

## Canadian University Music Review Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

Canadian University Music Review

# Multiculturalism, Diversity and Containment on MuchMusic (Canada) and MTV (US)

Karen Pegley

Volume 22, numéro 2, 2002

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014508ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014508ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Pegley, K. (2002). Multiculturalism, Diversity and Containment on MuchMusic (Canada) and MTV (US). *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 22(2), 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014508ar>

Résumé de l'article

Depuis leur lancement en 1981 et 1984 respectivement, MTV et MuchMusic ont reçu des critiques élogieuses pour leur répertoire vidéo diversifié quant à la représentation raciale. Toutefois, comme l'a fait remarquer Homi Bhabha, les pratiques « multiculturelles » qui favorisent la diversité devraient être examinées sous l'angle des modes simultanés de répression et de contrôle (Bhabha, « The Third Space », 208). La présente analyse de la programmation et des grilles horaires en rotation de ces deux stations depuis la fin de 1995 suggère qu'en élargissant leur répertoire, elles établissent des relations uniques, soigneusement contrôlées et à caractère national entre les traditions musicales dominantes et celles qui sont marginalisées. En utilisant les musiciens de la diaspora euro-américaine et africaine à titre d'exemple, l'article démontre comment MuchMusic et MTV semblent « célébrer » le multiculturalisme, alors que la représentation occidentale et non-occidentale est traitée de telle sorte qu'on ne trouve aucune contestation des normes ethnocentriques, lesquelles imprègnent les médias culturels nord-américains.

---

# MULTICULTURALISM, DIVERSITY AND CONTAINMENT ON MUCHMUSIC (CANADA) AND MTV (US)<sup>1</sup>

Karen Pegley

---

For MTV, the existence of a culture of the mass is deeply problematic, since it questions the fundamental mode of its distribution and consumption. The domestic, rather than the mass, is the given on which MTV predicates its signification as well as its business practices. Its racism is not a simple prejudice but a product of a struggle over the mode of circulation of meanings in the suburban, atomised and monopoly-dominated model of cultural formation.

Sean Cubitt<sup>2</sup>

It's the format.  
MTV<sup>3</sup>

"Pluralistic" is not an adjective that applies easily to the early years of MTV. Accusations of exclusionary practices date back to 1983 when MTV was criticized explicitly for excluding black artists. As Carter Harris argues, while MTV claimed to be playing "anything that could be called rock 'n' roll" in its early years, few black artists actually were featured.<sup>4</sup> Richard Gold similarly criticized MTV's imbalance when he stated in 1982 that "r&b artists in general continue to remain on the periphery of the music video revolution."<sup>5</sup> Rolling Stone's 1983 statistics corroborated both authors' observations: during MTV's first 18 months, less than two dozen videos—of the 750 aired—featured black artists.<sup>6</sup> As a defense to these accusations MTV argued that black artists' music

---

<sup>1</sup> Many sound and video examples for this paper are available online. To access these examples while reading the article, readers are invited to bookmark in advance the following Web pages:

1) [http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/queen\\_latifah/artist.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/queen_latifah/artist.jhtml)

2) [http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/jackson\\_janet/audvid.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/jackson_janet/audvid.jhtml)

3) [http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/adams\\_bryan/audvid.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/adams_bryan/audvid.jhtml)

4) [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000002G3I/ref=pd\\_null\\_recs\\_m/102-7490382-4066503#product-details](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000002G3I/ref=pd_null_recs_m/102-7490382-4066503#product-details). This is an audio example only.

If the reader does not already have a media reader installed, downloading instructions are available at the first website. I would like to thank CUMR's anonymous reader for her/his suggestions. Thanks also to Rob Bowman and Beverley Diamond for their helpful criticisms of an earlier version of this work.

<sup>2</sup> Sean Cubitt, *Timeshift: On Video Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 51.

<sup>3</sup> As cited in Serge Denisoff, *Inside MTV* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 102.

<sup>4</sup> Carter Harris, "Station Identification," *Vibe* 3, no. 9 (November 1995): 75.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Gold, "MTV Attitude Plays Big Role," *Variety*, 15 December 1982, 73.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

did not suit the desired format, meaning that white audiences would not enjoy this music. As Bob Pittman, founder of MTV stated: "we turned down Rick James because the consumer didn't define him as rock."<sup>7</sup> Les Garland, an MTV executive during the early 1980s, argued alongside Pittman for the merits of a narrower repertoire: "You cannot be all things to all people. You cannot play jazz and country music and funk. You lose your focus."<sup>8</sup>

As the now famous sequence of events goes, pressure continued to mount on the station to air more black artists; following David Bowie's 1983 interview with VJ Mark Goodman during which the marginalization of black artists on MTV and the success of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* was raised,<sup>9</sup> the "racial barrier" was chipped away to the extent that black artists were aired more frequently. Nonetheless, by 1986, a couple of years after Jackson's breakthrough, under-representation was still a point of contention, and still under scrutiny. Brown and Campbell's (1986) content analysis of MTV, for instance, revealed that non-white featured singers or band leaders of either gender only accounted for 5% of all videos aired.<sup>10</sup> They concluded that white men were almost always the focal point, while black artists and all women were rarely important enough to be foregrounded at all.<sup>11</sup>

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, MTV significantly increased the number of black artists aired within the video flow, due in part to public response to a number of successful programmes showcasing black artists, most notably the highly popular "Yo! MTV Raps." Other key developments that strengthened the position of black artists during the 1980s included the emergence of crossover music that combines historically black (rap) and white (rock) genres and the success of rap itself, reflected by the success of "Yo! MTV Raps." Indeed, in 1993 video scholar Andrew Goodwin suggested that because of such important strides "the question of racism [on MTV] has been resolved."<sup>12</sup>

While these changes at MTV are impressive on paper, we have reason to be skeptical, particularly given the station's early track record. What these data do not provide, for instance, is insight into how the station may have increased programming for black artists while simultaneously or subsequently containing their artistic growth. For instance, while "Yo! MTV Raps" was a boost for black artists, it is not coincidental that its 1988 debut followed the crossover triumph of white artists into black-dominated rap: Run-D.M.C. and Aerosmith's 1986 hit *Walk this Way* reached number four on the pop charts, enabling Aerosmith, one of the most successful rock bands of the 1970s, for a musical comeback; in late 1986 The Beastie Boys, a hardcore New York punk band, crossed into hard rock and rap and released *Licensed to Ill* which became

---

<sup>7</sup>Cited in Denisoff, *Inside MTV*, 99.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>9</sup>The interview is excerpted in *ibid.*, 100–101.

<sup>10</sup>Jane D. Brown and Kenneth Campbell, "Race and Gender in Music Videos: The Same Beat but a Different Drummer," *Journal of Communication* 36, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 98.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 137.

the first rap album to reach number one. While these artists may—and should—be credited with helping to bring rap to the white masses, were their contributions simultaneously used by MTV to render this black genre “safer” or “more familiar” for white youth? (Does this echo Elvis’ r&b contribution some twenty years earlier?) Was “Yo! MTV Raps” an inclusive, validating gesture towards black artists and rap, or can we also see it as a means for corporate MTV to shape a young underground musical tradition, choosing “appropriate” rap styles and artists for their viewers? On the point of cultural inclusivity, Homi Bhabha offers an important observation: while “multicultural” societies encourage diversity, this gesture frequently is accompanied by modes of containment and control. Under these circumstances, “the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, racism does not disappear, it simply takes more cleverly disguised forms. But which forms might this take on MTV? How might the inclusion of black performers be counteracted with containment practices?

While MTV has endured considerable criticism for their relationship with black artists, Toronto-based MuchMusic, MTV’s Canadian counterpart, has received very little critical attention on issues of race and marginalization. Because less overall attention has been paid to MuchMusic in popular magazines, newspapers and in scholarly journals since its inception in 1984, this observation is not entirely surprising. Nonetheless, as the literature on Canadian multiculturalism and cultural plurality expands, MuchMusic continues to remain outside of the pertinent debates; instead, the station today is discussed most often within the contexts of changing media technologies, globalization, and the expanding number of international stations.<sup>14</sup> Does this suggest that MuchMusic—regulated at the governmental level by a Canadian multicultural social policy—has found a solution to the problems with which MTV has struggled all these years? Is it possible that the Canadian station has celebrated multicultural expression rather than try to suppress it?

In this paper I explore explicit and implicit modes of multicultural and multiracial promotion and containment on MTV and MuchMusic. This research uses as its text the histories of the two stations with a particular focus on a one-week simultaneous sample of both taken during the fall of 1995.<sup>15</sup> This in-depth sample includes over 336 hours of footage, featuring 3,100 televisual “events,” including videos, commercials, trailers, and the like. That week MTV

---

<sup>13</sup>Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence Wishart, 1990), 208.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Justin Smallbridge, “Think Global, Act Local,” *Canadian Business* 69, no. 7 (June 1996): 43–56; John Daly, “Rebel with a Global Vision,” *MacLean’s* 105, no. 23 (8 June 1992): 40; or Douglas Bell, “Red Hot and Latin,” *Shift* 6, no. 7 (November 1998): 32–40.

<sup>15</sup>A video sample could either be discrete, meaning specific programs are taped over a period of days, weeks or months and examined as a set or, conversely, continuous samples of an entire day, series of days, or a week. I was not interested here in examining particular programs but rather the *range* of each stations’ programming; as such, a simultaneous continuous period of time was deemed most appropriate. The week of 4–11 November 1995 was chosen because it fell between two important events: Halloween and American Thanksgiving. The sample, then, reflected the seasonal programming of the stations without being overly skewed by images relating to either of these particular events (this would have resulted in an unbalanced comparison since Canadian Thanksgiving already had passed).

aired 248 different videos; most of these were repeated, resulting in 1,033 video events. MuchMusic, meanwhile, aired 400 different videos, which combined to create a repertoire of 1,457 video events.<sup>16</sup> One week, of course, is only a snapshot and any conclusions based on this material are limited; after years of watching these stations, however, I believe that the patterns evident here do point to larger, ongoing trends.

No decisions around categorizing race are—or should be—painless or straightforward. Stuart Hall correctly warns against differentiating people based on genetic differences, what he calls “the last refuge of racist ideologies.”<sup>17</sup> Race is a nineteenth-century construction, and, as he rightly points out, is a discursive, rather than biological category.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, as Thomas Hylland Eriksen has argued, “concepts of race can nevertheless be important to the extent that they inform people’s actions; at this level, race exists as a cultural *construct*, whether it has a ‘biological’ reality or not.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, as a cultural construct race plays an enormous role in musical production, dissemination, and consumption. As Russell Potter has pointed out in his analysis of hip-hop, “music ... is the site of the most insistent and potent articulation of race ...” and “while it is true that in a sense there is no unitary ‘black’ subject position, that race is a social construction ... it is also true that economic, social, and personal mobility of Americans is increasingly disparate along lines of both race and class.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, William Sonnega has argued that within the realm of music video itself: “few MTV artists currently treat [difference] in terms other than those constituted by skin color.”<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, analyses of music videos—as with a plethora of other representative forms—must struggle to recognize race as a cultural construct while simultaneously problematizing it as such.

## MTV

While MTV has unquestionably increased the number of black performers over the past several decades, journalists have argued that the artists and types of videos shown on the station gradually have changed. Carter Harris notes that a number of MTV shows featuring oppositional black performers have been rendered less accessible on the station. This, he suggests, is the history of “Yo! MTV Raps”: “Yo!” premiered on Saturdays with Fab 5 Freddy as host; several

---

<sup>16</sup>During the taping of the sample, approximately two hours of MTV videotape was mistakenly erased; the programs affected were “Rude Awakening” and “MTV Jams” on Tuesday morning, 7 November. This accounts for approximately 20 additional videos.

<sup>17</sup>Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, eds. Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson (Cambridge and Oxford: Open University Press, 1996), 617.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Ethnicity, Race and Nation,” in *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Migration*, eds. Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 34. Emphasis mine.

<sup>20</sup>Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 136.

<sup>21</sup>William Sonnega, “Morphing Borders: The Remanence of MTV,” *The Drama Review*, 39, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 50.

months later it expanded to the weekday edition, featuring Ed Lover and rap producer / writer / performer Doctor Dre. "Yo!" quickly became one of MTV's highest-rated shows. According to Ted Demme, who then worked at MTV: "The show was getting great ratings and really good press ... MTV [was] happy when there was a certain type of rap ... [like] D.J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince ... but when N.W.A. came up, and rap started to get gansta ... MTV's standards went berserk."<sup>22</sup> What Demme suggests here is that once gansta rap began to receive airplay, MTV, fearing a backlash, pulled back on this programming. In 1992, Demme left the show; after his departure, the programme was shifted around until it finally was moved to a 12 to 2 a.m. Saturday morning time slot in January of 1993. In 1995 hosts Freddy, Lover and Dre were relieved of hosting duties. "Yo! MTV Raps" then became even less identifiable, featuring different weekly hosts and not consistently aired within the designated Saturday morning slot. Inconsistent VJ appearances coupled with irregular scheduling jeopardized viewer-programme identification, resulting, predictably, in low viewer ratings.

In 1995, reggae artists experienced similar processes of marginalization. The week of my sample MTV aired four reggae videos; all but one was shown on the programme "Reggae Sound System." Shot in Jamaica, "Sound System" was a thirteen-part series supposedly aimed at expanding the network's black diasporic programming by showcasing different styles of dancehall, dub, and reggae. The show faced difficulties from the outset and experienced airing delays; finally, it was shown in the fall of 1995, between 1:30 and 2 a.m. on Tuesday mornings, a time slot clearly unfavorable for attracting a large viewing audience. As producer Jac Benson stated: "I don't see how my show is supposed to survive and be successful at this hour ... this show represents a year and a half of work, and this is what it gets?"<sup>23</sup>

I would have to agree with Harris when he suggests that MTV increasingly has demonstrated a preference for "softer"—that is, safer—music by black artists such as Boyz II Men, squeezing out N.W.A. and "Yo! MTV Raps."<sup>24</sup> Whereas MTV was known in the late 1980s for its daring programming featuring controversial, oppositional artists, it became more likely to air "palatable" soft urban performers. If, then, MTV has simultaneously increased the number of black artists while pulling videos that provide social critique or express cultural diversity, can we agree with Goodwin that the "racism question" has been answered in a meaningful way?

## MUCHMUSIC

Toronto-based MuchMusic, unlike MTV, had to face much more stringent policies on inclusivity when it was launched and it continues to do so today. These policies were established by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), responsible, among other things, for

<sup>22</sup>Harris, "Station Identification," 76.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, 80.

licensing stations and enforcing regulations such as the Canadian content quota and multicultural representation. According to the CRTC policy on cultural diversity, for instance, MuchMusic must “reflect ... the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society.”<sup>25</sup> The CRTC has been pleased with MuchMusic’s efforts; in 2000, they commended the station “for its efforts to reflect and portray fairly the rich ethnic diversity of Canadians.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, MuchMusic differentiates itself from its American counterpart MTV by claiming a more diverse video repertoire, including videos by Canadian artists. This is what MuchMusic originator Moses Znaimer called part of a “more mature and broader” playlist,<sup>27</sup> and what prompted journalist Jim Bessman to suggest that Much is distinctive from MTV in both repertoire and style.<sup>28</sup> MuchMusic’s promotion of a multicultural agenda is crucial for the station’s continued existence: MTV has long been at Canada’s door but unable to break into the market because it is forbidden by the CRTC to compete with existing pay and specialty service stations. To bypass these regulations, MTV joined forces with Calgary-based Craig Broadcasting and attempted their first “affiliation” with a digital Canadian channel giving them initial (although limited) access to Canadian viewers. As long as MuchMusic continues to satisfy the requirements of the CRTC and receive high viewer ratings, however, a full-fledged “MTV Canada” will never become part of Canadian basic cable packages.<sup>29</sup>

I agree with the CRTC that MuchMusic should be commended for airing videos far beyond the mainstream repertoire. Much regularly featured a world music show entitled “Cliptrip,” as well as “MuchEast” and “MuchWest,” programmes showcasing less known musics and musicians from Canada’s outlying regions. The economic challenges in programming musics with less economic return are significant. As one former MuchMusic VJ stated: “to create spaces for different genres of music and unusual music that won’t find its way into the mainstream because it’ll never be that commercially successful is always an effort. It’s always ... a process of advocacy.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, MuchMusic foregrounds cultural and racial diversity significantly more than does MTV,

---

<sup>25</sup>CRTC Policy on cultural Diversity, 1999–97, paragraph 115. Website: [www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/Notices/1999/PB99-97.htm](http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/Notices/1999/PB99-97.htm).

<sup>26</sup>CRTC Decision 2000–138, paragraph 22. Website: [www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/Decisions/2000/DB2000-138.htm](http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/Decisions/2000/DB2000-138.htm).

<sup>27</sup>Cited in Jim Bessman, “MuchMusic is Much Different,” *Billboard*, 9 March 1991, 63.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Initially, Craig Broadcasting proposed a teen channel named “Connect” to the CRTC; when the opportunity to work with MTV was presented, Craig decided to use the name “MTV Canada” and use MTV’s content. MTV Canada was directed by the CRTC to adhere to the following rules: target programming to the teen market; ensure that music videos do not comprise more than 10% of its programming; air music videos that feature “pop” artists. In January of 2002, CHUM filed a complaint against MTV Canada, stating that the new station had violated their agreement with the CRTC and was in direct competition with MuchMusic. The Commission concluded that the new station did not reflect the programming outlined in their original application and that it must adhere to the terms and conditions outlined in the original CRTC license (Decision 2000–462). What this narrative illustrates is that as long as MuchMusic continues to satisfy the requirements of the CRTC and receive high viewer ratings, a fully-fledged MTV Canada, resembling the original MTV, will not reach Canadian viewers. For more information on this dispute, see: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Decisions/2003/db2003-65.htm>.

<sup>30</sup>Personal interview, Toronto, 6 November 1998.

and this programming frequently intersects with explicit forms of social criticism.

While MTV excluded non-American rap artists the week of my sample and thus linked rap exclusively with the United States, MuchMusic featured a more pluralistic repertoire within which artists problematized socio-political constructs. Videos by Canadian rappers the Dream Warriors serve as an example. As Rinaldo Walcott has pointed out, the music of the Warriors illustrates how black migratory histories, policies, and experiences are constantly renegotiated, challenging socially-defined constructs of nation, home, and family.<sup>31</sup> This includes the Warriors' practice of naming places in the Caribbean and Canada in their songs, of celebrating black diasporic connections, thus creating a space of the "in-between."<sup>32</sup> In their song *My Definition of a Boombastic Jazz Style*, for example, they sample the *Definition* theme song, familiar to many Canadians as the music from the 1970s television game show of the same name, while simultaneously quoting from Quincy Jones: the song therefore is about being both a Canadian and part of the rich transnational black diaspora. The "definition" the Warriors seek to clarify, of course, is not only musical: "I walk with a gold cane, a gold brain, and no gold chain ... Your definition of me is definitely wrong / Why must I try to lie and find an alibi / When all you ask is just for me to be me." Combining a theme historically linked with Canadian popular culture while questioning their own "definition," the Warriors meaningfully problematize identity and belonging.

Similarly, the Warriors' song *Day In Day Out* from the 1995 sample is situated clearly within the Canadian landscape by the deliberate inclusion of one of the most familiar icons—the CN Tower—alongside images of Toronto city streets. This is not to suggest that these artists identify with this icon and buy into the notion of being "at home" within the Canadian nation-state. By the end of the song, the rappers turn their attention lyrically beyond Canadian imagery, paying homage to those who started hip hop "when hip hop was hip hop," by naming groups like Public Enemy and other performers from England, Canada, and the United States. Visually, the Warriors position themselves within Canada but they extend beyond the country's boundaries lyrically by tracing their musical lineage vis-à-vis non-Canadian performers of the black diaspora. Here the Warriors express the frustration of many Canadian rappers who feel doubly displaced, perceived as outsiders and not full "owners" of Canadian identity but also not "owners" of rap since a prevalent perception within the United States is that rap was and continues to be an essentially American genre.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, Canadian rappers such as the Dream Warriors

---

<sup>31</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing, Black, Canada* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 1997), 83.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> This perception was both acknowledged and challenged by Maestro-Fresh Wes, who, after moving from Canada to the United States to further his career, released a record entitled *Naaah This Kid Can't Be From Canada* (1994). As Walcott points out, this title was intended to challenge the idea that the best rap songs were, and could only be, performed by African-Americans (Walcott, *Black Like Who?*, 91).



articulate their concerns and construct their identities differently—and sometimes in more complex ways—than their American peers.

MuchMusic, then, could be perceived as a mouthpiece for rap discourses that extend beyond American-identified experiences to the problematics of the black diaspora within Canada. Indeed, black national identifications are not limited to these two countries on MuchMusic: a number of videos aired within the sample also foreground notions of Afrocentricity vis-à-vis sonic or visual imagery. For instance, Afrika Bambaataa's *Slo 'Nuff Funky*, a live musical performance video featuring Bambaataa and Family, invokes Africa through explicit visual references, including silhouettes of Africa hanging in the concert hall and on the necklace of one of the singers. Other videos were linked with Africa through a combination of texts. In James Brown's and Afrika Bambaataa's funk video *Unity*, Afrocentricity lines the work both musically and lyrically. First, Afrocentricity is manifest musically: funk, as Rob Bowman argues, was in itself a musical manifestation of the re-Africanization movement of black culture within the United States during the late 1960s. It was James Brown who, beginning with *Cold Sweat* (1967), de-emphasized features commonly associated with Euro-American music making (melody and harmony) and foregrounded syncopated and interlocking grooved rhythms (associated with Sub-Saharan Africa).<sup>34</sup> For many black Americans, funk not only signified a pro-black musical articulation, but an important connection with Africa itself. These musical/cultural connections with funk similarly underlie *Unity*.

Also entwined in Brown's musical performance of *Cold Sweat* was the notion of community, evidenced in his process of naming band members and his intense commitment to the audience.<sup>35</sup> Brown did not demand top billing during the musical performance but situated himself parallel to the other musicians present. A similar argument could be made for Brown and Bambaataa in *Unity*. The words "peace," "unity," "love," and "having fun" appear on the screen to reinforce visually the lyric content; these words reappear periodically in a number of languages communicating to the English-speaking viewer their desire for unity both locally and transnationally. The artists address the need for common positive goals within the international "community," an extension of the local community articulated and honoured in *Cold Sweat*.

The video aired on Much that makes the most explicit reference to Afrocentrism is Queen Latifah's *Ladies First*.<sup>36</sup> This video has been analyzed with attention to its strong feminist agenda; as Robin Roberts has pointed out, however, *Ladies First* is also a clear articulation of Latifah's Afrocentricity.<sup>37</sup> This should not be surprising: Latifah repeatedly has stated her commitment

---

<sup>34</sup>Rob Bowman, "Funk and James Brown: Re-Africanisation, the Interlocked Groove and the Articulation of Community," paper presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology (Toronto, Ontario, October 1996), 3.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>36</sup>To view an excerpt of this video, go to: [http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/queen\\_latifah/artist.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/queen_latifah/artist.jhtml) and click on "Ladies First."

<sup>37</sup>Robin Roberts, *Ladies First: Women in Music Videos* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 166.

to raising awareness and paying homage to her African heritage. Latifah: "To me Afrocentricity is a way of living ... It's about being into yourself and into your people and being proud of your origins."<sup>38</sup> The video affirms the connections between African-Americans and Africa in a number of ways: first, it opens with images of women who have served political reform; second, it includes a picture of a young Winnie Mandela among images of distinguished African-American women; and finally, the video includes South African images that address apartheid and struggle.<sup>39</sup> The video also references Africa through Latifah's dress: a military uniform with red, black, and green that evoke the colours of the African National Congress.<sup>40</sup> As Roberts has pointed out, between Latifah's attire and her physical actions (destroying large cement fists placed on a map of South Africa), she identifies herself as a participant in the ongoing struggle against racism and imperialism.<sup>41</sup>

This small—yet important—handful of videos makes connections between the performers and their African roots, visually, textually, or sonically. Because Much's entire video repertoire is historically broader than MTV's, early videos such as *Unity* (1984), *Slo 'Nuff Funky* (1988) and *Ladies First* (1990) that make explicit references to Afrocentricity, hold a solid and not atypical place within their video rotation. The first two videos were shown twice on MuchMusic during an after-school program entitled "Rap City" which was then repeated during the late-night rotation from 1:30 to 2 a.m. Queen Latifah's video, meanwhile, was shown on a general video flow segment on an early Monday afternoon and again the next morning (before school for most viewers). These airing times, then, were considerably more accessible than MTV's "Reggae Sound System," thus potentially drawing a larger audience than if they were shown only at marginalized times. These videos are also significant because some of these black artists—particularly Queen Latifah and the aforementioned Dream Warriors—problematicize political relations and their identities as persons of the African diaspora within North America. Their ruptures create what Bhabha would call a "third space" or hybridity that "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, [and] new political initiatives ..."<sup>42</sup> None of the videos discussed here—or related videos that similarly create a "third space"—appeared on MTV during the sample.

Did MuchMusic's video repertoire and scheduling, meanwhile, also evidence particular modes of restriction and containment? Because MuchMusic's programming over the 1980s and 1990s has not been as scrutinized as MTV's, specific changes in programming trends are not as well documented. Accordingly, I have chosen instead to analyse Much's 1995 repertoire vis-à-vis one of the traditionally most contained video repertoires: highly choreographed (dance) videos. Indeed, from the mid-1980s into the 1990s, dance was largely

<sup>38</sup>Chris Dafoe, "Rapping Latifah Rules New Tribes," *Toronto Star*, 18 May 1990, D8.

<sup>39</sup>Roberts, *Ladies First*, 171.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>42</sup>Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space," 221.

the domain of marginalized subgroups in mainstream music videos, that is, black artists and women, while the more dominant subgroups (particularly white men) almost always featured the musician/vocalist. An analysis of the MTV Top 100 videos from 1985 to 1994 (the top ten from each year) evidenced that only rarely did white males dance; most often they incorporated dance in their videos by featuring other, more marginalized performers.<sup>43</sup> In Tears for Fears' video *Everybody Wants to Rule the World* (1985, #7), for instance, co-lead singer Roland Orzabal sings and plays guitar in a studio, while smiling at footage of two black male dancers. Here, dance is relegated to minorities while (voyeuristically) enjoyed by the white male artists. In R.E.M.'s *Stand* (1989, #7), white men dance (significantly not the band members) but the dance simultaneously is trivialized with humour. In fact, only two white male musicians performed their own dances within these 100 videos: George Harrison in *I've Got My Mind Set On You* (1988, #8) and Vanilla Ice in *Ice Ice Baby* (1990, #7). Harrison's video, like R.E. M.'s, is characterized by a comedic tone: objects within the room "come to life" and "lip sync" along with him. This is an unusual aesthetic since the lyrics do not reflect this affect. Harrison's acrobatic dance (actually performed by a stand-in) reinforces the video's silliness. The first instance of a white male performing a dance segment within this repertoire (1988) clearly was not intended to be taken seriously by the viewing audience.

Vanilla Ice's performance, unlike Harrison's, initially appears more genuine. Ice's interest in dance is linked to his strong desire to be adopted within the rap community. Ice previously had engaged in other ploys to gain acceptance: in 1991, he was revealed to have been misrepresented in his record company's biography where his upbringing was falsified to depict his status as lower-class in order to be more palatable to rap audiences.<sup>44</sup> That he dances in his video is not surprising: it is an obvious extension of his desire to place himself within the traditions of hip-hop culture and simultaneously work against the expectations of white male performers.

White male performers, then, did not embrace dance during this decade-long span, at least not within the most "successful" video repertoire, the MTV Top 100 list. Instead, this video repertoire reinforces the mind/body split commonly attributed to white (particularly male) North American expressive culture. If one of dance's functions at the end of the 1980s, then, was as an access mode for black males and females, and white females, and these groups were by the mid 1990s more intrinsic to the mainstream video repertoire, who performed highly-choreographed dance in late 1995? Was it more balanced amongst the demographics? Did these statistics differ between the MTV and MuchMusic repertoires?

For comparative purposes, the coding process used here in table 1 separates three levels of movement from the most simple to the most complex: the first

<sup>43</sup>See Karen Pegley, "An Analysis of the Construction of National, Racial and Gendered Identities on MuchMusic (Canada) and MTV (US)" (Ph.D. Diss., York University, 1999), 69-76.

<sup>44</sup>D. Handelman, "Sold on Ice," *Rolling Stone* (10 January 1991) as cited by Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, 106.

level recognizes movement as a gesture; here, dance is for the personal pleasure of the musicians or audience, where no obvious choreography exists; the second, or organized-movement level features dance as an accompanying text, a temporary focus of the video which is superseded in importance by another text (such as the music). Finally, the choreographed style features a more complex dance vocabulary wherein the motions are rehearsed and replicable, and function as a highly expressive tool.

Who then performs the various levels of movement within the current sample? Table 1 outlines the three levels according to white and black males and females, on both stations:

**Table 1. MTV and MuchMusic: Movement Levels by Gender and Race**

<b>MTV</b>	<b>white males</b>	<b>white females</b>	<b>black males</b>	<b>black females</b>
<i>Choreographic level</i>				
choreography	1.0%	8.4%	6.4%	34.8%
organized movement	6.1%	13.7%	46.4%	38.4%
gesture	92.9%	77.9%	47.1%	26.8%
	(N = 409)	(N = 131)	(N = 140)	(N = 138)

<b>MuchMusic</b>	<b>white males</b>	<b>white females</b>	<b>black males</b>	<b>black females</b>
<i>Choreographic level</i>				
choreography	2.6%	19.4%	14.2%	63.3%
organized movement	5.4%	5.6%	33.1%	10.1%
gesture	92.0%	75.0%	52.7%	26.6%
	(N = 786)	(N = 178)	(N = 165)	(N = 79)

These data illustrate both commonalities and dissimilarities between the two stations' repertoires. A brief glance across the tables indicates that gesture for all four groups did not vary considerably between the two stations. Discrepancies are clearer between the stations within the organized movement and choreographic categories. Of particular interest are the data on choreography. White males were predictably low in this category, and consistently so between the two stations (1.0% on MTV and 2.6% on Much); white females varied significantly more (8.4% on MTV and 19.4% on Much). Black males also differed slightly: 6.4% of the videos featuring black males on MTV featured choreographed dance as opposed to 14.2% on Much. The largest discrepancy between the two stations involved black women: 34.8% of the time black women appeared on MTV they featured choreographed dance; this figure was a staggering 63.3% on Much.

These percentages are informative to the extent that, within this sample at least, choreographed dance remained an activity shared primarily by marginalized subgroups on these stations, especially black women. Of course, these discrepancies do not necessarily indicate racist or sexist agendas: that black women feature the highest degree of choreography might indicate that these performers use dance for empowering purposes. This echoes Lisa Lewis' theory put forward in *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (1990). Here, Lewis argues that dance can function positively in female-address videos as "access signs" or "discovery signs." She defines access signs as those "in which the privileged experiences of boys and men are visually appropriated ... [s]ymbolically, they execute take-overs of male space ... and make demands for parity with male-adolescent privilege."<sup>45</sup> Pat Benetar's *Love is a Battlefield* is such an example: the video depicts a homeless female teenager on the street; the narrative moves to the inside of a bar (a male space) where a woman screams in fear. A group of women break out with aggressive gestures to protect the teenager while the lyrics announce "We are strong / no one can tell us we're wrong." According to Lewis, within this video dance is a powerful symbol of female militancy.<sup>46</sup>

Lewis' second category consists of "discovery signs" that "refer to and celebrate distinctly female modes of cultural expression and experience." As she states, "[t]hese signs attempt to compensate for the devaluation and trivialization of female-cultural experience by presenting images of activities that are shared by girls alone."<sup>47</sup> Lewis argues for dance in Cindi Lauper's *Girl's Just Want to Have Fun* as a discovery sign: in addition to talking on the phone, the "girls" walk together in a choreographed line, moving to the beat of the music arm in arm, symbolizing their take-back of the street.<sup>48</sup> The choreography is positively charged because it reinforces, and is reinforced by, the lyrical content and visual imagery.

Dance, then, can be interpreted here in at least two distinct ways: first, it can be a marginalized activity that distinguishes black and female performers from white men. Dance is also a powerful, empowering action, sometimes in the form of access or discovery signs. Returning to the present data, it is evident that the percentages presented above cannot illuminate to what extent these individuals (blacks, women) are empowered or disempowered by dance. They do not point to, for instance, *who* performs the choreography. While an in-depth look at all of the videos to examine who performs within which style is excessive and cumbersome, it is useful to choose a handful of videos with which to examine how choreographed dance functions within the sample. Accordingly, table 2 identifies the most frequently aired choreographed videos from the sample:

---

<sup>45</sup>Lisa Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 109.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

**Table 2.** The Most Frequently Aired Choreographed Videos by White Men, White Women, Black Men, and Black Women on MTV and MuchMusic

MTV	
White female artist	Mariah Carey, <i>Fantasy</i>
Black female artist	Salt-N-Pepa, <i>Ain't Nuthin' But a She Thing</i>
White male artist	Chris Isaak, <i>Go Walking Down There</i>
Black male artist	R. Kelly, <i>You Remind Me of Something</i>

  

MuchMusic	
White female artist	Mariah Carey, <i>Fantasy</i> <sup>49</sup>
Black female artist	Janet Jackson, <i>Runaway</i>
White male artist	Bryan Adams, <i>Have You Ever Loved a Woman?</i>
Black male artist	Silk, <i>Hooked on You</i>

The most popular video by a white female for both stations the week of my sample was Mariah Carey’s *Fantasy*. Directed by Carey, this video was also the number one video on the “MTV Jams” countdown that week (“MTV Jams” was a popular morning show on MTV during the time of the sample). The narrative depicts the singer rollerblading and enjoying the rides at an amusement park during the daylight. When nighttime falls (in the second verse), Carey sings and moves while on top of a jeep; in front of her a group of male dancers perform a choreographed routine (all the men are black with the exception of one white male). The most frequently played video by a white female artist on both stations, then, features hired (primarily black) male dancers but does not involve the artist herself, other than in some lower-level movement while she sings.

The only other example of black men dancing is in Silk’s *Hooked On You* (the most aired video by black males on MuchMusic). In *Hooked*, the urban vocal group sings in a hotel to three on-looking women (while the singers perform, the seemingly innocent women slip out and rob the hotel’s safe). A series of short clips show the vocal group briefly dancing a choreographed routine in silhouette.

<sup>49</sup>I would like to address briefly the problem of categorizing *Fantasy* as a video featuring a “white artist.” Mariah Carey, in fact, is biracial: her father was a black Venezuelan and her mother was white. Carey, however, has been described as Whitney Houston’s (white) commercial rival in the female R&B market. As Amy Linden noted, “... Mariah Carey ... was presented to the record-buying public as a Long Island mall rat (you can read that as white) ...” “Smooth Operators: Contemporary R&B,” in *Trouble Girls: The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, ed. Barbara O’Dair (New York: Random House, 1997), 389. Because the popular perception of Carey is as a white artist, and because she has not challenged this label (and in fact has benefited from it), she is identified as “white” throughout this analysis.

R. Kelly's *You Remind Me Of Something* (the most frequently aired choreographed video by a black male on MTV) features the artist performing for an audience at a nighttime "Jeep-Nik Jam." Like Mariah Carey's video, the artist moves while he sings, but others, in this case, three unknown black female dancers, perform the choreographed dancing. These three women, dressed in basketball sweatshirts and appearing on cement with court-like white markings, move suggestively with basketballs. The dancers, however, are never shot together with Kelly; instead, they are at best peripheral to the artist, present when seen but forgotten when out of the camera frame.

Similarly, Chris Isaak's *Go Walking Down There* (MTV's most played choreographed video by a white male), does not involve the performer in the choreographed dance. In this video, Isaak acts within a narrative lamenting the loss of his beloved, and also performs in a room with orange paint and 1960s oversized flowers decorating the walls. In this same space white male and female youths dance to the text "look at all you happy people ... look at all your smiling faces." These youths are dressed in bathing suits and appear almost psychotically happy, contrasting Isaak's despondent disposition. Like R. Kelly's video, the artist never dances, nor does he ever share the same visual frame with the dancers.

MTV's most popular video by a black female artist was Salt-N-Pepa's articulation of African-American hip hop in *Ain't Nuthin' But a She Thing*. *Ain't Nuthin' But a She Thing*, unlike the previous videos described above, features the artists performing an American-derived dance style. The video incorporates both access and discovery signs: the text refers to women taking control ("fight for your right, stand up and be heard / you're just as good as any man ..."); and the images are of women in non-traditional roles, as firefighters, astronauts and police officers. The dance is performed in a gym-like setting with the three primary artists up front and a group of women (black and white) mirroring them in a militaristic style. Periodically, the artists also join them to dance alongside in solidarity. Dance functions, like the narrative, as an access sign: the taking-back of a traditionally male-dominated area (the military) and, through their sharp technique, the women demonstrate their technical proficiency within this realm.

Of these videos, only two (*Hooked on You* and *Ain't Nuthin' But a She Thing*) involve the featured artist(s) as choreographed dancers; the primary artists in each of these videos were either black males or black females. This corroborates what was suggested previously: marginalized demographic groups are featured more often as dancers. Once again, black women, arguably the most marginalized of the demographic groups, were featured most often. These videos could also be seen to reinforce particular racial identities within the United States and Canada. Salt-N-Pepa's video, for instance, incorporates rap (a commonly perceived "American genre," particularly for Americans), hip hop dance (another indigenous American movement lexicon), and images of narratives in American diners and on American streets. This, in combination with the significant alignment of the rap repertoire on the station, reinforces

the perception of a segment of black American popular culture artists unambiguously situated within the American nation-state.

On MuchMusic, meanwhile, other patterns were developing within the video repertoire. Much's most frequently aired video by a female black artist was Janet Jackson's *Runaway*.<sup>50</sup> *Runaway* was shown 22 times that week on MuchMusic, almost double the number of airings on MTV, a highly unusual practice for an American video. Popular Canadian videos tend to receive substantial airtime on MuchMusic to meet the Canadian content quota, but videos by American celebrities like Jackson usually receive considerably more airtime on MTV than MuchMusic. In *Runaway* Jackson travels the world by physically "jumping" between locations (New York, Sydney, Rio, Paris) to the text "I've seen the world, been to many places / made lots of friends, many different races." Her dress and jewelry is a combination of non-Western styles; she wears extensive makeup, appears with her hair up and dons "exotically" straightened eyebrows that point diagonally. This constructed image, it quickly becomes evident, allows Jackson to fit in visually with the other non-Western dancers. The choreographed sequence, set on the leaning tower of Pisa and on a seemingly moving airplane wing, features her and the other female dancers performing in a South Asian style. As the text suggests, she's traveling worldwide and sampling cultures: "... I woke up with an Australian breeze, and danced the dance with Aborigines."

Would the dance component of this video, then, qualify as a "discovery" sign? After all, aren't Jackson and the other women clearly enjoying their dance activity, which, as a dance performed only by women, is a positive expression of an artistically female domain? Yes. But *Runaway* also raises questions about discovery signs and their *cross-cultural* appropriation: this dance may be a "female activity," but, significantly, not indigenous for Jackson. Within the context of the video this tradition is something appropriated on the whirlwind, worldwide tour; the women (allegedly those who actually perform it) give Jackson her "authenticity," but remain nameless.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult, then, to label the use of dance within this video as a "discovery" sign for to do so is to assume that the performers are empowered by the choreography, which is not the case. Instead, these women fall within what Toni Morrison has called an "economy of stereotype," whereby the author of the text invents a "quick and easy image without the responsibility of specificity [or] accuracy ..."<sup>52</sup> Only Jackson is empowered by borrowing (other) women's tradition, rendering this act more of a cross-cultural access sign rather than a feminist discovery sign.

*Runaway* undoubtedly was designed for viewing on American MTV; the designers likely made certain assumptions about the "preferred" decoding

---

<sup>50</sup>To view an excerpt from this video, go to: [http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/jackson\\_janet/audvid.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/jackson_janet/audvid.jhtml) and click on "Runaway."

<sup>51</sup>This video bears a striking resemblance to Michael Jackson's video *Black or White*, wherein he evokes a series of cultural stereotypes. In particular, the Hollywood image of Native Americans is perpetuated by means of a "cowboys and indians" fight.

<sup>52</sup>Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 67.



strategies of the American viewing audience (after all, Michael Jackson's *Black or White* proved a huge success on MTV and *Runaway* resembles this video's appropriative style). But what about MTV's international stations? Are the representational politics of this video more charged when it is aired on stations like MTV Europe or MTV Asia? What are the repercussions of seeing a non-Western expression that is appropriated by a Western performer, unproblematically absorbed into Western aesthetics, and then "reflected" back (in altered form) to the culture of origin? Is this of concern to MTV? In a word, yes: unproblematic, free-flowing cultural articulations are at the core of MTV's transnational agenda. "In the past decade," William Sonnega notes, "few forms of media have more relentlessly capitalized on simulations ... than ... MTV, in which the world's diverse peoples, cultures, and most emphatically 'colors' are conflated in utopian technological scenarios."<sup>53</sup> Nowhere is this more obvious than in Jackson's *Black or White*, in which morphing is used to facilitate racial/ethnic flow within the cultural "melting pot." This is an example of what Sonnega describes as the deeply set North American or European multicultural models that are simply unattainable "melting pot" ideals.<sup>54</sup> But *Runaway* does not celebrate cultural diversity as much as represent multiculturalist modes of stereotypical economy. As Sonnega further notes, "the driving force behind MTV's multicultural makeover was the fact that the channel is broadcast in 137 nations ... to maintain profitability, MTV was forced to expand its gaze to include representations ... of peoples and cultures outside those its demographic consultants had 'targeted' as profitable."<sup>55</sup> In marketing to this broad range of countries, MTV must avoid critical analysis of the conflicts that affect the everyday lives of its viewers.<sup>56</sup> *Runaway* typifies this style: it is a representation of seemingly "friendly" intercultural exchange, evidence to other countries of MTV's cultural openness.

That may be part of the rationale behind the video's original design and its subsequent use by MTV, but I am talking about a slightly different context here. How might Canadian audiences watching MuchMusic read this video differently? Given the intensity with which this video was aired on the station, could this text contribute towards a viewer's perception of openness towards non-Western influences, perhaps MuchMusic's self-proclaimed celebration of multicultural exchange as part of a uniquely *Canadian* agenda?

While it is very difficult to attribute anything to the heavy rotation of only one video, a pattern arises when we view this video alongside the most aired choreographed video by a white male, Bryan Adams' *Have You Ever Really Loved A Woman?* from the movie *Don Juan de Marco*. (This video was not shown once on MTV the week of my sample.) *Have You Ever*, like *Runaway*, is ripe for a critical analysis of cultural appropriation but I would like instead to examine this video for the ways in which difference is negotiated. Whereas Janet Jackson transformed physically and stylistically to blend in with the dancers—and

---

<sup>53</sup>William Sonnega, "Morphing Borders: The Remanence of MTV," 49.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

thereby legitimate her claim to their cultural traditions—, Adams' participation is more complex. Here I would like to foreground his initial difference from and partial admittance into the world of the "ethnic other" vis-à-vis the use of light.

For this analysis I borrow from Richard Dyer's 1997 book *White*.<sup>57</sup> In this text, Dyer presents a compelling analysis of the social construction of whiteness from classical painting to contemporary Hollywood movies. What links his wide-ranging texts are the ways in which whiteness is perpetuated as both normative, and as the site of social, political, and cultural dominance. Of particular interest for my work here is his analysis of the use of light to accentuate whiteness. As he states: "Light is a defining term ... how different groups relate to it profoundly affects their place in society." As he argues further, within the realm of hegemonic Western representation, "Those who can let the light through ... whose bodies are touched by the light from above, who yearn upward towards it, those are the people who should rule and inherit the earth ..." From the late 1910s on, ideal movie lighting was referred to as "Northern" light: soft, white, and steeply slanted. "The North, in ethnocentric geography, in the map of the world that became standardized in the process of European expansion, is above the South." Northern light, therefore, is "literally and symbolically, superior light." Within the realm of theatre and cinema, Dyer writes, overhead and backlighting inject this type of light which not only ensures that the actor is separated from the background, but that "the ethnically loaded evils of shadow ... can be eliminated ..."<sup>58</sup>

Before I examine Adams's video *Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?*, I would like briefly to contextualize my analysis through another Adams video from the MuchMusic sample which proceeded *Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?* on several occasions that week. *Everything I Do, I Do It For You*,<sup>59</sup> from the soundtrack *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*, was a huge song for Adams in 1991, charting at number 1 for 7 weeks in the US, and 12 weeks in Canada. In Britain, *Everything I Do* enjoyed the most consecutive weeks at number 1 on the UK Top 40 charts to that date.<sup>60</sup> This immensely popular song/video saturated radio and video stations alike across North America and Western Europe. Its appearance before *Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?* in 1995, then, certainly drew many viewers to their television sets.

The use of light is significant in this video. In particular, Adams alone seems to attract the soft Northern rays. The musical performance is set in a forest intercut with clips from the movie; when the band is shown, the rays appear on Adams' face and over his shoulder; occasionally the light's glare is so powerful that the image is indecipherable. At the opening to the next video, *Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?*,<sup>61</sup> Adams walks into a dark bar filled with the

---

<sup>57</sup>Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 118–25.

<sup>59</sup>To view an excerpt from this video, go to: [http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/adams\\_bryan/audvid.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/bands/az/adams_bryan/audvid.jhtml) and click on "Everything I Do."

<sup>60</sup>For more on these statistics, see <http://www.everyhit.com/record5.html>.

<sup>61</sup>No video example is available online. To hear an excerpt of the song, go to: [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000002G31/ref=pd\\_null\\_recs\\_m/102-7490382-4066503#product-details](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000002G31/ref=pd_null_recs_m/102-7490382-4066503#product-details).

locals and their “ethnic” shadows leaving behind the strong, outdoor light. As light continues to pour in from outside the doorway, Adams, dressed in white, sings as if to “enlighten” those still “in the dark.” But the doorway is not the only source of light: at times, light seems to emanate from Adams himself, particularly when he is in the company of the video’s unidentified, undifferentiated women. During the guitar solo, Adams alone moves closer to a second source of external light, a hanging light bulb. Adams stands on top of a table close to the light while the featured guitar soloist Paco de Lucia performs relatively unnoticed from floor-level; this renders Adams’ elevated position incongruent with his musically less important role of strumming the accompanimental chords, but congruent with his inherited access to the symbolic power of this important light source.

This new source, however, is unable to eliminate the dangerous shadows that mark the outdoor nighttime dance sequence that ends the video. This scene is marked by a plethora of long shadows cast by the dancers on a background wall. Adams, because of his close proximity to the wall, casts a very short shadow, while de Lucia, who sits and plays in the foreground, casts an elongated and darkened shadow thanks to the use of floor lighting. The female dancers’ shadows, not surprisingly, are the longest and most threatening of all. Never is Adams’ whiteness threatened or tainted.

Why then were these two ethnically-inflected videos aired with such frequency on MuchMusic? After all, neither video qualified as “Canadian content”: *Runaway* is American-made and too many parameters of *Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?* were produced outside of Canada to label it a “domestic” product here.<sup>62</sup> Their frequency on MuchMusic, then, did nothing to further the stations’ Canadian content quota. Could the heavy rotation of these videos reflect MuchMusic’s attempt to target a particularly Canadian audience by weaving these images within the context of Canada’s imagined “multiculturalism”? Lucy Lippard’s observations are informative in light of these two videos and their rotational frequency on MuchMusic: “The dominant culture prefers to make over its sources into its own image, filtering them through the sieve of recent local art history, seeing only that which is familiar or currently marketable and rejecting that which cannot be squeezed into ‘our’ framework.”<sup>63</sup> It is precisely because Canadian viewers are familiar with Adams’ and Jackson’s personas that non-Western images—particular non-Western dance—can be successfully “squeezed” into their videos and function as part of a contained multicultural imagination.

---

<sup>62</sup>That Adams is Canadian born does not necessarily deem his music and videos “Canadian content.” CRTC policy stipulates that a Canadian music video must include Canadian involvement in a combination of parameters, including the audio component (the composition or performance of music and lyrics), production (director, producer), or production location. The detailed definition of a Canadian video clip is available online at: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2000/PB2000-42.htm>. Adams’ video did not meet the criteria.

<sup>63</sup>Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 26.

I would argue that these videos served another purpose: their heavy rotation pleased shareholders through the inclusion of mainstream performers while—intentionally or not—they simultaneously furthered the station's "multicultural rhetoric." If MuchMusic can implement the CRTC's imperatives like the mosaic rubric—thanks in part to a complex multicultural rhetoric as I have suggested here—MTV's desire for entrance into the Canadian marketplace will be perpetually frustrated. I wonder then if there is a slight irony embedded here: if MTV's corporate, multinational agenda encourages the production of videos that promote cultural diversity for foreign consumption, and stations like MuchMusic air these same videos in a heavy rotation, could MTV's own initiatives prevent them from expanding into the market right next door?

Perhaps. But the reasons MTV may never get into Canada extend beyond governmental policy: the multicultural narratives that pervade Canadian cultural discourses are distinct, complex, and contradictory and MuchMusic sees itself as a forum in which these narratives can be heard. Like any other station, MuchMusic has systemic modes of multicultural and multiracial containment as I have tried to argue here. But these modes are challenged on a daily basis by bands like the Dream Warriors, who speak for many Canadians by activating the local, embracing the global, and by problematizing their place within that continuum. They are also challenged by MuchMusic's expanded and historically deeper video repertoire, which allows space for socially oppositional videos such as those discussed here from the African diaspora. This rich, hybrid space of the "in between" is where Canadian youth carve out a piece of their identity not despite but because of the contradictions and tensions that they have inherited. This is why MuchMusic is an important and valued Canadian cultural medium within governmental and public realms, and why MTV's efforts for Canadian expansion might be stalled at the 49th parallel for some time to come.

### **Abstract**

Since MTV and MuchMusic were launched in 1981 and 1984 respectively, both stations have been commended for their racially diverse video repertoires. As Homi Bhabha has observed, however, "multicultural" practices that encourage diversity should also be examined for simultaneous modes of containment and control (Bhabha, "The Third Space," 208). This analysis of both stations' video programming and rotation schedules from late 1995 suggests that as they expanded their repertoires they established unique, carefully controlled, nationally-inflected relationships between dominant and marginalized musical traditions. Using examples by Euro-American and African diasporic performers, I explore how multiculturalism appears to be "celebrated" on MuchMusic and MTV while Western and non-Western representations are negotiated such that ethnocentric norms, which pervade North American cultural media, are never contested.

## Résumé

Depuis leur lancement en 1981 et 1984 respectivement, MTV et MuchMusic ont reçu des critiques élogieuses pour leur répertoire vidéo diversifié quant à la représentation raciale. Toutefois, comme l'a fait remarquer Homi Bhabha, les pratiques « multiculturelles » qui favorisent la diversité devraient être examinées sous l'angle des modes simultanés de répression et de contrôle (Bhabha, « The Third Space », 208). La présente analyse de la programmation et des grilles horaires en rotation de ces deux stations depuis la fin de 1995 suggère qu'en élargissant leur répertoire, elles établissent des relations uniques, soigneusement contrôlées et à caractère national entre les traditions musicales dominantes et celles qui sont marginalisées. En utilisant les musiciens de la diaspora euro-américaine et africaine à titre d'exemple, l'article démontre comment MuchMusic et MTV semblent « célébrer » le multiculturalisme, alors que la représentation occidentale et non-occidentale est traitée de telle sorte qu'on ne trouve aucune contestation des normes ethnocentriques, lesquelles imprègnent les médias culturels nord-américains.