

The Pornography Of Reality Content That Is Eating Away At Not Just The Fabric Of Society But Its Very Soul

In this MIPTV issue The Business of Film feels it is important to share an edited version of Jeff Zucker's address at NATPE so that members of the international community who weren't present at NATPE can have an opportunity to read it. WHY? I don't personally know Mr. Zucker, but a look at his resume shows this is a man who has risen to the position he is in from the bottom up. Running an unwieldy giant such as NBC Universal is no picnic. That he has chosen the best capable people to work with him shows the measure of the man who is setting the bar to achieve a creative working model within a viable financial landscape. But beyond that is the man's Vision itself.

Jeff Zucker clearly has a grasp of the URGENT need to STOP the waste in television programming and concentrate on content that the consumers want. Whilst he advocates stopping the waste, he underscores that the consumer is King and what it desires is timeless narratives that touch something universally human, that people want to be touched or moved or uplifted by a great story. Jeff Zucker is not just shaping NBC Universal into a profitable porthole for the shareholders. He is cogent that the key to ongoing success is 'adapting to change.' Perhaps the scripted series he talks about, rather than just pilots, will not always work, but he wants his creative people to go with their 'gut' and in doing so may very well succeed in one fell swoop in his mission to create content that can be sustained over a number of weeks or months. The satisfaction he offers is not only the creation of content that is uplifting and universally enthralling, but is avidly viewed by a public that is HUNGRY for CHANGE. Will Jeff Zucker achieve what he wants? Given time he can and will. WHY? Because he knows the system from the ground up, and with this knowledge and the fiscal power and wherewithal of NBC Universal, he can boldly go where no one has gone before.

Jeff Zucker's bold keynote speech was just part of the ethical catalyst for this comment. The other was the escalation of violence in both Film & television, which was brought to mind by a recent review in the New York Times by film critic O.A Scott writing about Funny Games: "...The conceit of Funny Games is that it offers a harsh, exacting critique of vulgar, violent amusements, a kind of homeopathic treatment for a public numbed and besotted by the casual consumption of images of suffering."

Why must film & television 'in general' particularly since the advent of reality TV, continuously perpetrate the rape of the consumer mind by the senseless foddors that Reality TV & pointlessly violent films portray? Can shows like Jerry Springer be termed to be uplifting? Day in and day out socially disenfranchised individuals 'perform' on the show to an orchestrated pornography of violence (security guards are on hand to wrestle people apart) that continues unabated, perpetrated by the major conglomerate that airs that show. Isn't it time for a moral thermometer to gauge not just the Jerry Springer show but also the countless other senseless shows that are aired daily across not just America but the world?

The constant 'dumbing down' of our society is reaching alarming levels, as the need for more and more content grows through the proliferation of technology and pursuit of the almighty dollar. Where is society headed? Already adult pornography is the biggest 'seller', not only over the internet and DVD, but via mobile phones. Does any one question that these 'reality' shows are reaching kids worldwide. In America for example kids under the age of 17, can drive at 16 but can't legally have sex until they are 18, can't consume alcohol legally until they are 21, but nonetheless can have access to guns? (A recent incident in the mid-west of America involved a child of 14 who had an arsenal of weapons some of which he apparently acquired himself.)

The fiber of our society is without question influenced by film and television, why do we continue to allow these powerful tools to be used to corrupt the fabric of LIFE, most always catering to the lowest common denominator that cannibalizes our senses with an orgy of depravity? In no way am I advocating censorship. I suggest we employ some global common sense. If these questions are not asked in 2008, by 2020 it may be too late. My comment this month was prompted by a bout of flu that confined me to bed, which I utilized as an opportunity to watch TV and survey what was really going on in 'our industry.' And I was truly taken aback by the saturation of inanity and violence.

Time and time again the industry sees that when it supports series such as The Tudors and John Adams, and other well written content that touches our souls, the public – the consumer – cannot get enough of it. There is plenty of money to be made in the TV & Film business by producing content that touches people. NBC Universal are now airing that brilliant detective series Monk. The marketing campaign (also brilliant) proclaims: "Monk is moving to NBC because we are clean." I would not be surprised if Mr. Zucker, sitting in his office in New York, didn't have a hand in that. It is time for CHANGE. Other successful shows that air on NBC such as Psych and Burn Notice point to the truism. Consumers want to be entertained with well scripted shows that make us laugh, cry, and have a sense of wonderment. That applies to television much more even than it does to film, because TV, due to its ultimately easily accessible technology offers a captive audience.

Perhaps just as Mr. Zucker has brought about change on many fronts to NBC Universal which in turn became the standard for the television industry at large, in time we will look back and see that his shrewd management and understanding of the complete process, and his 'gut' belief that good programming is the order of the day, will be responsible for changing the moral thermometer.