

**Edited by Tomáš Jirsa  
and Mathias Bonde Korsgaard**

# **Traveling Music Video**

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*Video Killed the Radio Star* by The Buggles (1979) is often regarded as the beginning of the music video era, particularly in its televised form, as it was the first music video broadcast by MTV in 1981. Not by chance, in their latest curated book, *Traveling Music Video*, Tomáš Jirsa and Mathias Bonde Korsgaard start from this episode to reflect on the non-linear history and development of music video in its countless mutations and variants. They trace its transition from being primarily a promotional and commercial tool to becoming a meaningful *cultural artifact* and *transmedia event*. Not a *genre*, then, but a *cultural form* capable of addressing a vast and global audience; “an intertextual space of perpetual remediations where one medium transforms the other” (6), while “traversing various platforms, engaging with new technologies, interacting with other media, interrogating cultural identities, and exploring audiovisual aesthetics” (15).

With an approach that draws upon an interdisciplinary perspective, the book offers an exhaustive account of the many changes of this protean and slippery object, defined by its inherent mobility and by its affordances and discursive systems of relations; in short, it encapsulates its “traffic”, as declared by the curators themselves. Expanding on a precedent line of research (Jirsa 2019; Korsgaard 2017, 2019), they offer a deep understanding of the pervasiveness of music

video within the current media environment, illustrating its ubiquity as rooted in its dual role—both practical and theoretical. Indeed, it serves as a “laboratory” for audiovisual and post-digital experimentation, as well as a “conceptual site to rethink the relationship between sound, music, and moving image” (7). Music video exhibits a remarkable capacity and speed for adaptation to the constantly shifting media landscape, existing at the interplay between broadcast and communicative media—from television (especially during the MTV era of the 1980s and 1990s) to online platforms like YouTube, VEVO, and TikTok, as well as live streaming technologies and VR hardware and software (see Eugy Han and Saul Quintero’s essay), all of which challenge traditional formats. Such hybridization and remediation are essential to the evolution of music video content across various media formats, epitomising, one could argue, the general *frankensteinzation* of convergence culture.

Furthermore, although it has been recognized as a “vernacular” media form (6), music video not only serves as an experimental ground for innovations in emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and digital tools like spatial media and locative devices (see Tania Rossetto’s account of the relationship between music video and the evolving practice of mapping), but it has

also given rise to various subgenres, including the porn music video, and intertwined with commercial narratives— as in the case of Katy Perry's advertisement for Just Eat (dir. Dave Meyers, 2022)— intersectional activism —see Hanna-Mari Riihimäki's contribution—, and queer aesthetics—emplified by Lil Nas X's *Montero: Call Me by Your Name* (dir. Tanu Muino and Lil Nas X, 2020), examined by Zack Bresler, Stan Hawkins, and Lisa Karolyn Holte.

However, what appears to be more meaningful in this process is the fact that, by doing so, music video reshapes audience responses and engagement. In this regard, consider how tracks like Fleetwood Mac's *Dreams* (1977) and Kate Bush's *Running Up That Hill* (1985) regained popularity through digital platforms decades after their initial release—thanks, respectively, to the viral video of Nathan Apodaca (an until-then anonymous user) skateboarding while lip-syncing, and to Bush's song being featured in an episode of *Stranger Things* (Netflix, S4E9, 2016).

These are the premises of a journey across three coterminous territories with shifting boundaries, namely “media, discourse, and sociocultural sites” (8). In particular, one of the most compelling aspects of the first section—*Topographies and Interventions*—is how music video functions as a tool for *political agency*. Lisa Perrott, for instance, focuses on *Poi E* (dir. Tearepa Kahi, 1984), which gained significant popularity upon its release, becoming the unofficial national anthem for New Zealand. Incorporating documentary audiovisual conventions as well as ideas from the animistic conception of time-travel, the music video merges Māori language and the gestural repertoire of the traditional indigenous *haka* dance, with elements of breakdancing and intertextual nods to Michael Jackson's iconic *Thriller* (dir. John Landis, 1983).

How music videos become sites for transcultural negotiation is also the focus of Tomáš Jirsa's contribution, which, however, concentrates more on how it travels “into the political space and tangibly interfere with it”

(73). By employing affect theory, Jirsa delves into music videos released in Central and Eastern Europe—the Czech *Bulhář* by J.A.R. (dir. F. A. Brabec, 1999) and *Fuck Off* by PSH (dir. Vít Hradil, 2015), as well as the Polish *Patointeligencja* by Mata (dir. Mariusz Sztykała 2019)—which are fully involved in the public debate on pressing issues such as xenophobia and racism, privilege, and the sense of rage and hopelessness spreading among younger generations. Accordingly, Emily Caston tackles the role of the music video as a proper vehicle for protest, tracing its first appearance well before the current wave that began in the US in 2015, back to the anti-gay HIV media panic of the 1980s in Britain, exemplified by Coil's video for *Tainted Love* (dir. Peter Christopherson 1984).

As for the theoretical use of music video, of particular interest is the “cross-pollination of music videos and documentary” discussed by Laurel Westrup, who points out a convergence enhanced by their inherent openness and resistance to strict definitions. Focusing on Young Thug's *Wyclef Jean* (dir. Staake, 2017) and Flying Lotus's *Wildcat* (dir. Kahlil Joseph, 2013), the author highlights and overturns the expectations surrounding both forms of representation in terms of intimacy, performance, and authenticity, affirming their nature as relative, changing, and “socially constructed” (23).

It should also be noted that Kahlil Joseph's *Wildcat*—which pictures an all-black rodeo subculture in Oklahoma—has undergone a three-dimensional translation as a video installation within contemporary art exhibition spaces. After all, the hybridity of music videos is such that the same product not only changes media and platforms but can also have many lives, as highlighted by the second section—*Extensions and Intersections*—which presents a collection of in-depth case studies on the presence of music videos within the art system and their relationship with historical narratives and cultural identities. Therefore, concentrating

on the art practices of Soda Jerk, Pipilotti Rist, Ragnar Kjartansson, and Angelica Mesiti, who utilise music video as a medium or artistically display large-scale video elements, Caleb Kelly consider its interplay with the visual and sonic arts. Historically, he claims, media artists have radically repurposed its formats by intersecting electronic media, performance, and sound art, thereby stretching the potential of music videos as video art and beyond, and exerting substantial influence on gallery practices. “Well before music video was enshrined as a critical element of the music industry, artists experimented with video recording technologies in a manner reminiscent of much later music videos as seen on MTV and social media” (118). Accordingly, Jamie Sexton also accounts for this music video attitude of pushing its own boundaries beyond the screen. Delving into issues such as media ageing, nostalgia, hauntology, and “occult psychedelia” (129), he grounds his analysis in Julian House’s transmedia work, which includes collage techniques and found footage that merge lo-fi commercial and avant-garde, “dispersing his aesthetic vision across different media forms” (135).

The final section—*Platforms and Interfaces*—delves into the diverse migrations of music video “across social media platforms, video games, and site-specific performances” (13), showing how it shapes not only institutional frameworks but also industrial practices. Mathias Bonde Korsgaard, for instance, examines Radiohead’s *Kid A Mnesia Exhibition* (2021)—“part virtual exhibition, part video game, part interactive music video collection” (186)—and its innovations in distribution strategies, as it was released on a gaming platform such as the PS5. With its pioneering *ludomusicological* approach, *Kid A Mnesia Exhibition* definitely represents a significant encounter between music videos and video games, incorporating their features and navigational interactivity.

Of course, this type of intersection that

redefines artist-audience relationships in terms of *gamification* is becoming more and more common. Another case in point is the innovative intersection of music videos and virtual concert experiences within online gaming platforms such as Fortnite—like those of Norwegian pop artist Aurora (2022), discussed by Anna-Elena Pääkkölä, and those of Ariana Grande and Travis Scott, discussed by Carol Vernallis. Vernallis, in particular, illustrates how the interactive and immersive musical experiences blend live (virtual) performance with gameplay elements and visual artistry, namely entertainment and new artistic expression. At stake, it goes without saying, is also the negotiation between authenticity and performance in online contexts, analysed in Berenike Jung’s contribution, which investigates how TikTok fosters embodied listening experiences and playful interactions with music through memes and gestures like lip-syncing and kinesonic movements.

As the exploration of the many occurrences of music videos continues to evolve, it is essential to recognise their multifarious presence in contemporary culture, both online and in real life. A new publication on the topic, for example, should now include a focus on AI-generated music videos, which introduce new possibilities but also raise new questions about how they shape cultural narratives and identities. Consider, for instance, *The Hardest Part*, the first AI-generated music video realised by Paul Trillo for Washed Out; the highly criticised competition launched by Pink Floyd to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *The Dark Side of the Moon*; the video *Turnà* by the anonymous beatmaker Liberato, which epitomises the commercial postcard imagery and stereotypes associated with the city of Naples, to name just a few. This dynamic interplay between music videos and cultural contexts makes it a compelling issue for ongoing study within contemporary audiovisual culture, as they serve as sites of negotiation for personal and collective representations and experiences. In conclusion,

*Travelling Music Video* usefully expands the list of recent publications on music videos (Arnold 2017; Di Marino 2018; Vernallis 2019; Shaviro 2022), offering a distinctive contribution regarding their significance in contemporary digital media culture. More importantly, it demonstrates not only how *video didn't kill the radio star* but also how it gave birth to new *constellations* of expressive forms and cultural meanings.

**Annalisa Pellino**  
[Università IULM, Milano]

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