

Eli Lee Carter, **Reimagining Brazilian Television: Luiz Fernando Carvalho's Contemporary Vision**, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018, 286 pp., \$28.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Melina Meimaridis
Federal Fluminense University, Brazil

In **Reimagining Brazilian Television: Luiz Fernando Carvalho's Contemporary Vision**, Eli Lee Carter examines one of the largest television industries in the Global South and its most successful network. Through an aesthetic analysis of Luiz Fernando Carvalho's baroque and antirealist theatrical style, Carter adds to the discussion on quality and authorship in contemporary Brazilian television. In a moment where American shows are very popular around the world, and especially in Brazil, the author innovates by shedding light on the state of the art of Brazilian television through an aesthetic and in-depth discussion about some of its most artistically challenging fictional shows.



Television in Brazil has undergone some changes in the last two decades. Most notably the rise of cable television from the mid-2000s to 2014. According to the *Associação Brasileira de Televisão por Assinatura* (Brazilian Pay TV/ Telecom Association), in 2014, cable subscriptions reached an all-time high with 19.1 million subscribers; however, in recent years, the cord-cutting trend has steadily increased in view of streaming services like Netflix and the country's current financial and unemployment crisis. Another factor to consider is the *Lei da TV Paga* (The Pay Television Law) that allowed the television industry in the country to develop smaller independent production companies. Despite these changes, TV Globo is still the largest broadcast network in the country. Along with its impressive stake in broadcast television, the Globo Group has its own cable and streaming services. With this in mind, the choice to focus on the productions of Globo's most successful director is easily justified.

Because of specific historical obstacles, as the depreciation of television as an art form, there have been few book-length examinations of television aesthetics (Jaramillo, 2013). Considering this gap in the literature and the fact that television in Brazil is still seen by a large part of Brazilian intellectuals as an "ignoble mass medium" (Moreira, 2000, p. 50) with the academic discourse frequently privileging film over TV, this book fills a much-needed gap in television research. Through an aesthetic examination of Luiz Fernando Carvalho's television productions, Carter produces a debate about authorship and the production practices of Brazilian commercial television. Therefore, scholars and students interested in television studies, aesthetics, and Brazilian contemporary television will probably enjoy the in-depth analyses of Carvalho's shows.

The entry point into Carter's examination of Brazilian television is to understand how Carvalho's work "functions as both a counterpoint to and a reflection of Brazilian television fiction's past and present, and its transition into the future" (p. 3). Such an aim is difficult to execute, yet Carter does a good job in

presenting a detailed account of Carvalho's work and production methods. The many images throughout the book help to situate the reader and present them with glimpses of Carvalho's creations. The choice to focus the book's analysis on Carvalho's shows allows the author the opportunity for a dense discussion and examination of the director's many production methods and aesthetic style.

Carvalho is a filmmaker turned TV director who is known for his aesthetic innovation in Brazil's audiovisual industry. He is also known for his on-screen literary adaptations of prominent Brazilian authors such as Machado de Assis, Graciliano Ramos, and Clarice Lispector. Carvalho, throughout his successful career, cultivated some clout at TV Globo, being given more creative control over his productions than other directors. Therefore, his productions share similar aesthetic qualities. Most notably are his preference for shorter narrative formats as the miniseries and the microseries, his baroque and antirealist style, and his closeness to theater both in production methods and in aesthetic style. His productions showcase Carvalho's belief of television's pedagogical functions. Although Carvalho still envisions himself as a true artist who happens to be a TV director, his relationship with TV Globo provides him with an enormous audience for his productions.

Each chapter starts off by presenting specific aspects of the Brazilian TV industry and TV Globo. Then, using one or more of Carvalho's productions, Carter situates the show in a production scenario tying together the aesthetic elements of the show with TV Globo's own economic ambitions. The first chapter discusses authorship in television and places the director, Luiz Fernando Carvalho, as the creative figure in television instead of the TV writer. The chapter also looks at the microseries *Afinal o que as Mulheres Querem* (So what do Women Want) (2010). In the second chapter, Carter presents Carvalho's relationship with TV Globo and the director's peculiar preproduction process in which Carvalho fosters an intimate and multilayered process as a way of exerting directorial control over his creations. This discussion uses the microseries *A Pedra do Reino* (The Kingdom's Rock) (2007) as its main example. The third chapter delves into Carvalho's need for control over his productions. He accomplishes this through the use of the theatrical *mise-en-scène* and a mythic imagery of the Brazilian *sertão* (backcountry) that challenges the rooted naturalism of the Brazilian telenovela format. In the fourth chapter, the author is interested in Carvalho's aesthetic tone and argues that shows like the microseries *Hoje é Dia de Maria* (Today is Maria's Day) (2005) and *Capitu* (2008) visually express emotion. Thus, the spoken word gives way to the "figurative or pictorial" (p. 127) in a process where Carvalho diminishes the power of the TV writer. In the fifth chapter, Carter argues that the director's creations through style and aesthetic experimentation seek to create an artistic language that represents the nation's singularity. To sustain his arguments, Carter relies on the concepts of cultural heritage and *ancestralidade* (ancestrality) while examining several of Carvalho's productions. The book's sixth chapter presents Carvalho's *Projeto Quadrante* (Quadrant Project), an intercultural and interregional exchange in which the director takes his show on the road, moving beyond the dominant production axis of Rio-São Paulo. Carter explores *Capitu*, an adaptation of Machado de Assis's masterpiece *Dom Casmurro*. In the seventh chapter, Carter analyzes Carvalho's interest in representing Brazil's C-Class in the microseries *Suburbia* (2012). Last, the author examines Carvalho's return to the telenovela format with *Meu Pedacinho de Chão* (My little Piece of the Ground) (2014) and argues that the director breaks with many established traditions.

There are still some shortcomings to be improved, however. Carter frequently shifts from a macroconceptual perspective toward a more microview of Carvalho's productions, trying to balance between specificity and generality. Yet, there are limitations to this approach and to the choice of focusing on only one creator. These choices limit the book from a greater debate concerning TV Globo's history and organization, specifically related to its *Padrão Globo de Qualidade* (Globo Standard of Quality) and how it applies to its telenovelas. These issues would help to denaturalize the network's place in Brazil's television industry and contribute to a better understanding of Carvalho's specific place within this general context. Likewise, the argument that Carvalho's work is singular would benefit from a larger discussion concerning some relevant telenovela writers from the 1970s who were responsible for the stylistic changes in Brazilian television dramas, if only to use their works as a counterpoint to Carvalho's productions. Telenovelas from the author Alfredo de Freitas Dias Gomes come to mind (Hamburger, 2005; Sacramento, 2014). Furthermore, a couple of subtleties escape Carter's view. The most notable is that Carvalho, while choosing to highlight the impoverished region of the Brazilian sertão (backcountry), ends up whitewashing the region by casting Caucasian actors to play most of the roles in productions such as *Hoje é Dia de Maria* (Today is Mary's Day) and *Velho Chico* (Old Chico) (2016). The latter received backlash for having a mostly white cast while taking place in Bahia, the state with the largest percentage of Afro-Brazilians.

These lapses should not dismiss this book's great value but motivate scholars to develop the discussions outlined by its author. Through the book's narrow focus, Carter still provides a more in-depth examination of several issues at play in the Brazilian television industry and should be considered a step toward a larger discussion of the state of the art of television aesthetics and the quality of its productions outside the Global North and the anglophone world.

This book should be of great interest to researchers and scholars working across a wide range of disciplines such as television studies, narrative and aesthetics of television series, political economy, and Brazilian television research. Those exploring specific issues in contemporary Brazilian television will find a well-supplied source of information and detailed analysis concerning several neglected issues. These include, but are not limited to, television and the disputes for authorship, aesthetic conventions in TV fiction, quality in Brazilian television, and the interplay between TV Globo and its creative artists.

References

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