They Can't Do That on Television... Can They?
An Analysis of the Replication of Ideology Through Capitalist Industry Treatments of Contentious Music Videos

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Abstract

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This thesis provides an analysis of music videos and music television in an effort to elucidate one way that ideological (in this case, Western capitalism) values and ideas are replicated through the media. To accomplish this, I examine the way in which contentious music videos are treated by music and television broadcast institutions in order to maintain control of audience expectations.

Control over audience expectations creates a stable marketplace as well as a sales channel to market not only music, but also a plethora of related merchandise within ancillary industries. Contentious music videos disrupt this stable marketplace by defying or changing audience expectations, and thereby creating instability in the form of controversy, defiance of community standards, or challenging proven and profitable formats used by broadcasters to integrate music videos into a corporate product line. I argue that contentious videos are subject to control mechanisms in the form of content editing or the cultivation a preexisting set of values that often defines what can be broadcast. In cases where a contentious video proves profitable, it is then integrated into the broadcast system that absorbs the controversy, using it to change the boundaries of contentiousness and regain a control over a stable market. This represents the maintenance of hegemonic power through the media, or—to put it another way—the control of meaning in the service of power.

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This thesis is dedicated to Brandi. Your love and constant support has always put me in my place... in front of the computer. I could not have finished this project without you. I can't wait for you and I to throw that makeshift desk in the bedroom out the window and reclaim that space for better things, like lamps... or air... or something.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The first music video I can remember viewing as a twelve year old was "Don't Forget Me When I'm Gone" by the Canadian pop rock group Glass Tiger (1986). The video depicts a young man and woman getting married on what was obviously a small production soundstage. The background was a uniform blue-green, the props plastic and crooked, and the acting was amateur at best. Glass Tiger provided most of the remaining cast of the video: sometimes best man, sometimes photographer, sometimes a friend throwing rice. Alan Frew (lead singer) was singing to the bride as he asked her to not forget him, while a child actor lip-synched Bryan Adams' chorus parts. This was a forgettable video to be sure, but also an unforgettable moment in a child's life. *Thin Red Line* by Glass Tiger was the first cassette tape that I bought with my own money. The video motivated me to make this purchase as it had me intrigued and entertained.

As an avid music video viewer, this kind of sensory experience lingered throughout my formative years. Later, when applying the tenets of critical theory, I saw music videos as texts that could be oppositional and contentious, even counter-hegemonic, but somehow still not revolutionary. I began to wonder how socially conscious videos and often contentious videos, by and large, did nothing to change the established order. It is this idea of a contentious video that this project seeks to analyze and understand. I accomplish this by looking through the lens of Stuart Hall's theories of articulation, ideology, and hegemony. I also discuss these videos as cultural artifacts through a semiotic analysis, so as to gain insight into the imagery and their meanings. I seek to establish that while the unique format of music videos allows it a degree of

latitude unconstrained by traditional narrative or structure, and can tease out and push hegemonic boundaries (even bring these structures to light for a mainstream audience), these videos are still subject and subordinate to capitalism's hegemonic agenda. In other words, videos that are contentious must first be proven in some way to be successful products, and only then will they be allowed to receive wide broadcast distribution. Yet, as this thesis will demonstrate, even videos that are oppositional texts, in that they challenge established social orders and meanings, are themselves stripped of their oppositional character and changed into commodities for consumption. It is this power to strip texts such as music videos of their oppositional meanings, that aids hegemonic institutions in keeping power over people. If an institution, such as the broadcast media, can control all aspects of the texts it broadcasts, this in turn allows it to better control viewer consumption habits, and in doing so maintain a stable marketplace for its capitalist profit-based agenda.

In order to substantiate such claims, I analyze music videos by treating them as ideological packages of consciousness. By this, I mean that music videos serve to buoy the music industry and the broadcast media associated with it, by helping to maintain a stable audience and feeding that audience content that reinforces necessary consumption habits. Using the existing literature, I demonstrate how these videos impart meaning, how they "make sense", so to speak. This analysis draws upon and also contrasts post-modern theories of meaning and representation (or loss of meaning), with Stuart Hall's more ideological notions of collaborative and negotiated meanings based on his articulation theory. As well, using semiotics, I also explain how the images and lyrics are contentious, and I theorize how the videos are decoded by the industry in order to decide what is aired

and what will be censored or banned. I begin by locating music videos in an historical context.

Defining Music Videos and Music Television

Before becoming a staple of early specialty cable broadcasting, music and broadcasting had a long prior history. Videos are older than MTV (the first of many music television broadcasters), having accompanied pop groups such as the Beatles or the Beach Boys in the mid-sixties. The renowned acid rock band, Pink Floyd released cartoon or visual accompaniments to its music as early as 1968, and also in 1970. Similarly, Pete Townsend and his rock band The Who were scoring rock operas and integrating film into the unrealized Lifehouse[1] project. The first Dixieland albums had black and white album sleeves designed with more than simply a group shot of the band. People dancing and singing figured prominently on Louis Armstrong's album covers and bandstand posters. Thus, music signified something: a lifestyle, a mode of dress, a generation, and perhaps even a sign of the times. Early country music scores for mandolin and guitar were covered with pictures of nature and cowboys, while Dixieland scores had photographs of New Orleans.

Moving towards late forties and early fifties, television variety shows began to highlight musical performances, and by the early to mid-fifties, rock and roll and rhythm and blues made their way onto both the small and silver screen. For example, shows like *The Peter Potter Show* (1953-54), *Upbeat* (1955), *The Music Shop* (1959) and *The Big*

[1] Lifehouse was an aborted film and performance project that Pete Townsend and the The Who started in 1970. The project was a "rock opera" that would use live performance, film projections, and actors to tell a story. The project was abandoned but the recorded music became the 1971 album "Who's Next."

Record (1957-58) showcased rock and roll music and some of the new dancing associated with the genre (Mundy, 1999, pp. 183-184). At this time, the rise of stars like Elvis Presley, whose suggestive dancing had fans hypnotized, were observable popular phenomena.

Yet at this time the audience was still rather undifferentiated, the shows were intended for the parents and the children, and even the rock and roll content could not alienate the older generation. Simon Frith points out that "[t]he effect of putting rock and roll into a medium like television is to make it safe, to deprive it of some of its significance – an undifferentiated audience can't be a rock audience" (1983, p.153). The union of music, performance and television, brought with it a necessary smoothing of the edges. The experiment that brought rock and roll from radio to television had to be profitable; those in charge knew what they had to do in order to assure a steady audience and constant income from America's families. In order to appeal to children and young adults, a show had to also appeal to parents who at this time had much more control over the viewing habits of their children (Spigel, 1990).

This era (the fifties) represented a time when the family watched television together, and the television was the locus for much family time spent together (Spigel, 1990). Corporate sponsors who funded the variety shows had to maintain and replicate this social order. In other words, the producers were careful to aim performances at white, older, middle class Americans and Canadians in an effort to avoid alienating the viewer. The music and performers had to be white and unthreatening, even if the true trailblazers of rock and roll were the black musicians of the American South (Mundy, 1999).

Black performers who were at the root of rock and roll were left behind the scenes when music hit television; the medium still needed a safe ground for the white, Northern audience that was its bread-and-butter (Mudry, 1999, p. 185). Near the end of this decade, rock and roll had begun to turn a serious profit (Ward et al. 1987, p.157) and shows featuring rock and roll performances gained in popularity. Alan Freed's *Rock and Roll Party* was one such show. The difference was that Freed did not shy away from turning the spotlight on to the black artists who were then popular only on the radio. When Freed showed a black singer dancing with a white girl, thirteen ABC affiliates immediately dropped the show (Mundy quoting Hardy and Laing, 1992, p. 186). Television at this time had a system that prioritized white middle class viewers and tended to reject texts that would compromise penetration of that market.

If we return to the history of the music videos, by the mid-sixties, music videos were in a kind of nascent form. New film recording techniques had allowed musicians to include a new visual aspect to concerts (such as projected film clips or pre-filmed light projections), and musicians could also produce their own early music videos. For example when the Doors performed on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1968, their background set reflected a visual representation of a mess of liquid oil projections and Technicolor psychedelic images. At this time, bands were beginning to produce promo-clips using new visual techniques. These promo-clips were early videos that were played on rock and roll shows like *Top of the Pops* in the UK and *American Bandstand* in the USA. These promo-clips were used in the place of the actual band when the artists could not appear in person. The clips could be simple "live" footage of the band playing, or at times used some interesting visual trickery for effect. For example, the 60s folk-rock band The

Lovin' Spoonful's famous promo-clip for the song "Do You Believe in Magic" (1965) has the band members disappearing and reappearing just like "magic." This type of promo-clip was common until the 1980s when MTV was inaugurated with the song "Video Killed the Radio Star" in 1982.

Music Video as Promotional Tool or How Video Saved the Recording Artist

Sound and image often act in concert on television, in sound recordings, art installations, and advertising and is an important element to guide meaning and add depth to these texts. But this only partially explains the importance of the music video. While sound and image often enjoy a symbiotic relationship, music video has pushed the commercial viability of popular music beyond anyone's conception. Yet, increasingly videos are critiqued for their meaninglessness, called "[n]utrient-free eye candy for the 'more blank than frank' generation" (Branwyn, 1998, p. 95). In light of this, it is worth exploring the current status of music video as a hugely successful promotional communication product in an attempt to locate the source of its popularity.

Music videos have reached unparalleled audiences in recent years. Music television as a format has seen itself split, diversified, and segmented into highly specialized niche markets. Take for example the City TV empire headed by Canadian Moses Znaimer, whose Much Music music broadcasting and specialized cable station has grown and fostered the development of a French-language sister station (Musique Plus), a station celebrating "urban music" (Vibe), a punk, heavy metal and hard rock station (Loud) and an adult contemporary/retro station (Much More Music) among many others. In the United States, MTV is credited with saving a floundering music industry

that had been in decline since the mid-eighties when record sales were at an all-time low (Goodwin, 1992, pp. 39-40). This points to the obvious evidence of the fiscal viability of the format, and the popularity it has managed to foster among the much sought after 12-34 demographic. It illustrates the importance and power of music videos to sell to viewers who consume the music and promotional material associated with an artist. Instead of the occasional seminal piece like *Hard Days Night* or *Woodstock*, one can now get a combined music-image product 24/7. With these videos come symbols associated with the music, for example, the ubiquitous glass of Crystal champagne in the hip-hop "party[2]" video signifying wealth or ownership of traditionally Caucasian symbols of affluence.

Music videos are now an integral part of an ever-changing music industry landscape. Yet, many of these can be considered highly contentious examples of what are arguably counter-hegemonic communication texts. For example, popular rap/rock act Rage Against the Machine shows images of Zapatistas in a number of videos and accuse the American government of undermining Central and Southern American regimes. Pearl Jam shows a pre-Columbine image of a boy shooting himself due to schoolyard bullying (*Jeremy* 1992). The Dixie Chicks released a series of politically dissenting videos including *Not Ready to Make Nice* (2006) that tells their audience that they are not ready to bow down to pressure to be "one of the boys" in country music and that they will continue to protest the Bush government.

These music videos challenge the existing moral order and in doing so are subject to censorship of various kinds. For example, Manson's *Beautiful People* video (1996)

[2] This kind of video is a staple of the Hip Hop genre. It features a house party with obvious displays of wealth such as expensive champagne or gold jewelry, and often features women dancing suggestively wearing "sexy" clothing that would be out of place in a regular party setting.

resulted in the cancellation of concerts. Robert Wright attributes this kind of behavior to a "moral panic" (2000, p. 366) of the neo-conservative right. More importantly he feels this panic has taken away even the need to feign debate on the subject. He states:

> Revulsion for Marilyn Manson emerges in the new context not as an element in broad public debate about art, politics or even freedom of expression, but as a kind of 'received wisdom' or even 'common sense' that obviates the need for such debate and tacitly scorns the suggestion that it is even necessary (p. 366).

Theoretical Orientation and Important Definitions

In cases such as the aforementioned, music videos quite commonly problematize social and/or political issues. Videos use both the power of lyrical content and images paired with music to make their mark. Yet the music industry itself finds it hard to promote political or social resistance. For example the video for Pearl Jam's song "Jeremy" (1992) has been removed from the VH1 playlist, as the image of a child with a gun in a classroom was too hard to swallow post-Columbine. To some theorists, this is evidence of a "new conservatism" (Grossberg, 1992, pp. 14-15), where industry self-censorship is considered "received wisdom" (Wright, 2000, p. 3). This refers to the notion that as conservative agendas for the media become commonplace, the turn towards moral and cultural conservatism in the music industry is then rendered into common sense, and therefore is hegemonic in nature. Music videos have the power to resist or challenge the social order, but they are, at the same time, integrated into a larger capitalist whole. Nonetheless, the music industry can deal with negative press, and indeed has learned to profit from it on occasion. Videos, such as those mentioned above, become subject to

industry pressure to change—through censure or adaptation—because they are contentious, in one form or another.

This notion of contentiousness is important since it denotes an interesting middle ground between the accepted (or perhaps "dominant") mainstream music television offering, and the outright banned (or perhaps "oppositional") texts. There is no existing definition for contentiousness formulated in this way, and as such I offer a working definition. Contentious music video material will in some way address an issue in a manner considered "undue" by an institution, group or social force such as but not limited to, institutions, public interest groups, politicians, or the media. This "undue" material tests or transgresses what are considered community standards. Contentious material always elicits open (largely negative) discussion in the pubic sphere, and the option to have the contentious material banned, limited, or controlled is always threatened or present. However, contentious material is not considered so "undue" that it can be legislated out of the public eye or even aggressively censored by any public-interest or lobby groups without a great deal of difficulty.

I offer an elaboration and contextualization of this definition in the second chapter of this thesis. There I integrate theories of ideology and selected legislative material to help grasp how contentiousness, community standards and capitalism combine to inform our societal codes of morality, and how this morality exists in relation to controversial or so-called morally questionable material. It is important to note here that the State does play a large role in determining what is contentious and what content is controlled or eliminated. While this is a worthwhile and useful study, I am

concentrating on industry and civil society's treatments of contentious texts in an effort to narrow my focus.

In order to get a firm grasp on the notion of hegemony in relation to media institutions working to maintain power, I utilize Todd Gitlin's formulation of hegemony in the news. In his article "News as Ideology Contested Area: Toward a Theory of Hegemony, Crisis and Opposition" (1979) Gitlin states:

> By the bonds of experience and relationships, in other words, by direct corporate and class interests, the owners and managers of the major media are committed to the maintenance of the going system in its main outlines: committed to reform of selected violations of the moral code through selective action by state agencies; and committed to approving individual success within corporate and bureaucratic structures (p. 19).

Contentious videos, I believe, represent a unique kind of "violation of the moral code" as they are indeed dealt with by state regulatory bodies, but also by the media themselves (see also Wright, 2000). Music videos are unique texts in that they exist as both art and advertising, thus their suppression, it can be argued, can be both anti-capitalist (as they are very successful promotional tools) and oddly moral at the same time (when videos go "too far" and are taken off the air).

Capitalism is adaptive and able to deal with such opposition. Stuart Hall (1996) states as much when he argues, " If the function of ideology is to 'reproduce' capitalist social relations according to the 'requirements' of the system, how does one account for subversive ideas or for ideological struggle?" (p. 32). This statement represents ideas about the texts I wish to examine - music videos as subversive ideas that do not reproduce "capitalist social relations" and in doing so do not meet "the requirements of the system."

The following represents a definition of ideology as utilized in this thesis. I conceptualize ideology as the way in which meaning is subject or subordinate to relations of power.[3] Broadly speaking, ideology guides meaning and works to determine how a citizen understands the "multiplicity of connections in a temporarily essentialized system of representation within which we live out those connections as real" (Slack, 1989, p. 333). As such, ideology actively seeks to control consciousness by guiding citizens towards understandings that maintain and replicate the power of social elites, particularly in this case, media institutions in general and broadcasters in particular.

Music videos can comment on, subversively, any number of societal ills, and in doing so, they theoretically help to upset the current ideological status quo. Acts such as the heavy metal band System of a Down tell viewers to download their music and turn off the television, or Me'Shell Ndegeocello's song about religious persecution of homosexuals "Leviticus Faggot" (1998) offer examples of jarring and subversive content. These examples are illustrative of ideological struggles within an existing system (broadcast media). But, within the system itself, I argue that there are controls, both obvious and subtle, that maintain a certain order and work to counter oppositional content.

John Fiske describes music videos as having a contradictory or dual aspect. On the one hand, such videos have a radical potential that is constrained by the economic reality of their production; on the other, they reinforce this reality through the profits accrued from sales. He argues, "[i]n offending realism, rock videos offend capitalism: in boosting record sales they maintain it" (Fiske, 1986, p. 76). As such, oppositional music videos

[3] The notion of meaning in the service of power was first conceptualized by John Thompson (in Goodwin, 1992) and is elaborated in chapter two.

somehow can exist as contrary to capitalism itself (for example *Sleep Now in the Fire* (1999) by Rage Against the Machine for a video that obviously critiques capitalism, but serves it via the profits from record sales, performances and merchandise). However, the radical potential of such videos is rendered less so when they are sandwiched between mundane or quotidian fare such as that offered by popular stars such as Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson. That aside, the actual structure of music television itself works to guide the viewer towards a decoding that is harmonious. If hegemony works collaboratively, then music television and the music industry helps to nudge a person along a route towards increased consumption and decreased debate or critical thought.

This project seeks to illuminate hegemony and ideology at work, in the work we do as consumers of music videos, in the work the industry does to "mainstream" or deflect contentious music videos, and the unconscious factors at work that help this "mainstreaming" along. I believe that change, whether revolutionary or simply progressive within mainstream media is difficult at best. In the following chapters, I use music videos to illuminate some microcosmic examples of ideology's machinations through videos and music television.

In the first chapter, I examine the constitutive elements of the music video form and music television as a format. This section identifies and defines music videos as complex cultural commodities that both circulate meanings and are also determined by economic forces. This chapter also surveys the relevant literature concerning both music television as a format, MTV as a station, and music videos as a genre. I first describe how more current quantitative content analyses are situating music videos and music television. I also survey postmodern and psychoanalytic analyses of music videos as a

cultural form. Last, I describe how music videos and music television are conveyors of ideology and dissent through a combination of political economic analysis (more specifically, the political economy of communication), and the cultural studies and articulation theory of Stuart Hall.

For this thesis, political economy in general is defined as "the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources" (Mosco, 2004, p. 6). To refine this definition towards a more relevant communication studies formulation, the political economy of communication is, "associated with macro-questions of media ownership and control, interlocking directorships, and other factors that bring together media industries with other media and with other industries, and with political and social elites" (Boyd-Barrett, 1995, p. 186). As such, political economy looks at how elites within media industries work actively to maintain power, and cultivate markets and accrue larger and more diverse audiences while at the same time limiting outsider or dissenting voices that challenge the established media order. Political economy allows me to look at music videos as texts created by an institution that is interested in maintaining power over the content that is broadcast to a wide audience, and maintaining that audience as a group of consumers of its media products. As such, contentious videos represent ruptures in that control, and in response the media institutions actively seek to close or eliminate such ruptures.

Regarding critical cultural studies, this refers to "a body of British literature identified with the intellectual traditions of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, notably under the

leadership of Stuart Hall" (Hardt, 1996, p. 102). While many scholastic traditions have influenced this multi-disciplinary area, one of the most important and overarching ideas in cultural studies and central to this thesis is, "a specific interest in the exploration of ideological representations and the process of ideological struggle with and within the media, emphasizing the relationship between the media and the maintenance of social order" (Hardt, 1996, p. 103). Music videos that challenge the "social order" and as such are considered contentious and subject to industry scrutiny are the subject of this thesis. As it is in the interest of a broadcaster to maintain the social order, to both satisfy the regulations of the state and the sensibilities of society, I argue that contentious videos are an excellent textual example of the ability of industry to quiet dissenting voices and maintain a stable audience of consumers who view approved content with little or no opposition.

In the second chapter, I expand upon the previous definition of contentiousness as this notion applies to this study and to music videos in general. In order to do this, I survey industry, legislative, media, and special interest group sources in an effort to define what is considered contentious. I then examine the debates specific videos have incited and the reactions generated from the aforementioned camps. In doing this, I define for the reader what makes a video contentious, and clarify how the debate surrounding a music video is executed and brought to the public sphere.

In conjunction with the above definitions, I provide an overview of my use of both semiotic analysis and articulation theory in chapter two. This examination carries into the next section where these two distinct but useful analytic techniques are applied to specific videos in an effort to tease out what makes them contentious. I examine in detail how

each is contentious, and how each, as an oppositional text, is either co-opted, modified, or rejected by the broadcast system.

The third chapter consists of an analysis of three music videos using the framework defined in the previous chapter. The videos examined in this chapter are *Outside* (1998) by George Michael, *Leviticus Faggot* (1996) by Me'Shell Ndegeocello, and *Beautiful People* (1996) by Marilyn Manson. This chapter highlights the meta-narrative surrounding both the artists and the videos, focusing particularly on the nature of contentious content. In order to arrive at an understanding of the 'message' of these videos, I employ a semiological analysis of the signifying practices of contentious videos, and the iconographic nature of both the video's star/performer and the signs that render that video hegemonically tenuous. I explore the influence of hegemonic structures in integrating the video and stripping or voiding it of its oppositional characteristics.

In the final chapter, I return to the central contradiction inherent within these contentious videos. I highlight certain aspects of the process that internalizes, edits, and copes with a commodity that does not conform to the ideological norms of consumer culture, yet can exist as a viable commodity within it. I discuss whether resistance of this kind is simply "resistance without power or political consequence" (Woodfin, 2006, p. 150) or is an authentic expression of opposition silenced by a system working to maintain a stable market and ideological balance.

Chapter One

Situating and Framing Music Videos

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the major theoretical approaches concerning music videos. My intent is to demonstrate some of the strengths and shortcomings of the various approaches. I conclude by offering a synthesis that draws primarily from the work of critical cultural studies theorists. In mapping this terrain, I assess the various theoretical perspectives from the point of view of their incorporation, negation or integration of ideology as consciousness within a framework that also accounts for the political economic dimension of the music video industry. In other words, my benchmark and aim is to outline a theoretical approach that will enable me to integrate the concept of an active audience capable of making meaning while still taking into consideration the determining influence of economic factors.

It is difficult to separate MTV (Music Television) the television station from music videos, as the station and its main content enjoy a symbiotic relationship. As early as 1990, Sut Jhally pointed out that MTV was solidly positioned as a site where a person goes to watch music videos and view what is "cool" on television and videos are major vehicles of these images of "cool." Simply put, what benefits MTV, benefits music videos as a genre and as a commercial vehicle. When MTV enjoys good ratings, it means there are more people watching videos and consuming a record company or artist's products. When a music video is popular, MTV enjoys a product that is bringing in people to watch other videos and commercials that are the main source of revenue for the station (Banks, 1996).

MTV is also the first and most successful model for a music television station. It began as a station that used a video flow format[4] airing back-to-back videos, and now airs programs based a on musical genre with interspersed with reality television and lifestyle programming. This model has been copied by a number of stations including the now defunct Power Station in Britain, and the successful Canadian station Much Music. Much Music has adopted many of MTV's broadcast techniques including the uninterrupted videoflow, and the anything goes and spontaneous look of MTV's programming. Much Music differs largely in its unique presentation in the "Much Music Environment." Instead of using sets for each program, most Much Music programs are filmed in the "Environment" that does not hide the technicians and "behind the scene" activity of the station. The VJ works in front of the editing terminals and hustle and bustle of a working TV station. This gives the station an air of transparency and helps the audience feel part of the broadcast process. Much Music differs also in that it is required by virtue of a CRTC[5] license to include media literacy programming. One of the programs created for this purpose was *Too Much 4 Much,* episodes of which are used in this thesis and described more fully in chapter 2. Still, many similarities between Much Music and MTV do exist including very similar video play lists (hits in the USA are usually hits in Canada) and frequent Hollywood celebrity based programs. One cannot

[4] The notion of video "flow' refers to videos appearing one after the other with no necessary thematic link. The video jockey (VJ) would introduce a series of vides, include some pop culture news or perhaps information bites about the artist(s), and then a series of 3-4 videos would play back-to-back without stopping.

[5] CRTC refers to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. This body governs all telecommunications in Canada including granting licenses to new broadcasters. It also administers the Canadian Content legislation requiring stations to play a minimum of Canadian produced material. This body requires Canadian broadcasters to include other public service components such as media literacy programming or multicultural programming. It is roughly analogous to the FCC in the USA.

analyze music videos as part of an ideological and institutional framework, without some mention of MTV the station, as it is what controls which videos are played, which videos are censored.

In fact, some theorists suggest that the ideological workings of music videos and MTV are not found in the images of the videos themselves. Rather ideology is in the lifestyle that MTV has a part in creating and promoting through music videos. Fry and Fry (1986) look at MTV as a medium that broadcasts styles that the public can identify with. The markers of this style are found in the videos and advertised commodities. The video communicates the language of a consumer culture: consumption as a way of life through the products and style found on MTV. Here, the ideology of capitalism is served even in anti-commercial video identifications. When a person identifies with an anti-mainstream message, there are style markers that are needed to project one's membership in this sub-culture. When MTV broadcasts content from a more marginal or less mainstream group, it helps maintain an image of itself as a liberal and tolerant broadcaster, when in fact it has a serious economic bottom line, and would not broadcast marginal music without some gain in the economic arena.

Theoretical Overview: Why Are Music Videos Important to Study?

MTV, and later on, all music television stations and formats, have become proving grounds for most genres of popular music as well as other related industries such as fashion and mainstream film. It is here that tastemakers come to shop their wares so-to-speak. Music television launches the careers of many influential youth heroes and pop culture icons. These icons become that which the young (and arguably the old as well)

seek to emulate and to copy. These icons also influence other generations of musicians, actors and their "coolness" helps determine the fashion and lifestyle choices of many. Further to this, MTV shows us a utopic and exaggerated view of our own landscape, where every rapper carries a gun and every pop star is hypersexual and beautiful, while still claiming to be a "regular person" like you and me. MTV is also a place where musicians can expose their ideas, opinions and values to a huge audience. Music television is a forum where pop stars have aired political views (like rapper P. Diddy's Vote or Die campaign), grievances (Rage Against the Machine releasing a song about jailed aboriginal leader Leonard Pelltier), as well as hopes and dreams. Sometime these opinions are controversial, sometimes they are censored, and sometimes they are allowed to exist in an effort to further the image of music television as a liberal and tolerant institution.

The importance of MTV is not difficult to gauge. The slumping sales of the record industry and a general inability for advertising to reach the elusive 14-34 demographic in the 1970s gave MTV a perfect niche market (Jhalley, 1990). MTV was soon successful enough that a generation of kids has been called the MTV generation. Music videos became commercial messages from record companies to the public, and the vehicle to broadcast these messages was the new format MTV presented, a station that showed exclusively music videos. This makes music videos an unusual and complex commodity. They are artistic texts, sometimes even resembling avant-garde films even as they act as commercials. They often take a musician's vision and add new depth to the song, a wonderful and entertaining visual element.

As well, music in general but music videos in particular, are part of a complex process of production. From the initial song writing stage to the final album, there are numerous people involved, many of whom have either a commercial or artistic stake in the music. Simon Frith describes this as the "industrialization of music" (1992, p. 50). This process of industrialization refers to the Marxist notion of alienation, where "something human is taken from us and returned in the form of a commodity. Songs and singers are fetishized, made magical, and we can only reclaim them through possession, via cash transaction in the marketplace" (Frith, 1992, p. 50). The music video is a perfect example of this fetishization, as videos provide real and immediate gratification of the singer or song made "magical" but do not give us the material possession, we have to then go out and buy the record to own a piece of the artist. The video is a commercial, asking us to buy the record of the singer we are watching.

Accordingly, music is now more than ever at the mercy of the music industry. Popular music is now so fully industrialized that it is difficult to broadcast music without utilizing the music industry's promotional system. Even independent artists create a video and provide it for free to MTV in order to have the music heard and seen by a wider audience. And while music videos do circulate meanings and ideas through the images and lyrics of the song, they are also highly influenced by, and reliant on, the system of production and distribution that is the music industry. As such, issues of profitability, marketability, band image, and popularity influence not only the bands themselves, but also how effectively messages in the music reach an audience.

Music Videos and Criticism: An Overview of the Main Paradigms

MTV stands as a perennial example of the enormous commercial success of the music television format. Yet, its unparalleled success spawned a great deal of questioning and criticism. Academically, music television has and continues to be criticized as being pastiche (Fiske, 1986; Chang, 1986; Tetzlaff, 1986), ideologically influencing (Kaplan, 1987), ahistorical and superficial (Fiske, 1986.), racist (Goodwin 1992, Orbe, 1998) and monopolistic (Banks, 1996), to name but a few of these critiques. In the areas of popular opinion, music videos have suffered a barrage of attacks. Religious groups rally against anti-religious messages; anti-violence advocacy groups lament the recurring themes of violence so often seen in hip hop and rock videos, and artists, who feel the weight of corporate pressure on altering content (Goodwin 1992, Banks 1996), have also articulated critiques dealing with challenges to artistic sovereignty.

This underscores the cultural place and importance of the music video. Loved by youth culture, provider of symbols of/for subculture, hated by "morality police," music videos are often cited as perfect examples of the hyperreality of postmodern America (this notion of music videos as hyperreal will be detailed below). The cinema and art community have accused music videos of rampant plagiarism and pastiche (Demopoulos, 1996; Kaplan, 1987), while others claimed that music videos are more about satire and subtle homage (Goodwin, 1992) as opposed to "blank parody" (Jameson, 1983). From the political economic front, music videos have been seen as agents of global monopolistic conquest (Banks, 1996) or as a medium that can bring new artists and new types of music to the "world music" stage, or new critical ideas to contest the dominant ideology.

Yet, it would appear that structural and postmodern critiques fell out of favour in the mid nineties with a proliferation of content analyses focusing on studies on race, sex and violence in videos (see below). This is disappointing in that the early critiques often probed deeper into the human side of music video's message, bringing to light many fascinating theories such as those concerned with pleasure (Kaplan, 1986 &1984; Sun and Lull, 1986). Joe Gow said it well when he commented on the proliferation of the "sex and violence paradigm" noting that, "[w]hile these content analysts informed the debate over sex and violence in music videos by describing the nature of video images at particular points in time, they made no attempts to formulate theoretical understandings of the larger communicative potential of this new form of media they examined" (1992, p. 42). In the following section, I outline the major theoretical schools and their respective critiques of music videos beginning with a brief introduction to the more empirical content analysis of contemporary studies.

Sex, Violence, and Rock n' Roll (videos)

The "Sex, Violence, and Demography" perspective dominates contemporary accounts of music videos. It represents studies that look at the images and content of music videos in an effort to categorize the types of themes and images most commonly seen as "bad" or deleterious to society. I include value-based studies that ask questions about why and who watches music videos, with results that tend towards the negative. These studies tend to utilize content analysis as a methodological tool (Gow, 1992) and examine the images of music videos in terms of major societal issues such as gender inequality (Brown and Campbell, 1986), violence on television (Sherman and Dominick,

1984), racism (Orbe, 1998), substance abuse (Smith, 2005), or social stereotyping (Hanson, 1989).

A good example of this perspective and one useful to my study is Sun and Lull's 1986 analysis titled "The Adolescent Audience for Videos and Why They Watch." The authors delineate nine overall categories of reasons as to why adolescents watch MTV: music appreciation, enjoyment/entertainment, visual appreciation, pass time/habit, information, emotional response, social learning, escape, and social interaction (these are listed in descending order based on popularity with the students). The study was revealing in that it found that the students polled were actively and intellectually involved in the viewing process, particularly in the "visual appreciation" subcategory of visual interpretation. The students apparently enjoyed the extra information about the song given to them through the video, and to them the videos gave the songs "more meaning" (Sun & Lull, 1986, p. 121). These findings emphasize that the audience for a music video is active and engaged, and the images they view stimulate thought and cognitive processes. We learn there are many reasons why adolescents watch these videos, such as the example that they inspire fantasies or violence (Lull & Sun, 1986, p.122). This kind of study helps to prove the simple fact that music television and MTV are important day-to-day elements of a young person's life, and are therefore worthy of study.

An example of the more "sex and violence" type of work is the recent study by Smith (2005) where she differentiates between overall incidences of violent content in videos by genre. According to Smith, 37% of rap videos contain an instance of violence as opposed to 17% of rock videos that contain violent images. Smith argues that "[o]verall, the violence that is shown in music videos on MTV tends to be glamorized and sanitized,

increasing the risk of harmful effects on the viewing audience" (2005, p. 92). This is a common thread in many of these studies, their analysis is done in an effort to gauge effects on the audience, and those effects are almost always negative or what could be viewed as resulting in dangerous behavior in society.

The usefulness of this kind of scholarship is obvious, it exposes the images of music television that are anti-social and unveils the uneven power relations espoused by music videos. Many studies also look at the difference in aggressors versus victims in music videos, with black men and white men being almost even in terms of acting as aggressors, but white women are almost uniformly the victims of violence (Rich et al. 2001). These videos represent, in some cases, the kind of contentiousness this study wishes to examine. What happens when there is too much violence in a video, the sex is too raunchy, or the drugs to "real?" The video is considered contentious, but also is examined by the industry for its use-value as a commodity. The music industry must decide if it is to allow the contentious video to exist and possibly set a precedent that further stretches the boundaries of what is acceptable.

The above paradigm is useful in that is clearly highlights the negative thematic elements of music videos. Music videos are constantly reminding the viewer of the more violent, greedy, materialist and "sex-minded" (for lack of a better term) elements of society. The link between the images and ideology in this paradigm is simple; people want what they see on television, they want to possess a commodity form of the images or act in accordance with the behaviour exhibited in the video, and depending on a viewer's viewpoint, images of violence or greed can be considered detrimental for society. Also

these kinds of studies remind us that these images perpetuate societal ills such as stereotyping, racism, sexism and consumerism.

What this perspective does not take into account is how these images and themes came into existence initially, and how they are constantly increasing in severity. Moreover, these studies do not look at the cultural meaning behind the images and lyrics. The cars, money, sex and violence are certainly omni-present, but there is a more overarching and implicit cultural reason for these that has deeper historical and ideological roots. A description and analysis of postmodern research into music videos is illustrative of this kind of an inclusive and insightful approach to music videos.

Fractured Images and Multiple Meanings: The Postmodern Viewpoint

In the mid-eighties, analysts began to look into music television, and deconstruct music videos using the post-modern theory of Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson. Notions of "pastiche," and problems of signification and simulation (Baudrillard, 1985), as well as "blank parody" (Jameson, 1983), are most commonly referenced in this approach. These ideas are the jumping-off point for much theory and criticism, and in the following section, I detail these critiques.

Within postmodern theory generally, music videos tend to be criticized as being highly referential works. By this I mean, music videos are liberal in how they take from many sources and reinterpret content to suit a new purpose, as for example, Madonna using Marilynn Monroe's look for a video *Material Girl* (1985), or the band Queen referencing Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* in *Radio Ga Ga* (1984). According to Frederic Jameson (1983), it is quotations of this sort—i.e. those that make reference to past

material—that are "blank," and music videos reference and recombine past elements through a technique or process of pastiche. Jameson describes pastiche as follows:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour (p. 114).

Music videos as examples of pastiche have the unique ability to morph any image or text, and change it to make a new meaning. Yet, references to any older text in either the music or the images are considered unconscious (not done on purpose), and go unreferenced. To Jameson, this is blank parody as the artist is using an earlier text as inspiration, but without being cognizant of it. The reference is then "blank" because there is no articulation of where the image or reference comes from or a demonstrated understanding of the history of the previous text by the artist or the audience. This utilization of "blank" and "pastiched" content in music videos allows the genre to effectively use any and all images, and recombine them in any way, allowing meaning to spring from near limitless sources. Videos in this way can look almost splintered, since images no longer need to follow lyrical content in any standard narrative sense.

Postmodern theorists view the music video as a fractured and flashy text, one that does not attempt to demand the viewer's attention and active mind; rather the videos are about immersion in images that are polysemous and undetermined and as such mean something different depending on the new context in which they are viewed. When I say undetermined, I mean that the music video image according to this theory is not expected to necessarily mean something exact and concrete. Rather, the form is able to use any

image free from the constraints of realism or narrative. A song like the Cars' hit "You Might Think" (1984) used a video that showed the lead singer swinging at planes as a giant on the Empire State Building (an obvious reference to the original King Kong film of the 40's), then turning into a fly spying on a woman (a reference to the horror film The Fly), later the band is performing on a bar of soap in a bath. The narrative of the song does not attempt to explain these transformations, nor are we expected to make the conceptual leap to make these images make more literal sense. We are expected to be entertained and to enjoy the visuals and the catchy song. In doing so, music videos can take on an air of uncomplicated fun. This aura of fun also defines MTV, and can conceivably apply in general to most content on the station, including contentious videos, rendering them less effective or able to tell a story.

The theorist that most explicitly utilizes this approach is E. Ann Kaplan (1987). Kaplan is critical of music videos and music television because she feels that the form either subverts real meaning (also see Pettegrew, 1994) or causes the form to render images apolitical and insists that audiences watch but do not engage with the video. Andrew Goodwin very succinctly summarizes this argument when he states, "The textual 'quotes' are blank because we are asked neither to criticize nor to endorse them" (1992, p. 160). Theoretically, then, major conceptual leaps or unexplained images that make no sense in relation to the song are forgiven, the audience is asked to enjoy the moment and not engage any further with the text.

Kaplan (1997) feels that music videos are places where progressive or transgressive issues are rendered somewhat politically neutral. This is not done so much by MTV or the music industry, but by the videos themselves through their unbelievable imagery or

self-indulgent nature. She cites as examples, videos by Madonna that show a strong female lead but are co-opted back into the mainstream through the latter's "obvious narcissism" (Kaplan, 1987, p. 102). Hence, the progressive or counter-mainstream messages that Madonna's strong female lead may portray are somehow less important than Madonna as sexpot, or Madonna as superstar. Madonna does not alienate her mainstream middle American audience because her occasional counter-cultural messages (anti-abortion in "Papa Don't Preach" (1986), anti-patriotism in "American Pie" (2000), S&M in "Erotica" (1992)) which, although presented as new issues, each become synonymous with a new version of the star. People see Madonna the star reinvent herself instead of Madonna the social critic or Madonna the "liberal."

In order to understand this particular postmodern criticism, we must first confront the theory informing the work. The work of Jean Baudrillard is highly influential in this paradigm of thought. His *Ecstasy of Communication* (1983) reveals the most theoretically valid and relevant critique of the issue of music videos as used by postmodernists. E. Ann Kaplan (1987) is most fervent in her utilizations of Baudrillard's concepts of a heavily universalized and image conscious world (p. 44). By this she implies that music videos embody "simulations" which collapse the fictive and real worlds into "surfaces, textures," and as a result "the self-as-commodity-threatens to reduce everything into the image/representation/simulacrum" (Kaplan, 1987: p. 44). For Baudrillard, there no longer is a private "scene" in which our private lives unfold, instead there is a continuous network of messages that dwell on the surface, a "hyper-reality" where through the "universe of communication" we are bombarded with instantaneous messages, and thus have our reality given to us (instead of imagined by us), constructed

through the simulacra of the image (Baudrillard, 1983, pp. 128-131). As such, we no longer project ourselves into our physical objects, rather there is a "tactic of potentialities linked to usage: mastery, control and command, an optimalization of the play of possibilities" (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 127).

Accordingly, there is a certain visual-ness to our society that allows the hyper-real to become real to us according to Kaplan (1987). In this theory, the world becomes a mass of images that are taken in and we allowed these images to construct perception and reality, and by extension, inform/construct our "usage" of whatever constitutes our perceived reality. To take an example from Baudrillard where he is indirectly quoting Roland Barthes, we are no longer the driver of the car, steeped in the fantasies which accompany the ownership of the commodity; rather it is how fast we can drive, how far without having to refuel, how clean the exterior is, and how close to home is our current location (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 127). There is a sense that experiencing a text becomes more about sensation before sense (Fiske, 1986, p. 77). More simply, instead of imagining the car as part of a personal fantasy about taking us to wonderful places, we are more concerned with it looking nice, if it is as efficient as its commercial claims, and if it will get us from work to home quickly. It is the surface that matters, not the history of the commodity.

The music video seems to embody this theory quite readily. It is fragmented, filled with colourful images and beautiful people, and the way videos present a highly stylized version of reality, we become lost in the images and the exhilaration of the visuals, and not engaged with or by the lyrical content or message of the music. Still, these videos often seem highly informational; a string of four or five videos could cover

issues as complex as poverty and environmental decay, to lighter fare, speaking about love, or even sports heroes. This is the supposed hyper-real image, rich in information, but poor in knowledge, detail, context and history. Michael Jackson can write a song that comments in three and a half minutes on child poverty, environmental decay, racism, and sexism, but if we follow the above notions, after the video ends so does our time with these issues.

All this is to say that Kaplan critiques videos as essentially being unsubstantial and bereft of meaning, the text is "empty" or "blank." It is in fact the image itself more than the image's message that is the hallmark of music video. In the "universe of communication" music videos exhibit an "ahistorical, asocial, amoral aesthetic" (Goodwin, 1992, 149) that is not so much about what a video means, so much as how it looks, the viewer prizes entertainment value instead of societal value. To Kaplan, music videos, whether political or not, do not ask the viewer to engage with the subject matter, rather the viewer is more impressed with the hyper-real images unfolding before them. Kaplan states, "MTV is part of a contemporary discourse that has written out history as a possible discourse" (1988, p. 146). In theory then, music videos copy references from the past without the audience needing to know or understanding the reference (because this understanding is not important to the enjoyment of the video). Neither does the video ask the viewer to engage any further. To apply this idea, a video that is counter-hegemonic or radical in its politics, is presented in a format where the viewer is not necessarily in a position where he or she will engage with or negotiate the politics of the video.

Images when acting in this manner are also considered "ahistoric" to postmodernists. Ahistoricity refers to when music videos quote each other and history, without in a sense admitting that music videos are a part of a history or discourse. This implies that ideas can be recycled and reused but are presented as brand new because the viewer does not understand the reference, or perhaps does recognize the reference, but feels the interpretation and new usage is as important or as relevant as the original text. According to Kaplan, videos do not ask us to know where the images they reference are coming from. It is more important to enjoy the pleasure of watching them.

This notion of "ahistoricity" is important to understand, as it is this concept that is allegedly responsible for the music video text becoming an empty commodity. It has been suggested that images with a certain history can be subjugated and made to fit something new (Kaplan, 1983, p. 56). This is based on Derrida's notion of the "sliding signified" (Derrida, 1976), where a signified, regardless of history or experience, can, through the use of language, be made to mean, in effect, anything. Pettegrew (1992) cites the example of the use of John Lennon's song "Revolution" in a Nike shoe ad. What was once a song about a generation and a movement becomes a metaphor for the changing technology of the shoe market. This enables the video to work metonymically, making it one short and largely undetailed "utterance" (Morse, 1986, p. 17) that stands in for the whole issue. The notion prevalent in much of the literature is that these videos use a barrage of images (which are decontextualized and rendered meaningless or meaningful in limited and mundane ways) in combination with the pop music song formula to appeal to a large audience.

What Kaplan asserts is that the masses, such as they are, are not identifying with anything either politically or otherwise. Kaplan believes that symbols in music videos have become so polysemous, that nothing can, in fact, definitively mean anything as any combination of references or ideas or texts can if articulated together, come to mean something new. This argument is predicated on the view again that videos are more sense provoking than sense making; videos then do not sell a product in a usual manner. Videos sell an artist by giving you a free sample of the musical product, but do not, like a commercial, tell you where to buy it, or in fact ask you overtly to purchase the work. Videos sell music by offering you the product cunningly packaged in a slick and entertaining music video, by providing an artist/performer, and the hope is the viewer will want more. Also, a video can provide a unique or different viewpoint, where while the video still acts as a commercial vehicle but acts counter-hegmonically by calling into question more "mainstream" or accepted ideas. A video that satirizes The Gap using sweatshops (Rage Against the Machine's *Sleep Now in the Fire* (2000)) is an aberration on MTV as it calls into question a viewer's consumption habits, while at the same time, it constitutes just one song available on the band's album that is currently on sale. In this way music videos are complex, they can be systemically challenging, while at the same time still be very much a sales channel for music products.

If, however, the orgy of images and special effects do not overtly sell, i.e. if they do not act like a typical commercial or advertisement, do they still maintain and promote a capitalist system? Do they encourage a capitalist point of view? Or can an alternate or even anti-consumptive viewpoint that some videos put forward enable us to resist capitalism? This raises a question: can music videos be in an economic sense, self-

defeating? Is the "24-hour commercial" (Fry & Fry, 1986, 29) providing images which tantalize rather than promote consciousness or conscious reasoning, or allow the subject (the audience) to engage in a form of resistance to the "object" (commercialism, commodities, the free market way of life)?

The answer to this question seems to be a "yes" with an even more resounding "but." Yes, there is a possibility of music videos providing such fragmented images that we are left with only impressions, and therefore are not asked one way or another to adhere to anything (or any policy, or any ideology, or any belief and so on). But, as Chen argues, "fragmentation and non-unity become the strategies of the capitalist subject to confront the insanity of the simulation machine; the de-centered subject has to find ways to fulfill the requirements of social institutions such as the family, school, military, and factory" (1986, 67). This means, while music videos do not necessarily need to make literal or realistic sense, they can still work to fulfill an ideological role and not exist solely on the surface, and in fact must do so in order to perpetuate their existence.

Tetzlaff (1986) argues that sliding signifieds are still ideological, and not simply pleasurable, if blank texts. "Blankness" in this case again refers to a certain emptiness of music videos, that they are entertaining but unsubstantial or without meaning beyond their surface images. That in fact, ideology is created as much through emotional responses elicited by texts, than in debate or rational thought. If an emotional reaction to a text causes one to purchase a product, this is what the music broadcasters and the music industry wants. This emotional reaction invoked by a video is then sated via a habit of consumption. As such music videos become an integral part of a culture industry that maintains ideological and hegemonic control by assuring that the right texts elicit these

kinds of responses. Tetzlaff cites the film *Birth of a Nation* as an example, arguing that it was more emotional and grandiose than informative, and yet is considered a classic of American cinema regardless of its racist and elitist content.

The above discussion of the music video image as de-centered and polysemous is important as it reveals an aspect of music videos that is not outlined in the "sex, violence and demography" paradigm. Music videos are not regarded as a static thing with a set meaning. Rather, the defining aspect is that the images and processes of music videos are easily mutable and changing. In terms of ideology, music videos that can easily be progressive, counter-cultural or confrontational, but can also be co-opted and changed to be part of, and not contrary to, the system that allows the videos to exist. With the above in mind, I now wish to move towards how postmodern critiques view ideology or the production of ideology through video.

Fiske refers to MTV and its videos as an "orgasm" (1986, p. 75), referring to the notion that it only acts upon the senses, and induces bodily pleasure just as readily or even more so than it induces mental activity. He states that "No ideology, no social control can organize an orgasm. Only freedom can. All orgasms are democratic: all ideology is autocratic. This is the politics of pleasure" (Fiske, 1986 p. 76). Fiske illustrates the different facets of MTV's image in contradistinction with television in general in the following table:

MTV	TV
Signifier	Signified
The Senses	Sense

Body	Mind
Pleasure	Ideology
Freedom	Control
Resistance	Conformity

(Fiske, 1986, p. 75)

These terms could benefit from definition to clarify the point Fiske is making. First, MTV is seen to contain and represent only signifiers, nothing is historically grounded or explained for clarity; images pop onto the screen without even the benefit of filmic conventions such as genre-based narrative or character. There is no need to make sense in any rational or normal way; in this way music videos are only signifiers, only ideas with no necessary or (pre)determined meaning. The senses versus sense binary is a more obvious and metaphoric way to explain that the music videos prefer to stimulate the senses, but do not need to make actual narrative sense (much like highly conceptual visual art does not need to reference reality but still has a "point" so-to-speak). The body versus the mind is also linked to the above — MTV is about excitement of the libido for example, but not the mind in any active way. Pleasure versus ideology is the binary that he explains the fullest and will be dealt with in the following section. Freedom versus control refers to the illusion of freedom created by MTV and music videos. MTV appears as ad hoc with signifiers thrown together, even the station taglines of "Better sorry than safe" or "Last minute is ok!" give an aura of nowness and spontaneity not found on the more controlled and formulaic news or traditional magazines. It looks as though we can say or do anything on MTV, while something like the news is about control, journalistic

ethics, and editing. Lastly, resistance versus conformity refers to the illusion that MTV is a place where resistance to hegemony is allowed and encouraged. Just like rock music of the past, MTV looks (or at least used to look) anti-conformist as opposed to other media such as newspapers or television news. All this to say that MTV has the aura of an uncontrolled freedom of expression, the censorship and economic factors behind the façade are far enough away that the viewer can possibly feel as though they are watching something unfold live before them. This kind of format appears antiauthoritarian and free from limits, controls, and most importantly, seems non-conformist.

Yet, it is Fiske's next point that is the most important and defines why MTV and music videos, while seemingly un-ideological in nature, may only offer an illusion of freedom. To Fiske, videos "while appearing to offer a choice of sense, they prescribe those choices-to-be-made within the space always already mapped out for the young" (Fiske 1986, 76). Thus, MTV can still offer a pseudo place of resistance by offering a threat to mainstream sensibilities. But to Fiske, this is more of an illusion of social responsibility and freedom:

> Resistance can strengthen the dominant system by demonstrating its ability to permit, contain, and finally defuse, oppositional forces. Barthes' metaphor of inoculation is productive here - the body politic increases its resistance to radicalism by injecting itself with carefully controlled doses. Have you had your video shot today, dear, you don't want to go down with radicalism, do you?" (p. 52).

More simply, by slowly dolling out bits and pieces of radical or countercultural images, the public gets used to them, and they become a part of MTV as a whole. Radical ideas that are common in music videos are subsumed into the whole of music television, which tends to be an apolitical forum. The radical is subsumed into the "middle of the road"

that is music television, causing the videos that do attempt a more radical or marginal message to become have less impact.

Kaplan also addresses this dichotomy of marginal video vs. corporate MTV, and helps explain the ideological nature of MTV. Kaplan believes that the nature of the 24-hour flow of MTV creates an aura of novelty around videos and undermines social messages (Kaplan, 1987, p. 52). The constant video 'flow' also satiates the postmodern desire for constant consumption and immediate gratification (Jameson, 1986). Accordingly, it is the video's placement amongst a series of videos that undermines its message. For Kaplan, the nature of this flow places a single video amongst a series of unrelated videos; this does not allow the viewer to separate it from the rest of the stimulating video fare. For example, a normal block of videos consists of between two and three videos sequentially in a row. Then, either the VJ (video jockey, the more visual on-air version of the radio DJ) comes back on, or there is a commercial break. The block could consist of videos by artists as disparate as Britney Spears, Rage Against the Machine, and The Rolling Stones. Kaplan believes in doing this, the embedded nature of the flow eliminates any "historical address" and treats all subject matter as one continuous stream of videos—content without referents and content replete with signifiers that signify anything and nothing. Thus, if the Rolling Stones are articulating their sense of disenfranchisement in their mid-sixties hit "Satisfaction," the latter when placed beside the pop fluff of Spears and the hard edge radical politics of Rage Against the Machine, results in a diffusion and evaporation of its real or political content, and the video becomes more nostalgic than meaningful.

In a rare defense of the music video, Andrew Goodwin (1992) focuses on pastiched imagery and posits that one needs to look at the modern context in which these videos exist. He states "Postmodern analyses often present this idea via a one-dimensional account of changing notions of history in pop music, tending to use all instances of quoting from pop's past as though they were simple examples of 'pastiche'" (p. 159). To him, while some videos do appropriate icons or imagery from other sources (with or without acknowledgment of the source of the pastiched image), the images are often put to new, more creative uses. Goodwin believes that the authors of many videos do actually have the critical distance.

To further this argument, Goodwin in his book, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (1992), states that simply reducing music videos to pastiche or in this case, simulacra is not adequate. In relation to what he calls the "spatial metaphors" (p. 158) thrown at music videos critiquing their "depth, distance, surface and so on" (p. 158) Goodwin says this, " what is at stake in these analogies is in essence political, since they raise the issues of whether or not postmodern cultural forms offer any position from which to understand or indeed to sustain social power" (p. 158). Goodwin offers two major criticisms of the music video as empty pastiche model.

First Goodwin states that the model of videos as empty pastiche are, "the basis for a model of readership in which viewers consume 'on the surface' via a fragmented sense of self." Goodwin claims this idea is flawed because "the argument overlooks some important economic determinations in the process of intertexuality. In fact, it can be shown that music television's intertexuality and its articulation of popular cultural history are often anything but blank" (1992, p. 159).

In reference to these points, Goodwin explains that often a self-reflexive and knowing distance exists between the video and that which it is accused of simulating. It can then be argued that the audience which views the videos is perhaps cognizant of this derivation from a previous text, and can recognize and appreciate the new formulation of the older text: the images are in fact successfully determined and meaningful in one specific and intended way. This is of course the "preferred meaning" that Goodwin is referring to, and not a more profound analysis of the signifiers. The most quoted example of this in the music video pantheon can be found in Madonna's "Material Girl" (1985) video, where she directly and obviously recreates a famous dance sequence from the Marilyn Monroe film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). The reference, while not ironic or humorous, is accessible and for the audience to recognize this is a necessary first step in order for Madonna to establish her Marilyn Monroe persona.

Goodwin provides a further example to illustrate the knowing and critical distance some authors' exhibit. To use Goodwin's example, some videos exist as homage to directors (Goodwin cites the video $E=MC^2$ by Big Audio Dynamite (1984) a homage to film director Nicholas Roeg), others exhibit self-reflexive parody in that they parody videos themselves (for example "Weird Al" Yankovic's parody of the Michael Jackson video for *Beat It* (1983) with his humourous video called *Eat it*[6] (1984)) He contends that these videos exhibit the critical distance necessary to not make them examples of Baudrillard's "simulacra" (Goodwin, 1992) or Jameson's "blank parody."

[6]Goodwin (1992) provides a table and deeper explanations of this and other categories of videos on pages 161-166.

Of course, there needs to be a level of audience knowledge of the codes being referenced by the videos if the above argument is to be supported. Goodwin (1992) uses the example of many Frankie Goes to Hollywood videos that split the audience. The videos "play with irony and critical distance —those who read the 'commercialism' as an ironic comment of pop, and those who simply carried on consuming in blissful ignorance of any such irony" (Goodwin, 1992, p. 164). Still, in this light, postmodern readings of music videos and MTV as pastiche and empty blank parody appear as totalizing, idealistic, and reductionist. Not all videos are pastiche and not all readers are simply entertained. Mediation and economic influences must be taken into account, particularly when looking at these videos as ideological "packages of consciousness" that reproduce dominant ideological structures even as they seem counter-hegemonic at first glance. There is more to the system that produces the videos that postmodernism does not take into account. Fiske does take this into account somewhat when he states that videos exist in a space created for them by the dominant ideology, and as such can only offer moments of counter-hegemony that are subsumed by the system that sustains them, a television station that is profit driven and totally hegemonic (Fiske, 1986, p. 52).

To further this point, and most important to Goodwin's argument, is the assertion that postmodern interpretations have "shifted the emphasis of research onto texts and audiences, the larger issues concerning how developments in the mode of production might be related to cultural production (which are surely central to any politics of culture), have been ignored" (Goodwin, 1992, p. 167). Research into the modes of production, into those structures that create the environment music videos exist in is important in as much as these videos are as much products as they are art. The music

video is subject to market forces that override the production of pastiched images. If a video is not deemed commercial enough, it does not receive the green light by the record company, or if the song is not a hit, the video will be shelved.

This is a weakness in the postmodern argument, it does not analyze or admit the importance of mediation (Goodwin, 1992, p. 167). Music videos are part of a television system that is quite specific, and Goodwin argues as much. Economic factors mediate the videos and their contexts because they "must nonetheless embody use-values while also teasing the audience into seeking out further use-values in the product being advertised" (p. 168). A video is after all meant to attract new buyers for other music products such as albums, concert tickets, posters, promotional materials and the like. Before videos become the pastiched text, the idea for the video has to be approved by the record company footing the bill. The economic element is important as it helps drive the content that makes it onto the television screen and into our homes. These music videos are teasers that Goodwin (1992) feels are as much product placement as they are art forms (p. 168).

Postmodern criticism, while limited to being textual and audience oriented, still has some currency for me. The focus on images in the text and audiences enhances the analysis in ways that political economy does not. Postmodern analysis is useful in that it identifies that images are changing and mutable, and as such can be used to mean anything, be anything to anyone. Postmodern analysis deconstructs the images and meanings with the assumption they are not determined or pre-defined and as such can be counter-hegemonic, and offer commentaries on nearly any subject with a guaranteed audience to hear/see it. There are no certain expectations of music videos. When

someone tunes in to MTV, it is with the supposition that they can see anything and everything. Postmodern analysis allows for a theorist to look at the references that the video might be citing, deconstruct the text, and flush out the multiple meanings contained within it, bringing to light the cultural meaning of the images. It can analyze the text and its multiple meanings whereas political economy can analyze the system that produced the product.

Issues of fractured images undetermined and multiple meanings help define a postmodern analysis of music videos. Postmodernism has done a great deal to help analyze and decode the meanings of the images and texts that make up music television. It is with these ideas of fractured images and meanings that I introduce the psychoanalytic analysis of music videos.

Psychoanalysis

The psychoanalytic viewpoint is now presented because it helps to bolster a postmodern notion of the "fractured self" (Goodwin 1992, Kaplan 1987, Dell' Antonio 1999, Chen 1984). According to this perspective/approach, not only are the images of the postmodern music video undetermined and free flowing, so is the identity of the reader. In other words, within music videos, common narrative conventions dissolve and as such the pressures to have texts in some way reflect reality become less important. To explain the effects of this supposed turn in viewership, some postmodern theorists, and again especially E. Ann Kaplan, have turned to the theory of the post-Oedipal subject as put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Max Guattari (1972).

Regarding the music video viewer, postmodernists often look to the investigation of the postmodern "de-Oedipalized" subject. This concept metaphorically deals with Oedipal desire and the Oedipal subject in a "postmodern" world. To explain, the traditional Oedipal person finds pleasure in representation, or rather, self-representation. Put more plainly, this concept of the Oedipal subject refers to the viewer seeing him or herself positioned opposite to that which is desired, the person sees something and wants it. This in turn forms a traditional and stable subject who finds pleasure in the desired object. In opposition to this, Deleuze argues that developments in our postmodern culture have made it such that there is no longer a stable subject who finds pleasure in simply wanting. The desire that a person embodies is itself schizophrenic, unstable, as is the nature of desire (Dell' Antonio, 1999); desire is undetermined, difficult to define, and unpredictable. For example, videos, especially in the mid to late eighties, saw the masculine "rock God" become feminine, with Boy George being the extreme, androgynous example of this new lead "man." Or the common example of the Glam Rock rocker, wearing full and exaggerated makeup, tight leather or colourful spandex, and "large hair" took on a very feminine quality while remaining a heterosexual sex icon. The rock idol changes from a hyper-masculine leading man, into a feminine and sexually ambiguous character.

A subject is considered de-Oedipalized when s/he no longer position themselves opposite that which is desired (the object). Rather, the subject positions her/himself with the object, becoming part of the story instead of watching it unfold. Dell' Antonio uses Beavis and Butthead to illustrate de-Oedipalized subjects who break from traditional relationships with the world they lampoon on television. Beavis and Butthead watch

television and comment on music videos, but apparently their reasons for hating it (saying "this sucks!") or loving it (saying "this rules!") are random and uncommon. They will love music that "rocks" regardless of genre or form. Dell' Antonio's example is that Beavis and Butthead dance to the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" as much as they dance to Iron Maiden's newest rock video (p. 7) because they find something in each text "that rocks." Beavis and Butthead construct their reality along with what they desire, allowing a collapse of classical music and rock music together into "stuff that rocks." Beavis and Butthead become machines that produce desire actively, and are not sated by simple acquisition of what they want, as what they want is fragmented and always changing, what Deluze would call schizophrenic.

There is much theoretical writing on music videos that examines this "schizophrenic" viewer, and again draws on Baudrillard's work in directing criticism towards the music video televisual image (see Kaplan 1986, Goodwin 1992, and Dell' Antonio 1999). According to Baudrillard, television now substitutes "the Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of consumption" with "the narcissistic and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback, and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication" (Baudrillard in Dell' Antonio p. 6). Videos then are seen to embody all that this anti-Oedipal viewer is. As Fiske puts it, "TV at its most typical, most televisual. The segmented medium, a mosaic of fragments: not sense but sensation" (p. 77). All this to say that music television provides a multitude of images that the reader is asked in a sense to "go along with" without asking why or who, but still finding something to enjoy, still reveling in the pleasure derived from the images. Basically, there are as many types of desire as there are people. Music videos are a wonderful example of

this, as there are as many topics, images, people, and scenes as there are people to watch them.

Kaplan (1987, p. 55) uses this notion of an uncertain subject and "play with Oedipal positions" as a main distinction that is part and parcel of her classification of music videos. The elasticity and instability of the subject-object relationship ensures that the videos are encoded with a latitude or degree of openness that enables various forms of identification by as many viewers as possible. Videos can play with meaning, such as mainstream notions of sexuality, and subvert them, satirize them, and even change them. Because there is no certain kind of meaning that is made in videos, nothing needs to be explained to the reader. Understanding (which comes from placing oneself in opposition to an object) is not as important as feeling pleasure from the consumption of the video.

For the present analysis, let us return to the example Heavy Metal "gender bending" by rock singers in the 1980s. This lends credence to the notion that music videos can challenge the social order and more specifically patriarchal values of an idealized masculinity. For example, music videos helped to take the leather and studs of biker culture and through heavy metal music videos, helped define a new kind of rock and roll rebel. Singers like Alice Cooper sang about youthful rebellion while strutting in a skintight leather outfit with gobs of heavy eyeliner. Images like these are sometimes perceived as anti-social, as are the lyrics of many hard rock songs. Still, viewers were given new rebels to identify with, new symbols of rebellion and resistance to position themselves with. A viewer can desire the control and carefree life of the rock musician, and through that identification, challenge social and normative middle-class values. The

music video can then be said to bring something contentious in prime time to an audience that is as diverse as any in North America.

What this approach is lacking is much the same as the previous postmodern section. There is no discussion of the process of making the video, given that the video is as much an industrial form as it is a cultural form (Laing, 1985). The above psychoanalytic perspective tells us how a viewer is positioned by the fragmented text of the music video, but now we must consider how a viewer is placed ideologically by the economic imperatives of music television. There can be desire, but that desire is formulated within a capitalist framework. If something pushes boundaries of the acceptable (like Rock/Heavy Metal bands like Poison or Motley Crue did), it still is packaged by a music industry that needs to sell to exist. As such we saw bands like Kiss take off their makeup or Anthrax teaming up with then popular rap act Public Enemy to create a new high selling single. Desire is then tempered by economic constraints, and in the end the music video is cross promoting other products by the bands. A critical cultural studies and political economic analysis can take this into account.

Synthesis - Critical Cultural Studies, the Political Economy of Communication and Articulation Theory

Individual meanings that are derived from music videos are still subject to the forces of the music video industry, and the capitalist ideology motivating it. It is this overarching reality in which a music video exists, and the viewer/consumer is forced to receive these videos through this framework. For example, Much Music's all hip-hop program *Rap City* is often guest hosted by a member of a hip-hop band. That person

often tends to push not only his own music, but also the music of label mates or collaborators. The commercials during this program advertise the album of the guest host or his friends on the record label. The end result is a convergence of images and messages that appear quite uniform and unmistakable. Here, the political economy of communication and specifically music videos and music television gains salience as a determining force, influencing the kinds of products made as well as their consumption. It is this dimension that Sut Jhally comments on when he states, "it should not be surprising that more and more advertisers are starting to produce commercials specifically for MTV" (1990, p. 98).

In keeping with the above, I assert that the audience "works" when watching videos. Akin to Dallas Smythe's audience commodity (Smythe, 1986, p. 4), the viewer is working with each viewing of a music video, consuming this advertisement produced to sell music. And, with videos acting as promotional tools (Kaplan, 1987, Banks 1996, p. 137), one could indeed argue these videos are in fact an "instant replay of bourgeois society" (Hardt, 1986, p. 65). They reflect the profit orientation of the industry they serve and the quest to reach an ever-expanding global market. Therefore, like any part of the media industry, these videos are tailored in such a way that they appeal to the largest demographic, and if exploding cars, misogynist imagery and guns define and appeal to hip hop's urban and suburban audience, so be it.

Political economic analysis also can be of use in elucidating the conventions of the industry that influence content. Music videos are unique in that they do not conform to many standard devices of other broadcast forms such as television. Television programs as Todd Gitlin (1978) explains, are filled with standard devices such as customary plot

devices or setting and character types that tend to lead the viewer down common hegemonic paths. Gitlin's (1979) example is the play *Street Scene* by Elmer Rice that would not be adapted to television as its squalor and general "lower class level" (p. 260) would not attract advertisers and hence was not viable. Yet, while music videos are not constrained by these devices ,they still must work to promote their product, the producers of such videos know how to articulate the images and meanings of a video to produce a result that is economically sound and commercially viable.

Stuart Hall's theory of articulation acknowledges the varied meanings each individual will ascribe to something (in this study's case, how a person integrates and consumes a music video) and also acknowledges that "entailed by this is the notion that meanings not only exist, but are full of the same contradictory and contesting forces as the society which produces, circulates and consumes them" (Fiske and Watts, 1992, p. 105). Articulation theory acknowledges that there are many possible readings for any number of texts (akin to the postmodern fragmentation detailed above), it is how, why, and for whom these images are assembled and put together, not simply as signifiers assembled to form an undetermined and unstatic signifieds, but rather in terms of the modes of production that allow the inclusion of certain images. How a person decodes a video is never determined nor is it necessary, but there are forces that guide a viewer down a certain path. Historical forces, industry norms, government, and marketing all play a part in deciding what text is assembled in which manner. Yet since "different articulations empower different possibilities and practices." (Slack, 1989, p. 331) articulation theory allows us to use postmodernism's ability to decode the image and the cultural meanings behind them, and further the analysis by detailing how the images and

ideas came together (or were articulated together) by industry forces. Articulation theory allows the viewer to be active in not only understanding the images in a personal way, but rearticulating them based on each person's relation to, and experience of, the ideology they live in.

Conclusion

Drawing from the critical cultural studies approach and most particularly, the work of Hall and Slack, I conceptualize music videos as both sites of audience pleasure through active interpretation and consumption, as well as products of consumption driven and constrained by an economic system. In this regard, I extend Daniel Hallin's conceptualization of media as "packages of consciousness" (Hallin, 1994, p. 90) to music videos which offer audiences the cultural meanings that are encoded in images but enable them to make sense of these meanings in ways that they see fit. However, I also regard these videos as operating within a cultural realm that is influenced by the dominant ideology. As commodities designed to earn profits, they are simultaneously constrained by an economic and cultural system, which will not necessarily and always risk offending the audience. For such an offence could translate it into a decline of profitability. Nonetheless, many of these videos, I argue, stretch the boundaries of permissibility. Novelty is always a factor in the marketplace. As the usual fare of music videos saturates and satiates audience desire, the search for newer, riskier and more edgy products becomes an evolving standard. But it is in this realm of the edgy—when it becomes too edgy, of the novel when it is too foreign to consume, that the greatest potential of these videos comes through, especially those videos that intentionally challenge normative

constructions regarding gender, sexuality, war, violence, criminality and the like. In other words, it is those videos that are deemed to be contentious, but not so controversial so as to be banned outright, that offer us a glimpse into that which is still allowed to exist, to be consumed but which is nonetheless still broadcast.

In the following chapter, I discuss the notions of contentiousness an ideology in more detail. I identify the methodological framework through which I have determined the particular videos that are deemed to be contentious and through a semiological analysis, illustrate their contentiousness.

Chapter Two

Theoretical and Methodological Framework and Boundaries

In the previous chapter I mapped out the theoretical terrain and specific frameworks that have informed work on music videos since the early 1980s. In doing so, I attempted to demonstrate that music videos are complex commodities that are both art and advertising, and are unique products that are still very much subject to ideological pressures. By this I mean, music videos are a product of a capitalist system, and serve to reproduce dominant capitalist values, and do so even if the videos are "contentious" and seemingly are contrary to dominant or mainstream media patterns. In this chapter, I elaborate on my previous definition of contentiousness and explain the methodological framework used to analyze specific videos in the following chapter. My aim is to analyze and clarify their contentiousness, demonstrating how the system in place deals with this breach. But before outlining my methodology and offering a definition of contentiousness, I will first situate myself within specific theoretical terrain and define the boundaries of this study.

The most important aspect of this chapter is not simply a definition of contentiousness, but also an examination of what defines limits of contentiousness ideologically (i.e. what constitutes contentiousness within, as defined by ideology) and how we can analyze content or texts that transgresses those limits. These limitations are specific and identifiable ideological and hegemonic boundaries, and as such are important and worthy of study. In the context of the thesis, music videos represent texts that can and do push boundaries or limits of acceptability, and in doing so offer a site to study the

replication of ideology in a microcosmic manner. A video can be observed as it goes through a process of creation, broadcast, public reactions and subsequent treatment by broadcast corporations. Throughout this process, the video is judged and its worth as a commercial product is evaluated. In the case of a contentious video, the work can simply be judged too contentious to be profitable, not so contentious as to not weather the storm of controversy, or the contentiousness is itself profitable as is the case with many "shocking" videos. In all, a contentious video is released and judged through a profit-based system that defines what is contentious (and acceptably contentious), and if the market can absorb the controversy associated with it.

Looking at music videos in this manner gives them a political dimension, and this important as music videos can play a role in the day-to-day life of many. In keeping with this, Andrew Goodwin (1992) offers a rather scathing rebuke to postmodern analyses of music videos as being apolitical and only able to view music videos as pastiched texts that refer to one another in both content and form (p. 159-165). He argues that music videos as texts are not simple "blank parodies," rather they are intertextual and self-referential for a very specific reason, that being to promote other videos and artists, and most importantly "to construct a very clear reading position centered on the effort to create an obedient consumer who will take an interest in the text (usually a film) that is being advertised" (p.165). This kind of obedient consumer can be alienated if presented with a contentious text that does not fall within the realm of usual or accepted music video fare. A teacher can turn off a video that is too sexual; a parent can turn off a video that insults religion; a government can black list a video that is not patriotic. All of these change the consumer's relationship with MTV and music videos. This can be as simple as turning

the channel, or even a conscious effort to no longer be a dedicated MTV viewer. This is economically defeating for a profit-based institution, and as such controversy (and viewing habits) must be controlled and a stable market created.

Ideology, Contentiousness, and Articulation: Elaboration on Definitions

The definition of ideology established in the introduction is a combination of two narrow, but very effective, definitions drawn from cultural studies. The first portion of the definition is drawn from a conceptualization put forward by Andrew Goodwin, who uses it because of the emphasis on the link between ideology, social power and dominance. Goodwin bases his definition on ideas first proposed by John Thompson (1990) whom he quotes as follows:

> Ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power that are systematically asymmetrical – what I shall call "relations of domination." Ideology, broadly speaking, is *meaning in the service of power.* (quoted in Goodwin, p. 158)

This definition is useful as it offers us an open interpretation of the way in which texts interact to reproduce a dominant ideology. However, not all texts necessarily work to produce this dominance, but the definition provided above prioritizes studying how texts engage with, create or contest social power relations.

I argue music videos and music television reproduce these power relations quite readily. Music videos have become a logical extension of the pop music star. This makes videos important promotional vehicles, and in all mainstream popular music, videos always accompany a pop single. But as advertising they lack the look and feel of the "hard sell" or the obvious commercial intent of typical television

advertising. In doing so, music videos reproduce an environment of consumerism, without the negative stigma associated with the blatant selling common to most advertising. Even a contentious video with interesting and politically engaging material, is still subject to the forces of the market that decide whether or not it is profitable to run the video, whether the controversy created by the content is itself marketable (or can be adapted to be marketable) or whether it will bring further attention to the station or generate greater sales.

The second part of this thesis' definition of ideology was advanced by Jennifer Daryl Slack and is grounded in a cultural studies framework. For clarity I wish to resubmit the quote from the introduction where I quote Slack as saying, "ideology is the mechanism that organizes the multiplicity of connections into a temporarily essentialized system of representation within which we live out those connections as real" (1995, p. 333). This definition is a more broad sweeping than Thompson's but allows us to see ideology in terms of a lived reality that consists of ideologically influenced "connections" that are assembled and make up our day-to-day existence. These connections are very much derived from growing up in a culture ruled by a particular ideology. A citizen makes life choices based on the institutions of this ideology such as the education system or the media among many. Yet, all decisions a citizen makes differ person to person, as each person's experience in and of these institutions differ. For example, two people growing up together, who go to school together, can take radically different life paths. One person can become a crown lawyer based on a love of the justice system learned at school while the other can become a dissident. All this to say, experiences of an

ideology such as capitalism can be the same for anyone, but the articulations and interpretations of what is learned can be rather different and as such the choices we make based on our individual articulations are individual and specific to a person.

Following this, I assert that we do not view or understand any text or perhaps any thing in isolation. Rather, we are constantly in negotiation with our environment and understand it through the connections we learned growing up in a particular culture, and time and place. For example, we link the church with morality and notions like family values. We connect the suburbs with safe living and family. In applying this logic to music videos and music television, the videos themselves do not stand on their own. Instead they are linked to artists, who themselves are linked to other artists, causes, lifestyles, politics, and so on. These connections are then, according to Slack, "organized" (1995, p. 333) by a person into something coherent and understandable.

What is important to understand for this study regarding the conceptualizations of ideology that I have used is to see that they both emphasize social relations, meaning, and power. Ideology, with this in mind, becomes a force that organizes not only political or social action but also the more mundane thought processes and values of day-to-day life. For example, if we look at Madonna as either a sex object or feminist icon depends wholly on who we are and what we know. Schwichtenberg uses a wonderful example of the Madonna song "Papa Don't Preach" (1986) (1992, p. 130). The song refers to a woman who is having a baby out of the confines of a traditional marriage (this is perhaps

informed by Madonna's own conservative Catholic upbringing), and asks her father for tolerance and understanding. The song, according to Schwichtenberg, was viewed very differently by young black men as compared to young white men (Browne and Schulze in Schwichtenberg, 1992, p. 130). The black men responded to the father-daughter relationship, while white men were more concerned with the abortion issue. Each party drew conclusions based on situational, cultural and life differences. Each connection is formed individually based on the differences in each person's life be it social, political, or cultural.

These "connections" are also known as "articulations" in cultural studies, and form the basis of articulation theory. I utilize this theory as it allows one to position a text in terms of how it interacts with a viewer or reader, how it interacts with all parts of the environment, and how it interacts with other elements through history. Articulation theory helps to explain how ideas and beliefs are assembled into discourse, and from here form social or political norms. I will now briefly summarize articulation theory as I will be using it, and explain how it relates to the definitions of ideology posited above.

Stuart Hall is largely thought of as the main theorist who refined and utilized this idea (Hall 1986a, Hall 1986b, Hall 1996). For Hall, articulation theory is, "both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (Hall, 1996, p. 141-142). The notion is predicated by the concept that there exist non-necessary links between "ideological elements." In this case, non-necessary links refers to the notion that

anything can be linked together or "articulated," but this articulation of different elements can be between anything and any element of society. These "elements" are linked much like the "connections" in Slack's definition of ideology as quoted above, and through those connections, are articulated into an individual's understanding of an idea or belief or practice. Hall uses the example of an "articulated lorry," a kind of truck that has various rear attachments (a cab and trailer for example) and together they form a unity (Slack, 1992, p. 330), a unified concept as a truck. However, "the unity is neither absolutely determined nor necessarily permanent. The unity is forged in the conjuncture of the elements brought together, and that unity can be broken by disarticulating (disconnecting) the cab and trailer (Slack, 1992, p. 330). The main thrust of this notion is that the elements are not connected by necessity, any kind of trailer or attachment can be connected to the cab, and each new pairing constitutes a new unity and a new kind of usage. In this formulation, ideology does not appear as an overarching and inevitable structure, rather individuals negotiate actions and activities through options and ideas that are delivered by ideology, but put together by the individuals who live in that ideology. Stuart Hall (1986) offers the following clarification:

> [...] the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position. (p. 53)

Slack lists some examples of articulations such as "social practices, discursive statement, ideological positions, social forces, or social groups" (1992, p. 331). It is these kinds of ideas I explore when examining contentious videos. I examine what group, idea, or

position, is targeted by the video and how the video is negotiated and treated by the media or the broadcaster as a corporation, and how both viewers and institutions articulate these videos as contentious. Does the video call into question a social practice (such as a live Madonna video featuring dancers in drag simulating heterosexual intercourse)? Further, how is the video mediated or its message changed, blocked or carried by institutions?

Articulation theory also includes another important idea, namely that articulations can be "rearticulated" therefore becoming new conceptions (or rearticulations), yet these rearticulations may not be permanent. Rearticulations fail or recede because some ideological structures are powerful and historically strong. Hence, structures such as religion, capitalism, or the modern education system (a more Western example) have a long history as guiding social forces, and as such have strong "lines of tendential force" (Hall, 1986, p. 53). What Hall is referring to here are historically entrenched institutions such as the church or education, whose influence on people is long lasting and difficult to change. When one attempts to rearticulate one of these social forces in a new way, this rearticulation will conflict with the deep socio-historical roots of the original formulation. This kind of long history gives dominant articulations a "normative quality" (Wright, 2000, p. 366) and rearticulations run counter to this "normative quality." Thus, rearticulations can go "against the grain of historical formations" (Hall, 1986. P54) and therefore may not readily be accepted by the mainstream. In looking at contentious music videos, we see that they often act as rearticulations of some dominant paradigm such as government and social policy, or simple community notions of propriety (same sex kissing for example).

By using articulation theory, I focus on these videos as part of a larger framework in terms of how they are positioned and articulated to an audience by the industry itself, as mediated by the broadcaster, commented upon by other media, and responded to by special interest groups that are engaged with the messages relayed through popular music. In so doing, I draw attention to how a video that is attempting to comment on a contentious issue or is by itself considered contentious, is in actuality a kind of rearticulation that is going "against the grain of historical formations" and is treated as such by the mainstream broadcast media.

Articulation theory allows a more global framework to analyze how institutional forces act on a aberrant or contentious text. However, I believe this analysis needs to be complemented by an in-depth analysis of the text itself. To do this, I employ a semiotic analysis of specific videos to examine, in a detailed way, their underlying meanings. My analysis is based on the work of Roland Barthes as exemplified in his chapters "The Photographic Message" and "The Rhetoric of the Image" in his seminal book *Image-Music-Text* (1987). Here, Barthes lays down a theoretical framework that looks at the notion of "floating chains of signifieds" that cultures work to "fix" (1987, p. 39). The notion of "chains of signifieds" refers to ideas or conceptions that when assembled form signs, and signs together form symbols. For example, a silver angel with wings spread is a statue (word "statue" is a signifier), when affixed to a car it becomes a Rolls Royce emblem (a signifed) and a Rolls Royce is a luxury car ("luxury car" another signified). A Rolls Royce as a proper name is a signifier, a literal "thing" that describes a kind of car, but with it comes signifieds such as luxury, money, rich, British, among many other related meanings.

These signifieds are "fixed," or in Barthes terms, "anchored" by a variety of forces such as a simple caption, or even linguistic rules of grammar. Meaning, most people who look at a Rolls Royce and know what it is, would have the above ideas come to mind, as they are most commonly associated with the idea of a Rolls Royce. Signifieds are not necessarily fixed or anchored together by nature, instead they are anchored by our lived experience. Simply put, a Rolls Royce is nearly always associated with luxury, and as such is typically decoded as such. An example of this is provided by Barthes (1987) when he says, "the anchorage may be ideological, and indeed this is its principal function; the text *directs* the reader through the signified to the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often sublet *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance" (p. 40 emphasis is the author's). In this case Barthes was describing a series of food images in a print ad for preserves. A caption told the reader to find the few scattered fruits appealing, like a batch of tasty preserves had just been finished, rather than a scant amount of fruit suggesting a poor harvest. This worked to anchor the images. This points to a series of signifieds that were "floating" until "anchored" by the caption, forcing meaning to be derived in a particular manner.

While the aforementioned discussion offers a distillation of basic semiotic theory, these ideas remain useful tools in the analysis of music videos. Looking at the images and lyrics as semiotic anchors, I was able to analyze meaning in the videos in terms of how their contentious themes were elaborated, and how these anchorages worked to create a contentious and meaningful text. More basically, I was able to theorize, using the semiotics described above, how the images and texts in my chosen videos, when combined, were anchored as contentious.

To illustrate the above, I offer one last example. In the video made for her song "Material Girl" (1985) (a homage to the Monroe film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*), to some, Madonna represented a reincarnated Marilyn Monroe as temptress and embodied a kind of superficiality as her sexuality was used to gain material possessions (Fiske, 1986). Counter to this, Schwichtenberg uses an example of another Madonna song "Vogue" (1990) that is a reference to "voguing," a type of dancing that was popular in black gay dance clubs. In this way Madonna uses imagery that is accessible to marginal groups as well as the mainstream (Schwichtenberg, 1992, p. 74), and also offers an example of how, depending on context, a signified can be anchored in a radically different way.

The main thrust of Barthes' semiotics points to context as important because signifiers are by nature polysemous (1987 p. 39). Much like the connections made in articulations, signifiers do not have any natural or necessary meaning until they are fixed. One must look at the assemblage of signifiers in order to realize how they act together to create a particular meaning. To put it another way, an image is important on its own, but it is more so when combined with others, and this causes connections to be made resulting in a code. Manning and Swan argue that "the social connection among the components of the sign, a set of signs clustered as texts, and even assembled as a discourse, is a code" (1994, p. 466).

In this thesis, music videos were analyzed in terms of their assembled and anchored signifieds that become a code. Music videos were also analyzed in terms of the codes they are producing (or reproducing) and on the basis of that, examined as to how those codes can be considered contentious. In doing this, I can glean what causes these images to raise the alarm. I add this semiotic analysis to the analysis done via articulation

theory to form a well-rounded examination of how and why a video is considered contentious from both an institutional point of view (through articulation theory), and from the point of view of the reader/society (semiotics). Articulation theory helps to ask "what structures and ideas does this video articulate that is going against the normative "grain?" In turn, semiotic theory helps us to ask how images in these videos become contentious, to whom, and why.

Lastly, before entering into an analysis of contentious videos, I will further flush out and contextualize the boundaries of just what is contentiousness in terms of this study. To do this, I will elaborate on the previous definition of contentiousness and then I will present the indexes that were used to choose videos for this study.

First, I will begin with Canadian obscenity law as it includes an interesting and relevant notion, that of community standards. I use this legislation as it offers a codified expression of societal moral values, contentious videos it could be argued, contravenes some of these moral values. In large part, Canadian obscenity law deals with sex, sexuality and the community. To quote the Government of Canada's Industry Canada website "Internet Issues" section:

> Obscenity is defined in the Canadian Criminal Code as any publication whose dominant characteristic is the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex together with crime, horror, cruelty or violence.[7] Whether a publication's dominant theme is the undue exploitation of sex is determined by reference to a "community standards test" [8] and an examination of the

[7] Criminal Code, s. 163(8).

[8] The community standards test considers what the community would tolerate others being exposed to on the basis of the degree of harm that may flow from such exposure, e.g. the stronger the risk of harm, the less the likelihood of tolerance. For the purposes of the community standards test, the Supreme Court of Canada referred to three categories of sex: (1) sex with violence; (2) explicit sex which subjects people to treatment that is degrading or dehumanizing; and (3) explicit sex without violence that is neither degrading nor dehumanizing. The first category will almost always constitute the undue exploitation of sex. The second category may be undue if the risk of harm is substantial. The third category will generally not fall

> alleged obscenity within the context of the work as a whole.[9] (http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/site/smt-gst.nsf/en/sf02988e.html)

More specifically, in the 1992 R vs. Butler case it was decided that "in order for a work or object to qualify as 'obscene,' exploitation of sex must not only be its dominant characteristic, but must also be 'undue.' (Government of Canada website: http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp289-e.htm) Later, the judge when giving reasons for this decision reasoned that:

> The portrayal of sex coupled with violence will almost always constitute the undue exploitation of sex. Explicit sex which is degrading or dehumanizing may be undue if the risk of harm is substantial. Finally, explicit sex that is not violent and neither degrading nor dehumanizing is generally tolerated in our society and will not qualify as the undue exploitation of sex unless it employs children in its production (Supreme Court Decision, R v. Butler, 1992: http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp289-e.htm#(1)).

I use this legislative material because it specifically references sex and sexuality. Music videos are often accused of being obscene in that they are exhibiting sexuality in a way that could easily be deemed "undue." These notions of "undue" sexual imagery and "community standards" form the first part of my definition. Contentious music video material will in some way bring to light elements considered undue, be it violence, drugs, sex or sexuality, as well as race or gender treatments, among other potential issues. This "undue" material will contravene community standards (as vague a term as that is, even in the legislation), and possibly motivate another party to express concern as to its appropriateness.

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within the definition of obscenity unless it employs children in its production: R v. Butler (1992) 70 C.C.C. (3d) 129, 11 C.R. (4th) 137 (S.C.C.)

[9] Upon determining that the material involves the undue exploitation of sex, the portrayal of sex is then viewed in context to determine whether it is the dominant theme of the work as a whole or whether it is essential to a wider artistic, literary or other similar purpose and therefore falls within a "public good" exemption.

To further bolster this definition, I looked towards the special interest groups who were successful in having certain contentious material labeled with the now ubiquitous "Parental Advisory, Explicit Lyrics" label. Tipper Gore and the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) brought to the US Senate a list of purportedly offensive material, the list called the "Filthy Fifteen" in the media (and later by Gore herself) includes the following:

#	Artist	Song title	Lyrical content
1	Prince	"Darling Nikki"	Sex/Masturbation
2	Sheena Easton	"Sugar Walls"	Sex
3	Judas Priest	"Eat Me Alive"	Sex
4	Vanity	"Strap on Robbie Baby"	Sex
5	Mötley Crüe	"Bastard"	Violence
6	AC/DC	"Let Me Put My Love into You"	Sex
7	Twisted Sister	"We're Not Gonna Take It"	Violence
8	Madonna	"Dress You Up"	Sex
9	W.A.S.P.	"Animal (Fuck Like a Beast)"	Sex/Language
10	Def Leppard	"High 'n' Dry (Saturday Night)"	Drug and Alcohol Use
11	Mercyful Fate	"Into the Coven"	Occult
12	Black Sabbath	"Trashed"	Drug and Alcohol Use
13	Mary Jane Girls	"In My House"	Sex
14	Venom	"Possessed"	Occult
15	Cyndi Lauper	"She Bop"	Sex/Masturbation

(music television station VH1 website:
http://www.vh1.com/shows/series/movies_that_rock/warning/filthy.jhtml)

What is "undue" about each of these videos is not necessarily the lyrical content or the album cover or video in every case. Rather, in some cases the content or message is not literal or obvious such as "She Bop"(1984) by Cyndi Lauper, a highly metaphoric song about masturbation. What the PMRC objected to was that the message was so easily accessible to anyone without any limitations be it legislative, industry, or otherwise. I interpret this as a group voicing concern that these videos are a kind of violation of community standards. Interestingly, the PMRC was at first not interested in outright censorship; rather they wanted a kind of content control. In her book *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society*, PMRC President Tipper Gore states: "Censorship is not the answer. In the long run, our only hope is for more information and awareness, so that citizens and communities can fight back against market exploitation and find practical means for restoring individual choice and control" (quoted in Siegel, 2005, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4279560). Gore and the PMRC found many of the lyrics or imagery of the artists listed above as being "pornographic," and the overall goal of the PMRC was "educate and inform parents of this alarming new trend... towards lyrics that are sexually explicit" (PMRC in Chastagner, 1999, p. 181). Following this, certain record labels agreed to label some "questionable artists" as recommended by Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) who had sided with the PMRC.

What the above demonstrates is that certain material is considered questionable, even obscene, yet is afforded protection by the law (4th amendment in the USA, and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in Canada) but can be limited or censored voluntarily by the industry or institutions that broadcast these images. This labeling of records informs the second part of my definition of contentiousness. That being, contentiousness requires

a party to seek action to limit, contain, address or openly question the appropriateness of a public text. This action may not necessarily seek open censorship or ask for the text to be abandoned, but the action does call into question the moral fabric of the text and that this text may contravene community standards.

Indexes, Limits, and Focus

In order to narrow my focus and select specific videos, I have chosen two indexes that highlight contentious videos. First, I look at the Much Music "Too Much for Much" segment that aired irregularly from 1997-2004. This segment brought to light videos that were in rotation at Much Music (the Canadian counterpart to MTV, although not owned or controlled by MTV), but were considered sensitive enough to merit late-night rotations, limited rotation, or were banned by the station (but played in other countries on other stations). Each of the "Too Much for Much" segments brought together various groups who had a vested interest in the content of the video. For example the segment that featured the Marilyn Manson song "Beautiful People" featured children's advocacy groups who felt the song encouraged and glamorized drug use to children, a social worker who dealt with street youth who idolize Manson, and fans of the artist who argued in favour of the song. Segments were often thematic and brought to light videos with questionable or theoretically "undue" treatments of women/girls, violence and rap music, sexuality and young people, and other socially relevant and topical themes.

I chose the Too Much 4 Much series as it stands as a substantive collection of videos that follow the above definition of contentiousness. In fact, it could be argued the

entire program series is predicated on the notion that music videos can and do bring to light issues and topics that are contentious either by direct reference in lyrics, or by provocative images in the videos. Titles in the series such as *What Offends Depends* (issues of censorship, community standards, pornography and music videos) (1999) or *Much Talks: Too Hot or Not - Sexual Imagery in Music Videos* (2003) and *Too Much 4 Much: Metallica/Marilyn Manson* (issues of sexuality, gender bending, and young peoples sexuality in music videos) (1999) all look at music videos and their ability to go "too far" in depicting areas that are deemed generally inappropriate for broadcast. The titles chosen for this thesis were selected because they focused very specifically on one issue, through one artist and one video, unlike many other titles that worked thematically and used many videos to illuminate an issue. This allowed me to complete an in-depth analysis not only of the video, but also the meta-narrative surrounding the artist, and of communities of interest with a stake in both the issue and the artist. While later episodes tackled very current topics such as young female sexuality and music videos or gang violence in Hip Hop, these episodes included many examples from a variety of artists and would not have included the in-depth and nuanced approach the earlier episodes demonstrated when examining one artist and video.

Also, to further demonstrate the usefulness of the *Too Much 4 Much* series titles chosen for this theirs, these episodes were also live and unedited. This allowed for heated and contentious debate to flow without interruption. The segments were quite long (often over an hour), featured the uncensored opinions of a varied and broad cross-section of experts, fans, and pundits, and as they were played late at night, did not censor or edit any comments or material. These segments were also initially broadcast live which

further adds to their authenticity and weight as there were no corporate broadcast controls that could be immediately levied if comments became too heated or explicit.

The segments I chose are admittedly rather dated in terms of music videos. Even with the most recent segment utilized shot in 1998, I argue the topics and videos aired remain relevant, and the subject matter still covers contentious ground by today's standards. Particularly in the case of Marilyn Manson, he remains a highly popular and contentious figure, and the video chosen for this study is an excellent example of a "Manson video." Also, as the segments progressed, Much Music began to shoot the segments as documentaries instead of live debates. As such, I chose to use the segments that maintained the unedited and challenging nature of the earliest examples. Again, the videos, artists, and issues discussed remain as contentious now as they were then. These episodes explore issues of homophobia, sexual stereotyping, the use of horrific imagery and themes, and racism. Issues such as these remain topical, contentious, unresolved and current, and as such the utilization of this somewhat dated material still stands as being relevant and contemporary.

The second index I use as a cross-reference is the treatments by newspapers of the videos found in the *Too Much for Much* segments. I do this as it assures us that the videos in question were popularly found to be contentious and were not a Canada-specific or Much Music specific issue. I use both standard articles and editorial commentary and integrate them into my analysis using both articulation theory and semiotic analysis. To find articles I executed a detailed database search using the *NewYork Times Archives, Lexis Nexus, Google News* archives, and *Factiva.*

The following chapter contains in-depth analysis of specific videos chosen based on the above criteria, and analyzed using the theoretical frameworks outlined in the first part of this chapter. I illustrate how videos can push certain boundaries (or community standards) and through that possibly rearticulate new ideas. Or, on the contrary, these videos represent new or contentious ideas that can be blocked by institutional or social forces, and forced to actually work for the system or ideas that are being contested and thus rearticulated as a consumer good under capitalism.

Chapter Three

"Too Much 4 Much"

In this chapter, utilizing analytic methods as described in the previous chapter, I illustrate what is contentious in each video by focusing on the unique combination of the stars' identities, the meta-narrative associated with the performer, as well as the visuals and lyrics. I begin by briefly surveying media reactions and coverage of particular videos in order to highlight the specific issues that were found to be contentious. To do so, I have selected videos from Much Music's live panel style *Too Much 4 Much* series that were periodically run from 1996 through 2004. As mentioned previously, these live shows aired discussions about videos that were deemed contentious by the public, the media, and Much Music's own internal programming department[10]. The specific video being discussed and any alternate versions of it were aired on the program. This included any banned version. The show was aired after the so-called watershed hours, usually between 11:00 PM and 1:00 AM. The format of these shows tended to be panel-based, with some studio audience contributions, and short "man on the street" clips that were previously recorded. When possible Much Music would also include the artist who made the video on a panel of subject experts. The specific videos I have chosen were the subject of three *Too Much 4 Much* episodes. The videos to be examined in this chapter are: "Outside" (1998) by George Michael, "Leviticus Faggot" (1996) by Me'Shell Ndegeocello, and "Beautiful People" (1998) by Marilyn Manson.

[10] This is the administrative section of Much Music that not only decides what videos play and when, but also what videos are banned.

The *Too Much 4 Much* series represents an unusual format for music television. The subject experts on each panel were drawn from a variety of fields and the panels also included fans of the musician in question. The shows aired difficult content and raised issues such as racism or homophobia, and did so in a very frank manner. This frankness could explain the choice to air the shows late at night on weekends, typically the least popular viewing hours. In my experience with Much Music in Canada or MTV in the United States, there has not been another forum that combined highly volatile social issues with the uncontrollable environment that is live television. Yet, in later years, Much Music moved away from this live unedited environment, towards a more controlled documentary style program in the *Too Much 4 Much* series. It is for this reason I concentrate on the earlier tapings as they contain the most unedited dialogue about contentious videos. While my chosen shows were recorded ten years ago in some cases, the diversity of the panel and discussions, as well as the unedited frankness and willingness to accept a diversity of opinion led me to choose these three programs over more current recordings.

According to the publicity about the show, Much Music created these programs to encourage their audience to think critically about what is on television, and about music videos and music in particular. Much Music targets 18 to 34 year-olds.[11] *Too Much 4 Much* generally follows this format with some exceptions:

I. Introduction segment done by the host. This usually includes the introduction of the video in question, general summation of the issues to

[11] Regarding the Much Music audience, during the 1998 episode that featured the George Michael video "Outside," the host explains that Much Music is targeting 18-34 year olds. This issue was raised when a panel member opined that the video might be to racy for young audiences.

be discussed, some "man on the street clips," and then the screening of the video in question (or the artist does a live rendition of the song).

II. Introduction of the panel, re-introduction of the issues raised by the episode, and first statements by the panel.

III. Montage of particularly contentious clips from the video, "man on the street" clips, new questions or topic introduced by the host, and the next round of panel discussions. At this point, the panel often fields audience questions or comments, including at-home audience questions that are communicated by phone, fax, or email.

IV. Third issue or question introduced by the host, panel discussion, introduction of any special guests in the audience and their comments. At this point, the format can repeat often depending on the length of the episode or the amount of comments permitted by the host.

V. Final panel comments, summation by the host, video is replayed or other contentious videos by the same artist are aired.

The panel discussions are monitored and directed by the host, who surprisingly makes few attempts at being neutral. As these were broadcasted live with no time-delay to allow for editing, panel comments can be considered uncensored.

In order to clearly illustrate what is contentious in each video, I highlight the main questions raised by the *Too Much 4 Much* panel. These questions represent a useful resource as they put into plain language the contentious issues surrounding a specific video. These questions as discussed by the panel, I believe, reflect a cross-section of the issues surrounding the videos. I summarize the main issues as well as briefly detail the dialogue motivated by each question posed by the host.

At the beginning of each program, each panel member is introduced along with a brief bio and explanation of why they were chosen to discuss the video in question. It is here that Much Music truly sets itself apart from other similar stations in that it does not

shy away from introducing panelists who are not only ideologically opposed to the artist, but are outspoken and willing to engage in an intelligent and exciting dialogue. We learn during the program based on the song "Leviticus Faggot" that some members of the audience were invited based on a relevant group affiliation. In the case of "Leviticus Faggot", a group of University of Toronto Black Lesbian activists were invited to attend and even though they were not actual panelists, they became heavily involved with the discussion.

The use of print media to corroborate the contentiousness of the videos is used simply as a marker to confirm that the video under question is or was considered contentious "across the board" and not only by the music television broadcast media. I do not go into great detail regarding the content of much of the print media content because in the case of two of the videos, the coverage was perfunctory and undetailed as the stars in question were not important musical personalities at that time. This triangulation was necessary as it allowed me to generalize my analysis to a greater segment of the population, not only music television viewers. If the video and its surrounding controversy were mentioned outside of music television stations, it lends credence to the video being contentious to a greater section of people. The search for print articles was done through a multiple database search including Factiva, The New York Times Archives Index, and Lexis Nexus.

Music Video 1 – *Outside* (1998) by George Michael

Background and Context

This particular video requires some additional background explication as the video references events that took place before it was made. On April 7th 1998 in Los Angeles California, pop singer George Michael was arrested for lewd conduct in a Los Angeles county public washroom. The then not openly gay singer was followed by an undercover police officer into the washroom where Michael was caught engaging in a "lewd" act. Michael pled no-contest to the charge and soon after openly announced that he was in fact gay.

Later that same year, Michael released a single called "Outside" that paints a satirical picture of the entire arrest and subsequent media hype. This satirical and unapologetic stance was echoed by the artist's comments after the arrest. Michael was often quoted as saying he was not ashamed of what happened that day, and is happy to have finally gone public with his sexuality. *Rolling Stone* magazine in May of that year quotes him saying the following on CNN days after the arrest, " I feel stupid and I feel reckless and weak allowing my sexuality to be exposed this way, but I don't feel any shame whatsoever" (May, 1998).

Print media coverage of Michael's arrest was substantial (articles appeared the next day in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, and most major newspapers and news wires). Yet when the video itself was released, it did not merit even an article in the *New York Times* until Michael was sued by the police officer who arrested him, accusing Michael of embarrassing and defaming him with his satirical take on the arrest.

It is only here that readers learn that the video not only contains a satirical look at his arrest, but also "sexually suggestive" images.

According to the 1998 *Too Much 4 Much* broadcast that aired the video for "Outside," there were four versions of this video released for public consumption. One version is uncensored, a second pixelates a scene of two male police officers kissing, a third version pixelates a heavily suggestive sexual moment where a man performs the beginnings of oral sex with a woman in an office, and a fourth removes both of these elements along with another "sex scene" involving two men engaged in heavy foreplay in the back of a truck. MTV would only air the fully modified version where all three aforementioned elements were removed via pixilation (Much Music 1998). MTV did not release a statement regarding the video or that the more conservative modified version of it was put into rotation. Only when viewing the *Too Much 4 Much* episode do we learn that MTV used the most heavily censored version of the video available for broadcast.

According to the director of Much Music and CHUM Television's director of Media Education, Much Music did not choose to air the video with the pixilated segment showing two male police officers kissing. The director of Much Music's media education service explains that this choice was made as Much Music's internal review committee considered this pixilation as being "homophobic" (Much Music, 1998). Much Music aired a version of the video that pixilated the oral sex and the men in the truck seen to be engaging in intense sexual foreplay.

The panel discussion addressed three main points including the following questions: 1) is the sexuality in the video "too much?" 2) Why does the public enjoy viewing celebrity sex scandal stories and is this video an appropriate venue to express an

artist's opinion on this subject? 3) Were the depictions of homosexuality too stereotyped or inappropriate, or simply too sexually explicit for prime time television?

The answers to question one were split into two camps: 1) the sex was not "too much" and nothing like this should be censored and 2) the video glorified a "harmful sexual ethic" where immediate gratification is celebrated and sex within a relationship is downplayed. Sub-discussions generated by this question raised other points such as videos like this one often render people into sexual objects, and that while the video celebrates immediate gratification, this gratification is an honest and real part of sex. A minister and youth worker on the panel opined that the video lacked any reference to safe sex and that this was an irresponsible oversight. Lastly, they argued that the video paints homosexual lifestyles in a negative or untruthful light as it portrays these lifestyles as being totally centered on meaningless, casual sex.

Answers to the second main question were split into two main camps, the first backing the notion that celebrities give up the right to privacy when they become celebrities, and the other saying that George Michael, like many celebrities, used this scandal to increase his popularity. Further discussions moved on to explain that celebrities use spin-doctors to turn these events into positive publicity and as such should live with the consequences. Later in this same discussion, the host of *Fashion TV* and ex-Much Music VJ stated that television is not an educational tool; therefore reporting on these events is fine because this is the kind of material people want to see.

Lastly, the discussion of point number three regarding homosexuality and the video largely discussed the notion that the video focused on the homosexual sex acts only

and that this video did not portray a healthy gay lifestyle. Sadly this final discussion point did not last long and occurred at the end of the episode.

Video Description and Analysis

This music video is presented as a series of repeated vignettes depicting various sexual acts all occurring outdoors. The video starts with a close-up of Michael sitting down with his head against the wall singing directly to the camera, with quick cuts to the somewhat innocuous beginnings to the video's many vignettes, usually a couple engaging in an innocent kiss. With the first chorus we learn that Michael is singing to us from a public washroom set that morphs into a kind of bathroom discotheque. The urinals become mirrored, the ventilation ducts become mirror balls, and Michael is now wearing a police outfit along with two female dancers also dressed as police officers that are fronting a 1970s style disco dance line. This is the only setting we see Michael in, usually for the chorus sections.

The following details the locales and subjects of each of the vignettes featured in the video. These vignettes are listed to give the reader a sense of what this video was trying to accomplish as far as getting across its main theme. I list each from start to narrative resolution, but the reader should note that each vignette is separated into short sequences and is interspersed throughout the video.

The first vignette is in a locker room—two male body builders have a "pose off" with each other until one is shown with hands clasped around the other from behind. The video then moves to an elevator where an affluent heterosexual couple is shown in black and white, obviously being filmed by a surveillance camera as it is shot grainy and

black and white. The video moves to a rooftop pool with one man in a body suit and two women in bikinis lounging by a pool, with the man and one woman engaging in an intimate kiss. There is a helicopter shadow that passes through the scene indicating that it is being recorded or surveyed from the helicopter. The next scene finds a couple outside beside a limousine. The couple is presumably newlywed (she is in a wedding dress, he in a tuxedo), are parked somewhere private, she is pregnant. The video shifts to the top of what looks like a large transport ship, two men are kissing and are being shot from a birdseye view, this is shot from what looks like a helicopter as the shadow of the helicopter is seen momentarily. The video moves to a public washroom where a heterosexual couple dressed in classic burglar's outfits, engage in a passionate kiss and vigorously undress each other in a public washroom stall. This is partially shot in the same surveillance cameral look as the elevator. A heterosexual couple is then seen kissing and lying on one-another in a van parked at the top of a cliff, this is shot with the same helicopter birdseye view. The next vignette features an older woman dressed in a business outfit, leading a younger man who has a leash around his neck. This is shot in a standard mid-range shot style. The video moves to a man and woman in an office, he is kneeling in front of her kissing her groin and upper thigh. Outside of the office the viewer can see a police helicopter spying on the scene, the couple is oblivious to this fact.

Further on in the video, two men jump into the back of a delivery truck after making sure they are not seen. They proceed to kiss passionately, with one man thrusting his groin into the other man's groin in a close-up. This is shot with the same helicopter birdseye view and is also a scene that is pixilated in a censored version of the video. Next, on a rooftop a heterosexual couple quickly disrobes and lies on one another on a

helicopter landing pad. At the end of the video, we see two male police officers that had apprehend the two men in the truck described above. These two police officers then engage in a passionate kiss. This is shot in a combination of the helicopter birdseye view and the surveillance camera style.

The last image shows the viewer a helicopter shot of a rooftop neon sign that says "Jesus Saves" and then we see a caption saying "all of us" appear once, then one word at a time with a pause and period between each word as such: "all. of. us." And last, as the video fades to black, the only word left on the black screen is the word "all."

What this video immediately imparts to the viewer is a feeling of surveillance; every angle and almost each shot that is not in the bathroom disco, is filmed in a way that takes intimacy away from the couple. Every signifier that would normally indicate passion, intimacy, or sexuality (or more colloquially but somehow more apropos: sexiness), is somewhat nullified by the obvious surveillance by authorities. What starts out as shadow of a helicopter looking at two men kissing on the top of a ship's "crows nest" is soon revealed to be a police helicopter, an unwelcome intrusion into an illicit moment of public intimacy. I admit here that the word "intimacy" may not be a proper word to describe these encounters as each is very sexual and each vignette is obviously leading towards eventual, but in all cases interrupted, sexual intercourse. Yet, I use the word "intimacy" as it describes adequately any kind of passionate encounter between lovers, even if the connotations of the word are perhaps not strong enough.

The locale, and the eventual discovery by someone else, in most cases either a literal or implied authority figure, marks each event. The song itself is describing two things, the joy of sex outside of the traditional confines of the home (literally "outside"),

and a society that frowns upon this kind of openness regarding sexual or intimate activity. The lyrics point towards the former, and while the images begin in this fashion, the vignettes tend to end with discovery by the authorities resulting in some kind of repercussion such as arrest or embarrassment.

What anchors meaning here is a common knowledge of a societal code of propriety. The presence of the police helicopter that signifies authority diminishes the intimacy of the sexual acts, and heightens the sense of inappropriateness. The audience knows that anything being surveyed by repressive state authorities is usually illegal or illicit, and as such, the very presence of the figure of authority is enough to render any situation suspect. It is this aura of illicitness, this overarching feeling of surveillance that tells the audience that each sexual act that takes place "outside" is considered socially unacceptable and should be almost a punishable "offence." These images are coupled with lyrics that celebrate being "outside" when with a lover. For example, take the first verse and chorus of the song:

"I think I'm done with the sofa
I think I'm done with the hall
I think I'm done with the kitchen table, baby

let's go outside (let's go outside)
in the sunshine
I know you want to, but you can't say yes
Let's go outside
in the moonshine
take me to the places that I love best

So my angel she says, don't you worry
'bout the things they're saying, yeah
got no friends in high places
and the game that you gave away
wasn't worth playing"

These lyrics reveal two things: that Michael wants to be with a partner "outside" and this should not be considered shameful, and second, that he feels that his attempts to remain heterosexual in the public eye was a "game" that "wasn't worth playing." Here lies another metaphorical use of the work "outside," meaning to be open and honest about his sexuality to the outside world.

I depart here from a semiotic analysis to examine some of the articulations implicit with this video. First, the video offers us a rearticulation of the codes of public affection. Michael is rather blatantly commenting on how society feels that heterosexual couples should not be overly affectionate in public, while homosexual couples should not be publicly affectionate in any way. The message here rearticulates how we typically look at our romantic relationships in public. The video tells us that any authority that denies our sexuality when expressed outside of the privacy of the home is repressive. In doing so, George Michael has actively attempted and perhaps succeeded in lessening the negative impact of his "lewd act" while pushing forward a new pro-gay and quasi pro-exhibitionist stance. By using symbols of authority and showing them in their most repressive functions, this video also rearticulates the role of the police in our private lives from protective to invasive.

The police are turned into repressive, conservative and authoritarian symbols in the context of this video. By doing this Michael is also linking himself with a certain sexually liberated image, and is "coming out" without hesitation or regret. Now, the audience sees him not as a pervert or sex offender, but as a person who was forced into revealing a major life secret (his homosexuality), and who is now conscious of this and proud of himself. This music video articulates George Michael with a new openness

about his lifestyle, and thereby resists the negative stigma of his crime and by extension, resisting conservative America.

Yet, in the midst of this, there is another more general and potentially more powerful articulation. This video, while articulating Michael's new lifestyle and resisting the stigma of his crime, also has to come to terms with the realities of popular music and broadcast media standards. These standards have as much to do with profit as with propriety. As such, Michael's record company sent four versions of his video, each one less contentious and less demanding of the viewer's tolerance levels than the last. In an effort to maximize the potential of the video, it had to be as adaptable as possible. The video and its message of openness and sexual freedom are articulated with capitalism and profit via market pressures. These pressures to keep certain elements of sexuality toned down cause the message of the video and its rare elements of open gay sexual expression to become subordinated to profit and broadcastability, as it offers broadcasters the choice of how much they wish to broadcast. In particular, it offers the scene of two men, perhaps more powerful, two police officers kissing. As such, there is an illusion of full freedom of expression, but behind this is a profit orientation underscored by the preference to have the video aired in as many places as possible rather than hold to a more contentious artistic vision that includes a same-sex kiss.

With this video, George Michael shows us a number of contentious images. First, we witness his send up of his own arrest through the bathroom disco scenes. While mocking authority through satire is certainly not novel or unique, it was enough to get the artist sued by the authority figure he was mocking, the arresting officer. It also opened the door to the viewer to see Michael differently, allowing a certain new

articulation of the event of his arrest. By this I mean, it is most easy to dismiss Michael as a pervert or even sex crime offender but Michael asks the audience, through this video, to look at him as rearticulated into a sexually liberated gay man instead. Still, a number of the "man on the street" clips during the *Too Much 4 Much* segments voiced complaints that this satire was "gross" or "very inappropriate."

The choices of what scenes were pixilated very obviously points towards other contentious elements of the video. While the two most overtly sexual scenes being pixilated were not a surprise, the choice to pixilate the scene with the two male police officers is a kind of admission. With this choice, the videos producers and the music television stations are implying that homosexuality might not be the taboo topic it once was (particularly within the confines of arts entertainment), evidently suggesting that there are still limits to the kind of images that will be tolerated in a homosexual context.

The video pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable on television in three ways with this simple scene. First, it subverts the authority of the police as the officers kiss immediately after making an arrest of another video participant who was caught engaging in a sexual act in public. It infers a double standard that one can imagine the police department would consider unacceptable. Second, rarely do we see images of authority figures engaged in this kind of sexual activity, particularly men, and most certainly never "on the job." As such, simply the act of two police officers kissing pushes the boundary of what is acceptable on television. Third, as do many videos, this clip is easily accused of glamorizing casual sexual activity and the act of sex without showing possible consequences. This is different then simply showing too much skin as Britney Spears is often accused of doing. Rather, this video in almost all of its parts shows what could

easily be termed "foreplay," and in fact the record company chose to send a copy of the video that pixelates a portion where we see one man thrusting during simulated intercourse. Frank images of intercourse are of course still very taboo on television, and *Outside* shows rather blunt images of sex that are far more realistic then the dance sequences of scantily clad pop stars.

Interestingly, a member of the panel opined that this video actually de-mystifies both the act of sex, and homosexual sex as well. Following this line of thought, *Outside* shows what could even be called a more "realistic" sex. Meaning, instead of the cat and mouse games and subtexual sexuality of many pop songs (although this subtext is rapidly becoming more and more literal), this video shows both homosexual and heterosexual sex openly and without any subtext to decode. This in itself is jarring to a mainstream audience and could be, as is mentioned by the *Too Much 4 Much* host, possibly not in keeping with community standards.

Outside pushed and prodded at the boundaries of what is acceptable through its obvious sexuality, subordination of authority figures, and explicit homosexual content in an era when this content was rarely seen in such a forceful and literal manner. This video openly celebrates a man's newfound openness and acceptance of his homosexuality, and he asks us to join him "outside" in expressing his sexual desires. Yet, the video had to contend with a broadcast environment that was not ready for this kind of overtness (and perhaps still is not) and as such, freely offered versions that allowed a station to tailor the video for its audience to consume. In this way, a pre-existing market condition caused the producers of this video to adapt their vision, making the message of the video subordinate to the profit orientation of the broadcast market.

Music Video 2 – "*Leviticus Faggot*" (1996) by Me'Shell Ndegeocello

Background and Context

Unlike Michael and his video for "Outside," Ndegeocello does not require as much background context, as her video, *Leviticus Faggot*, marked the first time she had stirred up controversy. Ndegeocello is still unique in that she does not hide her bisexuality from the media, nor did she play it up in the same way as Michael. Ndegeocello has been openly bisexual since the beginning of her career, and due to her relative obscurity (even with three Grammy nominations for her first album), this fact did not cause any major media storms. Yet until this point in her career, she had not openly tackled any controversial issues through her videos. In the case of *Leviticus Faggot*, Ndegeocello brought to light issues of homosexuality and the home, and the problems families can have dealing with a son or daughter who is gay. In the video, it was not necessarily these issues that were contentious; rather it was the use of the word "faggot" in the title and lyrics, and the use of the word "nigger" in the lyrics that caused reactions from within the music industry.

According to *Too Much 4 Much*, the "Leviticus Faggot" single was shipped to over 1000 radio stations, with only 20 giving the song any airplay (Much Music, 1996). Later, the song was banned by BET (Black Entertainment Television) and according to *Billboard* magazine (Atwood, 1996), this was due to the use of the term "faggot." Ndegeocello is quoted in this same issue of *Billboard* as saying that BET's refusal to air the song, "really hurts," and further that, "it's ironic that BET won't play it. They show scantily clad women—especially black women. It makes me wonder why they think certain things are more acceptable than others... I wonder if they are just looking at the

title and not the whole song" (Atwood, 1996 p. 85). The above statement adequately sums up the media's treatment of the issue. Due to the artist's relative lack of popularity in comparison to other contentious artists at the time,[12] the use of the term "faggot" enjoys a brief moment in the media, but is not considered edgy enough to maintain any kind of extended analysis or mass media discussion. In this same *Billboard* article, we learn that MTV has also considered asking for other scenes from the video to be cut, most notably a suicide scene at the end.

In a survey of print media, there oddly is little said about this issue, save some larger newspapers echoing the same sentiment as *Billboard.* In the *Charlotte Observer*, the author brings up the utilization of the word "faggot", and in passing mentions that there is "nothing testy" in the video or song, and expresses mild disbelief that it would be banned (Wertz Jr., 1996. p. E2). This mild media reaction is a useful example of a contentious video that is in many ways groundbreaking or challenging, but not enough to have its censorship make headlines for any length of time. In fact, the *New York Times* did not carry a story about this event, nor did the *Los Angeles Times* or the *Washington Post.*

In contrast to this, Much Music ran an hour-long episode in the *Too Much 4 Much* series dealing with the issue of contentious language in music and music videos, and images that play off of this language. This episode of the series began with the host Avi Lewis describing the song, the artist, and the negative reactions of broadcast media to it, resulting in little radio play. He then introduced a concept called "reclaiming." The

[12] Madonna released the banned S&M themed video *Erotic* months before, getting a great deal of press for its sadomasochistic themes and brief nudity.

latter refers to a subculture taking back a word or reclaiming concepts used derogatorily to describe or debase a culture, and re-use them in a positive way. The episode thus opens with the assumption that Ndegeocello is using the word "faggot" in a way that reclaims it.

This *Too Much 4 Much* episode asks the following questions: 1) Why use the word "faggot" or "nigger" in this way, this word can be very harmful and bigoted; 2) Should these words be used at all, even as a term of endearment? Is it still a hateful word when it is reclaimed; 3) What is the role of religion in relation to the word "faggot" both in the context of this video and in general?

Discussion began with a dialogue about the use of the words "faggot" and "nigger" and how a word can conceivably strip a person of their identity. This video was meant to bring that notion to light. Panel discussion also examined using the word faggot and how it brings a person as "out as possible," meaning the word loses its sting when the victim uses it themselves as openly as possible. Contrary to this, regarding the word nigger, regardless of reclamation or positive usage of the word, a large part of the panel would like to see it disappear because it remains, currently and historically, a hateful word. Last, Ndegeocello argued that the black community rewrites English, and as such this is actually a common usage of the word, it can be a term of endearment.

Concerning the second main discussion topic regarding the word faggot as being perpetually negative and hateful, the panel again covered a wide territory. A panel member who grew up traumatized by the cruel use of the word faggot, felt this word is always hateful and should disappear. This sentiment was echoed by some, but others including a gay publication's editor and Ndegeocello herself opined that no person should have their freedom to express themselves taken away, this includes the reclaimed usage of

a word like faggot. The discussion moved towards how the word is always articulated in a gay Caucasian context, and Ndegeocello's usage of the word is used in a black context and as such is a useful utilization of the word as it reveals the black experience of being gay. One should learn about the individual experience of this word and its effects on people before asking for it to disappear.

The last overall discussion topic was centered on religion and religious animosity towards homosexuals. The panel included a Catholic theology PhD candidate as an expert who provided guidance and context to the bible's accounting of homosexuality. According to him, the Old Testament reveals that God does not hate homosexuality outright, rather it is the homosexual sex act that is disapproved. Yet, the New Testament and current Catholicism's claim is that we should love all people in all cases. As such, the Catholic church technically accepts homosexuals, but the issues of the act of homosexual sex remained unresolved. This led to a more general discussion of the role of religion in morality. The lesbian activist group argued that the bible and religion attempt to define what is moral, but that is only if one considers the word of God as the highest moral law. And thus, if one does not believe in God, then the laws or morality of a God-centered religion should not apply. They went on to argue that religious-centered morality should not then apply when reclaiming a word such as nigger or faggot, as it is the individual's right to choose how the word is used and by whom. To them, the bible is ambiguous and as such is not a reliable source of information and particularly not a reliable source of information on Gay culture or how one should treat homosexuality. At this point, the bible expert on the panel stated that the word "faggot" is a detestable word, the Church

would not endorse its usage at any time regardless of biblical interpretation. This discussion was cut short as the program came to an end.

As one can judge by the discussion in response to the questions addressed in the episode, we can see that the panel was composed of a largely progressive group who felt, unlike MTV or BET, that using the word in this way could be construed as a useful and appropriate gesture. In fact, the panel consisted largely of individuals who represented progressive organizations (such as the host of a Queer radio show or president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women), or identified as gay or bisexual (the artist herself, and a male writer). A bible scholar was included on the panel, but was largely relegated to the role of interpreter of scripture and an authority on the status of homosexuality in the Catholic Church.

Video Description and Analysis

Leviticus Faggot tells the story of a young black man coming to terms with his homosexuality within an intolerant and religious family environment. The song title itself refers to the book of Leviticus, the section of the Old Testament containing the rules of comportment that govern daily life in Judaism. According to the panel's bible scholar, this book contains passages that condemn homosexuality as something that is banned and which God "hates." More specifically, according to this panel member, it is specifically the act of two men engaging in intercourse that God detests. As will be described, the title sets the tone for the rest of the video.

The video is shot in a series of isolated but linked vignettes, each detailing an aspect of this young man's life and homosexuality. The initial scene has the artist in what

appears to be a small, wood-paneled room, perhaps a basement, saying directly to the camera, "hey faggot." The video then jump cuts to a tender scene in the boy's room where he is accompanied by what we assume is a love interest or boyfriend. The father bursts in, violently ejects the boyfriend from the room, and closes the door, obviously intending to harm the young man. This violent interruption by the father figure repeats in various forms and sets the violent tone early.

We are then taken to a church scene, with the accompanying lyrics echoing, "his mother would pray, save him, save him, save him from this life" (full lyrics are available in appendix A). The boy looks around nervously as he knows that the people in the church surrounding him detest him. At this point, in what looks like a sequence that is not in continuity, Ndegeocello kisses a woman and glares at the father who does not react. This scene ends with the father tossing a suitcase of clothing out of the front door of the house; apparently the boy is no longer welcome at home.

Next we are given a brief respite from the seething violence of the earlier scenes. Here the young boy is enjoying time with his lover, playing outdoors each being comfortable with the other. There is no outward sexual or intimate touching, but the viewer gets the sense that both of these boys have strong feelings for each other, and in a way have come to terms with being homosexual, as long as it is outside of the family.

After this utopic set of sequences, the father appears again to violently separate the happy couple in a diner, with the mother outside in the car, looking upset and depressed as the lyrics echo again, "his mother would pray, save him, save him from this life." After this scene, close-ups of the boy imply that he has grown tired and is depressed with these turns in his life.

The last scene finds the protagonist in the family washroom, from a birdseye shot we see him cutting his wrists and falling to the ground. Presumably the pressure and anxiety of life in this family was too much, and he chose suicide. It was this scene that MTV wished to see cut before they would air the video on their station. This shot was echoed earlier in the video with the artist writhing on the ground of the bathroom singing, "beautiful angels dancin' 'round my soul as I rise, just searchin' and searchin' searchin' and searchin', trying to figure out... life." With this, the video fades to black.

The video is shot in two very different styles. The colour of the indoor scenes are very saturated and have deep rich tones and close camera angles. The scenes outside tend to be shot in a more open and light manner, with more natural light and camera angles that include more mid-ranged or full-body shots. The indoor scenes feel small and claustrophobic, with many scenes shot in small, cramped spaces. This closeness does something similar to the presence of the helicopter in *Outside*, it gives a feeling of surveillance, that at any instant, a figure of authority will burst in and catch the boy engaging in a moment of illicit pleasure. As such, all the signifiers of the indoor scenes such as the close surveillance by the father, and threatening and claustrophobic environs, are coupled with the codes of conservative family values, connoting collectively, an overwhelming feeling, a feeling of "unwelcome-ness." This man's son is obviously not the son he wanted, the lyrics tell us as much, anchoring signfieds with this feeling of intense violent disapproval saying, "daddy's sweet lil' boy just a little too sweet, and every night the man showed the faggot what a real man should be."

In this case, an image of the boy, who as we know is vilified by his father as a "faggot", becomes more than just a gay boy in a homophobic family. As a 'faggot', he is

not considered a 'real' man. As such, the boy gives up his rights to govern his own body, his father can beat him every night. Each scene inside, be it the church or the home, feels heavy and oppressive. The boy is subject to scrutiny by everyone save his implied lover. He is loathed by his father, and pitied by his mother, both of whom consider him an aberration that the church can remedy. Each signified strips him of his humanity and individuality. To his family, he is not "son" or even "human," he is "gay, " and as such must be saved or made to leave.

These signifiers of the close quarters of the indoor rooms, the violence of the father, the implied judgment of the church collectively signify the video's main message, that of oppression. Each element of the main character's life indicates how heavily oppressed he is - from the beatings from his father to the scrutiny of the churchgoers - he is always under pressure to change. It is the severity of these images that cause a chain of signifieds to actually anchor this song, in their severity, as an anti-oppression message. The horrible chain of events that leads to the main character's ultimate suicide is so vivid and nightmarish, that it appeals to the audience's sense of decency. The video, through the extreme behavior on screen, is actually asking the audience to reject that behavior in their own lives. Each gaze at the camera from the boy is one of hopelessness and fright. We are asked to do the opposite, to give comfort and hope to those who do not have it, we are asked to understand the reality of the boy's life and to reject this kind of behavior in ourselves and in our lives.

This video then creates a novel kind of sign system, the various signifiers that come together in a unique signified, oppression. The images are so extreme in severity that they run absolutely counter to the codes of behaviour in our culture. In theory, we

are not supposed to physically abuse our children, or make someone feel like an outsider due to their sexuality (this is of course sadly different in practice). When these images are presented to us in such a stark and unapologetic manner, the images of oppression send a message of anti-oppression. The song and video stand firm and obvious in their message of tolerance, anti-oppression, and against homophobia. As well, the video and song send a clear message condemning religious traditions that ostracize others on the basis of their sexuality. The video asks us to expand the boundaries of inclusiveness, to understand and empathize with a person who stands metonymically for many in the same family situation.

If we turn to articulation theory to look at this video, there are almost too many potentialities to explore. The video articulates the idea of homosexuality and religion, homosexuality to blackness/black identity, homosexuality and the image of a progressive music industry, the word "faggot" to society or the music industry, and the images of violence and broadcast media. Below, I focus on are the articulations of homosexuality and religion, paying particular attention to the articulation of words like "faggot" with and within the music industry

Leviticus Faggot rearticulates religion as a repressive and oppressive force, acting to define a gay male as an aberration and an object of scorn. The church scene where an entire congregation scrutinizes the main character drives this point home. The boy's face is shown in constant close-ups, he looks nervous and anxious, like a caged animal. All these images of oppression and intolerance work to oppose this same kind of action in reality, because the music industry and music videos are a place where, on the surface, this lifestyle is not only acceptable, but also celebrated.

This video and all music videos are located within an industry that projects an image of progressiveness. Within such a context, the video is easily translatable into a message of anti-oppression, as this is what the audience has come to expect from the music industry as progressive force. Then, when the audience views a video that shows horrible acts of aggression against a gay man, the assumption is that the video must be telling us this is unacceptable.

Also, the music industry (save perhaps country music) tends to be a non-religious. This itself is an articulation, the industry articulating itself with a stance of non-religiousness. The latter allows music television to broadcast a great deal of material that would otherwise be deemed inappropriate in religious circles. As such, a video like *Leviticus Faggot* is able to use this violent and oppressive imagery in a positive way, helping to define the boundaries of how homosexuality and homosexual people are treated, and comment upon those boundaries in order to have them changed for the better. *Leviticus Faggot* pushes boundaries in how it very harshly critiques religion, even associating the pressure from religion as a cause of suicide.

The video not only pushes the boundaries of what we articulate as acceptable behaviour in relation to homosexuality, but it also asks us to look at how the word "faggot" is perceived in Western society. The word "faggot" is contentious as it is near universally accepted as derogatory and its use is considered unacceptable in public life. The broadcast media, in the case of "Leviticus Faggot," has seemingly articulated the word as being unacceptable regardless of its usage, banning the word outright. In this way the word "faggot" is articulated with broadcast standards, which themselves are based on a profit motivation. Broadcast standards have been articulated with capitalism in an effort

to enhance profits by maintaining a level of appropriateness in order to maximize a stable market. By eliminating the word "faggot" from a playlist, broadcast media are ensuring that viewers who might be offended by the word are not exposed to it, and further, the broadcaster saves itself the trouble of answering to the poor publicity that might be generated should a song with "faggot" in the title and lyrics be aired. This maximizes potential market penetration and assures the broadcaster a consistent and sufficient audience for their advertising.

Perhaps, it is not the morality of the word that is potentially hurtful to a broadcaster, rather it is the scandal associated with it. Ndegeocello feels that BET did not want to use it because they wanted to "preserve the black image" (Atwood,1996 p. 85). It is unclear whether this refers to black people as being largely heterosexual and therefore not interested or attracted to homosexually themed material. In any event, the word is still considered contentious enough to have the video blocked from airing on this major music video station.

In summary, *Leviticus Faggot* pushes boundaries and is contentious in a number of ways. First it casts religion in a very negative light. It is the combination of religion and family pressure that caused the death of the main character through his suicide. It is also contentious because it uses a word in its title that almost immediately rendered the video difficult to air. One can almost imagine the difficulty of a VJ on air saying the word "faggot" when announcing the song. Music television is not equipped to provide context or help assign meaning to a song (as they "just play it"), and as we can see, BET chose to simply not deal with this contentious song. Apparently, few if anyone voiced concerns regarding censorship or artistic freedom, therefore there was little debate on the topic.

The video provides an adequate example of how contentious material with a positive social message, can by virtue of controversial images and a title that is simply difficult to say on air, be rendered somewhat politically inert. The music industry, as this example illustrates, is capable of suppressing contentious material, by either asking for changes in content (such as MTV), or choosing not to air the debatable material (BET's strategy) in order maximize market share.

Video #3 – "*The Beautiful People*" (1996) by Marilyn Manson

Background and Context

The last video examined in this chapter comes from more familiar terrain for those acquainted with contentious videos. In the case of *The Beautiful People* (1996) by Marilyn Manson, it is as much the artist as the video that is contentious. This video when viewed objectively (and outside of the media hype surrounding Manson) contains nothing particularly contentious, rather it is a part of the meta-narrative that is Marilyn Manson that renders the video contentious. Hence, before outlining a description and analysis of the video, we need to briefly examine Manson as a person(a), a character, and as a figure of contention.

Robert Wright (2000) describes the controversy with Manson in the media quite well, and as such I will only provide an outline for context. With the album Antichrist Superstar, Manson became a bona fide rock and roll superstar and youth icon. The album entered the Billboard charts at number 3 (*Billboard*, December, 1996) and the videos for the singles "Tourniquet" (1996) and "Beautiful People" (1996) were in heavy rotation on MTV and Much Music. As a public figure, Manson came under fire from a variety of

sources for his allegedly satanic imagery in videos, as well as alleged membership in the Church of Satan (Wright, 2000, p. 374). Manson is also quite vocal in the media and his lyrics denounce organized religion. In the *Too Much 4 Much* episode featuring Manson, he states:

> I see what I do as a positive thing. I try to bring people closer to themselves. That may be further away from God but that's closer to themselves. I think that's a good thing. I think that makes people stronger...I'm trying to tell people to believe in themselves because that's all that they have to believe in. I think that's a positive thing. (Much Music, 1996)

In saying this type of comment with regularity, Manson soon came under fire from the American religious right. After the video for "Beautiful People" was released in 1996, his tour supporting the single and new album was instantly marked for protest by groups such as the American Family Association (Thigpen in Wright, 2000 p. 347) and the Christian Coalition, said Manson was "beyond anything we've seen before" and "The group charges that Manson promotes satanism, suicide, drug use and child pornography" (Hogan, 1997, p. O5B). Later Manson was implicated in the Littleton, Colorado high school shootings when it was discovered that some of the boys involved in the shooting were fans of his music. This led the Clinton administration to begin hearings regarding music violence, focusing the lens on Manson even more tightly (Wright, 2000, p. 381).

These events turned Manson into something larger then a musician, he came to represent a meta-narrative onto himself. The notion of a meta-narrative of stardom is interesting as it furthers the idea that the modern popular musician is as much an identity or a character as he or she is a person or musician (Goodwin, 1992). Manson's image is as much a result of how he is characterized by the Christian right as it is his own doing. For

example, Manson never references the killing of animals in his music, lyrics, or music videos, yet this has been attributed to him by the American Family Association when it accused him of it (however falsely) (Wright, 2000, p. 375). When a musician reaches this plateau, he or she then "enables us to see that characterization, fiction, and perhaps even narrative itself exist in popular music at the point of narration, outside the digenesis of individual songs, live performances, or video clips, through the persona of the pop star" (Goodwin, 1992, p. 103). In becoming a figure beyond his own music, Manson has become the persona of a rock star that is both loved and vilified all at once. He is the target of smear campaigns, but is still a hero to a generation of teens that identify with the alienation and despair of his music. And when Manson produces a video in what is now his signature alarming and somewhat horrific style, the images in the video become more than fractured anarchic images, they become ant-Christian or "verbal pornography" (Dean in Wright, 2000, p. 375).

The *Too Much 4 Much* episode featuring Marilyn Manson and the video for *The Beautiful People* covered a laundry list of issues. The following questions raised by the Much Music panel are a good cross-section of these issues and represent a general summation of the debate in this episode: 1) Manson's music is nihilistic and hopeless, does it then cause listeners not to care about anything, as nothing is worth caring about? 2) Does Manson's music endorse anti-social behaviour such as self-mutilation or Satanism? 3) Does Manson represent an actual interest in, or promotion of other extreme subcultures such as serial killer fan culture (Columbine shootings) or even Fascism?

The discussion of the above points moved in many directions, with Manson almost always on the defensive, save when one panel member applauded him for coyly

manipulating the mainstream and opening people up to interesting notions of individuality and new ways of self-expression.

The debate in this *Too Much 4 Much* episode was quite varied and began with a community outreach worker commenting that the music has no hope, and no apparent avenue to provide any kind of release from the bleakness of his imagery and ideas. To this, Manson responded by saying that the music is certainly nihilistic, but also asks kids to question the bleakness around them, and in that sense asks them to look to themselves for hope, as nothing in the world is "real" or worth fighting for. Following this, a university of Toronto professor commented that the nihilist side of the music is a unique representation of the "post-nuclear, apocalyptic, and millennial" feeling of the time.

The dialogue is then directed by the community outreach worker who opines that the music asks children to "give up" because the world is bleak, and this causes children to give up on themselves and on life. Manson again countered by explaining that his music, while offering a bleak sound and image, asks children to look into themselves for strength and in effect become strong so as to not "give up."

It is here that Avi Lewis (also the host of this episode) turns the debate toward the issue of accusations of Manson as encouraging anti-social behavior. Again, the outreach worker interjects that Manson's music explicitly mentions self-mutilation, and as such it is difficult for children to understand whether Manson is or is not endorsing self-mutilation. In response to this Manson states, that self-mutilation was "just something I was into last year" (Much Music, 1996), and he feels he never asked anyone to join him in this exercise. According to Manson he wanted to add it to a list of experiences in his life and then write about them. It was an expression of the pain he

then expressed lyrically. Lewis then turned the dialogue towards the accusations often levied against Manson regarding Satanism. According to Manson, Satanism is a reality in his life, it is a part of his "complex system of beliefs" (Much Music, 1996) and represents beliefs he holds about self-preservation and individuality versus a Christianity that represents sacrifice and conformity.

The debate then turned towards the third main point mentioned above, namely, does Manson represent an actual interest in, or promotion of other extreme subcultures such as serial killer fan culture (Columbine shootings) or even Fascism? It was in this instance that a writer on the panel expressed his perception that Manson has many layers of distance from his work. To this panel member, Manson does not take any responsibility for the complex and contentious issues and questions his work raises such as his use of Fascist imagery or issues of using serial killer references and imagery. In response to this, Manson countered that the use of this imagery is related to the United States and its commercial culture that is disguised Fascism. Commercialism is Fascist because it works to "tell people what to do by telling them what to buy" and in this way is a major controlling force in the lives of American citizens (Much Music, 1996)

When viewing Manson as contentious, we see now that he is embodying much of what the Christian right in the United States and Canada despise about some popular music. Manson is openly anti-Christian, and openly asks his fans to turn away from religion and turn "towards themselves." His stance on such issues as Satanism and the glorification of serial killers is not a denial of his utilization of this iconography, rather a stance that it is up to parents to educate their children to make their own decisions including how they read Manson and his character. He states that is he is "an artist that is

making a statement using these images," (Much Music, 1996) and not a reverend preaching to his congregation. Still, elements of Satanism, Fascism, anti-Religion and even the celebration of serial killers are common elements in his videos, easily fueling the fire of the American moral and religious right.

Video Description and Analysis

The video for "The Beautiful People" could quite easily be described as a post-modern video as defined in chapter 2. The images are fractured and edited together rapidly and without apparent order or relation to one another. The messages of the images are as much feelings and tone as they are literal as described by the lyrics. As there are no easily identifiable schemes or easily separated scenes in *The Beautiful People*, I will not offer the scene-by-scene description as I did with *Outside* and *Leviticus Faggot*. Instead, I will offer a description of the video's overall tone, feel, and important images in an effort to get across both the overall message and describe what images or messages could be considered contentious.

As described earlier, this video is contentious because it is a Marilyn Manson video, not that it necessarily contains contentious images. The video is contentious as it is a part of the meta-narrative of a contentious character in Marilyn Manson. Yet with the media helping to paint Manson as a figure of some ill-repute, the dystopic images and anarchic feel of the video fit very well with the somewhat evil character that is Marilyn Manson, thereby rendering the video much more contentious then it might be otherwise.

The video opens with white noise and synthesizer squeals and a military-like drumbeat. This introduces the dark and ominous scenery that continues throughout the

video. The entire video is shot in crumbling buildings or ruined courtyards, with most objects being a uniform brown, grey and black. The look is post-apocalyptic, or as a member of the *Too Much 4 Much* panel (and expert on millennial imagery and culture) observes, "the millennial resonance is very strong. Clear apocalyptic landscape, bombed out buildings, the marking of the body, and these images that are drawn from the post-nuclear wardrobe of Mad Max" (Much Music, 1996). With each rapid-fire edit we see a new and darker or more foreboding setting. The overall tone of the video is set early; the setting is dark, squalid and intended to be frightening.

Manson describes the song as being a commentary on the "Fascism of Beauty" (Much Music, 1996). We are introduced to this theme early on as Manson is seen strapped to a chair with his face encased in what looks like a variation of the stocks a criminal would have been tortured with. His face is stretched out and pulled by hooks and he is spun endlessly around. This is a commentary on the extreme lengths a person will go to in an effort to be beautiful. This theme of body contortions and body marking continues throughout the entire video, and some could easily be described as horrific. At times, Manson's mouth is spread open with what looks like a nightmarish dental tool of some sort; at other times, he is strapped to a medieval rack with his limbs pinned down and stretched out covered in blisters and cuts. The imagery is jarring and frightening, done purposely to exaggerate Manson's message.

The song communicates a strong message to his alienated fans about outright hatred of conventional beauty and celebrities or "the beautiful people" associated with it. Manson's fans are themselves marginalized and alienated youth. While the *Too Much 4 Much* segment showed that his fans represent a relatively broad cross-section of people,

the vast majority are between the ages of 12-16, and most appeared to be dressed in modern version of "gothic" dress. As such, this song appeals to his fans, telling them in "The Beautiful People" that "there's no time to discriminate, hate every motherfucker that's in your way."

Manson does engage in some strong and obvious allusions to Fascism such as addressing the crowd from his window in front of a plethora of microphones much like an image of Mussolini. In this mode, Manson is dressed all in white, clothed in leather with a military feel, completely hairless and walking on stilts that raise him literally and metaphorically above the crowd. From here, he is seen directing people to move into pens like sheep, and counting heads as though these extras were his animals or playthings. In fascist mode, he becomes one of the "beautiful people" who towers above the crowd, perfectly white, powerful, and controlling.

As said before, this video is contentious because it is a continuation and validation of the contentiousness that surrounds Manson. Like Manson, the video is dark, gothic and brooding. It is almost as if there are no signifiers as the video is shot is such a way that each "bombed-out building" cannot just be a "ruin" or "broken down house," instead it is immediately something else, something from a horror movie set or a Mad Max film as opined by the aforementioned panel member. These scenes are contentious in that they are very clearly articulated with Manson as nihilist. The video emits a sense of hopelessness and darkness, and offers no way out, save perhaps by "hating every motherfucker that gets in your way." With this kind of imagery, Manson begins to

embody the anti-Christ[13], and subsequently becomes "the whipping boy of North American moral guardians of every stripe" (Wright, 2000, p. 375).

A semiotic analysis of this video could be endless as the video is so highly symbolic and contains many metaphorical signs. As such, I wish to now narrow my analysis to two modes I feel are important in this video. I call these the "anti-beauty" mode and the "fascist mode." The anti-beauty mode uses intense exaggeration and in some ways, explodes the signifieds of conventional beauty to in effect render them ugly. For instance, Manson is often seen in a chair that is a horrific representation of the chair one would find in a spa or salon. When he is seated in it, his face and body are often bound, contorted, stretched or marked. This signifies the ritual of beautification, and in his horrifying representation of it, the ritual is made to seem ugly and unnecessary. These images combine to form a sign, that of anti-beauty or ritualized beauty as some kind of terrible affliction as he sings "capitalism has made that it that way." These images are meant to be the polar opposite of the beauty of the advertising system, a beauty system that is engrained as perhaps one of the most universal in Western culture.

This beauty system is what the anti-beauty Manson is trying to crush, but in doing so, he is horrifying those who define their appearance in relation to that system. This is contentious for two reasons. First, having already been defined as a kind of anti-Christ, Manson is not considered as a prime role model to challenge the beauty system, and thus his challenge is construed as an alleged attempt to pervert his fans. Second, the images in this video are so disturbing and ugly that they become defined not by what they are standing against, but by their seemingly appalling ugliness.

[13] Manson's album containing "The Beautiful People" is in fact called Anti-Christ Superstar.

When combined, the signifieds of Manson as anti-Christian, anti-religion (perhaps even anti-morality), and a sort of pro-fascism, the images of "The Beautiful People" become anchored into a kind of Manson paradigm, with any and all images viewed as being a part of this paradigm. This paradigm represents a sign-system that is totally non-conformist; it is intentionally frightening and alienating. And, by extension, anything that stands against so many heavily ingrained cultural institutions such as the church, could easily become defined by many in society as anti-social, counter-cultural and highly contentious. Moreover, the fact that anything that critiques the beauty industry also opens itself to ridicule, dismissal or demonization.

In the fascist mode, Manson becomes a dictator, elevated above the common people that he rounds up like animals in the video. Dressed in pristine white leather with a very militaristic look, Manson becomes a kind of horror show Mussolini. He uses stilts that signify an elevation above the common people. The white garb signifies the unspoiled ironic perfection of Manson in this mode, a perfect leader who rules over the (literal and figurative) unwashed and dirty masses. As leader, he rounds up people, counting them as they line up, changing them from people into a "mass." In this mode, he ironically becomes a symbol of the beautiful or perfect people, the very people that the song is critiquing. Later, when queried about the questionable use of fascist imagery by host Avi Lewis, we learn that Manson is apparently making not only a commentary on the "status quo of beauty" (Much Music, 1996), but also commenting on the fascist nature of American commercialism. To Manson, US commercialism is the same as Fascism in that it "tells people what to do, how to act, and what to buy" (Much Music,

1996). As the fascist dictator controlling people, counting them as though they were sheep, Manson symbolizes the controlling hand of commercialism.

Avi Lewis finds this fascist imagery to be questionable as Fascism has a long history of brutality. To quote Lewis, "it [Manson's fascist imagery] represents an ideology that has killed many thousands of people" (Much Music, 1996). It is rather difficult to discern the meaning of the fascist imagery in *The Beautiful People* at first glance, but after a number of airings, the meaning does emerge. Again, it is not necessarily the use of the fascist imagery that is particularly contentious; rather it is another part of the overall Manson paradigm that forces an extra layer of contentiousness onto it. When articulated as an anti-messiah, and using the iconography of Fascism, Manson adds another layer to his counter-cultural star persona. The images of Fascism become contentious not on their own, but in combination with Manson's existing stardom. It is far easier to attribute issues of Fascism or inappropriate fascist imagery to a character who is deemed anti-religious, anti-social, and is already the focal point of much of the ire of Christian right wing organizations and parents groups.

Unlike the other videos profiled in this chapter, as of the writing of this paper, Manson has yet to have any of his videos censored or dropped by any music television station. Perhaps this is because Manson himself has articulated his video and his images *with* the mainstream, and not *against* it. He himself often states that commercial success and mainstream acceptance is and always has been his goal. He states in the Much Music episode, "I have no problem being mainstream, that has always been the point. You need to be in it to change it [the mainstream]" (Much Music, 1996). And, when we look at his videos, while frightening and often horrific, they do not cross any boundary that has not

already been established by mainstream film, radio, or television. In fact the constant comparison with Alice Cooper reveals what Manson is doing is perhaps an exaggerated version of Cooper's "shock rock" tactics of the late-1960's and 1970's. Yet in comparison with the other artists in this chapter, he is far and away the most reviled and contentious.

This is because Manson is always on the edge of so many contentious issues as for example, religion, self-destructive behavior/nihilism (self-mutilation particularly), Satanism, and suicide[14]. But Manson is rather apolitical in his critiques. He does not hold that organized religion is detestable; rather he asks his fans to turn away from the church for guidance and towards themselves. Manson does not ask for the destruction of religion, only a questioning of it by his fans, something that is much less contentious than outright anti-Christian images. In fact, most of Manson's videos do not utilize Christian imagery at all, they tend to be variations on the same horrific themes, but are covered in layers of style and music video editing.

Manson has therefore cleverly articulated himself within capitalism by understanding where the borders are for contentious issues, but not crossing them. He is controversial because he questions and attempts to thwart religion by ridiculing it. Manson then absorbs the criticism in such as way that it becomes part of his persona. This persona is what makes Manson contentious and reviled, but also what marginalized or alienated youth identify with.

When comparing Manson with Ndegeocello we see that she is more politically challenging as she consciously crosses and thwarts the accepted norms of music television

[14] Suicide is more attributed to Manson rather than really being present in his lyrics or videos. Particularly after the Columbine school shootings, Manson was held partially to blame for the actions of the young boys because they were fans of his music.

by openly using terms or images that are directly and obviously contrary to broadcast or societal norms. She does not absorb the criticism like Manson, instead she uses her video to attack homophobia and domestic violence openly without using a character or narrative to deflect controversy. Her images are real and understandable, with real cause and effect messages, articulating herself and her message very much opposition to mainstream sensibilities by showing images and using terms that have not been used in that way before. Manson does not do this; his video is contentious but remains well within the boundaries of permissibility because as mentioned before, many of his shocking tactics are reinterpretations of earlier artists who paved the way for this kind of performance. Manson has a signature style to his videos, one that is meant to be shocking and off-putting, but he does not in any clear way challenge power relations with his videos. And as such, his videos will always be considered contentious, but will never suffer from censorship.

Manson's videos are also articulated with a middle class audience of alienated youth. This audience identifies with the images and themes of the lyrics, but Manson does not give any answers or ask for change as do Michael or Ndegeocello. Instead Manson provides a soundtrack and series of video images that tell disaffected youths that they are understood, and their situation may be dark and dire; religion may not have answers, but at least there is someone singing about what they feel. In doing so he raises the ire of concerned parent groups and right wing Christian groups, but he does not ask for revolution, because true revolution (even in the form of youthful rebellion) is very contentious. In this way he offers the kind of resistance that can be rearticulated by the music industry into something useful, controversy that translates into market share. In

doing so Manson will enjoy a certain longevity as he can be constantly reused and rearticulated into a new image in order to shock people all over again, but in a new way. Goodwin illustrates this well when he says,

> "...the construction of star identities is central to [the] economics of the music industry. It has long been an article of faith in the record business for forty years now that career longevity can be achieved only by stars – this is to say, artists whose identities guarantee massive sales, or at least the media exposure that makes this a possibility. (1992, p. 103)

Manson does exactly this through the vehicle of the music video. Manson as character is perfectly articulated within the music industry as his videos keep him newsworthy and relevant, and guarantee that the public is constantly exposed to him because of his contentiousness and penchant for controversy. Because Manson knows how to pry at the borders of permissibility, but never extends or breaks through those borders, he will always be a counter-cultural icon, but never have to deal with censorship or challenges to his artistic vision.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that when boundaries of permissibility are pushed, and videos are considered too contentious, the broadcast media will actively seek to change the video to make it screen-ready. Videos are subject to profit vs. loss equations that dictate whether it is in the interest of the channel to screen the video, or ask for it to be changed in order for it to reach a broad audience. For Manson, his audience is proven and has the money to purchase his music, and this audience has shown that they will buy over and over again. As such, it is very much in the interest of the broadcast media to get behind any version of Manson (not literally, the support comes in the form of heavy video

or radio play for his songs), particularly as his videos, while disturbing, do not actively ask for change in an arena that would stir up wide controversy. But, in the case of someone such as George Michael or Me'Shell Ndegeocello, with the population so divided on the subject of homosexuality, and particularly when it is presented frankly, it is harder for a broadcast television station to guarantee a big enough audience for both videos. In fact, airing these videos might hurt the station, as playing the contentious video may cause listeners to change stations or alter their viewing habits. Manson, while turning off some, brings with him a solid fan base, constant publicity, and the ability to court controversy in such a way that his videos will always be contentious, but will never be banned due to their high profitability.

I have attempted to show that depending on how a music video and its message are articulated with capitalism (in the form of profit-based broadcast media), the video and artist can either have their music co-opted like Manson's, banned like Ndegeocello's, or modified like Michael's. One common denominator in all cases is the profit orientation of the station and the broadcast media in general.

Michael and Ndegeocello do challenge boundaries in a real way with their videos, so much so that they are then cancelled, or censored, or even their artistic vision compromised. Simply using a word like "faggot" in the title immediately articulates Ndegeocello's video with resistance and not conformity. By leaving her video unchanged, it cannot be articulated by and into broadcast television that is itself intricately articulated with capitalism. Put simply, it is too hard to sell a video that refuses to conform to the standards of propriety of the broadcast media, and as such the broadcast media will deny the video and artist access to these necessary vehicles that promote and sell music. In

doing so, this limits artistic expression as any output needs to conform to pre-existing accepted standards. Michael does this with the scene that so openly mocks authority by showing two male police officers kissing. However, the pixilated version of this image rearticulates the video with broadcast standards, thereby allowing it to be aired and the artist as consumer good, is sold.

Chapter Four

Conclusion and Future Considerations

This thesis sought to situate music videos as important cultural texts. To accomplish this, I examined the history and roots of music videos as they evolved from live television performances on variety shows, to multi-million dollar mini-movies. I briefly explained how music television stations like MTV work and how interrelated music videos are with the stations that broadcast them. I then situated music videos academically by examining over twenty years of critical theoretical writing pertaining to their production and consumption. This literature review covered theoretical schools as diverse as quantitative audience research, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, political economy, and finally an examination of articulation theory as a unifying framework.

The main thrust of this thesis was an effort to clarify, in some small way, how hegemonic and dominant capitalist ideologies are replicated by the mass media. In an effort to do this, I examined a small niche of the broadcast media world, music videos and music television. I attempted to explain how this industry deals with texts that are possibly damaging to profitability as they in some way push and pry at the boundaries of popular acceptability. In doing so, I found that texts that push at the boundaries of what is acceptable are subject to a myriad of pressures to change and conform, or the system conforms to them, and integrates their contentious messages so as to successfully market the product (the artist, the broadcast station itself, and promotional material). In this way, a profit-based system can still integrate texts that stir up controversy by changing the

meaning through control of the content, or adapting itself to the content. This in turn maximizes the size of the audience who will be watching their music television station, each of whom represents a consumer. It is in the best interest of a profit-based broadcaster that viewers not be alienated by the content broadcast on the station, and as such there are content controls that guarantee maximum audience penetration with minimal risk. Contentious videos, when not controlled, represent unacceptable risk unless controlled and carefully marketed if deemed profitable.

When a system adapts to the content, it means that the industry has found a way to deal with the controversy of someone like Marilyn Manson, and still profit from his stardom. If indeed ideology is "meaning in the service of power" (Thompson, quoted in Goodwin, 1992, p. 158), then this ability to affect content most certainly reflects the power of an industry to decide what "meaning" (in this case, in the form of a music video) is broadcast. In doing so, capitalism shows its adaptability, because broadcast industries that count on constant profit to exist, must assure that content pleases the greatest number of people to provide a constant audience and stable market for advertising. In this way, music videos can work to bring to light societal issues that otherwise would be left unheard, but if the video strays too far from accepted norms (in both lyrical and image content), it is censored in a way that allows controls on the contentiousness of the video, while still allowing it to exist in some form, maintaining an illusion of openness and tolerance, and hiding the overall profit orientation of television.

I will now proceed to examine the common elements in each video regarding how the broadcast system in some way adapted to the contentiousness of the video. The common element here is that each video was in some way exposed to institutional control

mechanisms of the broadcaster. What differed is how these mechanisms were brought to bear on the content of the text. At a basic level, *Outside*, *Leviticus Faggot*, and *The Beautiful People* are contentious because their images push beyond what could be argued are current community standards as outlined in the previous chapters.

Outside was contentious in a number of ways, such as the somewhat humourous and satirical image of two police officers kissing, and the openly same-sex sexual acts. This video also broadcasted sexuality in a manner that was perhaps too literal and real. With images of oral sex, simulated sex (that was not a stylized and choreographed dance maneuver), and unapologetic images of homosexual sexual activity, the video managed to offend segments of the *Too Much 4 Much* audience, while others on the panel found the video portrayed homosexual lifestyles as being sex-centric and superficial. With this in mind, the producers of the video offered edited versions of the video in order to guarantee it receive airplay on MTV and any other broadcaster who would play it. In this way, the broadcast and music industry have nurtured a preexisting content standard that the producers of *Outside* had in mind when editing the video. George Michael obviously wanted to make a satirical statement about both his "capture" and subsequent "outing," and also a more broad statement about society's intolerance of openly expressed sexuality, particularly homosexual sexual self-expression. Yet because the video was relying on a profit-based broadcast system for its existence, producers felt compelled to adapt the video and in doing so change its meaning in order to ensure the video's existence. The meaning of the video was, however minutely, altered in order to fall into a more acceptable broadcast category where it could come to market without institutional constraints. This is an example, however basic, of meaning in the service of power.

In the case of *Leviticus Faggot*, instead of a plea for sexual openness or a satirical message that undercuts authority as seen in *Outside*, Me'Shell Ndegeocello's video is more of a rude awakening. By using inflammatory language like "nigger" or "faggot," along with stark and jarring images of homophobia in both the family circle and the church, this video intends to offend. The video is also a plea to the viewer to understand and empathize with the victim in the video, to help raise awareness of this kind of cruelty. The treatment of the video's young protagonist is horrific and violent in the extreme, resulting in his suicide. This jarring imagery is the artist's way of asking the viewer to understand the treatment of young homosexual people and to help stop it. Yet it is not just the images of violence that is contentious, it is the pairing of these images with contentious language.

Unlike *Outside* where a preexisting system levied pressure on the producers of the video to conform to certain broadcast standards, in this case the artist chose to not conform and was shut out of the system the video required to get its message to as wide an audience as possible. The images and subject matter of *Leviticus Faggot* do not represent content that is particularly contentious, but the usage of certain language trumps any noble intent of the video. In doing so, usage of terms like "nigger" or "faggot" are denied room in the public sphere where an audience can negotiate the meaning of the video for themselves. To deny this video a commercial existence, the music industry use notions of community standards to validate the censorship of a song such as "Leviticus Faggot." Exercising this kind of power over content that I deem "oppositional" to mainstream commercial sensibilities of outlets like MTV, indicates the level of power institutions can levy in order to control meaning. When a video like *Leviticus Faggot* is no

longer in the public eye, broadcasters can rest easy knowing that by and large content will not offend viewers. Viewers will then keep coming back, keep buying product and watching commercials. In this way, a culture of consumption replicates an ideal marketplace and maximizes the number of consumers that will be exposed to sellable commercial products without fear of consumers being alienated, offended, and therefore not returning.

With Marilyn Manson and the video for "Beautiful People" we see an example of a system adapting to controversial content in order to integrate and control consumption habits even in the face of controversy. If we compare the fervor created by both Michael's and Ndegeocello's videos to that which was created by Marilyn Manson, we would find that Marilyn Manson had far more outspoken critics. Many more organized groups were critical of his music and image, and in general Manson is a far more contentious artist. Yet, Marilyn Manson has never had a video censored, nor has his music been banned in any form from both store shelves and the broadcast media. The answer to this seemingly lies in Manson's ability to skirt the boundaries of contentiousness, but never truly cross or release anything potentially indefensible.

Manson has also sold millions of albums (his first two albums sold over a million copies each [Dansby, 2003]), and with proven sales it is more difficult for a broadcaster to ask Manson to change the subject matter of his videos. Any corporation is loath to give up a proven sales channel, and the same holds true for the recording and broadcast television industry. Instead, profit-based institutions (and particularly culture industry based institutions) can adapt to the contentious material. They do so by positioning themselves along side the artist (such as Much Music stating that some censored versions

of *Outside* were homophobic), or by doing nothing with the hopes that video falls within evolving norms of permissibility

By integrating the contentious "otherness" of Manson, music television broadcasters are containing the contentiousness of Manson's images, and when this is accomplished, the broadcasters can then use the music video product to fuel consumption of their other products. Manson brings viewers to music television stations, and this is a music video's raison d'etre, to act as commercials not only for the music of Marilyn Manson, but also as commercials for the station, bringing viewers in.

The above, however subtle, points towards ideology actively controlling an environment in order to maintain itself and facilitate replication over time. This is accomplished by people or corporate entities in positions of power dictating what texts remain untouched, and what texts must be controlled, changed or adapted. If the credo of capitalism is "maximum profit with minimum risk[15]," then controlling content represents an effective method for broadcasters to minimize risk. When risk is minimized, broadcasters can cultivate an audience that will most likely return to a program or station, as the content will, by and large, remain acceptable to the largest possible audience. This audience cultivation is more then just programming, it represents a careful watch on "community standards" in order to filter out texts that might contravene those standards

[15] "Maximum profit with minimum risk" was quoted from a television program called *The Dragon's Den*, broadcast on CBC television in Canada. This reality show is based on inventors petitioning wealthy venture capitalists for investment capital in exchange for a percentage of their company or product. This quote was heard during a segment where an inventor was pitching an idea for a new kind of rifle accessory. Most of the panel did not want to invest as they found weapons manufacturing morally questionable, while two panel members had no such qualms but did not invest, as weapons manufacturing is a very competitive industry. One panel member went on to explain that the pursuit of profit is separate from morality. Capitalism, to him, is simply "the pursuit of maximum profit with a minimum of fiscal risk." (CBC, *The Dragon's Den*, October 31, 2007).

and in turn alienate an audience. And, as in the case of Marilyn Manson, a system or institution such as the broadcasting system can adapt to, or even promote, the contentious or alienating text in such a way that neutralizes some of the contentiousness. This ensures the text does not compromise the carefully cultivated broadcast environment and market. A broadcaster can stand behind an artist or text like this by claiming to be a proponent of freedom of expression. For example, MTV Networks Baltic were fined by Lithuania's Inspector of Journalists' Ethics for a satirical cartoon called *Popetown.* MTV commented on this by saying this was an attempt to limit freedom of expression (*World Wide Religious News*, Reuters, March 22, 2007) and continued to air the cartoon. A broadcaster can also control the broadcast environment by denying access to their distribution system, as was the case with "Leviticus Faggot." Because of these controls, "Leviticus Faggot" saw little airtime and faded away without much scandal. Lastly, by enforcing these controls so totally, a broadcaster creates a standard that defines the limitations and boundaries of what a text can say within a broadcast environment. In the case of "Outside," the producers sent multiple copies of the video with varying levels of overt sexuality to be sure that at least one version was fit to air.

This control of the broadcast environment is only a small example of the way in which capitalism controls all aspects of not only the market, but many aspects of culture. Artists who use mainstream broadcast channels as a means of distribution, are subject to the market-based intellectual limitations of the medium. These limitations decide what is acceptable and what is "too much." This is one means through which capitalist culture can maintain not only a stable marketplace for products, but also manage a culture's expectations. In other words, if an audience comes to expect a television station like

MTV to produce a certain kind of content, this audience will become return viewers when they accept that content as "cool" or entertaining. Over time these standards continue to popularize and others begin to associate particular content as being popular and also become return viewers. Contentious content can interrupt this viewing experience in what the broadcaster would feel is a negative manner. Viewers could be "turned off," or other gatekeepers (churches, educators, parents, government to name only a few) may bring unwanted pressure to bear on a broadcaster causing potential loss of audience. As such, it is in the interest of a broadcaster to maintain a stable market that is fed content that is largely guaranteed to elicit positive responses from an audience of willing consumer. This is ideology at work, this is "meaning in the service of power," when institutions with the power to decide what is seen and heard, control meaning, texts, forms of expression, and in doing so, retain power by retaining a loyal consumer base.

Future Considerations

For this thesis, I chose to couple articulation theory with semiotics in an effort to round out an interpretive framework for analysis of both videos images and their place within a capitalist and profit-oriented institutional environment. Semiotics gave depth to the analysis of the images and helped flesh out what was contentious, and highlighted the deeper culturally sensitive meanings. In this way, I could examine not only how the broadcaster was able to deal with the contentious content, but also help define the borders of contentiousness that were being pushed by the video.

This combination of articulation theory and semiotics I believe also helped to buoy Stuart Hall's overall formulation of ideology through articulation. To Hall, ideology forms a filter through which individuals negotiate meanings in the world they inhabit (Hall, 1986, p. 83). I attempted to demonstrate that broadcasters actively seek to impose this filter by choosing content that helps a viewer decode the images of MTV in such a way that they become the standard for music entertainment, and also the standard to define what is "good music." This is accomplished through a long-term cultivation of broadcast standards that videos tend to adhere to. While these standards do change over time, MTV seeks to always control what is broadcasted to people, and avoid broadcasting images that distract from the pleasurable experience of watching the station. In this way, MTV becomes associated with "fun," "music," "excitement," and becomes the authority on what is cool. It becomes a part of how people negotiate their day-to-day lives in terms of the cultural products they consume. People turn to in droves to MTV to find out what is cool, what is hip, and what is popular. In becoming this authority, MTV is helping guide, in some small way, the consciousness of people. The ability to decide what goes on the air, what controversial issues will or will not get airtime, and what is cool helps guide individuals' articulations of themselves (clothing, communities of interest based on music, cultural identification with certain artists). This is truly meaning in the service of power.

The theoretical framework I have elucidated here can be used to trace other microcosmic moments of hegemony and ideology at work. This framework could be applied for example to wartime news coverage (how Canadians articulate themselves with patriotism/support of the war versus articulating themselves with war protest) by examining what images are chosen and what images are filtered by governmental control

mechanisms. This framework could also prove useful to examine issue of heteronormitivity in primetime drama by examining how homosexual and heterosexual couples are written and portrayed. In each case, by examining what is excluded, censored or filtered, we get a clearer view of how institutions work to maintain a certain status quo that can be controlled, documented and quantified. This control is necessary for any kind of selling as an audience of consumers must be guaranteed. When the content is constantly in accordance with notions of community standards, the likelihood of a large segment of the population tuning in grows, with more consumers being exposed to the products and services commercialized in the media. Also, this theoretical and analytic framework can help decode how institutions control texts, and in doing so, control meaning. Such prior knowledge can facilitate the insertion of oppositional texts that expose these calculated ideological controls, and bring to light socially relevant and progressive issues to a wide cross-section of the population.

Videography

Music Videos:

Big Audio Dynamite, "E-MC2" Music Video, Dir. Luc Roeg & Don Letts, Music Televison, 1986.

Buggles, The. "Video Killed the Radio Star." Music Video, Dir. Russell Mulcahy, Music Television, 1981.

Cars, The. "You Might Think." Music Video, Dir. Jeff Stein & Charlex, Music Television, 1984.

Dixie Chicks, The. "Not Ready to Make Nice" Music Video, Dir. Sophie Muller, Much Music, 2006.

Glass Tiger, "Don't Forget Me When I'm Gone" Music Video, Dir. unknown, Much Music, 1986.

Jackson, Michael. "Beat It." Music Video, Dir. Bob Giraldi, Music Television, 1983.

Lauper, Cindy. "She-Bop" Music Video, Dir. Edd Griles, 1984

Madonna, "Material Girl" Dir. Mary Lambert, Much Music, 1984

Madonna, "Vogue" Music Video, Dir. David Fincher, Much Music, 1990

Madonna, "Papa Don't Preach" Music Video, James Foley, Much Music, 1986.

Manson, Marilyn. "The Beautiful People", Music Vidoe Dir. Floria Sigismondi, Much Music, 1996.

Manson, Marilyn. "Tourniquet" Music Video, Dir. Floria Sigismondi, Much Music 1996.

Pearl Jam, "Jeremy" Dir. Jeremy Pellington, Much Music, 1992.

Queen, "Radio Ga Ga" Music Video, Dir. David Mallet, Much Music, 1984.

Rage Against the Machine, "Sleep Now in the Fire," Dir. Michael Moore, Much Music, 2000

Yankovic, Weird Al, "Eat It" Dir. Jay Levey, Music Music, 1984

Too Much 4 Much Videos:

Inside "Outside": Too Much 4 Much Dir. Will Thomas. Videocassette. Much Music, 1998.

Too Much 4 Much: Marilyn Manson. Dir. Avi Lewis. Videocassette. Much Music, 1996.

Language Lab II: Too Much 4 Much. Dir. Avi Lewis. Videocassette. Much Music, 1997.

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Appendix A

The following section contains lyric transcriptions of the songs and videos analyzed in-depth in chapter three.

"Outside" (1998) by George Michael.

Think I'm Done With The Sofa
I think I'm done with the hall
I think I'm done with the kitchen table, baby

Let's go outside (let's go outside)
In the sunshine
I know you want to, but you can't say yes
Let's go outside
In the moonshine
Take me to the places that I love best

So my angel she says, don't you worry
'Bout the things they're saying, yeah
Got no friends in high places
And the game that you gave away
Wasn't worth playing

Let's go outside
In the sunshine
I know you want to, but you can't say yes
Let's go outside
In the meantime
Take me to the places that i love best

And yes I've been bad
Doctor won't you do with me what you can
You see I think about it all the time
Twenty four seven

You say you want it, you got it
I never really said it before
There's nothing here but flesh and bone
There's nothing more, nothing more
There's nothing more

Back to nature, just human nature
Getting on back to -

I think I'm done with the sofa
I think I'm done with the hall
I think I'm done with the kitchen table, baby

Let's go outside
In the sunshine
I know you want to, but you can't say yes
Let's go outside
In the moonshine
Take me to the places that i love best

And yes I've been bad
Doctor won't you do with me what you can
You see I think about it all the time
I'd service the community
(but i already have you see!)
I never really said it before

There's nothing here but flesh and bone
There's nothing more, nothing more
There's nothing more
Let's go outside
Dancing on the d-train baby

When the moon is high
And the grass is jumpin'
Come on, just keep on funkin'
Keep on funkin', just keep on funkin'

"Leviticus Faggot" (1996) by Me'Shell Ndegeocello

Faggot better run learn to run 'cuz daddy's home
His sweet lil' boy just a little too sweet
Every night the man showed the faggot what a real man should be
The man and the faggot will never see
for so many can't even perceive a real man Tell me

Not that the faggot didn't find a woman fine and beautiful
He admired desired their desires
He wanted love from strong hands
The faggot wanted the love of a man

His mother would pray
Save him, save him, save him from this life

Go to church boy
Faggot you're just a prisoner of your own perverted world
No picket fence acting like a bitch that's all he sees ain't that what faggot means
No love dreams
Only the favors sweet Michael performed for money to eat
'Cause the man kicked the faggot out the house at 16
Amen mother let it be
Before long he was crowned QUEEN for all the world to see bloody body face down
The wages of sin are surely death that's what mama used to say
So there was no sympathy

Let he without sin walk amongst the hated and feared and know true trial and tribulations
See my dear we're all dying for something searchin' and searchin'
Soon mama found out that god would turn his back on her too

Save me save me from this life
I pray to my Lord above save me they say you're the way the light

---

"The Beautiful People" (1996) by Marilyn Manson

And I don't want you and I don't need you
Don't bother to resist, or I'll beat cha
It's not your fault that you're always wrong
The weak ones are there to justify the strong

The beautiful people, the beautiful people
It's all relative to the size of your steeple
You can't see the forest for the trees
You can't smell your own shit on your knees

There's no time to discriminate,
Hate every motherfucker
That's in your way

Hey you, what do you see?
Something beautiful, something free?
Hey you, why you trying to be mean?
You live with apes man, it's hard to be clean

The worms will live in every host
It's hard to pick which one they eat most

The horrible people, the horrible people
It's as anatomic as the size of your steeple
Capitalism has made it this way,
Old-fashioned fascism will take it away

Hey you, what do you see?
Something beautiful, something free?
Hey you, why you trying to be mean?
You live with apes man, it's hard to be clean

There's no time to discriminate,
Hate every motherfucker
That's in your way

Hate! [x8]

The beautiful people
The beautiful people (aahh)
The beautiful people
The beautiful people (aahh)
The beautiful people
The beautiful people (aahh)
The beautiful people
The beautiful people (aahh)

Hey you, what do you see?
Something beautiful, something free?
Hey you, why you trying to be mean?
You live with apes man, it's hard to be clean

Hey you, what do you see?
Something beautiful, something free?
Hey you, why you trying to be mean?
You live with apes man, it's hard to be clean

The beautiful people, the beautiful people
The beautiful people, the beautiful people
The beautiful people, the beautiful people
The beautiful people, the beautiful people