

The naked truth about us and America

Boob tube

by **Bill Brioux**

Sun Media

Janet Jackson spoofed her infamous wardrobe malfunction by flashing a heavily pixillated breast on Saturday Night Live this weekend.

Ten weeks ago, the U.S. freaked when the singer's tempest in a C-cup shook the Super Bowl halftime show.

In Canada? Last week, Junos host Alanis Morissette stripped down to a flesh-coloured body suit, complete with fake nipples and a giant mop of pubic hair, and declared, "I am overjoyed to be back in my homeland, the true North, strong and censor-free."

Is that true? Is there, uh, cleavage between the two countries when it comes to nudity and censorship on TV? Are public attitudes different here?

The answer seems to be yes.

After all, even though Morissette said Canadians "are not afraid of the female breast," she didn't really flash any flesh.

If you think CTV's switchboards would have lit up at the sight of a real Morissette mammary, consider this: The same weekend the Clear Channel radio network was tossing shock jock Howard Stern off its airwaves south of the border, the pay-TV service Viewer's Choice was offering Canadians a free porn-channel weekend.

Even on our specialty channels, sex and nudity are becoming commonplace. Every station seems to have its own Sex Files or Naughty Bits. The few Canadian dramas that remain on the air, such as The Eleventh Hour or Da Vinci's Inquest, have far more explicit sexual content than anything on NBC or ABC — and viewers here seem to take it in stride.

America, locked in an election showdown, is another story. The religious right is on high alert, and not one breast shall pass unscathed.

Jackson's brief boob flash triggered a storm of condemnation south of the border. A staggering 200,000 viewers called CBS to complain; the U.S. Federal Communications Commission threatened to fine CBS and its 200 affiliates \$36,000 US each for broadcasting indecent material.

The trickle turned into a torrent. A delay was slapped on the Academy Awards (for the first time). In the strangest irony, NBC snipped a quick peek at an elderly woman's breasts out of an episode of ER.

Canadian viewers sometimes flip out, but our hot buttons are different. Conan O'Brien's Triumph the Insult Comic Dog was attacked on the floor of the House of Commons for pooping all over Quebec. A seven-second delay was imposed on Hockey Night In Canada's Coach's Corner, not because Don Cherry flashed a boob, but because he is a boob.

On Canadian screens it's like this: Sex good, racial attacks bad.

More eye-opening seems to be the disturbingly base trend in U.S. reality fare.

This week, Fox network brings The Swan, a nightmarish series which takes 16 plain-looking women and, through extreme cosmetic surgery, attempts to transform them into something quaintly acceptable in American society: Beauty-pageant contenders.

The result is far more pornographic than anything seen on TV before — either in Canada or the U.S.

The message is that you can carve, remove and "enhance" a breast on U.S. TV. Just don't show a breast.

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CUTS BOTH WAYS ... The FOX network's extreme cosmetic surgery show, The Swan.