

## **LOOKING FOR THE TV SOUND: music video as fashion object**

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### **Keywords**

Non-material fashion, music video, postfashion; fashion theory and pedagogy, performance of identity

### **Abstract**

Increasingly, fashion exists as postfashion: in the virtual realm and in curated spaces, intersecting with art, media and other forms of cultural production. In the context of postfashion, theoretical concerns and critical approaches to practice deliberately oscillate between forms of media that are understood as both fashion phenomena and fashion object. As the definition of fashion as a field of practice and inquiry continues to expand, so too does our understanding of how the discipline's supporting theories are realised. This paper proceeds from research being currently conducted that links fashion theory with the study of visual cultures by contending that music videos can exceed their function in popular culture as promotional representations of fashioned identity, and behave instead as fashion objects in and of themselves. It applies a new focus to the constituent parts of a music video such as performer/character, costume and filmic techniques, as well as their complex social, historical and aesthetic references in order to conceptually reassemble them as fashion objects. The paper also reflects upon the usefulness of music video as a pedagogical tool to introduce key fashion theory concepts to undergraduate students of fashion and textiles. This approach will be explored through the example of the 2013 music video for David Bowie's *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)*.

## 1. Introduction

At the present historic global juncture in which existential threats must be combatted with agile reasoning, fashion scholarship and fashion education are obliged to answer a crucial question: how can critical theories of fashion continue to explain and defend an expanding definition of the practice and products of fashion? Yuniya Kawamura proposes that: “fashion is a concept that separates itself from other words which are often used as synonyms of fashion, such as clothing, garments and apparel. Those words refer to tangible objects while fashion is an intangible object.” (2005, p. 2). Proceeding from a similar understanding of ‘what is fashion’, this paper speaks to current doctoral research being conducted at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), where I am also a teacher of fashion theory to students who are predominantly practice-based.

The research aims to contribute to an evolving definition of the fashion object by reflecting critically on typologies relating to material and non-material fashion forms, through a reinterpretation of music video. This hybrid moving image form, so culturally dominant in the Anglophone world upon its spectacular emergence at the turn of the 1980s, remains significantly influential to global image-making industries and their practices today. It has, however, previously been largely overlooked in scholarship. This gap allows for exciting possibilities in creating new knowledge by viewing music video through the lens of fashion theory.

The project contends that certain music videos can exceed their alternative function in popular culture as promotional representations of fashioned identity, and behave as fashion objects in and of themselves. This position is distinct from finding creative equivalence between moving image works and embodied outcomes of fashion practice, or from evaluating the clothed body in music video as evidence of cultural codependency between the music, media and fashion systems (Calefato, 2004; McNeil et al, 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Idacavage, 2010; Miller, 2011; Church Gibson, 2012; Geczy & Karaminas, 2015; Baron, 2016; Radner, 2019). My research focus is instead on how the constituent parts of a music video, such as narrative, character, costume, filmic techniques and — crucially — embedded contextual references can be conceptually reassembled so that their sum is assessed as being an agent of critical fashion practice.

Many concerns of critical fashion practice are threads woven into the fabric of music video. Key themes and methods here include collaborative practice, cultural critique, presentation of gender identities, be they conforming or non-conforming, and posthumanism (Geczy & Karaminas, 2018). If, as Kawamura states, “fashion is not visual clothing but is the invisible elements included in clothing” (2005, p.5), then, my research contends, these elements can be made visible in music video just as they may be in dress.

This paper will outline the research context for the project, being a nexus between theoretical understandings of postfashion and existing writing on the topic of music video. It will then analyse the 2013 David Bowie video *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* as a case study of ‘music video as fashion object’, and finally will offer a brief reflection upon the use of music video as a pedagogical tool in fashion education.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Postfashion

Increasingly, fashion exists as postfashion: in the virtual realm and in curated spaces, intersecting with art, media and other forms of cultural production (Steele, 2019). While advancements in textiles technology and innovative material practices will of course continue to be closely connected to the future of fashion, fashion's intersections with other critical domains and fields of practice are flourishing as sites of creativity and commerce (Steele, 2019); for example, an established acceptance of films and curatorial projects as valid methods of expression for fashion designers (Khan, 2012; Uhlirova, 2013; Rees-Roberts, 2018; Clark, 2019) explains much of fashion's nimble response to COVID's 'new normal'.

Postfashion as a conceptual identification to an extent parallels critical theories of postmodernism: as with Arthur Danto's diagnosis of art "after the end of art" (1997), the end of fashion does not mean that fashion is at an end. Rather, it recognises that systemic challenge to historically-bound conventions of medium specificity in the domain of fashion is no longer a matter of mere speculation, but can be observed to have *already occurred*, thus necessitating a reconfiguration of the category's internal logic. This is analogous to art historian Rosalind Krauss's persuasive case for category redefinition of postmodern sculptural practice in the germinal 1979 essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*.

Reflective of the term's frequent contemporary usage and understanding, wherein 'field' relates to its partial definition as an area of operation or activity — rather than Krauss's specific Piaget group of logical expansion — Lara Torres makes the argument in her article *Fashion in the Expanded Field: Strategies for Critical Fashion Practices* that:

... engagement with the notion of 'the expanded field' is not necessarily to prolong Krauss's systematic analytical grid, indebted to structuralism, but to operate where the legacies of Krauss's concept enable new points of departures and the understanding of what an expanded field of fashion can be.

(2017. p. 168)

Fashion analysis has connected with the notion of postfashion in different ways. In *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and cycles in the fashion system* (2005), Barbara Vinken declared fashion's century to be over while simultaneously naming its successor: a set of situations termed "postfashion" or "fashion after Fashion", with the lowercase "fashion" being an ongoing reflective, creative process, and "Fashion" identified as the capitalist fashion system's myths and constructs. Fashion business journalist Teri Agin's 1999 diagnosis of the fashion system in the late twentieth-century, *The End of Fashion*, foretells the negative impact of mass-marketing and the demise of mystique. Trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort's *Anti-Fashion Manifesto* published in 2015 decries the decline of fashion knowledge at the expense of the individualism characteristic of late-capitalism.

Common to these perspectives is a recognition of the globally significant consequences of a fashion system based upon material over-production and over-consumption, with a lack of criticality in its motivation. My research draws upon this literature to argue for the imperative of an expanded field of fashion that recognises both material and non-material fashion forms, supporting this through redefinitions of the fashion object in both theory *and* practice. An arising positive implication here is a de-emphasis of uncritical mass production, enabling contemporary practitioners to explore the fashion's eternal concerns in novel ways.

## 2.1 Music Video

Just as fashion theory has been synthesised from dominant concepts drawn from domains including art history and theory, sociology, gender studies and economics, so too does the emerging study of music video arise from perspectives initially focussed elsewhere. Although this influential media form of the late twentieth century has continued to develop over the early twenty-first, music video as an interdisciplinary creative practice remains largely undefined in scholarship. While it has been identified as a hybrid production culture (Jirsa & Bonde Korsgaard, 2019), drawing upon and extending the disciplines of graphic design, photography, fine art and performance, emphasis in existing writing tends to value music video more often as a form of cultural artefact (Caston & Smith, 2017). Early academic analysis of the form in the 1980s and early 1990s responded to the cultural phenomena of music television, being the dedicated cable channel *MTV* in the United States and genre-defining weekly programmes such as Britain's *Top of the Pops* and Australia's *Countdown* (Straw, 1993; Austerlitz, 2007; Ryan, 2010). While more recent scholarship has addressed issues of aesthetics and authorship, music video largely continues to be evaluated as an adjunct to either cinematic or televisual filmmaking, or marketing, and wants for critical appreciation (Cave, 2017).

American media scholar Carol Vernallis has published a number of articles and interviews with video directors on aspects of music video production, for example filmic techniques such as editing schema, and provides a most useful explanation of music video in the introduction to her 2004 book *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*:

music video [is] a distinct genre, one different from its predecessors — film, television, photography — a medium with its own ways of organising materials, exploring themes, and dealing with time, all of which can be studied through close analysis.

(p. x)

Nicholas Chambers explains that music video “came to infiltrate our lives — showing us what to wear and how to dance” (2004, p. 44), highlighting a frequent indivisibility between fashion and music video in late twentieth century popular culture. Robert Walser and Marcus Desmond Harmon offer an extended entry on music video in the *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender* (2007), wherein the authors state that: “as marketing tools and artistic products, music videos are a fertile site for depicting and contesting popular images of gender and sexuality” (p. 1049). With in mind that the same can equally be said of fashion practice when it is underpinned by fashion

theory, close analysis of select music videos reveals a vibrant intersection between these creative areas.

### 3. Case study: *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)*

The catalysing observation leading to this research occurred at the delivery of a lecture to second year Bachelor of Fashion and Textiles students at UTS in April 2018, the aim of which being to introduce perspectives of gender performativity in broad strokes, by encouraging students to make their own connections between this complex topic and a range of scholarly references and popular cultural examples, including music videos. Observing the capacity of music video to convey the lecture's key theoretical concerns proved thought provoking. The presentation concluded with *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)*, a video made to accompany David Bowie's twenty-fourth — and penultimate — studio album, *The Next Day*, directed by Italian-Canadian artist, filmmaker and fashion photographer Floria Sigismondi, whose body of work includes the 2010 feature biopic *The Runaways* and several music videos with Bowie.

David Bowie's culturally influential multi-disciplinary creative practice lends itself easily to theoretical as well as popular investigation. Lisa Perrott makes the observation that Bowie prefigured Judith Butler's 1988 theorisation of the gender performativity by several years, in his identification that characteristics drawn from Drag — such as costume, make-up, reworking of lyrics, vocal mimicry, musical quotation, bodily gesture and pose — can challenge, rather than reinforce, gender norms through acts of subversive imitation (2017). Close structural analysis of Sigismondi's self-reflective representation of what 'Bowie' means speaks clearly to this, and also to Bowie's career-spanning dedication to creative inquiry. It is also instructive in understanding the way in which fashion theory and music video can intersect to create a 'fashion object'.

The video opens with a series of daytime establishing shots of an apartment building dating from the early twentieth century, in a semi-urban area of the United States that has undergone a declining process of 'reverse gentrification'. Accompanied by live-sounding, anticipatory instrumental music, the camera voyeuristically pans and tilts around the exterior of the once-grand building, showing its stately architectural features including balconies, arches and a grand staircase, but also exposing peeling paintwork, broken window panes and unkempt rose bushes. We see the interior of one dwelling, frozen in time with a mid-century aspirational aesthetic, with deep-pile carpet and a large television cabinet as the focal point of its claustrophobically neat living room.

Moving furtively across this space is a thin, white woman of middle age who wears a stiff, peroxide-blond, shampoo-and-set hairstyle, pastel pink capri pants and swing coat. This is 'the wife'. Peering with paranoia through the curtained window, she retreats when her gaze is returned by a young, louche white person with an androgynous gender presentation. This is 'the rockstar'.

Their hair is worn in a floppy-fringed, two-toned orange and blond short romantic style, and they are dressed in a 1940s/1970s vintage-look menswear ensemble of white high-waisted

tailored trousers, light red slim fitting shirt, pullover and tie. Carrying a guitar case, they are one of a racially-mixed group of bohemian musicians who are taking up residence in the building, possibly without permission. The sequence is overlaid with titles as in a feature film, naming the production's lead actors, David Bowie and Tilda Swinton, and its director, Floria Sigismondi.

Next, we enter a run-down but well-stocked local grocery store with a white man of late middle to older age. This is 'Bowie'. He sports longish-fringed, short natural sel et poivre coloured hair, and wears an open-necked pastel green collared shirt under a light trench coat or mackintosh. 'Bowie' picks up a glossy gossip magazine called *PANTHEON Weekly*. Its cover story, titled *Celebrity Couple's Twisted Antics*, features a paparazzi-style photograph of a young, white, blonde femme fatale type and white, masculine-presenting brunette in glamorous evening wear. Other stories featured in the magazine are *Alien Lives Next Door*, accompanied by a photograph of a bald humanoid (posed by Bowie) and *Woman Goes to Oscars Without MakeUp*, with a snap of a woman with slicked-back, short red hair (Swinton).

In the grocery store, 'Bowie' is joined by 'the wife'. She is overdressed in this setting, her ensemble now augmented with gloves, handbag and a structured pastel pink neckerchief. Her grooming features pale blue eyeshadow in a late 1960s to early 1970s style. "We have a nice life," she says to him, kissing his cheek (Fig. 1). 'Bowie' repeats this line, as if it were a mantra. The couple speak with British accents. They complete their modest shopping expedition unaware that they are being observed from another aisle by 'the celebrity couple' of the magazine article, model- thin in contemporary red carpet attire with the masculine character wearing sunglasses, and move jerkily, as though outside real-time.

In the next sequence of the prologue, 'Bowie' pulls along a wheeled shopping trolley as he and 'the wife' make pleasantries on their walk home via an empty, postindustrial laneway. 'The wife' wears sunglasses. Incongruously, they are overtaken by a limousine with darkened windows. This confuses and displeases them.

We transition with a wipe-pan to a shot of the musicians, who are rehearsing in a dimly-lit, eclectically under-furnished room in the shabbier neighbouring apartment. Simultaneously, the musical soundtrack to the production, David Bowie's song *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* begins. 'The rockstar' shrugs their thinly shouldered and small breasted upper body as they prepare to perform (Fig. 2). We cut to 'the wife' in a heavily wood-panelled kitchen, wearing a light yellow and silver-white boucle top. She is unpacking a bag of groceries. In it, she finds *PANTHEON Weekly* and disapproving of the magazine, throws it in the bin, which is filled with empty plastic packaging and a single leaf of kale.

Seen from point of view of 'the wife', the mysterious limousine pulls up outside the building. Its tinted electric window lowers and we see 'the celebrity couple' inside (Fig. 3). They have found where 'Bowie' and 'the wife' live. The femme has an exaggerated manicure resembling dark crystal talons. Their movements continue to be stilted and their facial expressions indicate predation. 'The wife' recoils from the window in a private panic. We cut to an extreme close up of the 'the rockstar' which features their eyes. One pupil is significantly more dilated than the other, giving an impression of the eyes being in fact different colours. Through their own

window, 'the rockstar' has also seen 'the celebrity couple', and is also affected by their presence.

The action shifts to night. 'Bowie', who wears a blue open necked shirt and dark yellow cardigan, and 'the wife' watch television, affectionate in each other's company (Fig. 4). Their domestic contentment is disturbed by the sound of the musicians in the adjoining apartment, where 'the rockstar' now wears a high-fashion white tuxedo jacket, shirtless but with a detachable pointed shirt collar. They perform with emotion, lip synching to the video's soundtrack:

*They watch us from behind their*

*shades Brigitte, Jack and Kate and Brad*

*From behind their tinted window stretch Gleaming like blackened sunshine.*

We cut back to 'Bowie' and 'the wife's' apartment. He is indignant and moves to complain, she remains on the couch. A censorial 'Bowie' approaches the wall that separates the apartments and bangs upon it. The wall is shown in cross-section, visually dividing the screen in half. 'The rockstar' is drawn into the frame from the opposing side. The two performer/characters' each sense another presence. Separately but in unison, they perform a series of gestures that mirror each other. They first turn their ears to the wall (Fig. 5), then press their open palms against it (Fig. 6), then raise their eyes skywards. Intercut with this sequence, we see that the 'celebrity couple' have infiltrated 'Bowie' and 'the wife's' apartment. She is unaware that they mockingly perform a marionette-like dance behind her.

In the next scene, 'Bowie' and 'the wife' are asleep in their bed. They are visited by the femme of the 'celebrity couple', whose semi-naked body is revealed to have an alien or posthuman form with protruding vertebrae. This character squats over the sleeping 'Bowie' in sinister domination, using their even-further-exaggerated 'claws' and mouth in an occultish, non-consensual encounter that involves the 'sucking out' of something essential to 'Bowie' (Fig. 7). This is clandestinely observed by 'the rockstar', who wears an expression of horrified fascination. 'Bowie' awakes shaken from his 'dream'.

We return to daylight. 'The wife' wears a shiny, light chartreuse shell suit and a perspex visor as she follows an aerobic exercise routine being broadcast on television. The living room wall is decorated with a print of Vladimir Tretchikoff's 1952 Orientalist painting *Chinese Girl*, also known as *The Green Lady*. Suddenly, the television screen reveals something uncanny. 'The wife' sees not only her own reflection in its glass, but also an image of 'Bowie' and herself from the night before. She turns around but more surprisingly still, finds 'the celebrity couple' on the couch instead. They once again mock her, disdainful of her shock and her fear of seduction. 'The celebrity couple' slap their own faces and like psychic puppetry, this causes 'the wife' to do the same, and to move in their jerky, otherworldly-timed way (Fig. 8). This is intercut with the set-up of 'Bowie' and 'the rockstar', still separated by the apartment wall but now both singing, as if in duet:

*And they know just what we do*

*That we toss and turn at night*

*They're waiting to make their*

*movesFor the stars are out tonight.*

In an alternate reality, this is observed by 'Bowie' through 'the rockstar's' window.

Returning to the bedroom, we see that 'the wife' is now sexualised, manipulated remotely by 'the celebrity couple'. Witnessed by 'Bowie', she writhes on the bed, possessed. An erotic tussle takes place between the performer/characters that have thus far been recognisable as 'the celebrity couple'. They have become indistinct in their performances of identity, with their bodies, revealed and concealed by high-fashion undergarments, presenting as differently-gendered to when 'costumed'. In a complementary sequence, 'the wife's' appearance is dramatically altered, with her hair now a slicked back, androgynous blonde crop and wearing fashion-forward lingerie in nude tones. This is intercut with a 360 degree tracking shot of 'Bowie' and 'the wife' in her new presentation, wherein she applies lipstick and marks the passive face of an anorak-wearing 'Bowie' with smeared, proprietary kisses (Fig. 9).

In the next sequence, 'the wife' hosts 'Bowie', who is attired in smart casual checks, at a macabre private dinner. She wears a lavender coloured full-skirted dress with nipped waist, puffed sleeves, collar and buttons. This is accessorised with pearls, with her short blonde hair wildly unkempt and her make up principally in the form of heavily drawn eyebrows. 'The celebrity couple', wearing fashionable underwear-as-outerwear, control 'the wife' as she mimes the use of a mobile internet device and then attacks an uncooked chicken with an electric carving knife (Fig.10). 'Bowie' seeks to flee this horror and the three pursue him to the stairwell. The pace of the video escalates with a series of rapid intercuts between this set of action, the lipstick surround-shot and the fluidly-erotic set-ups, into which 'Bowie' is now drawn.

In the final scene, 'the celebrity couple' are seated on the couch in the positions once taken by 'Bowie' and 'the wife'. The femme wears 'the wife's' original wig, blue eyeshadow and boucle top, the masculine character wears 'Bowie's' collared shirt and cardigan. Drawn to the television, 'Bowie' and 'the wife' (in her transformed state), dressed in identical silver lamé and black shawl- lapelled dinner jackets with open-necked white collared shirts, approach from behind, both moving in the jerky time of 'the celebrity couple's' reality. All four are mesmerised by the screen. One-by- one they turn to the camera, breaking the conceptual fourth wall by returning its gaze (Fig. 11). We end with the title, *FIN*.

This late-period Bowie video is, as Karen de Perthuis explains, "a cross-dressing, transgender, role-switching, time-twisting narrative that, in its clear display of designer clothes, bears all the hallmarks of Sigismondi's fashion film roots" (2018, p. 12). Designer fashion is indeed used as costume throughout the video, with McQueen, Lanvin, Raf Simons for both Jil Sander and Dior, Rick Owens, and Hedi Slimane for Saint Laurent for example worn by its performer/characters as 'everyday' garments. However, the video does not exist in the realm of fashion due to its costuming alone. Rather, it exhibits many of the thematic hallmarks of critical fashion practice.

The collaborative nature of the production is established through Sigismondi's use of cinematic titles. While not introduced here alongside David Bowie and British actress and artistic collaborator Tilda Swinton, the video's supporting players bring with them cultural information that instantly places the work in the realm of critique, being exemplars of a twenty-first century shift in conceptions of gender, beauty and fame: Bosnian-Australian transgender model Andreja Pejić and Dutch artist and model Saskia de Brauw as the disruptive, youthful couple who personify celebrity, and Norwegian model Iselin Steiro as a Thin White Duke-era David Bowie avatar. In contrast to Bowie's own performance here of conservative masculinity, these androgynous 'stars' stand for the transgressive flamboyance of Bowie's previous personae, forcing the older performer/characters to confront their fears, desires, self-concepts and mortality.

While it is outside the scope of this paper to consider fully, it is also notable that while the cast is diverse in its range of ages and gender identities, it conforms entirely to fashion's ideal of thinness and whiteness, inviting the question: does Sigismondi's video challenge Fashion's norms or reinforce them?

*The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* is a text dense in the language of popular culture. 'The wife', portrayed by Swinton, could be seen as a descendent of Annie Lennox's tormented housewife persona in the Sophie Muller directed Eurythmics video *Beethoven (I Love to Listen To)* (1987). Further connections may be made, as George Piggford has noted that Annie Lennox's performances as a Camp androgyne offer parallels to the "serially dual-sexed" titular character of Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1997, p. 43). Swinton, famously, inhabited the titular character in Sally Potter's 1998 film adaptation of the story.

Links made by Caroline Evans in *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (2003) between hysteria, vampirism and non-reproductive sexuality are present in the video not only through what is depicted, but what is implied, with Bowie and Swinton each having portrayed other worldly beings, including vampires and aliens, across creative practices in frequent negotiation with conceptions of posthumanism. What their characters' call a "nice life" is dominated and validated by consumer culture and appearances, aligning entirely with Thorsten Veblen's notion of 'conspicuous consumption'. Indeed, these characters embody Veblen's conception of the 'Leisure Class', explained by Michael Carter as "an amalgam of the rich, the hyper-rich, the owning class, the ruling class, the upper class, the business class, the aristocracy, the *nouveau riche*, and high society" (2003, p. 44). Yet, their appetite for affluent domesticity, reinforced through the repetitive performance of heteronormative gender roles (Butler, 1990) is questioned and ultimately, overturned. This resolution to the video's narrative is proposed entirely through transformative use of clothing and fashion-adjacent adornments such as hairstyling and make-up, emphasising costume's privileged position amongst the *mise en scène* of music video as a moving image form.

Across the canon of fashion scholarship, it is commonly agreed that fashion is made not only *of* things (that is, a commodity or object produced within a fashion system) but also *about* and *because* of things (a phenomena or representation, either chronologically coinciding with or nostalgic in its relationship to historical time, and very often a cultural or subcultural cipher).

Variously — and sometimes simultaneously — fashion is about bodies, about identity, and about consumption itself, and in being so, is frequently and meaningfully self-referential. That this can be said equally of music videos of the complexity of *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* is informative to understanding an expanding field of fashion and its objects.



Figure 1. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* [music video] (still).



Figure 2. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* [music video] (still).



Figure 3. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* [music video] (still).



Figure 4. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). The Stars (Are Out Tonight) [music video] (still).



Figure 5. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). The Stars (Are Out Tonight) [music video] (still).



Figure 6. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). The Stars (Are Out Tonight) [music video] (still).



Figure 7. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). The Stars (Are Out Tonight) [music video] (still).



Figure 8. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). The Stars (Are Out Tonight) [music video] (still).



Figure 9. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). The Stars (Are Out Tonight) [music video] (still).



Figure 10. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* [music video] (still).



Figure 11. Sigismondi, F. (dir.) (2013). *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* [music video] (still).

#### **4. Reflection: music video as fashion pedagogy**

As colleagues in fashion education may attest, the development of novel pedagogical strategies to assist students in assembling a critical ‘toolkit’ for building their practice is both a challenge and privilege of the role. While film and video resources are frequently used in teaching programs across primary and secondary education, their usefulness in tertiary settings outside the fields of film and media studies can be underestimated. In particular, I note its potential as a device in the teaching of an emerging generation of critical fashion practitioners.

Music video appeals as a potential approach to the teaching of theoretical perspectives to culturally literate visual learners. Visual learners are characteristically imaginative and use their natural ability to picture events and remember information. They gain pleasure from the act of learning through visual and creative activities and are frequently able to conceptualise the components of a concept or task as a whole image (Reid, 2005). These qualities are frequently possessed by contemporary students of fashion: this is a cohort that learns in a formal academic context, yet at the same time uses atomised access to popular cultural information to inform their creative practice.

Proceedingly, these students of fashion frequently do not see themselves as being confined to ‘Fashion’ (to apply Vinken’s distinction); multi- and inter-disciplinarity are features of the

careers of those they admire and commonplace terms of self-description. Fashion films and photography are frequently produced by students not only for assessment, but as self-directed expansions of their engagement with the creative world. Easy access to digital moving image technology through smartphones means that students are uninhibited by the language of film and video, and constantly take part in its evolving conversation. My research identifies how music videos of the 1980s and 1990s contributed significantly to the vocabulary of moving image, partly owing to their short determined lengths. In having a native understanding of how short-form videos, such as those on TikTok, are constructed and what makes them effective as methods of communication and visual appeal, contemporary students are able to immediately discern themes and meanings in both historical and contemporary music videos. This existing skill can enable the use of music video to encourage dynamic class conversations on both fashion-related topics and to broaden students' general knowledge; to provide stimulus for briefs; or for deep diving into fashion research. This is because at their best — that is, most conceptually rich and creatively resolved — music videos and fashion collections have much in common. Often referencing cultural and visual histories, they are multidimensional realisations of creative ambition, featuring intriguing muses and unique narratives that are rewardingly surprising and oddly believable. While my doctoral research makes the leap that music video *is*, or can be, fashion, in the realm of fashion pedagogy I suggest that music video can also be considered more widely as a window through which to view both what fashion is, and how fashion works.

## 5. Conclusion

Fashion is an expanding field of practice and inquiry that maps continually renewed understandings of fundamental human motivations and the societal structures that support and constrain them. Transcending the boundaries of the garment, fashion is at once fleeting and perpetual. In the context of the condition of postfashion, non-material fashion forms such as moving image works can be considered products of critical fashion design practice. Understanding this can create a positive de-emphasis on the material production of fashion, which is a global imperative of the current era.

In the the 2013 David Bowie music video *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)*, it is possible to discern a number of critical concepts common to fashion and fashion-adjacent theories, such as posthumanism and non-reproductive sexuality, Butler's gender performativity and Veblen's conspicuous consumption. This demonstrates the usefulness of music video as a pedagogical tool in fashion education, in order to provide theoretical underpinnings to the work of a new generation of critical fashion practitioners.

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