

# The worst television is better than no television\*

A pior televisão é melhor que nenhuma televisão

FELIPE DE CASTRO MUANIS \*\*

Universidade Federal Fluminense, Departamento de Cinema e Vídeo,  
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação. Niterói-RJ, Brasil

## ABSTRACT

The discussion of a program quality by means of a communication process with its viewer makes generalizations impossible. The constant criticism to television refers, primarily, to its contents, but it is also form, broadcasting, medium and a communication process through which the audience can interrelate in a hermeneutical style, taking Gadamer's theory — which advocates that one interprets something from one's own history and experience. If what is said on television is more important than what is shown, then its quality is less in its content and more in its capacity to create communication and generate discussion between its viewers and society, although the latter frequently addresses programs as being low quality.

**Keywords:** Quality television, content, producerly text, hermeneutics

## RESUMO

Discutir a qualidade de um programa em um processo de comunicação com seu espectador impossibilita generalizações. A crítica constante à televisão se refere preferencialmente a seus conteúdos quando é também forma, transmissão, meio e um processo de comunicação em que o público se relaciona de modo hermenêutico, tomando como base a teoria de Gadamer, em que se interpreta algo a partir da própria experiência e vivência. Se mais importante do que o que é exibido é o que se fala da televisão, sua qualidade está menos em seu conteúdo e mais na capacidade de criar comunicação e de gerar discussão entre seus espectadores e a sociedade, mesmo que esta tematize frequentemente programas tidos como de baixa qualidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Televisão de qualidade, conteúdo, textos produzíveis, hermenêutica

\* This paper has been presented in the Conference *Qu'est-ce qu'une télévision de qualité*, organized by Ceisme/Sorbonne Paris III, 10-12 set. 2012. Translation: Carolina Alfaro de Carvalho.

\*\* PhD in Communication from UFMG with studies in Bauhaus Universität-Weimar. Professor of television and digital media of Departamento de Cinema e Vídeo - UFF. Professor of Graduate in Communication and coordinator of research group Entelas. Journalist, art director and illustrator associated to SIB, Brazilian Society of Illustrators. E-mail: muanis@mac.com

## INTRODUCTION

THE PROPOSAL FOR this paper is based on a question: why do we need quality television? In other words, can *quality TV*, as a theoretical concept, be considered an essential guideline for a discussion of television, whether in the field of research or in that of criticism?

The concept of quality television first appears in Jane Feuer's well-known book, *MTM Quality Television*, of 1984, which analyzes MTM Entertainment's production design and content, which bring a change of paradigm for television programs. They would be differentiated by attributes that bring about better quality. From *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* to *Lou Grant* and *Hill Street Blues*, which later firmed the tendency, such series stand out with a level of quality not previously seen, brought by independent producers who breathe oxygen into programming with new ideas and creativity, daring and breaking the old paradigms, free of the rigidity of the majors, leaving behind the studios and filming on location. These were new programs which allowed diverse levels of understanding and served a relatively young, sophisticated and urban public with texts considered of good quality. They were literary programs, complex and profound, which at the same time offered the pleasurable entertainment required of the medium by the "average spectator", according to Johnson (2005: 58). Thompson (1996), in turn, emphasizes that it's easier to explain quality television for what it is not; that is, traditional television:

Twin Peaks was universally praised by critics for being "unlike anything we'd ever seen on television". In a medium long considered artless, the only artful TV is that which isn't like all the rest of it. Quality TV breaks rules. [...] Quality TV usually has a quality pedigree. Shows made by artists whose reputations were made in other, classier media, like film, are prime candidates. (Thompson, 1996: 13-14)

Thompson also points out some characteristics of quality television and argues that the programs identified in this way end up having similar characteristics and become a genre of their own, internal to television, although one of their characteristics is precisely the mix of genres. These programs differ from the conventional and habitual; are distinguished by their technicians and actors, who back quality television production at the expense of other types of production which are more common; and they attract a select and opinion-forming public with a higher educational level, who are therefore considered more refined. The programs tend to deal with time and memory, referring to previous episodes, and are, in a sense, more realistic, based on the text, with content that tends to be controversial and deal with taboos; that is, they are less conservative. More daring, this genre often has problems with audience

expectations and, consequently, with broadcaster policies with regard to scheduling, positioning in the programming and continuity. It is a self-conscious TV which refers to itself, with allusions to both high culture and popular culture, with large casts which allow multiple plots and diverse viewpoints about interpretation on the part of viewers, making it acclaimed by critics and the more select public alike. Taking these as characteristics of the quality television genre, its associated viewer would be, then, the viewer of modernity.

But quality television is not defined only by a change in logic and in the production systems which come from independent producers like MTM, in the 1970s; nor is it only a revolution of content and genres. For John Caldwell, the care taken with the form is also characteristic of quality television, creating a televisuality. This care can be manifested both in a cinematic image with zone lighting, creating depth in the televised image, as well as by the profusion of digital graphics and vignettes, allowing for another visuality which had previously not been much explored. Caldwell (1995) also states that, in the mid-1980s, the changes seen on television were more in the graphics, the scenery and the lighting than in the content itself. Such features were seen in shows like *Hill Street Blues*, but not in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which still made use of flat and frontal lighting, reducing the feeling of depth. As for graphics, video clips and also broadcasters' vignettes in their programs, and especially on MTV, one sees the televisuality and self-reference of television.

For Thompson, however, quality television is nothing more than the transposing of the concept of art film, i.e., the *quality* adapts and reaffirms modern logic for television, establishing a value judgment based on the parallel between the art film and the blockbuster, on one hand, and quality television and the common program, on the other. It is important, however, to reflect on some of these definitions to understand what the changes are that result in a television considered of higher quality.

The period between 1947 and 1960 was called The Golden Age of Television, and, according to Robert J. Thompson, did not deserve this name, since television at that time was of very bad quality. Still, especially in the beginning, intellectuals had not yet developed such a great rejection of television, still seeing in it the possibility of an interesting instrument to disseminate culture and literature.

Brazil has the remarkable example of *Jornal de Letras*<sup>1</sup>, published from 1949 for arts and literary criticism exponents, like Álvaro Lins, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, José Lins do Rego and Manuel Bandeira, excited with the new media possibilities of be a new support to literature. Few realized television as an independent potential like Péricles Leal, who defends an *author television*, following the '60s european modern cinema tendencies.

1. About television criticism at *Jornal de Letras*, Freire Filho (2004).

With time and the influence of discourses on the culture industry, especially that of the School of Frankfurt, television became frowned upon and sidelined by intellectuals, who began to look critically and hopelessly upon it. This is when the growth of cultural theories contrary to mass culture and so also to television occurs, giving rise to the misconception of the viewer's passivity, still supported by many. According to Catherine Johnson (2005), it is precisely at this time that TV began to be measured by the number of viewers, which reinforces such speculations. In the following decade, however, television began to be measured also by the type of viewer, which changes programming and creates what Feuer calls quality television: a spectator between 18 and 49 years of age, liberal, urban, refined and demanding with regard to content, form and aesthetics – an opinion maker. That is, the TV market had found, at least for the researchers, their ideal spectator.

Thompson points to the '80s as the real Golden Age of television, when programs became more sophisticated. And so it was that the concept of quality television emerged, with Jane Feuer's book and the various changes in the dynamics of television, followed by crises at broadcasters, deregulation and the deepening of the narrowcast companies as a differential. In this sense, the case of HBO is exemplary in setting a new reference for quality in its programs, creating a new paradigm to be copied by other narrowcasters and even broadcasters, absorbing the differentiation into its slogan by opposing regular television: *It's not TV, it's HBO*. In the 1990s, that fragmentation deepened, and the market segmented into niches, also influenced by cultural studies and the end of the grand narratives, and by the distinction of its programs to attract specific audiences. This is, according to Geoff Mulgan, even one of the paths of quality that can characterize television: that of diversity.

Much of the path taken in previous decades by television until it got to the quality *genre*, proposed by the authors cited, has a rapprochement with the concepts of paleo- and neo-television elaborated by Umberto Eco at "TV la trasparenza perduta" chapter in his book *Sette anni di desiderio*, which subsequently received a more in-depth treatment by Francesco Casetti and Roger Odin at "De la paléo- à la neotélévision: Approche sémio-pragmatique", and then were developed by many other authors. The most dramatic changes from paleo- to neo-television, besides existing in the same time period leading to quality television<sup>2</sup>, result in the same characteristics, whether in structure, production methodology and organization; in its form or content; in the characteristics that define it as its own genre; or because of understanding it as modern television, endorsed by producers and technicians as well as by a refined public,

2. The turn from paleo to neo-television temporality is not strict and determined but on the contrary permeates one and other. Today both coexist in a hyper-television. About paleo, neo and hyper-television concepts, our thesis is a theory turn, in that they left to be temporalities that defines television to be paleo, neo and hyper attention modes, from contact, uses and relationship between spectator and television. More details, see Muanis (2013).

often contrary to the demand for numbers and the immediate subordination to audience statistics.

It is impossible to research television without relating television programs, their analysis, content, form and means of production with technology both for production and distribution, exhibition and dialogue with other media, their political and communication dimensions as agents of a discourse and their relation to the spectator. It is this confluence of factors that make television change day to day, systematically, and have more and more of a theoretical and analysis potential. So the first question is important: could what is conventionally called quality television not be merely a natural change in the nature of television itself, which, between the 1970s and '80s, most strongly articulated these variables, providing a result which was more evident in some of the programs? That being the case, could we say that, in any situation, the present has more quality than the past? Would it be correct to use *quality* to represent the complexity of a program or television series which is the fruit of these interconnections?

### QUALITY TV: IS THIS A LOCAL OR UNIVERSAL CONCEPT?

Another important point is to reflect on the development of the theoretical concept of quality television. There is a methodological difficulty in the study of television, which is to establish broad concepts that are applicable to different *televisiographies*<sup>3</sup>. That is, each country has its own television, with different analysis variables which are more complex than those for movies, for example. In television, the fields of content, aesthetics and politics are inextricably linked to their specific characteristics, like the programming, the technological possibilities, competition among different channels and their characteristics, the visibility of public or private channels, whether broadcast or narrowcast, the political conditions for granting and regulation of television, which also involve the social issue, the regionalization or not of production and programming, among others.

Taking all these factors as tenets for the discussion of television, it is clear that different contexts require different televisions, which, in turn, have particular views on quality which do not necessarily stem from those seen before. So what is quality television for a French viewer? Is it the series *Strip-tease*, produced by Marco Lamensch and Jean Libon? Is it public TV programming, the Arts Channel or some private TV programs? As a Brazilian, could I determine what quality television is, at least in Brazil? In my understanding, in the Brazilian context, we would have quality television if we had a truly public television, strong and with regulation that would allow greater integration of the polysemy of discourse in private television, making room

3. The word *televisiography* is used here as analogous to cinema, as in the word *cinematography*.

for independent producers and for greater regionalization of production, decentralizing this from the major broadcasters. Such possibilities would certainly lead to greater integration of the country through television, and through the knowledge of a plural and diversified production. Moreover, for Rede Globo (Globo Television), the leading Brazilian broadcaster that holds a vertical and centralized control of production, distribution and exhibition, following the successful cartel-like model of American movie studios in the 1930s, quality is in the star system, its production infrastructure and its care with content and image, to the point of keeping its commitment institutionalized in a slogan, as HBO did, with the well-known “Globo quality standard”, implemented by the station in the 1970s.

Thus, from the point of view of Rede Globo, what would be a quality program? Its soap operas, which are copied by other broadcasters and are seen around the world? Or would it be programs that follow the parameters indicated by theorists discussing quality television? Rede Globo has produced numerous programs that have a dialogue with the concepts mentioned, like the series *Malu Mulher (Malu)* and *Carga Pesada (Heavy Load)*, in the 1980s, at the same time as the miniseries *Morte e Vida Severina (Death and Life of Severina)*, based on the book by João Cabral de Melo Neto. In recent years, one of the television writers that has come closest to the ideal of a modern author in Brazilian television is Luis Fernando Carvalho, who does beautiful work, like *Hoje é Dia de Maria (Today is Maria's Day)*, *Capitu*, based on the work of Machado de Assis, and *A Pedra do Reino (The Stones of the Kingdom)*, an adaptation of the eponymous book by Ariano Suassuna. Carvalho works anthropophagically with the regional and the popular in television, mixing references of high and low culture without surrendering to safer mechanisms to keep the public and ensure a large audience. This latter, however, his programs do not have, because the narratives reach a more educated urban class of opinion makers. Even without a strong audience, Carvalho established his name in the pantheon of the few television writers recognized by Brazilian intellectuals as an author, and, perhaps because of this, Rede Globo still invests in his polished productions, including releasing DVDs of his programs. The use value and added value of Luis Fernando Carvalho's productions bring Rede Globo a unique product that fits the Globo quality standard.

In practice, there are two products that meet two distinct demands for quality, and which were taken over by the broadcaster. Is it possible, then, to establish a qualitative value judgment about soap operas, on one hand, and about Luís Fernando Carvalho's series, on the other? For Carvalho, teledramaturgy has as its main role that of being educational:

I am in search of a dramaturgy that represents us, that reveals a country of rich senses, but also a society of contradictory feelings. By getting closer to literature, I am distancing myself from any naturalistic form of staging where the actor aims for his performance to resemble that of his reality. I understand that a certain kind of naturalism that is normally done today in soap operas, movies or even theater doesn't even consolidate itself as a language, because it has a vocabulary dictated by the market. And this market seems to only privilege the immediate consecration and charisma of the performers, and not the art of the actor.<sup>4</sup>

4. During a lecture given at the VII International Television Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, on November 13, 2009.

While continuing in television, Carvalho's modern view makes TV an off-shoot of literature. For him, the quality is not in the soap operas. For the general public, in turn, soap operas have quality and therefore, from the quantitative point of view, attract a larger audience. And for the network, there is quality as much in the soap opera as in Carvalho's series.

But where is the quality for the researcher and theorist of television? To arrive at an answer, if that is possible, could we use, to understand the particularities of Brazilian programs, for example, a concept like that of quality television as it was originally conceived based on North American television production of the mid-80s? Even if this concept has gone beyond the limits of program analysis and of English and American theorists, as evidenced by colleagues and the rich papers presented at this event, is it possible to establish qualitative television criteria as a broad theoretical concept that can encompass different television contexts?

## QUALITY AND THE TELEVISION COMMUNICATION PROCESS

To speak of quality in television, as we saw earlier, one of the keys is the analysis of its form and content. Often, the analysis and validation of the program stand out more than the television product itself. The question that must be asked here is whether, to speak of quality TV or even to discuss television theoretically, the central analysis priority should be the program. John Fiske points out that there are three television texts. The primary ones are the texts themselves, the program texts. However, there are two other texts that are important for this analysis and which should not be forgotten: the secondary texts, for Fiske, are those that support the primary text, i.e., all the production of ads, posters, publicity and news stories dealing with the television show; and the tertiary texts are those generated by the public, in word-of-mouth, and in comments and letters to the broadcaster.

Television is a medium in which what is said of it and its programming is more important than what it conveys. We propose, then, recognition of the



importance of tertiary television texts to define its quality. Thus, it is the breadth and the popularity of television programming that make viewers of different social or cultural levels able to watch the same program, whether it is a movie, a soccer match, a soap opera or a reality show. On the following day, these and other people talk about and discuss what they saw, they communicate with each other, and exchange ideas and experiences.

The word experience is important not only from the standpoint of knowing the program, but also to infer in a hermeneutic way the life context and world view, generating an exchange on these. Therefore, it is important to return to the hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer to establish that the communication process is the most crucial feature of television.

Gadamer was not seeking the truth or original meaning in the author's text, again taking up the proposed hermeneutic, understanding that the hermeneutic process should not seek the truth, as did classical hermeneutics, but rather an experience of truth based on dialogue and the interpretation that brings about understanding. That is, an initial co-pertinence that suggests an expectation of meaning. This initial co-pertinence is based on prejudices and preconceived ideas that are essential and do not fade with understanding of the text, and these ideas are grounded in history and tradition, or, as Ferrater Mora says: "It is precisely because there is a historical tradition given that new paths can be opened" (Mora, 2004: 1,423 – free translation).

The predominance of reason in Enlightenment thought made room for the belief in the possibility of suspending internal assumptions and life experience of the reader to get to the (truth of the) analysis. In the hermeneutic process, and in Gadamer's understanding, the elimination of prejudice is not possible, because it is inseparable from the act of reading. Thus, the transmitted content, language, world experience and historical consciousness are inseparable when considering any reading process. Hermeneutics, in this sense, reveals primarily a dialogue, not something completed; the need for any utterance occurs as a response to a question posed previously. So thought and the linguistic process revolve around the hermeneutic circle; that is, from the movement of the utterance between the author and the reader, and from how the latter, using their prejudices and history, reworks the statement and sends it back to the author, in a circular motion.

On television, texts are done based on viewer interpretation, fan mail and word of mouth, that return and take television by storm, influencing the primary texts. Television seems to thus achieve and demonstrate explicitly the hermeneutic circle, in the way the texts are changed based on viewer experience, in circularity, and return to television, modifying it, to later return again to



the public, continuously. The frequent discourse of the popular program that encourages spectator passivity is therefore problematic, because the television communication process is centered on the relationship between it and its audience, in the hermeneutic circle, in a spiral that continuously changes its tertiary, secondary and primary texts.

If the concept of truth is elusive for Gadamerian hermeneutics, that is, the truth is presented only as an expectation, and not as something concrete, could we make a connection between the idea of *truth* and *quality* in television, since both result from a text validation process? *Truth* and *quality* start from an assumption: the assumption of a text that seeks to represent something ideal and absolute. In this sense, perhaps Gadamerian hermeneutics, upon putting the truth in check and reinforcing the concept of the hermeneutic circle, point to ways of deconstructing quality television, which is in a sense absolute and totalizing as a concept. Thus, could we – assuming the perspective of quality television as a communion ritual, and now increasingly immediate because of its relationship with social networks – speak of activating tertiary texts and enhancing the hermeneutic circle?

It is from this logic that the premise that provides the title for this presentation is established, expressed here as a question. Could a program considered bad be a quality program? Or be, in itself, quality television? Maybe not by the standards of discussion of quality television, with the frame of reference being the North American experience and context of the 1970s and '80s. However, the answer may be different when we prioritize the power of tertiary texts as the most important in the television communication process. Analyzing through this lens, then, it may be possible to formulate a theoretical concept of quality television that transcends borders, techniques, politics and televisualities.

It is worth a quick analysis of two television programs which are popular in Brazil, often viewed with reservations by intellectuals and opinion makers: soap operas and the reality show *Big Brother Brazil*, the latter idealized by the Dutch producer Endemol.

In spite of popular success both in Brazil and abroad, soap operas are still seen by many as a second-class product and narrative, because of story lines grounded in melodrama, because of having shallow, every-day plots, because of their form, because of a production methodology which results in an image without contrast, or because of being a zero-degree television. Another cause for criticism which is, in fact, justified, is that because the shows are produced, written and performed by professionals from the Rio de Janeiro-Sao Paulo areas, the richest in Brazil, the soaps have an often unreal take on the country, mediated by the way the Southeast region, where the television broadcasters

and fictional television production are mostly located, sees its own country and other regions. In fact, in these cases, the result, in terms of cultural integration and regionalization of the country, is disastrous. Even so, the soap opera finds a wide audience in all social classes, who join in discussions about what happened in the previous day's episode.

The reality show *Big Brother*, however, has even less sympathy from intellectuals and the middle class in Brazil, in spite of being an annual economic success on television, although with a decreasing audience. The criticisms are normally directed at the fact that the program seeks to appeal to baser sentiments, in which there are handsome young men and women with perfect bodies, holding the viewer's attention with the beauty and scanty clothing, but who cause discomfort with behavior and opinions consistent with their superficiality and lack of scruples, fueled by the need to win the game and reach the prizes. Then there is the parade of spoken stupidity, from a massacre of the Portuguese language to assaults on general culture.

Both programs, however, can be seen from another viewpoint, that is, realizing that even in what is considered a bad program one finds quality television by this movement over to its communication process, so that its public speaks, generating a tertiary discourse.

In the case of the soap opera, it is important to remember that with all the problems of representing other Brazilian states of the interior and periphery, it still discusses everyday situations, including the problems. Such discussions, which are often pamphleteering, treat topics like cancer treatment, surrogate motherhood, violence against women and land reform. In a country where there is still great inequality and in which many people did not complete their schooling, where for many it is difficult to discern right from wrong because they live in situations of oppression without access to information, the soap opera often serves as a source of information with which youth, women and workers come to understand that another reality is possible and that they have rights which they hadn't imagined. For the urban and educated middle class, many of these issues are so obvious that they cannot imagine that the soap opera could really be a source of useful and important information for a good part of the population that has not had the same opportunities for education.

Regarding *Big Brother*, an example of an incident in the 2012 edition is perhaps more instructive for this discussion. In the first week of the program, in which participants have a party with music and plenty of food and alcoholic beverages, two participants get together and go to the bedroom, where they have sex under the comforter. Broadcasted by the channel to subscribers of pay-per-view, the scene soon revolted a number of spectators who questioned

whether the woman had consented to the sexual relation, since, having drunk a lot, she was not moving and appeared to be asleep during the act. Almost immediately, news of a possible rape of an incapacitated person, broadcast live by the program of the country's main broadcaster, although only for subscribers, went out on social networks and Internet sites. The controversy was enormous and appeared in the major newspapers and television programs. Rede Globo's *Jornal Nacional* (prime time news), which does not usually report events that expose the broadcaster, highlighted the news, and the public prosecutor's office demanded that the station send all images that showed the event so that there could be a criminal investigation. The male participant left the program prematurely by decision of the broadcaster, was interrogated, and later, based on the female participant's testimony, the case was dismissed and the man acquitted. What is of interest, however, is that in a program in which events, a priori, do not favor thinking about anything that can be positive, there was a side effect provided by the communication process: for two weeks, people in general and the program's public, the media and social networks discussed not only the case itself, but also the problem of rape of an incapacitated person, which at no time in previous years had had such great repercussion in the Brazilian media.

That is, the bad program, of poor quality, was responsible for an important discussion which was born in the tertiary discourse leveraged by social networks. It *contaminated* secondary discourses and interfered in primary discourse. The program generates, even from a logic which is unfavorable with regard to so-called quality television, a debate and repercussion with critical thinking – in various social classes – which, ultimately, informs and establishes references of social conduct and respect for others. It may seem contradictory that this is possible coming from a program that seems to reduce its participants to hedonistic objects and erotic materials, but this is precisely the power not only of television, but also of its public: that of transforming the program and giving it back its best qualities, even giving it a chance to improve, and especially, creating a broad channel of communication and debate about the program.

## CONCLUSION

There is a lack of precision not only in use of, but also in understanding the word *quality* associated with television. It is important to highlight that there are two types of symbolic television capital: one is internal to it, establishing a differentiation in the programming, or a qualitative difference among the programs, according to criteria to be defined. This is, in a way, the starting point of Jane Feuer's discussion. On the other hand, there is an external discussion, wherein television as a medium is seen differently as compared to other media. Quality

can be applied both to certain programs and to broader and more commonplace television programming, resulting in a prejudgment of the media itself. Thus, the concept of quality television can be (wrongly) generalized and mean, for the critic and theorist, that either a given program has no quality in itself or that television has no quality compared to other media, by its own logic, which generates bad content. These two concepts are very different and should not be confused, even if they are complementary. However, both are incomplete.

A concept similar to *quality television* has no precedent in other media; one can speak of a good movie or a quality play, but a theoretical concept of quality cinema or theater, instituting analysis parameters for both academia and critics, has not been established.<sup>5</sup> As a theoretical formulation, quality television reveals an assumption based on a value judgment, which is highly prejudicial and compromises research as much as it does criticism and analysis.

Television is postmodern in nature, aggregating all: genres, languages, images, technologies and discourses. Thompson says that quality television is a genre and that its characteristic is that of adding other genres, as we have seen. But if this is a particularity of television itself, it does not necessarily imply a distinction that defines it as quality television – on the contrary, because adding other genres characterizes all programs, from the beginning. This fusion has always been a characteristic of television, one which is becoming more and more intense, updating itself. By this interpretation, all television would be of quality.

If one of the definitions of quality TV involves the values of modernity, as exemplified by Thompson, and if it were possible to define a single viewer as the typical television viewer, s/he probably would not be modern, but rather post-modern. Thus, quality would not be present in a product limited to the modern viewer, who is an opinion maker, urban and young, for the simple reason that television is not limited to that audience. On the other hand, if quality indicates superiority, excellence, attributes and virtue, we would assume that the demands for excellence in television would be the same everywhere and in all televisiographies, which is impossible. It also doesn't make sense to analyze programs which are supposedly part of quality television based on a historical reference and U.S. productions that justify a theoretical concept. There is no opposition here to television series, to the history of television and to American theories. But they do not explain the different demands of what is understood by quality in all countries.

In this sense, it might be worth reflecting on the concept of whether quality television can vary from place to place: in public, style, quality in form and in the text. One could, for example, add to these aspects ethics, equality

5. It's important to point out that the art film label, in cinema, somehow fulfills a similar function.

and regionalization, as well as their educational potential, according to local demands and expectations – or not. From this point of view, therefore, the concept of quality would initially be complicated, because it obeys the unique demands of a television in its own space, broadcast in its own world.

The proposal here is to shift the theoretical concept of quality television, with the understanding that thinking of such concept based on programs is an offshoot of contextual variables that prevent it from being a theory applicable to just any televisiography. That is, the preliminary proposal of this work is that quality television is possible, as a broad theoretical concept that can be used and debated as a variable in several televisiographies. But this should be, as a theoretical concept, inherent to television as a medium, and it would exist precisely in the way the public relates to television, or, according to some of the possibilities pointed out by Mulgan for quality TV, it would be inherent to television as ritual and communion. Thus, quality television is found mainly in what is said about it, in the communication and debate it provokes, realizing its potential as a medium. This is independent of the quality of programs, as these, when considered bad by the general public, by critics or by intellectuals, may prove extremely successful in creating and multiplying the communication contract, as seen in the examples of Brazilian soap operas and of the *Big Brother Brazil 10* episode aired by Rede Globo.

The intention here is not to disparage quality programs, nor the programs which are offshoots of modernist strategies. Technically well-made programs which seek debate, consistency and depth, as in any other medium, should be encouraged and valued. On the other hand, one must not discredit the importance of programs that do not meet these expectations and are subject to criticism. Such programs, despite their clear and recognized shortcomings, as we have seen, also contribute positively, though they are considered to be without any positive attributes. Rejecting these programs as fundamental spaces for discussion and accomplishment that also bring quality to television is to deny TV itself and all its communication potential. ■

## REFERENCES

- CALDWELL, John Thornton. *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television*. New Jersey: Rutgers, 1995.
- CARVALHO, Luís Fernando. *Lecture*. In: VII ENCONTRO INTERNACIONAL DE TELEVISÃO IETV. Rio de Janeiro, 13 Nov. 2009.
- CASETTI, Francesco; ODIN, Roger. Da Paleo à Neo-Televisão: uma abordagem semio-pragmática. *Ciberlegenda*, n. 27, p. 8-22, 2012.
- ECO, Umberto. *Viagem na irrealidade cotidiana*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1984.

- FEUER, Jane. MTM Enterprises: an overview. In: FEUER, Jane; KERR, Paul; VAHIMAGI, Tise (Ed.). *MTM quality television*. London: BFI, 1984. p. 1-31.
- FISKE, John. *Television Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- FREIRE FILHO, João. Decifrando os mistérios da “oitava arte”: a crítica televisiva no *Jornal de Letras* (1950-1970). In: XIII COMPÓS. *Anais...*, São Bernardo do Campo, 2004.
- GADAMER, Hans-Georg. *Hermenêutica da obra de arte*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2010.
- JOHNSON, Catherine. Quality / cult television: the X-Files and television history. In: HAMMOND, Michael; MAZDON, Lucy (Eds.). *The Contemporary Television Series*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2005.
- MORA, J. Ferrater. *Diccionario de filosofia*. Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 2004. t. II.
- MUANIS, Felipe. O tempo-morto na hipertelevisão. In: BRASIL, André; MORETTIN, Eduardo; LISSOVSKY, Maurício. *Visualidades hoje*. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2013. p. 173-189.
- MULGAN, Geoff (Ed.). *The Question of Quality*. London: BFI, 1990.
- THOMPSON, Robert J. *Television's Second Golden Age: Hill Street Blues from to ER*. New York: Continuum, 1996.

---

This text was received at 12 January 2013 and accepted at 05 February 2015.