



## REVIEW | Music/Video: Histories, Aesthetics, Media

*Gina Arnold, Daniel Cookney, Kirsty Fairclough and Michael Goddard Eds.*

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Looking back on the forty years of the music video, the saying “The condemned live longer” seems appropriate. When MTV dropped the term “Music Television” from its iconic logo in 2010, it seemed to represent the official end of the beneficial synergy that popularized both the television channel and its initial main content. Time and again rashly written off as a “dying art form” (Chaffin 2006: web source) and even memorized in a dedicated museum exhibition – *Spectacle: The Music Video* at the Museum of the Moving Image in 2013 – music videos have not only survived the detachment from the media conglomerate, but have become an important form of creative expression in their own right.

Their importance has been extensively reflected in academic writing, with a first wave of music video research in the 1980s and formative writings like Carol Vernallis’ *Experiencing Music Video* (2004) in the early 2000s. The increasing engagement in recent years ranges from Henry Keazor and Thorsten Wübbena’s *Rewind, Play, Fast Forward* (2010) to Mathias Bonde Koorsgard’s *Music Video After MTV* (2017), and finally becoming the subject of this anthology. This publication at once serves as a reflection on several decades of research and provides a necessary update at a point in time, which its editors suggest could be a “music video turn” (4).

The four editors – Gina Arnold, Daniel Cookney, Kirsty Fairclough and Michael Goddard – are not only individually acclaimed authors in the field of popular music research. Their interdisciplinary work on music and media is also representative of the diverging access points for research the music video offers. Even though some of the field’s more prominent names are missing from the book (such as Carol Vernallis, Andrew Goodwin, or Steven Shaviro), the international selection of contributors covers Europe, Northern America, and even Brazil, and therefore offers an unusually broad scope of music video research.

The structure of the anthology reflects this diversity in approaches to music video as an art form, with a focus on four subordinated categories: history; gender representation; art-ness; and (digital) technology. Through case studies focusing on artists, filmmakers, genres, and distribution strategies, music videos are read from their analogue versions during MTV to today's digital versions on YouTube with an equally broad spectrum of music genres discussed.

With topics such as the "Self-Effacement of H.P. Baxxter In The Video Work Of Scooter" (Hegarty), "From Broadway To Phineas And Ferb: The Rise Of Music(al Comedy) Videos" (Saffle) or "Completing the Mystery of Her Flesh: Love, Eroticism, and Identity in Björk's Videos" (Brozzoni), the chapters rely on popular, often colourful figures and recent discourses to provide insights into the parameters of music videos. Thanks to this approach arise vivid perspectives on its commercial context as well as its intersection with the world of art and film, and its role as user-generated content. These perspectives consider the introductory assessment of Gina Arnold and her fellow editors that music video in its ever-changing form is "a world of technical and creative passage" (3), challenging the methodology and theoretical framework once established to discuss it (4). This however does not mean the book discards established approaches. Many chapters still engage with a close reading of aesthetics and reflect upon the most prevalent discussions in the field, which focus on the history of the media form, its technological and distributional frameworks, and (especially) its representation of women.

However, the section on "Gender, Embodiment, and Sexual Representation" does extend beyond the established criticism of female objectification into both the manipulation of "the female form" (131), as discussed by Kirsty Fairclough with regard to FKA Twigs as well as Nicki Minaj's practices of "hyper-feminization through hyper-sexualization" (139), and in a reading by Fabrício Silveira. The section on "The Art of the Music Video" particularly showcases approaches pertinent to music video's ties to avant-garde practices by discussing the traditionally complex relationship between sound and images through topics such as dance, synaesthesia and the music video auteur.

With its international spectrum of writers, the book also benefits from a view that stretches beyond the traditional Northern-American market. Artists such as Laibach, Björk, and several British musicians' music videos are (for example) framed in their fragmented European context. However, the book would have certainly gained from a scholarly perspective on some of the markets on both the Asian and African continents in particular, but it does at least take into account the technically induced internationalisation of today's music culture. Gina Arnold's "Why Psy? Music Video and the Global Market" especially reflects on musical globalisation, highlighting the fact that one of the most popular music videos of all time – Psy's "Gangnam Style" – was produced in South Korea in 2012 and gained its popularity mainly on YouTube. This aptly engages with Sunil Manghani's findings in the very beginning of the publication that traditional music videos have increasingly become an "empty visual product" replaced by "the Internet video" as a new form for the new generation of music fans "to communicate and experiment with the forming of identities and social connections" (39).

Concluding with a videography as well as an extensive cumulative bibliography, this anthology is an essential read for anyone working on music video. At a time when "the long-forgotten/fondly remembered music videos of the late twentieth century have become widely available online" (9) and new videos by a growing number of producers spread across all modern gadgets and platforms, this publication takes a vital look back, forward, and around. Its multifarious

approaches not only mirror the interdisciplinary point of view of today's pop music research. They also remind us that even after forty years, music videos are far from dead – and far from explored.

## References

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