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I Can't Sleep

Multimedia Film

I am a night owl. Once the sun goes down a certain energy enters my body, willing me to read, write songs, binge my favorite TV shows, paint, and procrastinate on my rest—and homework. I often have a difficult time falling asleep. It takes me a while as my brain seems to run rampant with random, uncontrollable thoughts. Sometimes this manifests in anxious thoughts. I overthink my day and my future just wishing I could just turn my brain off. And so, I often stay up super late in an effort to tire myself out.

My final project zones in on this idea. The video is visually and musically backed by research into multisensory art as it pertains to music videos but narratively follows me during a typical night of procrastination and sleep deprivation. The video itself is made up of digital film, painted rotoscope animation, and painted stop motion animation. While the majority of the clips in the video were shot on the oxbow campus, two of the rotoscoped sections come from vlogs (of my late night endeavors) I found from last year in my camera roll. There is even a scene in the video where you can see me painting the frames of the rotoscope animation. I produced the backing track myself so that I could fully control the multisensory—being that of sight and sound—experience of the video.

Entering the Fifth Dimension of Reality:
a Multisensory Artistic Fantasy:
The Transportive Power of Video Art-Music



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Writer's Note: This paper addresses the immersive power of multisensory art—specifically pertaining to its sub genre, video art-music. It investigates the artistic process, history, and application of multisensory art to contemporary music videos. In it I also infer how I might go about taking tools and methods I've learned from my research and applying it to my own art making process.

I. A Human Introduction to Multisensory Art

Have you ever closed your eyes while listening to a song? Maybe you're in the car. You place your earbuds in and squeeze your eyes shut, bottom and top lashes meeting each other. Sound escapes from your phone, through a wire and into your ears. You've blocked out any visual distractions from the outside world.

Your brother beside you eating chips and playing minecraft.

Cars passing by.

Your mom driving in the front seat, glancing at google maps every once in a while.

None of this exists. No, you are in another world. A world of pulsing bass. Raspy vocals. A flowy electric guitar line that makes you feel like you're underwater. Ghostly Synths buried in the background of the song that give you chills. A steady kick drum that grounds you. Nearing the chorus, tension builds, burning its way to a beat drop and then... BAM. The drums really come in. Harmonies layer over the main vocal, and you ascend into a musical heaven.

On the other hand, have you ever sat in a museum and stared at a painting in complete silence? Perhaps you've just made the trek from Brooklyn to Manhattan. Lost in the maze that is the MET, you sit down on a bench before a painting you've never seen before. You allow yourself to be absorbed by the heartbreaking expression of the man depicted. You become lost in his 24 by

30-inch rectangle of existence. Your eyes graze each brushstroke. Each curve and sharp edge. You are drawn in by the drama of his shadow. You are immersed in a story told with colors. A love affair between green and red. As colors smoothly fade into each other, the outside world fades out.

When silently observing a painting, you are rid of any (audible) external distractions and so you become free to focus your mind on every detail of the piece. Similarly, in closing your eyes while listening to music, you are able to take in the landscape of sound more clearly and so, the experience of listening to it becomes intensified. This is a practice of isolating one of your senses to enhance its ability to take in a piece of art.

What is truly extraordinary, though, is what occurs when there is a collaboration between music and visual art. With multisensory art, there is no need to isolate one sense because both complement each other perfectly, and so you can be fully immersed in the story and feeling of the work. It feels less like you are watching and analyzing the art, and more as if you are a part of it—surrounded by it.

Have you ever—and I promise this is my last imaginative “have you ever” scenario—watched a movie in a theater and felt like you had fallen into another world?

Maybe it's towards the end of the movie and the main character is running through woods being chased after by a killer. The music is fast-paced with cellos playing low staccato notes. Your heartbeat quickens with uncertainty as minor notes creep into the melody. You are on the tips of your toes, waiting for the killer to catch up. It's as if all that exists in the world of your mind, is this chase.

Or, You're at a scene where a girl is looking out of a foggy car window, and a somber melody of descending notes on the piano plays as a tear rolls down her cheek.

Or, you see the crew of a heist zooming out of a planet in their spaceship after having just pulled off their mission. While they fly through the air, their theme song plays. It's uplifting and glorious, accompanying their adventurous narrative.

There is something magical about moving images lined up with music. What music and visual art give to each other when they overlap is something which they can't achieve by themselves. They are able to highlight moments in each other, for example, when a character's steps fall right on beat and your attention is brought to their hurried pace. It could be something as simple as music slowing or speeding up according to the movement on screen. It's when colors are coordinated with the soundtrack to convey a specific mood that I find myself in another place. This is the power of video-art. Especially when created with an emphasis on the music aspect, this medium is transportive and immersive. In my research, I aimed to track the development of this genre through the eras while considering how it can inspire me to merge my own music and visual art.

So what really is video art-music? How has the evolution of culture and technology influenced this medium through the eras and what remnants of this influence can be seen in music videos of today? How are artists able to utilize multidisciplinary mediums to further their artistic vision and create a more complex experience for the viewer/listener? And, finally, what tools can I take from this research and bring into my own work in order to make it more complex and transformative?

II. Fantasia: Allowing Music to Come First

When I began researching for this project, the first example of music accompanied by moving images that popped into my head was Disney's (1940) *Fantasia*. I first remember watching the

nostalgic movie on the VHS player in my grandma's basement. The movie opens with an introduction by Deems Taylor, the movie's orchestra conductor. In an effort to help the viewer understand how this special piece of cinema came to be, Taylor tells the viewer/listener: “what you’re going to see are the designs and pictures and stories that music inspired in the minds and imaginations of a group of artists. In other words, these are not going to be the interpretations of trained musicians” (Algar et al. *Fantasia*). Taylor highlights that this was a creative process of putting images to music rather than music to images; an important distinction because most often we see soundtracks as secondary in the process of making a film, a tool meant to highlight what is occurring visually but not meant to hold the spotlight. It is also notable that the animators were not listening to the soundtrack with a musician's ear and so their approach was an imaginative, creative one rather than one rooted in any formal training or previous knowledge of music theory.

Half way through the movie, Taylor introduces a character called “the sound track,” which is portrayed through an animated glowing line. Then, the conductor asks the sound track to make sounds of different instruments. As a harp plays, the line flows in hilly waves, becoming green and yellow, rippling out with each sound. When it is asked to play the violin, the colors become more vivid, transforming into steep pink and yellow zig zags, moving up and down the screen according to the pitch of the note being played. Taylor describes “The sound track” as “a screen personality whose possibilities nobody around the place had ever noticed” (Algar et al. *Fantasia*). He then goes on to say, “Now watching him I discovered that every beautiful sound also creates an equally beautiful picture” (Algar et al. *Fantasia*).

While, traditionally, a film’s soundtrack goes unnoticed, fading into the background, here the intention is to allow the music to take center stage and to use visuals to elicit an emotional response. Allowing music to come first in the process of making video art balances and strengthens

the partnership—between sound and visual art—that makes up this form of multisensory art. This allows both to complement each other so that neither is without a purpose—outweighed by the other—and they almost feel like one all encompassing sense. It also invites us as musicians to use visual techniques to further the musical experience in the form of media like music videos.

III. The 70's and the Rise of Psychedelic Inspired Music Videos

The first surge of Audiovisual art began in New York in 1965—the year that analogue video became commercially available (Rogers 1). Nam June Paik, the artist considered the “father of video art,” began to explore this technology while traveling through the city with his Sony Portapak (Rogers 4). The creation of this new medium prompted artists to begin pushing the boundaries of what they knew art to be, experimenting with moving images and sound. Video was the doorway into a new artistic realm of spatialized audio. It gave musicians and composers the opportunity to visualize their music. This expanded not only the limits of art exhibition, but the limits of music performance as well. Moving into the 80's, video allowed musicians the ability to broadcast live performances, display pre recorded footage in concert, and arguably the most important development of all, to create music videos.

These developments in technology occurred in tandem with the cultural awakening of the 1960's and 70's. A time of free love and psychedelic drug use, the cultural landscape inspired the creative process of musicians during this time period. The emotionally transformative power that exists in multisensory art comes from its ability to grab you and transport you in a “hallucinatory” way. This can be seen in the psychedelic music videos inspired by this era.

Merriam Webster defines psychedelic as “of, relating to, or being drugs (such as LSD) capable of producing abnormal psychic effects (such as hallucinations) and sometimes psychotic

states” (“Psychedelic”). Expanding on the “relating to” aspect of this greater definition, the dictionary also defines the word as “imitating, suggestive of, or reproducing effects (such as distorted or bizarre images or sounds) resembling those produced by psychedelic drugs” (“Psychedelic”). Many modern day music videos imitate the psychedelic experience in this way in an effort to take the listener/watcher out of reality and into another world. In their paper, “Traversing Immersion: The Psychedelic Experience in Recent Music Videos,” Jungsun Park and Kwangyun Wohn examine this occurrence. They write, “From mesmerizing visual effects to immersive narratives and finally to symbolic performances, the influence of psychedelic experience on music videos has shown how recent digital images can expand sensory perception and how the sense of immersion can be experienced more physically” (Park and Wohn 1). The elements and tools used to mimic this “psychedelic experience” can be investigated by analyzing music videos where it occurs.

In videos like the ones made for the songs “The less I know the better” by Tame Impala, and “Daydreaming” by Radiohead, this experience is represented through narrative (Park and Wohn). Characters are seen exiting reality and entering different worlds as they pass through a psychic experience. In the radiohead video, the main character is seen walking through a tunnel and then through doors upon doors upon doors. This obsessive loop alongside and the music go hand in hand to generate a sense of anxiety. This tension is finally resolved at the end of the video when he hikes up a mountain and crawls into a small cave where he falls asleep next to a fire. Here, looping—the focus point of the narrative—becomes a tool to build a feeling of anxiety.

As highlighted many times previously in this paper, visual effects are crucial to driving video art-music. In the year 2015, the band *Years & Years* put out a video for their song “desire.” It was made with a system of AI programs which enhanced existing footage to resemble that of a

hallucination or dream. The experience of being on hallucinogens was able to be replicated with technology and visual effects on top of music. This, alongside the music, generates a hypnotic feeling.

Performance is also a powerful element when it comes to representing the drug-state psyche. Bjork is a highly experimental artist who often delves into themes of transcendence and transformation. In her *Black Lake* (2015) music video she is seen walking through a dark valley in a daze, overcome with emotion as blue lava erupts around her and she continues to traverse Icelandic landscape. In this section of the paper Park and Wohn note: “all elements of her performance including the song itself, her voice, dance moves, gestures, adornments, and majestic archetypal landscape backdrops, evoke an overwhelmingly ritualistic and psychedelic atmosphere“ (Park and Wohn 5). Similarly to the Radiohead and Years & Years music videos, each performative component of this video, visual and musical, is aiming to evoke the same feeling when accompanying each other.

In every one of these examples, the narrative, visual effects, and performances are all successful in generating this “psychedelic experience.” Another key factor in their success, however, is their relevance to the music. As also witnessed in *Fantasia*, when music is first in the process, and visual art is used to enhance it, you feel as if you are entering another world. The 60s and 70s were eras where we witnessed the rise of both audiovisual art and psychedelic drug use. These occurrences influence modern video art, often in the form of music videos.

IV. The 1980s and MTV

Moving onto the 80s, with the rise of MTV, music entered the living rooms of every American household. What was once a niche genre had now entered the mainstream. In her paper, “Filming

Female Desire: Queering the Gaze of Pop Music Videos,” Cordelia Freeman writes that “Music videos cemented themselves as a key part of popular culture when MTV began showing back-to-back videos in 1981 and have since been hailed as 'pioneering,' 'powerful, if playful, postmodern art’” (Freeman). Artists started incorporating pre-recorded videos into live performances and the widespread televising of the music video medium created a new opportunity for artists to skyrocket to immediate fame (Rogers 5). Exposure was no longer limited to album, and concert ticket sales. During this era, Musicians realized the powerful potential of utilizing this new medium.

The power of a successful music video to help a song gain popular traction can be seen in the story of the collaborative production of the multimedia music video for “Take on Me” by A-ha. Though the song was eventually a smash hit, it was released unsuccessfully two—arguably three—times (“A-ha - The Making”). The band also released a music video with the original song releases which, too, was unsuccessful. Somehow A-ha was able to convince Warner Brothers that what they needed was a change of producer and music video director for the song to become a hit. And so they brought on Alan Tarney who approached production with the goal of taking everything that was in their original demo and making it better, staying true to the bands original vision.

Then, Jeff Ayeroff, a music executive at warner brothers records, came up with the idea for a music video. Once he was on the team, he brought on Steve barron, who directed the Billie Jean music video and animators Candace Reckinger and Michael Patterson. Barron shot the whole video and Patterson and Reckinger rotoscoped over it (“A-ha - The Making”). It took 16 weeks and 10,000 drawings for them to animate everything (“A-ha - The Making”). Similar to the way that Alan Tarney tried to stay true to the band’s original sound when producing the song, for the animation of the video, Aerof encouraged Reckinger and Patterson to stick to their personal,

sketchy styles instead of trying to replicate what was popular in magazines, as they originally planned to.

The combination of the song, the video's narrative, its filming, and the intricate drawings and visual effects of the animation made the music video impressive enough to stay relevant even 35 years later. This music video puts together all three of Jungsun Park and Kwangyun Wohn's elements of a powerful, "immersive" music video: narrative, visual effects, and performance. The amalgamation of these multisensory elements and the different creative minds all working to bring the song to life, allow the music and visual art to complement each other in an incredible way. This is what made this video so timelessly impressive and powerful.

V. Contemporary Use of Multidisciplinary Video Art-Music

In her book, *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music*, Holly Rogers states "Using the early technology, artists and composers could invite visitors into the heart of their work, allowing them to dictate the structure, audiovisuality, and trajectory of the video environment" (Rogers 2).

A modern example of this is the work of Japanese American Singer and director, Haley Kiyoko. As she directs all her own music videos, Kiyoko decides the style of the shoot, the storyline, the colors, overall aesthetic of the video, and more. With an unprecedented amount of control over her videos, she is able to focus on representing herself and others authentically. As a lesbian woman, a lot of this manifests into a focus on generating a platform for the queer gaze.

This term arises from the phrase "female gaze" which, as *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* defines it, means "the ways in which women and girls look at other females, at males, and at things in the world. This concerns the kinds of looking involved, and how these may

be related to identification, objectification, subjectivity, and the performance and construction of gender.”(Chandler and Munday). In applying this definition to the term “queer gaze,” we can realize its meaning as “the ways in which” queer people “look at other” queer people.

Though in recent years the music industry has started to become more diverse and inclusive, since the 70’s and 80’s, when people really started making music videos, there has been both an underrepresentation and problematic misrepresentation of lesbian sexuality in music videos. Lesbian imagery has been used to arouse male viewers with music videos like “All The Things She Said” by t.A.T.u, while queer female artists, like Tracy Chapman, are urged to focus on the performance of the song or telling a story that doesn’t show a female love interest (Freeman). In the research paper “Filming Female Desire: Queering the Gaze of Pop Music Videos,” Cordelia Freeman notes on the fact that “homosexual imagery is more vulnerable to censorship and rejection from mainstream playlists.” Kiyoko didn’t always direct her own videos. Some of her earlier music videos, like “this side of paradise,” depict her with a male love interest. But, once she directed and released her highly successful “Girls Like Girls” music video, she never stopped directing and only showed female love interests, focusing on authenticity and showing queer representation.

The power of being a multidisciplinary artist is that you have more tools—multisensory or not—at hand with which you may bring your artistic vision to life. In her research paper, Freeman notes on the importance of Kiyoko's multi discipline approach to her authenticity. She writes: “the fact that she directs her own music videos makes them more rooted in the reality of the lyrics of her music and the intentions behind the songs. They're very genuine and real, because she spends time making sure they accurately reflect the purpose of the song that she wrote.” As seen before in this paper, with Fantasia, the 70s inspired Psychedelic music videos, and the “Take On Me”

music video, this is a case where music being primary in the process of video-art making elevates it to be more “authentic” and transformative.

VI. Conclusion

As a singer and artist myself, I’ve always been fascinated with multisensory video art and music videos in general. When I was ten, me and my older sister would lay on her bed and watch Taylor Swift and One Direction music videos for hours. The love stories drew me in and the vocals made me want to sing their songs all day long. There were always those images that stuck in my head, like the bleeding cake in Taylor Swift’s “Blank Space” music video. As I grew older, my obsession with music videos grew from simply wanting to watch them, to wanting to make them. In sixth grade I made my advising class remake the music video for Backstreet Boys’ song “I Want It That Way.” In eighth grade I began songwriting. My writing process has always been visual inside. I songwrite based off of the story I am playing in my mind—describing the people and places I am picturing. I’ve always wanted to bring these images to life alongside my songs, as Haley Kiyoko does and works like Fantasia do. So, what tools can I take from my research into these eras of multisensory art? First, I should place music at the forefront so it doesn’t get lost in the video. I should use visuals, narrative, and performance to enhance it. And I should always make sure there is a balance between music and visual art.

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