
Series Foreword

While the scholarly conversations about music in film and visual media have been expanding prodigiously since the last quarter of the twentieth century, a need remains for focused, specialized studies of particular films as they relate more broadly to genres. This series includes scholars from across the disciplines of music and film and media studies, of specialists in both the audible as well as the visual, who share the goal of broadening and deepening these scholarly dialogues about music in particular genres of cinema, television, videogames, and new media. Claiming a chronological arc from the birth of cinema in the 1890s to the most recent releases, the *Routledge Music and Screen Media Series* offers collections of original essays written for an interdisciplinary audience of students and scholars of music, film, and media studies in general, and interdisciplinary humanists who give strong attention to music. Driving the study of music here are the underlying assumptions that music together with screen media (understood broadly to accommodate rapidly developing new technologies) participate in important ways in the creation of meaning and that including music in an analysis opens up the possibility for interpretations that remain invisible when only using the eye.

The series was designed with the goal of providing a thematically unified group of supplemental essays in a single volume that can be assigned in a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses (including courses in film studies, in film music, and other interdisciplinary topics). We look forward to adding future volumes addressing emerging technologies and reflecting the growth of the academic study of screen media. Rather than attempting an exhaustive history or unified theory, these studies—persuasive explications supported by textual and contextual evidence—will pose questions of musical style, strategies of rhetoric, and critical cultural analysis as they help us to see, to hear, and ultimately to understand these texts in new ways.

Neil Lerner
Series Editor

Preface

The music documentary has risen in prominence—from a mere adjunct to music “proper” to a component fundamental to contemporary popular music, and a film genre in its own right—without ever being subject to substantial critical and academic perspectives. And yet, even at the point of embarking on such an examination, we find that the genre itself is in crisis. It was the detection of the institutionalization of the music documentary and the ways in which, of almost all categories of documentary, this genre has become so fully given over to commercial concerns, that prompted the need to identify and explore the ideological, social, performative, historical, and aesthetic underpinnings of the form. To put this in more straightforward terms: almost any commercial music store will now contain a “music documentaries” section. The genre is clearly well established. And yet to sample even a small selection of these documentaries prompts an unavoidable question: how can it be that documentary, operating in the field of popular music, has strayed so far from ideas of objectivity and reportage—ideas that represent the fundamentals of the documentary form—and has become pure promotion?

To begin this study of music documentaries, an engagement with the form of the musical documentary was understood to be necessary and, beyond that, a reacquaintance with key periods of music and the relationship between the methodologies of their documentaries and the conceptions of popular music at that time. At the same time, our intention was also to look to the alternatives to the loose canon of acclaimed (“classic”) music documentaries, and to look to newer films that suggest the future of the music documentary. These were the intentions that have determined the selection of chapters in *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop*, as outlined below.

Structure of the Book

The first section of this volume, “Evolutions of the Music Documentary,” addresses the ways in which the music documentary has positioned itself as a recognised genre in its own right. Here a series of questions are raised

concerning the establishment and subsequent evolutions of the music documentary, in its form and content, for television, film and radio.

In Chapter 1, Long and Wall regard Tony Palmer's documentary series *All You Need is Love* (1977) as a seminal moment in the establishment of music documentary and as the first televisual presentation of pop history at a time when little else was emerging in this field. Long and Wall posit Palmer as pop television's first documentary-maker and through an analysis of narrative and narration articulate wider questions concerning how popular music histories are turned into stories, and critically received. Palmer's *All You Need is Love* established an approach to presenting pop music history that many subsequent documentaries have emulated and so can be identified as a significant moment in the establishment of the music documentary. Palmer is presented as deviating from a straightforwardly chronological examination of pop history and instead reveals a far more complex, and ultimately problematic, exploration of the past of pop.

Likewise Saffle, in a chapter that redefines the music documentary via an examination of Hollywood's musical compilation programs, questions the very nature of what a music documentary is, or can be. Saffle's intervention speaks to well defined disagreements in academic and industrial circles concerning what can be considered a documentary, in terms of questions of formal features, of audience expectations and of the construction and conflation of history and knowledge. After a series of arresting case studies, Saffle presents the view that there needs to be critical redefinition of the types of footage, and types of construction, that can be considered as music documentaries.

Music documentary in this section is considered not only visually but also within a purely aural medium. Carter and Coley in Chapter 3 consider the music documentary on radio, an area that has received remarkably slight critical attention. They consider both the production of radio documentaries and development of participatory fan cultures in the context of the ways in which David Bowie fans responded to the broadcast of *Bowie's Waiata* documentary (a program produced by Coley). This examination raises a number of questions about the continuation of the documentary and use of the documentary by fans in the context of Henry Jenkins' work on new participatory cultures. It questions how the boundaries between producer, listener, and fan have, and continue to become, increasingly blurred.

The chapters in "Scenes from the Sixties," Part II, find a central concern in questions of communality and festival audiences, as inside the festival area and outside, "on the streets." Wright identifies two distinct readings in operation and, via a deft deconstruction, illustrates how the modish notions of good karma and bad vibes determine the films that have come to document the two most notable festival events of the era. Woodstock, from this vantage point, is presented as positively utopian since, as Wright argues, the audiences are included as equal creators in the event or happening. The Altamont concert, on the other hand, confines the audience to the role of passive

consumers, to be policed and contained, and in so doing is seen to have engendered alienation, bad trips, and worse. And these readings and film documentations, in turn, go some way to shape the notion of the counterculture in the popular imagination.

Wennekes' concern in Chapter 5 is with those turbulent events "on the streets" and how they are understood to feed back into the music and performance of, and find a touchstone in, Jimi Hendrix. But this contextualization, which is found in innumerable texts that deal with the counterculture, is identified as questionable. Wennekes, and Sanjek in Chapter 6, destabilizes assumptions that are typically, and lazily, used to explain hippie cultures of this moment.

For Sanjek, Woodstock is thrown into relief by the attempt to mount a second such event, complete with festival film. In one of the final pieces of his writing to be published, characteristically incisive and resolutely determined to recover texts outside the canon, Sanjek sees, in this coda to the countercultural era, the unguarded emergence of the financial restructuring of popular culture at the turn of the 1970s. The common ground between the counter- and the dominant culture comes in the instruction to enjoy, and the assumptions that culture operates merely to provide enjoyment. Halligan, in his Afterword, finds in this train of thought a key to unlocking the ways in which the relationship between live music and event, in the context of the music documentary or the concert film, would come to be radically realigned in subsequent decades.

Part III, "Punk Cultures," moves the focus to the next period of case studies, with an emphasis on retrospective readings of films arising from punk music and cultures. For many the moment itself was so short-lived that its explosive interventions could only be considered as legacy; for others, the period only becomes palatable at some years' distance. All authors note how this legacy remains a matter of contention and subject to what Raymond Williams identified as the "selective tradition."¹ Such revisionism typically occurs in high-profile music documentaries, consciously or otherwise.

In Chapter 7, Goddard outlines and explores the mostly unmapped subgenre of No Wave films and filmmaking, closely connected to the New York punk scene, and considers the reasons for the invisibility of this distinctive collection of films. The films resonate with both the ethos and philosophies of punk, and in this respect remain as "documents" which have proven to be difficult to square with the ways in which punk has found its place in the collective imagination.

Hertz, in Chapter 8, focuses in on the ways in which the music documentary often presents the city as the essential element in the visualisation of punk music. "Dissonant" music is understood to flow from, and reflect, the experience of the musician in respect to the dangers and stresses, poverty and alienation, of city life. The punk groups typically designate or identify such a locale as their own, presented as a mark of the authenticity of their music as a *cri du*

coeur born not so much of outsider-ism and marginality, but of the unenviable position of being too far “inside”: conditions of alienation as endemic to, or at the very heart of, modern urban life. Once the punk group has made its exit via commercial success what then becomes of the city narrative? Hertz, in this respect, touches on tensions which find their fullest expression, and engender a variety of responses, in the music documentary.

In Chapter 9, Grant Ferguson looks to the documentaries that have emerged from the British punk scene and finds in them the beginnings of a postmodern aesthetic. The certainties of documentary form are eroded, and questions of truthfulness and untruthfulness come to the fore. Even in more contemporary documentaries looking back to this period the problem of “knowing” what “really” happened remains. But this is not a matter of unhappy confusion; these tendencies suggest a liberation from the confines of typical documentary-making, towards what could be termed a problematization of the form of the documentary (which necessarily suggests that “the truth is out there,” and so can be captured and reproduced). For Grant Ferguson, this is more than just differing sides to a story: it becomes a way of questioning the elements that, collectively, could be said to make up a wider history. And the potential of punk culture is the potential of rewriting history: of refusing to accept the official version of events.

Documentaries have long produced their humorous “mock” counterparts, or abandoned documentary tropes of objectivity in order to convey a fully immersive experience of the subject at hand. The music documentary is no different, and this is the focus of Part IV, “‘Mockumentaries’ and ‘Rockumentaries’”. In recent years, much critical attention has been paid to films that lampoon the style and aesthetic tendencies of the documentary. However, there has been little consideration of the music mockumentary. This section aims to redress this balance and presents chapters that explore the need to poke fun at a genre of music that has long been associated with defiance.

Roessner, in Chapter 10, considers why rock music documentaries attract parody via an examination of *The Rutles: All You Need is Cash* (Idle and Weis, 1978), a film that revels in mocking one of the most mythologized rock bands of all, The Beatles. Using Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque, Roessner examines why sixties rock and roll has been read in terms of carnival and how mockumentaries that lampoon this era represent a further expression of the carnivalesque in terms of their ability to undercut rock music pretensions.

In Chapter 11, Donnelly addresses the “rockumentary” film, in particular the progressive rock live concert film in Britain during the 1970s, as a distinct subgenre of the music documentary. He considers the often unfair treatment of these films, as the target of mockery by film theorists and historians, and reconsiders their form and function. Donnelly concludes by suggesting that the unique quality of the rockumentary lies in its subordination to the album soundtrack, and posits that fruitful analysis of such films lies in approaching them from a position of music history rather than film.

The final part, “New Directions in the Music Documentary,” addresses some of the contemporary issues associated with the documentary form as and when it interfaces with music, and seeks to embrace the diversity of emergent music documentary forms.

In Chapter 12, Burke addresses the technology involved in the production of music and focuses his attentions on a “Moogie Wonderland”. In looking at this development Burke notes that the documentary touches on the socioeconomic position of America in the 1960s and 1970s, which is understood as being a period of musical modernity. Burke’s analysis notes the importance of the integration between different subsets of American society through the use of the Moog and thus the documentary becomes an analysis of America through an analysis of popular music.

Music and documentary education is a topic highly pertinent to the development of future documentary forms. In Chapter 13, Ballengee addresses the practicalities of music and video pedagogy through detailed consideration of his own practice. This chapter addresses the matter of music students and their understanding of the practicalities of the documentary form and opens up issues associated with the music practitioner as commodity, and as a subject of, and for, documentary-makers. Ballengee also addresses the integration of music and image for music ethnographers, an approach that differs from what might be termed “conventional” documentary production where the music or musician, or aspect of music technology, is a subject like any other which can be approached in any way.

Rather than considering *The Agony and the Ecstasy* as a documentary primarily about music, Duffett and Hackett in Chapter 14 address the cult of personality, and the specifics of Phil Spector’s public downfall. In their forensic analysis of the documentary which follows, a critique of the supposed objectivity of the documentary-makers is mounted: the manipulations of documentary form at work in this film are seen to be anything but objective. Similarly, Kylie Minogue can be considered to be more of an icon than “just” a singer. In Chapter 15, Manghani and McDonald analyse the emergence of Kylie in and through the privileged access illustrated in *White Diamond*, which they then view as part of performer-centric documentary canon. However, there is something different in operation with Kylie as icon/performer which the documentary itself uncovers: the new direction is in part the music documentary as confessional. This echoes the emergence of a puritanical strain to the contemporary music documentary, as also identified in Duffett and Hackett’s analysis. Such a strain would seem to represent both the dubious legacy of reality television across the first decade of the twentieth century and the ideological project of moving against 1968 and its unresolved legacies which, as Badiou has argued in a European context, found its champion in Nicolas Sarkozy.² Through an approach that combines the methodologies of structuralism and semiotic analysis, Manghani and McDonald come to argue that even in the case of music documentaries engaging with familiar pop stars,

the music documentary cannot help but take the form in a new direction at the present juncture.

As a contribution to the *Music and Screen Media Series*, this edited collection intended to examine the clearest, indeed the most fundamental, correlation between these two elements, as found in the visual documentation of music—the “music documentary.” The assumption in operation was that this subject would allow our authors to identify and expand on a number of ideas concerning what it means to film musicians and music, with that essential documentary “liveness” derived from conducting interviews and capturing concerts. In the event, we have found that the notion of a “straight” correlation between music-making and documentary-making has proved to be insufficient from the critical standpoints that our authors have taken. Music and screen media have not operated in a neat parallel, but engaged in a process of symbiosis. As each connects, each has changed the other: music has been radically altered by its incorporation of screen media over the last half century, and screen media has been deprived of its old assumptions about documentary form and techniques of documentary-making through its encounters with music. This volume sets out to track how and why this has happened, and where this leaves both popular music and documentary.

Notes

- 1 Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” *New Left Review* 1, No. 82 (November–December 1973); republished in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (Verso: London and New York, 2010).
- 2 See Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (London and New York: Verso, 2009).

Acknowledgments

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Robert Edgar, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs, Benjamin Halligan
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Introduction

Music Seen

The Formats and Functions of the Music Documentary

*Robert Edgar, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs,
and Benjamin Halligan*

"Video Killed the Radio Star"

So sang The Buggles, in the last few months of the 1970s, on their wildly popular debut single, and their fear was precisely located: the damage that would be done by the transmigration enforced by the burgeoning mass media on the fragile and often ephemeral texts of popular mass culture. The album that followed, in the first few months of the new decade, boldly announced the termination of the Age of Aquarius. The *Age of Plastic* mined the etymology and pejorative implications of the term "plastic": the man-made synthetic, inorganic and characterlessly consistent in texture and colouration, as denoting the poor replacement to the rich and utopian hippy and New Age cultures of the Aquarian period. From this vantage point "plastic" was both an insult (as with those conformists Frank Zappa termed the "Plastic People") and intimation of things to come (Norman Mailer described futureshock Los Angeles as "the constellation of plastic").¹ The *Age of Plastic* album opened with the second single from The Buggles. "Living in the Plastic Age," in this context, suggests itself as a rejoinder to "Aquarius" from the musical *Hair*, now with plastic surgeons and "shiny serving clones" replacing cosmic alignments and "mystic crystals revelation/and the mind's true liberation."² In the accompanying promo video, which is framed as a vision of the dystopian future beheld by the druids of Stonehenge, cardiac arrests and Space Invaders assail a group of yuppies.³

Pop music mass culture, as was, for a group of the New Wave pedigree of The Buggles, would have been read as the site of victory. At its best, pop music evidenced the absorption of the countercultures of the Summer of Love, of punk and post-punk, and of the early years of rap and hip-hop, into a discourse that was diffident, critical, reflexive, and anti-establishment, and yet joyful, communal, multicultural, protean, and omnipresent. In order to conceptualize the full impact of what stood to be lost, The Buggles did not issue a straight warning ("video's killing the radio star") or a prophecy ("video will kill . . .") but, projecting themselves into the near future so as to look back, a lament. And what would be lost was lost at the behest of "video":

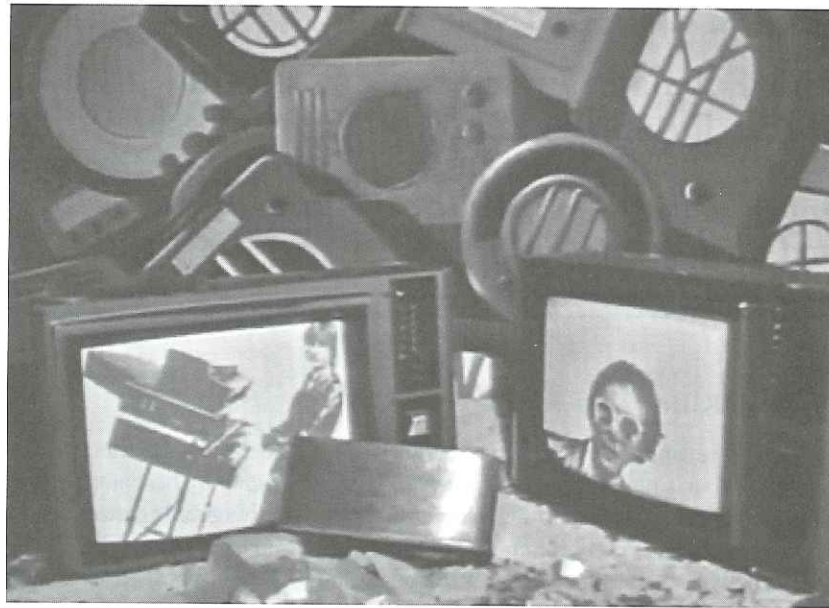


Figure 0.1 Both diagnosis and disease in The Buggles's promo video "Video Killed the Radio Star."



Figure 0.2 Stonehenge druids confront the city of the future in "Living in the Plastic Age."

a cheap, reproducible, televisual (rather than cinematic) technology—the paradox of a visual promotion of a sonic form, and one that would invariably reorientate popular music to look over sound.

In terms of the mainstream of popular music cultures that grew from the anti-establishment cultures of the West in the 1960s and 1970s (and that were understood as acceptable to white audiences), The Buggles were not wrong: video would come to dominate, and with this a new set of concerns, often apolitical and escapist, would come to the fore. However, the tradition that would be replaced had changed substantially since 1968. Tensions in popular music across the 1970s in relation to authenticity and musicality—as with the receptions of glam and prog rock⁴ and punk, and particularly in respect to the anti-disco backlash⁵—reflected the unwillingness of the old guard to think beyond “rockist” concerns, let alone pass on the baton. And authenticity and musicality were understood to be mortally endangered by a music–video hybrid.

This is not to say that music had been a merely aural affair before: looking back to the start of the 1970s, with the full media capitalization on the popular music scene, most famously for *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh, 1970), as well as a number of other films discussed in this collection, the idea of music as speakers without a screen belonged to an earlier period. But in general terms the approaches to the visualization of music in the 1970s, and live music in particular, were quite different. *Woodstock* and its immediate predecessors and imitators were essentially musical events: the cameras engaged in reportage, the musicians primarily engaged in the live delivery of their music. Such an approach presupposes the music event as an active and nuanced dialogue between performances and audiences, and as a “one-off” and particular to a time and place, and a social and historical context. As Sheila Whiteley argues in relation to outdoor music events of the 1960s, “[m]usic brought people together, engendering participation rather than passivity . . . rather than being seen as entertainment, music was considered to say things of cultural and political importance.”⁶ Even when these “things” remain opaque or obscure, as with *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* (Peter Whitehead, 1967), the idea of a coming together and a general and engulfing connection, rhizomatic if need be (to use a term of Deleuze and Guattari's),⁷ a connection that sweeps the audience up and creates the event in the symbiosis of audience and performer, persisted.

For the video age, and as further enabled (and this was more often than not the “problem” with disco) by machine- or computer-generated music, image comes first, and so comes to be created first. MTV began broadcasting in August 1981. The transistor radio, in this paradigm shift, would be unable to deliver the full payload, commercial or cultural, of music, and so this radio culture would wither away. And, it was commonly feared, musicianship, musicality, and even live performance would be rendered redundant. The shaman of yesteryear would be replaced by a succession of asexual, robotic models.



Figure 0.3 Event and reportage: singer, fan, cameraman in *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* (Peter Whitehead, 1967).

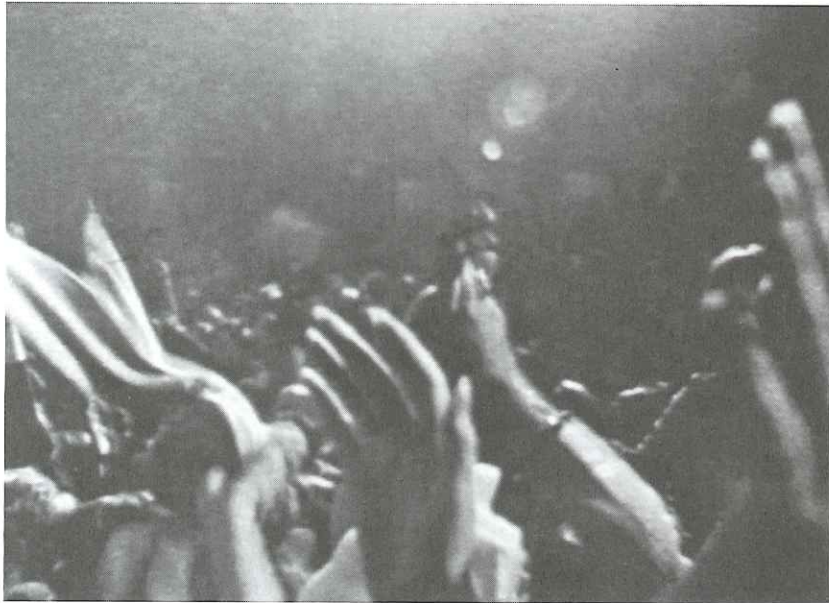


Figure 0.4 The affirmation of the masses: crowd shot from *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*.

However, in terms of popular music as it would actually evolve in the 1980s and beyond, at the point after the post-punk coda to the previous decade, The Buggles could not have been more wrong. To retain the communal and the joyous while developing further technologies for the delivery and replay of music, to junk the diffident and anti-establishment sentiments, and to recalibrate the critical, would result—for better or for worse—in a reinvention of the old guard. The Woodstock farm land would be replaced by the global and stadia events of Live Aid in 1985, as the next era-defining big gig. And the nature of the music–video hybrid on the other side of the transmigration is arresting: the introspection and immobility of the counterculture's preferred groups, as well as their multimedia ventures, had been replaced by, in all senses, performance. To privilege performance over playing, and deliver high-energy pop hits over the murkiness and meandering of psychedelia and prog, seemed to be the undoing of Led Zeppelin at Live Aid, while Freddie Mercury's mastery of performance fully established Queen as the "stadium group".⁸ The performance of "Do They Know It's Christmas?" which closed the London half of the event, delivered by a chorus of the new rock and pop aristocracy, established popular music as a proactive force of good: proceeds of the record, and this event, were not swelling the bank accounts of hedonistic rock stars, their dealers, managers, and groupies, but represented, selflessly, financial aid to those most in need. In all these respects, video was the savior of the radio star.



Figure 0.5 Freddie Mercury's world-wide audience: Queen perform at Live Aid.



Figure 0.6 Video redeems then saves the radio star: Live Aid, 1985.

“I Want My MTV”

Such tensions, which came to the fore in the years 1979 to 1985, characterize the concerns of this edited collection more generally. While there is no question that visually documenting or just visualizing popular music pushes various genres of film and television-making into new territories, and even creates genres of its own—as with the music documentary—a secondary problem becomes acutely apparent in the process. In visually documenting or just visualizing music, it would seem to be the idea of popular music that is assailed or problematized or propelled to enact sudden and radical change in finding itself exposed to cameras. It is as if the fear of video producers was that the visual potentially had as little to do with the experience of popular music, in terms of reproducing it, embodying it, or just capturing it, as the written: the difference between an orchestra in full flight and a few hundred pages of a bound musical score. The visual would ultimately therefore demand the reinvention of the aural and what seemed to be a crude usurping of the priorities of form, in the domination of the visual over the aural, could be read as a survival mechanism or life-support system: only by completely transplanting popular music to the domains of the visual, no matter what damage would entail, would popular music continue to exist as an essential component of popular culture. And even, by extension, and as Austerlitz

argues in respect of Tupac Shakur, to ensure that (artistic) life continues after death.⁹ Before briefly reviewing the contours of the problematization at hand, and in respect of this context of survival, it should be noted that the unease surrounding music film and, more especially, music television, can be understood as informed by purist, canonical, and elitist impulses: a cultural snobbishness in respect to the fragile and often ephemeral texts of popular mass culture, resulting in “that ignored artefact of contemporary culture—the music video,”¹⁰ only to be further aggravated as MTV became “the sun around which popular culture rotated.”¹¹

The fear of a mass culture as determined by the masses is expressed in one of the biggest hits in the early years of MTV: the 1985 Dire Straits single “Money for Nothing.” The accompanying music video, directed by Steve Barron, presents the dramatis personae that are also apparent in the different registers of the song itself. The band are viewed by two blue-collar workers, one of whom is unshaven, racist, and homophobic and, in between listing the removal jobs to be done, riddled with envy for the stars of MTV and their millionaire life-styles. The irony is, seemingly not lost on this removal man, that in order for the band to attain this level of luxury they need to appear on the heavy television sets that the two lug into other people’s homes. And the worry is exacting, as embodied in this animated protagonist: questions

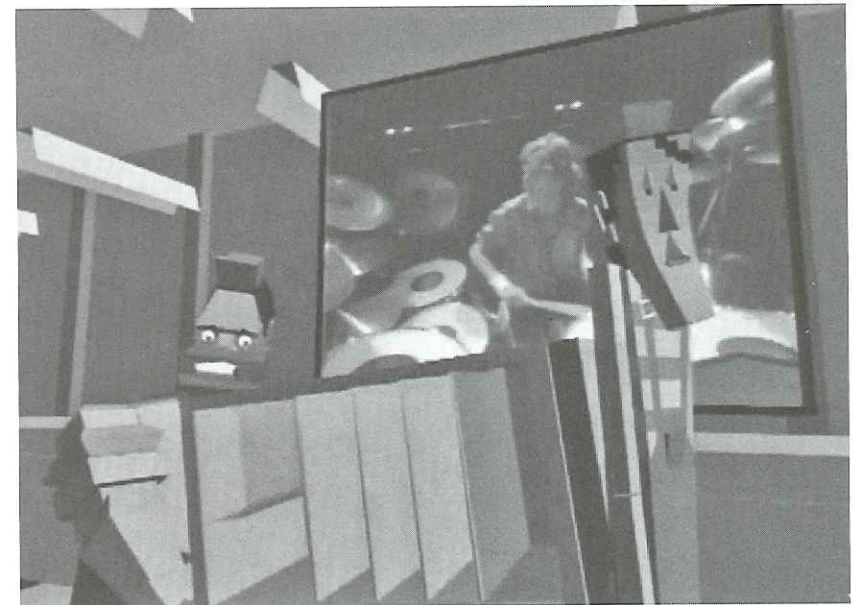


Figure 0.7 MTV auto-critique #1: mass culture for the unwashed masses, in Dire Straits’ “Money for Nothing.”

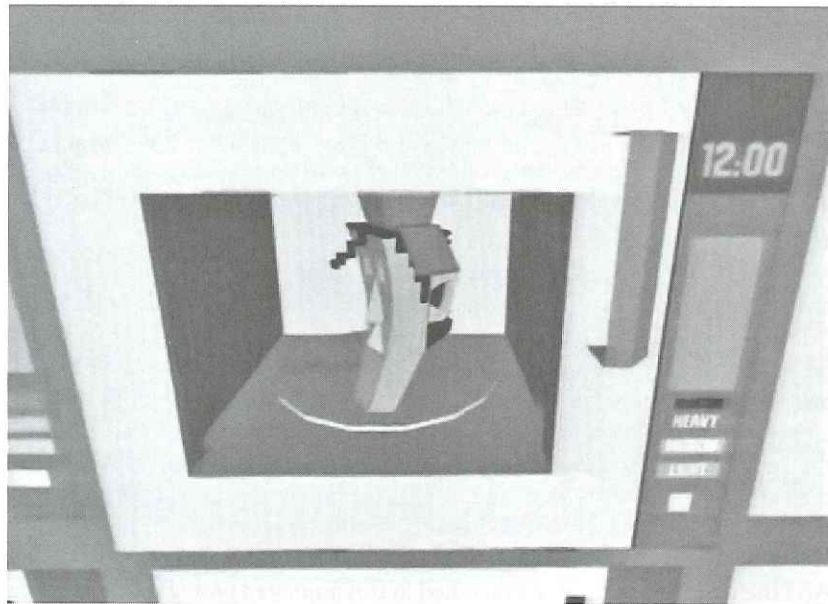


Figure 0.8 Pop music as neurological irradiation: "Money for Nothing."

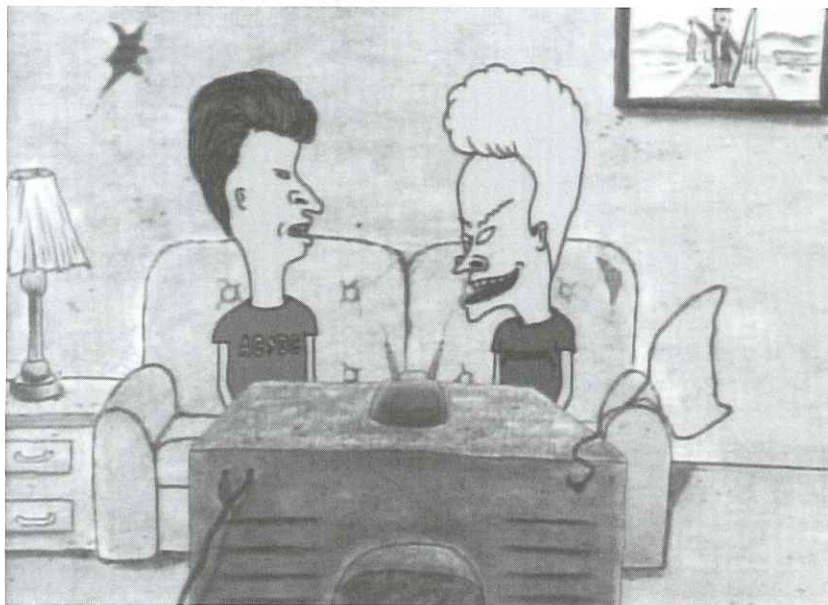


Figure 0.9 Auto-critique #2: Generation X as the second generation of MTV fans, with Beavis and Butt-head.

of musicality and critique, and of the persistence of poetry and philosophy in mass culture,¹² are either ignored in favour of the baser instincts of sexual and material jealousy or, for the other removal man (who appears brain dead; at one point his head is removed and microwaved), simply do not register. Any artistic achievement is wasted, and these two represent the audience, infantile, and ignorant, to which MTV will soon pander: the song begins with an ethereal, child- or siren-like voice singing of wanting MTV (rather than, as could be expected "I want my mommy," although the words are lifted from early MTV advertising), which sucks the latter removal man into the television set itself. (And this dynamic and dramatic set-up would re-emerge in 1993 on MTV, for *Beavis and Butt-head*).

"The Great Gig in the Sky"

MTV could be said to have offered an effective but only finite solution to the question of the visualization of music. As with MTV's *ur-text*, *A Hard Day's Night* (Richard Lester, 1964), ontological questions of the performance of music took second place to conceptions of the performer.



Figure 0.10 The nonchalance of the streets, the nonchalance of the singer: The Pet Shop Boys' "West End Girls."



Figure 0.11 Morrissey cleans rain from his glasses, outside the Salford Lads Club: The Smiths' "Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before."

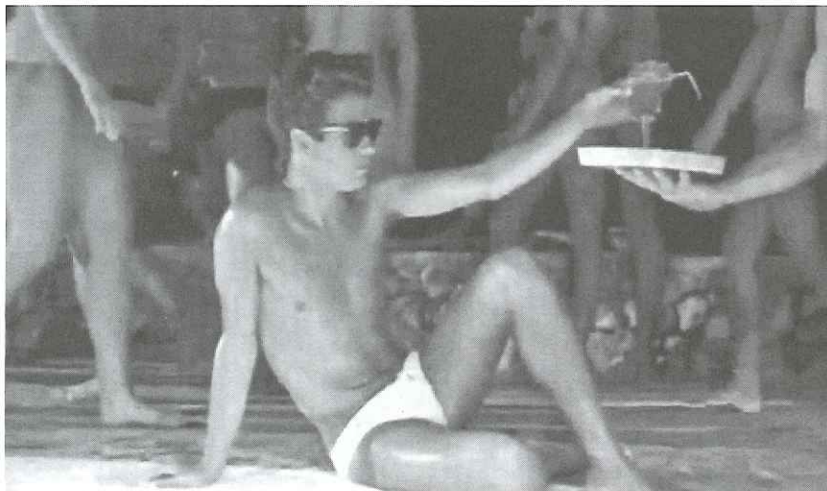


Figure 0.12 Exotic aspirations: George Michael sings the praises of going on holiday: Wham!'s "Club Tropicana."

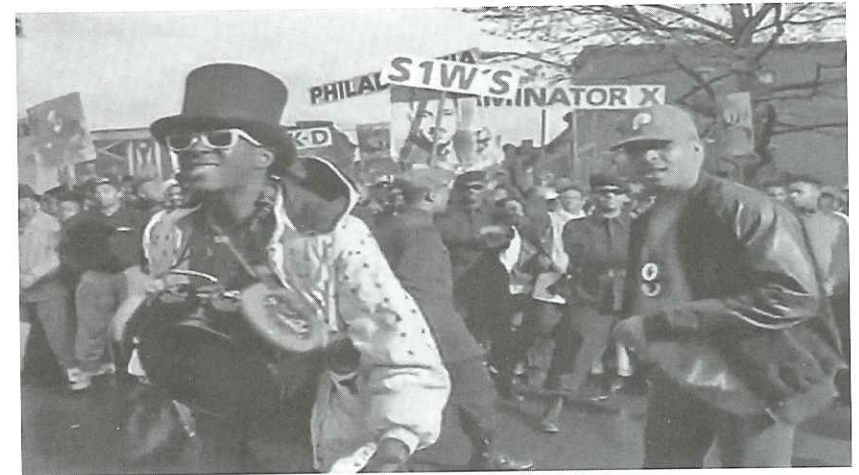


Figure 0.13 Taking it back to the streets: Flava Flav and Chuck D in Public Enemy's "Fight the Power."



Figure 0.14 Tourists as sirens: Aaliyah's "Rock the Boat."

And so just as Lester relocated his stars, placed them in a narrative and restaged their music, a generation later The Pet Shop Boys are found purposefully walking down London streets for "West End Girls" (1984) and Morrissey cycling the streets of Salford for The Smiths' "Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before" (1987), Wham! on holiday in the tropics for "Club Tropicana" (1983) and Public Enemy staging an open-air political rally for "Fight the Power" (1990), Aaliyah and her troupe dancing on a yacht for "Rock the Boat" (2001) and Britney Spears just pole dancing for "Gimme More" (2007). The *mise-en-scène* is rarely surprising. Re-imagining



Figure 0.15 The ghost of Christmas future? Britney sees a vision of herself as a dark-haired pole dancer: Britney Spears' "Gimme More."

the song in this way, and fitting the image to the group or artist, was invariably eye-catching, refreshed the music, entered into dialogue with other aspects of popular culture (most particularly fashion) and so channelled both the singer and the song into the area of commodity fetishism (particularly when the music was rendered as aspirational). With the paradigm shift in the music business in the wake of models of digital distribution, however, such hard-hitting promotion, which had been predicated on a limited number of outlets, became redundant, coinciding with the obsolescence of music charts. MTV began to manage its decline by a partial disengagement with music while, at the same time, the commercial importance of live music or, rather, the "live music event" was revived.¹³

Within half a dozen years of the new millennium, the gig had returned with a vengeance, prompting long-since-defunct groups to reform, reissue out-of-print recordings and tour, and artists to dump managers in favour of concert promoters. The live event now occurs in the glare of a protean media apparatus: digital in form, global in reach, and instantaneous in broadcast and yet, in the live relay of images and recordings to the social media sphere, highly individualized. What live event is now not visually documented, in one form or another? On the one hand a tradition of concert films has been revived, where the concert DVD or download has become as obligatory for popular groups in the 2010s as the music video was in the 1980s. On the other hand the notion of the all-important "being there," and so only fully consuming by attending, has been bolstered by the social imperatives of social media: to report and provide evidence of oneself at the event—conceptualizing oneself therefore as part of the event. It is telling that Martin Scorsese makes



Figure 0.16 The director as worker: Martin Scorsese in *Shine a Light* (Martin Scorsese, 2008).

much of his lowly position—effectively his worker status—in respect of showing his preparation to film The Rolling Stones in concert, for *Shine a Light* (2008). The film opens with documentary footage of the flustered director, unable to secure basic information as to the event, and setting up cameras and lights as best he can for all eventualities, which is contrasted with the relaxed and louche members of the group, enjoying hotel suites rather than cramped control rooms, and socializing with the Clintons, among others, rather than (as with Scorsese), technicians. This can be read both as a gesture towards the demystification of the music documentary form but also as an acknowledgement of and reverence to, to use Auslander's term, the liveness of the event filmed.¹⁴

At this point the contours of the above-mentioned problematization—the way in which it would seem to be the idea of popular music that is assailed and propelled to enact sudden and radical change when exposed to cameras—have shifted again and would seem to invite a revisiting of ideas associated with the concert film before MTV, not least with a view to understanding the post-MTV music documentary. The ways in which the music documentary then remains a current concern informed the conference from which this collection arises, which was convened by David Sanjek and Benjamin Halligan at the University of Salford in Summer 2010: "Sights and Sounds: Interrogating the Music Documentary."

For this first consideration of the music documentary, it was inevitable that a limitation would occur in the predominant Anglo-American focus of the project: documentaries examined invariably looked to Western (in the sense of First World) popular music that became an essential cultural component in the lives of the baby-boomer generation, their children, and their children's

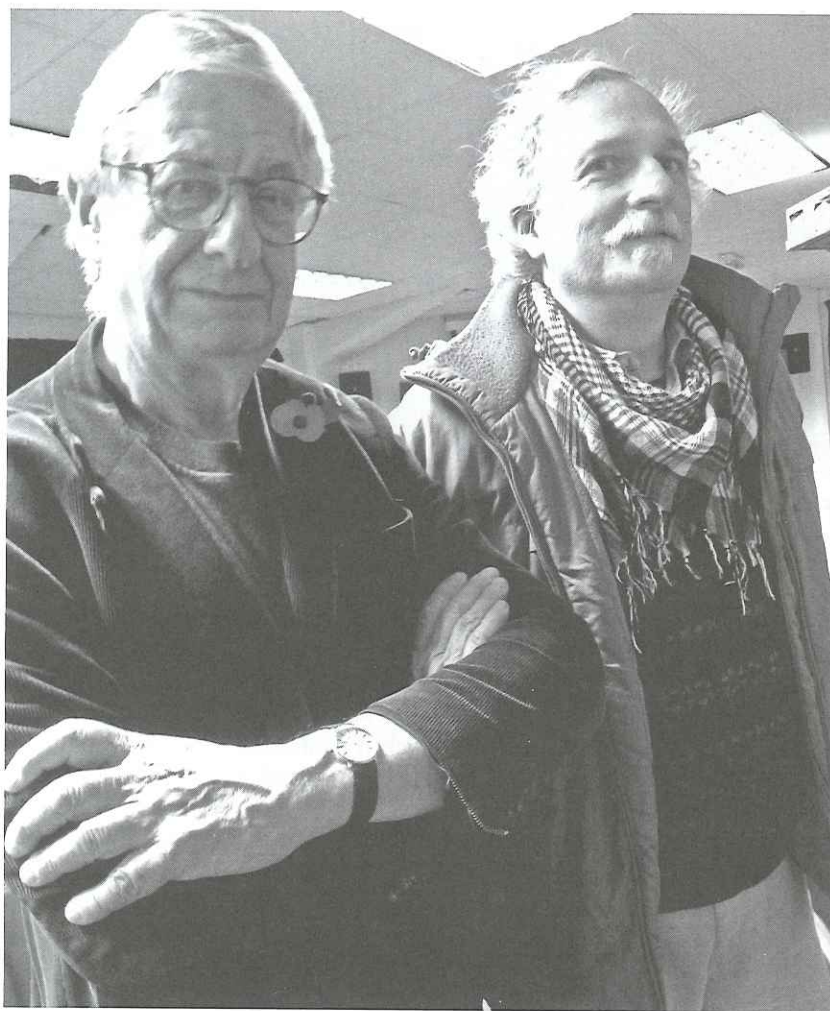


Figure 0.17 Tony Palmer with David Sanjek.

children. Non-Western traditions of music documentary remain to be explored, particularly when the tendency to marginalize or exclude the crowd remains as a central problem in Western traditions of music documentary—to the extent of the persistence of blind spots in relation to music events arising from DJ and rave cultures, and a failure to fully explore where the music “event” itself actually occurs.¹⁵ What seems to take the place of these considerations comes with an overlap between the music documentary and acceleration of celebrity culture.

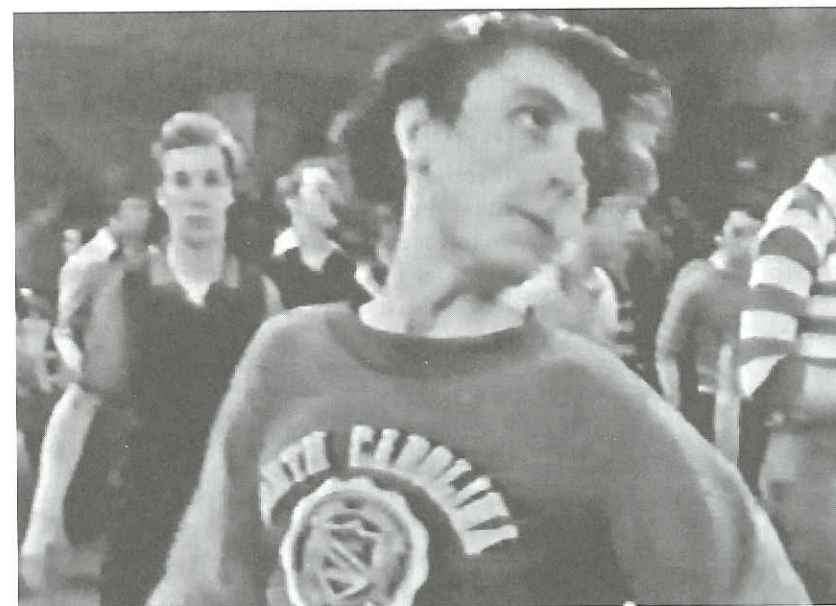


Figure 0.18 Found footage: the Northern Soul dancehall in *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (Mark Leckey, 1999).

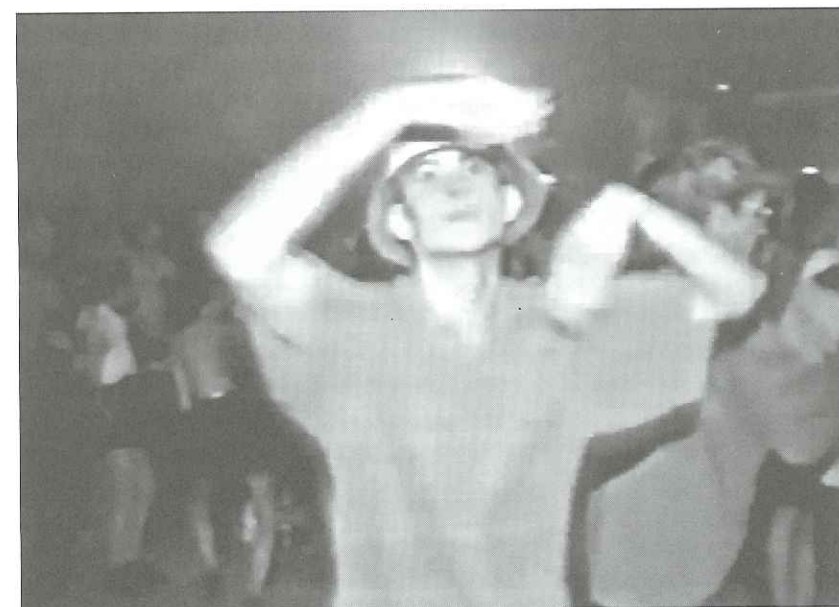


Figure 0.19 Found footage: the Acid House warehouse in *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*.

Celebrity Culture and the Music Documentary

Some of the most influential initial work on celebrity culture emerged from the established critical study of stardom, as conceptualized initially by Dyer.¹⁶ Dyer posed key questions concerning the representation and ideological connotations of the star image and offered significant methodological tools for its textual analysis. Dyer's theorizing provided a basis from which much of the subsequent work concerning the star/celebrity as a cultural text has emerged. However, this approach has been steadily fragmenting alongside the growth of a celebrity culture where ideas of stardom, fame, and talent do not necessarily function together. Now that the parameters of Hollywood stardom have seeped into a more diffuse and complex celebrity culture, the new modes of analysis needed have had to expand their scope and extend their range and, it should be added, enhance their methodologies. The impact of developments such as gossip blogging, the emergence of reality television, and the increased power, influence, and reach of the paparazzi have all come to function as central concerns. Actors, sports stars, reality TV contestants, pop stars, disgraced politicians, and musicians are all subject to the same level of scrutiny.

Celebrity culture, now no longer confined to the realms of down-market gossip magazines, is to be found as fully embedded within all spheres of popular media. It is no surprise therefore that the ways in which celebrity is constructed and disseminated have altered dramatically in recent years. Alongside this shifting landscape, the work of the paparazzi, with their propensity to meet the desire for candid images, has come to destabilize the image of the star or celebrity as known. A whole new culture has been created where almost no knowledge about a celebrity's private life is off limits and where scandal appears a normalized and even expected aspect of celebrity narratives. Consequently the scale on which images of scandal are circulated and consumed has intensified. Indeed, a single shot of a celebrity can alter the celebrity persona in a myriad ways, as with impact of the iconic image of pop star Britney Spears, having shaved the hair off her head in 2007, at the height of her mental breakdown. For some this represents a democratization of celebrity, in tandem with an *X-Factor*-like philosophy of "anyone can be a star." Anthony Burgess noted the emergence of the non-celebrity celebrity as well established even by 1980, in his Introduction to a portfolio of paparazzi shots.¹⁷ For others, this is understood as at best a distraction from the appreciation of genuine talent and at worse a kind of prurient pornography, full of moral comeuppance and public humiliation. For Burgess, the latter remains as transient as some of the names destined to be forgotten after their, as Warhol had it, fifteen minutes of fame. Burgess notes that the "lesson of vanity of a particular kind of fame" remains: "Callas dies but Verdi lives, and there will always be other singers to sing him . . . Art lives for ever, but executants are relatively expendable."¹⁸

The 1991 release of *Madonna: Truth or Dare* (Alek Keshishian) very visibly shifted the landscape of the music documentary, and pre-empted these tendencies: here the suggestion is made that the key tenets of the music documentary could be both scandalous, wildly entertaining, and overwhelmingly trashy. The film was a candid look behind the scenes of Madonna's 1990 Blonde Ambition tour, cementing the image of a notoriously outrageous persona that was further exacerbated by the singer's monstrous behavior towards her crew and fellow celebrities.



Figure 0.20 "Why would you say something if it's off-camera?" Warren Beatty in *Madonna: Truth or Dare* (Alek Keshishian).

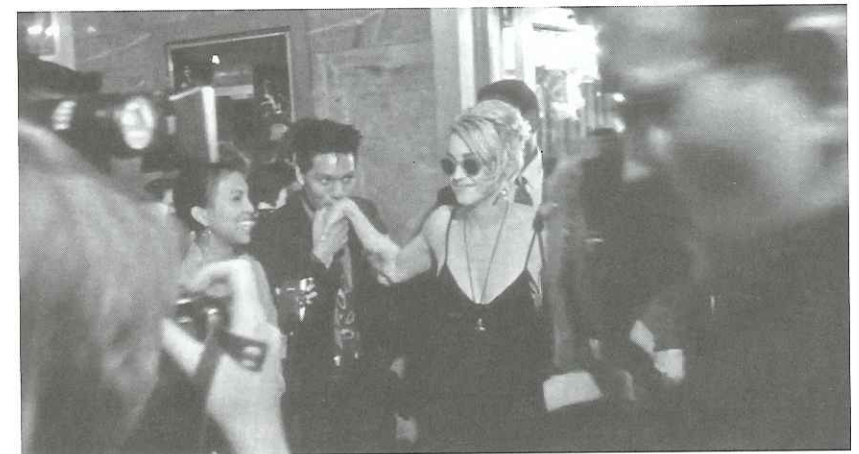


Figure 0.21 Star, entourage, paparazzi: *Madonna: Truth or Dare*.

The echoes of this documentary can be seen throughout contemporary celebrity culture, particularly in reality TV. The documentary answered, or reflected or engendered, an intense public fascination with all facets of celebrity life and, according to Madonna (seen in the documentary, interviewed on *Good Morning America*), aimed “to explode the myth that we raise up on a pedestal people we turn into icons. We make them inhuman and we don’t give them human attributes so they’re not allowed to fail, they’re not allowed to make mistakes.” But this “human” side was something that, as Warren Beatty astutely points out to her in the documentary, is rendered almost immaterial to a star that fully exists in public: “There’s nothing to say off-camera, why would you say something if it’s off-camera? What point is there existing?” The rise of social media in the last decade, and the ways in which self-documentation have come to the fore, in part answers Beatty’s question. But these developments in themselves look back to earlier harbingers of the media matrix of stardom and celebrity, the candid and the scandalous, and the intrusive and the intimate: Fellini’s paparazzi of modern Roman existence, of *La Dolce Vita* (1960), Warhol’s star factory, the “indecently” private photography of David Bailey, Francesca Woodman, and Nan Goldin, and the turbulence and denunciations surrounding the British tabloid media from the point of the death of Princess Diana to the present.

This notion of reclaiming the public image from the public has since become a key trope within the music documentary. Indeed the music documentary as a vehicle for the mainstream pop star has increased exponentially alongside the global digital convergence of media, and has created a multiplicity of outlets for the distribution of the celebrity/star image. It would appear that



Figure 0.22 “I jumped at the chance to make the documentary ... the, if you will, ‘rockumentary,’ that you’re about to see”: Rob Reiner in *This is Spinal Tap* (Reiner, 1983).

the music documentary is no longer reserved for “serious” musicians, as evidenced by the popularity of pop documentaries, often afforded a full theatrical release.¹⁹ In the context of celebrity culture, the music documentary can be seen to operate not only in the provision of an extra layer of financially lucrative content by the pop star for the fan, but also in adding to the celebrity/star brand via the presentation of a version of manufactured authenticity. This questionable *mise-en-scène* aims to present the “correct” version of the star/celebrity persona, away from the mutating versions seen in the blogosphere, accessed via the paparazzi, or even replacing the “banned” version: the ill-considered celebrity outburst in public or on the internet, leaked sex tapes and, in the case of The Rolling Stones, the judicial censoring of Robert Frank’s 1972 documentary *Cocksucker Blues*. These developments are even visible in the more respectable quarters of the music documentary: the jaded VIP point of view that has determined Martin Scorsese’s documentaries on icons of mainstream rock, where subjects narrate their own stories, often blaming society at large for misunderstanding them (as typically illustrated by the undifferentiated mass of fans) and/or getting too carried away with them, and never calling into question their own complicity in the creation and selling of their own star image, illustrates just such a tendency.²⁰ This is a regal rather than a people’s history.

Such a biographical focus offers an individualized mode of expression that supposedly allows the real celebrity an authentically mediated, self-articulated voice that rests precariously on the commercial and promotional activity of their brand. This trend has emerged in the firmament of an intensified celebrity culture in which, for better or for worse, the music documentary has taken its place.

In these respects and many others covered in this volume, it seems clear that the music documentary remains, in its functions and formats, in a state of flux. And yet the music documentary persists as both an index of, and an access to, the certainties and the vagaries of popular culture.

Notes

- 1 See “Plastic People” on the 1967 Mothers of Invention album *Absolutely Free*; Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the American Political Conventions of 1968* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 83.
- 2 *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* began as a 1967 off-Broadway musical and was filmed as *Hair* by Miloš Forman in 1979.
- 3 The video was directed by Russell Mulcahy and was the first video to be shown on the MTV channel.
- 4 Hegarty and Halliwell review the suggestion that 1976 can be fingered as the year of transition, from performance (of, in this case, prog rock) to “showbiz”; see Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell, *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 131. In keeping with this timeline, Austerlitz argues that the promotion video for Queen’s single “Bohemian Rhapsody,” shot in late 1975, could be said to inaugurate the music video as it

- would come to be known; see Saul Austerlitz, *Money for Nothing: A History of the Music Video from the Beatles to the White Stripes* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 25–26.
- 5 Shapiro charts this process, from the “death” of disco to the anti-disco backlash, and dates the culmination as 1979; see Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 194, 226.
 - 6 Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 27.
 - 7 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London and New York: Continuum, [1980] 2004).
 - 8 The enormity of the performance, and its persistence in popular memory, was such that Kurt Cobain, in his 1994 suicide note, complained that his dissatisfaction with his rock star status should be understood as his failure to follow the lead of “Freddie Mercury who seemed to love, relish [sic] in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy,” while Lady Gaga, a stadium performer who established herself in 2010, sports a name that directly references the 1984 Queen single “Radio Ga Ga.” Full text: http://kurtcobainssuicidenote.com/kurt_cobains_suicide_note.html (accessed March 2012).
 - 9 So that “Shakur, dead, became a bigger video celebrity than he had been alive . . .,” Austerlitz, *Money for Nothing*, 103. Plenty of recording artists have since fallen into this category or, even, have enjoyed a commercial career that only began once they had passed away.
 - 10 Austerlitz also notes the “inherent rebuke to the obstinacy of rock snobs who insist on the primacy of the music itself . . .” in the formation of this attitude; see Austerlitz, *Money for Nothing*, 1 and 6 respectively.
 - 11 See Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum, *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 16.
 - 12 The group could be said to have been unapologetic in these respects in their own output and the centerpiece of the album from which “Money for Nothing” was taken, 1985’s *Brothers in Arms*, looked to the moment of crisis, tragedy, and triumph for questions of the worth of art, utilitarian, metaphysical, and (as the foundation of Western modernism) progressive and contemporary: the coming to terms with the slaughter of the First World War, and an empathy with those whose lives were lost. As if emphasizing the difference between these two singles, the accompanying music video employed a style suggesting animated pencil drawings, in black and white, rather than the garish dayglo and blocky computer animated graphics of “Money for Nothing.”
 - 13 Marks and Tannenbaum (2011) frame their oral history of MTV in respect of the idea that the channel’s influence was effectively over after the end of the 1980s, as situated between the ascent of Duran Duran (whose videos for “Girls on Film” and “Rio,” of 1981 and 1982, set the tone for much of what was to come) and the advent of Nirvana (where “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” of 1991, is understood as the return of the repressed; outsiders over the beautiful, and dirgy “indie” music over high-energy corporate pop). However, Marks and Tannenbaum maintain, the persistent longevity of some bands can be related directly to those who were fortunate enough to become popular at the time of (and in part as a result of) the “Golden Age of music videos”; Marks and Tannenbaum, *I Want My MTV*, 17.
 - 14 Phillip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). Auslander applied this idea directly to popular music, tracking the ways in which musicality versus image can be seen to play out in the immediate wake of the counterculture and then in the infiltration of radical sexuality identities into 1970s popular music; see Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
 - 15 So that to consider Clover’s study of the popular music of 1989 (roughly between the poles of grunge and rave) is to realize that much of the latter remains undocumented and so generates a critical approach to its history that can incorporate the British motorway system, entrepreneurialism, and parliamentary legislation; Joshua Clover, 1989: *Bob Dylan Didn’t Have This to Sing About* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009). Mark Leckey’s installation film *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) is particularly clear-sighted in respect of the absence of the audience: abstract renderings of the sounds, or the sounds of the sounds, of various musical genres, playing over a selection of found footage of dance events from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. In that rave features prominently in *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, not least in the marked physiological difference of the dancers, the condition of receiving rather than witnessing music becomes uppermost in unifying this patchwork of scenes evidencing the ways in which the experience of popular music had been identity- and subjectivity-forming. For Leckey, DJ culture would seem to be the route away from the consumer-consumption determinations of popular music, returning music to its underground, phenomenological origins, and its religious and ritualistic roots.
 - 16 See Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979).
 - 17 See Anthony Burgess, Daniel Angeli, and Jean-Paul Dousset, *Private Pictures* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980).
 - 18 “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, unnumbered.
 - 19 For example: Justin Bieber’s *Never Say Never* (John M. Chu, 2009), Michael Jackson’s *This Is It* (Keny Ortega, 2009), Demi Lovato: *Stay Strong* (Davi Russo, 2012), and Katy Perry: *Part of Me* (Dan Cutforth and Jane Lipstiz, 2012).
 - 20 In addition to the above mentioned *Shine a Light*, *No Direction Home* (2005) and *George Harrison: Living in the Material World* (2011).