

(DIS)AGREEMENTS

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introduction

WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT TELEVISION SERIES

ELISA HERNÁNDEZ-PÉREZ

Taking Robert J. Thomson's classic book on TV series, *Television's Second Golden Age* (1996), and his notion of the television renaissance of the 80s and 90s, based on what he called “quality TV”, as a starting point (whether consciously or not), a lot of writers and scholars have sought to defend the artistic and cultural value of television series. Ever since *The Sopranos* (David Chase, HBO: 1999-2007), generally considered the first of what has been almost two decades of “quality TV” series, the interest in television productions has experienced a boom in every sense. Not only are more series than anybody could ever watch in a lifetime being produced and broadcast, but also all of them are being constantly commented on, praised and critiqued, both at the local pub and in academic circles, as well as on countless blogs and social networks.

And yet, reflections on television production still seem to be affected by a certain kind of bias similar to that which exists in film distribution and criticism. When we examine the television series that we watch and talk about most, there seems to be a certain predisposition towards discussing the big US productions and to focus on their content, their plots and subplots, and their main characters (a bias that is less obvious in the academic literature, but ubiquitous in the collective conversation

about television series). Indeed, rather than understanding the implications and effects that television production and reception has on us, we seem to be inclined merely to praise and celebrate everything that reaches our screens from the United States. The few exceptions include the mini-phenomenon represented by certain Scandinavian television series such as *The Killing* (*Forbrydelsen*, Søren Sveistrup, DR1: 2007-2012), or more recently in Spain the surprise success of *The Department of Time* (*El Ministerio del Tiempo*, Pablo and Javier Olivares, TVE: 2015-), both of which, as usually happens, have ended up being absorbed by the colossal dollar-making machine that is American television (in this case, the first was the object of a remake, while the producers of second have brought a plagiarism claim against an American series).

Taking into account the globalization process that has turned out to be more economic and financial than cultural (and profitable to only a few), in which identities and nations seem to be simultaneously diluted and reinforced in a paradoxical feedback loop, our intention here is to offer a platform for identifying the differences and similarities that exist in a variety of contexts of television series production and reception. As a complement to the articles featured in this issue

of *L'Atalante*, which focus on the ways in which the academic world analyses and researches the television series as a concept and a format, in this *(Dis)agreements* section we seek to extend the reflection to different contexts of production and reception. Experts and scholars from Spain, France, the United States, Colombia and New Zealand thus open the door on a new way of understanding the information flows and power relations of the contemporary audiovisual industry on a global level, offering a myriad of points of view about other TV markets and enabling us to rethink our own relationship with television. ■

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discussion

I. In television series production, at least in Spain, the power of big media conglomerates is obvious (Atresmedia and Mediaset, for example), even if they then outsource the work to smaller and less stable companies. Is there a strong television industry in your country or is it similarly dependent on media conglomerates? Is there public or government financial aid or support?

Concepción Cascajosa Virino

The model based on outsourcing TV series production to independent companies is widespread all over the world, not only in Spain. Here, its use began long before the arrival of private channels, because many of the shows being made were linked to filmmakers with their own production studios. But with the entry of private broadcasters, the trend really took off and helped create an industrial network that provided stability for some professionals. The problem in Spain has not been the independent production model. This model is still active and is actually growing internationally thanks to co-productions, which have become common in Europe. The difficulty has been an excessive dependency of producers on the networks, which for some time resulted in a proliferation of TV series made solely with a domestic market in mind. When the economic crisis hit, working conditions became very obviously unstable. This is beginning to change thanks to companies like Bambú Producciones, which has always been very clear about making its shows appealing to international audiences. But it also has to be acknowledged that public television has often failed to fulfil its task of stimulating the market and supporting new enterprises and young creators. Many of the contracting and purchase decisions made by public television broadcasters in Spain have been determined by political factors.

Marjolaine Boutet

In France, the television production market is very diverse and complex. Since 1986, when television ceased to be an entirely state-owned me-

dium, television channels have had to buy their original shows (series included) from independent producers. Some of these producers are owned by big conglomerates like Lagardère Studio or Europa Corp., but others are smaller companies like Tetra Media Studios or Zadig Productions. These independent producers are supported by the government through the CNC (*Centre National de la Cinématographie*), which supports movies as well as television productions.

However, the small number of channels that finance original TV series gives them a lot of power over independent producers. TF1 and M6 are private networks. Canal Plus, SFR and OCS are premium cable. All of these private channels belong to larger conglomerates (Bouygues, Bertelsmann, Vivendi, Altice, and Orange, respectively). France Télévisions (France 2, France 3, and France 4) and Arte are public channels. Each of these channels has quite specific requirements when it comes to TV series and producers develop their new series accordingly.

Amanda Lotz

The U.S. television industry is highly conglomerated and vertically integrated. A study in 2014 found nine companies produce 90 percent of the content. These same companies also own the networks and channels that distribute the programs and other media such as film studios, theme parks, professional sports teams, magazines, music labels, and book publishing. In the case of one conglomerate (Comcast-NBCU), it also owns the cable and internet distribution service that serves 22 million households—about 20 percent of the U.S. market.

There is no acknowledged public or government support of the commercial industry, however, cities and states have created incentives to try to increase the amount of production spending in their region. The industry also has the scale to lobby for policies in its favor. A small public service television and radio sector exists (although the new administration has proposed eliminating its funding). Government funding makes up a small amount of even those budgets (\$1.35 per person per year). The majority is paid through donations from listeners/viewers and from corporate and foundation sponsorship that increasingly blurs the line of commercial funding.

**Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed and
Jerónimo Rivera-Betancur**

For the most part, the industry in Colombia relies on two private free-to-air channels (RCN and Caracol TV), which produce their own TV shows but also hire smaller, independent production companies to produce some series. Thus, we have two levels: inhouse production by the channel itself, and outsourced production.

On public television we only occasionally find fiction television series on regional channels, which outsource production to small local producers. These producers are publicly or state-funded, since regional channels receive their financing from the ANTV (*Autoridad Nacional de Televisión*) and raise very little from advertising.

There is a large gap between public and private television. With the creation of the two private channels in 1998, the Colombian government stopped directly subsidising national public television and started supporting only certain specific products on certain channels. Advertising investment in regional and local channels is limited and some public channels cannot access private funding, but have access only to public money within their administrative district (department or municipality), which means that some public officials use these channels to further their own interests.

Geoff Lealand

New Zealand has a small population (4.6 million people) and a lot of television. Currently, there are more than 150 channels; more than 40 free-to-air channels and more than 110 payTV channels (the latter provided by the dominant Sky Network Television in more than half of New Zealand households), together with new VOD/streaming television players such as Lightbox and Netflix. With its beginning in 1960, television in New Zealand took its cue from the BBC but also had to find a means of funding, which led to a mixed model of broadcasting. Advertising was introduced in the earliest year, together with a broadcasting fee (abolished in 1999).

In 2017, however, any connections with public service models of television are few and faint. The two channel state-owned Television New Zealand (TVNZ 1 and TVNZ 2) continue to dominate free-to-air offerings, with a 60 to 65 share of the free-to-air audience, but it has been driven down-market in its pursuit of ratings and the need to return healthy financial dividends to the government of the day. Private broadcasters have come and gone (and have included the American network NBC, NewsCorp and CanWest Global Communications), through waves of bankruptcy, acquisitions and takeovers by offshore equity companies. Commentators have often noted that New Zealand is the least regulated television market in the world, as well as being long dependent on imported programming content. The only independent regulatory agency is the largely ineffective Broadcasting Standards Authority, with the advertising monitored by the advertising industry, and no constraints on overseas ownership of media interests.

This has led to a mess but also an interesting mess, in that it has introduced new players in the mediascape, such as New Zealand On Air (NZOA, established in 1989), a state-funded entity given the responsibility for contestable funding areas of local content (such as children’s TV, documentary, special interest programming, music videos)

which may not be regarded as commercially viable by broadcasters. Despite such funding being contingent on broadcasters providing a suitable slot in their schedule, NZOA funding has assisted the growth of an independent production industry.

In response to activism motivated by the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), which set out a relationship of sharing and equity between Maori (*tangata*

whenua, or the original people of New Zealand) and the Crown (representing New Zealand European, or *pakeha*, interests), the state-funded Maori Television service was established in 2004, providing two channels with an aim of providing a platform for Maori interest and a means of preserving and extending the use of *te reo Maori* (language).

2. Cable television transformed the classical narrative structure of episodes (with the disappearance of commercial breaks). Have online platforms and new modes of viewing similarly affected the narrative structure of recent television series?

Concepción Cascajosa Virino

Cable television in the United States didn't make commercial breaks disappear. Only series produced for premium cable networks (such as HBO, Showtime, and Starz) are free of advertising, but they are a minority and in many cases they still follow a more or less traditional narrative structure. At this point it seems premature to draw conclusions about the effect of the new platforms, because they have been producing for a very short time, and the case of Netflix demonstrates that they sometimes explore quite conventional genres and ideas. That is, we may like to think of how Netflix offers series such as *House of Cards* (Beau Willimon, 2013-) and *Orange is the New Black* (Jenji Kohan, 2013-), but its most successful series is *Fuller House* (Jeff Franklin, 2016-). With this as a benchmark, what does seem clear is that these platforms provide a different mode of consumption, since they don't depend on a weekly broadcast, and this frees the creators from having to offer viewers a reward each week, as would happen in a traditional television series. As a result, there is an evidently slower narrative pacing in some series. But, obviously, drama is not the same as comedy, and in the latter genre I see very little difference.

Marjolaine Boutet

In France, the new modes of viewing haven't affected the narrative structure of television series. It is rather the influence of complex US series and the ambition to sell French TV series to foreign markets that has shaped the 52-minute format and open-ended episodes. However, this past year, Canal Plus, France Télévisions and the Internet operator Free have launched VOD platforms where they broadcast original series, with shorter episodes intended for viewing on mobile phones.

Amanda Lotz

I'd argue first for a distinction between advertiser-supported and subscriber-supported cable channels. Only series created for subscriber-supported channels (HBO, Showtime) lack commercial breaks. Moreover, many of these series were produced with the expectation that they would later be sold to advertiser-supported channels, so while conventional broadcast narrative structure may be less apparent or rigidly required, this structure is not completely lacking.

The transformation introduced by original series is far more extensive than narrative structure and extends to tone, topics, and characterization. This derives directly from different measures of

success enabled by the different revenue model of all cable channels from broadcast networks and between ad-supported and subscriber-supported cable.

Series created for portals such as Netflix and Amazon Video are even less bound to narrative conventions because they exist free from a schedule (although even HBO series allowed flexible episode lengths). Series produced for portals also don't assume a viewer will wait a week between episodes. It is too early to speak about changes in narrative configuration that result. In many ways the “freedom” from “constraint” of constructing an episode of a specific length and knowing audiences will have to wait a week between episodes has yielded a lot of indulgent television. The freedom from editing to a prescribed episode length has led to stodgy pacing that will likely correct in time. Likewise, the freedom audiences have to view one, two or all the episodes at a time challenges creators' strategies for narrative development. A ten-hour “movie”, as some have referred to these series, does not have a tested structure. Nor is the same structure likely to work for those (the few) who binge all ten episodes at once as opposed to those who watch an episode or two in a sitting. This seems to me a significant challenge that creatives and audiences need to negotiate.

Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed and Jerónimo Rivera-Betancur

In Colombia we have seen a fundamental change with the disappearance of the distinction between the series and the telenovela. In the 80s and 90s these two types of productions were differentiated in various ways, such as by the number of episodes per week (one for a series, five for a telenovela) and the total number of episodes per year (a maximum of 46 per year for a series, about 250 for a telenovela). Recently, telenovelas have become shorter, with as few as 60 episodes, while series are no longer broadcast in weekly episodes. Essentially, a series-telenovela hybrid has been

created. This reduction of the telenovela is largely due to the wide variety of television entertainment on offer, and the need to update the format to adapt to the multiple viewing options available today.

However, what distinguishes this type of Colombian TV fiction from its international counterparts goes beyond the duration of episodes and seasons. A narrative that tends to melodrama, but with doses of humour and everyday situations, characterises both serials and telenovelas, which, as noted above, have blurry boundaries in contemporary Colombian television.

Recently, producers have begun adopting formats with wider media potential, thanks to online platforms (on each channel's website, the series sites or through sales to services like Netflix) and social networks, and (albeit more furtively) with wider narrative potential, facilitating viewer interaction.

In any case, it is interesting to note that the success of original Colombian series has been “exploited” through the production of sequels, prequels, spin-offs and adaptations, among others. An emblematic case is *Yo soy Betty la fea* (Fernando Gaitán, RCN: 1999-2001), which led to the purchase of the format, numerous international adaptations (including the successful *Ugly Betty* [Fernando Gaitán, ABC: 2006-2010]), sequels (*Ecomoda* [Fernando Gaitán, Univisión: 2001-2002]) and even an international animated version (*Betty Toons* [Fernando Gaitán, RCN: 2002-2003]).

Geoff Lealand

Television in New Zealand switched to digital in 2013. Television continues to be distributed around the nation (North Island and South Island and the smaller Stewart Island), which constitutes a similar geographical size to the United Kingdom. Terrestrial and satellite television are the only options, for there is insufficient population mass to justify cable television.

Since the transition to digital television there has been a proliferation of new streaming/

video on demand services. These include New Zealand-owned enterprises such as Lightbox (owned by the telecommunications company Spark), Neon (owned by payTV company Sky), the Australian/US service Quickflix, Netflix (US) and Amazon Prime (US). In addition a Freeview service provides access to all free-to-air channels and two of these (Three Now and TVNZ On Demand) provide access to screened programming online.

In an era of increasing convergence, previously disparate entities are increasingly looking at mergers. For example, the dominant payTV provider Sky recently sought a merger with the phone company Vodaphone but was declined approval by the Commerce Commission. This is in response to significant shifts in television viewership. A 2016 study (*Where Are The Audiences in 2016?* by New Zealand On Air), reported that whilst local audiences still spent more than 205 hours watching television daily, a generation gap was developing, with fewer 15 to 39 year olds watching television (63%), whilst those in older age groups (45 years or older) were present in larger numbers (81%).

This is not remarkable for similar age-related viewing can be found elsewhere, and indeed it is an echo of long established patterns (the teenage years, for example, has traditionally been a time of low television viewing). What is different is the shift from the practices of linear or appointment viewing, to newer phenomena of personal video recorders (PVR) as adjuncts to pay TV services, grazing, fragmented viewing, web series, watching television outside the home (on mobile devices, for example), and *binge* viewing.

Nevertheless we should be a little cautious in heralding this as a revolution in viewing behaviour; it appears to be a period of transition rather than a complete split from the past. For example, the students in my Contemporary Television course often tell me that they “don’t watch television”. In addition to telling them they need to watch all kinds of television for such a course, I remind them that indeed they do watch television, in their consumption of aggregated or posted material on sites such as YouTube or Vimeo, in addition to television-dedicated sites online.

3. There is a lot of discussion about how contemporary television series are cultivating a more active and/or demanding audience, in relation to both content and reception of the series. Are we really seeing a change in the paradigm of viewer identity?

Concepción Cascajosa Virino

Generally speaking, I think that the idea that the viewer is lazy, passive or undemanding is a snobbish lie, and a notion on which many of the negative views of television are based. I think that a defence of television needs to include a vindication of what television really is, and not by trying to turn it into something else. Viewers choose what they want to watch, and sometimes they look for different things based on their interests, mood and, of course, availability. Now what we always have is availability, due to the high num-

ber of shows being produced and the variety of ways they can be watched. And all kinds of series are being made. The key to the current context is precisely diversity. I think there is one kind of TV series that aspires to be more complex because it has found an opportunity to thrive, and because it has found a viewer who also has a greater cognitive ability, fostered by the many stimuli we are subjected to in the contemporary world. In its day, *Hill Street Blues* (Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll, NBC: 1981-1987) was a very difficult series to follow even for a sophisticated viewer, yet it mi-

ght seem boring to us today. Nor should we forget that many series assume viewing conditions that were once inconceivable, such as repeated viewing, discussions on forums and the efforts to analyse each episode (recaps). In other words, everything has changed.

Marjolaine Boutet

All audience analysis seems to indicate that the French TV viewer is ageing and audience numbers show that spectators are not necessarily keen on originality when it comes from prime-time French TV series, even though they tend to praise it more readily when it is present in a foreign TV series.

Amanda Lotz

No, the change isn't paradigmatic, rather it is possible for series to create more variation in the audience experience. Audience members ultimately chose their level of engagement—as has always been the case. For example—even going back over a decade now—a show like *Lost* (J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof, ABC: 2004-2010) allowed some audience members to engage in the series' mysteries outside the television narrative with great depth. But many simply watched the show. Likewise, some series may have abundant live tweeting, but engaging in this conversation is up to the audience member. You could say that there is more variation in the range of activities that can be included in spectatorship.

Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed and Jerónimo Rivera-Betancur

In the case of Colombia, all that could be said is that the impact of the audience is limited, and although they do have a greater influence than before, it is still marginal. TV channels modify schedules as they please, with complete indifference to viewers if they do not meet rating expectations. This shows that ratings and share are still

being used as the main ways to measure audiences. It is important to note that, although cable use (both legal and illegal) is widespread in the country, most Colombians still prefer the television programming offered by Colombia's two private channels (Rivera, 2014).

Some TV productions are experimenting with interactive narratives and tending to aim for greater audience participation, but these attempts are still furtive and are more common in formats such as documentary or magazine programs than in fiction series.

Geoff Lealand

The newer means of delivering television content have inevitably different kinds of engagement with such content, including television series. Delivery via mobile devices can, for example, encourage fragmented or distracted viewing and a diminished or diluted loss of picture quality and sound. The elaborate and expensive production values of series such as *Game of Thrones* (David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, HBO: 2011-) or *Fargo* (Noah Hawley, FX: 2014-), for example, is unlikely to be paid due justice when accessed on the reduced screens of mobile phones or tablets; at odds with the cinema-quality reproduction of domestic flat-screen television.

There are other consequences, as set out by Milly Buonanno in *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (2008). These include a shift from broadcasting to narrow-casting; redistribution of the mass audience through segmentation and niche interests; migration of creative talent away from both mainstream television and film to subscription television and new narrative freedoms; a multiplication of ways of viewing; inter-media coalitions between television and the internet; and an apparent and unprecedented freedom of choice for viewers.

In the ensuing years since Buonanno's book, such changes have accelerated. It seems to me that we must speak of television *audiences*, as

the former mass audience has splintered and reshaped into four major blocks: the child audience which continues to use television as primary entertainment but increasingly seeks programming with interactive components and connections to electronic devices; an older audience, who have grown up in earlier decades of stability and certainty, and continue to favour the familiarity of scheduled (linear) television; a younger audience (teenagers and young adults)

who watch television in a very fragmented, re-purposed fashion, accessing content primarily online (legally or illegally) through streaming/VOD services, or sites such as Youtube; and an educated audience, which is not necessarily age-differentiated, who favour long-form or limited series drama largely found on pay TV channels on cable systems, or new services such as Netflix. This appears to be the case in respect of television viewing in New Zealand.

4. What are the most successful television series (with critics and/or audiences) in your country? Are they local productions or international series? Does this have any influence on the national identity or collective imaginary of the country?

Concepción Cascajosa Virino

Television is a medium very much linked to identity, and this means that in general, once a national television industry has developed to a certain point, fiction TV series will be produced. In Spain, as in other European countries, a lot of American fiction series were imported because they were cheap and could be used to cover programming gaps. However, with the arrival of private television networks, national fiction experienced great growth, to such a degree that by the end of the 90s it was possible to watch a Spanish TV series five nights a week, often competing with other series. Very few American series have been really successful in Spain; recently, the *CSI* franchise, *House* (David Shore, FOX: 2004-2012) and to a lesser degree *Lost*. Their natural place is in the theme channels. In terms of critical success, *The Sopranos* (David Chase, HBO: 1999-2007), *Mad Men* (Matthew Weiner, AMC: 2007-2015) and *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan, AMC: 2008-2003) perhaps garnered a small but sophisticated audience, which generated a lot of discussion about these series. But none of them can compete with the bigger Spanish productions, which in recent years include titles like *Isabel* (Javier Olivares, TVE: 2012-2014), *El Príncipe* (César Benítez and

Aitor Gabilondo, Telecinco: 2014-2016) and *Velvet* (Ramón Campos and Gema R. Neira, Antena 3: 2014-2016), although their critical recognition and acceptance has been minimal. I think that the critics sometimes overlook the questions of representation that make some of these series quite interesting, not to mention other snobbish tendencies (everything that comes from other countries always seems better). To believe that a series that comes from the United States speaks of our reality is a mere fantasy. The only relevant exception has been *The Department of Time*, which achieved acceptable viewer ratings for its network as well as considerable critical praise.

Marjolaine Boutet

In terms of audience numbers, TF1 has dominated the market for decades. In 2016, it broadcast the three most watched TV series, all of them French: *Le Secret d'Elise* (David Schulner, 2016), with 8.2 million viewers; *Sections de Recherches* (Steven Bawol and Dominique Lancelot, 2006-), with 7 to 8 million viewers; and *Profilage* (Fanny Robert and Sophie Lebarbier, 2009-), with 6.8 to 7.3 million viewers. Yet the best reviews go to Scandinavian and Belgian series (both are very popular in France right now), and of course to internationa-

lly praised US “quality series”. In terms of French TV series, the ones produced by Canal Plus (*Le Bureau des Légendes* [Éric Rochant, 2015-], *Baron Noir* [Eric Benzekri, 2016-], *Engrenages* [Alexandra Clert and Guy-Patrick Sainderichin, 2005-]) are considered the best. Last year, *Dix Pour Cent* (Fanny Herrero, France 2: 2015-) was also praised. The TV series produced by Arte are also considered innovative and *auteur* productions.

Amanda Lotz

There is significant variation in critical and popular success. There are few U.S. productions watched by a large national audience. The most watched are sports matches—championship games of American football, baseball, and basketball. Most watched regular series in 2016 included *The Big Bang Theory* (Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, CBS: 2007-), *NCIS* (Donald P. Bellisario and Don McGill, CBS: 2003-), *The Walking Dead* (Frank Darabont, AMC: 2010-), and *Bull* (Phil McGraw and Paul Attanasio, CBS: 2016-). But, with the exception of *The Walking Dead*, critics focus on series such as *Game of Thrones*, *The Americans* (Joe Weisberg, FX: 2013-), *This is Us* (Dan Fogelman, NBC: 2016-), and *Girls* (Lena Dunham, HBO: 2012-), and rarely comment upon the most popular series. The series that critics most engage with tend to attract a much smaller audience than most watched series. *Mad Men* was perhaps the best illustration. Until 2010, series produced for cable channels drew smaller audiences than the 75 most watched shows on broadcast networks in a given week, and yet these were the series that drew the majority of critics’ attention.

Almost all of the commonly viewed series are U.S. produced. It is easier than it has ever been to access series originating elsewhere, but it is still outside the common practice of most viewers or the “general audience”. The U.S. industry is also watching for successful

series produced elsewhere and remaking them to a greater degree than used to be standard.

With the large U.S. population and the current quantity of original production, it is arguably the case that even Americans watching American productions hardly produces a sense of national identity or collective imagination anymore. I’m just starting on a project that aims to see if the same patterns of polarization that have been identified in news sources are evident in entertainment viewing. Preliminary evidence suggests substantial gulfs.

Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed and Jerónimo Rivera-Betancur

We have both. On free-to-air television, telenovelas still predominate. The two most popular themes in the last 10 years have been the *narco-novelas* (telenovelas about a Colombian drug lord, either as a biopic, or only as a point of reference) and biopics on popular musicians (which mix the telenovela with the musical genre). In contrast, the big winner at the India Catalina Awards for the Colombian Audiovisual Industry in 2017 was *La Niña* (Clara María Ochoa and Ana Piñeres, Caracol TV: 2016), a telenovela that tells the story of a minor in her process of joining and subsequently leaving the ranks of the guerrilla forces. Like the cases mentioned above, this example demonstrates the relationship between the recent history of the country and its major figures as protagonists of Colombia’s TV fiction series.

Discussion of the country’s serial productions has focused particularly on how Colombian history is dealt with, and the figures that are presented as protagonists, especially in telenovelas with prominent criminals as main characters. Currently, there is much debate about a series featuring a hitman who worked for the famous drug dealer Pablo Escobar. Criticism of the show has been harsh, suggesting that it defends the character, and, also, as the person portrayed is still alive and now out of jail, it would seem to be attempting to

justify his actions. Other *narco-novelas* have faced similar criticisms in the past, especially because they have been sold to the Latino market in the United States, raising questions about the image of the country that we are presenting abroad (Rincón and Martínez, 2014: 178).

As for international series, there is great interest in *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones*, which are only available on Premium cable channels and are therefore often viewed via illegal websites or illegal downloads.

There have been some successful adaptations, such as *A Corazón Abierto* (Fernando Gaitán, RCN: 2010-2011) and *Sala de Urgencias* (Guillermo Restrepo, RCN: 2016), adapted from the American series *Grey's Anatomy* (Shonda Rhimes, ABC: 2005-) and *E.R.* (Michael Crichton, NBC: 1994-2009), respectively, as well as adaptations of telenovelas from other Latin-American countries (particularly Chile and Argentina). However, adaptations need effective localisation of the product to the reality and interests of the country, to avoid looking like a bland transposition. Such is the case of *Metástasis* (Andrés Baiz, Caracol TV: 2014), an adaptation of the US series *Breaking Bad*, whose close adherence to the script and audio-visual style of the original series kept it from attracting the popular interest it was expected to.

In cinema and television, the most successful products are comedies. The longest-running Colombian TV show is called *Sábados felices* (Caracol TV: 1972-), which has been on the air continuously for more than 40 years. The comedic tastes of Colombian audiences have been marked by the storyline, characters and actors of this program, and its influence is visible in most TV comedies and the most successful Colombian films.

Geoff Lealand

The conventional measure of television and subsequent contraction of the “television audience”, in New Zealand and in other advanced systems around the world, is the ratings system based on

Peoplemeter panels; a system owned and operated by the global conglomerate Nielsen. The continued fragmentation of the television audience has further undermined the veracity of such measurement, but ratings remain the primary currency of exchange and *raison d'être* of mainstream television in New Zealand and elsewhere. The top ten programmes in 2016 were all scheduled on TVNZ1 and featured a mix of news and current affairs, reality TV formats featuring the professions (*Rapid Response*, *Dog Squad*, *SCU: Serious Crash Unit*), the long-running consumer affairs programme *Fair Go* and the long established down-on-the-farm series *Hyundai Country Calendar*. Seven of the top ten programmes were locally produced, with one reality TV format and two BBC imports.

Locally-produced television drama has a more difficult time. It has always had to sit beside a relentless flow of the best TV drama from the major centres of production (USA, UK, Australia, and more recently, Scandinavia). The cost ratio between imported drama and indigenous drama is very much in favour of the former; on average, one hour of US drama costs around \$NZ8,000-10,000 to buy in, whilst it costs more than \$NZ500,000 to make an equivalent hour of local television drama.

New Zealand On Air places a high priority on funding on drama, within an annual budget of around \$NZ80 million directed to television production. In respect of the very popular and critically well-received drama series *Outrageous Fortune* (Rachel Lang and James Griffin, TV3: 2005-2010), for example, New Zealand On Air supplied around 70 percent of the per episode cost (estimated at \$NZ600,000). The broadcasters remain rather risk averse at investing in such expensive drama (favouring lower-cost reality TV formats or imported drama).

Some years on, it appears that this interest has been difficult to sustain, in the wake of a lukewarm reception of more recent drama, and criticisms that local TV drama has drawn on a narrow band of scriptwriting and stories. In respect

of a continuing dialogue between locally-produced television drama and the collective imagination of the nation, the most significant site of such engagement centres less on limited drama series and more so on docu-dramas or forensic re-examinations of criminal cases which continue to fascinate many New Zealanders.

There is, however, a significant instance of a commercially-produced serial drama which engages more continuously, and possibly more effectively, with the national dialogue. This is *Shortland*

Street (Bettina Hollings, Caterina De Nave and Jason Daniel, TVNZ2: 1992-), the weeknight stripped medical drama serial, which regularly explores issues of nationhood (biculturalism and multiculturalism), gender, family and generational shifts. *Shortland Street* has been on the air since 1992 and it has been able, through processes of invention, variation and innovation, to sustain audience loyalty during all those years, and it has been pioneering in terms of casting and storylines, whereby diversity of race, culture and identity is now the norm.

5. Do the content, genre and structure of the television series produced in your country reproduce the characteristics of US series, or are there distinctively local narrative structures or models? Are there any examples that hint at a hybridisation of local and imported features?

Concepción Cascajosa Virino

Certainly, American television fiction has often been used in Spain as a point of reference for new series, although that does not mean that this influence is always positive. But I think we have to put an end to the myth that television series were invented in the United States. Television was introduced at the same time in many countries and in all of them fiction took on its own characteristics, in some cases with highly significant results, such as in the United Kingdom. In Spain, series with ongoing plots were being made as early as the 60s, such as *Novela* (TVE: 1962-1979). Not all TV fiction products are series for the widest possible audience: here in Spain, afternoon serials influenced by Latin American telenovelas and British soap operas have done very well. What the US industry does have is the ability to innovate, and thereby open up new avenues for creators from all over the world. In its day, *Hill Street Blues* was the inspiration for Juan Madrid to create *Brigada Central* (Juan Madrid, TVE: 1989-1990), and it seems obvious that the emergence of political series around the world would not have occurred

without the impact of a series like *The West Wing* (Aaron Sorkin, NBC: 1999-2006), which in its day was quite an anomaly.

Marjolaine Boutet

The narrative structures of French dramas have become very similar to mainstream international television series in the past two decades. There are exceptions, of course, such as *Les Revenants* (Fabrice Gobert, Canal Plus: 2012-) but its most striking and successful aspect is the *mise-en-scène* and the directing, not the writing. However, in the comedy genre, we have short-coms with 6-8 minute episodes which are a very specific TV format (*Kaamelott* [Alexandre Astier and Jean-Yves Robin, 2005-2009], *Un gars, une fille* [Isabelle Camus and Hélène Jacques, France 2: 1999-2003], *Scènes de ménage* [Alain Kappauf, M6: 2009-], etc.). A striking example of hybridisation is our longest running and only daytime soap opera, *Plus Belle la Vie* (Hubert Besson, France 3, 2004-), which combines soap opera elements with thriller, whodunnit and sometimes fantasy plotlines. It is an extremely popular

series (around 5 million viewers) with more than 3,200 half-hour episodes so far.

The influence of cinema on French TV series is very strong, and both the director and the actors (if they are already famous) usually have more power than the writer(s).

Amanda Lotz

That’s hard to say. There is so much domestic production that yes, a lot of series reproduce genre codes and characteristics and yes, there are some shows using more distinctive structures and models. Because the range of series is so extensive and so little imported, it is difficult to assess hybridization. The shift to seasons with fewer episodes might be one of the most significant practices long customary elsewhere to be increasingly common in the U.S.

Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed and Jerónimo Rivera-Betancur

As noted above, there has been an evident influence on the organization of the episode structure of local telenovela series. The case of *A Corazón Abierto* is illustrative, as its first season had 120 episodes, and the second season had 90, very different from the 23 episodes per season of the original version, *Grey’s Anatomy*. However, the reduction from 120 to 90 episodes is illustrative of the cutback process being experienced by the telenovela, a genre whose number of total episodes has decreased.

The rise in adaptations of fictional products from neighbouring countries also reflects a kind of standardization of the sale of formats and a reduction in production costs. This is a process that has been evident for the last ten years, with Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela as the major format negotiators for the region (Uribe-Jongbloed and Pis Diez, 2017).

In the last few years, Colombia has become a strategic base for the production of audio-visual products aimed at a wider Latin American audi-

ence, and some of the most important US producers have established subsidiaries in the country (Piñón, 2014). However, Miami as the centre of production, business and financing for a multicultural Latin America (Sinclair, 2003), and the Mexican accent as a supposedly international accent, particularly for dubbing, continue to set the industry trends for what is supposedly “Latin American”.

Geoff Lealand

As noted above, free-to-air broadcasters and pay TV services in New Zealand continue to favour imported programming or re-versioning of formats which have been “market-tested” elsewhere. The percentage of New Zealand-produced content across the mainstream channels seldom exceeds one-third of broadcast hours. The one exception is Maori Television, which broadcasts up to 90 percent local content.

Local equivalents of competitive cooking shows (*Masterchef* et al.), home renovation and make-over shows, mating/dating shows (*The Bachelor*), observational formats (*The Real Housewives of Auckland*) and talent shows proliferate. Particularly prevalent are “professional” formats, especially those featuring various branches of law enforcement such as police, traffic control and border security. On certain evenings, it seems that the television schedule operates as a public relations channel for such institutions, as well as providing many moments of *schadenfreude* for those watching.

Such programming largely flows from the primary centres of format production (UK, USA and, increasingly, Australia) but there have been some New Zealand contributions to both local and international schedules. The New Zealand-developed format *Popstars* (1999), built around of the all-girl pop group TrueBliss, was sold around the world, with ownership eventually acquired by Freemantle International. This early format is regarded as being directly influential in the de-

velopment of the now dominant *Pop Idol/American Idol* formats. Other formats include *The Chair* and others developed by New Zealand production company Touchdown, which was acquired by the Dutch media group Eyeworks in 2006.

In terms of interesting hybridisation of formats, it is Maori Television which is displaying innovation, producing clever and culturally diverse variations of mainstream formats, such the comedy match-making *Find Me a Maori Bride* (2015) and street-based talent show *Sidewalk Karaoke* (2016).

Despite the opportunities for shared funding, co-productions are not a major feature of New Zealand television. Notable exceptions have included the Jane Campion-directed limited series *Top of the Lake* (UK/Aust/NZ, Sundance Channel: 2013) and the comedy-drama *800 Words* (Aust/NZ, TV One: 2016-2017). The success of the latter series could lead to similar ventures but, generally, there seems to be little desire amongst Australian broadcasters to make more connections with New Zealand, despite the close cultural relationship and shared history. This is despite the Project Blue Sky High Court decision of 1998, which required Australian television channels to count New Zealand as “local content” under the Australian Content Rules. This has not led to any significant increase in New Zealand material on Australian screens, whilst Australian programmes remain very conspicuous on New Zealand screens. ■

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conclusion

RETHINKING TELEVISION ON A GLOBAL SCALE

ELISA HERNÁNDEZ-PÉREZ

Television series form part of a cultural imaginary that is increasingly global and local at the same time. This highlights the need to consider series not only as entertainment (although, of course, they are), but also as social, economic, historical and cultural objects. This does not mean that all these points of view need to be considered every time we think, talk or write about television series, but rather that they should serve to make us recognize and remember the intrinsic limitations of the analytical methodologies we adopt. As Concepción Cascajosa, Marjolaine Boutet, Amanda Lotz, Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed, Jerónimo Rivera-Betancur and Geoff Lealand have explained in their answers, there is far too much going on—both behind and in front of the television camera—to assume that a superficial comment or analysis could give us a complete picture of the effects and implications that television productions currently have for our society. Such research is undoubtedly necessary, but it is important to be aware of the immeasurable presence and relevance that television series have beyond the medium in which they are shown.

If we can confirm anything from the way in which all these experts describe television production in Spain, France, the United States, Colombia and New Zealand, it is the enormous importance of economic factors (related mostly to the potential profits for production studios) in shaping the structure of the audiovisual industry in these

very different countries. The way the television industry works in a country, who owns production studios, the distribution models and the audience shares are, as we have seen, fundamental indicators and factors not only for understanding these nations, but also the way these countries relate to others through television production, distribution and reception. Some factors, such as the presence and relevance of powerful media conglomerates or the emergence of new media in television viewing modes, appear to be a common feature of the direction that the global audiovisual industry is progressing towards. Others, such as the generic hybridization of the telenovela in Colombia or the presence and protection of Maori culture in New Zealand could be understood as local phenomena and reactions to certain unifying tendencies in the worldwide television industry.

In any case, the identification of these trends in content and themes, as well as in industrial and economic features appearing in different contexts offers an opportunity not only to rethink the direction in which television has developed as a medium in the past few years, but also to start a conversation about the path it will take in the immediate future. This *(Dis)agreements* is our humble contribution to this necessary and fascinating debate. ■

BEYOND “QUALITY TV”: THE MEDIUM THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Abstract

We live in a context in which cultural and industrial globalization is a more and more complex and paradoxical process whose main characteristic seems to be the tension and struggle between the local and the global. This discussion among experts in television from different countries seeks to broaden the geographical horizons of what we talk about when we talk about television production, distribution, and reception, so as to figure out how to rethink the medium beyond the “quality TV” boundaries.

Key words

Television; Spain, France; United States; Colombia; New Zealand

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MÁS ALLÁ DE LA «TELEVISIÓN DE CALIDAD»: EL MEDIO EN OTROS LUGARES DEL MUNDO

Resumen

En un contexto en el que la globalización cultural e industrial se presenta cada vez más como un proceso complejo y paradójico cuya principal característica parece ser la tensión y lucha entre lo local y lo global, esta discusión entre expertos en televisión de diferentes lugares del mundo busca ampliar los horizontes geográficos de aquello de lo que hablamos cuando hablamos de producción, distribución y recepción de series de televisión para ayudarnos a repensar el medio más allá de las fronteras de la «televisión de calidad».

Palabras clave

Televisión; España; Francia; Estados Unidos; Colombia; Nueva Zelanda

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