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Framing Personae in Music Videos

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I first developed the concept of the musical persona to enable a discussion of musicians as performers in their own right, rather than just as vehicles for the realization of musical works.[1] "Persona" is a flexible term that I (and others) have used in other contexts to suggest a performed role that is somewhere between a person's simply behaving as themselves and an actor's presentation of a fictional character.[2] For the most part, musicians in performance do not portray fictional entities: they portray themselves as musicians. Although this is the normative case, there certainly are instances in which musicians do portray fictional characters as part of their normal stage routine—think of the members of the rock band KISS, for example. A schema for the analysis of musicians as performers must be able to account for the entire range of cases. Since 2004, I have defined the musical persona as a version of the musician designed for public performance, i.e., the identity a musician presents to audiences. In this chapter I suggest taking musicians' personae as central objects in the analysis of music videos. I begin by defining musical personae with regard to elements of musical performance, including musical genre, and the relationship of performance to socio-cultural discourses, including discourses of race—which I emphasize in my examples here—gender, and other dimensions of identity. I then refine the definition by reference to Erving Goffman's concept of self-presentation and identify specific constituents of musical personae that can be analyzed fruitfully. Finally, I discuss the question of the relationship between musical genre and genres of music video. I suggest that, compared with live performance, the music video is in some ways an ideal space for the performance of musical personae because of the greater degree of control over expressive means that video affords performers.

Musical personae

Michael Jackson dramatized the process of persona construction in a routine he would perform frequently in concert before launching into the song "Billie Jean." Jackson, dressed in a billowy white T-shirt, athletic pants, and tap shoes, would walk on stage—sometimes

meanderingly, sometimes purposefully—carrying an old valise. After placing the valise on a high stool, he opened it and started removing items from it, beginning with a sequined black shirt, which he put on, followed by a single sequined white glove, which he wriggled onto his hand. Finally, he removed from the valise a black Fred Astaire-style fedora. He would adjust the brim, dust it off, walk around with it, but not put it on his head until he had walked across the stage to a microphone on a stand in a single spotlight. The moment when he put the hat on his head and struck the pose that begins the "Billie Jean" choreography was the moment when his transformation from Michael Jackson, the human being, into "Michael Jackson," the musical persona was complete and the concert could begin.[3]

When I originally proposed the concept of the musical persona in the context of popular music studies—an appropriate context for a discussion of music video—I turned initially to Simon Frith's analysis of performance in that realm. Frith helpfully identifies three different strata in popular musicians' performances, all of which may be present simultaneously. Frith proposes that we hear pop singers as "personally expressive," that is, as singing in their own persons, from their own experience. But two other layers are imposed on that first one because popular musicians are "involved in a process of double enactment: they enact both a star personality (their image) and a song personality, the role that each lyric requires, and the pop star's art is to keep both acts in play at once."[4] Drawing on Frith's insights, I identified the three layers of performance in which popular musicians engage as: the real person (the performer as human being), the performance persona (which corresponds to Frith's star personality or image), and the character (Frith's song personality).[5]

Since *character* refers to entities defined through the music and lyrics of songs but not all musicians are singers, and we generally do not have access to the musicians we see perform as *real people*, the *musical persona* is the most important of the three layers because it is the primary interface between musicians and their audiences. The persona is also an identity that musicians generally perform whenever they are publicly visible, whether onstage or offstage (although there have been cases in which the musician seeks to make a clear distinction between person and persona—Vincent Furnier's insistence that he and Alice Cooper are completely distinct individuals is an example). Admittedly, the line between persona and character is not always clear. For example, Ziggy Stardust was both a character in some of David Bowie's songs and the persona he assumed while performing those and other songs, creating complexity and ambiguity. It is also true that the line between the real person and the musical persona is not always clear, especially in musical contexts such as the singer-songwriter genre as exemplified by James Taylor and Joni Mitchell, where there is a desire to believe that the person we see on stage is identical with the artist as a private person and that the songs are in some measure autobiographical or confessional.[6] All of this notwithstanding, the vocabulary of real person, musical persona, and song character provides a way of describing and analyzing multiple elements of performed musical identities and their interrelationships in both clear-cut and more ambiguous cases.[7]

Framing musical performance: Performance, genre, identity, and society

I have suggested that musical performances, as events, are thrice framed.[8] I borrowed the term "frame" from sociologist Erving Goffman, who defines frames as the "principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them."[9] The way in which an event is framed allows us, as social actors, to understand what is going on in a particular situation and what our options for interaction are. For example, the New York City based performance group Improv Everywhere staged an event in Grand Central Station in 2008 called "Frozen Grand Central."[10] The performance itself was simple: at a specific time during a rush hour, over 200 ordinary-looking people suddenly and simultaneously froze in place and remained frozen for five minutes, then resumed their previous activities as if nothing had happened. The video of this event documents the reaction of those witnessing these actions. At first, they are mystified and ask each other questions about what is going on. Then, they start to offer hypotheses as to the nature of the event, suggesting that it could be a protest or an acting class. Once the performers start to move again, the bystanders applaud. The video clearly shows that, in order to understand how to interact with what was going on around them, the bystanders first had to understand the frame. Eventually, they determined that the event in question was framed as a performance. They then could conclude that the people frozen in position were performers and they, the bystanders, were in an audience role. Once they understood the frame and their role within it, they performed the audience role by applauding.[11]

I see musical performance as framed by three nested frames. The innermost frame, the one that most immediately defines the event, is the frame that allows us to understand that an event is a musical performance such as a concert, a recital, or an open rehearsal (each of which is a musical event of a somewhat different kind that entails different behavioral conventions). This frame has to do with the basic expectations as to what is going to happen and what social roles, including but not limited to those of performer and audience, are available. The frame defines a shared understanding among all those involved as to what is going on, particularly concerning the interaction between and among performers and audience.

Expectations about what will and will not occur in the performance frame are highly influenced by the second frame, which is that of musical genre. Genre can be defined in many ways, especially in popular music. Genre labels are used differently by the music industry to market its products, by broadcasters to program, by professional organizations to grant awards, by fans and music lovers to identify their tastes, by musicians to describe specific styles of playing, and so on. In all cases, genre labels distinguish forms of musical experience from one another, erecting boundaries between them with various degrees of porousness. As Fabian Holt puts it: "Genre is a fundamental structuring force in musical life. It has implications for how, where, and with whom people make and experience music

… There is no such thing as 'general music,' only particular musics. Music comes into being when individuals make it happen, and their concepts of music are deeply social."[12]

In describing genres as frames in Goffman's sense, like Holt I am emphasizing the social dimension of genres, the ways whereby they serve as "principles of organization" that define the contexts in which—and the terms under which—people come together to make music. Genres define norms for performance by both musicians and audiences and the ways in which these two groups interact to constitute the performance of a specific kind of music. Certain musical personae and audience roles are deemed to be appropriate to particular genre contexts, and all performances within a particular genre context take these norms as reference points. Performers and audiences can assume a variety of relationships with genre norms and the personae and roles they entail. A performer can construct a persona that adheres to the norms of the genre, or use a persona to critique those norms or even to undermine them. It is clear that some genres impose more restrictive limits on a performance than others. For example, a member of a rock band has far more flexibility with respect to appearance and attitude than does a member of a symphony orchestra or a marching band. Nevertheless, all genres place limits on what is considered a valid performance in its context, no matter how generous the boundaries may appear to be.

The third frame around the performance of popular music is that of the socio-cultural conventions defined outside the context of musical performance and genre by society at large. There is a line of inquiry in performance theory that posits performance as a social context framed in such a way as to distinguish it from the flow of everyday life in which behaviors that would not be acceptable in other social contexts can be enacted. Goffman points out, for instance, that it is perfectly acceptable to subject other human beings to a kind of close scrutiny in events framed as theater that would be unacceptable in other social contexts.[13] This line of inquiry is traceable to Johan H. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, first published in 1944, in which Huizinga describes sites of play and ritual as "play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart."[14] For Victor Turner, these temporary worlds are liminal spaces in which the status quo can be queried and critiqued and "new ways of modeling or framing social reality may actually be proposed and sometimes legitimated in the very heat of performance."[15] Despite performance's status as a liminal context in which different realities may be explored and even enacted, transgressing against socio-cultural norms is risky, and at times can result in sanctions, such as those imposed on Jim Morrison of The Doors for alleged indecency and profanity during a 1969 performance in Miami or on Pussy Riot for its performance in a Russian Orthodox cathedral in 2012. Musical performance, as a liminal practice, acquires social or political meaning through its conformity or resistance to social and cultural norms. The personae enacted by British glam rockers of the early 1970s, to name but one example, placed into the public sphere queer gender performances that conformed neither to conventional behavioral codes nor to the genre conventions of the rock music that had preceded them in the late 1960s, which had had little use for such heterodox gender identities as those performed by Marc Bolan, David Bowie, and Suzi Quatro.[16] In the analyses that follow, I will be attentive to the functioning of all three of these frames

and the relationship of musical personae to them in music videos. I will be particularly attentive to the ways in which the videos enact tensions between musical genre and racial identity through the performance of musical personae.

Musical personae as self-presentation

To refine my definition of the musical persona and to enable its analysis, I address musical performance using ideas developed by Goffman for the analysis of interactions in everyday life, which he calls self-presentation.[17] The playing of music is one of the routines, to use Goffman's term, that musicians perform in the course of their lives. As Goffman suggests, we present ourselves differently in the different routines we perform for our various audiences (I do not present myself in the same way to my students in the classroom as I do to my departmental colleagues at meetings, for instance). For Goffman, presentation of self is a matter of "impression management."[18] We seek to create a specific impression on a particular audience, one that we believe will cause that audience to perceive us in the way we wish that audience to perceive us, and we actively adjust our self-presentation in response to audience reaction. Therefore, there is no reason to suppose that musicians present the same identity when playing music as when they perform their other life routines. The version of self that a musician presents qua musician is what I am calling the musical persona.

Goffman's concepts work well in relation to the range of identities musicians may perform because his theory allows for the possibility that any given self-presentation in a social interaction can be a sincere presentation of a person's real feelings at the time or partly or wholly fictional. For example, if a student greets me on campus and asks how I am, I may respond that I am fine even when I am not feeling that way. I thus present myself as a fictional character, at least at this moment of the interaction. Unlike theories of acting that focus on how a real person may assume the identity of a fictional character, Goffman's concept of self-presentation applies equally well to fictional and non-fictional representations. From this perspective, the seemingly sincere demeanor of a singer-songwriter like James Taylor and the overtly stylized and artificial lounge-lizard persona of Bryan Ferry with Roxy Music are equally self-presentations. Whether real, fictional, or some combination of both, they are identities designed to create an impression of who the musician is in relation to a specific audience that both define and adhere to the norms for a genre of music.

Goffman initiates his discussion of self-presentation by considering the fronts presented by individuals;[19] however, he quickly makes it clear that he considers the team to be the basic unit of the performance of identity and individuals to be teams with only one member.[20] He goes on to analyze in detail the roles and interactions entailed in the performance of group identity. Although I have implied to this point that a musical persona is a matter of individual self-presentation, it is equally true that musical groups of any kind have collective personae. For example, during the era of Beatlemania in the mid-1960s, The Beatles had a collective identity of a cheerful, user-friendly, slightly irreverent boy band. Each Beatle had his own individual persona, but all of their personae had to harmonize

with this group affect. By 1967, however, The Beatles' group persona had morphed into that of a psychedelic rock band plugged into the countercultural ethos of the time. At both moments, each individual Beatle's persona was articulated to the group persona. Whereas, in the mid-1960s, fans dubbed Paul McCartney the Cute Beatle, John Lennon the Smart Beatle, George Harrison the Quiet Beatle, and Ringo Starr the Funny Beatle, their individual identities shifted in relation to the group's overall persona. In Richard Avedon's canonicical portrait photographs of 1967—originally published in *LOOK Magazine* in the United States and other magazines in the United Kingdom and Europe, then disseminated widely as posters—Ringo is shown with a dove on his hand, suggesting his commitment to the "Peace and Love" dimension of the counterculture, while John Lennon is presented with spirals for eyes, perhaps indicating his engagement with psychedelia and the drug culture. Paul appears as a flower child in pastel blues, surrounded by blooms, and the portrait of George emphasizes his mysticism.[21]

The vocabulary Goffman uses to discuss the means people employ in self-presentation is readily applicable to musical performance. Goffman uses the word "front," which he defines as "expressive equipment of a standard kind," to describe the self-image one presents to others.[22] Front is made up of two elements: setting and personal front, which in turn consists of two aspects, appearance and manner.[23] Setting refers to the physical location where a performance takes place, which can be used to further the impression one wishes to create on an audience—the display of credentials on the walls of a doctor's office is an example. Jimmy Buffett is a good example of a musician who makes use of setting in his performances. To reinforce the persona he has built around the idea of a sybaritic lifestyle in the Florida Keys, Buffett has performed against backdrops depicting the ocean as seen from the beach, potted palms, Easter Island heads, Tiki bars, and other kitsch representations of a semi-tropical existence devoted to leisure. Appearance has to do with the visual dimensions of self-presentation, while manner has to do with the behavioral dimensions. In the context of musical performance, these are the basic units from which genre-specific personae are constructed and through which they are communicated to audiences. Their deployment is always context-specific or, to use a sociological term, situated. Musicians often perform their personae both onstage and offstage, through interviews and public statements as well as in live performances and music videos.

Performing genre, persona, and race: "Walk This Way" by Run-DMC featuring Aerosmith

The 1986 video for "Walk This Way" by Run-DMC featuring Aerosmith entertainingly narrativizes the ways in which musicians construct their performance personae within the terms of different musical genres.[24] The setting is two adjacent rehearsal studios divided by a wall. On one side, the rock band Aerosmith is jamming while, on the other

side, the members of the hip-hop group Run-DMC bang on the wall and demand that Aerosmith turn down the volume (Figure 5.1). Each studio contains elements that make it an appropriate environment for performance within a specific genre and with its attendant personae. Aerosmith's studio, to the viewer's left, shows the band jamming in a hazy ambience with gigantic Marshall amplifiers against one wall and a messy array of cups, water bottles, and what appear to be full trash bags stacked against another wall that also features a number of posters. Run-DMC's side presents an environment that is both more spartan than Aerosmith's side and neater. The space is dominated by Jam-Master Jay's turntable setup and is lit primarily by a single bulb dangling from the ceiling by a cord. There are also some album covers on the wall, a gigantic sign with the group's name on it, and a couch on which a young woman sits. The contrast in settings clearly juxtaposes rock band nonchalance with hip-hop cool.

In the second half of the video, the setting switches to a concert venue. We see Perry and Tyler performing side-by-side until Run and DMC appear in silhouette on a screen at the top of a staircase behind them. Bursting through the screen, the two MCs descend the staircase and commandeer the show. The setting is generic and unremarkable, as Carol Vernallis suggests is typical for music video settings, except for one thing: the audience.[25] The few glimpses we have of the audience suggest that it is made up overwhelmingly of young white people dressed and coiffed in ways that indicate they are hair metal fans.

Figure 5.1 The split rehearsal studio with Aerosmith on one side and Run-DMC on the other (0:22).

This audience becomes a piece of expressive equipment; its presence indicates that we are seeing an Aerosmith concert into which Run DMC intrudes (although their intrusion is not resisted and is perhaps even welcomed by Perry and Tyler given that they turn to look at the staircase before Run and DMC venture down). Since the video is for "Walk This Way," a song Run-DMC acquired from Aerosmith, the implicit message is that hip-hop artists are impinging on turf traditionally occupied by rock artists.

The appearance of each set of musicians also contrasts sharply along genre lines. To begin, all of the members of Aerosmith appear to be white and all of the members of Run-DMC appear to be African-American. Considering the general paucity of black rockers and white rappers, this dimension of the performers' appearance adheres to genre norms, as does their apparel. Joe Perry, Aerosmith's guitarist, wears a sports jacket over a T-shirt, while singer Steven Tyler wears a black suit-cut leather jacket over his bare chest, which is adorned with necklaces and pendants, and skinny jeans. His trademark silk and chiffon scarves are tied around his microphone stand. By contrast, all of the members of Run-DMC dress identically in black slacks, jackets, T-shirts, and fedoras with unlaced white Adidas athletic shoes. While it is the case that hip-hop crews do not necessarily dress identically, and Run-DMC did not do so all of the time, it is inconceivable that the members of a traditional rock band such as Aerosmith would do so at all. Perry's and

Figure 5.2 Run, DMC, and Steven Tyler dance together during the climax of the concert sequence in the music video for Run-DMC featuring Aerosmith, "Walk This Way" (1986), directed by Jon Small (4:03).

Tyler's respective appearances underline the individualism and do-your-own-thing ethos of rock since the 1960s. Run-DMC projects a much stronger sense of collective identity than does Aerosmith.

The contrast between the more individualistic behavior of Aerosmith's principals and the more collectivistic behavior of Run-DMC is furthered at the level of what Goffman calls manner. In both halves of the video, Perry and Tyler enact their version of the relationship between lead guitarist and non-playing vocalist that is at the heart of the dynamics of many rock bands (think of Jimmy Page and Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin, Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey of the Who, and Keith Richards and Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones). Perry and Tyler stand near each other and interact through the music, but they don't look at or coordinate with each other. Perry's focus is on his guitar, while Tyler dances and performs acrobatics with his microphone stand. By contrast, the members of Run-DMC, in the first half of the video, interact extensively with one another, looking directly at each other, egging each other on and, in the case of the two MCs, dancing together. Representatives of both groups replicate this kind of interaction in the second half, as Run and DMC flank Tyler and provide responsive raps while he sings the lyrics. At the end, the three men form a chorus line and dance together (Figure 5.2), a notable show of unity between rappers and rockers in a scenario that began with the two groups at odds with each other. This overcoming of differences does not take place on neutral ground, but through Run-DMC's incursion into Aerosmith's territory.

Music video and genre

Pat Aufderheide, writing in 1986, relatively early in the history of music video in the United States, observed that the musicians in videos do not portray fictional characters but present themselves as "bold and connotative icons," further noting: "a bold image is crucial to video and, now, to recording artist celebrity." Aufderheide takes a dim view of music videos, arguing that with them "personal 'identity' has become a central element of commodity production" and that they contribute to "a betrayal of an authentic expression of talent."[26] Aufderheide's claim that music videos brought about the need for musical artists to present bold images is historically inaccurate, since modern popular musicians have been doing so since at least the 1920s; Fats Waller is but one of many examples of popular musicians who presented bold and connotative celebrity images in the 1920s and 1930s. Aufderheide's tone betrays the anti-ocular prejudice present in much discourse on music that I have addressed elsewhere, in which the visual dimensions of musical performance are seen as distracting from or undermining the music.[27] Leaving aside the negative aspects of Aufderheide's analysis, her emphasis on the way the music video calls upon musicians to construct their identities visually and through dimensions of performance other than those that directly involve the production of sound can be taken to suggest that the music video is an ideal venue for the performance of musical personae. I have made a related point in defense of lip-synced performances and music videos,

which "provide performers with good opportunities to define and extend their personae. With no obligation to sing or play, musicians are unencumbered and free to focus on performing their personae."[28] Whether or not they involve lip-syncing, performances in music videos are produced under controlled conditions that arguably provide musicians with better opportunities to present their personae in exactly the ways they wish than do live performances.[29]

This is particularly true with respect to setting. Except in those cases where musicians perform in purpose-built spaces designed to serve as expressive equipment appropriate to performances within specific genres (symphony halls and the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville are examples), or those in which musicians are in a position to travel with stage sets that express their personae (such as the sets used by Jimmy Buffett that I mentioned earlier), musicians have relatively little control over the settings in which they perform. In music videos, by contrast, they have complete control, at least in principle, and can ensure that the setting is coherent with the persona they seek to communicate.

Carol Vernallis devotes an entire chapter of *Experiencing Music Video* (2004) to the question of how setting is used in music videos. She finds setting to be a function of genre: "each musical genre develops a repertoire of settings."[30] Whereas the action of rap videos frequently takes place on the street, contemporary R&B videos emphasize the studios where the music is made or performance venues that showcase the performers' professionalism. Heavy metal videos, by contrast, "are often situated in abandoned industrial sites, with exposed pipes and debris on the floor."[31] Since Vernallis bases these observations on her review of a great many videos, the trends she indicates are surely accurate. My approach, however, configures the question a bit differently. Consistent with my performer-centered perspective, I see setting as one of the items of expressive equipment that performers use to communicate their personae, which, in turn, are defined in large part through identification with a certain genre. The relationship between genre and setting thus is not a direct connection but runs through the performer's persona, which I place at the center of musical performance. Vernallis's approach and mine converge, however, when she discusses uses of setting designed to make a performer appeal to a specific audience. She notes, for example, "the black British singer Seal sells records primarily to white audiences; placing him in an empty environment, apart from black culture, distances him from other black artists."[32] This suggests that the empty setting is not just a function of Seal's genre identification but is also a piece of expressive equipment intended to convey a self-presentation to a particular audience.

Because performers construct their musical personae in relation to musical genres, it is important to consider the connections between the music video and genre in relation to the idea of personae. For one thing, the music video arguably should be seen as a genre unto itself rather than as a subgenre of film, television, or advertisement. The question of how musical genres map onto the music video genre has been the matter of a debate that centers on the question of whether there is such a thing as a "rock music video," a "country music video," etc. Diane Railton and Paul Watson, for instance, argue that "genres of music neither map onto genres of music video nor … necessarily govern the look of any given video."[33] They argue instead for a taxonomy of music videos constructed through

combinations and permutations of two independent variables: musical genre and video style, the latter including "pseudo-documentary, art music video, narrative video, and staged performance."[34]

This approach is more flexible than one that argues for defining video style entirely in terms of musical genre, but aspects of Railton and Watson's argument are seriously flawed. They argue that, since both hip-hop and country music videos can contain similar elements—"the club, the beach, a pool and plenty of scantily clad women"—one cannot claim that these form part of the typical iconography of any one genre's videos.[35] To take the most obvious point, it may be simply that the elements they identify are present in the iconography of both genres. The mere fact that similar imagery can appear in videos associated with different genres does not in itself mean that the imagery is not a defining characteristic of each genre. The overlap could equally well suggest an orientation shared by the two genres. More important, however, is that the iconography Railton and Watson mention is much more specific than they allow. For one thing, honky tonks and strip clubs, the two kinds of establishments featured in the videos they mention, are both clubs, but they are hardly the same kind of club. For another, all of the women featured in the two country music videos they cite—Trace Adkins's "Honky Tonk Badonkadonk" (2005) and Travis Tritt's "The Girl's Gone Wild" (2004)—seem to be white, which is typically not the case in hip-hop videos.[36] It is observable, for instance, that when Snoop Dogg is performing in his rap persona, the women who surround him in his videos appear to be women of color, as in the video for "Drop It Like It's Hot" (2004). When Snoop Dogg repositions his persona in relation to the country genre in the video for "My Medicine" (2008), he wears cowboy attire, performs with Willie Nelson, and the women around him all look white. Railton and Watson argue for similarity by ignoring culturally significant aspects of the imagery they examine, aspects that are basic to analyzing the construction of a musician's persona in music videos in relation to genre norms and their socio-cultural implications.

In his discussion of country music videos, Mark Fenster argues that the country music video should be understood as a response to the rise of music videos in the context of rock music and, ultimately, as an instance in which one genre takes over a form associated with another to make something new.[37] He also posits that the typical visual style of country music videos is directly related to the content of the songs:

> [T]he development of a country video aesthetic includes the successful establishment of a classical narrative style that suits the genre's lyrical content. Unlike the more disjointed, fragmented narratives of pop/rock videos, which owe more to experimental films and advertising, most country video narratives are more directly descended from the classical Hollywood style. In fact, the tendency of country lyrics toward a character-centered, personal/psychological narrative can be traced back further than cinema, to their folk and blues roots.[38]

From this perspective, the term "country music video" is meaningful because there is a direct connection between the typical form, style, and iconography of the videos and the genre-specific content of the songs.

Performing personae, race, and genre: "Wagon Wheel" by Darius Rucker

The music video for Darius Rucker's performance of "Wagon Wheel" (2013) provides an opportunity to examine the performance of a musical persona in the context of both the genre and socio-cultural frames, in this case the framing of race in the context of country music.[39] As a genre, country music strongly emphasizes authenticity, meaning that its practitioners must appear to possess "appropriate backgrounds and proper cultural credentials [to be] carriers of a cultural tradition" rooted in the rural American South.[40] Rucker, who was born, raised, and still lives in South Carolina and experienced poverty in his childhood, clearly has a biography that includes some of the background of an authentic country musician. But, as an African-American, he faces what Michael Hughes describes as "a significant problem in dramatically realizing the role of a country music artist, because country music has been so strongly identified with whites and white Southern culture from the beginning."[41] Hughes is slightly mistaken; in fact, DeFord Bailey, an African-American harmonica player, was present at the inception of the Grand Ole Opry in 1927. Between Bailey and Rucker, however, although other African-American musicians recorded and performed in the country idiom, only Charley Pride has been accepted by the country music establishment as a full-fledged country musician, an acceptance achieved partly by his backers having hidden his racial identity when he was first introduced to the country music audience and industry. As Charles Hughes notes: "country music never had much room for black artists" even though "since the 1950s heyday of the Nashville sound, the genre's studio musicians, songwriters, and producers had included black-identified music styles, including soul, as part of country's musical mix."[42] This mix has a much longer history. As John S. Otto and Augustus M. Burns show, interaction between black and white musicians in the early part of the twentieth century, and especially in the 1920s and 1930s—country music's formative years—is traceable in both "black" music such as the blues and "white" music such as country (the so-called "hillbilly music").[43] Drawing on John Mowitt's concept of "musical interpellation," Geoff Mann argues that historically, formally, and culturally there is nothing inherently "white" about country music, and "that it has taken a great deal of ideological work both to make country the sound of American whiteness, and, at least as importantly, to make it continue to 'call' to white people to make country music seem not only something that only white people make, but also something that only white people 'hear' something that recruits white people to their 'whiteness.'"[44]

Given this context, the video for "Wagon Wheel" needed to construct Rucker's musical persona in a way that would establish his authenticity as an African-American country artist, especially since country music videos are usually among the discourses that do the ideological work to which Mann refers. The video opens with several shots that establish a rural Southern setting (it was shot in Watertown, Tennessee) belonging more to the past than the present. These shots depict, among other things, a railroad crossing, exteriors of small-town businesses with old-fashioned signs, rain on the pavement, and a hand turning back a clock. The first glimpse we have of Rucker in the main part of the video is of his

hand, clutching a black and white photograph of a blonde woman. We also see her in intercut shots, applying lipstick and looking at a similar photograph of Rucker. Rucker's persona is that of an itinerant musician, traveling with guitar case in hand. In the song's lyrics, the protagonist tells the story of hitchhiking southward from New England along the East Coast of the United States to reunite with a loved one in Raleigh, North Carolina. The primary elements of Rucker's appearance are items of clothing that, while contemporary, evoke the Depression era. His clothes look lived-in; he wears a vest as well as a gray wool coat and a fedora, all in subdued colors. The guitar he plays is either a 1930s model Gibson archtop or resembles one very closely. His preferred modes of travel, walking railroad tracks and hitchhiking, also evoke the Depression.

Mann argues that country music asserts its whiteness through nostalgia not just "for an era when white supremacy operated more explicitly" but more so for a nonspecific "white 'used to,'" a nostalgia for "an authentic, stable whiteness" that is always already slipping away as the present becomes the past (hence the image in the video of literally turning back the hands of time).[45] If so, constructing Rucker's persona in a way that links him to the period in which country music as we know it today was evolving, partly through the contributions of legendary traveling musicians like Woody Guthrie, is a subtly subversive challenge to the country music imaginary. Rucker's persona as an itinerant Depression-era country musician not only implies that he is a legitimate bearer of its cultural heritage, but also that he (or someone like him) was there at the origins of the genre. The video thus suggests the outline of what Mann calls an "alternative history" of country music that "trouble[s] the white-country coupling."[46]

Michael Hughes argues that a typical country musician attempts to project a persona of "a sincere, down-to-earth average person," and Rucker's manner in the video suggests precisely this.[47] As he plays guitar and sings directly to the camera (and therefore directly and intimately to the audience watching the video) on the railroad tracks (Figure 5.3) and inside of old stores, he seems friendly, unpretentious, and approachable. He smiles genially while performing and seems to be truly enjoying himself. At one moment when the lyrics of the song refer to his having shared a toke of marijuana with a trucker, he shrugs apologetically and seems a bit abashed. Scenes in which he shivers and draws his coat in closer to himself while sitting in the back of a truck in which he is getting a lift contrast with scenes in which he is clearly enjoying playing and singing, as if to suggest the adversity he endures for the sake of his audience.

Another strategy of impression management at work in this video is what might be called "authenticity by association" (the same strategy Snoop Dogg employed by including Willie Nelson in a video for "My Medicine," a song in which he flirted with country style). Characters who offer Rucker rides in vintage pick-up trucks are played by members of the Louisiana-based Robertson family whose life was chronicled on the reality television program *Duck Dynasty*. Their presence as media-certified, iconic "rednecks" confers rural white Southern authenticity on Rucker by association. This effect is furthered by the appearance of Charles Kelley, a well-known country musician and member of Lady Antebellum, winner of Country Music Association awards and the group that backed Rucker on the track. The end of Rucker's journey is a club where he apparently is to

Figure 5.3 Darius Rucker performing on railroad tracks in the music video for "Wagon Wheel" (2013), directed by Jim Wright (1:00).

perform. His last ride is from Kelley, driving a vintage Buick convertible with a young woman at his side. If the Robertsons represent ostensibly ordinary white Southern folk in this video, Kelley represents the flashier Nashville country music establishment placing its stamp of approval on Rucker as it delivers him to the venue where he is to perform. A sign outside the club reads: "Appearing Tonight … Darius Rucker and Friends."

At this point, one of the most interesting moments in the video occurs as a bearded man working the door of the club, played by Jase Robertson, tries to prevent Rucker from coming inside (Figure 5.4). They scuffle slightly until Rucker is rescued by the female bartender who assures the doorman that Rucker is in the right place and ushers him to the stage where he joins a band and plays out the rest of the song. (To return momentarily to Railton and Watson's taxonomy, one could say that, although the video for "Wagon Wheel" falls squarely into the narrative category, at this point it arguably shifts from narrative to staged performance.) Although no explanation for the doorman's behavior is proffered, it seems probable that he denies Rucker entry because he cannot imagine that a black man could be the night's featured country music artist.[48] (It may be a coincidence that, in a wide shot in which we see the doorman trying to keep Rucker from reaching the stage, there is a poster on the wall behind them advertising a bluegrass festival at the White Farmers Market.) This is the only moment in the video that refers directly to Rucker's racial identity and the possibility of its being stigmatized in the context of country music. Juxtaposed with the earlier image of Rucker as a peripatetic musician who participated in the origins of country music, this scene suddenly jolts the video away from an imagined alternative history of the genre to remind the viewer of the reality of how race works in country music.

The way in which "Wagon Wheel" is framed offers a further wrinkle. The video actually begins with a shot of four bearded male members of the Robertson family walking from

Figure 5.4 The club doorman, played by Jase Robertson, tries to keep Darius Rucker from entering in the music video for "Wagon Wheel" (2013), directed by Jim Wright (3:41).

a black stretch limo toward a trailer, as seen through a window from the interior of the trailer. Inside, Darius Rucker is sleeping. His pillow features the emblem of the University of South Carolina's football team. Following the club performance, the video returns to the framing narrative with a low-angle close-up of Charles Kelley telling Rucker that it is time to wake up and do a show. As he leaves the bedroom, Rucker encounters four members of the Robertson family; he greets and hugs all of them, then says: "Y'all, I just had a crazy dream," although he seems to decide not to tell them what it was about. This narrative frame is intriguing but highly ambiguous. Through the narrative of Rucker's life as a quasi-Depression-era itinerant musician, and the racial tension he encounters at the club, the video constructs Rucker simultaneously as a historical figure in the evolution of country music and a contemporary figure who has to negotiate the situation of being an African-American artist in a genre that has not been hospitable to black musicians. The narrative claim that this whole story was a dream enables the video to have it both ways: to serve as a kind of historical parable of race relations and authenticity in country music while simultaneously disavowing any idea that race is a serious issue in contemporary country music. In this respect, it ultimately falls in line with the Nashville establishment's repeated assertion that "country music [is] color blind."[49]

Conclusion

I have argued here for an approach to analyzing music videos that centers on musical personae enacted by the performers. In some ways, the music video is an ideal context in which to examine musical personae. Although my initial formulation of the idea of

musical personae assumed that a persona was developed primarily in the context of live performance with co-present performers and spectators, I would now argue that video is a performance space that lends itself even better to the definition of a persona than does live performance. Music videos allow artists to construct their personae exactly as they wish without having to consider the contingencies of live performance. This is particularly clear with regard to setting, since the juxtaposition of settings that establish the genre-related differences of personae between Run-DMC and Aerosmith in "Walk This Way" would be difficult to achieve in live performance, especially for the performance of a single song, as would the montage of location shots through which the setting of the first part of Darius Rucker's "Wagon Wheel" is created. Collaborations such as those between Run-DMC and Aerosmith as well as others I have mentioned, such as Willie Nelson's presence in a video by Snoop Dogg, can be replicated on stage, of course, but are logistically far easier to achieve in the space of music videos.

I understand the musical persona to be a specific kind of social self-presentation, in Goffman's sense, in which musicians engage when appearing before their audiences in any medium. The constituent parts of a musical persona can be described using Goffman's vocabulary for the elements of self-presentation: setting, appearance, and manner. These elements appear in performances framed in three ways: as musical performances, as performances in and of a specific genre of music, and as events taking place within a particular socio-cultural context. A musical persona is always constructed in relation to the norms of a musical genre, which, as we have seen in the case of country music's racial politics, can be reflective of larger socio-cultural formations. This does not mean that any musician's persona must adhere to these norms, only that they are inevitably a point of reference. The tensions among acknowledging, critiquing, and acquiescing to the status of African-American musicians in country music, which can be detected in different moments of the video for Darius Rucker's "Wagon Wheel," exemplify some of the positions an artist may assume toward established norms through the performance of a persona. Examining artists' musical personae through their music video readily opens discussion of the performance's implications in social terms, including representations of gender and race, by situating the persona in the interrelated contexts of genre and society.

Notes

1 Philip Auslander, "Musical Personae," *The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (2006): 100–119. Previously, I had always taken live performance and live interaction with an audience as the primary context in which musical personae are enacted. This chapter is the first work in which I take recorded performance as the primary site of persona creation.

2 Philip Auslander, "On the Concept of Persona in Performance," *Kunstlicht* 36, no. 3 (2015): 62–79.

3 Michael Jackson, "'Billie Jean' Brunei 1996," YouTube video (9:49), October 1, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjxRY7HCAMo.

4 Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 186, 212.
5 Philip Auslander, "Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14, no. 1 (2004): 6.
6 David R. Shumway, *Rock Star: The Making of Musical Icons from Elvis to Springsteen* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 154–160.
7 Philip Auslander, "'Musical Personae' Revisited," in *Investigating Musical Performance: Theoretical Models and Intersection*, edited by Gianmario Borio, Alessandro Cecchi, Giovanni Giuriati, and Marco Lutzu (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2019). Whereas it is possible to interpret my original formulation of the musical persona as a monolithic entity, in this chapter I treat the musical persona as a multivocal entity made up of different elements that are not necessarily in harmony with one another and therefore can produce tensions and ambiguities within the persona.
8 Auslander, "Performance Analysis," 10–11.
9 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 10–11.
10 Improv Everywhere, "Frozen Grand Central," 2008, improveverywhere.com.
11 My interpretation of "Frozen Grand Central" in relation to framing is different from, but compatible with, that of an anonymous author on *The Sociological Cinema* blog who considers it to be "a typical example of an ethnomethodological breaching experiment" in which conventional expectations are intentionally breached to see how subjects will respond: June 23, 2011, https://www.thesociologicalcinema.com/videos/frozen-grand-central.
12 Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2.
13 Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 123.
14 Johan H. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 10.
15 Victor Turner, "Frame, Flow, and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 1979): 474.
16 Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
17 In a series of essays, I have developed an interactionist approach to musical performance based on Goffman's work. The heart of the interactionist perspective is that social reality is not a priori but is both enacted and produced through human interactions that reflect the social conventions and underlying assumptions of the particular context in which they occur. In the first of these essays, "Musical Personae," I broached the idea that musical performance could be understood on the model of self-presentation and coined the term "musical persona" to identify the specific kind of self-presentation in which musicians engage when performing. It is important to assert that, from an interactionist perspective, this persona is not something that is created by a musician then presented to an audience. Rather, it is something that comes into being through the mutually constituting interaction of performers and audience within a mutually understood frame.
18 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959), 80.
19 Ibid., 17–76.
20 Ibid., 77–105.

21 Avedon's photographs are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City. See https://www.moma.org/artists/248?locale=en.
22 Goffman, *Presentation*, 22.
23 Ibid., 22–26.
24 Run-DMC, "Walk This Way (Video)," YouTube video (4:03), October 25, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4B_UYYPb-Gk.
25 Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 75.
26 Pat Aufderheide, "Music Videos: The Look of the Sound," *Journal of Communication* 36, no. 1 (1986): 67–68.
27 Philip Auslander, "Music as Performance: The Disciplinary Dilemma Revisited," in *Sound und Performance*, edited by Wolf-Dieter Ernst (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2015), 527–540.
28 Auslander, "Performance Analysis," 12.
29 Ian Inglis and I argue that a number of the filmed and televised performances by the Beatles, just before and after they stopped touring because they were unhappy with the conditions under which they performed, reflect a desire to create ideal performance conditions that could only take place in the studio. Philip Auslander and Ian Inglis, "Nothing is Real: The Beatles as Virtual Performers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 42–45, 48–49.
30 Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 87.
31 Ibid., 79.
32 Ibid., 80. Arguably, Vernallis overemphasizes setting in her reading of Seal's relationship to black music and audiences. Although it is true that the setting for "Crazy" (1991), the video she discusses, is an empty white space, Seal's appearance, which includes a large gold medallion over his bare chest and other conspicuous bling as well as hair in beaded braids, clearly links him to contemporary African-American fashion and performance practices in black music. Additionally, the only musician other than Seal to appear in the video is an infrequently glimpsed bass guitarist who appears to be black and may be there to connect Seal with the funk music that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s to which a particular style of bass playing was central. Finally, the black-and-white video for Seal's version of Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" (2008) also takes place in an empty space (this time a dark one). Seal's appearance in this video is clearly meant to evoke Cooke: he is dressed in a tuxedo, seems to be in a spotlight, and sings into an old-fashioned looking microphone. In this case, it is quite clear that the emptiness of the setting in no way divorces Seal from black music, a connection that is strongly asserted through his evocation of Cooke.
33 Diane Railton and Paul Watson, *Music and the Moving Image: Music Video and the Politics of Representation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 45.
34 Ibid., 48.
35 Ibid., 46.
36 In a related vein, Railton and Watson do not address the fact that the term "badonkadonk" is a specifically African-American slang term referring to a part of the female anatomy that the songwriters knowingly appropriated for the country genre.

37 Mark Fenster, “Genre and Form: The Development of the Country Music Video,” in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, edited by Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 94, 109.
38 Ibid., 99.
39 Darius Rucker, “Wagon Wheel,” YouTube video (5:46), March 21, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvKyBcCDOB4.
40 Michael Hughes, “Country Music as Impression Management: A Meditation on Fabricating Authenticity,” *Poetics* 28 (2000): 197.
41 Ibid.
42 Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 133–134.
43 John S. Otto and Augustus M. Burns, “Black and White Cultural Interaction in the Early Twentieth Century South: Race and Hillbilly Music,” *Phylon* 35, no. 4 (1974): 407–417. The song “Wagon Wheel” is itself a product of black and white cultural interaction in a modest and somewhat indirect way. The song originated as a work Bob Dylan recorded in an unfinished form during the sessions for the soundtrack to *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* in 1973. Ketch Secor of The Old Crow Medicine Show heard “Wagon Wheel” on a Dylan bootleg and wrote his own verses for it. The song became a staple of the group’s repertoire long before they recorded it in 2003. Dylan has acknowledged that key phrases in the chorus derive from older blues songs by black artists, particularly “Rock Me, Mama” by Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup, inspired by Big Bill Broonzy’s “Rock Me Baby.” As Edward Mack points out, other blues songs by Curtis Jones and Melvin “Lil Son” Jackson have related lyrics that may also have found their way into “Wagon Wheel.” Edward Mack, “The Surprising Origins of ‘Wagon Wheel,’ One of the Most Popular Country Songs Ever,” 2015, https://www.wideopencountry.com/song-day-wagon-wheel. The interaction among musicians of different colors that ultimately produced the song took place across at least three generations, across the genres of blues, country, and rock, and was mediated by the technology of sound recording.
44 Geoff Mann, “Why Does Country Music Sound White? Race and the Voice of Nostalgia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 83.
45 Ibid., 88, 91.
46 Ibid., 82.
47 M. Hughes, “Country Music,” 196.
48 There is a very similar moment in the film *Cadillac Records* (2008)—a fictionalized account of the legendary Chicago blues label Chess Records—in which Chuck Berry (played by Mos Def) is denied entry to a club where he is to perform because the club doorman and manager believe Chuck Berry to be a country music artist and cannot fathom that the black man before them could be Chuck Berry. Berry seeks to demonstrate his identity by playing a Johnny Cash-like country rhythm on his guitar.
49 C.L. Hughes, *Country Soul*, 129.