

Laugh-Tracks

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I am not sure when it occurred. Probably several years ago, but one day, I was watching television, a comedy of some sort, when I heard a *laugh-track*; not in the passive sense where it slips by unnoticed in the background, but I actually *heard* it isolated from the context of the program, the revelation of which, had caused me to consider it... I'm not sure what my initial response was, but perhaps it was a mixture of curiosity, perplexity, and perhaps laughter at the laugh-track. Over the years, I've reflected a little bit on laugh-tracks and their significance, and this very brief and introductory analysis contains some of my thoughts on this subject. Throughout this article, I'll be using the word laugh-track primarily in a general sense because this phenomenon involves more than mere laughter but a whole diverse assortment of expressions to induce more than just laughter from the viewing audience.

In light of the potential power television programs have to influence people and acquire money for those involved with their production, it is not particularly shocking that the laugh-track was invented and has been widely used for decades. Since laugh-tracks have had such a long reign in television, it seems obvious that these recordings are a tried and proven method for supporting the actors in their role of entertaining the audience. The more entertaining the program, the more people will want to watch it, and the more viewers the program acquires the more advertisers will be willing to pay for a time-slot, therefore, any device which may help to engender an atmosphere to entertain and bring in a larger audience is taken rather seriously. Hence, we have the ongoing insanity of the laugh-track. It has become such a well-integrated aspect within our culture that a strong awareness of its existence—despite the fact that its hearty mirth and other noises can be heard pummeling millions and millions of ears, many, many times in one single day—is barely recognized.

Laugh-tracks are carefully utilized to evoke certain emotions at a particular moment, in response to a particular situation at a specific level of intensity for a

certain, measured amount of time. Fine shades and degrees are utilized. The producers are most unwilling to leave the entertaining potential of the program to ungoverned possibilities. Every conceivable aspect within their power to control that the intended effect might be achieved, is usually given attention and employed, and often in a scientific manner to jerk the puppet strings of the viewer. For example: if it is a scene that is attempting to be sexually provocative, and by that I mean one where a flirtation is taking place or a kissing scene or a couple in bed, (which often involves fornication or adultery) shouts and a whole choir of something like *oooooooooing* and *whoooooing* noises from the illusion of an audience, and other assorted expressions are heard to encourage us in getting involved and excited in the situation.

In scenes where jokes are made, the laugh-tracks rise and fall, and the manner and length of the roars, laughter and clapping—most being that of a mixture of sounds—are wholly dependent upon how funny the producers or whomever, consider the joke, statement, or situation, to be. For example, what they believe to be a mildly humorous joke is accompanied with the recording of some *mild* laughter before quickly dying down, and what they construe as being a really funny joke is accompanied by a more firm and further twist of the laugh-track knob or press of the button (or however they do it!) to produce a longer, more effusive, voluminous roar of mirth, a veritable cataract of joy from the recorded crowd.

It is of some importance to briefly note that it is a *crowd* that is recorded since a crowd will naturally enhance the probability of inducing a response from the listener. We are all susceptible, whether for good or evil, (or a mixture of the two) to the sway of the crowd, to that vast, powerful majority, and this dynamic is certainly exploited by the broadcasters to achieve their goals.

Also, you will notice it is the veiled, mysterious *they* who are deciding what programs to broadcast and the kind of response we should be feeling, and when and for exactly how long we should be feeling it. This *should* provoke us to ask a question regarding who (which could include those residing further back in the shadows such as the philosophers who influenced *others* who influenced *them*) exactly *they* are, and what exactly are *they* attempting to express, and what kind of viewers are *they* trying to make with their programs and emotionally manipulating effects.

When a cute, sentimental, *touching* scene is taking place on a broadcast, a certain type of expression like...*awwwwwwww*—the kind of sound little girls and adults sometimes make around babies, puppies and kittens—is often employed.

These are just a few of the recorded sound effects used to induce a particular response from the viewer. Many other variations of the laugh-track are used in programming to garner a specific response.

Is this not astonishing? Certainly we expect them to try and achieve some kind of an emotional response, but to try and manipulate that response by using, in a covert fashion, a recording to make sure we feel just a certain way, at a certain level, and at certain moments for a certain amount of time, is absurd, and in the opinion of this writer, insidious, especially in light of the worldviews commonly communicated by these programs.

On a side note: It is interesting that shows on television are often referred to as *programs* or *programming* because that is pretty much what they are trying to do, which is program us to think and respond in a certain way for their benefit and to embrace the ideas and various worldviews they are attempting to express. People cannot help but express at least something from their worldview—it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for someone to completely avoid doing so—therefore, it is crucial for us, on every front, to try and ascertain what worldview is currently trying to infiltrate our minds that its undesirable elements might be cast aside and desirables (elements corresponding to truth) received.

Have you ever considered the influence laugh-tracks have over you, and how manipulative they are? Your response will indicate, to some degree, the success or failure the television industry has had in trying to be inconspicuous with their effects. They have been successful in meshing the laugh-track within their programs to such an extent that we are not even aware of its weirdness, which, by way of implication, veils its frightening ramifications. They have trained us through a process, which I have termed the *inundation method*, whereby, after being bludgeoned for so long by their mind-numbing effects, we get used to it, and tragically, often start to *like* it and respond to it in a passive, unconscious sort of way.

Let us strive to become more and more informed and aware of the vast array of influences working on us for good or evil—or more often than not, a mixture between good and evil—and respond accordingly by resisting appeals to our flesh no matter how long such allurements have been seamlessly interwoven within our culture. American culture is one that stresses sensations (and often sinful ones) over thought, rather than allowing for a balance between healthy sensations and reason. Some cultures emphasize reason over feeling and intuition, though more often than not, it's the other way around, but the best approach is to try and synthesize both in our thinking, to have a healthy integration and interaction (within the context of an increasingly biblically informed mindset) between both of these aspects regarding our person.

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