

ABSTRACT

Caribbean Ventilation:
Experiencing Television as Window in the Anglophone Islands

Marsha Pearce

This qualitative study explores the phenomenon of screen media reception in an Anglophone Caribbean context with the aim of illustrating how television and audience operate in Caribbean culture. Specifically, it looks at audience engagement with TEMPO, a cable television channel launched in 2005. TEMPO is promoted as “the first and only 24-hour, pan-Caribbean television channel dedicated to all things Caribbean.” Using the methodology of phenomenography, a strategy of enquiry which holds that there are qualitatively different ways of experiencing a phenomenon—an approach that sees the experience of a phenomenon as comprising different aspects or dimensions—the study asks the overarching question: In what ways does an Anglophone Caribbean audience experience TEMPO and its principal screen text: the music video? The dissertation argues that in the reception of TEMPO, an Anglophone Caribbean audience engages with the television as a virtual window and experience Caribbean ventilation. The term Caribbean ventilation is deployed in the study as the active scrutiny and interrogation of notions of “Caribbean.” Ventilation also refers to a metaphoric aeration, a flow or circulation between a represented Caribbean and a personal/lived Caribbean. The study gives nuances to a picture of television consumption in a Caribbean context, which has largely been painted in the monochromatic palette of passivity. Findings show that key to the audience-television interaction is functional equivalence, in other words, the audience sees TEMPO and its music videos as a paraphrase, which for them, must carry the same meanings as or be functionally equivalent to a lived Caribbean. Five dimensions of experiencing Caribbean ventilation are also identified: expectant acceptance, ambivalence, resistance, articulation and self-ventilation. The dissertation contributes to our understanding of a people grappling in the twenty-first century with the still emergent term “Caribbean” and reinforces television’s legitimacy in a climate characterised by a rise of new media.

Keywords: Television Studies; Mass Media and Culture; Popular Culture; Television and Music Videos; Television Audience; Caribbean; Identity; TEMPO Television Channel; Phenomenography; Marsha Pearce