

FRANCÉS, M. *Contenidos y formatos de calidad en la nueva televisión*. Madrid, Instituto RTVE, 2011, 280 p. ISBN 978-84-88788-81-8

BY **JOSÉ ALBERTO GARCÍA AVILÉS**

*Lecturer at Universidad Miguel Hernández in Elche*



### In search of lost quality

Quality on television constitutes a broad, heterogeneous concept that covers numerous proposals and constituent elements. There are some quality standards for popular entertainment, others for news, as well as a quality for reality shows and fiction. Since television, as the main socialising agent, has a great capacity to influence the political, human, social and cultural education of citizens, it seems logical to demand that, by means of programming variety and quality, it help to add a certain degree of training in the access to knowledge in society (Medina 2006). This function is not only the responsibility of public-funded television but is inseparably linked to the activity carried out by any kind of television (Ojer 2009).

This choral work, coordinated by Miquel Francés, relates the discourse regarding the quality of a programme with that of the television system, as well as the differences between public and private television, generalist and thematic. And, in the classic line of Ishikawa (1996), asks a fundamental question: should the study of quality be tackled from the sphere of efficacy, technology, aesthetics or ethics? Professor Francés is one of the greatest experts in documentary production (2003) and television formats in Spain, as well as the new audiovisual ecology (2009). His work in directing this volume has become an exercise of diagnosis and provocation regarding the contradictions of today's audiovisual ecosystem in Spain that lies behind the equilibrium between three broad aspects: the level of programmes offered by channels, professional production standards and programming strategies.

The book contains a dozen articles, the result of presentations at the 3rd CONTD Seminar – Content for Digital Television – which is held every year by Valencia University. This is not a mere compilation of talks but an evident attempt to offer a connecting thread and underlying argument, divided into four large sections: the regulatory framework and audiovisual system; quality content; digitalisation and content convergence; and production in the new television windows.

After the regulatory framework of the sector, which is presented impeccably by Jose María Vidal, from Universitat de València, Professor Enrique Bustamante laments the promises of quality and the growing poor quality of today's television content, at the same time as criticising “the Administration's total inhibition regarding market drift” (p. 59). The debate raised by the professor of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid is opportune and constitutes one of the book's great contributions. In an increasingly competitive audiovisual ecosystem, the industry's regulation is problematic, given the fear that intervention might become a hidden form of censorship, subject to arbitrariness or party-related ends. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to promote forms of regulation and self-regulation in order to stop market forces from taking over.

Emili Prado, professor of audiovisual communication at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, together with other lecturers belonging to the GRISS research group and the Euromonitor observatory, carries out a comparative analysis of the digital TV genres in Europe. His study reveals that the weight of public service has diminished and now accounts for little more than a third of the television on offer, compared with the 65% provided by private channels. This change in proportion has consequences in the area of content, with the predominance of three broad macrogenres: news, fiction and infoshows. Also relevant is his view of the most innovative programming strategies and the instruments required to fulfil the medium's public service mission.

Àlvar Peris, from Universitat de València, confirms the growing dynamism in the production of audiovisual content for the internet and mobiles, surpassing the deterministic discourses of technology and tackling narrative and aesthetic possibilities. Rosa Franquet, professor from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, explores various experiences of the Catalan Audiovisual Media Corporation, of the Spanish RTVE and the BBC in the area of cross media content, with media convergence strategies. Referring to this, Hipólito Vivar, from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, investigates the added value services

provided to users by connecting television and the internet. Germán Llorca, from Valencia University, describes the panorama of *crowd funding*, a new initiative to finance and create audiovisual content. Finally, Ángel García Castillejo, a member of the Telecommunications Market Commission, traces the evolution of the paid-for audiovisual service market.

Nevertheless, this volume remains halfway between a precise diagnosis of the formulas to produce laudable programmes and a pragmatic proposal capable of combining interest, profitability and originality in programming. It needs to be more specific when analysing the overworked factors that constitute quality to go beyond the usual conceptual analyses, so far removed from professional practices and often inclined towards theoretical visions without tested verification.

These pages criticise the “tyranny of audiences” as a method to measure TV quality. This perspective, usually defended by private broadcasters more than TV viewers themselves, tends to consider any alternative definition as the result of intellectual, political or academic interest. In this way, it seems that the requirement to achieve quality television consists of not setting any limits, not even through programming. The problem is that there is no measurable relationship between the quality of a programme and the size of its audience: numerous studies reveal that TV viewers habitually do not choose the programme they believe to be the best quality but the most spectacular, the one that doesn’t bore them or the one that requires the least effort (Artero et al. 2010). Often, those responsible for channels have acted without taking into account the long-term effect (both in terms of the prestige of their brands as well as for society) of programming content close to TV trash (Sánchez-Tabernero 2008). Thanks to this approach, the audience rating dictatorship distances from programming any content that involves a risk due to its level of innovation or because it requires time for the audience to assimilate it until it achieves the predicted share.

The book will please those studying television and professionals who wish to know the implications of multiplatform production, as well as those who are looking for an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the audiovisual industry in our country.

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