45 - THE PERVERSE REALITY SHOW GAMES: AN ETHICAL ISSUE.

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To get started...

Physical Education suffers several "attacks" and "thefts" when it comes to conceptual assumptions. Terminologies such as aerobics, reflexes, tactics, game, among many others, have been used by individuals that are supposedly experts in this physical activities universe, though evidently distant from conceptual approaches developed at academic level. On the other hand, these individuals are nothing but "de luxe laymen", since they are produced by the media.

Following the new international wave of manias that has invaded Brazil, we have been experiencing, since 2001, the home invasion of television shows known as **reality shows**. "Casa dos Artistas", "Amor a Bordo", "Fama", "Pop Star", "Ilha da Sedução", "Acorrentados" and "Big Brother Brasil" are some of which have most frequently exposed their ideologies to the wide Brazilian television audience. Among the innumerable characteristics that are possible to be identified as commom to all these shows, there is one which draws our attention closer: the existence of a game in which the participants are involved in the quest for a sole objective. This game approach may be, then, another conceptual "thefts" suffered not only by Physical Education, but by all the other areas that use this game object as teaching-learning methodological content and resource.

There are some questions to guide this brief reflection: What is the game concept present in these shows? Which interest(s) could be hidden in the propagation of the given game concept? What are the consequences of such propagation?

We have decided to choose, as object for our study, the Big Brother Brasil show, broadcast by Globo Television Network. This choice was due to the impact on audience this show has achieved among the other shows of similar genre. Our objective is to investigate which idea of game this show transmits to the society and how this society receives this "information".

Looking for clues...

Taking into consideration the classical discussions in the communication field which attributes to the television the power to influence the formation of points of view, stimulate and subject an array of objects connected to the arts, politics, religion, among other important aspects of life in society, this study aims to start off from the assumption that the show approaches and disseminates through its game proposition, certain values (countertvalues actually) such as plot, falsities, lies, betrayal of trust, seduction, defamation, among others, used by participants as "tricks" to accomplish individual realizations, that is: sympathy from the voting audience, peer support and even to stay in the show until the last and major aim is accomplished: the money prize and fame achieved by the winner.

We know about the wide (and already obsolete) academic discussion proposed in the past by Althusser (1992) concerning the State's Ideological Apparatuses (SIA). By being aware of this discussion, we also know that the Means of Social Communication (MSC) held this SIA function, but we don't want to go back to this, not even taking into consideration the statements by Adorno and Hockeimer (…), who say that the MSC are fierce instruments used by Cultural Industry. But if we yield to the temptation of discussing the subject, regarding the MSC as important "Educational Resources" for the masses (because it reaches the majority of population), what resource could be as powerful as those to confront their initiatives if not the school (which can also reach many people)?

In this sense, if we believe in this moral and ethical way of interpreting the possible Big Brother influence in a concept of game pervaded by countervalues, we could then start to question the role of the academy and intervention agents together with the population, aiming to offer an alternative game concept (we could take the most correct or educational one into consideration) to the population through various educational agents and/or the Physical Education action range (mainly the school).

Hence, there are these two dimensions of the study to be remembered: the identification of the game sense conveyed by the Big Brother show followed by its perception by the population, and the Physical Education teachers' (and investigators') resistance actions that made me ponder over a methodological pathway diverging into two directions: At first, I used interviews with semi-structured questions originated from two guiding inquiries: a) What is your opinion about the game presented in the Big Brother Brasil show? b) Say what you understand by game. The instruments were applied in groups of 05 (five) people, all declared viewers of the show divided in this manner: 14/15 year old children who do not attend school, 14/15 year old junior high school children and Physical Education teachers from the same school; Physical Education college freshmen (attending the first semester) and seniors (attending the last semester) from the same University; community people of different ages and older than the groups of children mentioned above. The school's Physical Education pedagogic programme used for study was also contiguously observed. Afterwards, with the data collected with the first instrument in hands, I assembled a questionnaire with the recurrent indicators that appeared in the discourses of the people interviewed and applied it to larger groups divided thus: an 8th grade class with 35 students in a countryside school in the State of Minas Gerais; a group of 14 to 16 year old adolescents with 35 individuals from the same town that do not attend school, the Physical Education teachers from the previously mentioned school; freshmen and graduating seniors majoring in Physical Education from a university in the same town; leisure and recreation teachers from the same institution, 35 people from the community in general.

Using these criteria to choose the group, I intended to verify: 1) The impact of the information given by the show on the young generations and what is the difference of impact on young individuals when teachers intervene and when they don't intervene; 2) If the teachers (following the school's pedagogic proposition) hold a game concept that is contrary to the one in the show, or if they simply reproduce its information; 3) If the students majoring in Physical Education show significant advances in the game conception presented by the University, allowing them to use it when teaching; 4) The impact of information given by the show on different aged individuals other than the ones from the groups previously mentioned.

The analysis of the interviews were performed according to the analysis techniques proposed by Bardin (1994), but there has been an attempt of semiological analysys based on Eco (2000), searching signifieds, signifiers and signs within the game ideas found. The data collected from the questionnaire was interpreted according to quantity and quality in relation to the analysis made in the interviews following Gil's (1999) orientations.

Some possible directions...

The proposition of this sort of shows, namely reality shows, is an initiative taken by the biggest television networks

from Europe and The United States which aim to broadcast to a major audience what could be the daily routines of people living inside a house, and, for a certain amount of time, kept away from contact with outside people and facts. Being monitored 24 hours a day by cameras and microphones, the participants open their lives, even the most intimate aspects of it, to the general audience. Among many other similar style shows, Big Brother stood out as a recipe for success in many countries, becoming almost an international network of the genre.

The main point I highlight is the idea that there is a game. As a game, there is a set of rules that, basically, determines the elimination of participants every week, until the last week when one is declared the worthy prize winner. It is also important to highlight the existence, within the set of rules, of exemption prerogatives earned by the week's leader and the protection conferred by a participant who weekly plays the role of "angel" (protector). Although the weekly indications for eliminations are done by the participants themselves, sometimes by the leader, sometimes by the entire group, it is the audience's duty to decide who is being eliminated, either via phone or internet voting.

After the considerations explained above, it is already possible to comment on the ethics that permeates the show. Firstly, the game idea is clearly grounded on the neo-liberal logic which is adopted in the entire globalized world and also disseminated by the Cultural Industry (Adorno and Habermas, 1997). According to this logic, we are permanently competing, and the player's competence, even beyond a Jewish-Christian moral tradition, suggests astuteness for political articulation, either with the people close by (other competitors) or with the distant ones (general audience). In this case, the "player" must not only develop strategies to grant his/her survival in the game by relating with peers, but also strategies to reach the general audience emotionally. Such strategies may often become perverse when they state a distance between the actions inside the house during the show and the real competitor's actions on the outside world. These very strategies draw most of the audience's attention, because according the theological point of view, they are the aspects that make a difference between those who consider as right the motto "everything goes" to achieve goals and those who stand for the limits of actions and respect the others' freedom to achieve their goals (Ribeiro, 1981). Conversely, it is observed that in the hegemonic moral point of view in a country said to be mainly Christian, it is very dangerous to admit that the winner is the competitor that chooses the strategies which are morally rejected by the tradition, but paradoxically accepted by the general audience that chooses the winner(s). This leads us to the second ethical consideration: is the winner actually chosen by the audience?

The issue I raised cannot be, primarily, answered with absolute certainty. All the internet and phone votes are processed by a computer system to which the audience has no access until the end of each stage of the show, when the results are informed. Such vote count system does not allow a fair inspection for proofs. Consequently, the results must be accepted in good faith. This fact allows the comprehensible criticism claiming that the broadcast stations can control and determine the course of the show, allowing the victory of a competitor to serve the stations' or the sponsors' interest, or even worse, of a competitor that reinforces the strategist concept which the ethics of the show aims to establish.

Globo Network announced in its website, after the 3rd edition of Big Brother Brasil, on 2nd April, 2003, the victory of another Brazilian of the "yokel" type. It also announced that the yokels had proved to be great "players", in spite of being supposedly non-learned, proving maybe that people coming from more simple classes are able to surpass those from higher classes, making use of resources, though not morally accepted, which allow them to reach more positive final results, and that that is what really matters. What kind of "player" do they intend to present? What kind of "wits" do they want to propagate?

I could just go on discussing about a long approach on the perverse ethics of the show bearing in mind the pre-raising of the theoretical scenario, but in order to work on this text objectively, it suffices to say that the results indicate that the social agents chosen for this study are assimilating the idea of game brought by the show, even though the process is still not completed, as I will make further comments on this, indicating the possible existence of a transition process. Maybe the corroborative fact for this, before I refer directly to the perception the social agents hold concerning Big Brother, is the general conception of game as a competition, the relation winner versus beaten, rewarded and prominent, as well as the great association: game and sport. Maybe the greatest surprise has been the generalization of this concept in all the groups of social agents who comprise this study, indifferently to their level of education, age and social status.

In the interview transcripts, it is clear among 14, 15 year old students, no matter if they attend school or not, that their speeches are invariable, i.e. they all present the same conceptual notions of the game, grounded significantly on the competitive aspect and on the winner X beaten. That gives the impulse to question the contents of the game being treated (if they are) in schooling, or the type of information about the game, such as contents or methodology these teens have access to via other educational sources. Here we may notice a fertile field for the establishment of a perverse game concept by such shows as the Big Brother.

The decade gap in university students' and adolescents' ages does not change the tone of this discourse. Students in university also present similar concepts of game as the ones presented by adolescents. This repetition is not what draws attention, but the fact that Physical Education seniors in their last semester, after a period of experience dealing with the game contents in many disciplines, repeat the adolescents' discourse. I am not sure this scenario is enough to draw a general framework beyond the data samples chosen for this study, but if it is, then what kind of professional will we have in schools to work with game contents in a different way?

Now that I mentioned the word professional, although a few teachers presented a somewhat more elaborated speech in comparison to the ones presented by adolescents and college students, we have been able to notice an implied competitive grudge in sportive tradition and also attracted, even if they made efforts to distance their game consideration as sheer competition, a no less noxious educational notion, because of its limiting character, a practical concept of game, without a concrete purpose.

Following the same content tendency, community people's speeches go in the same direction, that is, of a game concept grounded on competition, above all, in victory (showing traits of a sportive process). It seems that the data indicate that this idea is part of the perception the actors hold concerning the Big brother, that is, it is commonly agreed the existence of a game and, as in any competition to fit this hegemonic idea I am elaborating, winning is the ultimate goal, regardless of the strategies used for this achievement.

Though the speeches express the perception of the show as a game, it was possible to observe that despite the belief that various strategies should be used to win, independent of the emotional side of the relations, the people interviewed demonstrated certain censure towards certain points in the show, which are sometimes labeled as "exaggerated appeals". These are the points presented by the show that lead us to suspect that the winning results are manipulated, even if everyone still watches the show. This sort of paradoxical behavior by the audience, nay being suspicious about the show's integrity but still watching it, may represent a transitional ethic conflict experienced by societies when there is a change of values. Even though it happens gradually, it is still a process in progress that ends up assimilated by an insistence mechanism.

I believe the data collected from the interview was enough to begin a debate on the pedagogical action of Physical

Education in the conceptual, technical and educational formation of abilities, plus inherent field knowledge (game, sport and others). My belief comes from initial analysis of the social agents' speeches in this study, and I in my opinion there are elements available within the formal educational field which will allow us to evaluate educational actions in terms of efficiency and efficacy to form socially acceptable values. However, in order to build a more efficient instrument, it is necessary to discuss about a more refined diagnosis of the scenario previously presented, so I focus on other data, collected in a broader survey realized in my study (during a second occasion of data collection). This broader information shows that there is not yet, a concrete scenario to favor the possible show promoters' intentions, but it is already possible to observe some transformation in process, those perceived in the social agents concerning the game object.

Going to a never ending end...

As I collected data from a wider group taken as sample for my research, I aimed to highlight some data related to the image introduced by the Big Brother show, construed as fitting the reality show pattern. The data searched kept its relation to some categories and indicators that permeate the objects game, competition, victory, rules and the type of show itself. The survey for data collection was applied, in the form of a questionnaire-like instrument with close-questions, to groups of social agents with similar characteristics, nay those in equal level of educational life (elementary, middle, high or major), teachers and community people in general.

Revising the classic Homo Ludens, by Huizinga (1980) and the works by Kishimoto (1997), Bruhns (1993), among others who produce detailed knowledge about game as a theoretical object, some elements are easily found among its characteristics, functions and values, indicators of emotion, fun (game-related activities), fellowship (interaction, socialization), participation, competition, overcome and sagacity (wits), among others. Hence, I became interested in questioning the social agents about the importance they conferred to these indicators and I found fellowship, fun, emotion, overcoming competition, overcome and wits. In fact, although in a first moment I accuse the perversity in the television shows, it seems sensible to me to admit that the moral and ethical traditions still preserve some kind of judgment of values when it comes to measuring what is right or wrong.

Before I infer that the action of the insistence mechanisms leading to introduction and/or transformation of values within a culture, and still persevere in the possible perversion of the scenario described above, I highlight that one of the elements most frequently accused of perverting the educational sense of the game competition may help investigate the possible coherence in the social agents' speeches. Among some of the most important elements in a competition, there would be some more orthodox, in the strict sense of the term, such as winning (be the champion), go beyond one's own limits and as far as possible, as opposed to some elements better developed "pedagogically" in the competitors, such as participate and do the best, cooperate for success, achieve the goals planned. The latter ones appeared most frequently in the answers to the inquiries to the agents, what shows some coherence between the indicators related to competition and those indicators said to have greater importance to the game.

I believe this coherent proximity between indicators to be a reflex of the concepts declared by the social agents as an activity, a practice being developed to search satisfaction, fun, and achievements specifically related to the nature of the activity, which, considering the rules, allows interaction among competitors. This idea supplanted some close or distant concepts over which I made inquiries, but even bound to the moral hegemonic tradition in Brasil, as a concept built in a closed instrument, it opposes the speeches that occurred previously in the first data collection. I believe this shows again the results of the insistence mechanisms that in a latent manner disseminate new groups of values to be manifested thoroughly in the later generations. This seems partially visible in the declarations concerning issues on regulation, triumphs in competitions and the reality shows

When questioned about what is considered to be a triumph won by wits, most agents replied that the smart player is the one that follows the rule, but doesn't miss chances to profit from what is allowed. In other words, he is the one studying the rules in detail and claiming what is not clear as being allowed in the game, thus taking advantage of the situation. This could actually be smart, otherwise it could be a perfidious action, when the chance to warn the other competitors appears before the situation becomes unfavorable to somebody. This could very well be true, so much that when questioned about the justice value bound to the regulations, most agents state that the rules are fair, but not perfect, because in most cases, the best competitor does not always win. This could prove that the best player, technically speaking, though he can always justify his victories, is not always the most clever one and the regulation, bringing implied resolutions, was made to serve whoever is the most clever, not the best technically. However, even the fact of his being connected to the rules, he shows himself more interested in triumphing using cognitive interpretative wits than developing an ability to endure and triumph in the competition.

The behavior of the agents mentioned in the comments above seems to find justifications when questioned about reality shows, particularly the Big Brother. By the use of the instrument of data collection, it is clear that people really watch the shows and consider the rules as inappropriate regarding the competitors' eliminations and promotions, supposedly decided by the audience. That is because an open decision is not allowed, since most people watch the show in an open television channel and their access is limited to the edited scenes. This only could seem to be a strong argument for any competitor willing to object against the results, especially if we associate this fact to the vote count procedure that rules out the audience's participation. On the other hand, there is still large audience and no objections against the results, demonstrating flaws in the regulations, what may favor unreal winners, or even winners that have been set to win. Who is profiting in this case? Would it be those who deserved to be winners by a general rule or according to the logic of the show?

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THE PERVERSE REALITY SHOW GAMES: AN ETHICAL ISSUE.

ABSTRACT

When we watch the television programs known as "reality shows," we can observe a salient element, namely, the notion of an existing game. It is our intention to explore both: the conceptions of game in such programs and the understanding of this conception by the viewers. We have opted for the study of 'Big Brother Brasil', broadcast by Globo Television Network. The data was collected in semi-structured interviews and closed-question questionnaires with groups of viewers with similar characteristics. The analysis and interpretation of data, achieved with qualitative and quantitative methods, tends to indicate that the programs disseminate a conception of a game that subverts hegemonic ethical and moral values in Brasil.

Key-words: game, media, ethic, moral, physical education

L'ENJEU PERVERS DES REALITY SHOWS : UNE QUESTION ÉTHIQUE.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis l'année 2001, en regardant les programmes télévisifs dénommés "Reality show", nous avons observé un élément commun qui a attiré notre attention : l'idée qu'il existe un enjeu. Depuis, nous cherchons à comprendre la conception de l'enjeu de ces programmes , bien comme l'apréhension de cette conception de la part des téléspectateurs. Dans le travail dont il s'agit, nous avons choisi d'étudier le programme Big Brother Brésil, transmis par la chaîne Rede Globo. Les données ont été collectées lors d'interviews semi-structurées et des questionnaires sur des questions fermées auprès de groupes de téléspectateurs ayant les mêmes caractéristiques. Dans l'analyse et l'interprétation de ces données, réalisées par le biais d'approches quantitatives et qualitatives, nous avons rencontré des indicatifs que ces programmes répandent une conception d'enjeu qui bouleverse les valeurs éthiques et morales hégémoniques brésiliennes.

Mots-clés : Enjeu, les Médias, l'Éthique.

EL JUEGO PERVERSO DE LOS REALITY SHOWS: UNA CUESTIÓN ÉTICA

RESUMEN

Desde el año de 2001, al asistir los programas televisivos denominados de "Reality Show", hemos observado un elemento corriente que nos ha llamado la atención: la idea de que existe un juego. Desde entonces, hemos buscado comprender la concepción de juego de eses programas, así como el alcance de esta concepción por los televidentes. En el presente trabajo, hemos optado por un estudio sobre el programa televisivo Big Brother Brasil, transmitido por la red Globo de televisiones.

Los datos fueron recolectados por medio de entrevistas semiestructuradas y ecuestas de custiones cerradas junto a grupos de televidentes de características semejantes. En la análisis e interpretación de los datos, realizadas con abordajes cuantitativas y cualitativas, hemos encontrado indicativos de que los programas diseminan una concepción de juego que subverte valores éticos y morales hegemónicos en Brasil.

Palabras Clave: Juego, Mídia, Ética.

O JOGO PERVERSO DOS REALITY SHOWS: UMA QUESTÃO ÉTICA.

RESUMO

Desde o ano de 2001, ao assistir os programas televisivos denominados de "reality show", observamos um elemento comum que chamou nossa atenção: a idéia de que existe um jogo. Desde então, buscamos entender a concepção de jogo desses programas, assim como o alcance dessa concepção pelos telespectadores. No presente trabalho, optamos por um estudo sobre o programa Big Brother Brasil, transmitido pela Rede Globo. Os dados foram coletados por entrevistas semi-estruturadas e questionários de questões fechadas com grupos de telespectadores de características semelhantes. Na análise e interpretação dos dados, realizadas com abordagens quantitativa e qualitativa, encontramos indicativos de que os programas disseminam uma concepção de jogo que subverte valores éticos e morais hegemônicos no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Jogo, Mídia, Ética.