined by sharp contrasts between the verse and chorus, but in SSVC, that distinction is erased.

1.4 SONG FORM VS. VIDEO FORM

We’ve already seen how a video intro can make the music video for any song slightly different than the album version. In this final section, we’ll dig deeper into how this difference between music video versions and album versions of tracks happens. We’ll also learn how to use a new tool, the parametric form chart, to keep track of visual and musical form separately.

1.4a Cinematic additions

At nearly 14 minutes in length, Michael Jackson’s groundbreaking video “Thriller” was the longest video ever shown on MTV. But the album version, track four on the 1979 record *Thriller*, clocks in at under 6 minutes. Let’s begin by listening to the album version of the song, which is in a standard verse/chorus form. Now, let’s watch the video and notice where it diverges from the album version.

The chorus in the album version starts at 1:30, but we don’t hear the chorus in the video until 9:41! Using a tool called a **parametric form chart** (shown in Example 1.8) we can see exactly how the video form diverges from the song form. By looking at the video’s cinematic setting alongside the song

form, we can see that the chorus is withheld for the climactic moment when Michael Jackson himself is turned into a zombie and begins what is, without a doubt, the most famous choreographed dance scene in music video history, shown in Example 1.9.

Time	Song Form	Cinematic Setting
0:01	n/a (video intro)	Couple on date, movie theater
4:14	Intro (extended)	
4:42	Verse 1	City streets, Jackson acting like zombie
5:16	Verse 2 (chorus skipped)	
5:47	Verse 3 (chorus skipped)	
6:20	Drum Break (with voice-over)	Graveyard, zombies emerging
8:02	n/a (music stops)	Couple encounters zombies in street
8:29	Drum break continues	Jackson turns into zombie, dances with other zombies
9:41	Chorus	

Example 1.8 Parametric Form Chart for Michael Jackson, “Thriller”



Example 1.9 Zombie-Dance scene in Michael Jackson “Thriller”

You can use a parametric form graph to compare any two (or more!) musical and visual variables in a music video. Even when there are no cinematic additions to a video, it may be interesting to see how the song form and the cinematic form are either the same or different. For example, in “Karma Police” we saw that the verse and chorus line up exactly with the cinematic depiction of the antagonist and the protagonist, respectively. But in other videos, this may not be the case.

1.4b Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Sounds

Obviously the video for “Thriller” contains audio that does not appear on the album version of the song. These sounds, including spoken dialog and sound effects, advance the video’s story and are known as **diegetic** sounds.

Diegetic sounds are almost never included in the album version of a song. They often occur at the beginning of a video to setup the narrative plot. For example, the diegetic sounds at the beginning of “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun”—including a ragtime tune being played on the kitchen radio and the sound of eggs being cracked into a mixing bowl—establish the boring domestic life of our protagonist’s mother that she (the protagonist) is trying to avoid. But diegetic sounds can just as easily occur anywhere in the video, as in the revved-engine noises that accompany driving scenes in NSYNC’s “Bye, Bye, Bye,” which were not heard on the album version. Diegetic sounds can even occur *throughout* an entire video, as in the screaming crowd noises heard throughout “Hey Ya!” which help the viewer believe that Outkast is indeed playing in front of a live television audience.

Believe it or not, the song you hear in most music videos is actually **non-diegetic**. Obviously we, the viewer, hear the music (probably the biggest reason we’re watching the video in the first place!), but the characters pictured on-screen are not perceived to be hearing the song, and don’t interact with it in any way. The biggest exception to this rule is a type of video known as the “live-performance video,” in which concert goers are shown enjoying the band play the same song you the viewer hear. We’ll discuss live-performance videos more in Chapter Four.

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Intro	Strophic Form	Coda
Buildup	AABA	Terminal Climax
Verse	Video Intro	Terminally Climactic Form
Prechorus	Album version	Super-Simple Verse/Chorus
Chorus	Sampling	Form (SSVC)
Pump-up Chorus	Refrain	Parametric Form Chart
Verse/Chorus Form	End-Refrain	Diegetic
Form Chart	Beginning-Refrain	Non-Diegetic
Bridge	Drum Break	
Outro	Rap Verse	

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

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CHAPTER 2: INSTRUMENTATION AND EFFECTS

CHAPTER OUTLINE

2.1 INSTRUMENTATION THEORY

four layers

2.2 COMMON INSTRUMENTS

acoustic

electronic

2.3 UNCOMMON INSTRUMENTS AND EFFECTS

other instruments

timbre and effects

In this chapter we'll learn to recognize, by ear, the most common instruments heard in music videos. We'll learn which instruments belong to certain genres, but will also find that some instruments cross over, blurring the lines between genres. After learning about instruments, we'll discover some of the ways in which their exact sounds, or timbres, can be manipulated using effects.

CLIP LIST

Nirvana "Smells Like Teen Spirit" (1991)
Outkast "Hey Ya!" (2003)
Johnny Cash "Hurt" (2003)
Joan Jett and the Blackhearts "I Love Rock and Roll" (1981)
Fall Out Boy "Sugar We're Goin' Down" (2005)
Lady Gaga "Yoü and I" (2011)
The Cars "You Might Think" (1984)
R.E.M. "Losing My Religion" (1991)
Smashing Pumpkins "Tonight, Tonight" (1996)
Panic! At the Disco "I Write Sins, not Tragedies" (2005)
Daft Punk "Around the World" (1997)
David Guetta (ft. Sia) "Titanium" (2011)

2.1 INSTRUMENTATION

2.1a The four instrumental layers

Let's start by watching Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," paying particular attention to when instruments enter or exit. The video begins with Kurt Cobain playing the guitar (0:01). Dave Grohl's drums enter (0:07). After his drum fill, Krist Novacelic joins with a bass part (0:09). Kurt stops playing the main guitar riff and plays a quiet two-note lead guitar part (0:18). He starts singing at 0:26, and continues to

sing after his guitar chords come back in (0:42). Example 2.1 organizes each of these entrances and exits according to their role in the **four instrumental layers**. Nearly every song organizes its instrumentation into these four layers.

Layer	0:01	0:07	0:09	0:18	0:26	0:42
Melody				Lead guitar Vocals		
Chord	Guitar					Guitar
Bass			Electric Bass			
Beat		Drum set				

Example 2.1 Four instrumental layers in Nirvana “Smells Like Teen Spirit”

The **beat layer** keeps the beat on a non-pitched percussion instrument such as the drum set. The **bass layer** is the lowest in pitch, and generally plays only one note at a time. The **chord layer** is higher in pitch than the bass layer, and consists of multiple notes (chords) being played at once. Finally, the **melody layer** is the one in which we hear memorable tunes.

Recognizing how instruments combine to form the four layers is useful for a number of reasons. First, it allows us a different perspective into the song’s form. Notice in “Smells Like Teen Spirit” how the verse begins with two instrumentation changes: the vocals take over the melody layer from the lead guitar, and the chord layer disappears to highlight the melody. Second, the specific instruments that fill these four layers help to define musical genres. Because Nirvana is a grunge band, they use the distorted guitar as their chord layer and the drum set as their beat layer.

In the following sections, we’ll learn about all kinds of instruments heard and seen in music videos. Some instruments will be specific to certain genres (distorted guitars almost always signify rock music). Other instruments seem agnostic about genre (electric bass is heard in almost every style of music). We’ll even discuss a few interesting instruments that only occur in a handful of videos.

2.2 COMMON INSTRUMENTS

In this section you’ll learn the most commonly heard instruments in all styles of music. We’ll separate them into acoustic instruments and electronic instruments. **Acoustic instruments** make a sound without electricity, even though they may be very quiet and need microphones to be heard by a crowd. Voices, drums, horns, strings, and guitars are all acoustic instruments. Even electric guitars and basses, which have built-in microphones called pickups, are acoustic instruments because they have strings that make a noise, even when unplugged. **Electronic instruments** need electricity to produce sound. These include synthesizers, drum machines, and any sound produced with effects pedals or edited with on a computer.

2.2a acoustic instruments

The **bass guitar** is, aside from the voice, probably the most common instrument in all styles of music. A bass layer instrument, it plays the lowest pitches heard in the band, usually one at a time. Check out Andre 3000’s vintage Rickenbacker bass in at 3:45 in Outkast’s “Hey Ya!” shown in Example 2.2. It has four strings (though some basses can have five, even six), and is especially easy to hear at the beginnings of each verse (e.g. 1:09).



Example 2.2 Bass guitar in Outkast “Hey Ya!”

Two other guitars, the **acoustic guitar** and the **electric guitar**, are common in all styles of music, but especially rock. Both usually play more than one note at a time, and are therefore usually part of the chord layer. You can see and hear an acoustic guitar playing chords at the beginning of Johnny Cash’s cover of “Hurt,” shown in Example 2.3. The acoustic guitar has six strings (but can sometimes have 12), and makes a relatively loud noise due to its hollow body and large resonating hole.



Example 2.3 Acoustic guitar in Johnny Cash, “Hurt”

The electric guitar must be plugged into an amplifier because it has a solid body and no resonating hole. Watch Joan Jett play thick guitar chords (also known as “rhythm guitar”) on the top of a bar in the last chorus of “I Love Rock ’N’ Roll” (2:30). Her chords sound thicker and fuzzier because of **distortion**, an effect regularly added to electric guitar in harder rock styles. You can also hear the electric guitar playing single notes with distortion in the guitar solo at 1:49. Since the voice is absent in this section, the guitar playing single notes (also known as “lead guitar”) is filling the melody layer.



Example 2.4 Electric guitar in Joan Jett “I Love Rock ’N’ Roll”

Listen to the **drum set** in the opening seconds of Fall Out Boy’s “Sugar We’re Goin’ Down.” The drum set is actually a collection of several instruments. We first hear a low thudding sound (“kick drum,” aka “bass drum”), followed by a sharp cracking sound (“snare drum”). Once the rest of the band starts playing, the kick and snare are joined by high, ringing, metallic sounds made on cymbals. Example 2.5 shows these cymbals suspended on stands above the translucent purple drums. Drum set is the most common acoustic instrument to provide the beat layer.



Example 2.5 Drum Set in Fall Out Boy “Sugar We’re Goin’ Down”

The first sounds we hear in Lady Gaga’s “Yoü and I” at 0:48 are made by a synthesizer (more on that later). But directly afterward, at 0:52, a **piano** joins in the mix and becomes the song’s main instrument. Though it’s playing chords in this section, the piano is one of the only instruments that can perform any of the four layers. The right hand can play melodies on high notes, the left hand can play low bass notes, and the two hands together can play chords. If there’s no drum set, the piano can even provide the beat (as is basically happening here). Check out Gaga—and Gaga’s alter ego Joey Calderone—on a piano in a Nebraska corn field in Example 2.6.



Example 2.6 Piano in Lady Gaga “Yoü and I”

2.2b Electronic Instruments

In the early 1980s it became possible to synthesize sounds from scratch, rather than record them on an acoustic instrument. Known as **synthesizers** (“synth,” for short), these instruments can mimic acoustic instruments (i.e., sound like a saxophone), or can synthesize sounds that have no obvious parallel in the acoustic world.

Listen to the opening seconds of The Cars’ “You Might Think.” Three of the four layers have easily recognizable instruments: electric bass (bass layer), electric guitar (chord layer), and drums (beat layer). But what’s that instrument playing the melody layer? It kind of sounds like a mallet percussion instrument (xylophone?). While you may have your own interpretation of the sound it’s *mimicking*, the objective answer is that the melody layer is played on a synthesizer. Later in the video (0:43) we see it with the three acoustic instruments. When housed in the guitar-shaped casing shown in Example 2.7 we call this particular kind of synthesizer a “keytar.”



Example 2.7 Synthesizer in The Cars “You Might Think” (0:43)

Since most synthesizers have the same keyboard interface as a piano, they too can play any of the four layers. We call a synth playing a melody a **synth-lead**. A synth playing the bass layer, as in the main riff of Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” (4:15), is called a **synth-bass**. A chord layer provided by the synth is called a **synth-pad**—the synthesizer is “padding” the song to make it sound fuller. Listen to the synth-pad at the beginning of Aha’s “Take On Me” (0:09), just before the synth-bass (0:13) and memorable synth-lead (0:19) enters. Clearly, the advent of synthesizer technology made a huge impact on the sound of the 1980s.



Example 2.8 Roland TR-808 Drum Machine

A synthesizer that provides the beat layer is known as a **drum machine**. The first widely used drum machine, the Roland TR-808, was released in 1980. It created an entirely new sound for hip-hop that continues into today. As you can see in Example 2.8, each drum machine has knobs and buttons that are unique to the individual instrument. Later drum machines have buttons that simulate “playing” the drums, and some come linked to a set of rubber pads that simulate playing a real drum set.

Some drum machines are technically not synthesizers; they use **samples** of actual drums, recorded previously, which a user can trigger through the interface. Sampling programs like Apple’s Logic (shown in Example 2.9) can now produce drum sounds that are realistic enough to sound acoustic to most listeners.



Example 2.9 Sampling interface in Logic X

We’ve already looked at a number of videos that use drum machines. Listen again to the 808 at the beginning of Whitney Houston’s “I Wanna Dance With Somebody.” Specifically, listen how all of the little percussion and hand-clap layers build up until the main beat enters at 0:37. Drum machines are still common in later tracks like NSYNC’s “Bye, Bye, Bye,” Rihanna’s “Umbrella,” and Childish Gambino’s “This is America.”

Layer	Instruments	Singer-songwriter	Dance pop	R&B	Soft rock	Hard rock	Hip-hop	Electronic
Melody	Voice	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	Any pitched instrument		x	x	x	x	x	x
Chord	Acoustic Guitar	x		x	x			
	Electric Guitar (clean)			x	x			
	Electric Guitar (distorted)				x	x		
	Piano	x		x	x			
	Synth		x	x			x	x
Bass	Bass guitar	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	Low piano	x		x	x			
	Low synth		x				x	x
Beat	Drum set	x		x	x	x	x	
	Drum machine		x	x	x		x	x

2.3 UNCOMMON INSTRUMENTS AND EFFECTS

2.3a uncommon instruments

Occasionally one or more of the four layers is played on an uncommon instrument. These can be so notable as to define the song. Listen to the melody instrument in the introduction of R.E.M.’s “Losing My Religion.” Music videos usually help us identify uncommon instruments through close-ups. In Example 2.10 we see R.E.M.’s guitarist Peter Buck playing the **mandolin**, an 8-stringed instrument used primarily in bluegrass styles.

The extended range of the classical string family, composed of the low **cello**, midrange **viola**, and high **violin**, spans the bass, chord, and melody layers. Indeed, an entire genre of classical music, the string quartet, thrives on



Example 2.10 Mandolin in R.E.M. “Losing My Religion”

this possibility. Throughout the Smashing Pumpkins “Tonight, Tonight” we hear guitar, bass, and lead vocal, so those three layers are already occupied by rock instruments. The added string section merely thickens the texture, making it sound more orchestral. As you can see in Example 2.11, classical string instruments are traditionally played with a bow.



Example 2.11 String section in Smashing Pumpkins “Tonight, Tonight”

Panic! At the Disco’s “I Write Sins, Not Tragedies” begins with the distinctive sound of a cello’s strings being plucked, rather than bowed. Shortly afterward we hear a **glockenspiel** (a pitched percussion instrument) joined by a second cello track, this one bowed. Unlike the Smashing Pumpkins video, this intro only uses classical instruments. What’s worse, Panic! never shows us these classical instruments in the video, making them more difficult to identify.

2.3b timbre and effects

So far we’ve only really talked about which instruments are being used, not their exact sounds, or timbres. But while nearly every rock song has a guitar, the guitars on “I Love Rock ’N’ Roll” sound different than the guitars on “Sugar We’re Goin’ Down.” We can say that the two guitars have different timbres. **Timbre** describes the difference between two sounds played on the same pitch and volume. Pretend you’re at a symphony concert, and you hear the musicians tuning. Everybody is playing the note “A” at approximately the same volume. If sound waves are only made of two variables—frequency (pitch) and amplitude (volume)—timbre is what makes the trumpet *sound different* than the oboe.

Just like the trumpet and oboe have different timbres so do our individual voices. Whitney Houston sounds different belting out an “A” than Rihanna, and both of them sound different than your mother singing that same note. We are exquisitely capable, from an evolutionary perspective, of detecting minute differences between timbres, especially those of the human voice.

Though I could write an entire book comparing and contrasting the vocal timbres of each artist named in this book, I’m going to do the opposite. We’re instead going to look at some recent technolo-

gies that actually threaten to *erase* the difference between singers. The use of a technological effect to deform a singer's timbre is called **vocal manipulation**. Vocal manipulation encompasses one or more of the following effects added to a vocalist's recorded track.

Auto-tune began not as an effect, but as an imperceptible cosmetic cover-up for imperfect singing. Auto-tune takes any note that a performer sings out of tune and corrects it by snapping it to the nearest in-tune pitch. Example 2.12 shows the computer interface of the device. The squiggly red lines are the actual out-of-tune notes sung by the performer, while the blue and white boxes are the perfectly in-tune pitches they've been corrected to.



Example 2.12 Graphic interface of the Antares auto-tune

At some point in the late 1990s adding lavish, easily perceptible amounts of auto-tune to a vocal performance came to be an intentional **effect**. An effect is an electronic manipulation that intentionally distorts the “natural” sound of an instrument or voice. Auto-tune was used so extensively by hip-hop musician T-Pain that some now refer to it as the “T-Pain effect.” T-pain use of the auto-tune influenced an entire generation of hip-hop artists who still use it today.



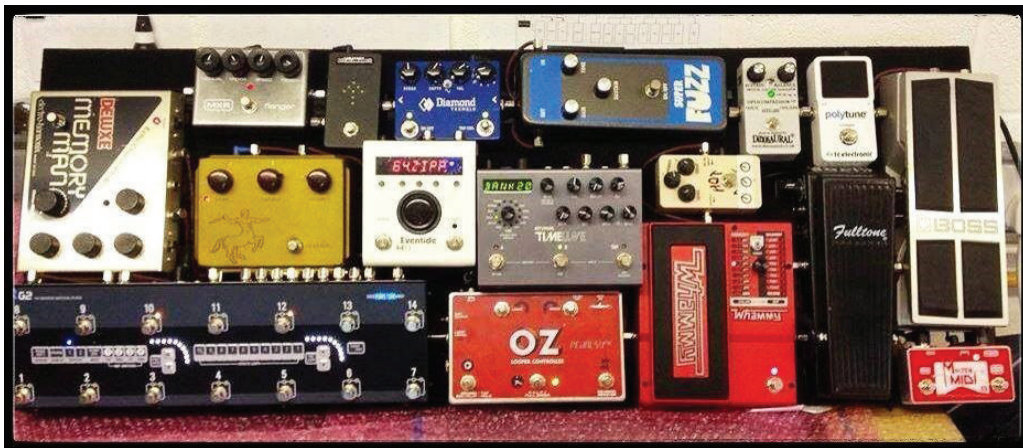
Example 2.13 Talk box vocal manipulation effect

Daft Punk is a French electronic music duo whose vocal timbre is also associated with a certain vocal manipulation effect. Their effect of choice is the **talk box**. It's a simple yet curious contraption dating from the 1970s. The performer plugs an instrument into the pedal shown in Example 2.13 (Daft Punk tends to use a keyboard), and the pedal blasts a highly amplified sound out of a surgical tube. Here's where it gets weird: you stick the surgical tube into your mouth and silently mouth the words you want to “sing.” The amplified sound uses your mouth as a resonating cavity, the pitches are selected using whatever instrument you've

plugged in, and what the audience hears is simulated singing. Vowels come out perfectly, but consonants are a little harder to articulate. Watch Daft Punk’s video “Around the World” (those are the only three words) and notice how the “d” sounds at the end of the first and third words aren’t really present at all.

Humans are especially attuned to vocal manipulation because we’re evolutionarily programmed to recognize and remember vocal timbres. But we’ve only been used to hearing guitar timbres for the past 70 years or so—the blink of an ear in evolutionary time. Therefore, it’s not so shocking for us when the sound of a guitar is deformed. Guitars with effects added may actually be more common in rock music than guitars without effects.

Most guitar effects are added using pedals called **stompboxes** (or pedals). Since guitarists need both of their hands to play, stompboxes are designed to be turned on and off with the feet. We’ve already talked about distortion, which is the most common guitar effect. Listen again to the intro of Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” and see if you can hear when Kurt Cobain steps on the distortion pedal (0:08).



Example 2.14 several stompboxes arranged on a pedalboard

Delay (aka echo) is another ubiquitous guitar effect. A delay pedal creates a clone of the note a guitarist plays and repeats it. If the delay is set very quick (say, under 100 milliseconds) it just makes the guitar sound thicker, and you probably won’t even notice it. But when you increase the delay of the repeated signal, it begins to take on an echo effect. U2’s guitarist The Edge made a career out of timing these delays to the exact tempo of the song. Listen for this rhythmic echo effect in songs such as “Where the Streets Have No Name” (fading in around 0:50).

Check out the pedalboard shown in Example 2.14, which belongs to one of my favorite guitarists, Ed O’Brien from Radiohead. It goes without saying that there are way too many stompboxes to talk about here. It can be fun to learn about the various phaser, flanger, and chorus pedals out there, and then learn to recognize them in your favorite songs.

Let’s wrap up by learning about effects that can be added not to individual instruments or voices, but to the entire track. Return for a moment to Daft Punk’s “Around the World.” Starting at 0:01, it sounds really round and bass-heavy, like you are standing *outside* a dance club. At 0:08 we hear a little bit more of the treble, like maybe we’ve walked in the front door but the speakers are still around a corner. Only at 0:24 is the full sonic spectrum revealed, like we’re finally on the dance floor.

This effect is called a **low-pass filter** (read: allows low frequencies to pass through, but not high ones). By continually moving the filter higher and higher, Daft Punk allows mid and high frequencies through. The technique is known as a **filter sweep**, and it can go the opposite way as well. Next time you see an older radio with a tone knob, practice adding a filter sweep to the beginning of your favorite song by starting with it at the far left and slowly turning it right (low-pass), or vice versa (high-pass).

Filter sweeps are merely one of a handful of audio editing techniques popular music has borrowed from electronic dance music. Another such technique is the effect known as **side-chaining**. Side-chaining briefly cuts out one sound (usually a high synth) when another one hits (usually the kick drum) so that every time the kick drum hits the rest of the track seems to “breathe.” Watch French DJ David Guetta’s video for “Titanium” (featuring Sia) with some really good headphones or speakers. First, check out the filter sweep from 0:43–0:46, and notice that every time the kick drum hits the synth completely cuts out. But this is merely a sneak preview for the side-chaining we hear in the **drop**, a song section when the beat re-enters, or “drops.” Side-chaining is particularly effective at mimicking the bodily movements involved in dance, so it makes the track feel even more “danceable.”

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Beat layer	Synthesizer	Vocal manipulation
Bass layer	Synth-lead	Auto-tune
Chord layer	Synth-bass	Effects
Beat layer	Synth-pad	Talk box
Acoustic instrument	Drum machine	Stompbox
Electronic instrument	Mandolin	Delay
Bass guitar	Cello	Low-pass filter
Acoustic guitar	Viola	High-pass filter
Electric guitar	Violin	Filter sweep
Distortion	Glockenspiel	Drop
Piano	Timbre	Side-chaining

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

- [electronic instruments] Butler, Mark. 2006. *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music*. Indiana University Press (see especially Chapter One).
- [vocal timbre] Heidemann, Kate. 2016. “A System for Describing Vocal Timbre in Popular Song.” *Music Theory Online* 22, no. 1.
- [effects in recent dance-pop] Peres, Asaf. 2016. “The Sonic Dimension as Dramatic Driver in 21st-Century Pop Music.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.
- [four layers] Moore, Allan. *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Popular Song*. Ashgate Press (see especially Chapter Two).

CHAPTER 3: LYRICS

CHAPTER OUTLINE

3.1 PRONOUNS AND PERSONA

- pronouns
- persona

3.2 COMMON THEMES

- party
- self-negativity
- breakup
- self-positivity
- desire
- social justice
- surrealism

3.3 CENSORSHIP

- lyrical
- visual

We'll begin this chapter by examining narrative perspective in lyrics. After debunking the commonly held myth that pop songs are autobiographical, we'll discover instead three different personas that lurk behind each song's authorship. We'll then examine some of the most common lyrical themes in music videos. Though each song is unique, most lyrics tend to cluster around seven distinct themes. Finally, we'll discuss censorship, both lyrical and visual, in music videos.

CLIP LIST

- Sia "Chandelier" (2014)
- Drake "Hotline Bling" (2015)
- Alessia Cara "Scars to your Beautiful" (2016)
- Shakira "Hips Don't Lie" (2006)
- TLC "Waterfalls" (1995)
- Kendrick Lamar "Alright" (2015)
- Soundgarden "Black Hole Sun" (1994)
- Dr. Dre "Nuthin But a 'G' Thang" (1992)
- Nine Inch Nails "Closer" (1994)

3.1 PRONOUNS AND PERSONA

3.1a pronouns

Before we can analyze the most common lyrical themes in recorded music we need to know who is being addressed, and who is doing the addressing. We can determine who's being addressed in each

mode of narration by the types of pronouns used. In **first-person narration**, the pronouns “I” and “we” imply that the narrator of the story is involved. **Second-person narration** uses “you” usually to describe a second person (or sometimes to create emotional distance by describing one’s self as “you”). The narrator is further removed from the story through **third-person narration**, which uses “she/he” (a person), “it” (a thing), “they” (singular or plural), and other pronouns to describe the action.

Unlike she/her/hers (**feminine pronouns**) and he/him/his (**masculine pronouns**), they/their/theirs, ze/hir/hirs, and other sets of **gender-neutral pronouns** can be used when it is unnecessary or undesirable to specify (or guess at) a person’s gender identity. They can also promote gender-neutral analyses of songs that do not specify the gender of either the first-, second-, or third-person. “You” is also a gender-neutral pronoun.

Let’s consider a real world example. You’re writing a paper analyzing the plight of the second person in Adele’s “Make You Feel my Love,” who is only identified as “you.” (Copyright restrictions prohibit me from reproducing large blocks of lyrics, so go ahead and pull them up on the internet now). You (the writer) might write that “ze undergoes many trials and tribulations from which the narrator wants to rescue hir.” Or, using the singular “they”: “they undergo many trials and tribulations from which the narrator wants to rescue them.”¹

3.1b persona

Avoiding masculine or feminine pronouns was necessary in the above case because we don’t know, nor shouldn’t attempt to guess at, Adele’s sexual orientation. However, here’s where it gets a little more complicated: was it really *Adele* singing that song? Firstly, the song was written by Bob Dylan in 1997. When I was taking a singing class in college in the early 2000s, my class was learning songs by American composer George Gershwin. We were told that, if you’re a boy singing love songs, sing “she,” and, if you’re a girl, change it to “he.” This outdated practice of assuming heterosexual orientation, called **heteronormativity**, aside from being hurtful to many people, misses a simple truth about a song’s narrator: *the narrator is not the human singing the song*.

The narrator of a song is only one **persona** present when we hear recorded popular music. The persona you probably think of first, Adele Laurie Blue Adkins (MBE), is the **human persona**. She was born in London, was given a national insurance number (similar to a social security number in the US), and was later appointed to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. The persona we discussed in the previous paragraph is the **narrator persona**, which is different from the human persona. I hope you’d agree that a skilled songwriter like Adele could pen lyrics from the first-person point of view of a man, or could convincingly describe a beachfront setting in a country she’s never been to. Just as you don’t assume that the human author Edgar Allan Poe is actually the “I” narrating *The Fall of the House of Usher* or any of his other fantastical stories, you should never assume that human personas are narrating pop songs.

The most subtle persona is the **artist persona**: Adele. Because it’s so subtle, it’s easier to understand in more extreme cases. Daft Punk, shown in Example 3.1, is an artist persona. Daft Punk is only possible because of two (French) humans—Guy-Manuel de Homem-Cristo and Thomas Bangalter—though it’s no stretch to imagine that if one of those humans had the flu, another highly skilled electronic musician could don the mask and Daft Punk’s artist persona would be more or less the same. Daft Punk’s songs frequently include narrator personas that address the listener in first, second, or third person, using either gender-specific or gender-neutral pronouns. Though she doesn’t wear a robot mask,

¹As of the time of this writing, using “they” as a singular (rather than plural) pronoun is still contested in prescriptivist grammar. But popular music has always defied prescriptivist grammar. Hip-hop culture regularly uses constructions not prescribed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In studying popular music, I encourage you to take a more descriptivist approach to grammar, which attempts to describe the grammatical practices of an existing culture rather than point out their non-conformity to prescribed grammars.

Adele’s artist persona is still different than her human persona, Adele Laurie Blue Adkins, and neither of them is the narrator of “To Make You Feel my Love,” who is wholly fictional.

It’s true that some songs are so powerful because we can easily *imagine* collapsing the difference between two or more of these personas. The artist Eric Clapton’s “Tears in Heaven” is perceived to be autobiographical because its narrator tells a story very similar to the tragedy that struck Eric Patrick Clapton (MBE) when his son Conor died. Some genres, such as punk and rap, thrive on the concept of **authenticity**, in which all three personas are perceived by fans as being the same. The artist 50 Cent, who has penned several songs in which the narrator is shot, thrives on the listener believing that both of these personas are more-or-less equivalent to the human persona Curtis James Jackson III, who was shot on May 24, 2000. Music videos, by simultaneously making making audible the human persona and making visible the artist persona mouthing the narrative voice, create the *illusion* that the three are one in the same.



Example 3.1 Daft Punk (actor persona)

It’s also important to recognize that an increasing number of pop songs in the 21st century are written not by one human, but by teams of songwriters. Flo Rida’s 2012 hit “Whistle” grants songwriting credits to no fewer than six human authors, only one of which is Tamar Lacel Dillard, the human perceived to be the artist Flo Rida. In an age where collaborations seem to be a recipe for market success, it makes just as much sense to think of an artist persona as a corporation rather than a single human.

3.2 COMMON THEMES

As an introduction to the seven most common lyrical themes, let’s analyze a video that cleverly combines two of them to create a more complex narrative: Sia’s “Chandelier.” Before watching the video, let’s just look at the lyrics. Go ahead and pull them up, and I’ll chart out the song’s themes alongside the form in Example 3.1.

TIME	SECTION	THEME(S)	KEYWORDS
0:10	Verse 1	Party, self-doubt	Party girls, push it down
0:33	Prechorus	Party	Drink
0:44	Chorus	Party, self-doubt	swing, chandelier, tears
1:28	Post-chorus	Self-doubt	Holding on, glass full

Example 3.1 Lyrical themes in “Chandelier”

You can see that the song combines themes of partying and self-doubt. The narrator begins by identifying as a party girl, but admits that she is also pushing down her feelings. Remembering to be careful about pronouns, we can be reasonably sure the narrator of this song identifies with feminine pronouns because the narrator is using “party girl” to refer to herself. She pushes these feelings down entirely in the prechorus, focusing with repetitive intensity on drinking (one, two, three). The chorus begins with what seems like her celebrating her inebriation by swinging freely from a light fixture, but turns dark when she begins to cry. Finally, the post-chorus (a section with the same backing music as the chorus but different lyrics) acts as an emotional hangover. No more partying in the lyrics, only self-doubt. Keeping her glass full until morning light is not about partying. It’s about using alcohol to suppress her own self-doubt. It’s also a **double entendre**, a phrase that can be read two ways. Her glass is literally full, but, in keeping her glass full of alcohol, she is also ensuring that her pessimism doesn’t return until the morning.

But how, if at all, does the video relate to these lyrical themes? A video can either reinforce the song’s lyrical meaning, actively contradict it, or neither. Therefore, we can label individual videos as **congruent**, **incongruent**, or **neutral** with regards to a song’s lyrical meanings. So, what about “Chandelier?” Quite a cinematic video, it features long shots of acclaimed dancer Maddie Ziegler (then aged 11 years) as she performs in an empty, dilapidated apartment. Her wig is promotional: it’s the same blonde wig Sia wore on the supporting tour for this album, which is also featured on the album artwork.



Example 3.2 Dancer Maddie Ziegler in “Chandelier”

Clearly Chandelier’s lyrics are more powerful for combining two different themes than if it had only been a song about partying or self-doubt. These two broad themes—**partying** (including carefree, youth, fun) and **self-negativity** (including self-doubt, depression, pain, anxiety)—are two of seven common lyrical themes in music videos. In the next section, we’ll examine the other five.

3.1a breakup, jealousy

Drake’s “Hotline Bling” begins with a chorus about late-night hookups, ostensibly from the “girl” he mentions in verse one. (It’s fine to use “girl” in quotes because we’re quoting lyrics, but it’s important to remember that “woman” more properly describes an adult female).

In verses 1 and 2, the mood turns darker. The narrator, no longer in the same city as this “girl,” begins to complain about her “reputation” and practice of wearing more revealing clothing. This jealousy comes to an apex in verse 3, when the narrator begins to criticize her for being sexually intimate with other people. Though breakup songs often contain lyrics that connote both sadness and jealousy, it’s important to distinguish between the two. Celebrating the sexual intimacy a partner shared with you only to demonize it when they share it with someone else is a practice that disproportionately and negatively affects women while promoting men to a position of power, and is therefore **patriarchal**.

3.1b Self-positivity (empowerment, success)

Songs about breakups are generally not those in which the narrator has a positive feeling. Songs in which the narrator does exhibit self-positivity might be broken down into two categories: empowerment and success. Empowerment lyrics describe satisfaction with a situation that may be seen as less than ideal to the outside world. Canadian-Italian singer songwriter Alessia Cara’s “Scars to Your Beautiful” features not only lyrics about empowerment, but also images of and interviews with people who have been discriminated against because of their appearance. The woman in Example 3.3, for example, has a skin condition called albinism, but reassures viewers that “weird things that make you seem strange” end up being your “greatest strengths.”



Example 3.3 Empowerment in Alessia Cara’s “Scars to Your Beautiful”

Success lyrics, by contrast, celebrate the attainment of a perceived ideal, usually beauty, popularity, wealth, or power. The first verse of Dr. Dre’s “Keep Their Heads Ringin’ (0:41–1:34), for example, boasts about the narrator earning another million dollars, being sexually attractive to women, and being able to kill his enemies before they kill him.

3.1c Desire (love, sex)

Songs about sex, love, or desire may represent the most common lyrical themes of all. While some lyrics describe love or sex in the present tense, most actually connote a desire for those things in the *future* tense. Columbian pop star Shakira’s “Hips Don’t Lie” (ft. Wyclef Jean) is a duet in which both

narrators describe their growing attraction to each other. Again, let's be careful about persona here. The narrator *voiced by* Wyclef is attracted to Shakira's dance moves (he names her in the song), and the narrator voiced by Shakira is attracted to her smooth-talking suitor who attempts to speak to her in Spanish (she does not identify Wyclef in the song). She speaks of "the attraction, the tension," but the lyrics never describe sex in the present tense.



Example 3.4 Desire in "Hips Don't Lie" (2:56)

The video illustrates this tension and distance well, with Wyclef singing to Shakira from the other side of the room. The two barely appear in the same shot, except for twice near the end. Example 6.4 is the closest (physically) they get to one another, and it appears in a bizarre non-sequitur in the lyrics regarding the CIA's prejudicial treatment of Colombians and Haitians.

3.2d politics/social justice

Music has always been a vehicle for social justice, a tradition that continues in music video. Pull up the lyrics to En Vogue's "Free Your Mind." Each of the verses is composed of four couplets that dispel prejudices about the narrator. Suggestive clothing does not suggest prostitution. One's fashion and music preferences do not suggest illegal activity. You can't determine someone's heritage by their appearance. One's race is not a predictor of one's dating preferences.

Videos with lyrics about gender identity and race will be the focus of entire chapters later in the book (Chapters 7 and 8, respectively). For now, let's focus on other social justice and political themes in music videos. Atlanta hip-hop group TLC's "Waterfalls," for example, addresses the HIV/AIDS crisis at a pivotal moment in the mid-90s.² The lyrics of the second verse describe a man enjoying a satisfying sexual relationship with a woman until he realizes he's become infected with HIV, after which he dies. Since the lyrics only identify HIV as "three letters," the video helps to clarify this coded message. Near the end of the video, the frame that once held pictures of both lovers fades to white, symbolizing mortality and the "final resting place" of the lyrics.

²The HIV/AIDS crisis is not wholly separate from either race or gender. A number of factors, including economic inequality, lack of access to treatment, lack of transparency among sexual partners, and homophobia all resulted in affluent, straight, cisgendered white men having higher survival rates.



Example 3.5 Lyrics concerning HIV/AIDS in “Waterfalls”

Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright” may have an optimistic title, but it was hard to be optimistic in 2015 about police brutality against young men of color. The lyrics “we hate Popo/wanna kill us dead in the street for sure” came on the heels of the killing of Michael Brown—an unarmed 18-year old African-American—by a member of the Ferguson, MO police force. Lamar’s video dramatizes this with a fictional police officer shooting Lamar off the top of a streetlight near the end of the video.

Other videos that address political issues in their visual setting (especially Childish Gambino’s “This is America” and M.I.A.’s “Bad Girls”) will be analyzing in the next chapter.



Example 3.6 Police Brutality in “Alright”

3.2e surreal/nonsense lyrics

Occasionally, it can be difficult to tell exactly what a video’s lyrics are about. While they may mean something to their author, such videos often come across as surreal or nonsensical to the viewer. Soundgarden’s “Black Hole Sun” is one such example. How do you interpret lyrics like “black hole sun/

won't you come/and wash away the rain?" Though the video does depict the sun transforming into a black hole and sucking everything into its vortex, it just as often uses extensive special effects to deform otherwise "real" images (such as the woman shown in Example 6.7) into surreal nightmares.



Example 3.7 Surreal imagery in "Black Hole Sun"

Surreal lyrics might be interpreted as a holdover from psychedelic themes in music by The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and other artists associated with the hippie movement of the late 60s and early 70s. You can still hear them in modern videos such as The Smashing Pumpkins' "Bullet With Butterfly Wings" and The Mars Volta's "The Widow."

3.3 CENSORSHIP

Censorship, the editing of an artist's work to conform to pre-determined societal norms, takes on many forms in music videos. Censorship can be applied to a song's lyrics, its visual images, or both. We'll begin with lyrical censorship.

Lyrical censorship can edit an artist's original work into three different ways: the bleeped version, the clean version, and the edited version. In **bleeped versions** of songs, offending words or phrases are rendered inaudible. Earlier, crude forms of audio editing generated a high-pitched "bleep" sound to drown out the offending word. Modern editing allows for less invasive techniques that don't disrupt the song's backing track. Listen, for example, to the chorus of Panic! At the Disco's "I Write Sins, Not Tragedies." One word of the artist's original lyrics has been bleeped, rendering the hook "closing the [silence] door."

Sometimes, when a song contains so many words that an artist knows will be censored, the artist records a separate **clean version** of the song. The video MTV aired for Dr. Dre's "Nuthin but a 'G' Thang" (featuring Snoop Dogg) is set to a clean version of the song. The lyrics that appear in the video are drastically different than those that appeared on the song's corresponding album *The Chronic*.

Occasionally, an entire section of a song is deemed altogether too offensive, and MTV or other media outlets only play an **edited version** that removes it. Dire Straits' 1985 video "Money for Nothin'"

omits an entire verse heard on the song’s album version. The offending verse contains offensive suggestions regarding sexual orientation, including a homophobic slur.

Censorship can also affect a video’s visual content. One of the most common examples of visual censorship involves product logos appearing in videos (The Roots’ “What They Do” actually satirizes this by flashing “no logos in the shot” across the screen). Several hats in Dr. Dre’s aforementioned video are censored with a translucent blur. MTV censored the hat worn by Snoop Dogg not because it featured a logo, but because it featured an illustration of marijuana. MTV also censored (with the large black circle shown in Example 3.8) the actual marijuana held by Warren G in the same video.

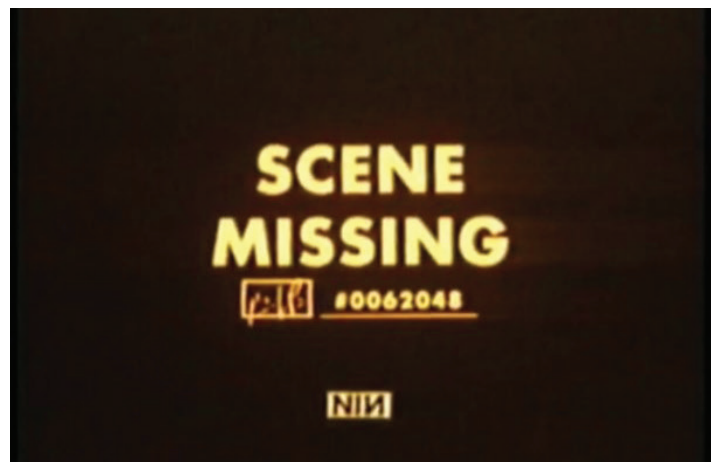


Example 3.8 Drug censorship in “Nuthin but a ‘G’ Thang”

The edited version of Nine Inch Nails’ “Closer” that aired on MTV still showed plenty of suggestive images. Lead singer Trent Reznor is shown in bondage attire, and mutilated animal corpses are present in most scenes. Among the images edited out for MTV were a nude woman, a live monkey bound to a cross, and Reznor’s face as he mouths an explicit word in the chorus (which was also silently bleeped). Director Mark Romanek prepared for this, creating the image seen in Example 3.9 to be shown over each of the offending scenes, giving the video a faux-documentary aesthetic.

Some videos weren’t edited, they were just banned outright by MTV. This includes Madonna’s “Justify my Love” (1990), which Madonna instead released as a VHS-single after MTV deemed it too sexually explicit. Others were banned because of excessive violence, drug use, or even for containing religiously controversial imagery (e.g., Soundgarden’s “Jesus Christ Pose”).

Many of these videos would later be shown as regulations and public taste changed, especially late at night or on MTV’s shadow network MTV2. Bjork’s “Pagan Poetry,” for example, which features sexually explicit images, body piercing, and the singer dancing topless, was



Example 3.9 Visual censorship in “Closer”
(Nine Inch Nails)

originally banned in 1997 but eventually aired on MTV2 five years later as part of a special program that finally gave airtime to MTV's most controversial videos, including "Closer" and "Justify my Love."

Ultimately, MTV's censorship practices are a political act. They have, for example, never aired M.I.A.'s "Sunshowers" (2004) because its lyrics support the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and M.I.A. did not agree to an edited version. "Justify my Love" was one of the first videos to show same-sex intimacy and bondage. But would Madonna's video still have been banned if the "sexually explicit" acts it depicted conformed to heteronormative ideals?

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Narrative Perspective (1st, 2nd, 3rd person)	Heteronormativity Persona (human, narrator, artist)	Neutral video Patriarchal
Feminine pronouns	Authenticity	Censorship (bleeped, clean, edited version)
Masculine pronouns	Congruent video	
Gender-neutral pronouns	Incongruent video	

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

- [on gendered pronouns and persona] Hawkins, Stan. 2017. "Introduction," in *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music and Gender*. Routledge.
- [on lyrical analysis] Burns, Lori, Marc LaFrance, and Laura Hawley. 2008. "Embodied Subjectivities in the Lyrical and Musical Expression of PJ Harvey and Björk." *Music Theory Online* 14, no. 4.
- [on censorship] Vernallis, Carol. 2004. Chapter Four of *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*, Columbia University Press.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE

CHAPTER OUTLINE

4.1 THREE NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

- performance video
- metaphor video
- story video

4.2 INTERTEXTUAL VIDEOS

- parody and satire videos
- movie music video

4.3 SETTING AND IMAGERY

- settings
- imagery

How does a music video's visual narrative correspond with the narrative in its lyrics? In this chapter we'll discuss three strategies for such correspondence. We'll also talk about a couple of special types of narrative that only make sense in relation to some other type of film. Finally, we'll discuss some of the most common settings and imagery seen in music videos and how to interpret them.

CLIP LIST

- Bruno Mars "Locked Out of Heaven" (2012)
- Fall Out Boy "Sugar We're Goin' Down" (2005)
- Beyoncé "Formation" (2016)
- Gotye "Somebody that I Used to Know" (2011)
- Michael Jackson "Billie Jean" (1983)
- Beastie Boys "Sabotage" (1994)
- The Roots "What They Do" (1996)
- Dr. Dre "Keep Their Heads Ringin'" (1995)
- Coolio "Gangsta's Paradise" (1995)
- Lorde "Green Light" (2017)
- Linkin Park "In the End" (2001)
- Rihanna "Umbrella" (2007)
- Lady Gaga "Alejandro" (2010)
- M.I.A. "Bad Girls" (2012)
- Childish Gambino "This is America" (2018)

4.1 THREE NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

4.1a performance video

Though all videos have the *capacity* to tell stories, directors sometimes choose not to do so. The visual focus of such videos is usually the musical performance itself. A video that highlights dancing, singing, or instrumental performance for most or all of its duration is known as a **performance video**.

Performance is only one of three types of narrative strategies, and it's important to remember that pure performance videos—where nothing else is shown and no other narrative strategies are employed—are rare. As you're watching the videos described in this chapter, notice how directors freely combine all three narrative strategies in a single video.

Some performance videos feature live performances. In **live-performance videos**, we see the artist performing in front of an audience. These can be realistic, taken from actual concert footage, but are often simulated. Bruno Mars's "Locked out of Heaven," filmed at the height of his pop superstardom, is set in a club way too small and intimate for him to be playing in. Scenes like the one shown in Example 4.1 could be interpreted as a dramatization of how it used to be "back in the day" before the band got famous. We'll talk more about how the retro colors and simulated VHS-tape effects enhance this feeling in the next chapter.



Example 4.1 simulated live-performance in Bruno Mars "Locked Out of Heaven"

Other performance videos, known as **staged-performance videos**, make no such pretenses. They feature the band playing by themselves, without an audience. In the case of Emo-punk band Fall Out Boy's video for "Sugar We're Goin' Down" the band is playing in a wood-paneled room (it looks like either a hunting lodge or a VFW hall). But where is the audience? It could be that you, the viewers, are the "audience." You're getting an intimate view of the band impossible in an actual concert experience.

A third type of performance video, the **choreographed video**, highlights dancing and lip-synching performances of instrumental ones. The main attractions in such videos are undoubtedly the highly choreographed dance sequences, such as the one shown in Example 4.3 from Beyoncé's "Formation." The dancers, including Beyoncé herself, are clearly "in formation." But the lyrics craft several possible double meanings, including one in which "ok ladies let's get *in-formation*" not only refers to dancing, but also to promoting women's independence and empowerment. Further lyrical analysis of the racial and sexual implications of this groundbreaking multimedia will be explored in Chapter 8.



Example 4.2 Staged performance in Fall Out Boy “Sugar We’re Goin’ Down”



Example 4.3 Choreography in Beyoncé “Formation”

4.1b metaphor video

Since music videos are nearly always conceived after the song is recorded, something about the lyrics usually inspires the video. We call videos in which the visuals seem to have something to do with the lyrics a **metaphor video**. In metaphor videos the visuals can either reinforce ideas already present in the lyrics, or cause us to interpret the lyrics differently. Let’s consider two hypothetical videos for a song about snowflakes. Video #1 shows a winter scene with a happy couple playing in the snow, while video #2 shows the fallout of a nuclear war with white debris raining down. Video #1 probably reinforces meanings you already had about the lyrics, while video #2 made you interpret those lyrics differently.

Belgian/Australian pop musician Gotye’s “Somebody that I Used to Know” (featuring Kimbra) is a prime example of a metaphor video. The duet’s lyrics express sadness and anger about an abrupt breakup. When Kimbra begins singing the second verse (2:32), we see the couple covered in body paint, both part of the same mosaic wall. As she continues to sing about the breakup her body paint slowly erodes away until she is finally no longer part of the mosaic. This is, of course, a metaphor for a couple that was once together but is now apart.



Example 4.4 Metaphor in Gotye’s “Somebody that I Used to Know”

4.1c story video

Depending on how narrow your definitions of “performance” or “story” are, either very few or almost all music videos could be considered metaphor videos. If lip-sync counts as “performance,” and any kind of temporal meaning is a “story,” then no videos would be metaphor videos. On the other hand, if you needed a classical dramatic structure (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, dénouement) to perceive a “story” and considered a performer’s body language “metaphorical,” every video would be a metaphor video. Rather than argue about precise definitions (as many scholars have), it’s best to leave these decisions in the hands of the person interpreting the video. Do you sense a coherent story, or is it just images that correspond to lyrics?

As an example I’d bet we all can agree on, let’s return to a different part of “Sugar We’re Goin’ Down” that we didn’t previously discuss. Apart from the performance scenes in the wood-paneled room, the rest of the video focuses on the budding courtship between a young woman and a boy with antlers (and the woman’s father who does not want them to be together). Example 4.5 breaks down the story according to a five-part dramatic structure.

Time	Structure	Plot
0:19	Exposition	Boy with antlers is ridiculed for being different
1:00	Rising Action	Boy with antlers meets young woman, they fall for each other, woman’s father disapproves, makes boy try to cut off his antlers
3:05	Climax	Father goes hunting for deer-boy, but is hit by car
3:15	Falling action	Father is revealed to have deer hooves himself
3:45	Dénouement	Boy and young woman living together with father, everyone feels accepted for who they are

Example 4.5 Dramatic structure in “Sugar, We’re Goin’ Down”

Clearly there is a story here, and so we have every right to call this a **story video** (as well as a performance video). What’s interesting is that the visual story has almost nothing to do with the lyrics, which are about a fleeting one-night stand and its sordid aftermath. It is therefore a subcategory of story videos known as an **incongruent story video**.

Most story videos tell a visual story that is close enough to the one heard in the lyrics that we consider them **congruent story videos**. Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean” was one of the first. Both the video and the lyrics concern the protagonist’s interactions with a woman named Billie Jean. There are, of course, minor details in the two stories that differ, but one would be hard pressed to defend the claim that this video was incongruent with its lyrical story. We’ll talk more about this video’s commentary on race, as well as the racial implications of its reception on MTV in the early 80s, in Chapter 8.

4.2 INTERTEXTUAL VIDEOS

4.2a parody, satire video

Some videos only make sense in relation to the viewer’s knowledge about other visual media. If the music video is copying or mimicking something else, we call this a **parody video**. If the music video is pointing out the flaws or shortcomings in something else, we call this a **satire video**. Since the two are related, looking at one example of each will help us to tell the difference.

Take a moment and watch two 90s hip-hop videos: “Sabotage” by Brooklyn-based trio The Beastie Boys, and “What They Do” by Philly-based hip hop group The Roots. “Sabotage” is a parody of 70s crime television shows. We shouldn’t consider this satire because the Beastie Boys are not making fun of 70s crime drama (quite the opposite, they seem to enjoy it). On the other hand, “What They Do” *is* making fun of something—namely derivative rap videos. By including text like that seen in Example 4.6, The Roots describe an overused trope in hip-hop videos by drawing attention to that same trope on screen.



4.6 Satire in The Roots “What They Do”

4.2b the movie music video

When a song is included on the soundtrack for a movie, the music video for that song will often reference the movie. Movie footage included in these **movie music videos** can either be taken from the actual film, or may use newly filmed material that references the movie.

Note the difference in two hip-hop videos from 1995. The plot of Dr. Dre’s “Keep Their Heads Ringin’” (included on the soundtrack for the comedy *Friday* starring Chris Tucker and Ice Cube) has almost nothing to do with the film, and so must show actual scenes from *Friday*. In this video about hi-tech crime and espionage, the assailants distract and confuse the security guards by broadcasting scenes from *Friday* into their closed-circuit cameras.

Coolio’s “Gangsta’s Paradise” was included on the soundtrack for the educational drama *Dangerous Minds*. While it uses some clips from the film, most of the music video contains new footage like that shown in Example 4.7, in which the film’s star (Michelle Pfeiffer) interacts with Coolio in scenery meant to mimic the run-down high school seen in the film.

Each of the narrative types in section 4.2 (parody, satire, movie) relies on a broader concept called **intertextuality**. These videos, a kind of multimedia “text,” rely on other texts for some or all of their meaning. A viewer with no knowledge of the original source material will have a different understanding of the music video’s meaning. For example, viewers with no knowledge of early 90s Mentos commercials will have a different understanding of The Foo Fighters’ “Big Me,” since the entire music video is a satire of those commercials.

4.3 COMMON SETTINGS AND IMAGERY

Music videos, like films and music generally, rely on conventions. Just like films have genres (comedy, drama, action) and lyrics have themes (breakups, social justice, alienation), music videos usually rely on settings and imagery inherited from other videos. In this section, we’ll discuss a few of the most common ones.

4.3a settings

A video’s setting is the kind of location in which most of the narrative takes place. New Zealand pop star Lorde’s “Green Light” advertises itself as a club banger by including a bombastic dance club among its settings. It’s not uncommon for a music video to have multiple settings—three seems to be a common number. In other scenes, Lorde is hanging out of a moving vehicle (or dancing on top of it when it stops). Other shots show Lorde walking around Los Angeles listening to headphones. All three of these settings—club, car/driving, urban—are common in music videos.



Example 4.7 New scenes evoking *Dangerous Minds* in “Gangsta’s Paradise”



Example 4.8a Dance club setting in Lorde “Green Light”

Through there are literally hundreds of possible settings, a few special ones are worth knowing about. The **CGI setting** involves actors shooting in front of a blank screen (sometimes called a green screen) so that their movements can be superimposed onto a computer-generated setting. This becomes common after the turn of the millennium. Linkin Park’s “In the End” was one of the first. The cracked desert with patches of green grass, multi-story vines, and a flying whale shown in Example 4.9 is just one of the video’s many fantastical scenes made possible only through CGI production.



Example 4.9 CGI setting in Linkin Park “In the End”

Some videos highlight their own production. This is known as a **reflexive setting**, and is somewhat related to theater actors breaking the fourth wall. When an actor breaks the fourth wall of the theater, they acknowledge the presence of the audience and thus the fact that they are acting in a play. Similarly, a video that shows the forensic traces of its own creation acknowledges its own artifice as part of the drama.

Beyoncé’s “Formation,” analyzed earlier in this chapter, has a driving setting (like Lorde, Beyoncé’s seen both in and on top of cars), as well as the reflexive setting shown in Example 4.10. The “PLAY” icon in the lower right hand corner simulates what the video would look like if viewed on a VHS player, while the grainy, unprocessed footage simulates what the camera person might see in their view finder.



Example 4.10 Reflexive setting in Beyoncé “Formation”

4.3b imagery

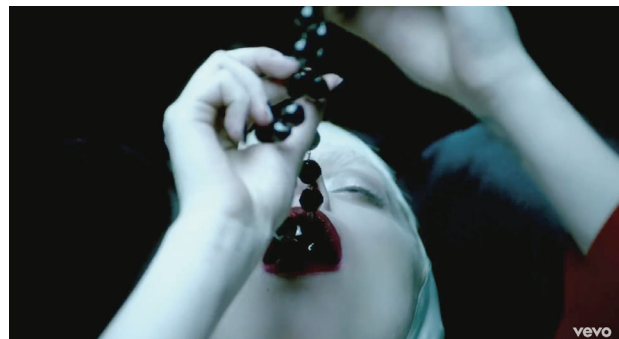
Somewhat independent from the locations in which they are shot, music videos also feature recurring **imagery**—props, symbols, icons, or other visual messages—that communicate meaning. Some of the most common imagery in music videos includes that from classic films, or that which is religious or political in nature.

Consider Rihanna’s video for “Umbrella” as an example of a video that uses props to create classic film imagery. Umbrellas feature prominently in dance scenes of many classic films, but two intertexts seem especially apropos here: *Singing in the Rain* (1952) and *My Fair Lady* (1964). For viewers who know these films Rihanna’s reinterpretation of the classic umbrella prop will spark a sense of anachronism. The Elizabethan architecture of the room evokes a sense of the old, but Rihanna’s sexy costume and the orange color filtering both suggest something out of place in films of the 1950s and 60s.



Example 4.11 Classic film prop in Rihanna’s “Umbrella”

Religious imagery in music videos tends toward the profane. Lady Gaga’s “Alejandro” features several provocative images, two of which are shown in Example 4.12. The upside-down cross on her underwear has long been a symbol of rebellion against Christianity, while her swallowing of the rosary is a more specific critique of the Catholic church. We’ll talk more about the gender politics of this video in Chapter 7.



Example 4.12 Religious imagery in Lady Gaga “Alejandro”

Political imagery in music videos can be quite a bit more varied in its meaning. In the early 90s rap-rock pioneers Rage Against the Machine made several videos that exposed the injustices Latinos and Native Americans suffer at the hands of European descendants. M.I.A.'s "Bad Girls" shows women wearing ornate *niqabs* (shown in Example 4.13) driving cars in the desert. In 2017 Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world that prohibited women from driving cars. M.I.A.'s video resonated with a growing women's rights movement there, and in May 2018 Saudi women were finally granted the right to drive.



Example 4.13 Political imagery in M.I.A. "Bad Girls"

Childish Gambino's "This is America" includes biting critiques of America's gun policy. The image shown in Example 4.14 references a 2015 massacre of nine African-Americans in a Charleston, South Carolina church by a 21-year old white supremacist who was legally allowed to purchase the murder weapon.



Example 4.14 Political imagery in Childish Gambino, "This is America"

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Live performance video

Staged performance video

Choreographed video

Metaphor video

Congruent story video

Incongruent story video

Parody video

Satire video

Movie music video

Intertextuality

CGI setting

Reflexive setting

Imagery

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

Vernallis, Carol. 2004. *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*. Columbia University Press.

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CHAPTER 5: VISUAL PRODUCTION

CHAPTER OUTLINE

5.1 COLOR AND LIGHT

- HSL (hue, saturation, lightness)
- digital intermediate
- interpreting HSL

5.2 CAMERA ANGLES AND MOVEMENT

- point-of-view
- eye-level
- high-angle/low-angle
- tracking
- handheld/shaky

In this chapter we'll become more familiar with some of the techniques and terminology associated with the visual production of music videos. We'll learn how the basics of color, lighting, camera angles, and camera movements changed from the 80s to the 90s as the industry moved away from tape and embraced digital production technology. Noticing these techniques in music videos will help us to interpret their meaning.

CLIP LIST

- Whitney Houston "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" (1987)
- Green Day "Basket Case" (1994)
- Johnny Cash "Hurt" (2003)
- Macy Gray "I Try" (1999)
- Sinéad O'Connor "Nothing Compares 2 U" (1990)
- Jennifer Lopez "If You Had My Love" (1999)
- Linkin Park "In the End" (2001)
- The Roots "What They Do" (1996)
- NSYNC "Bye, Bye, Bye" (2000)

5.1 COLOR AND LIGHT

5.1a HSL (hue, saturation, lightness)

Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" begins in black and white. Because it reminds us of documentary filmmaking, black and white footage is good at conveying a sense of authenticity. We are meant to feel like we're "behind the scenes" at one of Houston's shows, and to know what she's "really like" in concert.

Most of Houston's video, however, is shot entirely in front of a blank backdrop that allows for maximum color manipulation. Check out 1:03–1:05 (shown in Example 5.1), where we're treated to a smor-

gasbord of pastel colors: sunflower yellow, magenta, spring green, baby blue, and back to yellow all in the span of two seconds!

Pastel was the dominant color family of 80s music videos. For the most part, it was all produced with different colored **gels**—thin colored sheets placed over white lights to produce color. Because videos were still being shot to 3/4” tape, the only color editing was done on a **telecine**, a piece of equipment mainly used to transcode film and tape into a format playable by consumer machines. But telecine color editing was a primitive process. You couldn’t change the color of individual objects, only the color of the entire image.

Media professionals describe colors in terms of their **HSL** (hue, saturation, lightness) **value**. **Hue** is probably the first thing you think of when you’re describing a color: a shade selected from the entire visible spectrum from red all the way through violet (think ROYGBIV, as in the rainbow). **Saturation** is the amount of that color present, with 0% being dull grey and 100% being the most vibrant expression of that color you can imagine. Finally, **lightness** is how much white light is present in the color, with 0% being black (no color) and 100% turning the color to pure white.



Example 5.1 Pastel Gels in “I Wanna Dance with Somebody”

5.1b Digital Intermediate

Around 1994 music videos started being edited digitally, rather than on tape. This new tool, called **digital intermediate** (or DI), allowed for manipulation of HSL values of individual objects in a shot. A dramat-

ic scene from the 1998 film *Pleasantville*, shown in Example 5.2, helped introduce the world to DI. Because the entire film has been in black and white up to this point (representing purity and morality), Betty Parker (Joan Allen) perceives the color that fills her face as a symbol of passion, which initially embarrasses her.

Pop-punk band Green Day's "Basket Case" was one of the first music videos to use DI. It was actually shot entirely in black and white. All of the colors were added later, digitally. The bright neon colors, along with the mental hospital setting, amplify themes of schizophrenia and alienation in the song's lyrics. Neon also happens to be the most dominant color family of 90s videos.



Example 5.2 Digital Intermediate in *Pleasantville*



Example 5.3 DI in Green Day, "Basket Case"

5.1c Interpreting HSL values

Film theorists have long held that certain colors carry specific emotional connotations. Black and white is serious; sepia is religious and/or earthy; green means envy. While we can certainly find examples to back this up, we need not limit ourselves to these standards when interpreting the HSL values of an individual video. In this section, we'll look briefly at how two videos use notable HSL values to amplify the meaning of their lyrics and setting.

Johnny Cash's cover of the Nine Inch Nails song "Hurt" transforms the heavy, industrial original into a sentimental ballad. Cash was 71 when the video was filmed, and in noticeably poor health. He died

seven months later. Scenes in which the 71-year old sings feature low saturation values and dull golden hues (Example 5.4, left). But throughout the video these shots are contra-posed with old footage of Cash's younger self (Example 5.4, right). Despite the grainy quality of the older film, its rich saturation, blueish-green hues, and high lightness all connote relative youth. Lyrically, the Nine Inch Nails version centers upon themes of depression, self-harm, and disappointment. But the lighting in Cash's video makes it seem more gentle and sentimental. His alteration of one key lyric ("I wear this crown of *thorns*") also leverages this sentimentality into a quasi-religious acceptance of mortality.



Example 5.4 present and past HSL values in Johnny Cash, "Hurt"

Now let's watch Macy Gray's "I Try," paying special attention both to the lyrics and to the constant appearance of heavily saturated red and orange objects. Gray's lyrics are all about trying to play it cool after a breakup, pretending she doesn't still have feelings for her past lover when she clearly still does. Her pastel blue hoodie represents this "coolness" she's trying to feign, but the bright orange shirt sleeves that stick out from under it represent the emotional intensity she's hiding just beneath the surface. Notice also the orange carpet and red painting in the hotel lobby (0:38, shown in Example 5.5), the fuchsia flowers she carries (1:25 onwards), and the red and orange paint framing the annoyingly affectionate couple in the coffee shop (1:15). If you pay enough attention, you notice this contrast between the light, under-saturated "cool" blue and the intensely saturated "emotional" red and orange hues in nearly every scene.



Example 5.5 Cool (blue) and intense (orange) in Macy Gray "I Try"

5.2 CAMERA ANGLES AND MOVEMENT

In this section, we'll look at the most common ways in which camera angles and camera movements are used to convey certain emotions in music video. Once again, we have a rich history of film theory to draw upon if we wish, but can also just pay close attention to how camera work intersects with lyrical meaning, setting, and narrative in a specific video.

5.2a point-of-view (POV)

Music videos, along with most film and television, almost never let us see exactly what the characters on screen see. Such a first-person **point-of-view** (POV) angle would require the cameras to be mounted on or near the actor's eyes. This sort of angle is often reserved for first-person action video games. But I'll bet that earlier in this chapter you still *perceived* Johnny Cash looking at the photo of June Carter Cash on the wall. You also noticed Macy Gray glaring across the coffee shop at the annoying couple. Music videos create the *illusion* of point-of-view by cutting very quickly from the character's face to the object they are viewing.

5.2b Eye-level shots

Irish singer-songwriter Sinéad O'Connor's cover of Prince's "Nothing Compares 2 U" is an extreme example of **eye-level** camera angle. Because the camera is directly in line with the performer's eyes, the viewer senses that the performer is actually looking at them. O'Connor's lyrics are about a painful breakup. The empathy we feel for the protagonist is amplified by the eye-level camera angle, especially when it's this zoomed-in (see Example 5.6). For some viewers this empathy was further amplified through O'Connor's use of religious iconography throughout the video. This would latter take on an entirely new meaning after O'Connor famously ripped up a photo of Pope John Paul II on *Saturday Night Live* in 1992.



Example 5.6 Eye-level camera angle in Sinéad O'Connor
"Nothing Compares 2 U"

5.2c Low-angle, High-angle shots

Low-angle shots (also known as “worm’s eye”) are those in which the camera is placed near, on, or even under the floor using a special trap door. **High-angle** shots (also known as “bird’s eye”) shots are the opposite. They typically use cranes or ladders to look down upon the subject. Though most of Jennifer Lopez’s “If You Had My Love” uses a standard dance beat, the low-angle shot shown in Example 5.7 helps draw viewer attention to her fancy footwork in the Latin-dance bridge section.



Example 5.7 low-angle shot in Jennifer Lopez “If You Had My Love”

Rap-rock band Linkin Park uses high-angle shots such as the one shown in example 5.8 to enhance messages of isolation in “In the End.” The high-angle shot reveals that the band is physically isolated atop a tower from which there is no possible escape. We’ll talk more about this tower and the rest of Linkin Park’s “set” in the next chapter, since it was one of the first videos to use an entirely computer-generated “virtual set.”



Example 5.8 High-angle shot in Linkin Park “In The End”

5.2d Panning, Tracking shots

Music videos are all about motion. If a subject is in motion the camera merely has to move sideways to capture the movement. This is known as a **panning** shot. But to create an *illusion* of movement from a stationary subject directors often place the camera on a mechanical dolly that moves alongside the subject. This is known as a **tracking** shot. In The Roots “What They Do” the dolly slowly glides right-to-left over a full 15 seconds (0:31–0:46) to show four women dancing poolside in bikinis. As you can see in Example 5.9, the on-screen text advertises this as “the money shot,” which guarantees “automatic record sales.” This is one of several instances of satire seen throughout the video, each of which highlights an overused trope in hip-hop.



Example 5.9 Tracking shot in The Roots “What They Do”

5.2e Handheld, Shaky Camera

Instead of using a camera stabilizer to keep the image still and “professional,” directors often purposefully shoot with **handheld cameras**. This tends to create a feeling of authenticity and sincerity because of the handheld camera’s use in home videos. We’ve already seen this sincerity in flashback footage from Johnny Cash’s “Hurt.” You hopefully also noticed the “authentic” live performance and “behind-the-scenes” footage simulated through handheld cameras in Bruno Mars’s “Locked Out of Heaven.”

Beginning in the late 90s music videos began to mimic this effect using digital editing. Known as the **shaky camera effect**, this was popular in conjunction with low-angle shots, particularly in dance music. As shown in Example 5.10, NSYNC’s stomp-like dance moves in “Bye, Bye, Bye” feel even more powerful when the image is digitally shaken.



Example 5.10 Shaky camera effect in NSYNC “Bye, Bye, Bye”

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Gels	Digital Intermediate	High-angle shot
Telecine	Point-of-view	Tracking shot
Hue, saturation, lightness (HSL value)	Eye-level shot	Handheld camera
	Low-angle shot	Shaky camera effect

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

- Elicker, Martina. 1998. “Popular Music in the Age of the Video Clip.” *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 23 (1): 69–89
- Vernallis, Carol. 2013. “Music Video’s Second Aesthetic?” In *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, edited by J. Richardson, C. Gorbman, and C. Vernallis, pp. 437–465. Oxford University Press.

CHAPTER 6: EDITING AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

CHAPTER OUTLINE

6.1 EDITING BASICS

- storyboards
- offline vs. online editing

6.2 SPECIAL EFFECTS

- analog
- digital

6.3 EDITING TO RHYTHM AND FORM

- setting and form
- cutting rhythm

In this chapter we'll better understand the editing process that occurs after a video is caught on film. We'll distinguish between the timing and selection of clips, known as offline editing, and the online editing process, where visual adjustments are made. We'll see how one of those visual adjustment stages, the addition of special effects, has changed drastically alongside the evolution of digital equipment. Finally, we'll discover how music video editors listen closely to a song's rhythm and form when editing a music video.

CLIP LIST

Arcade Fire "Sprawl II" (2010)
Kendrick Lamar "Alright" (2015)
Smashing Pumpkins "Tonight, Tonight" (1996)
Madonna "Like a Prayer" (1989)
Nine Inch Nails "Hurt" (1995)
The White Stripes "Seven Nation Army" (2003)
Fun "We Are Young" (2011)
Justice "D.A.N.C.E." (2007)
The Cars "You Might Think" (1984)
Jack Ü (ft. Justin Bieber) "Where are Ü Now" (2015)
The Chainsmokers (ft. Halsey) "Closer" (2016)
Beyoncé "Single Ladies" (2008)

6.1 EDITING BASICS

6.1a Storyboard

We'll begin this chapter by learning the basics of music video editing. You can think of editing as everything that happens to a video *after* it's been actually filmed. Though we'll eventually distinguish

between two periods (analog and digital), let's begin by watching a video that incorporates techniques from both: "Sprawl II," by the Canadian alternative rock band Arcade Fire.

Directors, editors, camera operators, and the rest of the team collaborating on a music video communicate through a **storyboard**—a pictorial representation of the video's form organized by setting and scene, laid out chronologically. A small section of a (blank) storyboard is shown in Example 6.1. Since storyboards are created before filming occurs, the pictures are usually hand-drawn.

Scene Start: Duration:	Scene Start: Duration:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Example 6.1 Sample storyboard

Let's see if we can reverse-engineer a rough storyboard for "Sprawl II." Example 6.2 limits it to the video's six primary settings. This video is all about suburban sprawl, since it's part of Arcade Fire's larger concept album called *The Suburbs*. We start in a suburban neighborhood, then transition to a bleak suburban shopping center. Verse two takes place in a park at night, which illustrates that verse's lyrics (we rode our bikes to the nearest park/sat under the swings and kissed in the dark). At least two distinct solo dancing scenes follow at 2:50 and 3:48, each with its own setting. Finally, we see lead singer Régine Chassagne dancing alone at a tennis court. Storyboards can be as detailed as you want. For example, this one ignores all of times a setting recapitulates, like when the opening neighborhood setting comes back at 1:24–1:28.

			
Scene Start	Duration	Scene Start	Duration
0:01	52"	1:02	48"
			
Scene Start	Duration	Scene Start	Duration
1:52	48"	2:50	48"
			
Scene Start	Duration	Scene Start	Duration
3:48	12"	4:23	33"

Example 6.2 Basic storyboard for “Sprawl II”

6.1b offline vs. online editing

A much more detailed storyboard would be given to the video’s editor after filming was over. However, the exact rhythm of the changes between shots is largely the editor’s decision to make. This first stage of editing is known as **offline editing**. Offline editing is only about the rhythm and timing of the **cuts**, defined as a change from one shot to another.

In the analog computing era (roughly pre-1993 for music videos), all offline editing was **linear**. Linear editing meant cutting (literally!) clips from the original film to their desired length, then taping them (again, literally) into the desired order. This cut-and-tapped reel was then dubbed onto a single tape using a linear editing machine such as the Sony BVE-910 shown in Example 6.3. You can try linear editing if you have an old dual-VHS recorder sitting around (or even a dual-cassette audio player). Put a blank tape in Side 2 and hit record as you play clips from other tapes in Side 1.



Example 6.3 Linear editing machine

Linear video editing paralleled the linear audio editing processes used in the analog studios in

which the musicians were recording. Everything was on tape. But around 1994 modern digital computer interfaces allowed for the possibility of **non-linear** editing in both video and audio. Now, all of the original clips are loaded onto a computer, can be trimmed to any length, and then moved into any order with point-and-click simplicity. Because this process doesn't cut or damage the original files, it's also known as **non-destructive editing**. You probably even have examples of non-linear, non-destructive audio and video editing on your computer (for example, Apple's Garageband and iMovie).

Once the editor's gotten the clips trimmed and in the right order, they move to the next phase, known as **online editing**. Online editing is the phase in which all the adjustments are made to the film's image. One of the simplest online editing phases involves adding text to the image. The title credits to Kendrick Lamar's "Alright," shown in Example 6.4, were added in the online editing phase.



Example 6.4 Online editing in "Alright"

Color grading, in which the editor adjusts the HSL values, is another common online edit. Older, analog color grading was a difficult and risky process involving chemical procedures that over- or under-exposed the film. Later, the Telecine machine (see Chapter 5) provided an electronic means to alter color values across the entire image. We discussed some remarkable instances of color adjustments made possible by digital intermediate in Chapter 5, especially in Green Day's "Basket Case," a video filmed in black and white with color added digitally in the editing stage.

The remaining online edits include merging the song's audio file and finished video file into one output file, and adding special effects, which we'll talk about next.

6.2 SPECIAL EFFECTS

6.2a Analog effects

Like many alterations to a film's image, special effects have changed as technology has evolved. All special effects in films of the early twentieth century were **mechanical effects** involving wind machines,



Example 6.5 Mechanical effect in “Tonight, Tonight”

pyrotechnics, makeup, and costumes. These were performed in real-time by actors or stagehands as the film was being shot. Smashing Pumpkins’ “Tonight, Tonight” pays homage to this Golden Era through its set design and faux-imperfections in speed and light, but also by including some of these mechanical effects. At 2:12, the green space alien is defeated by a blow from the woman’s umbrella, at which point it instantly vaporizes. On set, the actor playing the alien quickly disappeared behind a cloud of liquid carbon dioxide.

In-camera effects are those special effects created solely with camera equipment during the film-

ing process. Slow-motion and fast-motion belong to the in-camera techniques known as **speed effects**. Madonna’s “Like a Prayer” uses slow motion to further dramatize the burning of a cross. Nine Inch Nails’ “Hurt” uses fast-motion to make visible the decomposition of a fox (0:01–0:10), then *reverse* fast-motion to simulate its recombination at the end (4:36–5:02).

Stop-motion involves filming one frame at a time. Originally used for claymation shows like *Wallace & Gromit*. Using stop-motion effects with human actors is a time-consuming process. Peter Gabriel sat under a camera for 16 hours at a time to get the stop-motion effects for his video “Sledgehammer,” which directly influenced the stop-motion paint effects in Gotye’s “Somebody that I Used to Know.”



Example 6.6 Speed Effects in “Like a Prayer” (left) and “Hurt” (right)

Other in-camera effects include those that manipulate light—such as lens flares, overexposure, and shutter effects—or those that zoom quickly in a manner that the human eye cannot. Lens flares and light-dimming effects in the intro of R.E.M.’s “Losing my Religion” help animate the song’s lyrics (that’s me in the spotlight/losing my religion). Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies” makes use of a famous in-camera

effect known as the **dolly zoom** at 0:33. Just when the music makes a mechanical “whirr” sound, the camera zooms forward very quickly on a mechanical dolly.

6.2b digital effects

The advent of **computer-generated-imagery** (or CGI) in the 1990s meant that special effects need not be performed on set, nor captured on film, but could instead be added later, digitally, in online editing. Some digital effects are essentially amped-up versions of analog ones. Watch the positively dizzying digital zoom sequences throughout The White Stripes’ “Seven Nation Army,” shown in Example 6.7. In Fun’s “We Are Young,” digital editing slows down just a few seconds of a bar fight to stretch the length of the song. This makes possible incredible shots of liquid and glass (see Example 6.8) flying through the air that would be imperceptible to the naked eye.



Example 6.7 Digital zoom in “Seven Nation Army”



Example 6.8 Digital speed effects in “We Are Young”



Example 6.9 CGI T-shirt designs in “D.A.N.C.E.”

While both speed effects and zoom originated in the analog era, other CGI effects would have been unthinkable in the pre-digital age. Justice’s “D.A.N.C.E.” would just be two people walking through a club if it weren’t for CGI effects that add continually shifting animated designs to their T-shirts. From 1:02–1:20 all of the song’s lyrics appear one-by-one on their chests. Immediately afterward, a digital zipper reveals one of the actor’s digital (albeit cartoonish) muscular structure underneath.

The seamless integration of live action and CGI effects in “D.A.N.C.E.” represents a

quantum leap from the earliest CGIs in music video, in which computer images were merely placed side-by-side with human actors. The Cars’ “You Might Think” was the first to do this. Despite the result looking quite campy by today’s standards (see Example 6.10), the images created by the primitive CGI technology of 1984 resulted in the most expensive music video ever created at the time. Today’s most visually stunning videos—for example Jack Ü’s “Where are Ü Now?” (ft. Justin Bieber), shown in Example 6.11—regularly contain special effects that early pioneers could have only dreamt of.



Example 6.10 primitive CGI in The Cars “You Might Think

6.3 EDITING TO RHYTHM AND FORM

6.3a. Form and setting

In the offline editing process, music video editors don't just change shots whenever they feel like it. Instead they make cuts between those shots that align with the rhythm and form of the song. The fastest cuts between camera angles are almost always edited to align with the beat of a song. A song's formal sections (e.g. verse, chorus) also tends to align with changes in setting. Editors frequently combined these two principles, changing the setting exactly on the downbeat of the new section. Let's see how this works in "Closer" by the electronic duo The Chainsmokers.

"Closer" is a duet between Chainsmokers frontman Andrew Taggart and guest vocalist Halsey. The video depicts the two meeting, falling in love, and eventually breaking up. Settings in the video help to establish the complex timeline of this affair. Three different bedrooms that appear at 0:11, 2:33, and 2:52 represent their first hookup at a party, the developing emotional distance between the couple, and their eventual breakup. As shown in Example 6.12, these changes in scenery line up perfectly with verse 1, chorus 2, and prechorus 3.



Example 6.11 Modern CGI effects in "Where are Ü Now"

TIME	SECTION	Singer	SETTING(S)	INTERACTION
0:01	Intro	n/a	Hotel Bar	Foreshadows breakup
0:11	Verse 1	Taggart	Bedroom 1, Party	First meeting, hooking up
0:50	Prechorus 1		Bedroom 1, Kitchen	Makeout on counter
1:12	Chorus 1			
1:32	Verse 2	Halsey	Bedroom 1, Pool	Halsey becomes more distant
2:12	Prechorus 2	Both		
2:33	Chorus 2			Underwater, Bedroom 2
2:52	Prechorus 3	Taggart	Hotel Bar, Bedroom 3	Couple broken up, moving out
3:33	Chorus 3	Both	Hotel rooftop	Taggart attempts to win her back

Example 6.12 Alignment between setting and form in "Closer"

6.3b cutting to the beat

Now let's zoom in to discover the rhythm of the quicker cuts. Watch again and nod your head to the beat of the song. You should be around 95 beats-per-minute (BPM). Like most pop songs, this one is in

4/4 time, meaning its basic patterns repeat every four beats. Let's call these beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. You'll know you're on the right beat if the finger snaps at 0:11 are on beats 2 and 4. This accent pattern on 2 and 4 is called a **backbeat**, and it's the most common rhythm in all of popular music.

Now tap your hand on a table to the speed twice as fast as that. This is called the **subdivision**, and, since it's twice as fast as the beat, it ticks away at 190 BPM. Each of the subdivisions that happens between a numbered beat is called "and." Put the beat and the subdivision together and you've got 8 counts per measure: 1-and-2-and-3-and-4-and. Got it? Just one more thing: let's distinguish between all those "ands" by which number they come after, so that "and-of-1" is the count that occurs directly after beat 1. Ok, now, let's see how many cuts happen on exactly those beats and subdivisions.

Start with just the four-measure intro (0:01–0:11). Tap along and see if you can feel and hear the cuts shown in Example 6.13. Notice how many cuts happen on the downbeat (beat 1) and the and-of-3. Not coincidentally, these are also the beats on which the keyboard notes happen, so the editing rhythm is lined up not only with the song's underlying counts, but with its musical design.

Time	Measure	Beat	Camera cuts to:
0:01	1	1	"The Chainsmokers"
		and-of-3	Taggart's face
	2	and-of-3	Halsey's back
	3	1	Taggart's face
		and-of-2	Halsey's back
		and-of-3	Taggart's face
	4	1	"Halsey"
		and-of-3	"Closer"

Example 6.13 Rhythmic cuts in "Closer"

Let's see how the rhythm of the cuts changes once the verse starts and there's more musical accompaniment. Listen for the synth-horn part. Its rhythm ends every other measure with four notes on [and-4-and-1]. The camera first dramatizes Halsey and Taggart meeting At 0:20, and it's synchronized exactly with these four synth notes. We see four quick cuts: Taggart looking at Halsey (and), Halsey dancing (4), Taggart looking at Halsey (and), Halsey smiling back at him (1). This recurring [and-4-and-1] cutting rhythm is seen and heard throughout "Closer."

Sometimes the cuts in music videos don't happen so precisely on the beat as in "Closer." Drake's "Hotline Bling," for example, is cut to his vocal delivery, rather than the underlying beat of the song. The cuts to his face tend to occur in the middle of the measure because that's when he starts singing.

Regardless of when and where these cuts happen, you've probably noticed by now they are much quicker relative to film and television. It's rare to see a shot in music videos that lasts more than two seconds. These fast back-and-forth cuts regularly seen in music videos are known as **disjunctive cuts**, or **jump cuts**.¹ They one of the most identifiable traits of both music videos and commercials.

Feature films and television, on the other hand, still generally adhere to longer shots, fewer cuts, and a process known as **continuity editing**, where editors tend to edit smoothly, slower, and only between related subjects or angles. Sometimes this continuity editing creeps up in music videos, giving them a distinctively more cinematic feel.

¹Because a jump cut is a specific type of disjunctive cut between two shots of the *same subject*, the cuts between Halsey and Taggart are not, technically, jump cuts. However, this technical distinction between disjunctive cut and jump cut has gone out of favor, sort of like how a Kleenex is technically a distinct type of facial tissue.

One easy way to achieve this cinematic feel in music videos by including longer shots. Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies” appears at first glance to be filmed in just one long shot, but some careful editing enabled the dancers to do it in multiple takes. Notice the fade-to-black at 0:18 that allows for a second take. Still, an 18-second shot is remarkable for music videos. The next shot is even longer (0:18–0:51). Watch these 32 seconds carefully for all the camera movement. “Single Ladies” holds the viewer’s interest not with jump cuts, but with extraordinary choreography and extensive use of the tracking shots such as the one shown in Example 6.14.



6.14 Cinematic long tracking shot in “Single Ladies”

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Storyboard	Mechanical Effects	Backbeat
Offline Editing	In-camera Effects	Subdivision
Cuts	Speed effects	Jump Cuts
Linear Editing	Stop-Motion	Speed Ramping (changing
Non-Linear Editing	CGI (computer-generated	frame rate from 60 to 24 fps
Online Editing	imagery)	or vice versa)

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

- [on editors’ professional practice] Caston, Emily 2017. “‘The First Cut is the Deepest’ Excerpts from a Focus Group on Editing Music Videos, with Explanatory Historical and Theoretical Notes.” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 11: 99-118.
- [on interpreting editing] Vernallis, Carol. 2001. “The Kindest Cut: Functions and Meanings of Music Video Editing.” *Screen* 42 (1): 21–48.

CHAPTER 7: SEXUALITY AND GENDER DIVERSITY (SGD)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

7.1 SGD TERMINOLOGY

- a. SGD terminology
- b. SGD in music videos

7.2 WOMEN IN MUSIC VIDEO

- a. Resisting the male gaze
- b. Women instrumentalists

In this chapter we'll merely scratch the surface of the wide variety of options for sexuality and gender diversity expressed in music video. We'll begin by learning about some terminology to describe sexuality and gender diversity before seeing how that terminology plays out in the analysis of several music videos. After that we'll turn our attention to the ways that women are portrayed in music videos. We'll see how the male gaze affects music videos, and also how some videos resist it. Finally, we'll take a look at how the depiction of women as instrumentalists, composers, and producers has evolved over time.

CLIP LIST

Panic! At the Disco "I Write Sins, not Tragedies" (2005)
Avicii (featuring Salem Al Fakir) "Silhouettes" (2012)
Lady Gaga "Yoü and I" (2011)
Miley Cyrus "BB Talk" (2015)
Rihanna "B**** Better Have My Money" (2015)
Peaches "Rub" (2015)
The Breeders "Cannonball" (1993)
Fiona Apple "Shadowboxer" (1996)
Tracy Bonham "Mother, Mother" (1996)

7.1 SEXUALITY AND GENDER DIVERSITY (SGD)

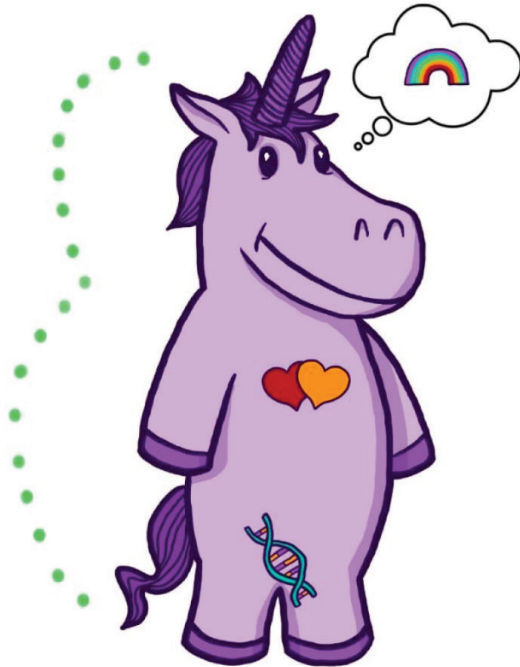
7.1a SGD terminology

In order to talk about the wide range of sexuality and gender expression seen and heard in music videos we need to be familiar with terms used to describe **sexuality and gender diversity (SGD)**. Since these change with time, it's important to consult reputable, published sources. Throughout this chapter, we'll learn SGD terms suggested by the University of Kansas Safe Zone Program.¹

¹This manual, last updated in 2015, is available as a free, downloadable PDF at https://silc.ku.edu/sites/silc.ku.edu/files/docs/LBGT/SafeZoneManual_Updated_2.5.15.pdf

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Equality Resources



 Gender Identity

-  Female/Woman/Girl
-  Male/Man/Boy
-  Other Gender(s)

 Gender Expression/Presentation

-  Feminine
-  Masculine
-  Other

 Sex Assigned at Birth

Female Male Other/Intersex

 Sexually Attracted To

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

 Romantically/Emotionally Attracted To

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

To learn more go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

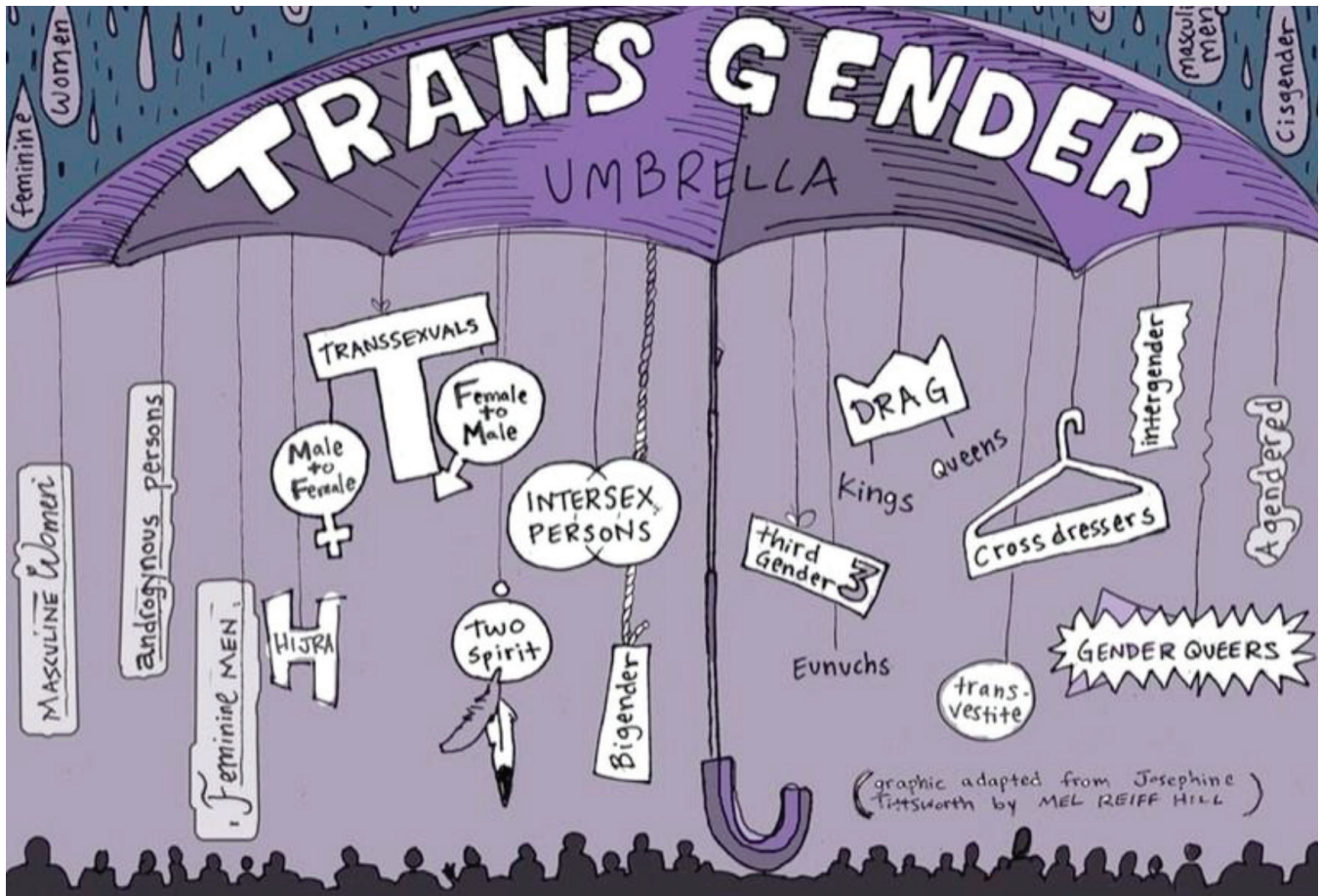
Design by Landyn Pan

Example 7.1 The Gender Unicorn

The Gender Unicorn, shown in Example 7.1, is a good starting point for learning about SGD. Medical professionals typically assign a biological sex to newborn babies: male, female, or **intersex**: someone whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals differs from the expected patterns of male or female. A person whose **gender identity** (their internal perception of their own gender) matches the sex they were assigned at birth is said to be **cisgendered**. The external expression of one's gender, or **gender expression** (aka **gender presentation**), is usually measured in terms of masculinity or femininity. Anyone can present or identify as masculine, feminine, or **genderqueer**: a catch-all term for people who resist the masculine/feminine binary.

Trans (a more colloquial form of "trans gender") is another catch-all term for people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Because people may self-identify with a more specific term than either genderqueer or trans, it's important to know some of these terms that exist underneath the Trans Gender Umbrella, shown in Example 7.2

The above terms connote gender, not sexuality. Any person, regardless of sex or gender, can have any **sexual orientation**: the type of sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction one feels for others. **Same Gender Loving** (SGL, aka **lesbian** or **gay**) people are attracted sexually, romantically, spiritually, and/or intellectually to members of the same sex. **Bisexual** (aka **bi**) people are attracted to people of their own gender and another gender. People who are primarily sexually or emotionally attracted to members of the opposite sex are known as **heterosexual** (aka **straight**).



Example 7.2 The Trans Gender Umbrella

7.1b SGD in music videos

In analyzing music videos, we'll most be concerned with gender presentation and the on-screen depiction of sexuality. Let's look at some videos to see how the above terms (and some new ones) do or do not apply to the analysis of a music video.

We'll start with Panic! At the Disco's "I Write Sins not Tragedies." Because the video's setting is a heterosexual wedding, we can say that it depicts heterosexuality, and might even say that it is **heteronormative**—the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual. Why didn't they depict the wedding of a SGL couple, as does Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's 2013 video "Same Love" (featuring Mary Lambert)?

However, it would be unfair to claim that this video is **gender normative**. It does not, in fact, align with society's gender-based expectations. Both the groom (left of Example 7.3, played by actor Isaac



Example 7.3 Gender Presentation in "I Write Sins not Tragedies"

Daniel), along with the circus ringmaster (right of Example 7.3, played by Panic! lead singer Brendon Urie) are wearing extensive makeup, including foundation, eyeliner, and lip gloss.

The central question for the analysis of gender in music videos is: how does their gender present to you, the individual viewer? If you have a background in circus or theater, you may not view this as genderqueer at all, since it's common for people of all gender identities to don makeup in this context. On the other hand, if you were exposed to Panic! through other emo bands (their label, Fueled by Ramen, also signed such acts as Jimmy Eat World and Fall Out Boy), your expectations for gender normativity in this genre may be so high that you may perceive these two presenting as genderqueer.

Now, watch “Silhouettes” (featuring Salem Al Fakir) by the Swedish electronic musician Avicii. The video contributes to trans visibility by showcasing both the struggles and joys of a trans person (played by actor Oscar Lindblad). It's better to refer to the character in this video as simply “trans” because we can't ask them whether they prefer more specific terms such as **M2F** (a male-to-female trans person) or **transwoman** (a term adopted by some M2F people to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as males). What we do know from the video is that the character opts for **sex reassignment surgery** (SRS). Example 7.4 shows the main character smiling for the first time in the video, waking up satisfied in bed with a partner who presents (at least to me) as a cisgendered man.



Example 7.4 Trans visibility in “Silhouettes”

Any person may or may not choose to undergo SRS, and this has no bearing on their identity. Lady Gaga’s “You and I” cleverly illustrates this truth by showing the same human in two gender expressions simultaneously. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, the video features artist-persona Lady Gaga playing piano with her alter-ego Jo Calderone—a separate artist persona played by the same human (Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta)—sitting atop it. Lady Gaga presents as feminine, Calderone as overtly masculine, despite the fact that, anatomically, both are identical.

This video also brilliantly proves that we cannot determine sexual orientation from gender expression. We see the character played by Gaga having sexual relationships with a cisgendered man throughout the video, but what we don't know is she is *only* attracted to cisgendered men, or if she identifies as either bi or **pansexual** (a person who experiences sexual or romantic attraction for members of all gender identities). It may be the latter, since the narrator describes her lovers as having “high heels on,” but also as a “cool Nebraska guy.”

We don't see the character played by Calderone in any sexual interactions, and can therefore infer nothing about his sexual orientation. This video illustrates the vast world of possibilities for sexual orientation and gender identity by positing separate, different possibilities for the human, artist, narrator, and video characters. SGD in the real world is perhaps just as complex!



Example 7.5 Trans/Genderqueer visibility in “You and I”

7.2 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

7.2a resisting the male gaze

Laura Mulvey identified the **male gaze** in cinema in the mid 1970s. Since then, it has also been used to describe the way in which women are represented in most music videos. Put most succinctly the male gaze represents all of the infantilizing, sexualizing, and/or victimizing ways we the viewer, the video's director, and/or characters within the video are made to look at women and girls on screen.

Since the male gaze is the hegemonic mode of representing women in visual media, it (unfortunately) acts as a baseline expectation for all music videos. When we find a music video that resists the male gaze, we should celebrate it. So rather than dwell on examples of the male gaze here (I've provided several avenues for researching this further at the end of the chapter), we'll look at some music videos that resist the male gaze.

Miley Cyrus's “BB Talk” (see Example 7.6a) resists the male gaze by satirizing music videos that infantilize women. Recall from Chapter 4 that satire videos point out flaws or shortcomings in another video. While she's probably not critiquing a specific video, the history of music videos abounds with this practice. One of the worst offenders is Oingo Boingo's 1981 video “Little Girls,” shown in Example 7.6b. Cyrus's lyrics, delivered through both singing and digitally modified speech, criticize a lover for “baby talk,” wishing instead for sex so that the baby talk would stop.



Example 7.6a Critique of infantilization in “BB Talk”



Example 7.6b actual infantilization in “Little Girls” (1981)

Rihanna’s “B**** Better Have My Money” subverts the male gaze’s tendency to portray women as helpless victims. (The song’s title uses an **insider word**, one that may be celebrated by people within a specific community, but which might be perceived differently if used by an outsider). The video is an extreme example of congruity between lyrics and narrative. Both depict the narrator’s plot to extort money from someone who owes her. The second-person lyrics specify that she’s kidnapped “your wife.” Though the gender of the second person isn’t revealed in the lyrics, it is explicitly a man in the video.

Throughout most of the video, Rihanna subverts the male gaze by appearing violent and ruthless. In Example 7.7 she’s shown holding the knife she’ll eventually use to kill the man, appearing covered in his blood and her money at the end. The only time that Rihanna appears “innocent” in the video is when she’s trying to hide the kidnapping-in-progress from a clueless white male police officer.



Example 7.7 Rihanna subverting the victim trope

You might be asking yourself at this point: does one merely *resist* the male gaze, or can it be truly *escaped*? According to our definition earlier, three things would have to happen: 1) video creators (directors, editors, etc.) would have to stop using shots that objectify women; 2) storyboard designers would have to avoid depictions of characters objectifying women in the video; 3) viewers would have to stop objectifying women on screen.

This antithesis of the male gaze is known as the **female gaze**. Unsurprisingly, we find it most in videos directed by and starring women. Peaches’ “Rub” is directed by a team of three female directors: A.L. Steiner, Lex Vaughn, and Peaches herself. It exemplifies the female gaze in nearly every way, but especially in resisting the tendency to make women in videos seem sexually available to heterosexual men.

Nearly all characters in the video are engaged in lesbian sex, which the video and lyrics depict explicitly (as of the time of this writing, the video is banned on YouTube). The lyrics only mention a man in the context of making him the *object* of several sex acts that, suffice it to say, transgress the norms of typical male heterosexuality. Both the lyrics and the video celebrate sex with a trans person. Women of all body types are shown, and they dress and behave in manners that subvert traditional male desire. Co-director Lex Vaughn says: “we include bodies that make the male chromosome shrivel.”²

In short, the video suggests nothing less than a complete upheaval of patriarchal society: the **matriarchy**. This is made clear from the video’s onset, shown in Example 7.8, in which a lesbian bows to a rock in the shape of a vulva.



Example 7.8 Matriarchy in “Rub”

7.2b Women instrumentalists

Singing is certainly an empowering activity, especially when you’re the star of the show (like Rihanna or Miley Cyrus). But other roles in the production of music and music videos can be just as empowering, including playing instruments and producing/engineering the recording. Because we can’t *hear* that Meg White is playing drums on The White Stripes’ “Seven Nation Army,” the music video has an important role to play in making women’s contributions to instrumental music visible.

Women’s contributions to instrumental music have often been marginalized. In 80s music videos it was a novelty to see a woman like Joan Jett playing the guitar in “I Love Rock ’n’ Roll” (1981). Having a female bass player in your band was trendy in the early 90s, especially in alternative rock bands like Smashing Pumpkins. Around 1994 music videos began to feature more and more women playing instru-

²See Mary Emily O’Hara’s interview with Vaughn in “Behind-the-scenes of ‘Rub,’ the strange, NSFW music video that YouTube keeps removing.” *The Daily Dot* December 4, 2015.



Example 7.9 Kim and Kelley Deal on guitar in “Cannonball”

ments, as well as bands that were fronted by, and mostly composed of women.

“Cannonball,” a 1993 hit video from The Breeders—a “supergroup” composed of former members of The Pixies and Throwing Muses—features women playing acoustic guitar, electric guitar, bass, and singing. Nearly all of the camera time focuses on the instrumental efforts of the three women. None of the women are dressed in a sexually revealing manner. Lead singer Kim Deal, for example, wears a three-piece suit buttoned to the throat with slicked back hair, as shown in Example 7.9.

Other all- or mostly-female bands followed in the wake of The Breeders, including Hole, Elastica, and Veruca Salt.

In just two years (1993–1995), music videos seem to have turned an important corner in making women’s contributions to instrumental rock music visible. This celebration of women’s music making led to the Lilith Fair festival, which began in 1997, and was the largest grossing touring festival of the year.

Two women composers who played the main stage at Lilith Fair that year, Fiona Apple and Tracy Bonham, are classically trained on their instruments (Apple on piano, Bonham on both piano and violin). Fiona Apple’s video “Shadowboxer” is a performance video that shows her recording in the studio. As you can see in Example 7.10, it uses faux-documentary footage (shaky, handheld footage shot entirely in black-and-white) to depict her as a serious composer and performer.

Occasionally, video creators make mistakes that threaten to undermine women’s contributions to instrumental music. Tracy Bonham’s “Mother Mother” starts with Bonham playing the song’s signature guitar riff on an acoustic guitar by herself. When her backing band—made entirely of men—enters in the prechorus, Bonham stops playing guitar and just tries on a lot of clothes while singing and rolling around on the floor. When Bonham’s acoustic guitar part returns in verse two, the camera shows instead a male *electric* guitarist appearing to play her part (1:32). We hear an acoustic guitar played by a woman, but see an electric guitar played by a man.

This strange facet of music videos is known as **timbral mismatch**. It results when the sound you hear does not match with the instrument shown making it. This usually occurs when an acoustic guitar



Example 7.10 Fiona Apple’s playing piano in “Shadowboxer”



Example 7.11 Tracy Bonham playing violin in “Mother, Mother”

is shown playing an electric guitar part (or vice versa). Timbral mismatch occurs semi-regularly in music videos. In a quantitative study I conducted of 288 videos from the 1990s, 12.85% of all videos featured timbral mismatch. However, it is in fact gender-discriminating: it *negatively* correlates (-.13) with male instrumentalists, and *positively* correlates (+.08) with female instrumentalists.

As valuable as these instrumentalists are to the visibility of women as bonafide musicians, we must also remember that a lot of music, especially in the new millennium, relies less on instruments like bass, guitar, and drums and more on electronic instruments housed within a studio or laptop computer. Watch Missy Elliott’s “Lose Control” (2005), Erykah Badu’s “Window Seat”

(2010), and Grimes’ “Kill v. Maim” (2016). Each of these women composes, records, produces, and performs the music you hear. But because these women are *acting* out creative character roles in their videos (rather than clicking on their laptops or adjusting levels on their mixers) it’s harder for the public to envision them as bonafide musicians. As Grimes puts it:

“I’m tired of men who aren’t professional or even accomplished musicians continually offering to ‘help me out’ (without being asked), as if i did this by accident and I’m gonna flounder without them. Or as if the fact that I’m a woman makes me incapable of using technology. I have never seen this kind of thing happen to any of my male peers.”³

The tacit assumption that men create as independent geniuses and women need help writing their own stuff is not only sexist, it’s just wrong. Furthermore, as we learned in Chapter 3, few pop musicians, regardless of gender, get sole writing and production credits on their records. It could be that honoring those musicians, male or female, who do everything themselves might be missing the point: collaboration is the new norm. Whether collaborating in a team or acting solo, women are just as capable of performing, writing, and producing electronic or acoustic music as anybody.

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Sexuality and Gender Diversity (SGD)	Trans	Sex reassignment surgery
Intersex	Sexual orientation	Pansexual
Gender identity	Same-gender loving (SGL)	Male gaze
Cisgendered	Bisexual	Insider word
Gender expression/presentation	Heterosexual	Female gaze
Genderqueer	Heteronormative	Matriarchy
	Gender normative	Timbral mismatch

³See Grimes’s interview with RJ Cubarrubia, “Grimes Rails Against Sexism: ‘I’m Done With Being Passive’” Rolling Stone April 24, 2013

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

- [on gender in music videos] Hawkins, Stan. 2017. "Introduction." In *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music and Gender*.
- [on the representation of women in video] Hurley, Jennifer M. 1994. "Music Video and the Construction of Gendered Subjectivity (Or How Being a Music Video Junkie Turned Me into a Feminist)." *Popular Music* 13: 327-38.
- [on the male gaze] Burns, Lori and Marc LaFrance. "Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Looking in Beyoncé's 'Video Phone' (Featuring Lady Gaga)." In *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Stan Hawkins.
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CHAPTER 8: REPRESENTING VISIBLE MINORITIES

CHAPTER OUTLINE

8.1 TERMINOLOGY

8.2 A HISTORY OF VISIBLE MINORITIES ON MTV

- a. 80s pop
- b. Golden age of hip-hop
- c. MTV Español and other channels
- d. YouTube and the Post-MTV era

In this chapter we will begin by clearing up some misconceptions about terms relating to race and ethnicity. We'll discover a working term for analyzing ethnicity in music videos: visible minority. We'll then take a tour through the history of MTV to see how they have portrayed visible minorities in music videos. Over time the network has tried specialty programming for visible minorities, and even separate cable networks. The chapter ends by exploring which minorities are made more visible by YouTube in the post-MTV age.

CLIP LIST

Michael Jackson "Billie Jean" (1983)
Salt N Pepa "Push It" (1988)
NWA "Straight Outta Compton" (1989)
Cypress Hill "How I Could Just Kill a Man" (1991)
Christina Aguilera "Can't Hold Us Down" (2002)
D'Angelo "Untitled" (2000)
Psy "Gangnam Style" (2012)
Asma Lamnawar "Andou Zine" (2017)
Supaman ft. Acosia Red Elk "Why" (2018)
Oumou Sangaré "Kamelemba" (2017)

8.1 TERMINOLOGY

Just as in Chapter 7, we need to start off this chapter by learning the correct terminology to discuss race and ethnicity. Throughout the chapter, I'll draw from ideas and terms presented in an open resource from the University of Minnesota called *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*.¹

¹This is open textbook published under a Creative Commons License (CC BY-NC-SA) by the University of Minnesota Press in which the original author explicitly does not receive attribution. I'm drawing from chapters 10.2 and 10.3 specifically. Access the work here: <http://open.lib.umn.edu/sociology/front-matter/publisher-information/>

Race is a term used to describe “people who share certain inherited physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and stature.” Scholars from diverse fields including genetics, evolution, and sociology critique the idea that race is a biological concept. People from “different races” now share 99.9% of the same DNA. Nobody is 100% a single race, and it’s even doubtful that such a person ever existed. Race is therefore not a biological condition, it’s a **social construction**: a concept that has no objective reality but rather is what people decide it is. Appeals to biological bases for race are often driven by superficial ideas about physical appearance. Early on in human evolution natural selection selected for dark skin for people living near the equator because it protected against skin cancer, while selecting for light skin for people living closer to the poles because it was more efficient at producing vitamin D. Such ancient evolutionary processes have tenuous connections with modern understandings of race.

Ethnicity, a term that avoids these misconceptions about the biological nature of race, can be used instead to describe the “shared social, cultural, and historical experiences, stemming from common national or regional backgrounds, that make subgroups of a population different from one another.” Such populations can be described as **ethnic groups**. Some of the ethnic groups most often represented in music videos include African-Americans or black people, Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx people, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Indigenous people.

As you might imagine, ethnicity is not something you want to guess at merely from looking at someone. When describing the representation of non-white, non-European, or Indigenous ethnic groups in music videos,² you may opt for the broader term **visible minority**. Visible minorities include all of those people who did not originate on the European continent, despite where they were born or may currently reside. The New Zealand pop star Lorde, for example, is not a minority despite being born on an island originally (and currently) inhabited by the M ori people.

The term “visible” reminds us that the processes an individual viewer might go through in interpreting the appearance of a minority in a video is subjective. Seeing a minority character who looks and/or acts like you depicted in a powerful situation may be empowering. If that same character is portrayed as a victim, it may be hurtful. Seeing a minority who does not look like you may lead to speculation about their ethnicity. When that speculation triggers a set of judgments about whole categories of people (known as **stereotypes**), and/or individual members of those ethnicities, we have committed **prejudice**. When that prejudice leads to a negative attitude, a sense of othering, or a belief in your own supremacy over people of that ethnicity, we have committed **racism**.

8.2 A HISTORY OF VISIBLE MINORITIES ON MTV

MTV has struggled throughout its history both with mere inclusion of minorities in videos, and with representation of minorities in those videos. In this section we’ll look at a timeline of the network’s successes (and failures) in representing visible minorities in music videos.

8.2a 80s pop

MTV started in 1981 as a channel for rock videos performed mostly by white musicians. At the same time, the influence of disco had led to a brand of danceable pop music largely performed by African-Americans. Disco musician Rick James and art rocker David Bowie both called out the network

²Of course, no catch-all term is perfect. “Visible minority” comes from the 2016 Canadian census. Canada’s definition of visible minority does not include indigenous people (aka aboriginal, native, or first people), who are often residents of sovereign nations within continents settled by others. The (roughly) equivalent term for visible minority in the U.S. Census is “People of Color.”

publicly for their failure to play music by African-Americans. MTV's response was less than helpful: "MTV was originally designed to be a rock music channel...It was difficult for MTV to find African-American artists whose music fit the channel's format that leaned toward rock at the outset."³ MTV's hand was eventually forced by the president of CBS Records, Walter Yetnikoff, who threatened to pull all CBS artists' videos from MTV if they didn't play Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." We could say that Yetnikoff and Bowie both acted as an **ally** for minorities, using their privilege to advance the causes of people with less privilege.

"Billie Jean" was the first video on MTV that made a minority highly visible. We talked a little about how the video's story is highly congruent with the lyrics in Chapter 4. Let's now examine its representation of visible minorities, specifically African-Americans. Again, we must distinguish between Michael Jackson (the artist persona) and the character in the film played by Jackson. First off, let's acknowledge the obvious: that Jackson is an exquisitely good dancer. The American public had perhaps only seen disco-influenced dancing like this on *Soul Train*, a long-standing Chicago-based dance show produced and owned by African-Americans, which was finally broadcast on national television in 1976.

Jackson's dancing is magnificent, but his character is downright magical. Despite the gumshoe's best efforts, he doesn't show up in photographs, things seem to light up when he touches them, and he has the ability to disappear (possibly even turn into a tiger?). Example 8.1 shows the climax of the narrative, in which a white woman calls a white police officer because she's seen a black man enter Billie Jean's room. Assuming that a black man entering a white woman's room is unlawful is a textbook case of racism. As the police arrive, Jackson's magical character disappears under Billie Jean's sheets just before getting caught, and the gumshoe is arrested instead. Minorities are often portrayed as threatening or dangerous to white people. Jackson's video acknowledges that racist trope, then subverts it in a supernatural way. Supernatural forces and special effects recur throughout Michael Jackson's videos, especially "Thriller" and "Black or White."



Example 8.1 Racism in "Billie Jean"

³MTV Director of Programming Buzz Brindle told this to Jet magazine in 2006 (quoted in Kareem Nittle 2018).

The mainstream success of Jackson’s dance pop videos paved the way for thousands of visible minorities after him in the 80s, many of whom, including Prince, Whitney Houston, Herbie Hancock, and Janet Jackson, had hit videos on MTV.

8.2b Golden Age of Hip Hop

Hip-hop originated in The Bronx in the late 70s and early 80s when vocalists started shouting and rhyiming (aka rapping) over drum breaks from funk records. Once MTV realized the popular appeal of hip-hop, they figured out a way to market it to the larger public. This corresponds with what many call the “golden age” of hip-hop (roughly the late 80s through the early 90s). MTV maximized profit in this era by condensing all such programming into a specialty show called YO! MTV Raps. Doing so created a lucrative opportunity for MTV to sell commercial time to companies that wanted to market their products specifically to minorities.

Salt N Pepa’s “Push It” was among the first rap videos to air on YO! MTV Raps. Entirely a performance video, it represents the three African-American women as competent musicians and entertainers. In Example 8.2 you can see two women in the front singing and dancing, and a third spinning records. Though the trio met in Brooklyn, Sandra Denton (Pepa) was born in Jamaica, and immigrated to Queens as a child. “Push It” is, like many songs, a song about sex. Hip-hop’s lyrics cover the same range of topics as any other genre (see Chapter 3).

A particular style of hip-hop known as gangsta rap was incredibly popular from between 1988 and 1993. Gangsta rap lyrics tend to focus on the struggles and hard-earned successes of urban African Americans. NWA’s “Straight Outta Compton” (1989) depicts the prejudice and brutality that African Americans face at the hands of the LAPD. In Example 8.3, you can see two police officers drawing their weapons on Ice Cube, playing an unarmed black man.

Another west coast gangsta rap group, Cypress Hill, gave Latinx people representation in hip-hop. Senen Reyes (aka Sen-Dog, shown in the left of Example 8.4) is a Cuban immigrant, and Louis Freese (aka B-Real, shown in the right of Example 8.4) was born in California to Mexican and Cuban parents. As we discovered in Chapter 3, MTV often censored these videos for depicting violence and drug use.



Example 8.2 African-American musicians in “Push It”



Example 8.3 Police prejudice in “Straight Outta Compton”



Example 8.4 Latinx representation in “How I Could Just Kill a Man”

8.2c MTV Español and other channels

To accommodate the growing diversity of music by visible minorities (not just hip-hop), MTV replaced YO! MTV Raps with a show called MTV Jams in 1996. R&B videos by TLC, Usher, Aaliyah, and others were hugely popular. By 2004, 80% of hits on the Billboard R&B chart were also topping the general Billboard Hot 100 chart.

While gangsta rap videos often portray visible minorities (particularly men) as both the victims and the perpetrators of violence, R&B videos often objectify the bodies of visible minorities. Let's watch Christina Aguilera's "Can't Hold Us Down," which features a rap verse by Lil' Kim. Lyrically, the song is about the double standards set for men and women. But, according to scholar Murali Balaji, the video does not portray the same level of equality between black and non-black women. Balaji notes that, relative to Aguilera, Lil' Kim is portrayed as the ideal of "primitive sexuality." It's worth noting that while Balaji emphasizes Aguilera's whiteness, others (including Aguilera herself, whose father is Ecuadorian) recognize her Latina ethnicity. Again, our perception of ethnicity is subjective.



Example 8.5 Racial/sexual stereotypes in "Can't Hold Us Down"

Clearly, there is much more we could say about the male gaze (see Chapter 7) in this video. But sexual objectification affects visible minorities of all genders. D'Angelo's "Untitled (how does it feel?)" sexually objectifies the black male body in much the same way. Especially when we compare it to a surprisingly similar video—Sinead O'Connor's "Nothing Compares 2 U" (see Chapter 5)—we can see a difference in representation between white and black bodies. Both videos use remarkably long shots that focus on close-up encounters with the artist. But whereas O'Connor's close shots all focus on her face, the focus in "Untitled" is on D'Angelo's athletic torso and sexually suggestive pelvic bones.



Example 8.6 Racial/sexual objectification in
“Untitled (how does it feel?)”

MTV began losing interest in playing music videos in the late 90s, favoring instead reality television. In 1996, they launched their first separate cable channel, MTV2,⁴ which would compensate by playing music videos 24 hours a day. Several other separate cable networks followed (MTV Jams became its own network in 2002). To accommodate the surge of interest in videos by Jennifer Lopez, Ricky Martin, Shakira, and other Latinx artists, MTV launched a separate channel called MTV Tr3s in 1998.⁵

8.2d YouTube and the Post-MTV era

By 2006 MTV2 had only a single block of time devoted to hip-hop videos (remember that MTV as a network was basically done with videos at this point). Called Sucker Free Daily,⁶ it, along

with shows such as 106 & Park and Rap City—both of which aired on Black Entertainment Television, or BET—continued the outlet for African-American artists that YO! MTV Raps started in the late 80s. Despite all the specialty shows and specialty networks these cable companies churned out, everything was about to change.

Though the video-sharing website YouTube began in 2005, its average user bandwidth wasn’t great enough to support music videos until around 2009. Once networks were no longer in control of programming, record companies (and later, independent artists) were able to upload their music videos whenever they pleased. This sea change is hard to overstate, but two changes are perhaps most noteworthy from the perspective of representing minorities. First, videos by similar artists are no longer segregated into specialty shows or networks. Users determine when and in what order they want to play videos from any artist. Second, as video and audio production tools became more affordable, independent artists of all ethnicities began making and uploading music videos. As you have seen throughout this chapter, MTV focused primarily on representing African-American and Latinx performers. But with the rise of YouTube, Western audiences started finally getting glimpses of musicians from different ethnicities in music videos.

“Gangnam Style,” a video by Korean pop (aka K-pop) artist Psy, is, at the time of this writing, the fifth most viewed video on YouTube. Again, the popularity of music videos on YouTube cannot be overstated—a quick glimpse at the 100 most viewed videos of any kind on the network reveals that an overwhelming majority are music videos! Released in 2012, “Gangnam Style” is sung entirely in Korean, and exposed Western audiences to many of the sights and sounds of the nation’s capital: Seoul. After going viral itself, the video inspired several parodies that also went viral, especially those imitating Psy’s horse-riding dance, shown in Example 8.7.

⁴Originally called simply “M2.”

⁵Originally called MTV S, and later MTV Español.

⁶The “Daily” aired during the week, while the “Countdown” was a weekend program.



Example 8.7 Viral horse dance in “Gangnam Style”

‘Moroccan singer Asma Lamnawar’s “Andou Zine” was one of the most watched music videos of 2017, racking up nearly 60 million views in its first year. The video exposes western audiences to, among other things, the difficulty of traveling to remote weddings, the difficulty of supplying power to those remote weddings, and mostly the fun sounds and colorful sights of a Moroccan wedding (see Example 8.8). Because of its lengthy video intro, the video contains both speaking and singing in Arabic, though the spoken parts are subtitled in English. Listeners are introduced to a variety of instruments and sounds in this video as well. Some of these are familiar pop instruments, and some are traditional percussion and string instruments from the region.



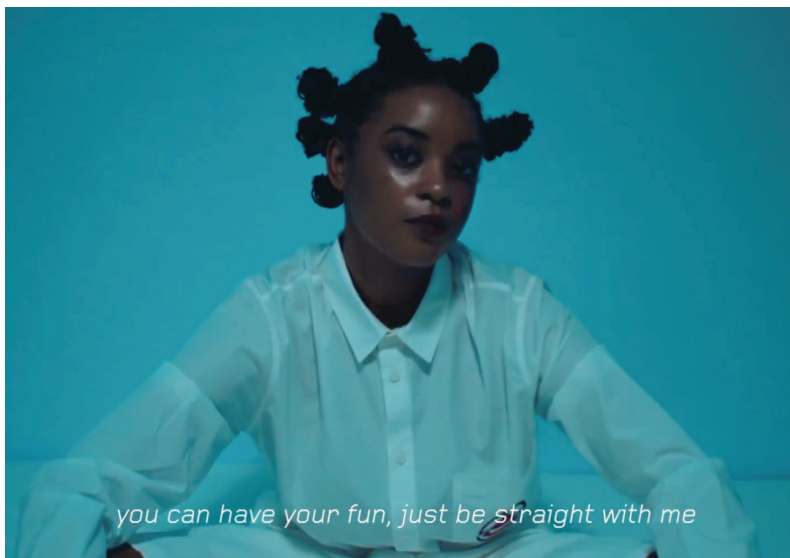
Example 8.8 Moroccan wedding in “Andou Zine”

Hip-hop musician Supaman, from the Apsáalooke people (aka Crow Nation) of North America, also showcases novel instruments in his video “Why?” Supaman is a looping artist, which means he performs and records short bits of music (called loops), which are then layered together as new loops are added in real-time. See in Example 8.9 as he captures the jingle dress sounds performed by Aco-sia Red Elk, a dancer and musician from the Umatilla people of North America. Viewers are shown the beautiful northwestern plains and traditional dress of these Indigenous artists. The song’s English-language raps ask “why” questions about some difficult topics facing Indigenous people, including racism, state oppression, and health issues.



Example 8.9 Looping jingle dress in “Why”

Oumou Sangaré is a musician from the Wassoulou region of West Africa. Her video “Kamelemba” does not advertise her country’s traditional settings (as Lamnawar’s and Supaman’s do), but instead show women performing dances, rituals, and social behaviors largely carried out by men. Lyrically, the video, like much of Sangaré’s music, sheds social critique on the treatment of women in Wassoulou culture. Because Sangaré was raised among Wassoulou musicians listeners hear traditional Wassoulou string and percussion instruments among other pop-electronic timbres. The lyrics (subtitled in English, as shown in Example 8.10) are entirely in Wassoulou, which is spoken by less than 200,000 people in the world.



Example 8.10 English subtitles for Wassoulou lyrics

It must be said that MTV rendered many visible minorities—those other than African-American or Latinx—largely *invisible* through its unequal representation. Luckily, this problem has been all

but solved by YouTube and the greater internet. Users can now access music videos by visible minorities from all over the world in just a few clicks, and these videos are among the most viewed videos on the internet.

Even if YouTube goes defunct, the wider worldwide web shows no signs of giving up on music videos. Both Kanye West and Beyoncé have invented novel ways to introduce their multimedia in the past few years. Beyoncé famously released an entire album, *Lemonade* (2016), in video format only, creating at the same time a pay-for-use network on which to view it (Tidal). West also released his album *The Life of Pablo* (2016) on Beyoncé’s Tidal network, only to remix and reorder the tracks after its release, which led many (including Kanye himself) to conclude that the traditional album release—as the dominant pop music format—is officially dead. Long live the music video!

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Race	Visible minority	Racism
Social construction	Stereotypes	Ally
Ethnicity/ethnic group	Prejudice	

FURTHER READING TO FUEL YOUR RESEARCH

- Balaji, Murali. 2010. ‘Vixen Resistin’: Redefining Black Womanhood in Hip-Hop Music Videos’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 41: 5-20.
- Kareem Nittle, Nadra. 2018. “How MTV Handled Accusations of Racism and Became More Inclusive.” Thoughtco, February 27, 2018. <<https://www.thoughtco.com/when-mtv-first-aired-black-videos-2834657>>
- Reid-Brinkley, Shanara R. 2008. ‘The Essence of Res(ex)pectability: Black Women’s Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap Music and Music Video’, *Meridians*, 8: 236-60.

CHAPTER 9: FASHION AND GENRE

CHAPTER OUTLINE

9.1 GENERIC FASHION

- a. 1980s
- b. 1990s
- c. 2000s
- d. 2010s

9.2 NON-GENERIC FASHION

- a. Movie fashion
- e. Anachronistic fashion
- f. Choreographed fashion
- g. Fashion as narrative
 - as parody (weezer, hey ya, sabotage)
 - as narrative (alejandro, Arcade fire, pumpkins)
 - as anachronistic (titanium)
 - as choreography costume (formation)

We've looked at a lot of videos from a lot of different angles over the past eight chapters. Now we're in a position to talk about the genre(s) in which these videos belong. Genre in music videos is not just determined by music, but also by fashion. Fashion and genre are both emergent sociological phenomenon, and they tend to change rather quickly. Chronology is important, so we'll start this chapter by going through many of the videos of the past 8 chapters (and some new ones), in order, to discuss changing tastes in fashion and genre. At the end of the chapter we'll discuss some special reasons why fashion may *not* be tied to genre in an individual video.

CLIP LIST

(too many to name in section 9.1)
Xtina, et. Al "Lady Marmalade" (2001)
David Guetta (ft. Sia) "Titanium" (2011)
Beyoncé "Formation" (2016)
Arcade Fire "Sprawl II" (2010)

9.1 GENERIC FASHION

Look at the video stills in Examples 9.1a and 9.1b. We haven't talked about either of these videos in the book. But without even hearing the music, I'd bet you can tell what genre each belongs to. In music videos, fashion and genre are inextricably linked. You can also make pretty good guesses about the fashion a musician might wear in their video just by hearing the music on the radio!



Example 9.1a Monie Love “It’s a Shame” (1991)



Example 9.1b Dimmu Borgir “Progenies of the Great Apocalypse” (2008)

The majority of this chapter will be a whirlwind tour of nearly four decades worth of music videos to examine the links between fashion and genre. Luckily, you’ve analyzed many of these videos in previous chapters. In order to manage this chapter’s page count, I won’t provide screen captures for videos we’ve already looked at. I will provide images for several videos to which you’re exposed for the first time here. To help keep the chronology in focus, I’ll provide dates for all videos in the text, instead of using the “clip list” at the beginning. Making the smallest dent in the history of genres in music video is going to necessitate moving at breakneck speed, so hold on tight!

9.1a 1980s

Check out what Joan Jett is wearing in “I Love Rock and Roll” (1981). So. Much. Leather. Hard rock in the early 80s was heavily influenced by both punk of the late 70s and by the guitar rock of earlier bands like Black Sabbath. You can see the former in the cut-up T-shirts, fist pumping, and spikes seen in the audience. Compare this to Michael Jackson in “Billie Jean” (1983—I told you this was going to move fast!). He’s also wearing leather (or is it pleather?), but his music and dance moves come from a different 70s trend: **disco**. Compared to Joan Jett, listen how much **4-on-the-floor** there is—everything is directed onto beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. You don’t pump your fist to this beat, you get out on the floor and dance.

Around the same time a mainstream genre called **new wave** was, in some ways, combining these two disparate styles. New wave (see also The Cars’ “You Might Think”) took the synth sound from 70s disco and blended it with punk aesthetics. Watch Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” (1983). Notice that all the instruments are electronic (this music is also called **synth pop**—see also Whitney Houston’s “I Wanna Dance with Somebody”). Now check out the hairstyles (both Lauper’s and the other “girls” in the video). Yes, they look totally 80s, but they also look a little punk: razor cut and spiky. Place also plays a role in fashion. This video provides a glimpse into the immigrant culture of early 80s NYC, using the outdated fashions of her European parents as a counterpoint to the colorful fashions of her young friends from a wide range of ethnic groups (see especially 3:00 onward).



Example 9.2 Genderqueer misogyny in Mötley Crüe “Girls, Girls, Girls”

Example 9.2 shows lead singer Vince Neil from the **hair metal** (aka glam rock) band Mötley Crüe. Centered around LA, hair metal bands confused audiences by being simultaneously genderqueer in their appearance (lots of makeup and hairspray) and revoltingly misogynistic.

Hip-hop originated in NYC and arrived in the mainstream around 1987. We saw Salt N Pepa wearing matching baggy logo jackets in Chapter 8. You can see even more colorful and baggy accessories, now reveling in mismatch rather than uniformity, in Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” (1989). Example 9.3 shows the contrast between hip-hop heterogeneity and Black Panther uniformity at a political rally against racial violence. Highly colorful, baggy fashions dominated early hip-hop, even across the pond in Monie Love’s “It’s a Shame,” shown in Example 9.1a.



Example 9.3 Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” (1989)

9.1b 1990s

Rock has always been about rebellion. Kurt Cobain from the Seattle-based **grunge** band Nirvana was about to redefine 90s rock by rebelling against the overtly masculine glam rock and heavy metal that dominated the rock charts from the mid 80s through the early 90s. Grunge was just as heavy as these styles, but it was anything but polished. It was raw and vulnerable. Grunge’s most identifiable fashion marker is the flannel shirt, which you can see on several audience members in “Smells Like Teen Spirit” (1991). Kurt’s wearing another grunge uniform—a thrift-store looking stripped T-shirt with long sleeve undershirt.

Flannel shirts in the early 90s have an entirely different genre correlation as well: **gangsta rap**. While mainstream hip-hop was developing on the east coast, gangsta rappers like NWA spoke out against police racism and brutality in LA. Two members of NWA, Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, went on to have hugely successful solo careers. You can see flannel shirts all over Dr. Dre’s “Nuthin but a G Thang” (1992). While grunge and hip-hop share an affinity for baggy, layered fashions, they obviously differ in a few ways. Notice all of the button-fronts on men’s shirts in gangsta rap, as well as the logos on their clothes. Women’s fashions are also more revealing in hip-hop relative to grunge, which is comparatively unisex and less revealing.

Chapter 7 analyzed the representation of gender in The Breeders’ “Cannonball.” Relative to the harder edge of grunge, The Breeders’ softer, more melodic sound exemplifies the other dominant rock trend of the early 90s: **alternative rock**. Alternative rock uses less guitar distortion and smoother beats than grunge. Fashion-wise, alternative rockers still loved the thrift store, but didn’t mind shampooing their hair, and tended to avoid the rips and tears that grungers preferred. In summary: torn jeans, long hair in dreads or near-dreads=grunge; good-as-new layered fashions and neater haircuts=alternative rock.

Pop-punk artists such as Green Day, Rancid, and The Offspring upstaged alternative and grunge around 1994. Rewatch “Basket Case” (we talked about its DI coloring in Chapter 5). Like the harder, underground punk that inspired them, pop-punkers such as Billie Joe Armstrong wore their hair short and

full of gel. They also filled their ears, nose, and other body parts with piercings. The “gas station shirts” worn by bassist Mike Dirnt in this video were hugely popular in the mid 90s. Mainstream **ska-punk** bands Reel Big Fish, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, and No Doubt blended this pop-punk sound with ska, also augmenting pop-punk fashion with more checkered patterns and polyester.

R&B was huge in the mid-to-late 90s. TLC’s hit video “Waterfalls” featured cutting edge digital effects, shed light on crime and HIV/AIDS, and also set the tone for women’s fashion. Their juxtaposition of athletic-fitting tops with baggier bottoms barring the midriff in between (see Example 9.4) would be appropriated by both Sporty Spice and Scary Spice in “Wannabe” two years later. This tougher, more athletic look can be seen as the beginning of a trend toward female empowerment in music the later 90s.



Example 9.4 Athletic look in TLC “Waterfalls” (1995)



Example 9.5 Pixie cut in Natalie Imbruglia
“Torn” (1997)

The Lilith Fair festival, which we discussed in Chapter 7, put solo female singer-songwriters’ music and fashion front and center in a big way. I prefer the term **Lilith Fair** for this late 90s genre, but it also goes by the name **adult contemporary**. Fashion approaches to this genre vary by artist, but the “pixie cut,” shown in Example 9.5, was prominent. “Torn” is a soft-edged pop song with an ironic name—Imbruglia’s clothes are baggy but in one piece. Alanis Morissette wears longer, messier hair in her harder feminist anthem “You Oughta Know” (1995), all the better for headbanging. Sarah McLachlan, the founder of the Lilith Fair festival, splits the difference in these hair and clothing styles in “Building a Mystery” (1997). Her compromise between a softer pixie look and a harder headbanging fits her song, which similarly balances strummed acoustic guitar with lightly distorted electric lead guitar.

9.1c 2000s

The increased visibility of Latinx musicians on MTV (ironically known as **Latin invasion**) also led to an increased visibility in that culture’s musical genres and fashion identities. Most Latin pop music blends traditional samba and clave rhythms with pop dance beats. Timbrally, it blends traditional Latin percussion and brass instruments with Top-40 synths and drum machines. Artists such as Selena, Jennifer Lopez, and Ricky Martin were among the first to bring these styles to MTV, followed by Shakira and others in the 2000. Latin fashion is as wide-ranging as the countries and ethnicities from which these artists draw, consisting not only of clothing and hairstyles but also dance moves influenced by traditional styles such as Salsa and Merengue.

Boy bands continued to be popular in the early 2000s. Influenced by All-4-One, New Kids on the Block, and Boyz II Men in the previous decade, boy bands usually had between 4 and 6 members. Their songs were primarily electronic, blending beats from hip-hop with catchy pop hooks. Millennial acts Backstreet Boys and NSYNC also borrowed fashion trends from hip-hop, especially baggy clothing and gold chains. Rewatch “Bye, Bye, Bye” and notice how these hip-hop fashions are appropriated by a white culture (see especially the *bleached* spiky hair and *frosted* tips).

At the same time, but for a completely different audience, groups of 4–6 men were forming much harder sounding **nü-metal** and **rap-rock** bands. They appropriated sounds and fashions from African-American and Latino hip-hop, most notably layered looks with baggy pants and jackets, and shirts buttoned to the throat. Their most obvious appropriation was the turntable. Rap DJs had been using turntables to spin drum breaks since the late 70s, only occasionally “scratching” the record to make the characteristic sound. DJs in nü-metal bands sometimes played samples on their turntables, but they primarily used them for these scratching effects. Rewatch Linkin Park’s “In the End” and notice how many elements from both fashion and instrumentation it borrows from hip-hop.

Throwback rock (aka garage rock revival) was the most popular rock style in the early and mid-2000s. The raw simplicity that worked for Joan Jett and the Ramones worked just as well for several bands starting with “the” (e.g., The Strokes, The Killers, The White Stripes). As you can see in Example 9.6, most of these bands adopted the late 70s/early 80s fashions as well. Even the guitars and stage lighting are vintage. I remember listening to the radio in Seattle as late as 2007 and not being able to tell if the music was a new throwback band or actually a band from the 70s!



Example 9.6 Throwback fashions in The Strokes “Last Nite” (2001)

By 2017, R&B and hip-hop has finally overtaken rock styles as the most popular music in the U.S. But its ascendance was a long time coming. In the mid-to-late 2000s artists such as Missy Elliott, Rihanna, and Lil' Wayne were hugely popular. Regional styles dictate a lot of the choices in both hip-hop fashion and music. Three of the most prominent styles/regions are: west coast (especially LA), east coast (especially Brooklyn and Queens), and southern (especially Atlanta). We've already seen a lot of west coast rap and fashion from Dr. Dre and Snoop in previous chapters.

Lil' Wayne, a southern rapper shown in Example 9.7, helped popularize dreadlocks and gold dental work (known as grills). The east coast style, pioneered by Jay-Z and the Notorious B.I.G., has always featured more female musicians than either of the other two scenes. Missy Elliott, Alicia Keys, and Rihanna had huge hits in the aughts.



Example 9.7 Southern rap fashion in Lil' Wayne "Amilli" (2008)

Just like punk was polished in the mid-90s to become Top-40 (pop-punk), emo—an underground rock style from the American midwest—cleaned up its act to become **emo-punk** in the mid aughts. Emo-punk took the indie thrift store fashions of melancholy midwesterners and blended it with catchy pop hooks and punk rhythms. We've already talked about emo-punk hits from Fall Out Boy and Panic! at the Disco, but you can watch My Chemical Romance's "Helena" if you're hungry for another.

9.1d 2010s

The rise of hip-hop and R&B began in the mid-2000s as interest in rock began to wane. It's worth asking, then: just what have rock styles done in order to remain quasi-relevant? The answer: rock goes electronic. Nearly all of the "rock" bands that have adapted to remain on the Top-40 in 2018—bands like Fall Out Boy, Panic! at the Disco, and Maroon 5—have done so by incorporating **EDM** (electronic dance music) styles and electronic instruments into their music.

You can hear the beginnings of this pop-goes-electro trend as early as The Postal Service's *Give Up* (2003). The Postal service was a "band" comprised of indie rocker Ben Gibbard (Death Cab for Cutie) mailing vocal tracks to electronic musician Dntel for re-mixing. Ten years later the biggest rock hits—such as "We are Young" by Fun. (2013) And "Maps" by Maroon 5 (2014)—all incorporated more pop and EDM timbres than distorted guitars. In April of 2018, three of the top four songs on Billboard's "Modern Rock" chart were by Imagine Dragons. One of these videos ("Thunder") uses vocal manipulation, synth

leads, synth pads, and an 808 drum machine track. It is, for all intents and purposes, more hip-hop and electronic than rock. As you can see in Example 9.8, Imagine Dragons' borrowing of hip-hop styles comes across in their fashion as well. No more headbanging and flannel, just designer slim-fitting, dark fashions and appropriated hand gestures.



Example 9.8 pop/electronic/hip-hop crossover in “Thunder”

Hip-hop and R&B have simultaneously incorporated EDM in much the same way. Stars such as Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, and Ariana Grande have recorded Top-40 collaborations with EDM producers such as David Guetta, Diplo, and Skrillex. Another way to conceptualize this development, then, would be not to think about rock vs. hip-hop, but about the infiltration of EDM into all popular music.

Skrillex's 2010 Grammy-winning record *Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites* was one of the first big pop EDM records to influence today's sound. Skrillex's slow and hard backbeats (borrowed from a British EDM style called dubstep) would eventually give way to the more pop-friendly “big room” dominating today's pop hits. David Guetta's “Titanium” (featuring Sia) is an example of big room EDM pop. Rewatch this video and listen to the hard-hitting four-on-the-floor beat achieved by side-chaining, drops, risers, and filter sweeps.

As of the time of this writing, big room does show some signs of giving way to an emergent EDM style known as **tropical house**. Listen to the tropical house drops in Jack Ü/Justin Bieber's “Where are Ü Now” (2015, at 1:08), Chainsmokers/Halsey's “Closer” (2016, at 1:10), and Marshmello/Selena Gomez's “Wolves” (2017, at 1:10). All are, of course, collaborations between pop stars and EDM producers, which is basically the norm now. Notice how these tropical drops are softer, more syncopated, and full of tropical flute- and horn-like synth sounds relative to the louder big room drop of “Titanium” (2011, 1:16).

9.2 NON-GENERIC FASHION

Fashion in music videos is not always linked to genre. In this section we'll quickly examine a few of the reasons why a music video may not reflect the fashion conventions of a certain genre.

9.2a movie fashion

Sometimes music videos from movie soundtracks adopt the fashion conventions of the movie. Rewatch “Lady Marmalade,” from the soundtrack of the 2001 film *Moulin Rouge!* Notice how the outfits



Example 9.9 Movie fashion in “Lady Marmalade”

worn by X-Tina, Lil’ Kim, Maya, and P!nk don’t reflect hip-hop, R&B, or Latina fashions of the time, but rather those of the 1920’s French cabaret after which the movie is named. This is distinct from, yet somewhat related to, the practice of movie music video we saw in Chapter 4. It’s also a bit like parody. The Beastie Boys and Weezer both referenced films and television shows (generic cop drama and Happy Days, respectively) by imitating the fashions of those visual environments.

9.2b anachronistic fashion

Because the fashion in “Lady Marmalade” comes from another

time, we can also call it **anachronistic**. Any music video, not just those from movies, may adopt an anachronistic approach to fashion for various reasons. “Titanium” (2011), for example, adopts the same early 80s midwestern fashion seen in feature films such as *E.T.* (1982) and *The Goonies* (1985). Modern viewers watching “Titanium” might find that it actually anticipates (by five years) another throwback/supernatural fashion universe, that of the Netflix series *Stranger Things* (2016).

9.2c choreographed fashion

Beyoncé’s “Formation” (2016), like many hip-hop videos, features several choreographed dance scenes. In most choreographed scenes, the dancers have similar or even identical outfits. These outfits may or may not reflect the fashion norms of their genre. Several costumes in “Formation,” such as that shown in Example 9.10, are more reflective of the video’s settings (an old southern home, later a swimming pool) than modern hip-hop. One well to tell the difference: would you wear that to a club?



Example 9.10 Choreographed fashion in “Formation”

9.2d fashion as narrative

Sometimes music videos just create fantastical fashion worlds that reflect little about their genres. We can say that the fashion world of these videos is part of the video's narrative. We saw the Smashing Pumpkins create a world of alien conquest and space travel through their costumes in "Tonight, Tonight." We've seen Lady Gaga wear all kinds of things in music videos that you probably wouldn't wear to a dance club. The costumes both she and her dancers wear in "Alejandro" (another example of choreographed fashion) help build a narrative of totalitarian dance regimes.

Arcade Fire, the Canadian indie-rock collective, builds a complex narrative with fashion throughout their video "Sprawl II." Let's watch the video and note how the costumes relate to the lyrics. One of the first scenes, shown in Example 9.11a, depicts the suburbs as a boring place full of people who wear drab colors and who are literally faceless ("they heard me singing and they told me to stop/quit these pretentious things and just punch the clock"). In the second verse, the narrator escapes the suburbs ("we rode our bikes to the nearest park/sat under the swings and kissed in the dark") and dons the fantastical pom-pom dress shown in Example 9.11b.



Example 9.11a first verse of "Sprawl II"



9.11b second verse of "Sprawl II"

Doubtless, as you’ve read this chapter, you’ve identified some “cracks” between various eras that may, to you, represent a distinct era for genre, fashion, or both. Maybe you can identify a distinct brand of rap fashion that was popular between 2005 and 2015? Perhaps you can identify a separate shift in rock genres that occurred between emo-punk in aughts and the electro-rock of the teens? Such is the nature of both fashion and genre. As our individual tastes in clothes and music specialize, we become more attuned to the detailed differences between genres, and position ourselves uniquely within one or more of those subgenres.

You may have also noticed that there are numerous genres left unrepresented here. One reason for this is the book’s focus on Top 40 music. Genres such as Norwegian black metal, 8-bit/chiptune, chap hop, shoegaze, vaporwave, math rock, and mumble rap never made it into the mainstream, and were probably never designed for that audience. It’s also simply impossible to represent the unprecedented number of genres available today. Innovative research by Tom Johnson, which starts by processing Spotify’s metadata, shows statistically significant clusters of more than 1,100 distinct genres (as of early 2018).¹ There is no sign of this supernova of genres contracting any time soon. Clearly, there’s more work to be done in defining music videos by both their musical sound and fashion trends, and researchers like you will be the ones to do it.

LINGO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Disco	Gangsta rap	Boy band
New wave	Alternative rock	nü-metal/rap-rock
4-on-the-floor	Pop-punk	Throwback rock
Synth pop	Ska-punk	Emo-punk
Hair metal	Lilith Fair/Adult Contemporary	EDM
Grunge	Latin invasion	Tropical house

¹See Johnson, Tom. ‘#genre’. Paper delivered at the Society for Music Theory annual meeting, Arlington, VA, November 2, 2017. Available online: <https://tom-johnson.net/stuff/smt2017/> (accessed July 20, 2018).

Brad Osborn is Assistant Professor of Music theory at the University of Kansas. He is the author of the monograph *Everything in its Right Place: Analyzing Radiohead* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Osborn's other research on post-millennial rock music is published in *Music Theory Spectrum*, *Perspectives of New Music*, *Music Analysis*, and *Music Theory Online*. He is currently writing a monograph about MTV's Buzz Clips, a series of music videos in the 1990s. Outside of academia, Brad writes and records shoegazey post-rock as the artist D'Archipelago, described by one recent critic as "synth droid-core for replicants."