

IS THERE SPACE FOR GAME SHOWS ON CONTEMPORARY GHANA TV?

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Abstract: *The proliferation of game shows on contemporary Ghana tv within the cultural environment of modern Ghana impels this paper into being. Game shows like – Ghana Most Beautiful, Talented Kids, Date Rush, Mentor, ‘What do you know’ and in the past: “Agoro”, ‘Good Life Game Show’, ‘Who Wants to be Rich’, ‘UCMAS Arithmetic Quiz’, ‘The Pulpit’, ‘Football Challenge’, ‘M’Icons’, ‘Idols’, ‘Stars of the Future’, ‘Battle for discovery’ are some of the tv content that have cluttered the contemporary Ghanaian tv space. These have attracted a lot of audience appeal in contemporary Ghana. The purpose of this paper is to set off Game Shows as important in the Ghanaian contemporary tv space. Questions like- Why Game Shows? The functionality and the consequent reception of Game Shows will be touched upon.*

Keywords: game show; discursive modes; textual formats; cultural meanings

I. INTRODUCTION

There are different discursive modes of projecting textual formats on tv; these differentiated modes constitute the genres. That is to say that different tv programs can be compartmentalized into different genres viz. sitcoms, telenovellas, game shows, music shows, sports programs, news formats etc. Feuer (1987) asserts that the concept of genres in discourse within the framework of industrial arts i.e. TV and film- brings into a unified focus- the system of production, the structural analysis of the text and the reception process. The genre imposes the framework within which we can interpret a particular text. The text, thus offers a privileged locus for the analysis of cultural meaning, since tv is a cultural apparatus. Feuer (1987) indicates that the methodology an analyst brings to bear upon the texts determines the way in which the analyst will construct a particular genre.

“The games of a people reveal a great deal about them” (McLuhan 1964). McLuhan (1964) cites examples from modern Papua and ancient Greek societies and talks about games in ancient and non-literate societies which served as dramatic models of the universe, leeways through which psychological tensions were released (cf. Hjorth, 2011, 2009). Here we glimpse the communalistic poise of games (cf. Hjorth & Richardson, 2020). Raymond Williams (1975) recalls how several parlour games of old have appeared on TV as quiz and guessing games (ref. ‘Agoro’, and ‘Good Life Game Show’, ‘What do you know’, ‘Who wants to be rich’ in Ghana). Fiske (1987) stresses that game shows have their roots in radio, in party and community games. Williams (1975) also asserts that there is a connection between the ethos and conventions of many commercials and the games.

The binary oppositions of fact and fiction are fused together on TV. This is set off succinctly when the fact of competition is manipulated and transformed into the fictional universe of ads, which in turn link us to the real world.

The broadcasting system inheres a cosmos which garners as well as formulates the zeitgeist of a society. In dealing with the question of meaning of Game Shows, therefore, we have to bear in mind this tripartite conflation of the text, ideology and society.

TV programs operate within a system of broadcasting codes; without this system there will be no intelligible discourse. Broadcasting codes are the codes by which a culture communicates with itself. They are simple, have an immediate appeal, and do not require an “education” to understand them.

They are community oriented, they are frequently anonymous or have “institutional” authors.

There are a set formulae by which broadcasters produce programs which will fulfill the expectation of the audience- these formats constitute the genres of TV as already seen above. The form of any program on TV has been defined by Fiske (2010) as constituting an encoded message. Which is composed of units of TV behaviour combined according to conventional syntagmatic practices. The real meaning of a TV program hinges upon its form and not derived entirely from its content or themata.

The broadcasting system is structured along two axes i.e. the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic, further it can be regarded as the langue and the different discursive genres, the paroles. We can say within the logic of this that meaning necessarily works at connotative and denotative levels. The denotative aspect deals with how a particular sign can communicate a close approximation of reality, whereas connotation refers to all the cultural wealth of meaning we attach to a sign. We go beyond the diegesis of the TV program.

Every time we sit down to watch TV, this communicative event, has made paradigmatic choices from a corpus of programs (genres) within these programs a choice has been made amongst a paradigm of sounds, settings, characters, editing techniques, camera angles etc; for the meaning of the program to be complete the selected items must be combined. Meaning is derived from the relationship of the chosen items to another in this combination. It is the broadcasting institution which makes the paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices. The meaningful latent depths of a particular genre could be palpable if one conceptualizes the text as a cultural form.

This perspective is further reinforced by Fiske (1987) who recalls Levi-Strauss’ comparison of games with rituals, when he defines games as cultural forms in which the participants start out as equal and finish differentiated into winners and losers. Whereas rituals take differentiated groups and provide them with equalizing communal

meanings and identities. But then games move from similarity to difference, rituals from difference to similarity. On TV both the elements seen in rituals as well as games are experienced. “Talented Kids”, “Ghana Most Beautiful” ‘What do you know’, ‘Good Life Game Show’, ‘Who wants to rich’, ‘Stars of the Future’, ‘Icons’, ‘Football Challenge’, ‘Mentor’, ‘The Pulpit’ and so on all have a ritualistic format, for example- a ritual opening and a ritual ending. At the start all contestants are introduced and their backgrounds indicated. This as Fiske (1987) asserts puts the contestants on an equal pedestal.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fiske (1978) puts game shows among the group of programs he labels as “competition-conflict” type games (quiz program, sheepdog trials, sports broadcasts, beauty competition, music competition and so on). That what these programs have is the two-dimensional structure of relationships:

Most of the game shows on contemporary Ghana TV have this internal relationship. The horizontal relationships between player and player are expressed in terms of conflict governed by a set of rules that is meant to provide the same opportunity for all the players and a measurable result (Adansi&Oringo, 2019). This is seen in the seasonal musical game shows like ‘Talented Kids’, ‘Date Rush’, ‘Ghana Most Beautiful’, the quiz shows ‘What do you Know’

Further, the viewer is invited to participate by proxy and thus achieve a conscious result- he also wins and loses in the “fictive” universe of TV. The vertical relationship of evaluation imposes upon the viewer the realistic role of judge. This is reinforced by the power of the viewer to text his weekly favourite contestant to the competition. This is evident in most of the musical game shows like ‘Talented Kids’, ‘Date Rush’, ‘Ghana Most Beautiful’ and so on and this is characterized by weekly evictions. This counterpoises the viewers’ role as proxy, in this way he shares the role of the judge- he thus uses his cultural and realistic faculties to make the evaluation. This double role of viewer as player and judge is indeed revealed in ‘Ghana Most Beautiful’, ‘Talented Kids’, ‘Date Rush’ and so on.

Game shows are contrived like sports shows, while the sports event is structured by the rules of the game, the event moves from moment to moment in unpredictable ways (Herbert Zettl,1978). Sports shows generally have deterministic designs, thus it is the quality of the moment that counts. There is therefore no set plot structure that builds from crisis to crisis. Although then “live” dramatic moments are plastic. Zettl (1978) emphasizes that “when done with skill the live transmission of the event can change the audience from “viewers” to ‘percipients’ or even participants. As already indicated, competition shows on TV put the audience on the tripod of viewers, percipients and participants

To set off the audience in this way demands that the producers of these programs must have an intuitive as well as a subjective conception of them. This image of the audience neither derives from any empirically generated research nor from any formal quantitative method (Espinoza quoted by Ang,1991). Rather, as Ang (1991) stresses the ‘audience’ is a cultural category which the producers form from previous reactions to other programs or previous other like-programs and so on. During game shows the audience are active participants, the strident applause from the internal audience of game shows themselves is indicative of this.

During game shows prizes are won, and these are usually consumer goods and services. The commercial interests behind the game shows are immense, for they use the game shows to advertise their products, since these interests look at game shows as the cheapest means of advertising their products. They are presented as sponsors instead of advertisers.

It is necessary to mention that human beings are put forward as commodities too in game shows. Their habiliments and skills, for example, vocal or innate skills are sometimes in focus. This is a philosophy not quite apart from the machinations of commercial TV and the “sublimation” shows can be said to textualize the interaction between the audience and the advertiser. As

already mentioned in this paper, it is the institution of broadcasting that provides the link.

For the purposes of analysis of the game shows, Williams (1975) medium –range analytic approach to discourse i.e. “flow” as germane in this direction. Williams (1975) finds a logical connection between news programs, for our purposes game shows, together with their ads, promos and so on. This is primarily meant for us to see whether there is unity of purpose as regards the game shows together with their advertisement i.e. “flow”. This holds research possibilities for the Ghanaian media researcher.

III. CONCLUSION:

This paper has discussed the genre of the Game Show in terms of its discursive formations. The text of Game shows was also discussed and suggestions were made as to how to analyse the genre for future research. Williams (1975) analytic approach of the “flow” was recommended, since TV was seen as a seamless cultural apparatus. Discourse was seen as a heuristic tool that will conflate the system of production of Game Shows, the text itself and the reception of the program per se.

The broadcasting institution that transmits the Game Shows was also seen as circumscribing a cosmos which formulates the zeitgeist of the Ghanaian society. In dealing, therefore, with the meaning of Game Shows we have to bear in mind the tripartite combination of text, ideology and society.

It is the hope of this writer that the Game Show texts on Ghana tv channels and the reception of these shows as well as their cultural environment space will be subjected to analysis and interpretation for future research.

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