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The Two Golden Ages of Animated Music Video

Music videos have been being made since the mid 1960s and had their breakthrough in the mid 1970s. Since then it has been the main marketing tool for breaking new pop and rock artists in the international market. When MTV opened on August 1st 1981 by showing the video *Video Killed the Radio Star* (Russel Mulcahy, 1979) it was prophetic programming. Within a couple of years MTV was the main source for an artist to reach the American market. The enormous success of Michael Jackson and Madonna in the 1980s was at least partly caused by their clever use of the music video medium. Since then almost all pop and rock artists have music videos. The prestige of the medium has been variable, since the first golden period in the 1980s to the subsequent loss of this prestige in the 1990s. However new dance music, rap and hip hop have continued to use it extensively, and there is a new attention given to the videos in the last ten years, both as an underground phenomenon, an internet medium and as traditional advertising for popular music.

While animated images to music have been made all through film history, the animated music video did not arrive until the mid 1980s with highlights like *Sledgehammer* by Peter Gabriel and *Take on Me* by A-ha. They initiated what I call the first golden age of animated music video. Many of the best and most celebrated music videos are animated. I believe there is a correlation between animation and music video quality. *Sledgehammer* and *Take on Me* are always high on lists of 'best music videos ever'. Many of the other videos on the top of such lists are animated as well. In the first part of this essay I will discuss the surprisingly late arrival of the animated music video and the quality of the animated music videos of the late 1980s.

In the 1990s, when the prestige of the music video format declined, the animated music videos virtually disappeared. In the last decade they have come back with magnificent animated music videos by directors and producers like Michel Gondry, Jonas Odell, Jonathan Dayton/Valerie Faris, Shynola and H5. The last part of this essay will discuss these new animated music videos and compare them with the 'classic' videos of the first golden age.

Using a triangle model for analyses of music videos (Strøm 1989, Strøm 1995) an argument will be made that both groups of golden age videos belong to the concept kind of music videos (as different from concert and collage videos) and where the directors (more than the artists or the record companies) are the major creative reason for the success of the videos.

Take on Me

As a Norwegian animation scholar with a long-time passionate interest for rock and pop music, the groundbreaking animated music video *Take on Me* by the Norwegian band A-ha is for me, the ultimate example of the peak performance of the mid 1980s music video boom. This video is an excellent example of how a well produced music video could push an unknown pop group (from Norway!) to the top of the hit lists all over the world.

The story begins at the graduation show at California Institute of the Arts in 1984 when Michael Patterson was screening his diploma work *Commuter* for an enthusiastic audience. With elegant use of the rotoscope technique Patterson had made a thrilling combination of live action and realistic drawn animation on paper. In the audience were representatives from Warner Brothers records and Senior Vice President of WB, Jeff Ayeroff, was so impressed by the film and

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the technique it was made in, that he agreed with Patterson to make a music video in the same technique when the right opportunity appeared. This happened when Warner Brothers was about to release the Norwegian band A-ha on the American (and international) market in 1985 (Marcussen 1985 p.73).

In 1983 the three members of A-ha moved from Oslo to London to be international rock stars. It took them two and a half years to reach No.1 on the Billboard list.¹ A first version of *Take on Me* had been recorded in the autumn 1984, but it didn't make it. When Ayeroff was visiting the London WB office in early 1985 he saw a photo of the band – three beautiful Scandinavian youngsters. His reaction is remembered as: “Who are these guys? You can't look like this! They are cartoon figures!” (Omdal 2004 p.28). A new version of *Take on Me* was produced and Ayeroff got the well established music video director Steve Barron to make the new video for the song. He teamed Barron up with Michael Patterson and one of the classic videos in music video history was born.

The *Take on Me* video is also an illustrative example of the marketing power of the new music channel MTV in the mid 1980s. Warner Brothers saw the marketing potential of the video and sent it to TV stations weeks before the record was released. MTV liked the video and put it into “heavy rotation”. It started to climb the MTV charts and had reached the top of the chart when Warner Brothers finally released the single. The public demand for the song was then well established, and the song went straight to the top of the single list.

Take on Me was exceptional as a music video in many ways. The song is a well written, performed and produced pop song, but it would hardly been such an international No.1 if it wasn't for the outstanding video. The realistic, almost photographic, animated pencil drawings were stunning visuals which the music video audience had rarely seen before.² It told a charming love story between an ordinary working class girl and her successful dream to be pop star Morten Harket's lover. It was told as a traditional narrative quite different from the collage-dominated dreamlike visuals that dominated the music videos at the time. And the efficient combination of live action and animation was closely thematically connected to the two worlds of dream and reality in the story. The video is a regular on most best of music video lists even today.

Steve Barron, together with Julien Temple, was the leading director at the London studio Limelight Film and Video. Barron also directed one of the other pioneering animated music videos of 1985: *Money for Nothing* for the British band Dire Straits. *Money for Nothing* is a comment on the central position MTV had achieved in the music world of the mid 1980s, and the video is an early example of computer animated images in a music video. Another Dire Straits video from the same year and album, *Brothers in Arms*, directed by Bill Mather, is another rotoscoped video where shots of the band playing and aerial live action tracking shots are made into impressive animated images. In 1986 the *Sledgehammer* video for Peter Gabriel premièred, and together with the three animated videos mentioned above, were the final breakthrough for the use of animation in music videos.

¹ October 9th 1985 *Take on Me* reached the top of the Billboard chart.

² Of course the rotoscope technique was patented by Max Fleischer already in 1915, but the way Patterson and Barron used it was new to the MTV audience.

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The Beginning of Music Video

Several days and events are often referred to as the beginning of music video. Nowadays August 1st 1981 when MTV premiered in the US is referred to as the final breakthrough for the medium. It is probably correct when we speak about when music video became part of American youth's daily life. But American bands like DEVO and Residents were well established music video stars years before MTV. Also Talking Heads made excellent videos before MTV.³ In the UK *Bohemian Rhapsody* (1975) by Queen is often referred to as the breakthrough for music video. This is the first time a video was given the honour as a main reason for the success of a pop song. The British TV stations did not want to show music videos on their pop shows like Top of the Pops. They believed that the audience wanted to “meet” their favourite artists “live” on TV, not to see a pre-produced film clip. *Bohemian Rhapsody* proved them wrong. When the song entered the British charts as no.30 and Queen was invited to the Top of the Pops studio, they refused to come and sent the video instead. Next week the song was in Top 5. Again Queen sent the video. Then it went to no.1 and stayed there for 9 weeks – the longest no.1 position by any artist since Paul Anka's *Diana* (9 weeks in 1957) and Slim Whitman's *Rosemarie* (11 weeks in 1955) (Gillett & Frith 1976).

Bohemian Rhapsody made by the TV producer Bruce Gowers, was not a typical video in the mid-1970s. It was a performance clip closely linked to the musical development in the song. The editing followed the singer Freddy Mercury and the other artists in the band through a magnificent play-back-performance. The peak of the video was the inventive use of new technology and video feedback during the opera sequence in the song. These technical experiments may seem dated today, but they made a huge impact in 1975.

Most popular videos from the 1970s were dominated by a rapid editing pace and non-narrative storytelling. The Australian music video director and experimental filmmaker Russel Mulcahy came to London in 1976 and was involved in music video production for the record company Virgin. His combination of experimental film and music video production had made him a career as a successful video director in Australia. In the UK he became the leading exponent for the rapid editing and non-narrative storytelling that characterised the typical collage music video of the late 1970s. These videos became hugely successful when New Wave and New Romantics artists like Duran Duran, Human League, Ultravox and XTC replaced the punk bands of the mid 1970s at the end of the decade. In 1979 Mulcahy made the video for *Video Killed the Radio Star* by the Buggles. In a few years the title of the song had become the truth with help from MTV and other music TV channels. *Video Killed the Radio Star* was the first music video ever screened on MTV.

In Australia, Scandinavia and other parts of the world where the artists behind the songs that were on top of the national hit lists were not easily accessible for the TV stations, special music videos shows were common in the early 1970s. Here music videos by major stars like Rolling Stones and Elton John were screened regularly as a substitute for the missing “live” performance in the TV studio. These videos were made mainly for the foreign market. But music video history goes even further back. In the mid 1960s popular bands like Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kinks and The Who made promo films to accompany their songs. In the US Doors were music video pioneers. Even Bob Dylan made a music video for *Subterranean Homesick Blues* (1965).

³ For an informing presentation of early music video and the beginning of MTV see Steven Levy's article in *Rolling Stone Magazine* no. 410 (Levy 1983).

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No animation

Around 1980 the music video was well established as the most important marketing tool for new popular music in Europe. At the same time the use of animation in these music videos was almost non-existent. This is highly surprising when we think about the strong connection there has been between popular music and animation through animation history. Since the beginning of sound film animated films made as illustrations to music has been made. That was the idea behind Disney's *Silly Symphonies*. This close connection is illustrated by the name of the parallel animation series the other studios made in US in the 1930s: *Merrie Melodies*, *Looney Tunes*, *Happy Harmonies*, *Color Rhapsodies*. The Fleischer studio made superb Betty Boop "music videos" for Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong in animated shorts like *Minnie the Moocher* (1932), *Snow White (St. James' Infirmary Blues)*, 1933) and *I'll Be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You* (1933). In Germany Oskar Fischinger made animated illustrations to popular jazz music of the day in several of his *Studie* films (1929-32). Norman McLaren's *Begone Dull Care* (1949) with music by Oscar Peterson is another example.

Even better examples are the animated TV-series about The Beatles (1965-1969) and The Archies (1968-1977). And of course George Dunning's feature *Yellow Submarine* (1968). In every episode of the TV-series and for every song in *Yellow Submarine* there are early examples of animated music videos, but they were never thought of as music videos, and neither are they today.

Seaside Woman (1978) is a striking example of the non-animation presence in late 1970s music video. This animated cartoon made by British animator Oscar Grillo, is a straight music animated music video made for Linda McCartney's record *Seaside Woman*. In 1978 it won the Golden Palm in Cannes as best short film, an award that will never go to a music video. To be considered as a music video will disqualify any short film from the Cannes competition. *Seaside Woman* won in 1978. Geoff Dunbar made a longer animated cartoon for Paul McCartney's *Rupert the Frog Song* (1984), a traditional narrative cartoon that ends with the song by McCartney. A shorter music video version was also made where live action shorts of McCartney playing is mixed with cartoon scenes from the film. Neither *Rupert the Frog Song* nor John Halas' excellent computer animated film illustrating Kraftwerk's *Autobahn* (1979) is made to promote the song. But *Seaside Woman* is a music video even though it was not considered so at the time.

Both DEVO and the Residents used animation in their early videos like *Beautiful World* (1981) and *It's a Man's Man's Man's World* (1984). The real pioneers of the animated music video were Annabelle Janckel & Rocky Morton. Their film *Accidents Will Happen* (1979) for Elvis Costello is often cited as the first animated music video. Janckel and Morton started their Cucumber Studios in the mid 1970s, and their impressive animated TV ads had won them solid exposure. But when they showed *Accidents Will Happen* at the Cambridge animation festival in 1979, the audience did not know how to react. The first animated music videos were looked upon as something between animated shorts and music videos. And this scepticism towards animated music videos did not disappear until *Take on Me*, *Money for Nothing* and *Sledgehammer* in the mid 1980s. With further animated music videos for artists like Tom Tom Club and Donald Fagen among others, Janckel and Morton had made the ground for the animated music video as a sub-genre around 1980. They pushed the medium still further in 1983, when they introduced the computer-generated VJ (video jockey) Max Headroom for the UK's Channel 4.

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Why so late?

There are probably several reasons why animation did not play a part in music video history before the mid 1980s. The animated music videos that did exist were considered Art. A real compliment for animation as an art form, but still hard to understand when we look at the central place animation has in the music videos of today. This is a parallel to the early animated advertising films that especially flourished in Germany and other Central European states in the 1920s and 1930s. In the tradition of the Bauhaus movement, advertising and Fine Art lived closely together. Pioneering abstract animators and Fine Artists like Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Lotte Reiniger and Oskar Fischinger made advertising films using the same aesthetics as they used in their experimental art films. Fischinger's *Kreise* (*Circles*, 1933) and *Muratti greift ein* (*Muratti intervenes*, 1934) were both early colour experiments using the new technology Gasparcolor. They are considered early examples of colour animation art. At the same time they were advertising films for advertising company Tolirag and the Muratti cigarette brand. This well established connection between animation, music and advertising as Art can be one reason why the early animated music videos were not considered music videos proper. As for the entertainment aspect of animated cinema, Disney's *Silly Symphonies* and *Fantasia* had placed the convergence of animation and music as a natural combination in the minds of the cinema audience.

The very early music videos had other inspirations than the combination of animation and music. The Beatles, The Stones, The Kinks and The Who wanted to make small live action films to accompany their music. The Kinks and The Who were inspired by slapstick comedies in their *Dead End Street* (1966) and *Happy Jack* (1967). The Beatles were inspired by experimental films and psychedelia in *Strawberry Fields Forever* (1967). The Beatles were not very happy with the Beatles cartoon series, and they never really actively participated in the production of *Yellow Submarine* (1968). When their musical universe was to be transferred to film they preferred surrealistic live action combined with a cinema variété approach in *A Hard Day's Night* (Richard Lester 1964) and funny gags in *Help!* (Richard Lester, 1965).

A more practical reason for the lack of animation in the music videos around 1980 was the need to make the videos quickly. The videos should be ready when the song was ready for release. And to make an impressive animated music video, more labour and longer production time was needed. Most important though was the need to show the artists themselves in the videos. Around 1980 music video showed its potential in breaking new artists to a wide audience. These new New Wave and New Romantics artists were also very conscious about the look and their visual image. The 'Art of Posing' and the 'Art of Nightclubbing' were important factors in artist image building around 1980. And for this purpose, music video was perfect. As Nick Rhodes from Duran Duran has said: "Video was for us like stereo was for Pink Floyd" (Henke 1984 p. 26). To sell this image, live action was better suited than animation. But this was before A-Ha and Take on Me.

The First Golden Age

Music video was at the height of its popularity in the mid 1980s. The record companies put big money into video production. Artists like Michael Jackson and Madonna were becoming huge stars partly because of well planned and ambitious use of music videos. Established film directors were engaged to make prestigious videos. John Landis and Martin Scorsese made videos for Michael Jackson. Derek Jarman made several videos for The Smiths. Steven Spielberg made a video for Cyndi Lauper. New computer technology opened new possibilities for film and video

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production. These techniques were tested out in prestigious music videos. A good example is Jeff Stein's special effects video for *The Cars You Might Think* (1984) that won as best video of the year in the MTV awards. With higher budgets, more prestige and longer production time it was time for the animated music video. The basic purpose of all music videos is to sell the music and the image of the pop stars. They are advertising films where the product to be bought is the soundtrack of the advertising film. In the 1980s this fits well with the commodity acceptance of the postmodern culture understanding. These were good times for a new product which fit so nicely in postmodern life.⁴

Among the many excellent animated music videos from the mid 1980s are several videos made by Portland based animator Jim Blashfield made in his typical cut-out technique. Most famous is perhaps *And She Was* (1985) for Talking Heads. But he also made music videos for Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel & Kate Bush, Michael Jackson and Tears for Fears in the second half of the 1980s. Zbigniew Rybczynski made a dozen groundbreaking videos in his matte single frame technique in the late 1980s. Aardman Animations are best known for *Sledgehammer*, but Peter Lord's *My Baby Just Cares for Me* (1987) for Nina Simone is another masterpiece. Ralph Bakshi makes the cartoon video *Harlem Shuffle* for Rolling Stones. And the experimental animator Robert Breer made *Blue Monday* 1988 (1988) for New Order. All these videos are made by strong directors in their personal animation style. It is typical for most animated music videos are that they are strongly defined by the visual ideas and animation film careers of their directors. Peter Gabriel is among the most visually concerned rock artists, he's an artist that has put a lot of prestige into his music videos. At the same time are they very different in the way they look. It seems like Gabriel has chosen directors for his videos from the visual record and personal work of the directors.

Academic interest

With the huge attention given to the music videos in the 1980s, academia started to pay attention to the new medium. Special attention was given to the fresh editing and non-narrative storytelling that represented something new to the television language. A serious media scholar such as John Fiske describes the music videos as "visual orgasm" in his enthusiasm for the revolutionary TV language they were told in (Fiske 1986 p.75). The music videos fitted perfectly into the post-modern theories of the time. American film scholar E. Ann Kaplan published her book *Rocking Around the Clock on MTV, music video and post-modernism* in 1987 (Kaplan 1987).

Marsha Kinder wrote her famous article *Music Video and the Spectator* in 1984 (Kinder 1984). In this article Kinder presents her three main categories of music video. Also E. Ann Kaplan tries to arrange the different types of videos into distinct categories, but Kinder's categories were already established as the standard reference when I published my book on music video in 1989. According to Marsha Kinder music videos in the early 1980s can be divided into three main categories of videos: "performance videos", "narrative videos" and "dreamlike visuals". The first two categories are dominated either by the artist performing the song in the video, or they are traditional storytelling small films based on classic narrative style. The third category which was the most common around 1980 was the collage-dominated non-narrative videos like the ones pioneered by Russel Mulcahy. Kinder see these videos as parallels to the non-

⁴ E. Ann Kaplan's study *Rocking around the Clock: music television, postmodernism and consumer culture* (Routledge, London: 1988) is one of several books and articles discussing music videos in the light of postmodern theory in the late 1980s.

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coherent narration and images we experience in our dreams. It is this last category that interests Kinder the most. It is also such “dreamlike visuals” that makes John Fiske draw parallels to orgasms.

Most of the videos from the early 1980s fall neatly into Kinder’s categories. Usually the videos do not strictly belong to just one of the categories, most videos have signs of all three. But usually their focus is put to the side of one of the three main categories. Many of the music video classics from the mid 1980s on the other hand are difficult to put into Kinder’s formula. Huge video successes as Kevin Godley and Lol Crème’s *Cry* (1985) for their own song and Mick Haggerty’s *The Old Man down the Road* for John Fogerty (1984) do not fit into the form. *Cry* shows a long row of faces which is dissolved into each other in one long take. Also the Fogerty video is shot in one take. It follows the speaker cable from the loudspeaker along a road, under cars, through the woods and all the way to John Fogerty’s amplifier at the end of the cable. Many of the best videos from the mid 1980s are composed around such visual concepts. They are neither performance, narrative nor dreamlike visuals.

Most animated music videos do not fit easily into Marsha Kinder’s categories. The A-Ha video *Take on Me* is told in a quite traditional narrative form with a beginning, middle and an end. A-Ha is performing in the video and it is unclear if the story is dream or reality. Probably it is both. And when it comes to Kinder’s categories it has elements of all three. But the most striking element in the A-Ha video is the use of rotoscoped animation. And as I have discussed in the opening part of this article, the conceptual animation idea was fundamental for the whole video. To be able to include videos like those above in a model of categorisation, Kinder’s model has to be adjusted.

Three Triangles

I have made my own model for categorisation of music videos that is based on Kinder’s categories. As Kinder I divide the music videos into three basic categories which I place in a triangle model. I also include two more triangles in this model in an attempt to describe content and structural form in music videos (Strøm 1989: 88ff, Strøm 1995).

While it is common to talk about image and sound when we discuss film and TV, I find it more correct to say that the music video speaks through three different channels: text, music and image. Most attention has been given to the visuals when academics have discussed the music video medium. In later years an interest in the music video as a medium that combines music and images arrived. The phenomenologist Kevin Williams argues that it is impossible to separate the images from the music: “...sights and sound interpenetrate creating a third expressive domain that I call musical visuality: Sight becomes musical and what you listen to is visualized. Seeing, then, becomes nonlogocentric experience, a sensuous (indeed, cross-sensual), tactile, sonorous, and visual activity.” He describes this activity as “the synaesthetic interplay and communicative interpenetration of music with vision, sight with sound, whereby visual images ‘dance’ to music and sound is manifest visually.” (Williams 2003 p.13).

For analysing music videos it will still be useful and even necessary to separate the three channels text, music and image. The basic element for any video is the song itself. That is the content the video is going to sell. The song itself consists usually of both a text and music and both can be influential when the visuals are designed. For many artists the lyrics of the songs are essential. But in many music videos the lyrics drown in visuals and music. In Bill Konersman’s video *Sign’O the Times* by Prince (1987) this problem is solved by making the text of the song the

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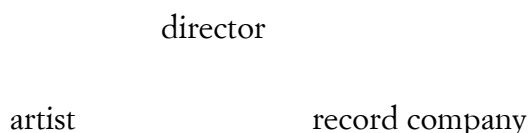
images of the video. This animated video is an excellent example of a concept video. It is also a good example of how text, music and visuals work together as a kind of synaesthesia, a kind of musical visuality that even includes the lyrics.



What Kinder calls “performance” videos I call “concert”, what Kinder calls “dreamlike visuals” I call “collage”. Kinder’s last category “narrative” is in many ways the opposite of what I call collage. In number they are very few. Traditional narratives are in a way what music video is not. Music videos of the late 1970s and early 1980s are a reaction against classic narration. It works as an alternative to “collage” but I find the category a bit narrow. To include the visual concepts by the videos discussed above, I call my third category “concept”. A straight classic narration like in *Happy Jack* by The Who (1967) will then be a concept and belong to the same category as a one shot video following a red guitar cable like in John Fogerty’s *The Old Man Down the Road* (1984).

There is a lack of logic in my three category model. When narration is included in the concept category, aren’t then both concert and collage videos concepts in a similar way? What I like about these categories is that they describe well the videos included in the respective categories and most important I find that this map correlates well with the actual video scenery. In my opinion there are three main types of music video: videos based on the artists performing, videos told as a non-narrative collage and videos structured around another visual, often cinematic, concept. Very few videos are plain examples of one of these categories; most videos include elements from all three. But usually it is quite easy to decide what category a video belongs most to. And mostly all animated music videos belong to the concept category. The very decision to make an animated music video is often a key decision in the development of the visual side of the video.

The first triangle is saying something about WHAT the video is all about. The content of the video is told through text, music and image. The second triangle is about HOW the video is told. In 1995 I added a third triangle about WHY the video look the way it does. The final look of the A-Ha video *Take on Me* is dependent on three different individuals/institutions that all has had major influence on the final product. Firstly it is the artists themselves who performs the song, secondly it is the record company responsible for the production and last but not least it is the director that is responsible for the visual side of the video. This gives us this last triangle:



The artist, the director and the record company have different interests in how the finished video shall look. The record company wants to sell as many records as possible. It wants the artist to be as attractive as possible to as big an audience as possible. The artist can feel this as a threat to his or her credibility as a serious artist. Bruce Springsteen was for a long time reluctant to make music videos, and when he had to do them, many of them were performing videos like *Dancing in*

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the Dark (Brian De Palma, 1984) made as close as possible to a documentary from a concert. Every effort is made to make this video look like real concert footage, the goal is to let the spectators feel they are watching a real live concert, but Springsteen and his band is miming to a play back of the studio recording that was released on the single record. The director is concerned about his own career as a visual filmmaker. In a very broad sense I think it is to some extent correct to say that when the record company wants to make the video as commercial and attractive to the buying audience as possible, the artist will very often go for the performance aspect. The video director, who very often considers himself a filmmaker, will try to create a visual concept for the video that makes it interesting as a filmic artistic expression. The typical animated music video is very dependent on the artistic choices of the director. The classic videos of the mid 1980s can also in most cases be categorised as director driven concept videos.

In *Bohemian Rhapsody* Queen are singing 'Is this the real life?/ Is this fantasy?'. Is a music video reality or fantasy? From being advertising made to sell popular songs, music videos very quickly became attractive TV programming speaking to a large audience. As music TV entertainment, they are real. They are even sold as separate goods in music stores as DVDs. The first video collection to be sold on the commercial market was DEVO's *The Men Who Make the Music* from 1979.

As advertising the music videos are just as real as any advertising films. But as portraits of popular artists, many of them stand out as small documentaries. Many of the most popular direct cinema films of the 1960s were music documentaries reaching a wide audience because of the popularity of the artists they were portraying. *Lonely Boy* (Paul Anka, 1962) and *Don't Look Back* (Bob Dylan, 1966) are good examples. A collection of music videos by a popular band/artist serves some of the same purposes for the fan wanting a closer look at his or her idols. Is it the real world or just fantasy? For the fan, it is a world where the fan can get closer to the hero. The girl in *Take on Me* is crossing the border from the 'real' world where she is reading the comic book about A-ha to the animated fantasy world of A-ha. But also A-ha performs in two different worlds in the video; the cartoon fantasy world and the 'real' world where they are performing the song in play back. For the video audience, the girl is our representative in our meeting with A-ha. But still it is all a fantasy world selling an experience about popular artists to an audience who are ready to spend its money on popular culture.

Does animation make a music video more realistic or not? I don't think it matters as much as one should believe. In the article *The Animated Documentary* (Strøm 2003) I have argued that an animated film can be just as "true" towards the subject it portrays as a live action documentary. What matters is if the audience believes you or not. Almost all music videos are illustrations of the song they are advertising. If you illustrate the song with a play back performance, some live action shots showing an attractive location, a dance floor or some animated images does not make the video more or less "real". If you are an ambitious musician who wants an artistic music video that fits with your credibility as an artist, to choose animation may be a good choice. To work with an ambitious director to achieve this, may be another smart move. The music video history is full of such successful collaborations. Many of them have been made in the last ten years.

Intermission and New Dawn

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s the prestige of the music video was falling. Every new pop song needed a music video for its promotion, but the excitement for the medium was gone. Budgets went down and directors with artistic ambitions found other outlets for their art. The concept videos were almost gone. The most vivid music scene was the rap and hip hop scene, and

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the videos made for these new artists were based on performance and dance. In the more established rock and pop scene the rare stunning and inventive music video were few. Even on MTV the heyday of the music videos was over. Saul Austerlitz writes in his book *Money for Nothing*: “If you turned on MTV any time starting in the mid 1990s a striking thing would have happened: in all likelihood, the channel was not showing a video” (Austerlitz 2007 p.183).

However changes were happening in the late 1990s. The rapid development of the computer technology had made it both cheaper and more accessible to make videos. The data technology had also opened up for a convergence between different artistic expressions. The Apple computer became the core of any creative youngster. The boundaries between music and visual arts were getting blurred. Electronica, contemporary music, jazz and rock met in new inventive music. Visuals were added to the music experience both in videos and to the stage performances, and a new generation of music video directors were coming out of film schools and art colleges. The musicians and video directors considered themselves more like artists than entertainers. Their credibility was rising and more attention was given to design. Special magazines like the music magazine *The Wire* and the film/video magazine *RES* wrote about the new scene. Lev Manovich discussing the aesthetics of this new generation of internet filmmakers declared: “This generation does not care if their work is called art or design.” (Manovich 2006 p.209).

New outlets for music video distribution also developed this change. One of Saul Austerlitz major points in his new music video history *Money for nothing* (2007) is that today you hardly find music videos on MTV any more. The best way to watch music videos in 2007 is over the internet on special sites like YouTube, Yahoo!, Google Video and MySpace. The new technology has also made the production facilities to make music videos much more accessible. Young filmmakers and musicians of today can make their own videos and reach a huge audience with their small music films. A good example is the Norwegian artist Lasse Gjertsen whose videos are seen by millions on MTV. Music video is there as an underground movement.

Matt Hanson celebrates the new age of music video in his book *Reinventing Music Video*: “I can’t believe that music video isn’t a more studied area, because the work captured within these pages is awe-inspiring. And currently the form stands in a tremendously exciting time – with the advent of the video-enabled iPod, the PSP, and other portable video playback devices, music video is going through a transitional time of upheaval and mayhem – always nice to watch” (2006 p.7).

At the same time a new generation of musicians with huge interest in their visual performances including the production of their videos has entered the scene. Artists like Björk, Beck, Röyksopp, Air, Daft Punk and Chemical Brothers are among the many top international stars that have made fabulous videos over the last 10 years. The new generation of music video directors includes Michel Gondry, Spike Jonze, Chris Cunningham and Jonathan Dayton/Valerie Faris. With these directors the concept video is back. A good example is Michel Gondry’s one shot street ballet, filmed from the roof of a skyscraper, in *Mad World* (2004) by Michael Andrews and Gary Jules. According to Saul Austerlitz: “Never satisfied with simplicity where complexity would do, Gondry’s music-video work embraced the tangled, gnarled aesthetic of modernism, alleviating the form’s fatal seriousness with a soupçon of Gallic humour and a twist of sheer oddity” (Austerlitz 2007:163f).

A new serious interest in music videos is born. Books are again written on the subject (Feineman & Reiss 2000), Williams (2003), Vernallis (2004), Fraser (2005), Hanson (2006), Austerlitz (2007). In magazines in a wide variety of fields, music videos and their directors are

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being discussed. DVDs devoted to different video directors are being released.⁵ Music videos wins prizes at film festivals, more and more festivals include a separate music video category in the programs. And the music video directors (Spike Jonze, Michel Gondry, Jonathan Glazer) are becoming stars and are offered feature film projects like the leading directors Russel Mulcahy, Steve Barron and Julian Temple in the 1980s.

The Second Golden Age

In this revitalised music video scene there is room for a new boom of animated music video. While animation was absent in the early development of music video, it is at the core of this new vitalisation of the medium. In the convergence between music and visuals the computer and the animated image are central. And a new generation of animated music video directors and producers are entering the scene.

One of the few studios producing quality animated music videos in the early 1990s was the London company Bermuda Shorts. Run Wrake's video for *Music for Babies* by Howie B (1986) is one of their famous videos. Bermuda has been joined by other London companies like Shynola that is well known for their work with artists like Radiohead and Beck. In Paris the company H5 has made creative graphic videos for Röyksopp, Audiolibulys and Massive Attack. Jonas Odell and Filmtecknarna in Stockholm have been very successful with animated videos for Franz Ferdinand and U2. Jonathan Faris and Valerie Dayton are best known for their videos for Red Hot Chilli Pepper's *Californication* album (2001). Also Jim Blashfield is back with a new animated music video *Pancreas* (2006) for Weird Al' Yankovic. Many of Michel Gondry's videos are animated as well. Animation plays an important part in several of his videos for Björk. In *Fell in Love with a Girl* (2002) for White Stripes he tells the love story with the help of animated Lego bricks. In another animated video for White Stripes, *The Hardest Button to Button* (2003) he moves drum kits around in a stunning stop motion ballet. In *Walkie Talkie Man* (2005) for New Zealand band Stereogram the whole video is knitted.⁶

In *Reinventing Music Video. Next Generation Directors, Their Inspiration and Work* Matt Hanson presents 15 new directors that are inspired by Jonze and Gondry and their contemporaries, and who represent the new blood in the music video art form of today (Hanson 2006). On the list we find animators like Bessy & Combe, Ben Dawkins, Hideaki Motoki, Jonas Odell and +Cruz. Most of the other directors presented in the book are also using animation in their sophisticated modern music videos.

In his description of these new directors and their videos Matt Hanson gives special attention to the animated image. It seems to him, that the typical visual image of the modern "quality" music video image is animated: "The best videos can appropriate myriad animated styles from 3D, motion graphics, computer gaming, and VJing to vivid effect." He continues by giving credit to the concept videos: "Yet these videos can also be simplistic, stark visual haiku – bringing forth the essences of things, tracing wondrously pure forms." (Hanson 2006 p.7).


As in the mid 1980s these new music video directors are building names for themselves as music video director stars among the connoisseurs. They make videos for a wide range of different artists and bands. Common to the artists though is their visual consciousness and their excitement in making music videos that stand out and fulfils their artistic ambitions. Still the

⁵ E.g. video collections released in the *Directors Label Series* by Palm Video in 2003–2005.

⁶ For more examples and information on videos from this Second Golden Age, see Strøm 2006. At the Zagreb Animation Festival in 2006 I programmed a total of 50 animated music videos under the title *The Best Animated Music Videos...Ever*.

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videos bear the mark of their directors more than the musicians. It seems like the artists choose the director for his visual style more than the directors chose artists from their music. Typically most of these videos are more and more being considered as a piece of art signed by the directors than just another music video for the pop or rock artist.

As in the first Golden Age also the videos of the Second Golden Age are director driven concept videos. And as in the mid 1980s many of the very best music videos of today are animated. 

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