THE SEMIOTICS OF TV FOOTBALL: IMMERSIVE, INTERVALED AND FRAGMENTED NARRATIVES

A SEMIÓTICA DO FUTEBOL TELEVISIVO: NARRATIVAS IMERSIVAS, INTERVALARES E FRAGMENTADAS

LA SEMIÓTICA DEL FÚTBOL TELEVISIVO: NARRACIONES INMERSIVAS, INTERVALARES Y FRAGMENTADAS

Marcio Telles*, Alexandre Rocha da Silva*

Abstract: The paper investigates possibilities for studying sports TV broadcasts within a theoretical framework coming from audiovisual theories, especially semiotics. Global strategies used by television to frame modern sport within its world are examined. The corpus includes eleven World Cup finals (1970-2010), which are analyzed synchronically and diachronically. As a result, it was possible (1) to systematize procedures that are repeated and form a code for broadcastings; (2) to limit the evolution of those codes; (3) to recognize the predominance of immersive, intervaled and fragmented narratives, and (4) build a theoretical and methodological apparatus for further analysis.

Resumo: O artigo investiga possibilidades de estudo das teletransmissões esportivas a partir de uma moldura teórica advinda das teorias do audiovisual, sobretudo da semiótica. Assim, são identificadas estratégias globais utilizadas pela televisão para enquadrar o esporte dentro de um mundo televisivo. Compõem o corpus onze finais de Copa do Mundo (1970-2010), que são analisadas sincrônica e diacronicamente. Como resultado, foi possível (1) sistematizar procedimentos que se repetem e que formam um código para as teletransmissões; (2) circunscrever a evolução desses mesmos códigos; (3) reconhecer a predominância de narrativas imersivas, intervalares e fragmentadas; e (4) construir um aparato teórico-metodológico para futuras análises.

Resumen: El texto investiga posibilidades de estudio de las teletransmisiones deportivas a partir de un marco teórico proveniente de las teorías del audiovisual, en especial de la semiótica. Así, se identifican las estrategias generales utilizadas por la televisión para enmarcar el deporte en el mundo televisivo. Componen el corpus once finales de la Copa Mundial (1970-2010), que se analizan sincrónica y diacrónicamente. Como resultado, fue posible (1) sistematizar procedimientos que se repiten y que forman un código para las teletransmisiones; (2) circunscribir la evolución de esos mismos códigos; (3) reconocer el predominio de narraciones inmersivas, intervalares y fragmentadas, y (4) construir un sistema teórico metodológico para futuras análisis.

*Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.
E-mail: tellesdasilveira@gmail.com.

1 Introduction

In Brazil, nearly a thousand football matches of the two major leagues of the National Championship are broadcast on television every year, spreading throughout open channels, segmented channels and increasingly on pay-per-view. Including international championships, continental and national cups, regional tournaments, qualifiers among national teams, etc., over 10 thousand television hours are dedicated to football a year.

During World Cup times, football guarantees major audience rates outside traditional peak hours. According to Gastaldo (2011), citing Ibope as a source, a football match at an "unlikely" time had the highest audience rates in the history of Brazilian television: during Brazil vs. England for the 2002 World Cup, at 3 am, 98% of TVs were on, with an estimated 110 million people connected to the channel. The International Football Federation (FIFA) estimated global audience during the final match of the last World Cup held in Brazil at 1 billion people – an all-time record for an international event (CHADE, 2014).

The purpose of this article is to introduce readers to the research perspective in communication and sport based on audiovisual theories, in order to better understand football within the topic of television. Thus, the article is divided in two steps: first, the focus will be on the general rules used by television to *frame*[1] sport within the subject of TV; then we will examine how those general rules apply to the technical and aesthetic characteristics of football TV broadcasts (their *framings*). To this end, we examine eleven World Cup finals from 1970 to 2010 – since the first color transmission of a final match, when the *ethicity* of football TV broadcast was already consolidated.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS: TV FOOTBALL FRAMES AND FRAMINGS

We start by the work of Suzana Kilpp (2003), for whom television is composed of virtualities (objects, personas, situations, etc.) that seem real, but which are actually its constructs. Sport would undergo the same process: the established practice of airing it in the last 50 years has *framed* it into the television grid and a television identity (*ethnicity,* according to Kilpp) was created for football through technical and aesthetic processes (which Kilpp calls *framings*). That identity is constantly negotiated every time a match is broadcast. It is as if the mere placement of a football match on the screen were realized at the level of the television imaginary (World). Both that *ethicity* and the processes that compose it (its *frames* and *framings*) are not always (we would say that almost never) exercised consciously by television producers. What originates a sport that is slightly different from that seen at stadiums are the habits consolidated by repeating those practices and the audience's expectations.

Kilpp (2003) sees *frames* as meaning territories built according to the logic of each medium, and she mentions programs, time slots, genres, program grids as examples. However, we can understand the concept beyond coded artifacts and also include strategies broadly used by television to appropriate objects external to their worlds. For example, every TV show, at the time of its conception and before its production, chooses basic guidelines to *frame* its object: some of these stem from the time slot, the genres, the program schedule, etc.

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1 The concepts of television world, *frames*, *framings* e *ethicities* are put forward by Suzana Kilpp in her work *Ethicidades Televisivas* (2003). We explain our view on those terms below.

Also according to Kilpp (2003), *framings* are the technical and aesthetic processes that combine, in a *frame*, visual elements such as composition and the choice of viewpoints and plans, as well as visual devices and editing pace. The term can be extended to encompass specific strategies employed by the television towards external objects visible in the subject studied. That is, while *frames* start from an intellectual perspective, *framings* are practical.

Finally, we agree with Kilpp in her view that television *ethicity* is a "mix of frames and *framings* of images" (KILPP, 2003, p. 33). Therefore, we propose to think of television – or televisible sport – as part of television and its worlds. What is that process like in the case of football? In the following sections, we will discuss some *frames* (ethical procedures) and *framings* (aesthetic procedures) of television football, relying on discussions carried out by authors from different approaches.

3 FRAMES: DISCUSSING TELEVISION SPORT

Whannel's (1992) study of sports TV broadcasts is based on the need to think about the relationship between sports events and direct television broadcast as *transformation* rather than representation. Eco agrees with Whannel, but he offers a more interesting term, saying that "direct transmission never appears as specular representation of the event that develops, but always – although sometimes at an infinitesimal level – as its *interpretation*" (ECO, 1986: 182, emphasis added). Furthermore, Whannel (1992, p. 94) notes that the limits imposed by the nature of a specific sport, as well as the effects of codes and television technology, will determine its *televisibility*. For him, some sports would be more TV-like than others, which would justify their greater presence in the media. That would explain why sports with a large number of practitioners, such as squash and handball, have not established themselves in television grids.

To what extent can we say that *televisibility* is aprioristic regarding television rather than the actual process of framing of sport within television grammar? We chose the latter because, in our view, the *televisibility* of each sport depends on its ability to adapt to TV codes already imposed by other forms of teletransmission (volleyball's television form is more similar to basketball's than to tennis's, for instance, with which it has more family resemblances) and also by the technology available. This does not mean that established sports such as cricket and volleyball did not have to adapt to television. *Televisibility* is not intrinsic to sport; it is rather extrinsic to it – its nature is similar to that of television. There are sports whose mechanics are capable of adapting to television codes (like volleyball) and to whatever television considers interesting as entertainment.

Moreover, *televisibility* is a technological issue, and every technical decision implies an aesthetic equivalent. Umberto Eco notes that,

> to broadcast an event, the television director puts three or more cameras so that its layout provides you with three or more complementary points of view, whether all the cameras point to the same visual field or – as can happen in a bicycle race – they are displaced in three different points in order to monitor the movement of anything mobile. It is true that the provision of the cameras is always subject to technical possibilities, but that is not enough to prevent a margin of *choice* already in this preliminary stage, (ECO, 1986, p. 182-183, emphasis in original).

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By delimitating the space of the sporting event on television segments (plans and framings), television creates a subtle – but important – difference between the sporting event and the television event. Then the sporting dynamics with its game mechanics and workings will be subject to television's dynamics, its editing rhythm, its aesthetics and its language. Even though the content of television delimitations is restricted by sports mechanics (the focus in football is on the ball, for instance), it is "in the use of objective lenses, the stress on values related to personal initiative and team values, in these and other cases [that] choice intervenes" (ECO, 1986, p. 183), that television will cause a rupture between sport played and sport broadcast.

Still, all sports have portions that are not relevant to current television form and therefore end up excluded or hidden along the broadcast. They are not insignificant: they range from backstage – or changing room – dynamics to – the orders that football coaches shout by the field (as opposed to volleyball, where coachers directions are recorded by TV). And sport, whichever it is, is not limited to execution: there is preparation of athletes and teams, behind the scenes, etc., which appear on television as metatext in journalistic comments. On the other hand, there are also television devices[2] that are not updated in televised sports but are common in other TV products and are therefore translated.

Ultimately, no matter the sport, pointing television cameras at any sport will result in creating its television version: a cluster of plans, sequences, editing choices, which in its most developed stage, will change the social imaginary of that sport. It is like going to a football stadium and stand on the bleachers in the middle part of the field, in the same viewing angle of the TV in order to emulate the television experience.

Moreover, as Benítez (2006) points out, there is heterochrony in sports TV broadcasts, a profusion of spatialized times running simultaneously. For example, there will be a "plan time" and a "screen time". The former is what the camera captures while the latter is what viewers are offered on the screen. The challenge to the image director in a sports broadcast is to organize it, to order how plans and their respective spaces will enter the screen time. In the last World Cups there were 32 cameras with 32 different views of the playing space. Such complicated 32:1 equation needs to be solved by creating hierarchies and safe organization models. After all, proliferation of cameras does not favor the narrative or viewers' understanding, but rather the safety of television itself, which avoids the loss of *any* detail at all costs.

Benítez notes that football

> has some features that do not help it at all: it is a game whose physical effort tales place mainly at the positional level, whose relationship between a player and the portion of the field to be covered is one of the largest among team sports, whose offensive efficacy is undoubtedly among the lowest ones, and which contains a significant proportion of pause in the sporting action that is difficult to locate and measure. Scenographically, all this translates as a large number of characters displaying their activity over a large location and with sporadic and surprising highlights (BENÍTEZ, 2006, p. 6).

That is, in football, the extensive playing space separates the places where sport might develop. By transforming that space into scenographic space, its breakdown into plans and the subsequent suturing during editing will cause an irreparable split in the dynamics of the football flow, which then will have already become television.

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2 As a short example, we remember television news anchors and how they are framed. Even though narrators and commentators are included in broadcasts during intervals with the same framing, their authority is more based on their presence off screen than on it.

The length of the game space and the need to convert it into a scenario for sport TV broadcasting are at the heart of the option to put the ball in the center of frames, placing it in the focus of attention and leaving the spatial organization of teams in the background. That choice is not only aesthetic but also technical: in the first audiovisual records of sports, the absence of the ball is evident since there were no mechanisms to capture it yet because of its speed. Those mechanisms were improved throughout the 20th century. But when they reach television, in the second half of the century, the centrality of the ball was already a habit, and then it becomes an aesthetic and narrative procedure.

Since the ball is essential for the development of the sport's mechanics, the decision to center on it is consistent. However, this does not mean that it is the main element: the spatial organization of the teams is as important as (or even more than) the action that occurs around it. The *moment of tension*, to use an expression of Dutch sports photographer Van der Meer (cited by WINNER 2001, p. 64-65) is rarely around the ball, but precisely where the ball might be in the next moment.

> "Football is a game of space. So, why should leave the space out?" he [Van der Meer] says. "Every Monday in the newspaper you see the same stupid, boring close-ups taken from behind the goals with long telephoto lenses that distort the space. These photos show you football situations, but you have no idea what they mean. Two players fighting for the ball? So what? Where on the pitch are they? (WINNER, 2001, p. 64).

The centrality of the ball leads to a general line of centrality of the other objects in their respective frames – players, coaches, referees, fans and extra-field celebrities: they will all appear centered. There will only be one cut sensitive to this logic: the image of fans – not a lone individual but an agglomeration of them. Perhaps because of the very inability to recognize the body of the crowd or precisely for recognizing it as a body, as a giant organism that spreads throughout the surroundings of the field and therefore is ungraspable in a single frame.

On the other hand, the unframed frame, empty at its center and redefined at its edges, is rare in television football. When it exists, it is understood by the television machine as an error, a failure that needs to be immediately corrected by re-centering the image. When the ball moves too fast for the camera to follow it, television has to record that passage fearfully. That is when the camera betrays itself: swinging, out-of-frame, it will go to one side and to the other until it re-centers the ball. While being out of frame defines "the non-classic style par excellence and, why not, cinema less caught in the diegetic illusion" (AUMONT, 2004, p. 130), football broadcasting is classical in nature.

Another frame for television sport is the approach of sports action in small visual spaces, limited frames that offer a closer glance at athletes. This principle, which will guide the transposition of any sport to its television version, is described by Whannel (1992) as "maximum action in the minimum space possible". According to that British author, this would be the main value of boxing televisibility: the fact that all crucial actions take place with fighters very close to each other, which would facilitate the photography of the scene. But what should be done with sports (especially team ones) in which the action does not happen in space as small as boxing's or as static as tennis's? Benitez says that "[football's] scenic space drastically separates the places where key events may occur" (2005, p. 6) in a match, so "football as a sport is not very telegenic, and television as a medium contributes negatively to it" (BENÍTEZ, 2006, p. 9).

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Minimizing the space to maximize action will only mean anything to viewers when it is within editing, since many frames in the case of football have no indication of where the action occurs. That is, the frames of action in television sport, especially in football, *require* the *out-of-field*. It is only beyond the frame field, exactly on the playing field, that those frames are able to acquire meaning. Aumont (2004, p. 135) says that in cinema the *out-of-field* is imaginary – as in painting – and concrete, "to the extent of the belief in the diegetic world as a coherent and unitary world. Strictly speaking, every *out-of-field* is always imaginary, as well as the field". And while in the case of football we are speaking of a physical and concrete field (turf), when it is out of field it also becomes imaginary, since the position of other players, coaches, the referee, the fans, etc., starts existing within the broadcast as updating power on the television screen, through cuts between cameras and other possibilities of images. But in the frame and in the field, the *out-of-field* is always unknown and only exists because of our belief that the match takes place in an organized and coherent world that can nevertheless be coherent only in its diegesis (as in the movies). That is why Eco (1984) and Flusser (2008) speak of the possibility of television sports even existing as a sport, being not more than *mise-en-scène*.

4 *FRAMINGS*: TYPE OF PLANES ON TELEVISION FOOTBALL

While *frames* are the ethical strategies to address an object external to television, *framings* are the set of aesthetic practices resulting in the actual television space. It is in editing, in the materiality of the audiovisual product that we can begin to deconstruct the broadcast in order to analyze it. The aim is to identify the types of plans and points of view that make up those *framings*. In the discussion that follows, we will use that typology to analyze how they are sowed (edited) and debate the issue of rhythm.

For Whannel (1992, p. 110), especially in team sports, "the commencement of a play is conventionally seen in the long shot, followed by moves in the middle shot as soon as the move is restricted to a smaller area". We call this *conventional* plan Main Plan. It is quite similar to the master plan of the film, although it plays a distinct role. In film, the Master Plan is used to locate the space of action. In sports TV broadcasts and especially in football, the master plan is an idealized convention: it is the *ideal* view of a model spectator that stands on the side bleachers, right in the middle, watching the game horizontally. And it is also the *main plan* because its function is to sew the other plans.

The main camera follows the game from afar and captures about 1/3 or less of the field, with the ball as its anchor point. When the play is restricted to smaller spaces and there is high body contact between players (especially in the final thirds of the field, near the areas) or at the apex of a sports action, there is the option to use more close-ups. Thus, there is ongoing dialogue, during the whole broadcast, between two types of plans during action: the *main* one, which also works as a mesh on which the others will be sowed; and *situational* ones, which focus on high tension actions (which Whannel calls *maximum action*) in reduced space. The latter are closest to the reasons why the ball is rolling, that is, when play time is not dead.[3]

However, this is not only about favoring action over understanding the game mechanics; rather, it is the effect of another television framing pointed out by Rial (2003). For the author, television "thought" football ideologically in the 1960s; then it started to "emotionalize it" and

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3 We understand dead time as that when the ball is stopped, out of the scene. For example, when the ball goes out on the side or goal lines, after a goal is scored, the time between a foul and resumption of playing, etc.

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today it "immerses itself" in it in order to see every match from the inside and get as close to sport as possible. It is this principle that will guide the increasing use of close-up images of players, coaches and referees, and replays and slow motions of almost any play (not only those with high narrative tension). We call those plans *immersive*. That is an attempt to place viewers not in the passive position they had occupied so far, where players paraded for them to watch, but in the game, where players parade *with* them. Unlike situational plans, immersive plans are those that erupt in edition during dead ball time.

Figure 1 outlines the use of some plans during the broadcast of the final match of the 1982 World Cup in Spain between Italy and West Germany. The plans indicated in green (1 and 2) refer to plans used while the ball was in play, that is, they are *not* dead time. Plan 1 is a typical example of main plan cutting the game space and keeping it away. Plan 2, in turn, is a typical situational plan; as can be seen, the size of the focus points (players) on the field is different between them, with plan 2 offering more prominence. Technically speaking, if we take film literature into account, there would be little difference between them, besides the camera anchor.

The other plans are *immersive*. Plans recurring during dead times, occurring throughout the match with the ball out of play, are in orange (3-11). Here, there are new cuts in game space: a detail of the goalkeeper (3), of the field in vertical (4), of the attacker recorded by a side camera at the level of athletes (5), of the *out-of-field*, such as the coach space (6 and 8) and a close-up (7 and 8, farther away), which reduces the space of significance for players' faces. Plan 9 shows the special booths where politicians and celebrities watch the match. This plan, as well as 10 and 11 (fans) will recur throughout the match in their dead time, especially after a goal is scored (it is a way to personify the broadcast).

Plans in red, in turn, are part of the broadcast rather than the game: they occur before or after the match and are part of the TV program. Plan 12, for example, is the first of the TV broadcast: a classic master plan, it shows the location of the game. Then the same plan rolls to the right until it finds the Santiago Bernabéu stadium and starts to approach it with a slow zoom in: film panoramic vision. Plan 13 captures the moment when hymns are played while Plan 14 offers the view from another game space: press booths.

5 ANALYSIS: RHYTHM AND EDITING IN SPORTS TV BROADCASTS

If, as discussed in item 3, the game space is organized through a well-marked rhythm that internalizes the diegesis and is able to relate types of plans to key moments of the match, such organization has been slowly transformed over the last decade, which saw the game space being pulverized into more fragments than the previous organization: within less than 40 years, it went from 383 cuts (at the final match of the 1978 World Cup) to 1,121 cuts (2010 World Cup). Figure 2 shows this evolution, counting the number of cuts (or plans: the different images that occupy the screen) during the match – from kickoff to final whistle – therefore excluding extra game periods. To standardize and compare the data, extra time (overtime and penalties) of the 1994, 2006 and 2010 final matches were excluded from the count.

As can be seen, after a point outside the curve – the 1982 final (with 787 cuts) – there was a decrease in the number of cuts and the consequent slowdown in the editing rhythm, which reached its lowest point in 1994 (492 cuts, close to the 383 of 1974 and 330 of 1978).

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From the next Cup on, however, the number of cuts would double: 986 in 1998, 931 four years later (stagnation) and then the start of an upward trend with 1029 in 2006 and 1121 in the Cup held in Africa (the number of cameras also increases from 18 in 2002 to 26 in Germany and 32 in Africa).

The higher number of cuts results in two paradoxical phenomena: on the one hand, the higher number of in cameras allows views not present in previous TV broadcasts so far, which increases the game space covered by television; on the other hand, that same space is blown up in successive cuts and fragments, remaining on the screen for no more than a few seconds – from one extreme in the table to another, the frequency of cuts went from 4.25 per minute in 1974 to 12.4 in 2010 – almost three times more.

As a result, the game space is lost in favor of an intervaled spacetime where the diegesis no longer works to tie a continuous physical space – and where one image succeeds another in a logical plan and meaning happens more by presumption that A (main plan) succeeds B (situation plan) – but rather to bind the granular space that is made of points and intervals. Now the succession of plans as cuts is no longer standardized and intuitive; it is even counterproductive sometimes: immersive plans – which contain images of the *out-of-field* such as coaches, fans and celebrities or close-ups of players – interpose themselves in the main plan *during* running ball time, or when time is not dead. This causes the game space, which could previously be considered a single extension where television chose viewpoints and camera angles, to be divided into smaller, atomized units, causing the extensive to open way for the intensive – the habit continues to connect the dots, but now they favor feeling (affection of the match) over meaning (understanding space and what happens).

In a way, these paradigm shifts are connected to what Shaviro (2012) calls "post-continuity", an aesthetic sensibility that disconnects space and time, where "narrative is not abandoned, but it is articulated in a space and time that are no longer classical", the increase in the number of cuts, fragmentation of space in successive intervals and close,[4] both of people and objects (what Deleuze (1985) calls the "affection-image" and faceness) give an "ADHD rhythm" (STORK, 2011) to the new generation of action movies and thus also to sports TV broadcasts. And this is paradigmatic in another sense: running ball time (of the actual game) has been decreasing over the years. According to FIFA reports, in 1998 the average time (mode of all matches in the cup) was 60'34" (986 cuts at the final), which was reduced to 52'47" (931 cuts) in next edition, and then to 55'03" (1029 cuts) in 2006, stabilizing at 54'04" (1121 cuts) in 2010. In other words, the number of cuts and the pace of editing have increased while sport action time has actually decreased.

In sports TV broadcast, the prevalence of the out-of-field establishes the classic model: by habit and belief, we know that the space of the playing field does not match the space framed by the camera field; rather, this field is the sum of all fragments which, when they are not shown, become the power of the image on screen. However, they only organize by having an *out-of-frame*: editing, which causes B to be the succession of A, and C of B, etc. It will organize the *out-of-field* – always a multiplicity of images – in a watchable audiovisual.

At the other end, however, today's TV broadcasts (from 1998 on) give rise to an *out-of-frame* that empowers the *out-of-field*, turning that "discursive space" into game space. This

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4 On the increase in the use of *close-ups* in outstanding players during sports TV broadcasts, cf. "O rosto do craque: fascínio da TV broadcast esportiva" (TELLES, 2015).

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turns the extensiveness of the pitch – where the camera used to create small units (plans) with field/*out-of-field* (cut) duality – into intensiveness(s), where meaning gives way to feeling and the camera no longer does incisions on a physical extension (game space), but rather plans and cuts on a "discursive" space which, as Fechine (2008) points out, exists only during transmission.

To Fechine (2008), it is typical of mediated communication to establish a disjunctive space between enunciator (here) and enunciatee (elsewhere), since these two figures are not physically in the same place. Thus, "all the efforts of the media discourse will be to [...] try to cancel this opposition between here and there, between there and elsewhere" (FECHINE, 2008, p. 133). A kind of "transmission space" is created for that, that is, the physical space where communication agents are positioned as senders or receptors. In any case, it is an *out of frame*, since

> it does not have direct correspondence with the space of production, presentation or reception – figurativized in the audiovisual *syntagma that is* produced and broadcast 'live' [...] It is a space that only exists at the very moment of transmission and connection takes place through it; furthermore, by putting all participants in one 'now', it turns all their different physical spatial positions in the same 'here' (FECHINE, 2008, p. 135-136).

The apprehension of that space without a physical referent happens solely through television language operations: not only plans and framings, but also linguistic devices (such as references to physical space), directing eyes (there is an outside to which the sport narrator looks that also becomes television space), technical effects and editing resources. According to the author, all these operations in direct transmission would build the "simulacrum of a unique location where interlocution would take place" (FECHINE, 2008, p. 138). Finally, this "space typical of broadcasting" puts into operation a kind of *mise-en-scène* similar to theatrical performance, since it makes up a communicative scene that exists only as long as "some act before others in a temporal present" (FECHINE, 2008, p. 141).

This new intervaled and fragmented game space has a particular, not logic geography where images are not intended to situate viewers – as in classic film – but rather to make them feel the audiovisual – as in chaos-cinema (STORK 2011) – that is, not *for* viewers, but *on* them. It is a space that does not unite but rather divides: it turns the playing field into intervals where the main plan (PP) is no longer main; it becomes just one more image updating possibility among many others. While televised football used to be the connecting of points divided in space that created a narrative through the easy location of the action in those separate spaces, what is connected today is no longer points but intervals – and a lot goes through those breaches, including a football match.

6 SOME REMARKS

The semiotics of TV football: immersive, intervaled and fragmented narratives analyzed sports TV broadcasts from a theoretical framework resulting from audiovisual. The goal was to understand what language is that which creates an actual televised football, what its characteristics are, how it expresses itself. Therefore, we distinguished the general guidelines with which sport is framed by television (*frames*) and then described some of the processes that follow that logic (*framings*).

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Therefore, we intended to systematize procedures that are repeated and make up the code of TV broadcasts. The heavy use of close-ups, graphics devices, counter-attack scenes, replay and slow-motion, etc. configure this encoding process that, together with comparative analysis of World Cup final matches between 1970 and 2010, allowed us to understand football as belonging to the Television World – a world whose language is currently expressed in immersive, intervaled and fragmented narratives as demonstrated in this article.

Our purpose with this type of approach was to build a distinct perspective for an eye used to football on television, discussing the status of a sport that has been establishing itself with actual television narratives over the decades.

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