

New, improved MTV still the same

A female Elvis impersonator gyrates on the screen and mutters a few non sequiturs about her art. When she finishes, the MTV logo flashes on the screen. . . . Click. . . . The scene switches to MTV VJ Julie Brown, who has been reduced to the size of a Bic lighter. As she introduces the new Tiffany video, she speaks from a tiny television set covered with flashing day-glo geometric patterns.

Later, as Tiffany's pubescent wail fades, a teen-age boy is shown babbling about his girlfriend and his hometown. He mutters something about his town being nothing but a haven for pancake houses; then the MTV logo is seen again. . . . Click. . . . Julie Brown is back to introduce the new Whitesnake video. As she squeals in her grating British accent, psychedelic lights distort her face.

Once Whitesnake has finished headbanging, we see a group of surrealist muses wearing togas on a dimly lit stage, talking to Beat poet Allen Ginsberg. "I have seen the best minds of my generation," one proclaims. Another muse mentions something about the best minds of the generation tooling around suburbia in BMWs, reading the Wall Street Journal and living in corporate bliss. As they finish, the MTV logo flashes on the screen.

Then it's back to Julie Brown, who now has her face superimposed over some Keith Haring pop-art mural. But she's not about to recite Beat poetry or deliver some message about the apathy of youth. She's just talking about Stevie Nicks' new concert tour.

When it began in 1981, MTV was a forum for introducing new music to the masses, an alternative to the top-40 and AOR repetition on radio. Seven years later, MTV is merely top-40 and AOR radio's video counterpart. But it's more. MTV is perhaps the first broadcast medium to actually make fun of its audience.

This notion was first evidenced in a series of promotional ads in the network aired last fall. In one ad, a teenage airhead girl babbled about how horrible her boyfriend was. She proceeded to tell some incoherent nonsense about her last dating disaster, then summed everything up: "And then I got in the car and decided I needed a doughnut or something." As the ad ended, a voiceover stated: "MTV . . . at last, a channel for the way you think."

One of the best promotional ads

was a parody of beer commercials. Corny, ethereal music played as scenes of nature, mountain streams, hang gliders jumping off cliffs and eagles soaring were juxtaposed with ad copy like "Pop it open . . . Pop it open . . . Pop open an MTV." At the end, a working-class palooka was shown opening a can of MTV Beer. "This stuff tastes awful!" he shrieked, grimacing as he swallowed the unsavory booze. The ending voiceover stated: "MTV . . . we never said you could drink it."



Scott Harrah

These ads reek of self-parody, contempt for the network and contempt for the mindless viewers softening their brains as they absorb endless bad heavy-metal and top-40 videos.

About a year ago, MTV tried to beef up its old image. Veteran VJs like Martha Quinn and Nina Blackwood got the ax and were replaced with trendier, younger VJs like Julie Brown and Kevin Seal. Along with the new image came the high-tech graphics and the offbeat promos, but the music remained the same. New, alternative music was tucked away on a two-hour late Sunday night show, "120 Minutes," meaning that viewers could only see underground acts like Sonic Youth once a week but could see Debbie Gibson, Belinda Carlisle and Bon Jovi several times an hour, several times a day.

But the question is this: Why bother creating subversive ads when they only promote the new shopping-mall siren or the latest metal gods in leather and lipstick?

Does MTV's PR department truly believe the Michael Jackson and Bangles set has any idea who Allen Ginsberg is? Of course not. Perhaps the promos are MTV's way of proclaiming that although the network's executives have better taste in music, they can't program offbeat artists because 15-year-olds would rather groove to George Michael's "Father Figure" than Pussy Galore's or Mojo Nixon's latest. So we have to settle for incessant Belinda Carlisle videos

fused with Julie Brown shrunk down to the size of a pinhead to satisfy our craving for something original. But wouldn't we rather see better music than funky promos?

MTV also has tried to soothe the mainstream overkill blow by programming shows like "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and its own parody of a game show, "Remote Control."

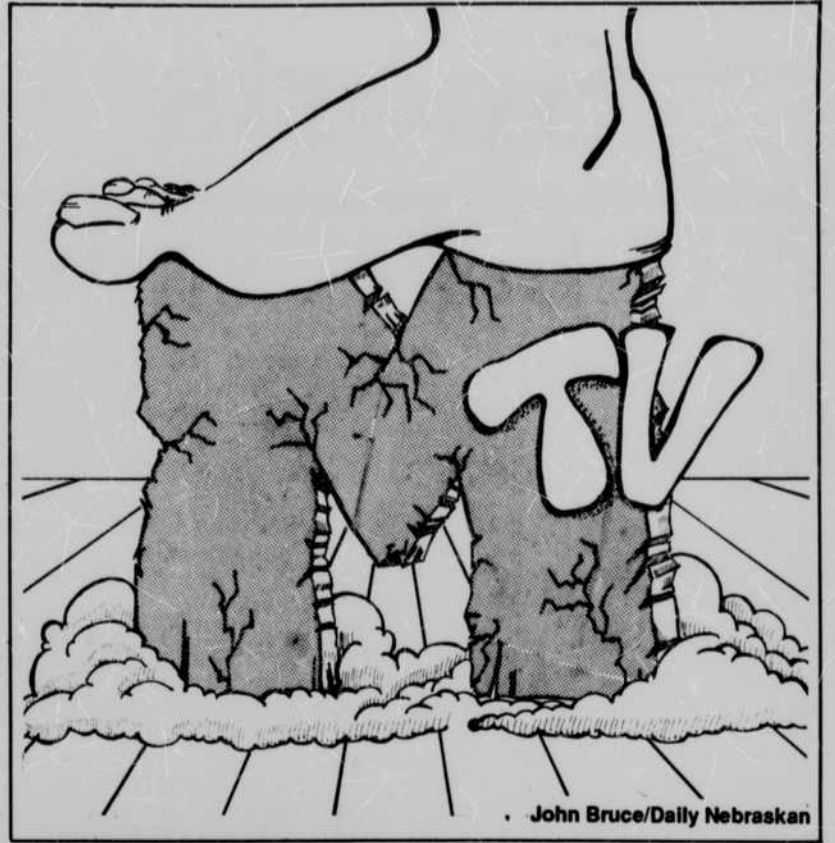
"Remote Control" is MTV's most blatant attempt to eviscerate its audience. The premise of the show is trivia about old, bad TV shows. Contestants choose from categories like The Brady Network to the Home Shopping Zone, a hilarious satirical slam aimed at the cable shopping channels. "Remote Control" contestants tend to be the most obnoxious frat boys from coast to coast, and the show's hosts put them on display in all their "hey, dude" idiocy and laugh as they make fools of themselves on national television. On one recent episode, the frat-boy contestants did so poorly that the host decided to disqualify them all and ordered three new contestants. This incident was most likely planned.

The show's Vanna White copy, Marisol Massey, is especially cruel to the frat boys. She constantly wears a condescending sneer on her face and strikes pompous fashion poses like a pint-size Bette Davis each time the camera is aimed at her. When frat boys choose the Sing Along With Colin category, they must listen to co-host Colin sing atonal versions of Bon Jovi and Van Halen songs a cappella, then sing the next few lyrics when Colin's finished. As the frat boys screech out "Livin' On a Prayer," Marisol wrinkles up her face and claps with sarcastic relish.

MTV should be commended for its irreverence because its self-parody is an amusing antidote for guilt — guilt for spawning the MTV generation, guilt for making Tiffany a superstar. But the promos do not make the network more palatable. If anything, they are unintentional warnings for those who choose to revile the "Shake Your Love" life. Why don't they just come out and say their programming is paltry?

Besides, MTV executives must not feel that guilty. After all, they did start "Club MTV," Julie Brown's teenybopper disco dance show.

Harrah is a senior news editorial major and Daily Nebraskan night news editor.



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Deb Harry cameo movie's best scene

SATISFACTION from Page 6 role as Tina, one of the Falcon's ex-lovers who hangs around his kitchen. Supposedly she's romantic competition. Hardly. Debbie looks the middle age she's reached, but even next to fresh-faced Bateman, she's still the coolest female rock musician there ever was. Seeing her on the screen reminds one of just how pale other media creations, like a certain seven-letter-first-name bleached-blond singer, seem in comparison.

You really can't hate a movie that entertains you as hard as "Satisfaction" tries and tries and tries. Just when you think you're going to go out of your mind, one of the characters (usually Britta Phillips) says something completely outrageous to poke fun at the movie. You'd better see it while you can.

"Satisfaction" probably isn't going to stick around long, although I could be wrong, since it placed in the top 10 box-office hits for its opening weekend. In that case, "Satisfaction" doesn't deserve to stick around long. OK, maybe "Ironweed's" out right now. But if you want something that requires absolutely no thought or belief, if you like TV movies on the big screen with the added treat of hearing Mallory Keaton spew dirty words, you'll probably be satisfied with "Satisfaction."

"Satisfaction" is playing at the Plaza Four. It's PG-13, so you can take your mom.

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