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MUSIC VIDEO

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It.: *Videoclip musicale*; Fr.: *Clip musical*; Germ.: *Musik-Video*; Span. *Video musical*. Music Video is a promotional short-film for several genres of popular music (pop, rock, disco, rap, etc.); it is a video rendition of a recorded song, often showing the musicians performing or a dramatic interpretation of the lyrics or the mood of the song, sometimes through a series of surreal and abstract images. Music Video or “video clip” belongs directly to the logic of the entertainment and culture industry: Music Video in postmodern culture is also an important sector for aesthetic and expressive experimentation related to cinema, music, and video art for explicit commercial purposes (Dupont 1995). Music Video was born from the discovery, by the record labels, of the image’s commercial value of the musical authors, rather than of the musical product itself. Music Video promotes not only the product but the whole “packaging” (Peverini 2004), because it promotes the song and the artist-performer as well as the models of behavior, look, outfit and social-cultural dimensions in a global process of construction of the imaginary.

FROM THE ORIGIN OF THE PHENOMENON TO THE 1980S

The dialectic approach to film form and editing by Sergei Eisenstein and other Soviet film directors in the early 20th century is the most important influence for the aesthetic definition of the Music Video style, over all by means of the idea of the correspondence between the visual dimension and the rhythmic structure of the music. We can trace the origins of the Music Video to short movies by jazz singers such as Cab Calloway and Bessie Smith. With the advent of the international icons of popular music (Elvis in 1950s, The Beatles in the 1960s) and the spread of European video-jukebox (Scopitone and Cinebox), the visual dimension became the primary element in the field of popular music.

The advent of the golden decade of the Music Video culture coincides with the birth of the television broadcasters entirely dedicated to music-video (MTV): in that period a precise aesthetic arose, which became recognizable and specific to this phenomenon. The Music Video soon became one of the

privileged representatives of postmodern aesthetics, relating to the typical hedonism of the 1980s as the quintessential postmodern art form: hybrid, appropriative, often compromised by commerce or undermined by aesthetic pretension.

On the one hand, the 1980s represent the golden age of the language of Music Video, because in those years a hedonistic aesthetics was expressed by a specific visual grammar (editing, choreography, scenography); in these terms, *Bohemian Rhapsody* (1975) of Queen, directed by Bruce Gowers, can be considered the first Music Video of the story, because built, thought and calibrated on television promotion, thus overcoming the exclusively live dimension that was typical of the 1970s and inaugurating the "glam culture".

Videomakers such as Bruce Gowers, Russell Mulcahy, Tim Pope, Steve Barron, with their works for Duran Duran, The Cure, Madonna and many more showed how video could improve, if not outright define, the value and quality and success of a song. In this phase, the most important icons of pop music, such as Michael Jackson and Madonna, collaborated with great film directors and photographers in order to define an attractive dimension (John Landis, Martin Scorsese, David Fincher, Stéphane Sednaoui, Jean-Baptiste Mondino).

Video killed the radio star (1980) of The Buggles, directed by Russell Mulcahy (the first Music Video broadcasted on MTV) prophesizes the impact that video-aesthetics would soon have in the music industry. Music Video became one of the main platforms for new artists to gain attention and to consolidate the possibility for artists to show their latest works. The relationships between video art, cinema and Music Video became ever closer, and its approach that initially inundated the MTV in the early 1980s would soon fade towards huge production budgets and lead to an era where Music Videos cost more than feature films.

1990S, AESTHETIC MATURITY AND CURRENT CONDITION

Music Video, since the early 1990s, has evolved considerably in an aesthetic sense. In fact, as also happened in the history of cinema, the golden phase of the video clip also coincided, paradoxically, with a stagnation and a fixation of formal solutions. American classic comedy marked the triumph of cinema as a popular product and as a means to influence society, thanks to the inauguration of a precise grammar and a rigorous syntax, but this also decreed the suspension of more experimental and avant-garde approaches. Music Video had the same fate, which in the 1980s experienced its most widespread diffusion, setting logics of representation more or less shared by the various protagonists of popular music, reflecting the criteria of the typical postmodern aesthetics and thus becoming one of its most significant representatives. However, with the crystallization of formulas and ideas, the same expressive modality experienced then a turn into a static nature that would last for a decade, until the customs clearance of the 1990s.

If the 1980s represent the decade of the classicism of the Music Video language, the 1990s are the decade of creative experimentation and the overcoming of worn rules: the music video becomes more refined and

original, thanks to authors who explicitly claim their stylistic function in video construction. The crossover video between these two different expressive seasons is *Losing my religion* (1990) of R.E.M. directed by Tarsem Singh. In these years arose the most significant videomakers that became authentic "authors", such as some artists practicing music videos as high-concept art: Chris Cunningham (*Come to daddy* for Aphex Twin, 1997; *All is full of love* for Björk, 1997) and Floria Sigismondi (*The beautiful people* for Marilyn Manson, 1996; *Untitled #1* for Sigur Ros, 2002) adopted post-human aesthetic, anamorphic and monstrous elements as seductive expressive tools; Jonathan Glazer (*Street Spirit (Fade Out)* for Radiohead, 1995; *Rabbit in Your Headlights* for UNKLE ft. Thom Yorke, 1998) and Walter Stern (*Teardrop* for Massive Attack, 1998; *Bitter Sweet Symphony* for The Verve, 1997) adopted cinematic techniques and visual-photographic experiments; Michel Gondry (*Bachelorette* for Björk, 1997; *Let forever be* for Chemical Brothers, 1999) and Spike Jonze (*Buddy Holly* for Weezer, 1994; *Weapon of Choice* for Fatboy Slim, 2001) propose narrative and scenographic experiments, with a vintage and infantile approach (deriving from experimental films by Zbigniew Rybczyński).

Music Video is no longer simply a matter of sensory and perceptive or erotic stimulation, but in the 1990s and in the new millennium we find short films with complex narrative and expressive structures. Music Video becomes the narration of an image rather than the narration of a story, like the story of a live exhibition (Hebdige 1988). For example, the drastic interruption of the habitual visibility theorizing by Raymond Bellour (2002) for video art finds various correspondences in the Music Video sector: on the border between restitution of the real and unmarking, vision in which we recognize something and at the same time we feel uneasy for its extraneousness, the distortion elements and blurred images are useful figure to relate to the visual post-human imagery of video-makers such as Chris Cunningham and Floria Sigismondi (Beatrice 2005).

It is easy, as many critics have done, to either dismiss Music Video as a worthless by-product of artistical capitalist business practice or, even worse, to ignore it all together. Not only are music videos being incorporated into the study of popular music generally, but, more specifically, they are being used as a way of investigating the relationship between music and cultural politics, and in particular the cultural politics of race and gender (Railton, Watson 2011).

In the 21st century, when the importance of MTV diminished and as more and more people watched music videos on the Internet (e.g., on YouTube and MySpace) and on the smaller screens of mobile devices (e.g., MP3 players and cellular phones), the approach taken by many Music Video makers began to change. The image of the performer is no longer sufficient, but other apparently boundary characters, such as the scenographic environment in which the artists are placed in the clip, while exploiting the most avant-garde digital techniques are assuming greater importance to attract the sensitivity of the public of image manipulation. Among the most significant music video authors of the 21st one can mention Édouard Salier, Martin de Thurah, Daniel Askill, Yoann Lemoine.

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