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# MUSIC VIDEO

July 17 – September 22, 2013

Music is temporal. And human beings use their dancing bodies to impose a rhythm on that temporality, to engage with space and to express their emotions to music. The history of the music video is punctuated by some memorable performances. Owing to its length and outstanding choreography, *Thriller*, directed by John Landis in 1983, is still considered the most influential dance video ever produced.<sup>1</sup> There are few more iconic movements than Michael Jackson’s “moonwalk,” premiered in the May 1983 single *Billie Jean*, or Madonna’s dancing for *Vogue*, directed by David Fincher in 1990, which rapidly became one of the classic choreographies of pop culture.

Among productions that have changed the aesthetics of the music video is the extraordinary choreography performed on exercise treadmills by the group OK Go, for *Here It Goes Again*. This “homemade” video, posted on YouTube on July 31, 2006, went viral,<sup>2</sup> earning OK Go the 2006 YouTube Video Award for Most Creative Video and propelling the group onto the stage of the 2007 MTV Video Awards, where they won for Best Short Form Music Video. The endless tumble down the escalator of a small Los Angeles shopping mall that lasts the length of **Battles’** video ***My Machines***, directed by Daniels (pseudonym of the duo Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert), has some of the zany virtuosity displayed by OK Go but also reflects the influence of recent video classics in its allusion to actor Christopher Walken’s performance in Fatboy Slim’s *Weapon of Choice*, directed by Spike Jonze in 2001.<sup>3</sup> The *My Machines* image of a man falling down an escalator creates an acute sense of anxiety, seeming to turn Jonze’s idea quite literally on its head. In 2003, Spike Jonze, Michel Gondry and Chris Cunningham – all members of the first generation of video makers to have grown up with MTV and the first to carve out reputations as “auteurs” – created Directors Label, a series of DVDs designed to showcase directors who have “helped redefine film and music videos.” The genre had entered an era when special effects and post-production software could be used to push concepts to new limits.

Works exploring creative avenues opened up by new technologies abound in the field of the music video. A striking example is Jaron Albertin’s video for *Our Hell*, by Emily Haines & The Soft Skeleton (2007), which was filmed entirely with an infrared camera. For ***Unnamed Soundsculpture***, Berliners Daniel Franke and Cedric Kiefer created a moving sound sculpture: they asked dancer Laura Keil to interpret the music of *Kreukeltape* as closely as possible and then, using data recorded by three cameras controlled electronically by the music, they created a “digital body” that is existent yet evanescent, inhabitant of a parallel world.

The creations of Montreal artist **dominique t skoltz** arise from compositions that are the result of a process of transcoding: as the images unfold, the music writes itself in response to visual pulsations and clashes. She recently made a series of short kinetic tableaux entitled “y20,” which includes the piece **[ nerfs ]**. This tableau features a couple – a man and a woman – suspended weightlessly in the non-reality of an elastic space-time. Exploring a theme that recurs frequently in this artist’s work, **{ nerfs }** “juggles with the emotional knots that form and unravel when two interiorities collide.”

Shaped from one generation to the next by social trends and technological developments, the music video is constantly changing. YouTube, created in 2005, brought music videos into the social network community, and a participatory, open and spontaneous aesthetic was born. The growing use of appropriation and collage led to an explosion of “home” videos, which in turn stimulated the creation of “official” videos – sometimes produced in multiple versions. For example, the Toronto-based Samy Rawal made two videos for the song ***Stumble***, by **Bonjay** – the Addy version, featuring Addy Chan, and the Liana version, featuring Liana Lewis, with both dancers performing the same choreographic routine by Montrealer Dana Michel.

Webcams and the development of online sharing platforms encouraged the emergence of new forms of expression, such as the “mashup” video, which has gained rapidly in popularity,<sup>4</sup> and the crowd-sourced music video. Participation comes in various guises. In 2008

Radiohead invited fans to create an animated film for any of the songs on the band's *In Rainbows* album, released through its own website in 2007 as a pay-what-you-want digital download. In February 2010, in another example of the crowd-sourced music video, Chris Milk launched *The Johnny Cash Project* – an interactive website that invites participants to use its online drawing tools to make their own portrait of the singer. *Ain't No Grave* is a collective work that will continue to evolve as long as people keep participating. In the spring of 2011 the Michael Jackson Estate and Sony Music launched *The Behind the Mask Project*, inviting Jackson's fans to contribute by sending webcam footage of themselves “lip-syncing and moonwalk dancing” to his version of the song. This “100% fan-made video,” composed of 1,600 submissions from 100 countries, was launched online on June 14, 2011.

In selecting the works for this program – a program centred on the dancing body and performance – an obvious choice was *What'll It Take*, which is composed of 85 amateur videoclips from 22 countries, executed in accordance with “choreographic” instructions given by the singer **Graham Coxon** via his website, Twitter and Facebook. Painstakingly spliced together by Briton Ninian Doff, the concept of this collaborative video, in which fans themselves perform, is perfectly reflected in the words of Coxon's song: “What'll it take to make you people dance?”

*Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)*, made by Vincent Morisset for **Arcade Fire**, is a hybrid work composed of a traditional linear version and an interactive dance-activated version. In the latter there is a direct cause-and-effect relation between the movements captured by the user's webcam and the dancing of the suburban “drones” pictured: the user's dancing pace dictates that of the characters in the video, and if the user stops moving altogether they remain suspended in an endless loop. The song *Sprawl II* was inspired by the book *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, which explores the longing to escape an alienating environment. Morisset shot his scenes in anonymous suburbs that resemble the settings of many home videos, creating seemingly banal images to which he added a touch of strangeness. In an interview with Andy Cush, the director declared: “There's something really exciting about that niche [music video] because you're juggling between two worlds. You connect to a broad audience but you're able to propose things that are unusual and sometimes a bit challenging.”<sup>5</sup>

Emily Kai Bock and Claire Boucher (alias Grimes) shot the video for **Grimes'** song *Oblivion* in stadiums – incorporating fans, using the sporting events themselves as the backdrop, and briefly becoming part of what they describe as “a very real and odd world.” Vancouver-born Claire Boucher, who has been living in Montreal since 2006, operates in a realm where punk culture and pop music come together to create a unique vision of society, religion and psychedelic delirium.

Kahlil Joseph's short film *Until the Quiet Comes* – a riff on the music of **Flying Lotus** – is set in the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Nickerson Gardens, where violence is rife. It opens with images of a boy being shot in an empty swimming pool. As Hilton Als wrote in his *New Yorker* review, Kahlil Joseph's images are “an amalgamation of horrifying beauty.” In *Until the Quiet Comes* a man is killed, but Joseph reverses reality through the magic of rewind, and the character's fall becomes a kind of dance for life.

**LOUISE SIMARD**, Head of Multimedia

1. *Thriller* includes virtually all Michael Jackson's signature moves, including the front kick and twirl, the side shuffle and shoulder shift, and the celebrated crotch grab. *Beat It*, directed by Bob Giraldi in 1983, and *Bad*, directed by Martin Scorsese and influenced by the famous rumble scene from *West Side Story*, are also recognized masterpieces of the genre.
2. *HIGA* had been seen by a million people only six days after its release. The choreography was created and directed by Trish Sie, sister of the group's lead singer Damien Kulash, whose voice is not in fact heard on the video. The video dance phenomenon of 2012 was unquestionably the performance by South Korean singer Psy, whose *Gangnam Style*, directed by Lee Bo Young, has become one of the few music videos to have garnered over a billion views on YouTube.
3. Spike Jonze is also the author of the famous pseudo-improvised dance number performed by the Torrance Community Dance Group outside a movie theatre on Hollywood Boulevard, created for Fatboy Slim's *Praise You* in 1998.
4. A video mashup is composed of excerpts from films and TV shows that web users select and recombine. The technique has become such a phenomenon that there are now mashup film festivals, mashup music video festivals, and mashup charts, with their own top ten and annual awards.
5. See "Meet Vincent Morisset, the Interactive Filmmaker Behind Arcade Fire's Latest Video," <http://www.wired.com/underwire/2012/02/vincent-morisset/2/>. *Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)* can be accessed via the website [www.sprawl2.com](http://www.sprawl2.com). Vincent Morisset worked on this project in collaboration with Régine Chassagne, Karine Denault, Gabrielle Desgagnés, Noémie Dufour-Campeau, Mark Eden-Towle, Alan Lake, Milan Panet-Raymond, Esther Rousseau-Morin and Michael Watts. Choreographer: Dana Gingras; art director: Renata Morales; director of photography: Christophe Collette; editor: Stéphane Lafleur; programmer: Édouard Lanctôt-Benoit; designer: Caroline Robert; remix: Damian Taylor; producer: Jean-Luc Della Montagna; production: 1976; post-production: Post-Moderne; interactive production: AATOAA.

## PROGRAM

### *Unnamed Soundsculpture*

Kreukeltape, Machinefabriek  
Daniel Franke and Cedric Kiefer, Berlin, 2012  
Onformative/Burning World Records  
4 min 56 s

### *Stumble, Bonjay*

Sammy Rawal, Toronto, 2010  
"Liana" version and "Addy" version  
Revolver Film/Mysteries of Trade  
3 min 20 s

### *{ nerfs }, dominique t skoltz~*

Montréal, 2013  
2 min

### *What 'll It Take, Graham Coxon*

Ninian Doff, London, 2012  
Pulse Films/Parlophone Records  
4 min 30 s

### *My Machines, Battles*

Daniels, Los Angeles, 2011  
Prettybird/The Creators Project/Warp Records  
3 min 59 s

### *Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains), Arcade Fire*

Vincent Morisset, Montréal, 2012  
1976 and AATOAA/MergeRecords  
5 min 41 s

### *Oblivion, Grimes*

Emily Kai Bock and Claire Boucher, Montréal, 2012  
Iconoclast/Arbatus Records  
4 min 17 s

### *Until the Quiet Comes, Flying Lotus*

Kahlil Joseph, Los Angeles, 2012  
Pulse Films/Warp Records  
3 min 50 s

#### PHOTO

dominique t skoltz~, *{ nerfs }*, 2013  
Courtesy of the artist