Music Video, Sense of Place, and the Symbolic Gentrification of Memory

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Between 1981 and 1991, Music Television (MTV) went from a network on the fringes of popular culture to a historical juggernaut of influence and image cultivation. By the middle of the cable-proliferating decade, the network became ubiquitous in households globally and played a crucial role in segmenting television audiences along generation lines.

This research contends that the incursion of capital into music videos reflects a greater neoliberal trend in Western society and can be understood in terms of geographic theory. While gentrification of urban landscapes has displaced low-income residents, similar levels of development in programming have eliminated content which marginalized income for the network. Both are reflective of the constant tension between capitalism and human identity and expression.

Scholars of race, urban studies, and elsewhere in the humanities have written about the causes and byproducts of “revanchist urbanism” (see Smith 1996). Others, more recently, have characterized systematic erasure of marginalized voices within the Civil Rights era as “symbolic violence” (Alderman 2008). This critical intersection of popular culture studies and geography seeks to enhance the conversation about music and social justice, as well as the contribution both make in teaching social sciences.

Dr. Tyler Sonnichsen is a Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (US), having earned his PhD there in 2017. His research focuses on underground music, tourism, urban development, and geography pedagogy. He recently published *Capitals of Punk: Paris, DC, and the Circulation of Urban Underground* (Palgrave), and more information is available at his website SonicGeography.com.