

Cinematography and Television: Differences and Similarities

Adriano Nazareth

anazareth@porto.ucp.pt

Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP)
School of the Arts, Portuguese Catholic University

1 | Introduction

Television and Cinema present specific behaviour and language in relation to reality. If film focuses on its proximity to artistic practices, and this reflects the viewer's relationship with the film, television, in turn, seeks in directness or the transposition of the real to the imaginary, the key to its success, the audience. We all see the possibilities that television has for viewers. Even those most aware of the various constraints, and who claim themselves to be not influenced, come under the hypnotic power of the television screen. The quality of the programming continues to decline, succumbing to the claim that television channels have to get into the audience "ratings".

Given day-to-day hardships, television can distance people from their own problems by showing the struggles of others, their relative happiness, a lack of concern, a series of problems solved without having to deal with them.

Recently, the so-called "reality shows" have achieved extraordinary record audiences. The most compelling example is that of Big Brother. A house that encloses a group of young people, chosen according to selection criteria that follow stereotypes compatible with the dreams of the masses; A programme that does nothing to encourage analysis or a spirit of observation, and contributes nothing to increased levels of knowledge. The viewer is limited to immediate assimilation, feeding only on the feeling that he or she has for each of the participants.

Always having audiences as a target to be achieved, some television stations use a different strategy: moral and ethical issues. Transgression as an conscious reflection on the viewers' own frustrations and repressions, enhancing the power that the view-

er has to make the big decision. Moral and ethical conflict as an integral part of the human condition, represented metaphorically or dramatically, is able to raise empathy and communication.

Not unrelated to this reality, professional politicians use television to make press conferences and media releases coincide with news services. One may speak of an a-culturation of the viewer, an increase of passivity and indifference to the content he or she watches.

In the search for something new, there's "zapping", which is nothing but the search for redundancy. Someone once said that the cinema stirs the imagination, whereas television exerts a hypnotic effect. Television must take into account many factors if it is to achieve its desired success. From the statistical study of potential audiences divided into various categories of viewers, through to the detailed study of the tools and steps needed to produce a TV sub-product of proven success, as is the case of soap operas, in which the script is of paramount importance to capture an audience. Here, the top priority is the target audience, and to make sure that it stays, follows and becomes familiar with the story. The first episodes are of the utmost importance, and the action and suspense at the beginning and the end of each episode should have high points, directed at high audience peaks and therefore its loyalty to the show.

Music also occupies a prominent place not only as an aid to express and support the action, but also to help fill the dead spots, as an emotional means of holding the viewer. Thus, the basis of communication is guaranteed

2 | Television development between the 50's and 90's

Likewise, there are profound differences between the television of the 1950s and the present. In early television, up to the 1980s, the idea would be ... Educate, entertain and inform. With the passage of time, this maxim has given way to... The individual no longer cultivates himself. At best he is cultivated.¹ Production is divided into three phases (pre-production; production and post-production) and, once again, the economic factor is omnipresent in the various surveys conducted, which determine the cost that a project may entail. In pre-production, there is already a thorough study of the needs and costs that the narrative itself involves, and there is also a need on the part of the general-interest television stations to continually satisfy the average spectator, which results in cost containment.

Faced with this combination of factors, television is poor in content, politically correct, lacking a critical sense, and does not stimulate the viewer to go beyond the limits of mediocrity. Millions of people simultaneously hear the same joke, their existence being no less solitary.

In comparative terms, while television develops this kind of low creativity and absolutely standard inflexibility, cinema seeks to be innovative in its narratives, increasingly using the imagination to reach the ideal that it is geared to: transfiguration.

Film gives us an illusion with a more intense consistency than the representation of life on stage or in everyday life. If, on the one hand, it has an obvious irreality, its space and time differ profoundly from ordinary perception. All this is explained by a strange phenomenon of belief on the part of the viewer.

Television is defined as a reproductive, not selective, practice, linking the real to the plausible, while insisting on the first. Using a much more persuasive dynamic narrative, it stops connecting shot to shot, sequence to sequence, resulting in a more realistic and symbolic language and, alongside the central theme of the story, imposing other parallel themes in order to enhance the effect on the viewer or his emotions, that is, television extends the audiovisual spectrum but takes the mystery out of filmmaking. Unlike television, film turns the plausible into truth, while reality stems from the imaginary, because, for the duration of the film, the existence of the spectator is transformed into countless other possible lives that the filmic narratives inspire.

The scenario that the television stations follow boils down to "the more the screen is filled, the better." This picture, full of "embellishments," accompanied by intense and disperse camera movements, is sometimes followed by the miserabilism of speculative news, not as exposure but as a show that will

contribute to an increased audience.

Audience surveys (audiometry), do not try to determine viewers' interests or tastes, but only who is viewing and what is seen in the programming. Based on these studies, the heads of stations choose what to broadcast so as to increase and hold their audiences, which in turn means increasing the value of their advertising space.

Between fiction and nonfiction, television broadcasters have built a by-product that has led audience ratings: "reality shows" and "real-life soap opera." It began in Portugal with *Ponto de Encontro*, and this was followed by shows with a similar orientation. Public preference requires the stations to transmit such programming with the aim of speculating with the feelings of others, pacing the drama, a key ingredient for success.

3 | Television Crisis in 90's

In the early 1990s a screenwriters/scriptwriters crisis began that almost did away with scripts and texts for drama series. There was a need to find alternatives. Would it be possible to replace one of these shows with a documentary or good quality feature film, or by a cultural programme followed by discussion? Maybe, it happened for the first and last time, or maybe not. Taste, like the palate, is educated, refined or it is ruined...

In this context, reference to the American TV show industry, which invented a cheap product with reduced production costs and guaranteed success, is almost inevitable. Anonymous members of the public relate their stories, their fears and traumas and, for a few minutes, are guaranteed their moment of glory.

Ultimately, the structural basis of soap operas and reality TV is the same. At the beginning of each story, the pairs are all changed, getting to meet and stay together through secondary characters. The formula stays the same, the time is reduced, actors are replaced by ordinary people, with an interesting life, who start out as spectators and end up starring as the character the public demands.

Some critics, as well as some people with common sense, raised their voices and a series of opinion articles emerged which led the Ethics Council of the Journalists' Union to organise debates, pointing out the dangers of the shows in question, emphasising the baseness or even certain sordid details that viewers were subjected to for a handful of pennies, from undressing in public to eating spiders, amongst other trickery. Of course they relied, a lot, on Andy Warhol's "fifteen minutes of fame".

While in *Big Brother* almost anything was possible, in May 2001 the broadcaster SIC presented *TV Bar*, where during a family disagreement, a contester

argues with her parents, who tried to dissuade her from joining in the show. The producer, Ediberto Lee, serves as an intermediary, but emotions and affection are explored in an undignified manner and broadcast live throughout the country. Such an attitude led the Commission on Rights, Freedoms and Guarantees to invite the High Authority to go to Parliament to make the following statement: "The ethical and legal parameters that aim to protect the image of the person and privacy of personal life have been seriously infringed." And we, by analysing the statistics, see that the audience rose and, for the first time in months, SIC overtook TVI and its Big Brother II by more than 4%, reaching an audience of 50.7%. An observation made by Guilherme de Oliveira Martins (2001) comes to mind: "The cavalcade of the grotesque and of voyeurism can have unforeseen consequences in terms of indifference and draining of civic and ethical values." Indeed, the ratings demonstrate the preferences of the public, but also reveal the cultural level of the viewers. Between the lines, one finds the need of the TV viewer to be educated and informed.

Journalism is also part of the television scene. In this context, truth, accuracy and impartiality are called for. Transforming TV news into soapboxes of opinion, supporting politicians or sports personalities according to the whim of the sponsors of the moment, is a betrayal of the basic principles of authentic journalism. Given the current landscape, and referring to the Presidential elections, Emidio Rangel said he could put into power whoever he wanted to.

If film, as a language, can sometimes produce artistic messages, television, as a reproducer of reality, does not yet have a language. The precondition for the identification of a language is the recognition of a system of signs and the ability they possess to transform reality.

If it is true that there are differences between film and television, it is also true that on occasion there may be a certain similarity between the two media. By way of example, if television broadens the audiovisual, cinema should use this capability to promote itself using co-production, a compromise between the two media that would benefit both. Film has the ability to construct narratives and television to disseminate filmic objects with artistic messages. However, although film and television have content, they rarely manage to reconcile them. They prefer to navigate the limbo of ambiguity, or, what is more facile, let themselves descend into a sort of apologia for violence with the creation of superheroes, the paradigm of the dreams and frustrations of a majority, who find empathy in these figures of "writing in motion".

The survival of film-video-graphic narrative relies

first and foremost on a deep remodelling of technique and its use, but also on a change of universal values that are no more than the glorification of mediocrity measured by imposed standardisation. The cinematographic work, while in our home, comes mutilated and altered in the physical sense of the term, due for a start to the framing of the TV screen (4:3). Another observation is that instead of film in which the image is projected from behind the viewer, on television it is reflected in the viewer's face. Also, it is not a gregarious activity and the aesthetic of the shot is adulterated, going from the general and medium shots in cinema to close-ups and wide shots on television, due in part to the size of the screens. The cinematographic narrative itself - what to tell and how to tell it - although partially accepted by the television industry, is diverted to produce emotion at any price. The broadcaster/receiver relationship is controlled by audience ratings, hence by the dictatorship of the sponsor. The formative role is disregarded in favour of the informative.

With the advent of high definition, the frame is replaced by a similar scale to that of the cinema. With the end of kinescope, the use of LCD and plasma screens brings the television screen even closer to the cinema screen. The advent of broadcasters of thematic and regional channels brings with it, undoubtedly, the dissemination of specific cultures, and there is a greater formative exchange, rather than mass dissemination, promoting the exchange of cultural values based on equality, which makes the difference.

Cinema will maintain its position as the vehicle for audiovisual communication independent of television, and a degree of responsibility falls to each of them.

4 | The New Cinema and Television Adaptation

Cinema will not have to adapt to the television industry, as is the case of the great contemporary American and European cinema, nor does television have to play second fiddle to the cinema. Each has its own aesthetic and narrative. Ultimately, it would be fitting to match the role of Lumière² to television and that of Méliès³ to cinema, independently of whether they can mix in certain areas of speech or even complementary forms of narrative.

However, there appears to be a mutual interest between cinema and television. In terms of joint production, television broadcasters and film production-related bodies have found common ground, managing added value: low production/direction costs; institutional and private funding; the opportunity to create video-film products that guarantee the best of both forms of communication in terms of sound

and image.

Some television benchmark works were made by directors who work mainly in the field of cinematography. That is the case of David Lynch and Peter Greenaway.

David Lynch is known in cinematography for his direction of works like *The Elephant Man* (1980); *Dune* (1984) and *Blue Velvet* (1986). In terms of television he was the director of the successful quality series – *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk With Me* (1992).

Another example to be taken into consideration is from 1991, on the bicentenary of the death of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, when various television broadcasters joined in the co-production of a project on the theme of Mozart. Several directors were commissioned to make films on the same topic, among them Peter Greenaway.

Greenaway⁴ is a producer, director, scriptwriter and current representative of British art cinema. His participation in this project took on a distinctive character because the whole staging of *Not Mozart* was based on dance, whose movements give rise to body positions, always aided by the written and spoken text, superimposed on the image clarifying the meaning of the words. In this work, it is therefore possible to see that the scenography enhances the narrative, building on the set of real and graphic images in constant movement, on the written word, spoken and performed in the musical structure systematically and obsessively repeated, in an image full of elements that complement each other, words that overlap, wide shots of the characters who sing and interpret the text. Constantly evolving lines, sketches, shapes and colours, recreating and alternating with the narrative, show man and his potential. It makes various men arise from different substances, from flour, iron, water, and puts them aside. What remains, in the end, is only man with a set of joints, bones, fluids, who needs to be taught to move, to understand, to know himself.

This brief reference supports what we wanted to emphasise when we approached the question of co-production, of the benefits and advantages that could bring an improvement in the final product, reflecting an increased opportunity for creators, a greater exchange of experiences and even an increase in funding.

5 | Adaptation to Television

Given the complexity of the production/direction process, those involved should display a reflective, attentive spirit. An example of this is the adaptation of a literary work by Agustina Bessa Luís for television, entitled *As Fúrias*⁵. A new version of the theme came from the suggestions proffered by the producer and the director. This fruitful collabora-

tion resulted in a script that focuses on the figurative without changing the literary content.

In the script of *As Fúrias* there were points that were duly detailed, such as: the plot, the characters and the unfolding. The script being the key element in filmmaking, it should not



Figure 1: Ofélia

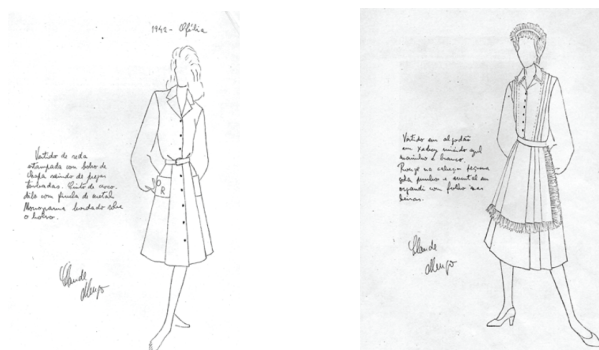


Figure 2: Ofélia and Arminda

be forgotten either that this is a working tool that is absolutely essential for the filmic construction. In this particular case, the planning should be noted, not just the script, because the final plan has all the basic elements, and is the most detailed, not only dramatically but also technically. The story-board, the organisation of the sets, the technical script, all contributed equally to make this project viable in a

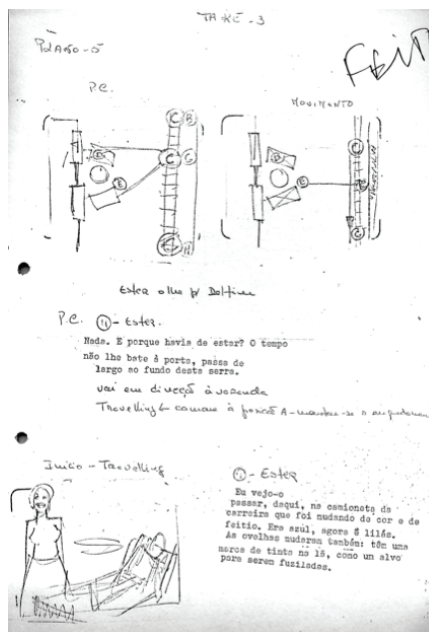


Figure 3: The Story Board



Figure 4: Construction Stages of “lancha Poveira”

world in which all elements are interdependent and equally important.

The principles set out or accepted to lead to a film or television production/direction are identical. It is only the means required to achieve the specific aims that differ. Film deals with the content, the narrative, the composition of the image, the soundtrack and the setting differently to television. As *Fúrias* as a television series would be about ten hours long. In cinema, it would last about two hours.

Another practical example, this time an anthropological/cultural documentary, is *Lancha Poveira do Alto6*.

Begun in 1990 with the pre-production of a television programme, this is based on a reconstruction of a fishing vessel common in Póvoa do Varzim until the 1950s, when it was replaced by safer, larger, motorised boats able to go further in the pursuit of fishing. The first phase of the project was to study this type of vessel in detail, from its origin, to arrive at its technical characteristics and the socio-cultural implications that a boat can have in a region dedicated to fishing as a source of income for a significant portion of the population.

The main aim of the reconstruction of this boat was to be a testimony for current and future generations of one of the ways in which the fishermen of Póvoa drew their sustenance from the sea.

The estimated time for the construction of this vessel was more than a year, divided into phases. Two or three days per month were set aside to monitor the construction until completion.

Meanwhile, it was necessary to provide the graphic designers with additional elements for the documentary – the history, origin of the vessel, complementary construction stages (prints and drawings used in the identification of boats), in order to produce a set of auxiliary designs for the narrative.

The research considered it essential to use images from the 1942 film *Ala Arriba*, by Leitão de Barros. We stress this interesting point: a documentary being based on the visual anthropology of another film when the Póvoa boats still roamed the high seas off the coast of Póvoa.

The final sequence of this documentary mixes the present of a ship being launched with the past of *Ala Arriba*. The vessel that gave rise to this narrative remains the main character more than the people of Póvoa, particularly its fishermen who, then as now,

try to keep alive some of its symbols, testimonies of joys and sorrows, of the lives of one of the areas in Portugal with a great fishing tradition.

This documentary sought the dynamic narrative, thus avoiding days and hours, but always breaking with the present/past, mixing them, developing a parallel story (additional educational information, like doing something and why it was done), combining the scientific rigour of research cinema, which in this case, should be the attraction, the adventure made documentary.

The dynamics used in the development of this documentary did not overlook space/time: variation of angles, variation between scenes and settings, graphics, museum artefacts, the reconstruction of the boat; and variation in the time sequence.

The editing, in the narrative dynamic, generates various circumstantial associations, and gives credibility to the representation, so that each new image is associated with those immediately preceding and following it, giving it continuity. To divert attention, so that the image sequences can be part of the viewer’s memory. The cuts follow a logical reasoning without interrupting the continuity of the narrative, avoiding false relations with previous sequences.



Figure 5: Ala Arriba

To summarise, after an analysis of what television is today, we wanted to close on a suggestive and somewhat challenging tone, with two separate examples that reveal a television with a range of contingencies as well as strengths. A television with programmes and content that do not underestimate the intelligence of the viewer nor their own potential, in contrast with what is roughly the image we have of the current state of television, in that while film conveys poetic art and imagery, television is a vehicle for mass communication, calling for the opacity of the viewer⁸. Thus limiting itself to serving as a vehicle in a non-selective reproductive practice, not possessing its own language, i.e. not changing reality in a different sense of what it represents.

REFERENCES

- [1] Frédéric Bichon - Diário Notícias 1994-04-01.
- [2] LUMIÈRE (Louis) - Inventor of cinematography, first films made (documentaries) - "Workers leaving the Lumière factory" - "Baby's Breakfast" - "Arrival of a Train", 1885.
- [3] MÉLIÈS (Georges) - "Creator of the mise en scène" - director from 1886/1914 - "Card Party" - "The Ballet Master's Dream" - "A Trip to the Moon" - "Gulliver's Travels" - "The Impossible Voyage".
- [4] GREENAWAY (Peter) - "The Cook, the Thief, his Wife & her Lover", 1989 - "TV Dante", 1989 - "Prospero's Books" - "The Baby of Macon", 1993.
- [5] Directed by Adriano Nazareth.
- [6] Idem.
- [7] Film financed by SPN, a remake of Maria do Mar by the same director.
- [8] MOSCARIÉLO (Angelo): "Como Ver Um Filme" - Translation: Conceição Jardim and Eduardo Nogueira - Editorial Presença, Lda., Lisbon, 1985.