



## Music Video Space

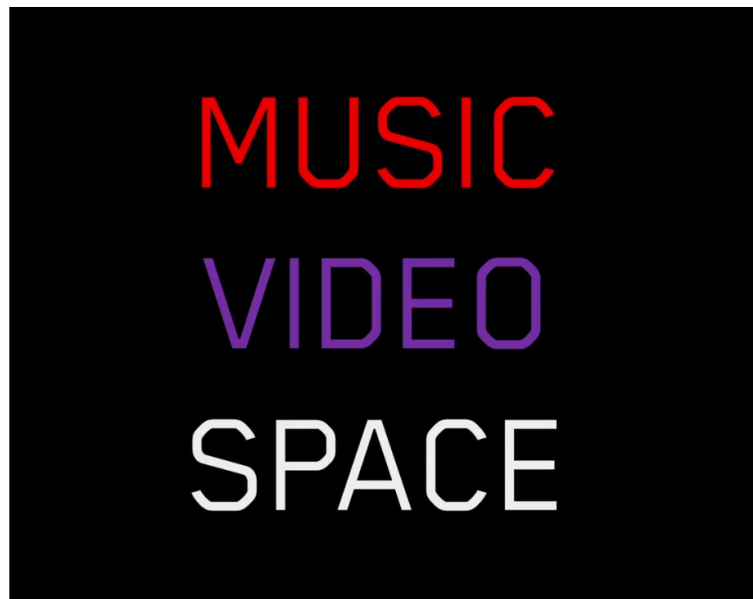
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The audiovisual essay "Music Video Space" is one of the first audiovisual essays to address music videos. Including examples from 68 different music videos, the essay explores the uniquely audiovisual aspects of music video space, arguing for the medium's general propensity toward spatial imagination.

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### Creator Statement

This audiovisual essay grew into being following the keynote I gave at the 2020 conference Music Video Spaces hosted by Universität Zürich, arranged by Maximilian Jablonowski and Johannes Springer. With Laura Frahm's *Bewegte Räume* (2007) remaining the only sustained theorization of music video space so far, the conference rightly identified a lack in scholarship on the spatialities of music video. However, apart from Frahm's book, some of the past research on music video does of course address the spatial aspects of music video to some degree, and the keynote thus aimed at providing an overview of extant work, suggesting that one way forward is to synthesize what was already to be found there (including not only music video research, but also theorizations of cinematic space, musical and sonic space, as well as theories on space originating in other traditions altogether, including cultural geography and philosophy). Approaching music video aesthetics—and some of the central research on music videos—through a spatial lens makes evident the complexity of music video spaces, the defining facet of music video spaces probably being their blatant *audiovisuality* and *hybridity*: as audiovisual composites, music videos typically create a visual space on the basis of a preexisting piece of music that already suggests a certain sense of space through sound.

For this reason, music video spaces tend to differ from the spaces that are typical of other audiovisual media such as cinema and television just as they are obviously also different from musical spaces alone. Because the images are created after the music (and not vice versa as is typical of film), the images of a music video often respond to

some of the logics and parameters of the music. When compared to other media, music video has thus occasionally been credited with opting for “a different articulation of space and time” (Shaviro 2017, 58). Scholars have noted how music videos “expand and transcend our conceptions of temporality and spatiality” (Frahm 2010, 155), maintaining that music video space is often “fragmented and unstable” (Vernallis 2004, 116) or indeed “hybrid” (Willis 2005, 57–58; Korsgaard 2017, 113ff). Due to their basis in music, music videos do not adhere to the norms of cinematic continuity, instead providing audiovisual spaces that are often characterized by their malleability, visual fragmentation and dizzying transformation. In this way, music videos are often vehicles for a distinct “spatial imagination”, to put it in the words of the original conference CFP. Across the field of contemporary music video practices, spaces are frequently constructed in unanticipated ways and casting but a quick glance outside of mainstream music video confirms that music video spaces are surprisingly diverse. Moving forward from these general understandings of music video space, the audiovisual essay aims to do this heterogeneity of music video spaces justice—providing both mainstream and leftfield examples that together display the spatial imagination and diversity of (mostly) contemporary music video (a total of 68 music videos have been included in the approximately eight minutes of the essay).

Apart from offering itself as a further addition to the sparse tradition of research on music video space, this audiovisual essay also breaks new ground for the tradition of videographic criticism. As they have developed through time, audiovisual essays have been occupied with a range of audiovisual media, but some media have clearly been more favored objects of study than others—particularly with research in narrative cinema forming the backbone of this mode of audiovisual criticism. Audiovisual essays about music videos are very limited in number so far—within academia, Jaap Kooijman and I are among the few to have approached music video (Kooijman 2023; Korsgaard 2023), but outside academia audiovisual essays on music video are equally unusual (Willems 2017 is one of the rare exceptions). Making this essay also seemed to methodologically confirm some of the differences between music video and cinema—musical rhythm quickly manifested itself as the defining facet of my editing practice (both sonically *and* visually), and I thus found myself drawing more on my background as a practicing musician rather than getting to live out my inner filmmaker. The question of whether or not to use voice-over was also automatically settled: the primacy of the music demanded that any verbal component needed to be written instead of spoken.

The implications and potentials of approaching the study of music videos through audiovisual essays are clear: given the shared audiovisuality of music videos and audiovisual essays, the relationship between sound and image offers itself as a mutual

area of reorientation. For the audiovisual essay, this would mark a further step in the direction of a truly *audiovisual* criticism, while simultaneously offering fresh methodological perspectives for music video studies. Indeed, as Shaviro suggests in his review, the essay's own excess makes tangible certain facets of music video's spatial properties that might have been impossible to draw out, or at least seemed less argumentatively convincing in the shape of a traditional written analysis. And perhaps, as suggested in Rogers' review, pursuing an active reworking and remixing of the *music* would yield further insights. This was definitely a practical challenge in editing the essay: what to do with the music when the visuals were organized into a split-screen? Accept the chaotic sonic polyphony? Or, as I chose to do, create musical (mostly rhythmical) transitions between the musical tracks? Working more actively with the sound editing is definitely a tempting future prospect. Seeing that the medium of music video "has come to be defined by its very mobility" (Jirsa and Korsgaard 2024: 15), hopefully the scholarly community around music video and audiovisual studies will also feel encouraged to embark on a methodological journey into videographic territory. So apart from providing insight into the spatial characteristics of the medium of music video, perhaps this essay might simply inspire others to produce audiovisual essay on music videos.

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Willems, Patrick H. (2017), “David Fincher & the Craft of Music Videos” (audiovisual essay): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esIFZnJqYow>.

Willis, Holly (2005), *New Digital Cinema: Reinventing the Moving Image*. Wallflower.

A written chapter that offers a more extensive theorization of music video space is also in the works (meant as a sister piece to this audiovisual essay).

### **List of videos referenced (by order of appearance)**

The Body: “A Pain of Knowing”, 2021, dir. Alexander Barton

Lido Pimienta: “Coming Thru”, 2021, dir. Borja V. Conde

Aesop Rock: “Long Legged Larry”, 2021, dir. Rob Shaw

Weval: “Someday”, 2019, dir. Páraic McGloughlin

Yves Tumor: “Licking an Orchid”, 2018, dir. Daniel Sannwald

black midi: “John L”, 2021, dir. Nina McNeely

Silk Sonic: “Leave the Door Open”, 2021, dir. Bruno Mars & Florent Dechard

Zammuto: “Great Equator”, 2014, dir. Nick Zammuto

88Kasyo Junrei: “攻撃的国民の音楽 (Kogeki-teki kokumin-teki ongaku)”, 2014, dir. unknown

Daði Freyr: “10 Years”, 2021, dir. Guðný Rós Þórhallsdóttir

Chelou: “Halfway to Nowhere”, 2016, dir. Andy Baker

Max Cooper: “Resynthesis”, 2017, dir. Kevin McGloughlin

RVDE: “CNCB”, 2016, dir. Kånde

The Smashing Pumpkins: “Tonight Tonight”, 1996, dir. Jonathan Dayton & Valerie Faris

Madonna: “Express Yourself”, 1989, dir. David Fincher

Oranssi Pazuzu: “Uusi Teknokratia”, 2020, dir. Zev Deans

Red Hot Chili Peppers: “Scar Tissue”, 1999, dir. Stéphane Sednaoui

Katy Perry: “Wide Awake (Lyric Video)”, 2012, dir. unknown

Vince Staples: “FUN!”, 2018, dir. Calmatic

The Limousines: “Very Busy People”, 2011, dir. Mathieu Wothke

Flasher: “Material”, 2018, dir. Nick Roney

Maroon 5 feat. Megan Thee Stallion: “Beautiful Mistakes (Official Lyric Video)”, 2021, dir. Anya Salmen & Justin Moon

John Mayer: “New Light”, 2018, dir. Fatal Farm

Buck 65: "Superstars Don't Love", 2011, dir. Travis Hopkins  
 TWENTY88: "Talk Show", 2016, dir. unknown  
 FKA Twigs: "M3LL155X", 2015, dir. FKA Twigs  
 Radiohead: "House of Cards", 2008, dir. James Frost  
 Justin Timberlake: "Lovestoned/I Think She Knows Interlude", 2007, dir. Robert Hales  
 TV on the Radio: "Staring at the Sun", 2004, dir. Elliot Jokelson  
 WIN WIN feat. Alexis Taylor: "Interleave", 2011, dir. Colin Devin Moore  
 Kylie Minogue: "Come Into My World", 2002, dir. Michel Gondry  
 The Presets: "My People", 2007, dir. Kris Moyes  
 General Elektriks: "Different Blue", 2017, dir. Arno Salters  
 Anna Luisa feat. Ana Roxanne: "Maintenance in Loving", 2019, dir. Anna Luisa  
 Moderat: "A New Error", 2009, dir. unknown  
 Eli Keszler: "Lotus Awnings", 2018, dir. Alan Segal  
 Arca: "Mequetrefe", 2020, dir. Carlos Sáez, Arca & Puru Watt  
 Sevdaliza: "Darkest Hour", 2020, dir. unknown  
 SOPHIE: "Faceshopping", 2018, dir. SOPHIE  
 The Human League: "Never Let Me Go", 2011, dir. Casey Raymond  
 Amnesia Scanner feat. LYZZA: "AS Going", 2020, dir. Marc Elsner  
 Clams Casino feat. Vince Staples: "All Nite", 2016, dir. Ryan Staake  
 Max Cooper: "Platonic", 2018, dir. Páraic McGloughlin  
 Floating Points: "Last Bloom", 2019, dir. Hamill Industries  
 The Carters: "Apushin'", 2018, dir. Ricky Saiz  
 Metronomy: "Month of Sundays", 2014, dir. Callum Cooper  
 Six Organs of Admittance: "Goodnight", 2008, dir. Cam Archer  
 Flying Lotus: "Post Requisite", 2017, dir. Winston Hacking  
 Death Grips: "On GP", 2015, dir. Death Grips  
 Tierra Whack: "Dora", 2020, dir. Alex da Corte  
 Laura Les: "Haunted", 2021, dir. Weston Allen  
 Moses Sumney: "Cut Me", 2020, dir. Moses Sumney  
 St. Vincent: "Pay Your Way in Pain", 2021, dir. Bill Benz  
 Crumb: "Locket", 2018, dir. Haoyan of America  
 Battles: "The Yabba", 2015, dir. Roger Guàrdia

Bonobo: “Cirrus”, 2013, dir. Cyriak  
 Liars: “Cred Woes”, 2017, dir. Yoonha Park  
 Jamie XX: “Gosh”, 2016, dir. Romain Gavras  
 Juana Molina: “Cosoco”, 2018, dir. Juana Molina, Alejandro Ros & Ian Kornfeld  
 Mary Lattimore: “We Wave from Our Boats”, 2021, dir. Hari Leigh  
 Oneohtrix Point Never: “Long Road Home”, 2020, dir. Charlie Fox & Emily Schubert  
 Lil Nas X: “Montero”, 2021, dir. Tanu Muino & Lil Nas X  
 Apparat: “Heroist”, 2019, dir. Matilda Finn  
 Cardi B feat. Megan Thee Stallion: “WAP”, 2020, dir. Colin Tilley  
 Oshiripenz: “女の裸 (Ona Na Hadaka)”, 2010, dir. unknown  
 Kelly Lee Owens: “Melt!”, 2020, dir. Laneya Billingsley  
 Amnesia Scanner: “AS Chingy”, 2016, dir. Sam Rolfes  
 White Suns: “Ordinance”, 2020, dir. Haoyan of America

## Biography

Mathias Bonde Korsgaard is Associate Professor of Online Video Cultures at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, Denmark. He has published extensively on music videos and audiovisual studies. His publications on music video include the book *Music Video After MTV: Audiovisual Studies, New Media, and Popular Music* (Routledge, 2017), which covers some core issues in the study of music video – including the history, analysis and audiovisual aesthetics of music video – while also specifically engaging with the digital afterlife of music video online. Furthermore, Korsgaard is also the editor-in-chief of the Danish online film journal *16:9 (16–9.dk)* which publishes articles in both Danish and English on film, television and streaming series, documentary, music video and more, also including the publication of scholarly video-essays.

## Review by Steven Shaviro, Wayne State University

Mathias Bonde Korsgaard’s “Music Video Spaces” is a dazzling supercut of ravishing shots from sixty-eight different music videos, edited together in a dizzying sequence. The video’s most immediate effect is to overwhelm the viewer/listener with its nearly eight-minute barrage of colors and sounds in continual metamorphosis. I think that this video’s visceral impact exceeds its cognitive import. However, I do not make this statement as a criticism; rather, I consider the video’s excess to be a vital portion of Korsgaard’s argument. Music videos, like other audiovisual forms, offer us

visualizations of concrete areas of space. But where film and television for the most part present unified and largely homogeneous spaces as backgrounds or containers within which people move and actions take place, music videos tend rather to dynamize space itself, to foreground it and show it in process of continually being constructed. The video shows us some examples of empty, static spaces, but more often it shows us frantically mutating ones.

Time and space are conventionally conceived as separate from one another, but 20th century physics proved that they are intertwined and interconvertible. Isaac Newton stated that “absolute space, in its own nature, without regard to anything external, remains always similar and immovable.” But modern physicists reject this; instead, they regard spacetime as a single, densely differentiated matrix. The spaces we see in Korsgaard’s video are often not stable backgrounds, or three-dimensional containers for some action unfolding within them. Instead, space itself is action: it is foregrounded, it pulses with musical rhythms, it twists in fractals, more than two-dimensional but less than fully three-dimensional.

Many of the shots we see in Korsgaard’s video consist in bodies, faces, or abstract shapes that were evidently shot before a green screen; they hang, twist, and evolve in an otherwise null space. Things do not exist in space, rather, space itself is secreted from the weight and the contour of individual things – faces, bodies, artifacts – whether these are vibrating frantically or standing still.

### **Review by Holly Rogers, Goldsmiths, University of London**

Music videos: “a visual space born from music”. Mathias Korsgaard’s dizzying video essay marks an important first step in expanded, performative explorations of music videos. With snippets from 68 music videos, the essay is chaotic, rhythmic and energising, chopping and changing in a whirl of colour and perspective: it feels like a music video. In his accompanying statement, Korsgaard refers to music video as an “audiovisual composite.” Here, existing works are remediated and reappropriated to form a jostle of voices and textures that reflect music video as a composite of other media forms, as well as of sound and image, something Korsgaard has written about in his previous work.<sup>1</sup>

In music videos, visual space arises from a preexisting audio track, and this invites a certain hauntological “weirdness”; an unexpected intrusion of perspective, movement, abstraction and dynamism into a previously discrete musical form.<sup>2</sup> The reimagining

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<sup>1</sup> Mathias Bonde Korsgaard, *Music After MTV: Audiovisual Studies, New Media, and Popular Music* (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (Repeater Books, 2016).



of sonic space through the moving image gives rise to “composite” spaces that are rhythmic, full of vertical and horizontal harmony and encourage visual repeats that cluster around a song’s choruses and refrains. For Korsgaard, this innovative process produces a new form of “spatial imagination”, an idea that is going to become ever more important as we move into the age of interactive and live hybrid spaces pioneered in the hybrid TikTok performances of Rosalia and the radical multi-platform worldbuilding of Lil Nas X.<sup>3</sup>

The rhythmic clarity that opens Korsgaard’s essay, which alternates between audiovisual clips and dip-to-black intertitles sutured by continuing sound, soon becomes breathless as the edits speed up and videos jostle against each other, four to a screen. And yet, when placed within our current culture of cascading TikTok rolls and YouTube playlists, it doesn’t feel overwhelming. In fact, it’s surprisingly easy to digest. In part, this is due to Korsgaard’s carefully curated examples, each prefaced by clear headings and subheadings: fragmenting space by fragmenting time, abstract spaces, concrete spaces, dynamic camera movements, static ones, spaces that are protean and frantic, others that are empty and minimal. Within these spaces are bodies that move through empty space, multiplying, splitting into single parts. Korsgaard fills this structure with examples that bear rhythmic as well as pictorial resemblance to one another. This is particularly clear in the “Faces” section (4.10), in which Arca’s “Mequetrefe”, Sevdaliza’s “Darkest Hour”, SOPHIE’s “Faceshopping” and a fourth video I don’t recognise (Google Images hilariously threw up adverts for men’s bald caps when I tried to search for it!) embrace the artificiality of the post-human. All the faces used undergo technological transformation, with the latter offering a hyper-futuristic audiovisual space distended through CGI so bold that it sets your teeth on edge. Korsgaard’s placement of each video within the quadriptych is fully embodied, introduced with sound and image together. As each new clip is added, the music from the new video takes over. But the fourth video, that appears last in the bottom right corner, doesn’t have a voice. We don’t hear it. Why? Instead, its images remain under SOPHIE’s metallic music before Amnesia Scanner’s “AS Going” video moves the gaze back out to the single screen. For me, this threw up important questions about the choices we make when analysing audiovisual work through audiovisual forms.

Korsgaard locates his decision to eschew voice-over in a desire to allow the music to speak. This is a great move. All too often sound and music are dipped beneath an

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<sup>3</sup> Emily Thomas, “Quare(-in) the Mainstream: YouTube, Social Media and Augmented Realities in Lil Nas X’s MONTERO”, in *YouTube and Music: Online Culture and Everyday Life*, edited by Holly Rogers, Joana Freitas and João Francisco Porfírio (Bloomsbury 2023), 65–89.

authorial voice as though their position within the audiovisual texture is dispensable, reinforcing the age-old belief in the primacy of the eye over the ear that runs through early film criticism. Film musicology and audiovisual analysis has deftly dismantled this assumption over the last four decades of careful work and today's scholars understand moving-image media as an audiovisual dialogue between sound and image. But when using split screen to show how several audiovisual pieces work in relation to one another, how can sound retain its collaborative position? While the visual gaze can be split across the screen, sound poses a difficulty. Were we to hear the music of Arca, Sevdaliza and SOPHIE together, it would be cacophonous. While seeing all the melting faces next to one another invites comparison and constructs a visual argument, to do the same with sound through mashup or remix is a highly skilled task. Korsgaard is right to say that, in terms of video essays that reside within the academic sphere, there aren't many examples of music video analysis. But in the astute world of social media, there are numerous instances of nuanced, audiovisually creative works, from the split screen histrionics of the YouTube reaction video, to vidding, supercuts and mashups that I am increasingly including as core analytical material in my music video classes.<sup>4</sup> In many of these examples, a variety of technologies are used to perform creative audio song analyses through compilation, wordplay, autotune, harmonic mixing and collage.<sup>5</sup> Moving forward, could we also use these sound editing skills and forms of sonic mashup to respond to the "spatial imagination" of music videos in a way that is inventive both visually and sonically?

In a 2018 interview, SOPHIE asserted that "The best pop music ... gives you a new sensation and a new perspective".<sup>6</sup> Korsgaard here begins a conversation about how editing and sound can be responsive to its form. He carves out new perspectives of audiovisual space in an eloquent and sensorial way, and I look forward to seeing where he takes this work next.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on YouTube reaction videos, see Michael Goddard, "Sincere, Authentic, Remediated: The Affective Labour and Cross-Cultural Remediations of Music Video Reaction Videos on YouTube", in *Remediating Sound: Repeatable Culture, YouTube and Music*, edited by Holly Rogers, Joana Freitas and João Francisco Porfírio (Bloomsbury 2023), 73–92.

<sup>5</sup> For more on vidding and mashups, see Holly Rogers, Joana Freitas and João Francisco Porfírio "I feel like I've heard it before": The Audiovisual Echoes of YouTube", in *Remediating Sound*, 1–34.

<sup>6</sup> SOPHIE quoted in Kate Branch, "This Rihanna-Approved Musician Is Changing the Sound of Pop—And Its Impossible Beauty Standards", *Vogue* (4 April 2018), at <https://www.vogue.com/article/sophie-face-shopping-album-british-producer-beauty-standards-red-hair>.

