Resistance Gazes in Recent Music Videos

BRAD OSBORN

Abstract. A number of recent music videos by women subvert the male gaze (Mulvey) through a number of techniques I construe as “resistance gazes.” These videos subvert the hypersexualization, infantilization, objectification, and victimization regularly seen in music videos using imagery that resonates with broader cultural movements such as #metoo and #timesup.

Laura Mulvey first defined the male gaze in 1975 as a dominant trope in film and media in which women are rendered as objects. She states:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. . . . In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote a to-be-looked-at-ness.¹

Many scholars have adapted and built upon this original conception of the male gaze, particularly in relation to music video.² Lisa Lewis asserts that early videos on MTV relied on “coded images of the female body and conventionally positioning girls and women as objects of male voyeurism.”³ Ann Kaplan devotes an entire chapter of her 1987 book to understanding “how the televisual apparatus constructs the female body” on MTV.⁴

Writing more recently, Matthew Bannister identifies particular camera techniques associated with the male gaze in music video, claiming that

[t]here is a fetishization of particular gendered subjects: face and body are presented to the audience as pleasurable objects through the use of big close-ups, soft lighting, and a shallow focus to minimize distracting background, thus constructing the object of the gaze as spectacular, passive, emotionally receptive, isolated/removed from the world.⁵

Like Bannister, Jennifer Hurley broadens the subject of the gaze to all genders,⁶ suggesting that this practice affects “not only girls and women who are actively constructing their gendered subjectivity in music video’s ‘gaze.’”

In this article I build upon these and other post-Mulveyian perspectives on the male gaze and how it might be adapted to the specific context of music video. I begin by identifying four specific ways in which the male gaze regularly affects women in music video: hypersexualization, infantilization, objectification, and the victim trope. After providing clear examples for each of these in the following paragraphs, I will argue that many recent music videos, especially by women and/or LGBTQ+ artists, subvert these and other facets of the male gaze through a number of techniques I construe as resistance gazes.
The Male Gaze in Music Video

In the video for Miley Cyrus’s “Wrecking Ball,” the viewer sees Cyrus “displayed” (in Mulvey’s parlance) as a hypersexualized object. In shots such as that seen in Figure 1, the camera focuses on her naked body—especially her breasts and buttocks—in a manner that resonates with Jacqueline Warwick’s assessment of the male gaze in music video, in which “spectators are compelled to look at images in film from the point of view of heterosexual men, regardless of their actual gender identities and sexual preferences.”

Figure 2 shows an infamous example of infantilization in Oingo Boingo’s 1981 video for “Little Girls.” The video’s protagonist (played by the band’s lead singer, Danny Elfman) proclaims his love for these “little girls” as he engages in sexually harassing behavior with several young women. Their youth is emphasized visually through costume: including a girl scout uniform, pajama party, and a young woman licking a lollipop in a white dress with her hair in pigtails with ribbons. Their small stature is also depicted visually, as the women are always smaller than the protagonist. Toward the end of the video, one of the women actually shrinks down to fit inside the protagonist’s hand. The protagonist’s facial expressions and general countenance depict him as a predator and the “little girls” as his prey.

A more contemporary example of infantilization occurs throughout Girls’
Generation’s video for “Gee.” Writing about this video, Soyoung Kim states, “Female artists are often depicted as a hybrid between children and sexually developed adults, ... essentially infantilizing mature adult women, making them seem like utterly clueless children who must depend on older men to teach them about love.”8 The musicians in Girls’ Generation are not only infantilized—they are also objectified. In Figure 3, we see that the women are literally treated as objects (mannequins), carried by a young man around a store.9

The victim trope, in which women are helpless to defend themselves from male aggressors, constitutes a fourth (though probably not final) way in which the male gaze acts upon women in music video. The narrative action in The Weeknd’s “False Alarm” is divided between a bank heist, a police shootout, and the capture of the helpless-looking young woman shown in Figure 4. The young woman is dragged through a variety of violent situations: she is shot at, handcuffed, physically abused, and thrown in and out of moving vehicles, all of which we see from the point of view (POV) perspective of one of the criminals, played by The Weeknd. Even at the end of the video, when all of the criminals have been killed and The Weeknd lays dying, the young woman has no agency. The Weeknd’s last act is to give her the key to her handcuffs, suggesting that even though he is near death, he still has more power and agency over the young woman, the victim.

This article is ultimately not about the male gaze in music video;10 rather, it aims to highlight the steps women and LGBTQ+ folk have taken to resist it. In the rest of this article, I will discuss some recent music videos that subvert the male gaze through a number of techniques that I summarize as resistance gazes.
Resistance Gazes

Resistance gazes act in opposition to hypersexualization, infantilization, objectification, victimization, or other facets of the male gaze. They are most often found in music videos created by women and/or LGBTQ+ artists. Lisa Lewis claims that women’s resistance to dominant male narratives (what she calls “the female address”) arose as a separate textual practice shortly after MTV began, citing Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” (1983) as a watershed video.¹¹ Murali Balaji identifies music videos as sites of resistance for Black women particularly, highlighting Melyssa Ford’s dancing as a way to resist “being objectified and controlled” throughout Mystikal’s “Shake Ya Ass.”¹² Shanara Reid-Brinkley similarly finds narratives of resistance throughout Black women’s performance in music video, further problematizing the hostility toward said resistance she witnesses in online chat boards.¹³

In the following sections, I will attempt to build on this scholarship by highlighting several specific cases of women’s and LGBTQ+ folks’ resistance to the male gaze in recent music videos, providing visual and musical analysis to bolster my claims.

Resisting Hypersexualization

A common depiction of lesbian relationships and female pansexuality in music video and other media evokes tropes of hypersexualization and objectification by focusing on sex as a realized male fantasy rather than a representation of love and relationships. Two different music videos with the same title—Jill Sobule’s “I Kissed a Girl” (1995) and Katy Perry’s “I Kissed a Girl” (2008)—both illustrate this clearly. In Sobule’s video, the budding relationship that develops between her character and the neighbor, both of whom are married to men, is impaired by infantilization. The cartoonish setting, bright colors, and fantastical dream scenarios, along with shots of Sobule playing guitar in her bedroom and sitting in an oversized chair (Figure 5a), ultimately present the women’s relationship as fantasy. Perry’s video uses hypersexualization and objectification, which, alongside the lyrics “I kissed a girl and I liked it / don’t mean I’m in love tonight,” subjects the relationship to the male gaze (Figure 5b). The comparatively conspicuous sexualization in Perry’s video might say just as much about censorship in the mid-1990s; Sobule’s video either did not, or could not, do this in 1995 and get played on MTV.

“Girls Like Girls,” written and codirected by Hayley Kiyoko, begins with a gratuitous panning shot up a young woman’s bare legs all the way up to her bloodied face (Figures 6a and 6b, respectively). In depicting a woman as both hypersexualized and as a
victim, it effectively calls attention to two facets of the male gaze but does so en route to becoming a video that subverts that gaze in nearly every way.14

The bike-riding woman (Stephanie Scott) goes to a party to meet another young woman she has a crush on (Kelsey Chow). Both women are verbally and physically abused by Chow’s boyfriend. Taking respite from these assaults, the two women retreat to the bathroom to paint each other’s nails and lips. Figures 7a and 7b display a resistance to the hypersexualization of women, particularly that seen in same-sex love scenes.15 In Figure 7a Chow applies lipstick to Scott’s lips while Scott gazes into Chow’s eyes and at her lips. Likewise, Figure 7b, from the couple’s first passionate embrace, is shot entirely from the shoulders up, with soft backlighting emphasizing the women’s hair, eyes, lips, and hands. This resonates with Natalie Wilson’s praise for the 2015 film Carol, directed by Todd Haynes, which allows mainstream viewers to “see love and desire between women realistically rendered.”16

Another form of resistance to hypersexualization occurs through conscious reversals that depict men as objects while women gaze upon them. Jennifer Lopez’s “I Luh ya Papi” (see Figure 8) does this as an exercise in daydreaming. The video unfolds as a dream sequence in which Lopez imagines what it would be like if men were objectified in music video (all while her agent pitches her sexist ideas for the “real” music video). Subverting, or even reversing, gender norms is an example of what Lewis identifies as “access signs,” one of her two forms of the female address regularly seen and heard in music videos.17 Matthew Bannister has identified similar “reversal” techniques in a number of popular music biopics, stating that “in these films, the gaze is reversed and the male lead is eroticized, sensitized, and his career or life revealed as dependent on the agency of female characters.”18

Sofya Wang’s approach in “Boys Aside” (2017) is arguably more effective for its lack of hypothetical framing. Silver Michaelsen draws our attention to the fact that the men in this video are shown wearing far more
revealing clothing than the women, who appear fully clothed (even in the pool) and in positions of power (driving the car). Timbral analysis of the video’s opening reinforces this reversal of traditional gender norms. The video opens with only tinny, trebley sounds played from a small pink radio. Other fluffy, soft, pink items are shown (ice cream, a kitten), until the camera pulls back to reveal that they decorate the room of an effeminate man. When the low synth-bass and powerful beat finally drop (0:28), the camera shows Wang standing confidently in the center of the frame, singing seductively to a woman about setting “all of those other boys aside.”

Subverting the Victim Trope

As Murali Balaji notes, it can be difficult to disentangle empowerment and objectification in hypersexualized music videos. Balaji seeks to find “sites of self-definition by Black women in music videos while accounting for the cultural industries that reproduce and exploit Black women’s sexuality.” Rihanna’s “Bitch Better Have My Money” (2015) is an instructive case in this regard. While the camera focuses on Rihanna’s physical body—often minimally clothed—the video also depicts her as the locus of control. Rihanna kidnaps a well-to-do white woman, holding her for ransom against a philandering husband who

Figure 7a and 7b. Realistic depictions of love in “Girls Like Girls” (2015, 2:23, 4:17).

Figure 8. Hypersexualization reversal in Jennifer Lopez, “I Luh ya Papi” (2014, 2:51).
owes her (Rihanna) money. Instead of placing Rihanna in the role of the victim, the video shows her as the perpetrator of physical violence. Her vocal delivery throughout the track is categorized by exceptionally tense vocal folds vibrating aperiodically, just on the brink of a scream, which, as Kate Heidemann has shown, listeners are likely to mimetically associate with power and/or rage.

The video’s final scene (see Figure 9) shows Rihanna luxuriating in a chest of the man’s cash, covered not in her own blood, but in his. This sense of agency does more than subvert the victim trope, it also helps us see Rihanna’s hypersexualized body as a site of self-empowerment rather than objectification. However, in merely reversing the dominant subject positions, Rihanna’s video falls into a similar pitfall that Marc Lafrance identifies in P!nk’s “Please Don’t Leave Me” (2009) in that it “[confirm[s] rather than contest[s] prevailing stereotypes of gender, sexuality, and ability.”

Both of the male characters in “Bitch Better Have My Money” fall victim to Rihanna’s dominance owing to their objectification of women. Instead of paying Rihanna the money he owes, the philandering husband (Mads Mikkelsen) is seen on a bed covered in money with two women. In the final scene, which implies (but never shows) his murder, Rihanna is seen selecting her weapon dressed in a transparent and revealing outfit, suggesting that her sexuality is as much a weapon as the knife in her hand (Figure 10a). The other male character is a policeman (Eric Roberts) whose attention is diverted from the kidnapping as Rihanna and her posse smile and wave at him (Figure 10b). By flaunting an air of availability, Rihanna is able to subvert the male officer’s power and veil her criminal activities through a projected innocence.

Figure 11 returns to the climactic scene of “Girls Like Girls.” This extended narrative requires a parenthetical audio insert, heard from 3:29–3:44 in the video, that is not heard in the album version. At 2:55 we hear what should be the dramatic swell from the bridge into the final chorus, which is about to be
timed perfectly with the couple’s first kiss. But just before it drops, Chow’s abusive boyfriend pulls Scott by the hair, throwing her to the ground (3:29). The attenuated low frequencies of the audio-insert section, along with a diegetic high-frequency ring, mimic the effects of a concussive blow to the head. This continues until 3:44, at which point Scott retaliates against the abusive boyfriend with a punch to the head that is timed perfectly as an anacrusis back into the final chorus; just as the final chorus’s beat “drops,” she drops him.

Using a low-angle shot, typically associated with machismo power in rap and nü-metal videos of the late 1990s, Kiyoko emphasizes the strength in Scott’s physical body as well as her drive to protect Chow as she delivers blow after blow to the abusive boyfriend. Kiyoko subverts the victim trope by depicting Scott not as the victim of physical violence but as a woman capable of self-defense. The video ends with a recapitulation of the opening shot, but now we see Scott smiling, brandishing her facial wound as a battle scar. We now understand the opening scene as a prolepsis that withholds a crucial element of the plot until the video’s ending,

Matriarchal and Yonic Imagery

Janelle Monae’s “Pynk” depicts women not as victims, but as active participants in a jubilant celebration of the female body. CGI dust (rather than wheels) under the car at the video’s onset immediately situates the viewer in an Afrofuturist utopia, in which an abandoned hotel in the desert is occupied entirely by strong Black women. These futuristic shots are curiously paired throughout the video with “throwback” shots (e.g. 2:44) that utilize the 4:3 aspect ratio and tracking lines associated with VHS technology,

In Monae’s vision of the future, women can and do celebrate all different body types. A low-angle shot in which a pink baseball bat dangles between a woman’s legs (1:17) also demonstrates Monae’s commitment to trans women. This phallic shot stands out because the rest of the video delights in stylized depictions of the female reproductive system. Figure 12 shows the famous “vagina pants” seen throughout the video.

Other yonic elements featured include the inside of a seashell (1:07), a finger poking the inside of a donut (3:47), and ice melting on a sliced grapefruit (3:49). The video description reads: “Pynk is a brash celebration of creation. Self love. Sexuality. And pussy power! ‘Pynk’ is the color that unites us all, for pink is the color found in the deepest and darkest nooks and crannies of humans everywhere . . . ‘Pynk’ is where the future is born.”

I read this statement as not only a celebration of empowerment, but also a meditation on how our shared color of flesh unites all humans. Such a description further celebrates the female reproductive system by linking this unity to
the "darkest nooks" and to birth itself. Celebrating such traditionally feminine imagery is an example of Lewis's other type of female address, or what she calls "discovery signs." Discovery signs in music video fulfill "girls' desire for recognition as expressive cultural subjects in their own right."28

When Monae reached out to director Emma Westenberg, her only suggestion was that the video should be pink.29 Westenberg uses color grading throughout the video to transform the desert's sepia hues into pink tones. She also shoots with an infrared camera in several scenes, which records the desert's abundant sunlight as pink. Benson-Allott has argued that similarly transparent production techniques (e.g., VHS-like glitching, supernatural color grading), may disrupt the male gaze by drawing attention to the physical medium itself.30

"Pynk" is just one of a number of recent videos that celebrate yonic imagery as a direct resistance to the phallic icons that dominate patriarchal society (such as the Washington Monument). Peaches' "Rub"—a video directed by a team of three women and featuring only women and trans folks—opens with a butch woman bowing to a monumental yoni in the desert (see Figure 13). As Korsgaard has argued, such NSFW (not safe for work) videos are only possible in the post-MTV era, which has led to increased diversity in music video.31 In this case, by depicting non-heteronormative sex acts that make Madonna's "Justify my Love" (famously banned by MTV in the 1990s) pale by comparison, "Rub" showcases a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities.

A scene from Ariana Grande's "God is a Woman" (see Figure 14) reimagines Michaelangelo's The Creation of Adam in a matriarchal society, in which Eve is a Black woman, and God (in this case played by Grande herself) is enveloped, along with an ethnically diverse choir of angels, in a womb-like container. Whereas the first two choruses feature Grande singing the song title by herself, this scene matches the pictured matriarchal choir with an all-treble choir heard reinforcing Grande on the song title for the first time.

It might be said that many, or even most videos—to the extent that they show a woman as an active, adult agent—resist the infantilization and objectification seen in "Little Girls" and "Gee." But Miley Cyrus goes one step further in her video "BB Talk" by creating an absurd, self-conscious parody of infantilization in music video. Figure 15 exemplifies most of the video’s imagery, in
Figure 13. Yonic iconography in Peaches, “Rub” (2015, 0:11).

Figure 14. Matriarchal rereading in Ariana Grande, “God is a Woman” (2018, 3:45).

Figure 15. Critique of infantilization in Miley Cyrus “BB Talk” (2015, 2:08).
which Cyrus sits, lies, or rolls around on the floor dressed in a diaper, usually with a bottle, rattle, or pacifier. Cyrus’s lyrics solidify this anti-infantilization theme. Delivered through both singing and digitally modified speech, her lyrics criticize a lover for their incessant “baby talk.” What she wants, instead, is sex, if for no other reason than to make the baby talk stop. Both her speaking and singing are delivered in an exceptionally low range for Cyrus, further adding to the uncanny and the satirical in this video.

**Oppositional Gazes**

Musicians in music videos can also resist the male gaze by calling it out directly. bell hooks coined the term “oppositional gaze” to explain the ways that Black viewers assimilate to the norms of white phallocentric cinema, being forced to see whitewashed versions of themselves on film and television. According to hooks, “sitting in the dark [she] must imagine herself transformed, turned into the white woman portrayed on the screen.” This also resonates with Balaji’s concern about the ways in which images of Black bodies can be commodified for the [male] viewer’s enjoyment.

I would like to suggest that we may also adapt hooks’s concept of the oppositional gaze to empower the actions of the musicians and actors on screen in music video. In so doing, it may be possible to locate sites of resistance where musicians and actors gaze back at us, the viewers, to catch us in the act of [male] gazing. Anna-Elena Pääkkölä has previously identified precisely such an oppositional gaze in the film Secretary: “By returning the audience’s gaze in such an unabashed way, Lee [Maggie Gyllenhall’s character] shows both self-assuredness as well as a sense of control for not only herself but also the audience.” Locating this resistance in musicians’ performance may help animate hooks’s claim that “even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.”

The artwork for Solange Knowles’s album *A Seat at the Table* (2016), shown in Figure 16, illustrates a clear oppositional gaze. Jenée Osterhelt’s essay “Don’t Touch our Hair” asserts that this album cover, “a direct celebration of #blackgirlmagic with a revolutionary gaze, does not need white validation.” In this reading, Solange stares back at the viewer to catch them in the act (“gotcha”) of assessing her hair against the rigors of white beauty norms. Similarly, the cover of Lizzo’s “Cuz I Love You” (2019) features the artist casting a sideways glance toward any gaze that might meet her voluptuous naked body.

A number of recent videos by Black women do not necessarily use their eyes to enact this oppositional gaze—they use their middle fingers instead. Immediately following the lyric “pynk, like your fingers in my . . .” Monae’s video cuts to the shot shown in Figure 17, in which the actresses preempt the viewer from imagining their bodies as the objective site of penetrative digital sex.

![Figure 16. Oppositional gaze on the album cover of Solange, *A Seat at the Table* (2016).](image)
Beyoncé and her dancers hold their middle fingers high throughout the 2016 visual album *Lemonade* (see especially “Sorry” and “Formation”). The chorus of the former provides a corresponding lyrical narrative through which to interpret this resistance (“middle fingers up / put ’em hands high / put ’em in his face / tell him ‘boy, bye”). “Sorry’s” chorus amplifies this resistance by setting up the expectation that this lyric will occur on the first bar of an eight-bar phrase, then surprises us with yet another middle finger in bar 7 (2:18), two bars earlier than expected.

Such combined visual/lyrical gestures of resistance and opposition contrast sharply with what Watson and Railton identify as a dominant trope in Black women’s music videos a decade before, in which performers would regularly “make themselves available to the scrutinizing gaze and physical touch of an (often unnamed) black man.” Banister reminds us that the male gaze in music videos by Black women transcends gender, linking to race and other power structures. In both subverting and drawing attention to these norms, these videos and the discourse surrounding them resonate with larger, intersectional feminist movements to empower all women, especially #metoo and #timesup.

**An Audiovisual Analysis of Resistance**

This article began by briefly introducing four ways in which women are subjected to the male gaze in music videos before ultimately demonstrating several that resist that gaze. I have largely demonstrated this resistance through analysis of a video’s lyrics, vocal delivery, instrumental timbres, cinematography, visual imagery, and plot.

But linking musical analysis to supposedly “extra-musical” detail is nothing new, especially for music theory and the “new musicology” of the early 1990s. This line of thinking has been applied extensively to the analysis of opera, where musical detail can be linked to simultaneous text and visual elements. It is easy enough to find a similarity between these musical/textual/visual assemblages in opera and roughly the same in music video. If we assume the male gaze to be a dominant, hegemonic force—a set of expectations that a viewer has been conditioned to see in music videos—then we might start by identifying a similar set of musical expectations. In modern popular music, these might include the presence of a backbeat, largely diatonic harmony, verse/chorus or strophic song forms, and commonly heard timbres, be those associated with rock (electric guitar, bass, drums),
Resistance Gazes in Recent Music Videos

hip-hop (drum machine and synth), or EDM (vocoders, filter sweeps, and sidechaining).\(^{40}\) Beyoncé’s extra middle fingers in bar 7 notwithstanding, it seems far-fetched to claim that any resistance to these more abstract norms might also suggest a resistance to hegemonic patriarchy.\(^{41}\)

I find lyrical analysis and vocal delivery more fruitful in this regard. Like all recorded popular songs, music videos present lyrics as a hybrid musical-textual assemblage. We hear the lyrics (including the manner in which they are delivered) and also process them as lexical indexes of meaning. “Girls Like Girls” provides, through its lyrics, textual resistance to heteronormativity and other sexual binaries. Kiyoko’s precise delivery of those words, which can be heard as either “girls like girls / like boys too” or “girls like / girls like / boys too” adds further critique. Janelle Monae’s pregnant pause after “pink / like your fingers in my . . .” encourages us to wonder just what she was going to sing next, at which point we are immediately reprimanded by multiple middle fingers thrust into the air. Music videos add a third dimension to this musical-textual assemblage by allowing us to attach interpretations of visual stimuli to the meaning of the lyrics. Biting lyrical critiques of patriarchy are also nothing new. Riot Grrrl bands such as Bikini Kill, Heavens to Betsy, and Brat Mobile wrote lyrics about rape and the self-harm caused by oppressive social constructions of the “perfect woman.”\(^{42}\) While Riot Grrrl was notoriously resistant to the mainstream,\(^{43}\) several rock bands comprised mostly or entirely of women, including The Breeders, Hole, and Veruca Salt, did receive mainstream video airplay in the 1990s.

Though Catharine Strong notes that, even when such acts were successful at breaking into the mainstream, “they are far more likely to be sexualized vocalists than to play instruments,”\(^{44}\) the women in these bands offer another form of resistance by appearing not as hypersexualized, infantilized, or as victims, but rather as bona fide musicians.\(^{45}\) Figure 18 shows a screenshot from Veruca Salt’s Seether (1994), in which the women are shown in modest clothing playing iconic Gibson Les Paul and SG guitars.

“Cannonball,” the 1993 hit video and song (#2 Billboard Hot Modern Rock Tracks) by The Breeders, a supergroup composed of former members of The Pixies and Throwing Muses, illustrates audiovisual resistance to the male gaze as well as any of these early
1990s videos by women. Sonic Youth bassist Kim Gordon co-directed the video alongside a then up-and-coming skateboarding filmmaker named Spike Jonze (Jonze’s practice of filming skateboarders is evident through numerous low-angle tracking shots of cannonballs moving laterally at high rates of speed). “Cannonball” refuses both the clarity and stillness the male gaze demands of its subjects. Visual distortion of many if not most of the images couples with the conservative/funky dress of the band’s musicians to all but thwart opportunities for gazing upon. Figure 19a shows an example of the former, with simulated VHS tracking lines covering the musicians’ lower halves; Figure 19b shows the band’s full-coverage costumes with additional image distortion added by the careful placement of mirrors—another trick used throughout the video, especially when both twins (Kim and Kelley Deal) are singing together in the chorus.

This visual distortion is coupled with musical distortion, most often literal. While thick guitar distortion was certainly nothing noteworthy in early 1990s rock music, the level of vocal distortion heard on Kim Deal’s voice is. Figure 20 shows the moment when...
Deal sings the chorus hook, “want you/ cookoo/cannonball.” Deal’s screaming face is anything but hypersexualized, victimized, or infantilized. Rather, it’s musically expressive and aggressive, the highly distorted delivery paired perfectly with visual distortion owing to the underwater camera and hue manipulation. Though not as beyond the pale, there are a handful of instrumental gestures in the track that confound easy comprehension, keeping listeners on their toes rather than comfortably gazing at the musicians. The iconic bass riff opens the rhythm track by twice ripping up to an A high on the neck (matching the pitch of the singers’ opening vocalize), but the song is actually in B-flat, which the bassist “corrects” as soon as the rest of the band enters by moving the riff just one fret higher. Such refusal to “play by the rules” (of rock conventions and tonal harmony) might be read as a hallmark of musical resistance.

Just as lyrics in music video operate simultaneously in two different domains (the aural and the lexical), instrumental timbres in music video operate in both the aural and the visual. We not only see these women as competent musicians, we hear them as such. Analyzing women’s vocal delivery and mode of instrumental performance provides the further possibility of extending the kinds of visual resistance to the male gaze I have identified in this article to the domain of musical analysis, especially if that musical analysis is linked to the textual or visual domains afforded by music video.

NOTES


2. Indeed, Anna-Elena Pääkkölä suggests that “Mulvey’s theories of the male gaze have been discussed in cultural studies over recent decades in such detail that it feels redundant to regurgitate them here.” See Anna-Elena Pääkkölä, “Sound Kinks: Sadomasochistic Erotica in Audiovisual Music Performances” (PhD thesis, University of Turku, 2016), 197.44.


9. I should be careful to admit that I am analyzing this South Korean video from a North American perspective and have little cultural context within which to situate it.

10. For more on the male gaze in popular music, see Doris Leibetseder, *Queer Tracks: Subversive Strategies in Rock and Pop Music* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), chap. 4.


15. See, for example, the hypersexualization of same-sex love throughout mainstream dramas such as *Orange is the New Black* and *The L Word*.


24. For more on the role of prolepsis in cinema, see Brian Henderson, “Tense, Mood, and Voice in Film (Notes after Genette),” *Film Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1983): 4–17.


26. Robert Strachan has argued that “particular types of film and video stock, editing techniques, visual effects, and post-production all signify historical filmic eras but also draw upon the specificities of their historical use within the mediation and cultural documentation of popular music.” See Robert Strachan, “Post-Digital Music Video and Genre: Indie Rock, Nostalgia, Digitization, and Technological Materiality,” in Burns and Hawkins, *Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music Video Analysis*, 145.


40. For more on the formal, rhythmic, harmonic, and timbral expectations in modern pop-rock music, see Brad Osborn, Everything in its Right Place: Analyzing Radiohead (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

41. Martin Scherzinger has suggested that, to the contrary, a purely musical analysis can itself suggest broader social critiques: “close listening can encourage a social consciousness not wholly absorbed by the ‘reification’ of capitalist rationality.” See Martin Scherzinger, “The Return of the Aesthetic,” in Beyond Structural Listening: Postmodern Modes of Hearing, ed. Andrew Dell’ Antonio (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 275.


43. For more on the underground politics of the Riot Grrrl movement, see Marion Leonard, “Rebel Girl You are the Queen of my World: Feminism, Subculture, and Grrrl Power,” in Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge 1997), 230–256.


45. In Elvis Costello’s “‘The Other Side of Summer,” women playing instruments appear as subservient to his role as musical frontman; they are depicted not as musicians, but as eye candy for the male gaze.

46. Jonze, who is, of course, now one of the most widely acclaimed music video directors of all time, had just finished working with Kim Gordon on Sonic Youth’s video for “100%.”