

# PERCEPTION OF VISUAL NARRATIVE AS A COMPONENT OF DIGITAL NATIVES' INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

**Sandra Veinberg**

*Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences Liepaja University (Latvia)*

## Abstract

In physical sciences, music has traditionally been considered an acoustic phenomenon because its perception is related to hearing. For a long time, most music recordings were distributed in exclusively audio formats. But with the development of a screen version of a song or film adaptation of music and with the popularization of video streaming services in the last decade, visual representations have become available and are now one of the most popular challenges in music distribution, especially among the younger generation. The visual component is not a minor aspect of music perception, but an important factor in conveying meaning. The topic of this research is the analysis of the visual component of the music video or MV. This research aims to investigate the impact of visual cues on the perception of musical messages. This study seeks to understand how 86 art students from two Latvian universities perceive MV impulses within their internal communication systems. Participants watched Jonas Åkerlund's music videos and analyzed their perceptual effects individually and collectively during a discussion in a university auditorium. Art reception analysis was employed as the study methodology. Bourdieu's theory of mediated decoding operation was utilized to assess whether the students could decipher the video artist's message. Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Symbolic Interaction Theory were also employed to analyze the results, as internal communication research has been influenced by sociogenetic theorists and was thus utilized to ensure the proper processing and interpretation of the collected data. This is already the fourth study dedicated to analyzing the internal communication of digital natives through music video perception.

**Keywords:** *Digital natives, music video, Jonas Åkerlund, Pierre Bourdieu, intrapersonal communication.*

---

## 1. Introduction

The social structure encompasses the patterned relationships between individuals that persist over time. Each social structure fosters its own unique social perception, a process by which individuals utilize the behavior of others to form opinions or make inferences about those individuals. Consequently, each social structure resembles a unique pair of glasses through which individuals perceive external stimuli. This phenomenon extends to art perception. New social groups, upon entering the scene, adopt art forms that align with their sensibilities, demonstrating their distinct approach to consuming artistic impulses compared to preceding generations.

This difference may be illuminated by its resemblance to the concept of a "foreign language" as formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin in linguistics. This language enters and begins to function without an existing context (Volosinov, 102), remaining incomprehensible for a period to the dominant sections of society and traditional culture.

One such "foreign language" is music video art, which is rapidly developing alongside the digitalization of society. The native residents of this socio-economic formation are digital natives, who have learned screen communication since childhood and favor it over other art forms.

The grammar of their foreign language is the following: 1) They have access to a vast array of art and information readily available on their screens and the internet. 2) They don't need to go to the theater or concerts as they can access a diverse range of artistic experiences through their smartphones and computers. 3) Digital natives have a distinct approach to art consumption. Digital natives consume art continuously, following impulses on their phone screen: on the street, at a bus stop, in a canteen, during lessons at school or university and talking to parents at the dinner table. 4) Digital natives are immersed in the digital realm. They maintain a constant connection to art through the internet.

Music videos were initially created as a form of entertainment for young people, and they have since become a popular and influential art form. Digital natives, who have grown up with technology and are accustomed to consuming information and entertainment through screens, have embraced music videos in a way that previous generations have not. This suggests that music videos can be seen as a cultural manifestation of the digital age, reflecting the values, attitudes, and preferences of this new generation.

Music has long yearned for a visual dimension. Several classical composers indicated in their scores a desire for visual accompaniment during concert performances. Among these were Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). Claude Debussy (1862-1918), a pioneer of Impressionistic music, employed music to conjure imagery of light, water, and other natural phenomena (Latham, 2002; Burkholder, Grout & Palisca, 2010). Alexander Scriabin's (1872-1915) most ambitious and radical work, *Prometheus, or The Poem of Fire* (1919), is a tone poem for orchestra, chorus, and piano. Scriabin envisioned it accompanied by a 'light organ' that would project colored lights onto the stage (Bentham, 1980). However, no such light organ was ever created.

About 130 years ago, the first cinematographers emerged and experimented with combining music and film. In the early 1900s, several musicians started producing short films to showcase their songs. By the 1920s and 1930s, musical short films gained popularity, paving the way for the modern music video. Music videos exemplify postmodern media art as they continue to innovate and explore new ways for artists to tell stories and express their musicality.

To analyze the perception of music videos (M/V) as art (which was done in this study) we use the works of the supporter of anti-authoritarianism with acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power, the Swedish director and filmmaker Jonas Åkerlund. The focus group of this study included only digital natives who are concurrently studying audiovisual media arts at university.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate whether the process of decoding artistic impulses can be considered a form of internal communication during interactions with art. To elucidate this concept, we have designed an experiment involving four key elements: 1) Jonas Åkerlund's music videos as artistic artifacts, 2) digital natives as recipients, 3) Pierre Bourdieu's theory of mediated decoding operations, and 4) relevant existing research on the processes of internal communication in art perception.

## **2. Methodology**

To explore the dynamics of art communication among young people, a qualitative reception analysis was conducted. The study involved 86 participants, with an average age of 23.5 years, all of whom were students at Liepaja University and RISEBA in Riga. The study took place from September to November 2023. Participants were shown the music video "The Cardigans. My Favourite Game" by Jonas Åkerlund and then engaged in both individual and group discussions to analyze its perceptual impact. Subsequently, each participant selected and analyzed a different music video of their choice. Four focus group discussions were held throughout the study. The study author then reviewed and analyzed the 86 individual analyses, compiled both in PowerPoint presentations and written commentaries.

To further contextualize the findings, a similar study from the previous year was consulted, which focused on the analysis of MV perception. The study employed reception analysis as the primary methodological approach, drawing upon the works of Eriksson (2006), Holub (1984), and Hall (1980). This approach was complemented by Bourdieu's theory of mediated decoding operations (Bourdieu, 1992)

## **3. Analysis, findings and results**

### **3.1. The first step in the perception of an idea**

Understanding how people comprehend visual narratives, including picture stories, comics, and film, requires integrating traditionally separate theories that span the initial sensory and perceptual processing of complex visual scenes, the perception of events over time, and comprehension of narratives (Loshky, 2020, p. 311). The Scene Perception & Event Comprehension Theory (SPECT) is one of the most recent and currently prominent theories in the field of art perception analysis. While psychology has primarily focused on analyzing these processes, our narrative analysis differs from that of psychologists as it focuses on the relationship between the artist's message (code) and its interpretation by the audience, who attempt to decode and comprehend this code.

This process is described by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as a mediated decoding operation. Immediate and accurate comprehension is only possible in the rare instance when the cultural code that enables the act of decoding is fully grasped and internalized by the observer, either through acquired knowledge or a natural predisposition, and aligns with the cultural context (Bourdieu, 1992)

In our research, we wanted to find out if this is how the first step in the perception of an idea proceeds. So: a) do the students surveyed know that such a code will be offered? b) are they confident that they will be able to decipher it?

Half of the surveyed students admit that such a code of the author's message exists in the work of art, but only 2% of them are able to decipher it. 40.9% believe that such a code is "probably hidden somewhere" but agree that it is often not noticed and deciphered.

If students are presented with multiple specific interpretations of the artistic code in the music video "My Favourite Game," 6% of respondents agree with both versions of the offered "interpretation" or didactic conclusions: a) Losing the game can result in losing your life, b) If something fails, you should not do it. An additional 18% of respondents agree that the car ride is a metaphor that illustrates how individuals are responsible for their own problems in all life situations. These findings support the notion that some individuals utilize all four stages in their internal communication, while others may skip or omit the second or third stage entirely (Veinberg, 2023).

Our previous research in this direction has proved that the perception of artistic impulse is a part of internal communication. (Veinberg, 2023; 2020) and the decisive factor in the perception of the work of art is still the wow-effect (52%), although 22% rate it as insignificant.

Students gravitate towards artists or artworks that evoke a sense of surprise, placing a premium on the brilliance and impact of the conveyed message. Unlike its application in other industries, such as healthcare or financial services, the wow-factor in art can effectively capture attention even when it triggers unpleasant associations, irritation, or anger (31%).

The following responses were received to explain the wow effect: strange screen characters (14.9%), awkward, complicated relationship situations (13.8%); a powerful message (12.6%), unusual storyline (12.8%); recognizable sensations, for example, driving a car, exceeding the speed limit (23%); journalistic style (4.48%).

This means that music videos can come to the attention of digital natives due to two identified reasons: a) it suits my taste or likes 52%, so I always only choose distributors that I like and know (45.6%) or b) it contains the wow-effect (52%). The research proved that it is almost impossible to attract attention with an unknown distributor or author of MV, because digital natives watch and listen only to those fillers and MV authors that they already "roughly know", "know" and are sure that they "like it". (52%). An exception to this choice only occurs if friends suggest to watch something previously unknown (21.4%), someone forces you to watch it (17.4%), if you suddenly manage to understand the message code (39.9%), if MV are watched together with friends and acquaintances (21.4%).

This means that it is difficult to get the students surveyed to choose to focus on the work of a lesser known or unknown author. They consume art just like food - they order only what they know and know they like. Until now, it has been believed in the reception of art that the acceptance of unknown authors is connected with the fact that the public does not buy tickets for performances of unknown authors, film screenings, because they do not want to spend money on untested goods. In other words, there are objective obstacles (money, space, time) that prevent us from focusing on areas of art that have not been studied so far. This study demonstrates that there are no such limitations. MV are available on the phone or computer and the viewer decides for himself which ones to choose and which ones not to.

### **3.2. Art narrative with basic instincts and emotions**

A substantial portion of surveyed students (18.6%) recognize the strong plot logic in Jonas Åkerlund's music videos. This narrative prowess, as acknowledged by 12.9% of respondents, effectively engages viewers, drawing them into the unfolding events on screen. The immersive nature of Åkerlund's storytelling fosters empathy for the main character and even creates the illusion of personal participation in the narrative. As a result, the audiovisual narratives in his music videos captivate audiences (18.6%), offering an inviting escape into a world of captivating stories.

Jung identified five instinctive factors: creativity, reflection, activity, sexuality and hunger. Our study confirms the presence of these instincts: 1) the theme of driving on the highway at maximum speed resonates with viewers (21.6%); 2) the presence of details like rings with skulls, a bandaged hand after cutting the veins, and the sacrifice of a beloved toy suggests that 9% of respondents can interpret the artist's symbolic language. 3) 12.2% of respondents can identify and relate to the protagonist's experiences of love, success, and failure, demonstrating their capacity for empathy. Interestingly, the majority of respondents still prioritize aesthetic pleasure in their evaluation of the artwork, suggesting that

while instinctive drives influence our perception of art, aesthetic considerations remain a significant factor, i.e. be "candy for the eyes and ears" (22%).

Individuals seek out "tasty information" in the art kitchen, just as they do in their own internal communication processes (Veinberg, 2023). Internal communication employs a specific defense mechanism that resembles a black-and-white rating scale. Information deemed "tasty and wholesome" is readily absorbed, while messages perceived as suspicious, difficult, or unwanted are excluded from internal dialogue. This selective filtering mechanism can be attributed to the principle of energy conservation, which applies to communication as well. If individuals lack control over incoming information, the influx of unwanted or overwhelming stimuli can lead to "overheating" of internal communication, resulting in internal stress.

Survey participants indicated that a familiar environment plays a crucial role in their engagement with art, facilitating emotional involvement in the events unfolding on the screen (29.3%). This finding suggests a parallel between communication with engaging video art and internal communication with oneself. Internal communication, like a dialogue with a close friend or like-minded individual (Veinberg, 2019), involves a receptive and open mindset, allowing for the intake of stimulating and enjoyable information.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

Music videos have emerged as one of the most prevalent forms of art in the digital natives' online landscape. This group of recipients possesses a unique ability to decipher and grasp the cultural codes embedded within the artist's message.

The first stage of engagement with music videos is often triggered by the "wow factor," a captivating element that emotionally enralls the audience, immerses them in the artist's world (escapism), and temporarily satisfies fundamental human instincts.

Despite their relatively short duration, music videos can evoke powerful emotional responses through the skillful employment of expressive techniques such as symbols, details, exaggerated scenes, intense experiences, dramatic editing, and characters navigating emotionally charged situations.

This ability to evoke deep emotions within a short timeframe suggests a parallel between engaging with captivating video art and engaging in internal dialogue with oneself.

The potential of music videos extends beyond the realm of artistic training, offering valuable applications in various educational fields within higher education. They serve as catalysts for stimulating discussions and fostering the exchange of diverse perspectives among young minds.

#### References

- Bentham, F. (1980). *The Art of Stage Lighting*. London: Theatre Arts Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Texter om de intellektuella*. Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag.
- Burkholder, J. P., Grout, D. J., & Palisca, C. V. (2010). *A History of Western Music*. London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Eriksson, G. (2006). Rethinking the Rethinking: The Problem of Generality in Qualitative Media Audience Research. *Nordicom Review*, 27(1), 31-44.
- Hall, S. (1980). *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Hutchinson.
- Holub, R. (1984). *Reception Theory*. London: Methuen.
- Latham, A. (2002). *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Veinberg, S. (2019). The Attitude of Digital Natives Towards Intrapersonal Communication. In E. Soriano, C. Sleeter, M. Antonia Casanova, R. M. Zapata, & V. C. Cala (Eds.), *The Value of Education and Health for a Global, Transcultural World, Vol. 60: European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 855-863). Future Academy. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2019.04.02.106>
- Veinberg, S. (2020). Notas sobre el uso del dialogismo (heteroglosia) de Mikhail Bakhtin como método de análisis de textos de medios de comunicación. *Comunicación & Métodos*, 2(2), 35-45.
- Veinberg, S. (2023). Intrapersonal Communication – a Hypersensitive Area for the Interpreting of Messages in the view of Digital Natives and Multilinguists. In A. Güneyli, & F. Silman (Eds.), *ICEEPSY 2022: Education and Educational Psychology, Vol. 3: European Proceedings of International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology* (pp. 197-204). European Publisher. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epicepsy.22123.17>
- Voloshinov, V. I. (2010). Ekspozicija problemi „juzoi reci“. In M. Bahtin, & V. Voloshinov (Eds.), *Antropolingvistika*. Moskva: Labirint.