

ABC's 'Splash': The Era of Spectacle Television

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COMMENTARY | I admit it. I feel slightly dirty, like I'm betraying my brain. I've become part of the problem.

I watched ABC's "[Splash](#)," the show where "stars" dive into a pool. Maybe it was the irresistible draw of rooting for Rudi from "The Cosby Show," who now, inexplicably, goes by the name of Keisha Knight Pulliam. Maybe it was the strange crush on co-host Joey Lawrence I haven't been able to shake since the days of "Blossom."

All I know is I programmed in the name to my TiVo and hit "Season Pass."

Don't think I think I'm too good for reality shows. I watch most flavors of "Housewives," still love "Project Runway," and am familiar enough with the genre to see Kevin Hart's "Real Husbands of Hollywood" for the genius that it is (and it is. If you're not watching it, you should be).

I've watched enough to lose track of Top Models and Design Stars and Top Chefs and Food Network Stars, with seasons compressing into one megaseason in my head.

But I've never watched "Dancing with the Stars." The idea of women vying over one guy who doesn't seem that amazing to start in "The Bachelor" turned me off. I cringe for the people on "Wipeout."

So why "Splash?"

That's what makes it so bad. Someone might get hurt, and I simply can't look away. And, aside from the aforementioned Rudi and possibly some others to be determined later, I don't think I'm watching with empathy.

Now, in all fairness, I am a huge fan of the absurd and the surreal. I think that's what keeps me going back to "Housewives," because there the real and the unreal live side-by-side, without question or an internal sense of irony.

And the opening sequence of "Splash," replete with synchronized swimmers and underwater cameras and people diving like lemmings into a crowded pool with Joey Lawrence and Charissa Thompson standing poolside in formal clothes was so like the odd dreams I've been having lately, I wasn't sure exactly what I'd seen actually happened.

For me, the show is a tribute to what the human mind can come up with while simultaneously putting the human mind in some hypnotic trance. There is no thinking with a show like this; thinking makes it impossible to follow. You must take only what you are handed, there is no absorption, there is no interaction between show and audience, not on an artistic level. It's like one of those automated puppet shows that goes on and on in a loop, whether anyone's watching or not.

Maybe there is room for a show like this, but my fear is that, someday, it might be the only form of entertainment we have. Not thinking is sometimes the goal of entertainment, but should it always be the goal? Should it be our sole option?

Watching this kind of show encourages more of this kind of show, while smart, crafted scripted shows like "Happy Endings" and "Community" have constant fear for their fate. Perhaps there is room for both, but it's starting to feel like one is crowding out the other.

And I don't think I'm helping by watching what could only be dubbed spectacle television. And yet I can't seem to stop.