“The Worst Show in the History of Television!” : Uncovering the Truth Behind the Popularity of The Jerry Springer Show

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Rise to Popularity

Based on the traditional female talk-show
- The public v.s. the private

Increasing competition = lowering standards
- The inclusion of the “Other”

“The standards of television have gone to an all-time low, and I’m here to represent the change.”

- Jerry Springer
Thesis Argument

- Democratic and egalitarian forum or profit-seeking consumer mechanism?
- Result: Democratic facade fueled by coded mechanisms
  - a particular perspective for the viewer.
- The Participatory Illusion
  - veils the underlying profit-based motivations of the show
  - dependent upon the assumption of a separated social order
- The Politics of Transgression
Underlying Motives

The Show is a product of NBC Universal Studios

dependency on the supporting network produces the need to create the participatory illusion.

Blurring the lines

How Springer fits in

The format, guests, audience, and viewer
The Coded Mechanisms

- The Camera
  - intricate method of identification

- The Conversational Process
  - Turn-taking process creates perspective

- The Questioning Framework
  - meant to evoke specific reactions from the guest, audience, and viewer

- Conflict Resolution
  - No Therapists
  - Emotionality = Authenticity
The Participatory Illusion

- “attacks the authority of the ego through degradation and flaunts the material body as a pleasurable grotesquerie.”
  - Stallybrass and White, 183

- Suspending hierarchies

- Sad realization of not belonging
Maintenance of The Social Order

- Why can they utilize this strategy?

- Dependent upon having two social spheres
  - The threat of social integration

The Moral Majority

The "Other"
How Springer Maintains The Social Order

- The politics of transgression

- Historical Examples:
  - Theatre – elevated boxes separate unruly audiences
    - allows the success of the coded identifications and creation of perspective
  - Carnival – Utopian promise, fear of inclusion, exploitation of the phobia
  - Coffee House - inclusive and exclusive, list of rules
The Politics of Transgression Within The Show

- Fighting within the show
  - What the norm should never be
  - Cohesion through exclusion

- Within the show’s structure: guests, audience, host, and security

- Themes of the show
Perpetuating the Cycle

- uninterrupted cyclical process of maintaining the social order
- Oppositional product promotes viewership
- Threat and Resolution
- the show can create a threat and dispose of it simultaneously.
- Cultural hegemony is upheld by the self-exclusionary practices of the ruling social majority
- Enforces the boundaries of the social norm