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BODIES IN FOCUS: THE IMPORTANCE OF ANALYSING POPULAR MUSIC VISUALS FOR MUSICIANS IN POPULAR MUSIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Focusing on bodies in popular music, this article explores approaches to visual analysis, arguing that a critical engagement with and ability to analyse the body as part of the visual spectacle of music is crucial in the professional development of any young musician aiming for a career in the music industry, and therefore should be part of popular music higher education (PMHE) curricula, especially in vocational, practice focused courses. Taking account of the marketisation of the higher education sector, and the resulting adoption of an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning in the sector, the article follows John Biggs et al. (2022) to advocate a constructivist approach to learning, arguing that this enables students to develop conceptual understanding through the practical application of analytical approaches to their own creative outputs, specifically the body as a key visual aspect of their music-related promotional images and music performances. While analysis of popular music visuals can encompass a wide range of phenomena, including dress and costume, promotional images, performance visuals and music video, this article focuses specifically on introducing some approaches to analysing representations of the static body in images and the moving body in performances, also taking account of how the body is costumed.

Numerous existing works offer approaches that can be synthesised to develop a toolkit for analysing popular music visuals. Philip Auslander (2009, 2021) explores the concept of the musician persona through analysis of music performance, arguing for the integral nature of visual aspects alongside sound. Joanne B. Eicher and Sandra Lee Evenson (2024), in *The Visible Self,* propose a detailed classification system for dress that affords precise description and analysis of body supplements and modifications, as well as considering the concept of costume. *Gender and Rock* by Mary Celeste Kearney (2017) analyses visual aspects such as imagery, costume, performance and music video, outlining generally applicable approaches and theories alongside the specific focus indicated by its title. *Analysing Popular Music* by David Machin (2010) analyses visual and sonic aspects of popular music from a multimodal semiotic perspective.

The article begins with a brief overview of PMHE, then considers the importance of popular music visuals. Next, it discusses the development of a popular music visuals analytical toolkit for PMHE, explaining the analytical approach taken, i.e. social semiotics, then considers the body as a key feature of most popular music visuals. The final three sections offer an introduction to an analytical toolkit, based on examples of music-related images and music performances, focusing first on the costuming of the body, then on the setting of the body, followed by a consideration of what the body is doing, including gaze and facial expression, postures and positions, and gestures and movements.

POPULAR MUSIC HIGHER EDUCATION

»The last two decades have seen a dramatic change in the nature of higher education« (Biggs et al. 2022: 12). In short, »for financial, academic and vocational reasons, more professionally- or vocationally-oriented programmes are required as are more institutions that serve different needs and constituencies from the traditional academic ones« (ibid.: 4-5). In PMHE, the spread of marketisation across the sector has led to intellectual and critical aspects decreasing to make way for a more vocational and employability emphasis, impacting contextual subjects such as popular music studies (Warner 2017: 136-137). Many institutions, both public and private sector, now offer music courses with a practical, commercial and/or professional element or focus. For students enrolled on such courses, musical practice underpins their study and practical aspects of the course are, therefore, of primary importance. Joe Bennett (2017: 287) argues that, as popular music is

»a mass-market, commoditized product, designed and manufactured to appeal to a large number of people«, when considering the goals of a PMHE curriculum, »schools and departments of popular music need to teach skills that can supply the needs of the listeners their students intend to serve« (ibid.). Enabling students to acquire the skills required to effectively produce aspects of the aural product, i.e. sound recording and performance, are clearly the priority (ibid: 288-291). However, the study of the cultural and social contexts of music is integral to even a practice-based music degree. In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education provides quality assurance for UK higher education institutions and, in the most recent *Subject Benchmark Statement* for Music, states:

> *The study of music in its practical, creative and cultural dimensions develops a wide spectrum of cognitive, intellectual, critical, practical, technical and contextual skills, knowledge and understanding. … Students of music, in whatever context, are required to engage with their own experience of musical materials and objects, and to develop their own understanding of how theory and practice come together (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019).*

Donna Weston (2017: 107) proposes »a more holistic approach to popular music practice« in which critical and practical components of the curriculum are balanced in a way that relates to a vocational agenda. Similarly, Emma Hooper (2017: 159-160) argues that competency in analytical and critical thinking potentially leads to greater graduate success for music students; not only an ability to analyse in an abstract way, but to apply the understanding directly to their own practice. Taking these points into account, it can be argued that constructivism provides an effective theoretical framework for teaching and learning, as it emphasises that learners »construct knowledge with their own activities, and that they interpret concepts and principles in terms of the ›schemata‹ that they have already developed through prior experience« (Biggs et al. 2022: 13). A constructivist approach to teaching therefore »aligns students' emergent self- and career-awareness with the provision of … strategies which support students' metacognitive engagement, active participation and experiential learning« (López-Íñiguez and Bennett 2021: 135).

Before discussing how this relates to the importance of analysing popular music visuals for musicians in PMHE, it is useful to establish another underpinning premise: the importance of popular music visuals.

POPULAR MUSIC VISUALS

In the age of visual social media, it might seem unnecessary to assert the importance of the visual aspects of music. Fabian Holt (2011: 51) argues that music »remains distinct as an art form defined primarily by audio, but … the media distribution, presentation and sharing of music are becoming more visual« (ibid: 52). Nonetheless, Auslander (2023: 98) points out the persistence of discourses in which visual aspects are devalued »largely through versions of the antiocular prejudice grounded in the position that since music is sound, only sound matters, and the visual dimensions of musical performance are superfluous.« Auslander's focus is music performance, yet the argument could be applied more widely. As Chris Anderton et al. (2022: 52) assert: »Popular music is understandably viewed, primarily, as an aural experience. Yet songs are consumed, to varying degrees, with visuals—publicity photos and posters, magazine covers and website banners, album artwork, social media posts and teasers, and promotional films and videos« (Anderton et al. 2022: 52).

Focusing on music performance, Auslander (2023: 97) notes that it has been »amply demonstrated both theoretically and empirically, the visual information provided by musicians in performance shapes the listener's perception and experience of the music.« In relation to images, Janis Libeks and Douglas Turnbull (2011: 30) conclude »both album cover artwork and promotional photographs encode valuable information that helps place an artist into a musical context.« Considering a broad range of popular music promotion and performance, Guy Morrow (2020: 8-9) similarly asserts that visual design is integral to music, as »the production of meaning and value« is not limited to music but »occurs across a number of textual sites« including »album covers, gig and tour posters, music videos, stage and lighting designs, live concert experiences, websites, XR [extended reality] experiences, merchandise and other forms of non-musical content.«

Moreover, as Melissa Avdeef (2023: 225) argues, with the rise of video-based social networking sites such as TikTok, many artists capitalise on the creative and participatory activities of consumers by leaving space for consumers to create content alongside their own outputs. As well as the rise in consumer creativity, there is an increasing need for musicians to self-promote by regularly posting and appearing on visual social media platforms, as Nancy K. Baym (2018: 1) points out: »today musicians relentlessly seek re-

lationships with audiences, following listeners from platform to platform, trying to establish a presence for themselves and build connections.«

Popular music visuals, then, can be understood to encompass all aspects of musical and music-related creativity and practice that can be seen, including costume, promotional images, the visual aspects of music performance, and music video in its broadest sense (Vernallis 2017: 2). Together with the musical product, these aspects are integral to the ways in which popular music artists and their creativity are branded, promoted, interpreted and engaged with. So, how does this relate to PMHE?

DEVELOPING A POPULAR MUSIC VISUALS ANALYTICAL TOOLKIT FOR PMHE

As I argue elsewhere (Davies 2024), due to the vocational agenda of PMHE combined with the importance of visual aspects of music in the music industry, a strong case can be made for enabling students to critically analyse visual aspects of their own musical creativity within the broader contexts of popular music and music industry culture. Furthermore, as Hooper (2017: 161) argues, educating music students to analyse and contextualise their own creative practices and products is increasingly important due to technological change, which necessitates musicians undertake more of their own promotion and marketing. Similarly, in his consideration of the components of a PMHE curriculum, alongside directly musical practices such as sound recording and performance (Bennett 2017: 288-291), Bennett also highlights marketing and distribution: »If the democratization of music production has allowed artists to self-produce to some extent, then the equivalent trend in marketing has created related autonomies in self-promotion« (ibid.: 291-292). Due to the decline of economic value of recordings and the rise of live music performance as the more important income stream, he extends the point to include music performance skills »beyond those of simply playing an instrument« (ibid.: 292), as »stagecraft will play a necessary part, because employable popular music graduates are likely to spend a significant amount of their work time performing live« (ibid.). While this article is not focused on the practical skills required to produce visual materials, the ability to critically analyse visuals to potentially influence and shape their creation (either by musicians themselves or by collaborators with relevant expertise), is clearly a valuable and relevant skill, and adheres to a constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

Analysis of popular music visuals requires an analytical approach, and for analysis of visual materials, semiotics can be the most appropriate (Rose 2016: 50-51). Briefly, semiotics is »the study of signs« (ibid.: 107), with signs defined as »cultural constructs that take their meaning from learned, social and collective use« (Gill 2007: 47). Semiotics offers »a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image [or visual] apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning« (Rose 2016: 106). In a further development, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2021: xiii) take a social semiotic theoretical approach »with its assumption that meanings are made in social action and interaction, using existing, socially made, semiotic resources that change ceaselessly in their use.« In their approach, »›the visual‹ is one among a number of modes—the central resource for making meanings materially evident«; and in different modes, meanings are realized in different ways (ibid.: xiv). Furthermore: »The meanings made with any mode are a part of the broad range of meanings of a community. That is, all modes realize the same *kinds* and *range of meanings* in the one society« (ibid.: xv, emphasis in original]. In a similar way to how musical interpretation depends on »various listener subject positions informed by a variety of class-, gender-, and culturally based attitudes« (Brackett 1995: 22), how viewers interpret and respond to visual phenomena depends on »the larger cultural meanings they invoke and the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they are viewed« (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 25).

Furthermore, according to Sean Cubitt (2000: 157), »any single [musical] utterance is meaningful only in the context of other discourses that surround it and the multiplicity of subjects imbricated in its production, both as artists and as listeners.« Consequently, »the song is reproduced by the listening subject, never the same twice« (ibid.). In a similar way with visuals, meanings are created with each viewing and, while not infinite, are potentially multiple, depending on the set of cultural codes the viewer has, and the context of the viewing. For example, regardless of the original intention, viewers may or may not infer progressiveness, sexiness, irony or camp in different contexts and at different times. In addition, while it is informative to analyse a particular visual phenomenon such as an image or performance by focusing on the various components that create the whole, it is important to note that individual components only have »meaning potential« (Machin 2010: 7). In other words, »the meaning of individual signs changes when used in combination with others« (ibid.). Therefore, analysis of individual components of any visual requires synthesis to create meaning.

BODIES IN FOCUS

The body is an important focus of any analysis of popular music visuals. As George McKay (2013: 88) points out, »popular music is one of those contemporary cultural zones in which the body signifies centrally.« According to Sherril Dodds (2015: 411), »popular music artists engage their bodies to visualize the generic categories, aesthetic features and philosophical dimensions of their musical affiliations.« Advising musicians on using social media for self-promotion, Bobby Owsinski (2020: 45) simply asks, »Have you ever seen a Facebook page or website of a major artist without an artist or band photo?« Although not all popular music visuals involve depictions of bodies, either those of the artist(s) or others, it is arguable that most of them do, as music is an artform that is either directly or indirectly created by the human body: according to Philip Tagg (2002: 2-3) music can be defined as »that form of interhuman communication in which humanly organised, non-verbal sound is perceived as vehiculating primarily affective (emotional) and/or gestural (corporeal) patterns of cognition.« Of course, as Cubitt (2000: 146) maintains, in vocal popular music recordings where the performer is absent as a physical presence, the performer's body and listeners' responses to it are evoked primarily by the singing voice: »the voice is … a personality—or rather its signifier, since it represents a personality for us.« However, as this article is concerned with visual aspects of musical creativity, the primary focus is the visual spectacle of the bodies of musicians.

We can understand the body of the musician, alongside their music and other creative outputs, as being central to the idea we have of their persona: the social or professional aspect of the person as opposed to their private or everyday self. Although, as Auslander (2021: 26) argues, »we must be suspicious of any supposition that musicians are simply ›being themselves‹ on stage«, for some music students, recognising the distinction between the everyday self and musician persona in relation to themselves and taking an analytical approach to their own musician persona can be challenging, so enabling them to recognise that they have a musician persona is an important first step. Auslander (2009, 2021) explores musical persona using the concept of front, developed by Erving Goffman (1959) to provide a theoretical framework for analysing »the means performers use to define and project personae« (Auslander 2009: 309). Front comprises two key aspects: personal front, which consists of »appearance and manner« (ibid.), in other words, what the body looks like and what it is doing; and setting, which

is where the body is situated. This framework can apply to music-related images, performances of music, and music and moving image, such as music video.

However, just as the ways in which music is part of everyday life are shaped by »the technologies through which we experience it« (O'Hara and Brown 2006: 3), the same can be said for popular music visuals. As Joshua Meyrowitz (1985: 115) points out, the development of electronic media has disrupted the connection between physical and social place; communicating using such media means that »where we are physically no longer determines where and who we are socially.« Furthermore, following Stig Hjarvard (2013: 153), Auslander (2021: 209) distinguishes between direct and indirect mediatisation:

> *If the appearance of performances by … any performer not only as live performances but also on audio recordings, video, film, and so on exemplifies direct mediatization, the ways in which media influence and have infiltrated not just the means by which audiences access performances but also the form of the performances and the nature of the performing in them exemplifies indirect mediatization (ibid., emphasis in original).*

As a simple example, any live music performance captured on film can be viewed as direct mediatisation. However, if the performers perform to the camera (e.g. Freddie Mercury during Queen's Live Aid set, 1985), or the performance includes elements that are staged in a way that can only be seen by the camera and by extension by viewers watching the filmed rather than the live performance on the stage (e.g. Camila Cabello's 2024 performance at Glastonbury festival), this is indirect mediatisation. In the case of music-related images, a similar distinction can arguably be made between candid and posed shots of the body. While it is clear that taking account of the effects of mediation and mediatisation of performances and images is crucial in interpreting and analysing the body as an aspect of popular music visuals, these effects are not explored in any further depth in the following sections as they are beyond the remit of this article.

Analysing bodies in the context of popular music visuals is complex and it is possible to only briefly introduce a potential analytical toolkit for use by music students in application to their own music-related visuals. Focusing on details of specific examples helps to illustrate the analytical toolkit in practice and is also a useful teaching approach in PMHE. Through examples of both images and performances, the following sections discuss the costuming of the body, the setting of the body, and what the body is doing, considering at certain points discourses of genre, identity and authenticity.

HOW IS THE BODY COSTUMED?

The way a body is dressed provides immediate visual information about a person, »ordinarily preceding verbal communication in face-to-face interaction« (Eicher and Evenson 2024: 43). Consequently, analysis of dress and costuming constitutes a crucial first element of a popular music visuals analytical toolkit. Whether undertaking analysis of the body as a key visual aspect in images or performance (or images of performance), the body will be dressed or costumed in some way. Defined as »an assemblage of modifications of the body and supplements to the body« (Eicher and Evenson 2024: 2), dress comprises the components of the ensemble each individual wears to fulfil the demands of daily activities and communicate meaning to others within specific social and cultural contexts. As Fred Davis (1992: 4) explains, »we know that through clothing people communicate some things about their persons, and at the collective level this results typically in locating them symbolically in some structured universe of status claims and life-style attachments.«

The classification system for dress proposed by Eicher and Evenson (2024) encompasses body modifications: transformations of hair, skin, nails, muscular/skeletal system, eyes, teeth and breath; and body supplements: the items that enclose, are attached to, or held by, the body. This system allows for the categorization of »how dress interfaces with the armature of the body« (ibid.: 43), providing a common language with which to describe dress across cultures (ibid.: 45). Their approach aligns with social semiotics, as it breaks down dress into individual components and considers their shifting meanings in cultural contexts across time and place. It can provide, therefore, a useful framework for the analysis of the costuming of student musicians in their promotional images and performances and can be explored in application to popular musicians who are known to students.

For example, US artist Billie Eilish rose to prominence in her early teens and released her first album aged 17 (*When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* 2019). She stood out from other mainstream female artists, not only for her unconventional body modifications such as green hair and fingernails, but for wearing oversized clothing that concealed her body shape. In response to the resulting media debate, a video was included in the set of her 2020 world tour, in which she challenged the scrutiny (Young 2020). Features of body enclosures such as volume and proportion are significant and change in accordance with the fashion industry (Eicher and Evenson 2024:

59). For females, there is an expectation to wear »tight, revealing clothing to accentuate their physical features« (Kearney 2017: 174). In June 2021, in sharp contrast to her previous style, Eilish was featured in *British Vogue*, »embracing a ›classic, old-timey pin-up‹ look« (Snapes 2021) in a variety of corsets, stockings and high heeled shoes. From one extreme to another, the relationships between the body and choice of dress of a female performer such as Eilish can be analysed in detail to illuminate not only her persona as an artist, but also the status of women in the music industry and wider society. As Jacqueline Warwick (2015: 339) argues, female musicians »must think carefully about what to wear and how to look, in ways that men can more easily disregard.« Such analysis can help to instigate discussion of the potential issues relating to costuming for female musicians, informing students' analysis of their own visuals and potentially shaping their approach to their own visual presentation.

As a mediated persona, what Eilish chooses to wear might (sometimes) be perceived as her everyday clothing but, for musicians with a public-facing identity, the relationship between everyday dress and performance costume is complex. Of course, costume is often designed to fulfil the physical demands of the performance, allowing for movement as well as visibility in relation to space and lighting (Eicher and Evenson 2024: 264-269). However, it can be argued that »dress enhances an individual's identity, but costume conceals the identity of the actor« (ibid.: 261). In relation to musicians, this distinction can be used to accentuate the degree to which a performer appears as their everyday self. Auslander (2009: 65) notes how the identical suits of 1950s doo-wop groups distinguished them from their audience by positioning them as »entertainers«, whereas 1960s psychedelic rockers wore »the same fashions as their audiences« to reduce this distinction (ibid.: 312). These two examples show how costuming and persona connect with discourses of authenticity and genre.

Authenticity in relation to music should be understood as »ascribed, not inscribed« (Moore 2002: 210). In other words, rather than an essential quality that some music or musicians have, it is a perception that is brought to the music and/or musician by the listener. As a discursive concept, it can invoke a range of notions, depending on the context and perceiver and as such can be understood as »a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicised position« (ibid.). Perceptions of authenticity can be relevant to costuming in terms of the distinction between the musician and the audience, i.e. whether the costuming resembles everyday clothing and therefore the persona can be perceived as closer to the everyday (or ›real‹) person, as well as in relation to its appropriateness

in a cultural context. The costuming conventions, and authenticity discourses, of popular music are clearly often genre-dependent, following what have been theorised as »genre rules« (Fabbri 1981), which include conventions of authenticity construction. This construction is usefully conceptualised as »authenticity work« (Peterson 1997), highlighting the discursive rather than essential quality of music-related authenticity. So, however close to their everyday self a musician's dress might suggest they are, it is their musician persona that their audience perceives (Auslander 2021: 26). Consequently, it could be argued that the ways in which the body of a musician is dressed in images and performances can always be understood as costume.

Equipping students with the skills to analyse their costuming in relation to wider socio-cultural discourses, as well as in relation to identity, genre and authenticity, can be illuminating. Furthermore, conceptualizing their dress as costume can help to sharpen the distinction between their everyday self and musician persona, however alike or distinct from each other these are.

WHERE IS THE BODY?

As already noted, Goffman (1959) argues that, in everyday life, a performance involves both a front: the appearance and manner of the performer; and a setting: the physical context of the performance. Applying this to music performance, Auslander (2009: 309) explains »[a]ll aspects need to be understood by the audience for the performance to make sense.« Consequently, taking account of the setting of the body is essential for meaningful analysis, not only of performances but also of images.

IMAGES

While recognising the mediatising effects of technologies on the interpretation of setting without analysing these effects here (as noted above), in popular music promotional images, spaces and places provide significant settings for bodies. Machin (2010: 45) observes how, in album artworks, »settings are used to get general ideas across« and can be used in genre related ways. For example, musicians working in the folk genre might stereotypically use pastoral settings whereas punk rock or rap artists might show a tendency for urban settings to convey edginess (ibid.: 45-46). A recognition of

this quite basic convention is useful for students when choosing locations for their promotional images that take account of generic associations.

In contrast to real world settings, Machin (ibid.: 47-48) argues that a photographic studio setting can »connote modelling and beauty« as well as »being out of time and space.« The artwork for the 2022 album *Harry's House* by UK artist Harry Styles, for example, subverts the impression of domesticity potentially evoked by a room in a house, not only by literally turning it upside down but also by being an obviously constructed set. Although not the empty studio setting often used to represent »being out of time and space« (Machin 2010: 47-48), its construction and orientation create an unsettling environment. The body of the artist in this setting is standing with one hand to his face, seeming a little swamped by his loose clothing, with the toes of one foot slightly raised as if not quite standing firmly, suggesting the artist is puzzled by his circumstances and cut adrift from reality. This meaning would undoubtedly differ if the setting was more clearly an actual room and/or the right way up. This example illustrates the importance of an awareness for students of how the combination of setting and other visual details create potential meaning.

Not all music students enrolled on popular music courses are featured performers, aiming to develop an audience-facing profile. Music students include session players, as well as producers and songwriters, and it is important to emphasize that these kinds of musicians also need to create visual materials through which to self-promote often to other people working in the industry rather than to music audiences directly. It is conventional for session musicians' promotional images to depict their working bodies in appropriate settings of either recording studio or stage, as in the images on the website of session drummer Ash Soan (Soan 2024). For non-performing musicians, a workspace is often used as the setting for the body, providing a focus on the work role of the musician. For example, the music production studio is typically used in images of music producers, as seen in images of the Canadian producer WondaGurl (see for example Spotify AB 2024).

As well as analysing the kinds of spaces and places that provide the settings for bodies in popular music visuals, it is important to take account of the features and objects within them, as elements of set design are relevant to analysis of visuals of all kinds that involve bodies, including images. A more in-depth analysis of the *Harry's House* album artwork, for example, could take account of the objects in the set, which, as Machin (2010: 43) states, are key communicators of ideas, values and discourses. The sparse modernism of the furniture combined with decorative elements such as a vase of tulips, table lamp, window blind and sheer curtains, as well as the

small plain white plate on which there appears to be a morsel of food, subvert the impression of domesticity by evoking it to such a minimal degree.

For students in the process of creating promotional images, the ability to analyse the potential meaning of the setting for the body and take a constructively critical approach to this aspect of their visuals can help them to choose settings that relate appropriately to their music and musician persona.

PERFORMANCES

In music performance, venues provide the visual setting for the moving body and, as Auslander (2009: 309) states, »musicians can use the cultural associations of a particular venue or kind of venue to assert their personae, either by invoking them or subverting them.« Cultural associations are, in part, the result of visual aspects that represent such associations. Some performers eschew the traditional raised stage that separates them from their audience and suggests an imbalance of power, choosing instead to play on the same level (Kearney 2017: 167), as exemplified by the staged performance in the music video for US grunge rock band Nirvana's 1991 single »Smells Like Teen Spirit«. At the other extreme, the impact of the Royal Albert Hall in London is also visual, through its size and the grandeur of its architecture and design. By performing in such a venue, a popular music artist can garner its associations to construct and evolve their persona in various ways. For example, in his 2016 performance at the Royal Albert Hall, London, US punk artist Iggy Pop both subverted and invoked the prestigious associations of the venue, by simultaneously embodying anti-establishment rebelliousness alongside the celebrity status solidified during his lengthy career.

Within venues, set designs can include lighting, artwork, visual media, special effects, and objects (including musical instruments and technologies), all of which create meaning in conjunction with the performing body. The relative simplicity or extravagance of the set is »dependent on the type of music its members perform« (Kearney 2017: 168) and can be related to genre as well as the type of authenticity the performer is aiming to convey. As most student musicians are at a relatively early career stage, the kinds of venues in which they have opportunities to perform tend to be limited in size and stripped back in terms of design. Nonetheless, equipped with the analytical skills to consider the effects of visual aspects of performance setting such as lighting, stage set and props, they can create settings that communicate and construct their personas in ways that fit with their intentions.

WHAT IS THE BODY DOING?

As well as through costuming and setting, bodies also communicate through what they are doing. Various types of gaze and facial expression, postures and positions, as well as gestures and movements, are all perceptible in relation to the moving body in music performances as well as depictions of the body in still images, including candid and posed images and performance stills.

IMAGES

In popular music images, as in everyday life, it is important to interpret the gaze. Depending on the type of gaze, images can be »offer« or »demand« (Machin 2010: 40). A direct gaze can produce an image in which the viewer is acknowledged and a response is demanded, as opposed to an offer image in which the gaze is directed away so the viewer feels a response is not required. Combined with facial expressions and bodily postures, the gaze therefore creates meaning (ibid.), as an initial analysis of the album artworks of US artist Taylor Swift can exemplify. From her debut album *Taylor Swift* (2006) to *The Tortured Poets Department* (2024), her fifteen studio album artworks (including her four re-recordings) depict her in various settings, postures and costumes. In eleven of the artworks, her gaze is off camera, obscured, or missing from the image due to cropping. In relation to gaze, then, these can be considered offer images. Swift is looking directly at the camera in only four of the artworks, including *Taylor Swift* (2006) and *Reputation* (2017). The demand in the gaze in the former is contrastable to that in the latter: while they are both direct to camera, her gaze in the *Taylor Swift* image seems level with the viewer, while in the *Reputation* image she appears to look down at the viewer. Combined with other features of the images, including facial expression, costuming, colours, setting and typeface, the gaze contributes to a distinct potential meaning of each image that can be interpreted in relation to the musical content of each album as well as the evolving career and biography of the artist, all of which are intertwined.

Postures and positions of bodies can also be analysed in promotional images used by musicians, and can »suggest something about the band, whether they are approachable, independent or moody, whether they are to be thought of as a unit or individuals« (Machin 2010: 37). The project *6 Feet Covers* (Activista 2020) serves as a useful example, as it takes well known

album artworks featuring images of artists and repositions their bodies to represent two-meter social distancing. The results show the importance of body positions in images, with changes having significant effects on potential meaning. The artwork for The Beatles' album *Abbey Road* (1969), for example, features the four band members walking in line on a zebra (pedestrian) crossing. While not overlapping, their bodies are close in terms of proximity and visually matched in relation to their walking postures. The *6 Feet Covers* version of the artwork keeps the figures in the same position horizontally but only George Harrison remains in the foreground, with the other three positioned at intervals receding into the distance. While the original image certainly presents the band members as individuals, especially through their individualised costuming, their proximity implies they are a unit, not least through the patterning created by their legs in simultaneous stride. In contrast, the distance between their bodies in the amended version implies a far less unified group, not only through the distancing but also through the breaking up of the striding pattern, illustrating how postures, positions and depictions of movements interact.

For music students developing promotional images, the ability to analyse the details of what the body is doing, including gaze, postures and positions, and depictions of movement, can help to increase awareness of the potential meanings of promotional images, leading to visual products that communicate their intentions more effectively.

PERFORMANCES

Bodily movements in music performance can be understood as a use of the body in »extradaily ways« (Fast 2001: 147), with the body being »yet another instrument of expression in live music performances« (Kearney 2017: 176), expressive of »not only the song being performed but also their own identities and public personas« (ibid.). Of course, as Simon Frith (1998: 205) notes, interpreting the body in performance depends on the viewer having an »ability to refer these bodily movements to others.«

As in images, gaze is significant in music performance as an aspect of facial expression which, as William Forde Thompson et al. (2005: 204) note, can support »musical intelligibility« in various ways. Gaze can be a means of communication between performers, and between performers and audience; and when performers close their eyes, it can suggest technical effort or signify an emotional peak. Alongside gaze and other forms of facial expression, Kearney (2017: 176-177) identifies types of gestures: illustrative, such as head movements and arm raising; and emblematic, which are more

genre specific, for example the sign of the horns. In addition, whole body movements can be genre related, as with the distinction between choreographed movements, more common in pop genres, and ritualised movements, which are specific to an individual performer or genre, such as rock guitarist Pete Townshend's ›windmill‹ gesture and the knee slide that features in many rock performances.

As in images, postures are significant in performance; most basically, whether the performer is seated or standing. Standing »draws attention to … bodies and music while also allowing for greater flexibility with technology and movement« (Kearney 2017: 176-177). In addition, the ways in which performing musicians hold and interact with technology and instruments are significant, as they can develop »very distinctive personae … expressed … in the way they play« (Auslander 2009: 309). Moreover, »the relationship between body and instrument is of extraordinary importance, so much so, that at times the body-instrument connection becomes seamless« (Stevens 2009: 6). Performances (and performance images) of US artist Tori Amos illustrate these points well, as she sits astride a stool between two pianos that she often plays simultaneously, facing the audience with her legs apart. This distinctive posture, clearly necessitated by the demands of her performance, combines with other visual elements including her long red hair and performance costume of tight trousers, flowing top and high heeled shoes, to construct her sensual and sexually confident persona.

Analysis of specific details of what the body is doing, both in images and in music performance, is complex but having the tools to carry out such analysis, even on quite a basic level, can enable music students to effectively communicate their musician personas and musical intentions through their images and performances.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that a critical engagement with the body as part of the visual spectacle of music is crucial to the professional development of young musicians aiming for music industry careers. The analytical approaches outlined here form only the beginning of a popular music visuals analytical toolkit that, when developed further, can enable critical engagement with a range of popular music visuals in which the body is central. It has focused on the body in music-related images and music performances and can be further developed to include approaches to analysing music video of all kinds. Such a toolkit can enable musicians in PMHE not only to

analyse and interpret popular music visuals, which are increasingly prioritised in the promotion of and engagement with popular music, but can also inform the development and creation of their own music-related visuals, an activity that is essential for many popular musicians working in, or aiming to work in, the music industry. As such, it takes an effective, constructivist approach to learning, developing conceptual and theoretical understanding through active analysis of students' own music-related visuals, combined with developing a key graduate skill to enhance employability in an increasingly vocational and practice focused higher education context.

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