

Riptide music video, Vance Joy (2013)



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<http://www.vancejoy.com/video>

**AS Component 1:
Investigating the Media**
**A level Component 1: Media Products,
Industries and Audiences**

Subject Content: Media Language
**Focus Area: Representation,
Media contexts**

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- Vance Joy is an Australian singer-songwriter signed to Atlantic records (a subsidiary of major label, Warner). His music can be categorised as fitting into indie folk-pop genre.
- *Riptide* was Vance Joy's first single to be released in the USA, following his debut EP, "God Loves You When You're Dancing". It became a platinum selling single.
- The video was directed by Dimitri Basil and Laura Gorun and has had nearly 100 million views on YouTube.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS - Media Language

Economic Contexts:

Consider whether the seemingly low budget, unique style of the music video was an artistic decision or an **economic** one. Later Vance Joy music videos such as "Georgia" make use of larger budgets, special effects and elaborate, coherent narratives. **Funding** could be discussed in relation to music video in terms of the way that bands might start out with small low budget productions which increase in scope and budget as they gain popularity and fans. Consider the extent to which **budget** impacts artistic decisions and the visual **style** of music videos. An extension of this discussion might explore whether music videos are in themselves an **advert** for the band or a representation of how "valuable" the band are to

producers. Are mainstream **audiences** impressed by larger budget music videos and attracted to the apparent implied "quality" of that band?

Consider how the combination of elements of media language influences meaning and intertextuality:

- The video makes **intertextual** references to different media forms (see below) and offers a wide variety of seemingly disparate elements.
- **Montage editing** is used in an overt way - a wide range of contrasting shots juxtaposed (often through hard jump cuts) to convey a large amount of information:
 - » The editing together of seemingly disparate images invites audience **interpretation** and candidates could consider Eisenstein's concept of "intellectual montage" where new ideas emerge from the collision of images and generate new meanings that might not otherwise exist:
 - * For example the sequence where a male and a female suddenly turn their heads to look at something off-screen and the next shot shows a seemingly unrelated pile of dollar bills - consider the **connections** audiences are being asked to make through this use of montage.
 - * Many of these cuts also have a clear link to the **lyrics** themselves and candidates might explore the visual metaphors and possible significance of these edits in relation to the lyrics.
 - » The music video for the most part rejects a clearly defined **narrative**. There are some short coherent narrative sequences (such as the scene where the girl goes missing in the graveyard) but for the most part the sequences deliberately lack narrative coherence.
 - * Candidates might explore the way in which the music video seems to reference **surrealist** or avant-garde cinema (such

as the work of Luis Buñuel) and discuss the impact these references might have on the meaning of the video.

Consider the codes and conventions of media forms and products:

- Ways in which the music video seems to defy or **subvert music video conventions**:
 - » Whilst it is a convention of the music video form to have song **lyrics interpreted** on screen, the overt and deliberate way the lyrics are interpreted in this music video might be subverting this convention:
 - * The opening line “*I was scared of dentists and the dark*” is interpreted explicitly with a shot of a female looking “scared” with a metallic contraption in her mouth that suggests she is in a dentist’s chair and followed by a shot of a light swinging in a darkened room. This **overt graphical representation** of the lyrics is largely repeated throughout the video. Consider whether this is following or subverting the convention of lyrical interpretation.
 - » The music video seems to explicitly reference **feature films**:
 - * The **opening shot** makes use of cinematic style credits and information about the music is presented with a title at the bottom of the screen. This title is graphically similar to a “**billing block**” or “**credit block**” which is often seen on film posters or in trailers. Consider why this style of presentation might have been appropriated from the film genre and how this might frame an audience response. Is the video presenting itself as a short film or a music video?
 - * The video frequently references the Western and Thriller **genres** (and arguably the hipster style of Wes Anderson films), but most notably uses **Horror genre iconography**, e.g. females repeatedly dragged off screen by unseen forces and a character going missing in a dark graveyard.
 - * Consider whether the overt use of **references to film** is attempting to offer an implied artistic value that transcends the music video form.

Consider the significance of challenging and/or subverting genre conventions:

- *Riptide* is relatively **unusual** both as a music video and specifically as a text within the indie folk genre in terms of its style, rejection of narrative and lack of spectacle or special effects.
- Comparison could be made with a later Vance Joy video *Georgia* (2015), which follows many more conventions, to consider why *Riptide* **challenges or subverts** the conventions of the genre.
- Candidates might explore the way in which the video might have been designed to confer a sense of **uniqueness** or intrigue to the band. Consider the **purpose** of music videos and the way that Vance Joy are marketed to audiences through the style of the video.

Consider theoretical perspectives:

Semiotics – Roland Barthes

- Explore the concept of **signifier/signified** using specific signification in the music video and how this might be interpreted according to social convention, for example the pile of dollar bills which accompanies the line “*Oh, all my friends are turning green*”.
 - » Explore Barthes idea that **constructed meanings can come to seem self-evident** by discussing the connotations of the colour green in relation to both money and envy - this could be said to have achieved Barthes’ status of **myth** through a process of **naturalisation** which might allow for complicated readings of the image.
 - » This example of **polysemy** could be **interpreted** in a variety of ways e.g. is it implying that friends (possibly in other bands) have “sold out” by giving into money? Or might instead these friends be turning green with envy at the success of Vance Joy?

Genre Theory – Steve Neale

- Use the video to explore Neale’s idea that genres may be dominated by **repetition**, but are also marked by **difference, variation, and change**.
- Discuss the ways in which the indie folk music video **genre** is dominated by **repetition** (low-fi videos with bands playing instruments etc.) and the extent to which *Riptide* offers **variation** to these aspects.
- An extension of this discussion might explore the way that the video fits into the wider **economic and institutional context** of the music

industry. Candidates might explore the purpose of the music video and ask whether *Riptide* is offering variation for artistic reasons or to generate interest in the band to make a profit.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Representation

Social and Cultural Contexts:

Consider the context of the music video in terms of the **texts** and media **forms** it **references** and explore the significance of these texts in relation to the way women in particular are represented. Candidates could watch sequences from Buñuel and Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) to explore surrealist film, considering the way this film explores violence and sexual desire in a way that might **inform the music video**. The infamous eye cutting scene in *Un Chien Andalou* for instance could be compared to the hand stabbing scene the music video. A brief exploration of the **subconscious** might also afford the chance to add depth to a discussion of the representation issues in the video and its sometimes dream-like logic.

Consider how media representations convey values, attitudes and beliefs about the world:

- The video offers many interesting examples of the representation of women - consider whether or not the video reinforces a **patriarchal** world view or is **subverting** the objectification of women in media.
- **Women** in the video are repeatedly presented as an **object** to be watched:
 - » In one shot a woman with her back to the camera undresses out of her swimming costume and there are a number of instances where we see disembodied, isolated sections of women's bodies such as bare feet running away or feminine hands being dragged out of shot.
 - » Consider whether these images of women are **sexualised** and offered to audiences for their pleasure (scopophilia) or presented in a way that **challenges** the sexualisation of women in many music videos.
 - » Explore the **lip-synch sections** where a woman sings the lyrics of the song into a microphone. At first she has immaculate

make-up and is framed and lit in a flattering way arguably **conforming to social norms** of beauty and glamour associated with mainstream media texts. As we repeatedly return to this character she becomes increasingly dishevelled, her make-up smudges and her expression becomes more and more vacant as she sings "*the words wrong*". Discuss the extent to which this representation **challenges gender representation** in music video and how it sits with the other representations of women in the video.

- Along with the representations of women the music video also presents a number of scenes that offer images of **violence**, such as a female hand being stabbed by a knife and a gun being pointed off screen. The lip-synching woman also clutches at her own neck and we see what seems to be blood over her hand. Candidates may discuss why these images are used in the video and whether they may be **trivialising or normalising** violence.

Consider theoretical perspectives:

Theories of Identity - David Gauntlett

- Use Gauntlett to explore complex and diverse representations in the music video - his concept of the **pick and mix** seems particularly relevant to the style of the video which constructs a range of different stimuli that the audience are invited to interpret. The video rejects singular, straightforward messages and instead invites a **variety of different responses and interpretations**.

A level only:

Feminist Theory - bell hooks

- Hooks could be used as a stimulus to explore the seemingly **contradictory messages** about **gender** in the video. Is the video **objectifying** women in an ironic or knowing way or is it instead feeding into the **oppression** of women in a patriarchal society? Use hooks' position that **feminism is a struggle to end sexist/patriarchal oppression** to ask whether the video is part of that struggle or part of the oppression.