CODES AND CONVENTIONS OF MUSIC VIDEOS
What are codes and conventions?

- The codes and conventions of music videos are the different techniques used to construct meaning in them.
- These techniques can be divided into two types; technical and symbolic.
Technical Techniques

- Technical – how meaning is conveyed using technical equipment
  - the way camera angles are used
  - different types of shots and movements
  - diegetic vs. non-diegetic sound
  - the pace and style of editing
  - the genre.
Symbolic Techniques

- Symbolic techniques are ways of showing meanings beyond what you can see
  - facial expressions
  - gestures
  - poses
  - mis en scene.
Reasons for codes and conventions.

- The audience can become familiar with a particular genre, as they get used to recognizing the different conventions within a genre.
- It provides a structure that the audience can understand.
- To ensure the lyrics of the song fit in with our expectations of the music.
The codes and conventions

- The conventions of a music video vary depending on genre of music. However, the general conventions include:
  - The Style
  - The Camera
  - The Editing Techniques
  - The Sound (non diegetic and diegetic)
  - Mis en Scene – props, lighting, costume – hair and makeup, location/setting, and colours.
  - Notions of looking - stereotyping
The Style of music videos
Performance

- Performance videos mainly focuses on the artist or band just plainly performing either on their own or in front of a crowd. There is no storyline, just a collection of camera angles and movements of the band members. This is popular amongst rock artists videos and are often seen in pop style music videos. A good example of this is ‘Beyonce – Love on Top‘ where the video shows the artist continuously performing the song from a variety of camera shots and angles.
A Narrative music video follows a story line. There are two types of narrative: linear and fragmented. A linear narrative follows the standard storyline structure: beginning, middle, end. ‘Katy Perry – ‘Thinking of you’ A fragmented narrative is one that doesn't BUT depicts the lyrics from the song.
Mixture – is a combination of performance and narrative. The artists is featured in this style of music video with the narrative of the story acting as the “B-roll”. This is portrayed in ‘Kelly Clarkson’s’ video – ‘Since you been gone’.
Animated
These videos use fast movement showing a series of pictures and frames. They can be done digitally or manually using props.

Foo Fighters: Everlong

Surreal
- These videos include weird and unexpected images in them making them memorable and sometimes fun. They are beyond believable.

Pastiche or parody
- A Parody is a work that mimics in an absurd or ridiculous way the conventions and style of another work - in order to derive ridicule, ironic comment or affectionate fun.
- Weird Al Yankovich is very famous for all of his parody music videos.

White and Nerdy
- A Pastiche is a video with a mixture and blurring of generic conventions and boundaries. It’s a collection of genres and themes from various other music videos.

Geri Halliwell: It’s Raining Men
Cameo

This is the style of music video when other artists or famous people appear BUT don’t perform in the video. This still involves the artist/s usually singing through the video with cut backs to them performing whilst almost doing a narrative video.

Examples:
Fatboy Slim: Weapon of Choice
Fall Out Boy – I Don’t Care
Michael Jackson – Black or White
The Camera

- The way the camera is used is crucial in producing a music video. It can create different effects by the different Angles, and Movements. In general every music video uses a variety of camera Shots, Angles and Movements to create different moods, reflect different genres and to emphasize certain elements in the video itself. Each director and/or cinematographer develops his own style and it is reflected in the finished product.
Camera Shots

Music videos feature a number of shots for various reasons; to relate with the audience by expressing thoughts and feelings, but also to show the viewer what is happening. Camera shots that would be found in a music video are:

- **Long Shot** – The emphasis on this type of shot is the location. The artist is shown but cannot be clearly seen.

- **Wide shot** – This is where the artist is shown taking up most of the shot but the location/setting is still focused on.

- **Mid shot** – this shows the artist from his/her waist to head, and focuses mainly on the subject but still giving an impression of the location/setting.
**Medium close up** – this shot is halfway between a mid shot and a close up, showing the artist from chest to head.

**Close up** – this shot shows the artist's face or can show an object that the artist is holding, or something where the camera focuses closely on.

**Extreme close-up** – this shows the artist's face extremely close, for example eyes, or mouth to identify something; it can have the effect of showing the audience the artist's thoughts and feelings or even showing a lip sync commonly used in music videos.
Over the shoulder shot – this is a good shot used, specifically in narrative based music videos, when the artist is acting and speaking to another person. This shot is also used to show something the character is looking at.

Cut in – this shot can be used in music videos to show something that the lyrics might be referring to. For example ‘I will shoot you with my gun’ and a gun comes in’ It shows the object in detail, similar to an extreme close up, but used very quickly. A cut in is also used to show a transition of time.

These shots are the basic shots you expect to see in most music videos. However, there can be some additional creative ways of displaying a scene through different camera angles...
Camera Angles

The way the camera is positioned determines the angle of the shot. There are many different camera angles used in the production of music videos to convey different images. Examples of camera angles are:

Eye-Level – this is a very common view as this is how we view the world. It shows subjects as we would expect to see them in real life.

High Angle – This is where the camera shows the subject from above - the camera is angled down towards the subject - which has the effect of making them appear less powerful, less significant and or even submissive.

Low Angle – This is where the subject is shown from below, giving the impression of being more powerful or dominant.
Bird's Eye – this angle is showing the subject/scene from directly above. It is completely different and can be from an unnatural point of view which can be used to add a dramatic effect or showing a different spatial perspective. It can also show the positions and motions of different characters and objects, enabling the viewer to see things the character might not see.

Slanted – this is when the camera is slanted also known as a Dutch angle were the camera is purposely tilted to one side so the horizon is on an angle. This is creative in making interesting dramatic effects. Dutch tilts are also popular in MTV-style video production, where unusual angles and lots of camera movement play a big part.

Camera angles play a huge part in emphasising the artist or to show emotions and expressions. The camera angles that are the most common in music videos, are close ups, showing the artist lip syncing, and extreme close ups where lyrics can be linked to visuals. The camera never stays on one shot for longer than 3-5 seconds.
Camera Movements

The camera moves to follow the artist or to show the performance of the artist. These movements include panning and tracking. A director may choose to move action along by telling the story as a series of cuts, going from one shot to another, or they may decide to move the camera with the action. Some examples of camera movements are:

- **Pans** – This is where the camera scans a scene horizontally. The camera is placed on a tripod, which operates as a stationary axis point as the camera is turned, often to follow a moving object which is kept in the middle of the frame.

- **Dolly/Tracking** - This is where the camera is mounted on a cart which travels along tracks for a very smooth movement. Also known as tracking. This is used to emphasize movement.
Editing Techniques

- Editing is the process that concludes the making of the music video. When you edit, you cut scenes down, add special effects, stylize or colourize the video and put it in order so that some type of story is being told. The editing consists of the following things:
  - Jump Cutting: including extra shots (often close ups) to transition from one scene to the next or to emphasize an action or lyric in the song
  - CGI effects: chroma keying out shots to include specific background scenes, adding CGI - adding Computer Generated Images to create specific moods or effects

*Labrinth: Earthquake*

- Parallel editing: method of cutting between a couple of scenes or stories that are happening at the same time
- Sound editing: timing the video with the music and adding non-diegetic sound
- Colourize / Stylize: create a specific mood or genre by altering the overall colour of the video.
Sound consists of two main forms: **diegetic sound** which is already present in the film *(Rabbit in your Headlights by Unkle)* and **non-diegetic sound** which can be edited in. Sound is absolutely essential in any music video as this is the main reason for why people watch and listen to them. Sound, like video footage can be edited to create different effects and variations to the normal vocals that we hear.

**Sound Parallel** sound is when the music matches the mood of the video. An example would be if the song was slow then the video would also be slow to go with the mood of the song. (pacing) If it was a sad song then the video would also be sad. Some music videos have diegetic sound, where they include sound from the surroundings, such as birds, police sirens that make the video seem more realistic. However, the music itself is non-diegetic sound.
The Mis en scene for music videos focuses on the *lighting, props, costume, hair and makeup, location, and colour*. These elements usually depend on the genre of the music video and the style. These elements are also important in contributing towards the chosen genre. They are used to convey the importance of the people in the music videos. They are also used to represent certain characters in different ways.

- Lighting – how the scene is lit / artificial lights/ side lights
- Props – performance equipment, band merchandise
- Costume - clothes that stereotype; costumes that tell the story
- Hair and makeup – style of the artist
- Location – concert halls, venues, streets, “on location”, etc
- Colour - Specific colours representing a mood (during filming AND in post through the stylizing of the video)
Lighting -

The Mis en scene connects some pre-conceived notions associated with a specific social group. The lighting in a music video allows the audience to recognize the genre and style of the music video depending on the style and type of light that is used.

For example, a scene lit by using natural style is often associated with country type music videos. Those that use artificial lights, strobe lights and colored lights would most likely be seen in a dance pop/hip hop video. Grunge style videos use darker, higher contrast often using a filter overlay in post production.

You can see the use of light according to the genres in these 2 examples: ‘Forever and Always by Shania twain’ – which is country music, and a famous dance pop song ‘Release me by Agnes’.
The angle and direction of the light can also determine the genre of the video as it gives the audience clues about what time of day the scene is taking place.

In the video Delilah ‘Go’ the video is very dimly lit showing that it is night time. The quality of the light in a scene can also hide or reveal things and influence the viewer’s reaction. For example, in Delilah - ‘Go’ the use of lights is very effective - the light is out of focus, enhancing the artist and making the background less important, but relevant at the same time.

The scene in Kidulthood where it is raining and the lights are out of focus in the background, allow the viewer to focus on the character. The lighting also plays a part in showing the time laps, and can be used effectively to pass a time in a music video or film.
Lighting can also change throughout the music video depicting different scenes connected to the lyrics. Psy’s, Gangnam Style uses different lighting elements depending on the scene, costumes, make up and props to clearly illustrate the genre and mood that is created and even has some CGI mixed in.
In most music videos props are used to link the lyrics with the visuals and to help tell the story in the narrative (make it believable). The props in a music video add to the entertainment value and can be used in a fun imaginative way. One music video that uses props to make the video more entertaining is *Beastie Boys: Sabatoge*.

Katie Perry is an artist that always incorporates a large number of props in her videos such as this one, *Dark Horse*. 
Costume!

The costume is usually used to represent certain characters in different ways. Different artists would also wear different clothes to represent what they are portraying in the music video. An example of this is with Lady Gaga’s music videos. She often wears dramatic clothing to go with her extravagant image. One video in particular is Bad Romance’. Another music video that displays costume well is in the video ‘When I was a youngster by Rizzle Kicks’.

Costume can also stereotype. First impressions is very relevant in music videos where we learn about the character only through visuals. This is very true in the different genres of the music videos: Heavy metal – jeans and chains; rap – low slung jeans and balls caps; pop – dramatic, high style clothing; country – cowboy boots and hats. Sometimes the costumes make the video as in “Around the World” by Daft Punk.
The location, or scene of a music video, can not only show the audience where the artist is, but is also reflective of the genre. For example, locations such as the beach, in a car, or at a party, would usually be found in a dance pop music video due to the happy and energetic feel they give.

If the music video is filmed on a street, in a house or a warehouse that are typical locations you might find a gang, you would associate this to grime/Hip-hop/rap type video.

The location influences the genre, but is also chosen purposely to relate to the song. Two great examples of these locations are: ‘Katy Perry Teenage Dream‘ (beach; happy – dance pop) and ‘Drake – Headlines‘ (urban – hip hop/rap)
Colour

- Colours are shown through almost everything in a music video: lighting, costumes, hair, makeup, locations. Even the way the camera is angled can play a part in portraying the colours we see in music videos.

- Color can affect us psychologically and physically, often without us being aware, and can be used as a strong device within a story. Being able to use color to create harmony, or tension within a scene, or to bring attention to a key visual theme can be used to spectacular effect. Desaturating a scene can create a depressed, isolated mood ([Evanescence: My Immortal](http://example.com)) while over lighting and the use of bright colours can create an uplifting, happy mood. ([Katie Perry: California Gurls](http://example.com))

- A strong red color has been shown to raise blood pressure, while a blue color has a calming effect. Some colors are distinctly associated with a particular location or place, while others give a sense of time or period. The teal/orange look that is so popular now reflects a nostalgic feel ([Smashing Pumpkins: 1979](http://example.com)) while the black and white colour scheme is reflective of the “film noir” time period. ([Bob Dylan: The Night We called it a Day](http://example.com))