

# Participation in Broadband Society

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Edited by Leopoldina Fortunati / Julian Gebhardt / Jane Vincent

Alberto Abruzzese / Nello Barile / Julian Gebhardt /  
Jane Vincent / Leopoldina Fortunati (eds.)

## The New Television Ecosystem

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*Alberto Abruzzese*

## Introduction

Environments work us over and remake us. It is man who is the content of and the message of the media, which are extensions of himself. Electronic man must know the effects of the world he has made above all things (McLuhan, 1972, p.90).

I use this quotation from Marshall McLuhan as the epigraph to this volume not only as a tribute to the end of his Centenary, but more so because it expresses the notion of environment in a way that is most pertinent to media studies and to the television – the topic of this volume. In this introduction I explore the new issues and challenges facing society in which the new television ecosystem is developing by putting forward new arguments that challenge and contextualise the debate, and the discourse in this volume. McLuhan posited that:

New technological environments are commonly cast in the moulds of the preceding technology out of the sheer unawareness of their designers (McLuhan, 1972, p. 47).

This is exemplified in the present ecosystem which has been framed and, indeed, shaped by McLuhan's legacy and is one in which the multiple facets of our global digital age are put in sharp focus via the medium of the television (TV).

McLuhan's famous motto "the medium is the message" (1964) heralded much debate, not least in his own works such as quoted here, in which he explored further the notion of environment as a system of interaction between material and nonmaterial media (technologies, words, images, sounds, people etc.). This present book follows a similar approach, as it aims to represent a realistic picture of contemporary international TV studies. Looking more broadly at television in the context of media studies one can see that the eco-systemic vision is not just an opportunistic idea that follows the same trajectory of other industrial sectors; rather it is a different paradigm that pushes us to think and use media in a different way. When the routines of old capitalism, and old technologies are critiqued from the point of view of a new ecologic thought, it is clear that we cannot just ignore this process and continue to study television as an individualistic technology. I evoke here the intellectual example of one of the most important contemporary sociologists, Edgar Morin whose debut in the sixties, *L'Esprit du temps* (1962), provided the academic world with a fundamental contribution to the development of the cultural industry. Even in this early work we find some examples of a systemic thought, although it was not until the 1980s, when sociologists started giving attention to the dynamics of complex systems that Morin moved in his later

works to a complete conjunction with the ecologist thought. The existential and cultural trajectory we see in his work is useful in understanding the evolution of a medium (television) that is also a huge metaphor of a part of society.

Television broadcasting is, indeed, not only the main technological mode of communication in the development of mass society; it also offers an approach that informs many sectors of social life, from logistics to marketing and from advertising to fashion. We can say that TV broadcasting represents the amplification of the mass market logic from the nineteen fifties to the nineties. Now, with the twilight of this broadcasting era we can see how television is trying to re-negotiate its function and fit with other new media, a point explored by new theorists such as Bolter and Grusin (1999). This is, of course, much more visible in the general process of the digitalisation of the TV broadcasting that will eventually completely transform the way we consider TV in the near future.

McLuhan's thesis, that the old media have become a part of the new media is perhaps too enigmatic if we do not, at the same time, keep in mind another even more crucial thesis of his. According to this the development of the forms of communication – from their primordial origin up to the present regimes of meaning of their highest technological permutation – has been characterised by an ongoing conflict between the visual languages and the languages of the senses. The first of these language approaches is governed by written activity that dramatizes the images (books, the press, cinema and television); while the second is ruled by senses, by the body or more exactly by the flesh, which is violently inhibited and subjugated by social bonds (governments, strong roles and identities, armies: products of both civilization and modernization). This is a line of thought that is against both the institutions and the western idea of progress which in the 1930s – one of the most heretical times for European culture – was viewed as the conflict between knowing and not-knowing. In short, if we accept – again following McLuhan – the idea according to which technology is a prosthesis of the human body (1964), the process in which today the digital languages are emerging against the analogue ones, the society of networks against the traditional ones, personal relations against social bonds, can be interpreted as a resounding re-appropriation of ourselves in terms of the most intimate part of human nature (I must highlight that the aforesaid is absolutely not in line with the “principle of hope” of humanist thought in its current ideological versions, either extremist or moderate: human nature is *per se* an expression of both violence and suffering). It is actually true that both the major TV stories and collective information as well as post-modern TV are increasingly and rapidly migrating, moving towards the networks. The former are simultaneously traditional, generalist and deeply rooted in the culture of a country, and are domestic, for families and for developing sovereign identity; the latter – the hyper-modern TV – broadcasts segmented stories and situations, very niche ones, forming an audiovisual product distributed for the sake of private consumption and not for linear, historical and social use by the

public sector and opinion forming. However, it is also true that while the two streams come together, the traditional TV contents are to be immersed in such a powerful medium that it redefines their significance, their points of view and perspectives. On the contrary, the expressive platforms of the digital networks can potentially multiply the points of view and the perspectives of communication endlessly, as never before, within the media framework of modern society. Therefore, their existence seems to contradict (potentially of course) McLuhan's assumption itself (at least the assumption from which we have started). The content of the message (the latter's statute on which modern media theories are essentially based) does not survive but on the contrary seems to dissolve into the extemporaneousness of the relational practices (some sitcoms/soaps have already given clear signs of this occurrence).

What is becoming of the world we are living in? What is the destiny, now and moreover in the future, for the social subjects in this time of transformation, suspended between a modern society and a network society? How are the political, institutional, economic and social subjects of information in those human environments becoming characterized by a higher and higher media density and therefore by connective skills eager to spread everywhere? How is the activity of the socializing agencies (which have to negotiate the meaning of the digital expressive platforms) restructuring itself within the medium and long terms of their development? How are the lives of those who – as adventurers, pioneers and finally natives – have started to inhabit the new media sphere evolving and transforming in ways that are more or less in conflict with the geopolitical models of the modern society and with the icons of the mass civilization that evolves and transforms itself? What is the meaning and the destiny of frontier wars? They have been evident since the very beginning, exploding between the creatures of the entertainment society and the creatures of a consumption society. Is it between the citizen-audience and the citizen-actor? Between the consumer and the “prosumer”? Between the external worlds of the public environment and the inner worlds of private life? These are the questions that have now arisen. These are the problems that we are currently tackling. Now, like many other times in the past, innovation has revealed itself during a catastrophic passage of eras. We are at a crossroads between the past and the future, a really momentous moment: in the middle of a systemic collapse that demolishes the certainties (and also the interests) of both the capitalist economies and the progressive ideologies and democratic politics.

This is about an epoch-making crisis, both structural and cultural. Has it exploded just before or after the move to Digital TV, to the information tools' digital languages? I personally believe that the upheaval we are facing does not concur with the modern concept of crisis which is totally dialectic, essentially affirmative and positive, i.e. necessary for our improvement, transforming our own discontinuity into continuity. On the contrary, I believe that the extreme and blatant catastrophe that our daily life is going through does not herald the promise of a revolu-

tion in the modern sense – that of short term (according to the aristocratic, bourgeois or proletarian traditions), but is actually the first signal of a mutation into the long term (similar to the millennial transition of the nomadic regimes to rural civilization). If McLuhan was able to see the computer era in television, we are supposed to see in the networks not what is evident since it is immediate, but what is not visible, thinkable nor yet happened.

In any case, what it is about is a crisis that is closely pursuant to the dizzy leap that the Internet has caused: the junctions, the plexuses and the tides of forms of relational lives that have emerged undermining – in their maximum acceleration and deceleration – even the grounds of what is Modern. It is almost as if the Old World, which is *now* past history – Civilization, Western, Westernization – has lost the languages (the contents and the forms) with which it was able to express its own power or its own distress. Therefore, the current metamorphoses of communication media – given the clash between mass media and personal media – are revealing (although still in an unclear manner) a new Tower of Babel, which, while crumbling in ruins, possesses many diverse and different languages. It is a Babel that feels nostalgic and, at the same time, recognizes the overbearing desire to rebuild the unique image of its own power.

In studying the current media situation we are asked to analyse both the past and the future of languages that are facing each other on the fields of digital networks more and more often. Is it about a war for new land between old and new social entities? Talking about new social entities could mean putting an end (or at least hoping to do so) to the tradition of the “modern ones” who assume presumptuously to be “new”. It seems therefore more suitable to say that we are still within the boundaries of the traditional modern conflict between avantgarde and rear-guard. We are on the battlefield, therefore, of a kind of uncertain and confused living. This is a living that is weak and precarious and, therefore, demands to make a decision – a stand, in order to divide and reassemble what exists. The materials analysed in this book, although sector specific, will hopefully contribute to orient ourselves in the current media scenario and lead to further discussion.

What are entailed by “discussion” here are the reasons provided by social entities, their apparatuses and mechanisms which justify the way in which they act. In order to debate there must be a situation, a field where choices – which are divergent and different in terms of strength and consensus – are conflicting. They are choices that divide and must be overcome by the disagreeing parties through some tactical moves that can safeguard their own strategic vision and their own goals. In those environments that are deeply immersed into the needs and interests of the government systems – markets, businesses, political parties, institutions, laws, organisations, corporations, movements – the democratic debate has to proceed through an extremely complex mass of fields of strength, which are different and hostile against each other. It is difficult to find a consistency in those processes because of the clash of interests – both material and nonmaterial, real and im-

aginary. The clash divides and/or unifies the economic and political environments, the money for globalisation and the bodies and places of living. Both the actors and the factors at stake are so complex that they are like an opaque screen beyond which it is very difficult to recognize the forces that really influence the transformation of a regime of meaning – and power – into an additional one.

The need to make a decision, as publicly debated as it may be, is actually the result of a series of incoherent survival instincts mixed with a dose of survival spirit. Such instincts come alive mainly motivated by self interest; as a consequence each transformation of human existence is always achieved by social action so lacking in transparency that it comes to be perceived as phenomena. The multiplicity of different subjectivities – to be aware of themselves and due to this awareness thus in conflict with each other – turns into the objectivity of a uniform, unique and subjectively inscrutable force, which, nevertheless, we call (or should call) society. It is in fact society itself that acts objectively as a filter, hiding the existence: the strict tie, which forces both roles and social professions to the division and abstraction of work (the organizational models of modern society are based on them), becomes obligation and even sense of responsibility. The public field has therefore its own hidden space, a backstage, which renders “necessarily” a kind of simulation and pretence of itself: such an existence – like appearing from the outside – that practices and social apparatuses, being themselves bound to a specific interest of their own, cannot be revealed. The subject, both as a person and as a collectivity, feels it must undergo an influence of mysterious and fatal forces: debate is no longer a free negotiation but becomes a forced negotiation: from practically open, it is confined and forced to be aware of a destiny already marked, an obligation already set to move forward. The public debate is made of scraps, marginal discussions; not about what is happening, or what is about to, but rather about what has already passed. Choices to be taken for the future have been already decided by the recent or the remote past. Therefore the present, especially in its dimension of complete media penetration, is assigned the task to carry out – inter-media fiction, symbolic ritualisation, and emotional “massage” – to represent the plots of power as destiny; they have been clouded in the coils and complexities of relations in society and have won, even before being democratically revealed, discussed and professionally processed.

In my introduction I have tried to give a general outline of the mediological problems in order to represent a scenario to be used when asking ourselves about the techno-cultural quality of the current transition from the analogue media to the digital one, from TV languages to network ones. My considerations herein have arisen after having analysed, with quite a heretic eye, the democratic regimes in the complex systems of a post-modern society. The material gathered in this book is the product of a rightfully and advisably more cautious vision. If I have dared to introduce my post-democratic and anti-modern vision first, it is because, in any case, my vision, extremist as it is, can contribute to evaluate the critical relevance

of human entry into the regimes of meaning, which we define as societies of networks (Castells, 1996). I hope my vision can allow us to move forward without coming back to the ideological dichotomies typical of the short term in revolutions. The online practices and media, along with the human element incorporated in their essence forces us to ponder about power, however, not limiting our reasoning to recall the tragically glorious heritage of the social theories in modern tradition solely related to political facts. There are actually some moments of self-awareness, such as those most deprecated by critical theories and anti-capital political thought: the place of sensory, emotional, initiatory – inner, secret, sacred – exaltation, where the hedonism of consumption and the violence of power, pleasure and sufferance of the flesh, happiness and death of the individual, come together. They meet on the same unfair and terrible field of laws of nature and society.

With the last decade of the twentieth century television has turned its aesthetics to be much closer to ways that can experiment with the contemporary social media. The Reality show, for example, is the sign of a twilight of the golden TV era that underlines two main processes: first, the way in which the audience is pulled into the heart of the representation and second, the way in which the matter of the *mise en scène* becomes the authentic dimension of everyday life. Digitalisation is not only modifying TV technologically but I would say anthropologically. This process, driving the user into the core of the production, has changed completely the meaning of the word “medium”. We can say that the discovery of an experiential and emotional world around the audience has forced TV managers to make the identity and the interface of this old medium softer and more emotional. I see the confrontation between the technological determinism and the holistic vision as just an excuse to define one’s own field of explanation. Both are coming from the positive sciences and both are trying to deal with the difficulties of explaining without a dramatic reduction of meaning. This is why, in our book, we try to confront the different perspectives around the general and the legitimised consideration of the centrality of the user.

## Overview of this Volume

This book investigates the new cultural and social shaping of Digital Television in which the old, analogue television is being diluted. It represents the beginning of an overdue analysis and in particular it covers four main fields of research: The role of emotion in the new television ecosystem, Practices of use of Digital Television Audiences, The new types of Digital Television: Mobile Television, Neighbourhood TV and Web TV and finally Behaviour and Attitude towards Digital Television.

The first chapter of this book aims to investigate the diversification of the television audience that has taken place after the advent of the various platforms now available such as Digital Terrestrial Television, Satellite TV, Cable TV, IPTV, as well as explore the emotional fabric that people attach to television and its new forms. Leopoldina Fortunati's and Sakari Taipale's contribution on the one hand outlines the main features of the diffusion and adoption of the new forms of television in the five most populous and industrialized countries in Europe (Italy, France, Germany, UK, and Spain) and on the other applies Russell's circumplex model to the feelings people associate with television by using the same battery of emotions that was in a previous survey in 1996.

Along similar lines, in Chapter 2, Nello Barile goes deep into the relational dynamic between technology and emotion, trying to stress how TV is turning its original mission and can now be used as a personal medium by users and also producers. Here the question is how the cultural device of "confession" (Foucault, 1978) becomes the point of contact between old mainstream TV rules and new Web 2.0 self-expression. In this development, the personal Web TV is not only a content provider but more a tool for public relations that extends the celebrity brand name to multi-existential dimension. This sophisticated storytelling about the celebrity's everyday life is the core of a strategic integration between mass and customised media that feeds a "soft" form of cultural hegemony.

Chapter 3 moves us from the lights of the stage to the darkness of a tragedy, Emiliano Treré and Manuela Farinosi decided to handle the difficult matter of the analysis of a TV cross-media platform – FromZero TV – that was created to offer a countervision exploring the difficulties of Italy's L'Aquila citizens, after the earthquake that struck the city so forcefully in 2009. The *Fromzero platform* was created to compensate the lack of information proffered by the Italian broadcasters in the coverage of the tragedy. Using qualitative methodologies (video analysis and interviews), the authors found that *FromZero TV* offered a considerate and balanced representation of sense of pain and grief of the victims of the catastrophe. This cross-media platform, in the conclusion of Treré and Farinosi represents an interesting "experiment" in how new forms of television on the Internet can offer alternative representations of events and give a voice to ordinary people without having to appeal to the exhibitionism of feelings or to stick to the rules of the traditional media agenda.

The fourth chapter of this book moves onto the study of TV consumption, referring to the attitudes of the audiences and how the digitalization of our cultures is modifying the forms of TV consumption. Leif Kramp discusses the notion of archive that is fundamental to understanding the transition from old to new media not only under a quantitative point of view. As it has been demonstrated by a recent range of books, exhibitions and conferences – the best and the most interesting was "Atlas" organised last year by Georges Didi-Huberman at the Museum Reina Sofia of Madrid – the notion of archive is the core of a modern and western



conception but also one of the most important conquests of the postmodern ways of communication. This is why digital innovation today, that was celebrated in the nineties as the last outcome of “real time”, is much more recognized for the number and the variety of information that consumer can get through the digital archives such as YouTube or even more through the social networks as a kind of living archive.

In Chapter 5 Fausto Colombo and Andrea Cuman are concerned to avoid adopting technological determinism in their analysis preferring to underline the nature of television as a cultural device. One of the most important innovations made possible by digital media, is the recovery of the “myth of gratuitousness” that was much stronger at the beginning of the commercial TV era and has now been re-established by the digital free circulation and free downloading of TV content. The value of TV consumption at the time of Web 2.0 is generated by different dimensions: the individual and self-managed (as a sort of economy of attention) and the collective way of consumption that creates a sort of a “bottom-up or horizontal circuit” where the users of a social network can assign value to the content through peer networking.

The point of view of outsiders on American TV is explored in Chapter 6 by Eleonora Benecchi and Giuseppe Richeri with special attention to the consumption of TV series and the way they can activate phenomena of fandom. Their analysis begins from a quite inspiring issue: the consideration that it is not useful to invest in marketing and advertising if you do not know how to involve the community of fans that follows your series. Comparing the traditional literacy and traditional media fandom with the Web 2.0 approach, the authors underline an extension of values and practices that defines the complexity of the contemporary mediatic consumption. These range from the exhibitions of “creativity, critical approach, participation” to the process of “lauding, preserving, collecting, scrutinising and being passionate about a popular TV” that turns this social phenomenon into a kind of paradoxical mainstream subculture.

The seventh chapter is dedicated to points of contact between TV and other new technologies such as the newest generation of mobile phones and Internet in a dimension that could be termed “Glocal”. The paper written by Juan Miguel Aguado, Claudio Feijóo, Inmaculada J. Martínez and Marta Roel starts from the dimension of mobile phone content consumption and tries to define the trajectories of interaction between this medium and other more general innovation such as the multi-screen convergent television. Here, the notion of ecosystem is a constitutive step in their analysis and shows the field of competition between two different technologies, considering their different positioning and possibility of an intersection between their respective services. Starting from a comparative approach between different geographic areas (USA, Europe and the Asia-Pacific) the authors show the nature of the limits to this convergence. It is basically eco-

nomic, technological and normative, but, as the meaning of “mobility” anticipates, it also concerns the users and their cultural dimension.

Andrea Miconi's Chapter 8 aims to focus on the role played by micro-TV stations, during the chaotic transition between broadcasting system and new media system, as happened in the Italian cultural industry (1990-2010). This transition can be divided into two main periods: the first has been characterized by several amateurish broadcasters, such as “neighbourhood TV”, deeply grounded in the culture and needs of local territories, while the second is ruled by the rise of Web-TV stations, showing a new technological asset and, to a great extent, a new way for the Italian mass media system as well.

The Ninth Chapter is recognition of the ecology as a consumer based approach in the two main dimensions of social and individual consumption. Jakob Bjur wants to verify the idea of a progressive and increasing collapse of the Television era through research based on a general mapping of the contemporary scenario. His analysis uses the Swedish People Meter data as a representative sample of the national television audience that gives static information about the channel chosen by the audience and also dynamic information about the audience activities. This allows distinction between individual TV consumption from the dyadic or collective consumption and shows how a TV becoming even more “social” is not just a mainstream process, but more an expression of a certain type of target with some specific characteristics.

Bartolomeo Sapio, Tomaz Turk, Stefano Livi, Michele Cornacchia, Enrico Nicolo', Filomena Papa investigate in Chapter 10 the Italian diffusion of the digital television (DTV) with particular attention to the influence of end-user variables in the adoption strategy based on the interactive payment service and its security issues. Digital TV is not just a new device and a new way of consumption but also a new experience that creates a different fidelity with the audience. The authors show the results of a field study on the Italian T-government project “Services for citizens via DTV” carried out on a sample of 300 users, selected in three main areas of the country (North, Centre and Rome, South).

As the reader will no doubt appreciate, the variety and multi-disciplinarity of the approaches presented in this book offer considerable added value to a deeper comprehension of the new TV scenario. From the emotional construction of devices and contents to the strictly technical design of functions and services, we nevertheless find the dialectic between individual and “social” consumption, massive diffusion and customisation, professional managing and neo-amateur uses. Beginning with McLuhan's original thoughts about the environments in which messages are conveyed, through these chapters we re-discover that the individual user is at once the core and the generator of the new communicative platforms that comprise the contemporary multi-channel and integrated mediatised ecosystem.

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